

PROOF

Hansard

LEGISLATIVE ASSEMBLY

60th Parliament

Wednesday 19 November 2025

CONTENTS

BILLS

Control of Weapons Amendment (Establishing Jack's Law, Use of Electronic Metal Detection Devices)	
Bill 2025	1
Introduction	1

COMMITTEES

Environment and Planning Committee	8
Inquiry into the Supply of Homes in Regional Victoria	8

DOCUMENTS

Documents	8
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BILLS

Parks and Public Land Legislation Amendment (Central West and Other Matters) Bill 2025	8
Council's amendments	8
State Taxation Further Amendment Bill 2025	8
Council's amendments	8

MEMBERS STATEMENTS

Australian Music Month	9
Minister for Women	9
Melba Highway	9
Douglas Zerbe	9
Metro Tunnel	9
Wild dog control	10
Darebin L2P program	10
Preston electorate office work experience students	10
Preston electorate policing	11
Prahran electorate	11
Mental health	11
World Cord Blood Day	11
Hastings electorate	11
World Teachers' Day	12
Road safety cameras	12
Nyaal Banyul	12
Polwarth electorate food	12
1st Iramoo Scout Group	13
Werribee Primary School	13
West Gate Tunnel	13
Electoral reform	13
Barb Godfrey	13
Ovens Valley electorate community hubs	14
Brendan McGrath	14
Narre Warren North electorate student leaders	14
McHappy Day	14
Birthday celebration	15
Brighton electorate development	15
Bun Bun Bakery	15
Greenwood Mulgrave early education centre	15
Kororoit electorate youth round table	16
Monash citizenship ceremony	16
State Emergency Service Monash unit	16
Brentwood Secondary College	16
Glen Waverley electorate early childhood education and care	16
Peggy Decker	16
Sinhala language school concert	17

STATEMENTS ON PARLIAMENTARY COMMITTEE REPORTS

Economy and Infrastructure Committee	17
Inquiry into Workplace Surveillance	17
Public Accounts and Estimates Committee	18
Report on the 2025–26 Budget Estimates	18
Environment and Planning Committee	19
Inquiry into the Supply of Homes in Regional Victoria	19
Public Accounts and Estimates Committee	21
Report on the 2025–26 Budget Estimates	21
Economy and Infrastructure Committee	22
Inquiry into the Impact of Road Safety Behaviours on Vulnerable Road Users	22

CONTENTS

Public Accounts and Estimates Committee	23
Report on the 2025–26 Budget Estimates.....	23
BILLS	
Justice Legislation Amendment (Vicarious Liability for Child Abuse) Bill 2025	24
Statement of compatibility.....	24
Second reading.....	27
Justice Legislation Further Amendment (Miscellaneous) Bill 2025	29
Statement of compatibility.....	29
Second reading.....	35
State Taxation Further Amendment Bill 2025	39
Council's amendments.....	39
Parks and Public Land Legislation Amendment (Central West and Other Matters) Bill 2025	47
Council's amendments.....	47
Children, Youth and Families Amendment (Stability) Bill 2025.....	56
Second reading.....	56
QUESTIONS WITHOUT NOTICE AND MINISTERS STATEMENTS	
Health system.....	57
Ministers statements: economy	59
Community safety	60
Ministers statements: housing	61
Electricity prices	62
Ministers statements: Trans Awareness Week.....	63
Kensington Primary School.....	64
Ministers statements: health workforce.....	65
Road maintenance	65
Ministers statements: Respectful Relationships	66
CONSTITUENCY QUESTIONS	
Brighton electorate	67
Laverton electorate	68
Murray Plains electorate	68
Pascoe Vale electorate.....	68
Croydon electorate.....	69
Cranbourne electorate	69
Evelyn electorate	69
Thomastown electorate	69
Euroa electorate	69
Sunbury electorate	70
BILLS	
Children, Youth and Families Amendment (Stability) Bill 2025.....	70
Second reading.....	70
GRIEVANCE DEBATE	
Economy.....	83
Liberal Party leadership	86
Disaster preparedness	90
LGBTIQ+ equality.....	93
Government performance.....	95
Climate change	98
Economy.....	101
Liberal Party leadership	104
BILLS	
Children, Youth and Families Amendment (Stability) Bill 2025.....	107
Second reading.....	107
Justice Legislation Amendment (Family Violence, Stalking and Other Matters) Bill 2025	110
Second reading.....	110
ADJOURNMENT	
Wombat protection.....	117
Delacombe housing development.....	118
Protective services officers	119
Werribee electorate schools.....	119
Rubicon solar farm	119
Women's health.....	120
Melbourne electorate cultural relocations	121
Coburg development.....	121

CONTENTS

Mornington Tourist Railway	122
Creative industries	123
Responses	123

Proof

Wednesday 19 November 2025

The SPEAKER (Maree Edwards) took the chair at 9:32 am, read the prayer and made an acknowledgement of country.

Bills

Control of Weapons Amendment (Establishing Jack's Law, Use of Electronic Metal Detection Devices) Bill 2025

Introduction

David SOUTHWICK (Caulfield) (09:33): I move:

That I introduce a bill for an act to amend the Control of Weapons Act 1990 to provide greater powers for police officers to use electronic metal detection devices to search persons for weapons and for other purposes.

This bill would be known as the Control of Weapons Amendment (Establishing Jack's Law, Use of Electronic Metal Detection Devices) Bill 2025. Every day of delay is another day that risks the lives of Victorians due to knife crime. This is one of the most urgent things that this Parliament should be talking about today.

Jack's law was created after the tragic stabbing of 17-year-old Jack Beasley on the Gold Coast in 2019. The purpose of this is preventative policing, to provide police with the powers to wand for weapons and to remove knives, machetes and edged weapons off the streets before assaults and robberies occur.

In Queensland, during the first full year of its operation police conducted more than 122,000 scans, seized 1200 weapons and made 3200 arrests. Queensland has made Jack's law a permanent statewide law. Jack's law is now in Queensland, New South Wales, Western Australia, Tasmania and the Northern Territory, but not in Victoria. The Beasley family have been over to the UK, and they are looking at it there, but not in Victoria. The time to act is now. In June Brett Beasley, the father of Jack, met with the Minister for Pollice and urged the police minister to do this. The police minister said that this was a great idea and that they would look at it and look at introducing it.

What has happened? Nothing. Crickets. Zero. In that time we have seen deaths on our streets in Victoria. People have died because this government has done nothing. This government needs to act now. If we had had Jack's law 15 months ago, when Brett Beasley could have met with the Minister for Police, we would possibly not have seen the deaths of 15-year-old Dau Akueng and 12-year-old Chol Achiek. They should be alive today. They were fatally stabbed at Cobblebank after being ambushed by a group with armed machetes and large knives. Seven offenders aged 15 to 19 have been charged with their murders, exposing the shocking case of youth violence. We have seen this happen again and again. In September we saw it with 18-year-old Kaiden Morgan, who also should be alive today. His life was ended on a residential street in Morwell after a machete attack on 27 September. This tragedy did not have to happen, and with Jack's law we can ensure young Victorians do not become victims.

This is an opportunity for the government to wake up and do this. We have seen so many knife attacks, and this government thinks the \$13 million machete bins are the answer. We cannot wait for the machetes to be handed in. We cannot wait for good Samaritans to do the right thing while people are doing the wrong thing – getting away with carrying these knives on the streets. We have seen it. I know the government is going to stand up and say, 'There are thousands of knives that have been confiscated.' In Victoria we have only had 129 knives that have been seized in 12 months. In Queensland there have been a thousand through these Omni operations. These knife searches should be no different than a random breath test.

When you give police the powers to go out, just like we do with drink driving, it ensures that we reduce the road toll and keep people safe on our streets. Why can't we do the same with knife crime? Why

can't we have the same kinds of powers to stop and scan people to ensure people are safe? The government wants to put PSOs into shopping strips. Give them Jack's law so they can go out there and proactively search. We do not need to have the police fill in paperwork and wait two weeks before they can do a search in shopping precincts and at train stations. These new powers that we are proposing give designated areas so that people can do this as part of everyday business. Police should be able to do it and PSOs should be able to do it in knife crime hotspots.

Let us not wait for another death. Let us not wait for the government to keep talking big and doing nothing to get dangerous knives off the streets. The government has failed to listen to the Beasley family, who have been pleading for this government to introduce Jack's law in Victoria. Why reinvent the wheel? Why not do what is working successfully in Queensland here in Victoria? They have talked a big game with adult time for violent crime – what about Jack's law? Here is a perfect example where you can use Queensland ideas to make Victorian streets safe. If the government were serious about taking knives off the streets, they would look across the border to Queensland and implement it now. I urge the government to bring on this bill now.

John LISTER (Werribee) (09:39): I thank the member for raising this important issue in this place. I would also like to acknowledge the family and representatives here today. We know – we have been listening on the ground – that it is really important to listen to these experiences but also to make sure that our responses are led by intelligence and data. We do not support the introduction of this bill for the simple reason that we are already working in this space, and later today there will be an opportunity for people to talk about this and the changes that we are making in the context of the Justice Legislation Amendment (Police and Other Matters) Bill 2025. While I do not want to pre-empt debate on this bill, I do just want to mention that there are sections in this bill that go to some of the changes the member for Caulfield raised.

It is important that we give police the powers they need to do their job. Police have that operational independence to make sure that they are doing these kinds of searches based on intelligence, based on the data and based on that coordination between the different units of Victoria Police and the agencies involved.

We do not necessarily need to adopt Jack's law in the form that the member for Caulfield has raised here today, because we have had this designated area police weapons search scheme for quite some time – since 2009. This was before any other Australian jurisdiction introduced these random, without-warrant-or-suspicion weapons searches of people, using electronic metal detection devices or wands. This scheme allows police and PSOs to search people and vehicles for weapons randomly in a public place within a designated area, without warrant or suspicion.

We discussed in this place earlier in the year changes to the –

Brad Rowswell: On a point of order, Speaker, I believe the member is reading from notes.

The SPEAKER: Is the member reading from notes?

John LISTER: I am referring to notes.

The SPEAKER: He is referring to notes.

John LISTER: I think it is important to refer to notes, because there have been quite a few amendments in this space over the years since 2009 when we led the charge across all jurisdictions to have these random searches in designated places. It is important that we have made these changes – and I will refer to my notes here, for the member – in 2010 and also recently in 2025, and those changes came into force on 26 March this year. And we have already seen the effects of these changes here: 15,000 weapons seized by Victoria Police, the most in any jurisdiction. We have also announced this week that we will procure an additional 842 hand metal detectors as part of the changes announced with the reforms that the Chief Commissioner of Police has spoken about – getting our PSOs out into different parts of the community and expanding what they can do.

I know this is working. Since 26 March we have seen numerous operations, particularly in my community in Wyndham. We saw an operation – I will have to confirm the date, referring to my notes here, for the member opposite – on 3 July. We had Operation Omni operate at Werribee plaza in response to concerns and intelligence that there were issues there. 450 people were searched at that designated area over the time that they were there; 50 personnel from across multiple units were involved, and it is important to see that we already have changes that have been made that are in effect being driven by Victoria Police. We always have to respect that operational decision-making that is independent from politics, and that is why what we will be discussing later today – not to pre-empt debate – with the Justice Legislation Amendment (Police and Other Matters) Bill 2025 does go to those spaces. To keep it very broad, there will be changes to the way that those declarations are planned. Search notices will no longer have to be physical, so the photocopier at Werribee police station will get a bit of a break. They can have a QR code that they can serve on that person so they understand why they are being searched and what their rights are around that, which is particularly important when we are looking at some of the vulnerable communities that may get caught up in these searches.

Since we made these amendments earlier in the year, building on the strong changes that we have had in this space, we have also seen operations at Werribee train station and at our bus interchanges across the western suburbs. This is intelligence-led policing, and we need to make sure that we give the police the powers they need to do their job. Wait till later today – you will see on our little green sheet that we are debating it.

Brad BATTIN (Berwick) (09:44): I rise to support the member for Caulfield's position here with introducing a bill in relation to knife laws here in Victoria. Can I say first of all, one of the things that is probably a misnomer, and we are hearing from the other side about it, is this is not about searches; this is about stop and scan. This is a not-intrusive way that we can actually take knives off the street that is not offensive and that gives the police the powers and the opportunities to use a small, hand-held scanner to ensure that knives can come off the streets.

John Lister interjected.

Brad BATTIN: I did not interrupt you, member for Werribee, not once. So if you would do me a favour –

The SPEAKER: Member for Berwick, through the Chair.

Brad BATTIN: through the Chair – and stop complaining about your constituents who are whingeing about crime and actually put on record –

The SPEAKER: Through the Chair, not to the member for Werribee.

Brad BATTIN: What we did not hear from that side at all was that we have actually heard that this could be called Jack's law because of Jack Beasley. I have met with and spoken with Brett Beasley about the tragic circumstances of losing his son at just 17 years old. But it could be called Dau's law. It could be called Chol's law.

These are victims here in Victoria. These are young boys who were on their way home from a basketball game. Do I think it would have stopped those crimes? I do not know, but it may have, and it may have taken the knives off the street.

These laws have been in place for a period of time in Queensland. Down here in Victoria we have heard about people like Ash Gordon, who was stabbed to death. We have heard about up to 25 young men under the age of 25 on the streets of Victoria. We saw an innocent victim get stabbed in the chest walking through Melbourne. If that is not a reason to change the laws here in our state, then I do not know what is. All we are asking for is for once the government to stop patting themselves on the back for what they are doing and look at the reality of the crimes that are still happening here in Victoria. They will continue to happen until you make change.

Sometimes in this job – and trust me, I know it more than many right at the moment – you have to put your pride aside. The problem is the Victorian Labor Party will not do it. Not once will they accept the knowledge from this side of the chamber that we can make change. To say it is about separation of powers – this motion is to introduce legislation to give the police the powers they need and the protection they need so they can go and stop and scan. It has nothing to do with us directing the Chief Commissioner of Police what to do. Otherwise you would not bother having the Victoria Police Act 2013, and that is what is in place so that Victoria Police can operate independently. We would not bother having the Sentencing Act 1991. We would not bother having anything to protect Victoria Police. But the reality is we need to. Why – because crime in Victoria is at record levels. It is at a stage where people are emailing me and, I know, my colleagues here and saying they have fear their own homes. I know the other side they keep telling me that is just not the case. I do not know who checks their emails then, because I can guarantee you that many of us in this place have received emails where every single one of us has got the same email. It comes through and says, ‘I have genuine fear because of the things that have happened here on the streets in Melbourne.’

This legislation is urgent. It is not actually a request; in my view this is a demand. This needs to go through this Parliament. I caught up with Brett last night across at the Imperial, and we had a chat. When you speak to someone and you look them in the eye and you ask them, ‘Why do you bother travelling to every other state? Why do you bother travelling to England?’ it is because he wants to make change. We all know the power of one can make a huge difference. Can I congratulate the Beasley family on what they have done in Queensland under David Crisafulli and with Chris Minns in New South Wales, and they have gone into South Australia. But the thing here is this government will not even meet with him. In the one meeting they had they made commitment after commitment, but now they will not respond to an email or a call. When the Premier got on *Sunrise* and said, ‘I’m not sure what you’re talking about,’ and it was only moments after Brett Beasley had been on talking about the fact that he had lost his son, it was the uttermost, highest level of disrespect that I have seen for a person who is fighting for something that is just right. He is not fighting for anything else. He is not fighting for a pat on the back.

I just say to the government: if you do not want to trust Brett, that is fine. If you do not want to trust a Queenslander, sometimes we can live with that too. But listen to those families that have lost kids here in Victoria. When the member for Morwell gets up and he tells you about the families down his way, take your time to go and sit with them and explain to them why Victoria Police do not have the powers to stop and scan and get knives off the streets in Victoria.

Josh BULL (Sunbury) (09:49): In rising this morning to oppose the member for Caulfield’s position I want to take the opportunity, as I did in yesterday’s debate, to acknowledge those victims, communities, families, friends, loved ones and those who have been hurt and harmed by violent offenders and, in doing so, make the observation and the point around the government’s position on these matters.

I think, as was pointed out yesterday by members on this side and members on the other side as well, these matters should be beyond party politics. We know and understand, as I made comments to yesterday around the work of retail staff, of hospo staff and of those that work in fast food, the damage, the hurt and the pain that is caused by these crimes.

The position of the government that was articulated last week by the Premier, the range of measures that have been taken, particularly through this place, and the announcements of last week made by the Premier, the Minister for Police, the Attorney-General and others go to this very important work. As I said at the start, there should be no contest when it comes to looking after local communities. There should be no contest when it comes to making sure that we are supporting victims and their families, and I made some references in yesterday’s debate about these circumstances – being able to, certainly from my working background, see in a retail setting the damage and the harm that is done to staff when violence occurs and the prolonged and sustained trauma that occurs in any of these circumstances.

The work that has been done by VicPol, the references that have been made in these matters by Victoria Police, indeed the work that goes to the more than 15,000 seizures and the designated search areas and the references that were made by the member for Werribee in his contribution just a short time ago go to the work that will be done – being careful, of course, not to pre-empt debate on further matters, which go to the circumstances that the member for Caulfield has raised. There is indeed an obligation and a profound sense of responsibility that we all have in this place when it comes to community safety. Our position, which has been articulated very clearly, as I mentioned earlier, goes to working very closely with Victoria Police and the advice provided by the Chief Commissioner of Police.

I do want to take in the short time remaining the opportunity to thank for their work Victoria Police. The matters that they deal with each and every day when putting themselves on the front line for the protection of our communities is something that we need to always respect and admire, and we do so with the understanding and the knowledge, as we have seen particularly in recent times, that crime, like so many things within our communities, does evolve and does change. The position of the government remains the same, and that is taking the advice of the chief commissioner, listening to victims and those that are harmed by circumstances and to their families and making sure that we have the settings in place to be able to deal with these matters in an appropriate way – and doing so where we are not cutting across many of those processes that I think all members of this house support when it comes to the separation of powers. Making sure that these circumstances are dealt with in the appropriate way at all times is the focus of the government.

Martin CAMERON (Morwell) (09:54): I rise to fully support the member for Caulfield's motion here today. May I say that I will deal in facts. Unfortunately the hard and harsh facts are that because individuals carry knives on our streets people are losing their lives. That is the bottom line. It is costing people their lives – mums and dads that have to go and bury their children that are hunted down on the street and not just stabbed once, stabbed multiple times.

These people that are carrying knives do not care. They face no consequences. The government has constantly in the last two weeks talked about consequences. They face no consequences at the moment. Jack's law will more than likely stop it in its tracks. If we can give the police the powers and the wands so that every single police officer and PSO can carry a wand and stop and search someone, that is going to go a long way to protecting the community.

I walk down the streets, whether it be here in Melbourne or in regional Victoria, and I have got my wits about me, looking around to see who is about me, who is following me, if there is someone, and what is going on over on the other street corner, because I know probably that person or those people over there will be carrying weapons which will put our lives in jeopardy.

I sit with the family of Dr Ash Gordon constantly, have a chat with them and talk about life and how they have daily reminders and questions about why their son was stabbed multiple times out on the street defending his property. I feel that if the government were fair dinkum about introducing laws to protect us, they would sit down with the Gordon family. They would sit down with the family of Kaiden Morgan-Johnston, look them in the eye and feel their hurt. And I think the government would have an about-face and bring these laws in to protect the community.

We bend over and try our best to look after the minority in this state. The fact is: if you do not want to be wanded and found to be carrying a weapon, do not carry it. Why should people in this state be able to walk around with a knife and think that they should be protected? Enough is enough. Too many lives have been lost. I do not want a family member of mine to be the next victim. I do not want someone in this chamber saying we should have done more because that is their family member.

We have an opportunity today to work together to stop what is going on, and I do not think anyone in this chamber can say that Jack's law is not the way to go. Put an end to it. Look after the people that are doing the right thing. And for those that are carrying weapons to harass, chase down, and murder

people on our streets: stop it. They should not have the right to be able to do that. There need to be hard consequences in this state of Victoria, and we need to make a statement now. The opportunity is there with this law that the member for Caulfield has put up. We have the data; we have people being killed or injured on our streets. I reckon if we gave wands to police and PSOs and they walked down the CBD of Melbourne today, we would be astounded at how many people were carrying knives, and that also happens right over regional Victoria. So I fully concur with the member for Caulfield, and I think everybody does in this chamber. We need change. We need a law to protect us. You should not be able to carry weapons in Victoria.

Daniela DE MARTINO (Monbulk) (09:59): Before I commence I would like to acknowledge that there are many people who feel very passionately about this. I have just heard my friend on the other side of the chamber the member for Morwell, who I have a lot of time for, speak obviously with real passion, as well as the members for Werribee, Sunbury, Berwick and Caulfield – all those in the chamber today. No-one wants to see anyone a victim of crime – no-one in the state of Victoria, no-one in this house, no-one in the other place at all – because we know the impact that crime has on people. I do want to extend my deepest sympathies to the family of Jack and to the families and the victims who are survivors still, who have been on the end of terrible, horrific violent crime.

As I say, none of us want to see it. None of us in government want to see it, which is why we have introduced a suite of reforms. There has been a comprehensive, cascading set of legislation that we have been working on very closely in consultation with Victoria Police and with key stakeholders, and it is undeniable that we have introduced significant legislation when it comes to curtailing crime. But in particular, when we talk about Jack's law, I think it is important to note that Victoria Police have had the power since 2009 to actually have the police weapons search scheme under the Control of Weapons Act 1990. That was before any other Australian jurisdiction came even close. And we have expanded that further this year. Our scheme allows police and protective services officers to search people and vehicles for weapons randomly in a public place, within a designated area, without warrant or suspicion, and all designated area weapons searches must commence by police and PSOs using electronic metal detection devices. There are two forms of designated areas: planned and unplanned. There were some amendments made to the scheme in 2010, but really significant ones were made this year as part of our response to crime – because as I say once again, none of us here, none of us in this place, none of us in Victoria, want to see crime happening. But we have adequate powers already in place. Even yesterday we introduced –

Members interjecting.

The SPEAKER: Members will show respect for the member on their feet.

Daniela DE MARTINO: further powers when it comes to retail and when it comes to fast food, hospitality and transport workers. We introduced legislation yesterday which will come into effect from the day of royal assent. I am very pleased those opposite are not opposing that legislation; it would be good to see it carried through.

Workplace protection orders will be coming in next year, and that is incredibly important, especially to retailers, former retailers like me and others out there who have experienced terrible crime as well. The machete ban that we brought in – the first jurisdiction in the nation – actually resulted in Amazon ensuring that they did not allow machetes anywhere else into this country because of Victoria and what we did here.

Our amnesty bins have seen 7000 machetes dropped into them. I will make the comment that some on the other side and in the other place wanted to actually undermine that scheme and tried to break into one. That is just a terrible thing to do. What signal does that send to the public? Fifteen thousand knives have been seized in the last year; in the year prior it was 14,000 and in the year prior to that it was 12,000. We are seeing an effect out there. VicPol are doing the work. Those officers deserve all the support of all of us in here. Every time they don their uniform it is an act of courage, and the work

that we have done in the legislation we have produced has been in consultation with Victoria Police. We are doing everything we can here. We will be opposing that bill.

Ellen SANDELL (Melbourne) (10:04): By leave, I just want to say a few words about the way the Greens will be voting on this one. It is an important principle that members who are not ministers – crossbench members, opposition members – should be able to introduce and first read bills. That is a principle that we support, and so ordinarily we would support the first reading of a bill. But it needs to come with some notice, and we were not given any notice. That is a common courtesy – to give crossbench members some notice when bringing –

Members interjecting.

The SPEAKER: I would ask you to show some respect to the member on their feet.

Ellen SANDELL: It is a common courtesy for members who are bringing bills to this place to give other members some notice.

On the substance of this bill, we also cannot support it. On the subject of this bill, this is a really important issue. When we are talking about crime and safety, everyone deserves to feel safe in our community. It is a basic human need. But I do not think our community is well served by grandstanding and reactionary, panicked politics.

We should be looking to the evidence of what reduces crime and what increases community safety and not policies that are designed to look tough but do not address the root causes of crime, and especially we should not be introducing policies into Victoria that we know will have a disproportionate negative impact on vulnerable communities. Policies like this can often be misused with young people of colour being disproportionately targeted unfairly. This happens in my electorate. A large proportionate of my electorate are young people of colour who are from African Australian populations and have been disproportionately targeted by the police in the past, and giving the police more powers to do that I think cannot come without some serious scrutiny and safeguards.

I note that Labor is also not supporting this bill today, and I very much hope that we do not see the Labor Party turn around and do a 180 later on in response to pressure and *Herald Sun* headlines. We need to look at evidence. When it comes to community safety we need to do what actually works, not introduce panicked policies to cynically win votes off the back of community fear. Let us be clear on what is happening here. This is all about politics, not about community safety. I think if we actually cared about community safety, we would be having a serious conversation about it rather than bringing in a bill, with no notice, to this house that is based on reactionary politics. That is why we will not be supporting it.

Assembly divided on motion:

Ayes (27): Brad Battin, Jade Benham, Roma Britnell, Tim Bull, Martin Cameron, Annabelle Cleeland, Chris Crewther, Wayne Farnham, Will Fowles, Sam Groth, Matthew Guy, David Hodgett, Emma Kealy, Tim McCurdy, Cindy McLeish, James Newbury, Danny O'Brien, John Pesutto, Richard Riordan, Brad Rowsell, David Southwick, Bridget Vallence, Peter Walsh, Kim Wells, Nicole Werner, Rachel Westaway, Jess Wilson

Noes (47): Juliana Addison, Colin Brooks, Josh Bull, Anthony Carbines, Anthony Cianflone, Chris Couzens, Jordan Crugnale, Lily D'Ambrosio, Daniela De Martino, Gabrielle de Vietri, Steve Dimopoulos, Paul Edbrooke, Eden Foster, Matt Fregon, Ella George, Luba Grigorovitch, Bronwyn Halfpenny, Katie Hall, Paul Hamer, Martha Haylett, Mathew Hilakari, Melissa Horne, Natalie Hutchins, Nathan Lambert, John Lister, Gary Maas, Alison Marchant, Kathleen Matthews-Ward, Steve McGhie, Paul Mercurio, John Mullahy, Danny Pearson, Pauline Richards, Tim Richardson, Ellen Sandell, Michaela Settle, Ros Spence, Nick Staikos, Meng Heang Tak, Nina Taylor, Kat Theophanous, Mary-Anne Thomas, Iwan Walters, Vicki Ward, Dylan Wight, Gabrielle Williams, Belinda Wilson

Members interjecting.

The SPEAKER: The Minister for Police and the member for Caulfield can leave the chamber for half an hour. Wait at the doors until the division is completed.

Motion defeated.

Minister for Police and member for Caulfield withdrew from chamber.

Committees

Environment and Planning Committee

Inquiry into the Supply of Homes in Regional Victoria

Juliana ADDISON (Wendouree) (10:13): I have the honour to present to the house a report from the Environment and Planning Committee on the inquiry into the supply of homes in regional Victoria, together with appendices and transcripts of evidence.

Ordered that report and appendices be published.

Documents

Documents

Incorporated list as follows:

DOCUMENTS TABLED UNDER ACTS OF PARLIAMENT – The Clerk tabled:

Auditor-General – Accessibility of Tram Services: Follow-up – Ordered to be published

Ombudsman – Investigation report: When the water rises: Flood risk at two housing estates – Ordered to be published

Statutory Rule 118 under the *Corrections Act 1986*

Subordinate Legislation Act 1994 – Documents under s 15 in relation to Statutory Rule 118.

Bills

Parks and Public Land Legislation Amendment (Central West and Other Matters) Bill 2025

Council's amendments

The SPEAKER (10:14): I have received a message from the Legislative Council agreeing to the Parks and Public Land Legislation Amendment (Central West and Other Matters) Bill 2025 with amendments.

Ordered that amendments be taken into consideration later this day.

State Taxation Further Amendment Bill 2025

Council's amendments

The SPEAKER (10:14): I have received a message from the Legislative Council agreeing to the State Taxation Further Amendment Bill 2025 with amendments.

Ordered that amendments be taken into consideration later this day.

Members interjecting.

The SPEAKER: Order! The member for Cranbourne and the member for Evelyn can leave the chamber for half an hour.

Members for Cranbourne and Evelyn withdrew from chamber.

*Members statements***Australian Music Month**

Matt FREGON (Ashwood) (10:15): It is Australian Music Month again, and with some help from Triple J and a nod to Molly Meldrum let us count down to 26. Now, I can assure those on the other side that we will never be like you. No matter how much you say, ‘Throw your arms around me’, Victorians know you are walking on a dream – and while you are asking them, ‘Are you going to be my girl? – or guy?’ Meanwhile, on this side of the house we are meeting Victorians where they are. We are getting to her door, to his door. We are getting on with what matters, getting down under the detail and delivering for Victorians. Others might get on a big jet plane thinking the less I know the better – and let us face it, you cannot blame them when their beds are burning. Victorians know this government is making tomorrow better, giving this state an inner bloom and a positive future. They say, ‘You’re the voice.’ These days in this place are a privilege, ones I know we are all proud to be gifted. Some have informed the house that they will be calling time next year, and I was a little thunderstruck to hear from them. I do wonder if I am ever going to see your face again. But it is a sign of the best of this place, to see the sweet disposition of these members. I guess for some, you will be someone I used to know. We are not here to learn how to make gravy, but it is getting to that time of year. It is okay. Santa is coming soon. We will be moving from flame trees to Christmas trees. My happiness is working every day for the people of Ashwood so others do not dream it is over – will not leave a scar. Our government remains untouched. And for those in the nosebleed section over there: you will never tear us apart.

Minister for Women

Cindy McLEISH (Eildon) (10:17): Last week in Parliament number of female MPs shared their experiences of sexual harassment. One of these was the Minister for Women, whose story was picked up by mainstream media. I was appalled by the online comments that were directed to the minister. Such commentary and behaviour are unacceptable. Women must feel safe to speak out, and it is precisely these kinds of comments that silence them. This dreadful conduct should be called out and condemned. Women deserve better. The minister deserves better. Women should not be subject to this type of harassment.

Melba Highway

Cindy McLEISH (Eildon) (10:17): Residents of Yarra Glen, Dixons Creek and beyond threw their hands in the air when the speed limit on the Melba Highway from Coombe Cottage in Coldstream to Yarra Glen was reduced to 70 kilometres an hour. It was not long ago that it was 100 kilometres an hour. Apparently this reduction is part of a safety upgrade between the Maroondah Highway and the Healesville-Yarra Glen Road. There are a couple of well-known notorious bends at Yering. Residents want to know what the upgrades are and when they will take place. In short, they want the roads to be fixed.

Douglas Zerbe

Cindy McLEISH (Eildon) (10:18): Doug Zerbe was a great Liberal. Inspired by Robert Menzies, Doug joined the party as a Young Liberal at its inception. In an early role he was Robert Menzies’s branch secretary in Doncaster. Doug remained staunchly dedicated to the party, and he was an active volunteer for the next 78 years. He passed away peacefully two months shy of his 100th birthday on the weekend. He will be fondly remembered by many in the Liberal Party. Condolences to his wife of 70 years Patricia and children Catherine, Richard, Andrew and Susan.

Metro Tunnel

Dylan WIGHT (Tarnait) (10:18): The Metro Tunnel is officially opening at the end of next week. From 30 November you be able to hop on a train at any one of our five brand new stations. A new timetable and broader network changes will be introduced early in 2026. Until then 240 extra services

a week will run through the Metro Tunnel between West Footscray and Westall, with some end-to-end services on weekends. The opening of the Metro Tunnel will be the biggest network change since the city loop 40 years ago. The Allan Labor government knows just how important it is to continue building the infrastructure projects that change Victorians' lives. That is why we are also opening the West Gate Tunnel later this year. By providing an alternate route into the city, you will face less time in traffic to and from work and more time at home with your family.

Whilst those opposite oppose these transformative projects, we are getting on with delivering them. I cannot wait for both projects to be open to the public, and I am proud to be part of a government which is committed to making travel easier for every Victorian. We on this side of the house are committed to delivering the critical infrastructure projects that Victorians need to get to and from work, spending less time in the car, less time on a train and more time at home doing the things they love, whilst those opposite and the Greens have opposed them every step of the way.

Wild dog control

Tim BULL (Gippsland East) (10:20): It was only recently the government was considering the future of the wild dog program. Thank goodness that program continued, but it needs more resources. This was sent to me on the weekend:

Hey Tim ... was very frustrating for us ... Between us and our local trapper we have trapped and shot over 27 dogs and have lost over 300 sheep just this year alone. We have dog proof fencing and I'm out all the time checking cameras and every night with my thermal gear and it never stops. We have at least 15 dog on camera at the main farm and 5 ... at our other farm ... down the road ... we have for the first time lost calf's so they are not just killing sheep anymore ... Please for the love of god we need you guys ... to stop these idiots.

That is his reference to those who want to afford greater protections to the wild dogs. There you are. That is just one farm enterprise that has lost 300 sheep, and there are many, many more in the electorate that are experiencing significant losses. We would have lost thousands of head of sheep this year alone.

In recent years the government has introduced more regular trap checking. What that does is impact the ability to successfully trap, and the administration burden on our doggers has increased also. It is time to expand this program with more workforce and greater flexibility to look after our farming community here in Victoria.

Darebin L2P program

Nathan LAMBERT (Preston) (10:21): Not having a drivers licence can be a significant source of disadvantage insofar as it limits people's access to employment opportunities and services that they might need. In that respect I would like to very much thank the Darebin L2P program for the work they do to help young people in our area get a drivers licence in circumstances where they may not have access to a supervising adult or a car. I would like to particularly recognise longstanding volunteers Dawn Lowry, Philip Bouchier and Rhonda Otto and driving instructor Cheryl Davies, all of whom have been part of the program for its entire 15-year history, as well as program coordinator Angela Gilmore and Helen Reddan and all the team at the TAC, who support and fund the program on behalf of the Victorian Labor government.

Preston electorate office work experience students

Nathan LAMBERT (Preston) (10:22): I would also like to thank work experience students Ruby Stokes and Vinh King for joining our office in recent weeks and for raising issues that are important to them. They raised issues related to the 86 tram, which services both Preston High and Reservoir High, and they are particularly concerned about tobacco and illicit vaping products – the presence of those products in shops near their schools, their presence on buses, trams and public transport and the selling of those products to teenagers.

Preston electorate policing

Nathan LAMBERT (Preston) (10:22): I would also like to thank Mark Van Rooyen at Reservoir police and Lee-Anne Hamilton from Preston police for the work they do to help with difficult and complex issues in our community. In particular their commitment to advising and supporting community members from a wide range of backgrounds, including those in community housing and public housing, is greatly appreciated. Finally, I would like to thank Acting Inspector Michael Pope and Senior Constable Peta Williams for their participation in our recent community safety forum.

Prahran electorate

Rachel WESTAWAY (Prahran) (10:23): I rise to address three important issues affecting our community. First, the proposed Storage King development at 180 St Kilda Road: I have met with over 35 constituents about this proposal, which would see trucks moving in and out of a very small rear laneway until 10 at night. Port Phillip council has rejected this proposal twice, yet the developer persists through VCAT. This would cause unacceptable impacts on local residents, including those at Europa residential aged care facility and families on Somerset Street and in the surrounding area. Planning decisions must be consistent with community values and residential amenity, not overridden by appeals that disregard local concerns.

Second, Clara Street, South Yarra: multiple constituents have raised that the footpath outside the Department of Families, Fairness and Housing block is often littered with syringes and rubbish. I too have experienced that and seen it with my own two eyes. While I acknowledge Stonnington council's proactive response, the department of housing must work with the community to support residents and ensure safety and amenity for all. Residents deserve dignity, safety and clean public spaces.

Finally, welcome news: FatBuoy Lobster Seafood Market has opened at Prahran market, offering affordable seasonal fish, hand-cut chips and potato cakes, not frozen carbon copies. Private business is investing in Prahran, creating jobs and bringing fresh energy to our market. We must protect what makes Prahran special while supporting genuine investment in our neighbourhood.

Mental health

Paul MERCURIO (Hastings) (10:24): Yesterday was my brother Michael's birthday. He would have been 61. Sadly, he took his own life 25 years ago. He is much missed and much loved and always will be. Suicide is a cold, lonely and terrible place to be. It is okay not to be okay. If you are having suicidal thoughts, there are people and organisations out there that can and will help you, and I urge you to reach out.

World Cord Blood Day

Paul MERCURIO (Hastings) (10:25): On another matter, Monday was World Cord Blood Day. Earlier this year I and my office helped cerebral palsy sufferer seven-year-old Zara to get Australia's first ever own cord blood cell infusion. I would like to thank the Minister for Health for her assistance and support in making this happen. I am very happy to say that there has been marked improvement in Zara's motor skills and ability to care for herself. This is an Australian first; I would like to make it an Australian norm. There are many other kids like Zara in Victoria that could benefit from this treatment.

Hastings electorate

Paul MERCURIO (Hastings) (10:25): On another matter, thanks to funding from the Minister for Community Sport, Mornington shire council have released the Somerville Recreation Reserve master plan on their website, and it is open for community consultation. I urge everyone to get onto the website and have their say about this fantastic master plan. It was also fantastic to celebrate the upgrade completions at Somerville Bowling Club, Somerville Tennis Club and Somers Primary School recently.

World Teachers' Day

Paul MERCURIO (Hastings) (10:26): And finally, World Teachers' Day is always a great day where I and my staff deliver over 1500 cupcakes, beautifully made by Josephine's Sweet Treats, to every school in my electorate as a thankyou.

Road safety cameras

Darren CHEESEMAM (South Barwon) (10:26): I think over the last few years Victorians have been disappointed to see an increasing road toll throughout our regions. The reality is that new technologies that have been introduced, particularly on smartphones – Waze, Google Maps and a whole raft of others – provide drivers useful information and in fact real-time information about the state of the roads, broken-down vehicles on the sides of roads and other things. They have in so many ways made commuting that much safer. Disappointingly, though, it also enables those who wish to speed to speed, because of course the enforcement regime that we have in place – our fixed cameras and the like – can be actively sidestepped by drivers, who accelerate once they have passed a camera and slow down when the next one is due. I think it is timely that the state government consider more fixed cameras to be introduced in Victoria. On a recent trip interstate I was surprised to learn that almost all roads into our major cities around the nation have this technology.

Nyaal Banyul

Chris COUZENS (Geelong) (10:27): The Allan Labor government is supporting the Geelong region's award-winning manufacturing and construction businesses, and the landmark Nyaal Banyul development is fast becoming a showcase of all they have to offer. Nyaal Banyul now features more than 6000 square metres of 100 per cent locally manufactured carpet produced by Geelong-based Godfrey Hirst. Established in 1865, Godfrey Hirst has been a leading manufacturer in Geelong, and on this project has supported the commercialisation of a flooring technology that places the Geelong manufacturer at the forefront of its industry. The company's new Enviro Grip technology makes the venue's hall and theatre carpet removable without the use of adhesives, which is a big advantage for exhibition spaces. It is this type of innovation that has just seen the company named regional manufacturer of the year at the 2025 Victorian Manufacturing Hall of Fame Awards. The Enviro Grip carpet was co-designed with the Wadawurrung traditional owners and is the latest in a long list of design features at Nyaal Banyul that celebrate Wadawurrung culture. Sitting beneath the award-winning company's carpet is the concrete that was batched at Moolap by the family-owned Barro Group. Overhead, the roof structure includes steel fabricated at Hanlon Industries' Corio plant, as well as flashings from nearby Rodgers Sheetmetal, while on the walls, the joinery and cladding are manufactured by North Geelong's Jacaranda Industries, featuring locally milled fabric from LoomTex and Instyle.

Polwarth electorate food

Richard RIORDAN (Polwarth) (10:29): We are fast approaching the wonderful Christmas food season across the wonderful electorate of Polwarth, and I just want to bring the house's attention to it. It is really kicking off this coming weekend with Graze the Day down in Timboon. It is an ongoing festival they have down there. Tickets are available online, and it is an opportunity to sample some of the best food, wine, chocolates and all sorts of things produced down in the Timboon region. But wait, there is more. Just in recent weeks we have had the marvellous Hulms Bakery in the main street of Colac voted by this government, in fact – and we do not often agree with the government, but in this case they got it right – as having Victoria's favourite pie, and it is no wonder. It is a short distance around the corner from my shop, and I have way too many of them in the year. Thank goodness they occasionally have a nice bowl of hearty soup that can go down, instead of yet another pie which builds up around the old belly here.

We also want to bring to your attention, when you are along the Great Ocean Road, Dooley's Premium Ice Cream in Apollo Bay, who have won the Australian Grand Dairy Awards for the best ice cream

with their honey malt flavour. What a treat – not only can you have some of the finest lobster around the world in Apollo Bay, but you can finish off with a nice ice cream. And to finish off, the wonderful Ambe Foods Jiwan product have been nominated as small manufacturer of the year. This is a great new industry in the Colac area, developing and marketing to the world Australian-made Indian-style paneer and yoghurts.

1st Iramoo Scout Group

John LISTER (Werribee) (10:31): Not only am I fighting for my community, but I like to use my time here to celebrate the amazing things our young people do. Congratulations to the 1st Iramoo Scouts, who celebrated 50 years since their establishment. It was fantastic to join you all and see the pride you take in your group. And thank you to all the parents who organised the event. As a former Scout myself, I was honoured to cut the cake with more contemporary leaders of the group, and I look forward to working with you all to hone your skills in civics and leadership. Thank you for showing me up with your trebuchet construction skills.

Werribee Primary School

John LISTER (Werribee) (10:31): I also had the pleasure of presenting a new Aboriginal flag to student leaders at Werribee Primary School. This school does an amazing job of making everyone feel included and celebrated. Thank you to the teachers as well for letting me drop in to see your students hard at work and how you are driving up those NAPLAN scores there at Werribee Primary. Thank you to Trent for inviting me and to school captains Arya and Tarun and vice-captains Neharika and Trinaubh for showing me around as well.

West Gate Tunnel

John LISTER (Werribee) (10:32): Finally, on Sunday I joined thousands of other western suburbs locals to enjoy the new West Gate Tunnel on foot before it opens to cars. While it was not my best 8-k time, the surface was smooth and the vibes were, as they say, good. This project is a shining example of Labor's commitment to building the infrastructure our growing community needs. While those opposite probably spent their Sunday counting the numbers, we were counting the smiles on people's faces seeing this great project – that was so lame, sorry. It is another example of how we are on the side of people in the western suburbs.

Electoral reform

Ellen SANDELL (Melbourne) (10:32): Neo-Nazis could be about to get a seat in the Victorian Parliament due to Victoria's dodgy laws that allow parties to essentially buy seats in Parliament through preference whispering. Labor could stop this and they must stop this. Last week the Nine papers reported the disturbing news that the National Socialist Network, or neo-Nazis, have just announced their intention to form the White Australia political party and run for office across the country. This is deeply scary, obviously, for a number of reasons, the first being the huge threat to our social cohesion and to our multicultural, First Nations, Jewish and disabled communities in particular, who are key targets for the racism and violence of the neo-Nazis. Just a few months ago we saw the neo-Nazis violently attack Aboriginal women and elders at Camp Sovereignty, just down the road from Parliament. The really scary thing is, because of the dodgy vote-buying system in Victoria's upper house, the neo-Nazis could get an actual seat in Victoria's upper house on as little as 1 per cent of the vote if Labor does not change our dodgy group voting ticket system. All other states in the Commonwealth have gotten rid of the undemocratic group voting system. Victoria is the only place that still has it. Labor can make the choice to remove it.

Barb Godfrey

Paul EDBROOKE (Frankston) (10:34): Local Frankston resident Barb Godfrey was honoured this year by the President of Timor-Leste for her work and unwavering commitment to the Timor-Leste friendship group community, financially supporting and fundraising to build a small village

school, financially supporting the employment of staff for that school and supplying technology and a kindergarten class and staff in recent years. Barb Godfrey is no stranger to anyone in Frankston. She is known for her immense generosity and her love of community, and it is no surprise that this has been noticed across the globe. Congratulations to the wonderful Barb.

While I am on the subject of Barb, I want to put in *Hansard* some of the history that Barb helped create many, many years ago when the Orwil Street Community House was on the chopping block. It looked like, at that stage, council was going to bulldoze this facility, and Barb was one of the strong proponents for keeping this community house, which is still there today and still strong.

Barb actually stood in front of earthmoving equipment and dozers on this said day and made change in her community that has lasted decades and decades.

This community house has stood strong. It has helped so many people in the community because of people like Barb. For Barb to be recognised across oceans means a lot to our community. She is another Frankston community member kicking goals, a strong community member and a much-loved community member.

Ovens Valley electorate community hubs

Tim McCURDY (Ovens Valley) (10:35): I want to thank our hardworking staff at our neighbourhood houses across the Ovens Valley. Tennille Hall of Pangerang Community Hub, Loretta Waters of Open Door and Christine Osborne of Cobram Community House work tirelessly to upskill and support our communities. Without neighbourhood houses we would not have the opportunities to complete courses locally, and these courses are targeted for real people seeking solutions for real jobs, with barista courses, basic computer operating skills or even how to navigate AI. We are eternally grateful to those leaders in our community hubs and centres that provide these opportunities.

It is sad to see that the Victorian government is underfunding these hubs and that they will rely on more volunteer hours by local leaders. I urge the minister to dig deeper and fund these organisations properly, rather than expect them to do more with less money. It is also particularly important in regional communities, as public transport options do not always align with access to TAFE and other further learning options. Show some respect and pay these organisations what is fair.

Brendan McGrath

Tim McCURDY (Ovens Valley) (10:36): I also want to give a brief shout-out to Brendan McGrath, CEO of the Rural City of Wangaratta, who has called time on his role as CEO. Although he will not be lost to our community altogether, I want to thank him and congratulate him on a steady hand, a level head and a sense of humour.

Narre Warren North electorate student leaders

Belinda WILSON (Narre Warren North) (10:36): I recently visited Juniper College in my electorate, a specialist alternative secondary college for students who have not thrived in mainstream that offers flexible and supportive education with a strong focus on wellbeing and individual support. I had the absolute privilege of presenting my respect and integrity award to the amazing Jackson. Despite having to move homes and schools, he has shown incredible resilience and determination. Throughout his challenges, Jackson has always remained respectful and polite to all the staff and his peers, and he is always an active participant in class discussions. He is a valued member of the school community, and it was an absolute great celebration of his success. A huge congratulations to Jackson. I cannot wait to watch you thrive.

McHappy Day

Belinda WILSON (Narre Warren North) (10:37): On the weekend I had the absolute pleasure of helping out at Endeavour Hills Macca's for McHappy Day, which raises money for Ronald McDonald House Charities, places where families can stay close to their sick and injured kids while they are

receiving hospital care. A huge shout-out to the amazing Tyler and her superhero team at Endeavour Hills Macca's for making me feel so welcome and teaching me how to make a Big Mac – a very big bucket list item ticked off.

Birthday celebration

Belinda WILSON (Narre Warren North) (10:38): It is my dad's 80th birthday this week, and I want to wish him an absolutely huge happy 80th birthday. Frankie, you are the best.

Brighton electorate development

James NEWBURY (Brighton) (10:38): Thousands from Bayside and around Melbourne set out on Sunday for a community action walk in Brighton opposed to state Labor's forced high-rise tower policy. As we know, the Premier has approved a plan for an 8-kilometre-long development zone from Brighton to Sandringham. It will allow towers up to 16 storeys high to be built in Bayside, with six-storey developments in residential streets. Instead of creating four activity centres in Bayside, as state Labor originally indicated, they will join North Brighton, Middle Brighton, Hampton and Sandringham into one activity centre that is 8 kilometres long. The 8-kilometre-long zone represents Jacinta Allan's Gold Coast plan for Bayside. Under the new system the state Labor government determines what can be built in those locations, and developers have a right to build within the allowable envelope. The community no longer has current planning law rights. The Liberal Party does not support Jacinta Allan's plan for our community and will scrap it.

After almost a year of hiding their true intentions, the Labor government have also admitted that they intend to allow apartment towers to be built on train station car parks. The policy will scrap 80, leaving only 35 car park spots, in Middle Brighton station and 75, leaving 45 spots, at North Brighton station.

Instead of listening to the loud concerns of the community, yesterday the Premier mocked the thousands of Melburnians who attended the community walk. That says everything about this government and about this Premier.

Members interjecting.

James NEWBURY: No, she mocked them, mate. She mocked them.

Bun Bun Bakery

Eden FOSTER (Mulgrave) (10:40): I rise today to celebrate a remarkable achievement in my electorate of Mulgrave, proving once again that Springvale is Victoria's food capital. I am speaking of Bun Bun Bakery, the iconic Springvale institution which has just been crowned the winner of the coveted Vic's Picks best banh mi award. This award is a spectacular testament to the quality of their famous crusty rolls and their delicious fillings, whether it is crispy pork, lemongrass chicken, barbecue pork or tofu for the vegetarians. Serving hundreds, sometimes thousands, of these world-class banh mi every day, the team at Bun Bun are true culinary masters. This success is not just Bun Bun's, it is a win for the whole of Springvale business precinct, showcasing the rich cultural diversity that makes our community so special. I offer my warmest congratulations to the owners, the staff and the entire Bun Bun family on this thoroughly deserved recognition. Please, if you have not yet tried it, visit Springvale and taste the best banh mi in Victoria. I have been enjoying it for over 20 years.

Greenwood Mulgrave early education centre

Eden FOSTER (Mulgrave) (10:41): I also want to congratulate Greenwood Mulgrave childcare and kindergarten centre on their magnificent art show over the weekend, which I attended with member for South-Eastern Metropolitan Region Mr Galea in the other place. The talent on display was truly astounding and I want to sincerely thank and congratulate Zunaira and her dedicated team for fostering such a creative environment and art show.

Kororoit electorate youth round table

[NAMES AWAITING VERIFICATION]

Luba GRIGOROVITCH (Kororoit) (10:41): Recently I hosted a youth round table in Kororoit with 12 passionate young people. Each of them came ready to share their thoughts and talk about how we can make our community a better place. Their enthusiasm was just amazing and their honesty and their ideas truly inspiring. It was clear just how much they care about the future of our community. We had discussions on education, mental health, public transport, infrastructure and so much more, emphasising exactly how we as the government can improve our community for our future. The session was a great success, and I am pleased to say that we will be holding more youth round tables, with a full calendar locked in, and we are aiming to have one here at Parliament House. I want to help inspire these young people, and I love dedicating time to young people. I also want to thank the Minister for Youth Natalie Suleyman for all of the work that she does around inspiring all of us to make sure that we include the youth in our areas. To Caleb, Jasmet, Kashaf, Gunmi, Jaran, Sophie, Sula, Ethan, Kavya, Joanna, Charlie-May and Tanishka, thank you for your time, your enthusiasm and your passion to make our community a wonderful place. I am looking forward to working with you for the rest of the term on the Kororoit youth round table.

Monash citizenship ceremony

John MULLAHY (Glen Waverley) (10:42): It was wonderful to attend Monash council's citizenship ceremony earlier this week to welcome the new citizens into our wonderful community. The diversity of culture that Monash possesses is something that we are all incredibly proud of, and I congratulate our neighbours on becoming our newest Australians.

State Emergency Service Monash unit

John MULLAHY (Glen Waverley) (10:43): I also was delighted to acknowledge the contributions of the Monash SES unit at the VICSES pin ceremony. Our SES volunteers serve a critical role in our community, often being the first responders to emergency situations. I thank the volunteers for all that they do for our community. It was great to see unit controller George Haitidis and deputy controller Kylie Trott recognised for their amazing dedication to the Monash SES as they were both made unit life members.

Brentwood Secondary College

John MULLAHY (Glen Waverley) (10:43): On another matter, I was delighted to note that Brentwood Secondary College has been allocated over \$1.2 million to aid in maintenance works. This funding will go towards drainage, painting roofs, switchboard and other replacement works, ensuring that students have the best educational environment possible. I thank the principal John Ballagh and everyone in the Brentwood community for their continuing passion and advocacy.

Glen Waverley electorate early childhood education and care

John MULLAHY (Glen Waverley) (10:43): As part of the Building Blocks infrastructure grants program, the following kindergartens in our district have been successful in receiving funding: Brandon Park Children's Centre, Brentwood Pre-School, Legend Park Pre-School, Wayburn Pre-School, Tally Ho Pre-School and Highvale kindergarten. I am proud to be part of the Allan Labor government, which continues to deliver record support in the education sector, including in the Glen Waverley district, and it is wonderful that these places have free three- and four-year-old kinder as well.

Peggy Decker

Bronwyn HALFPENNY (Thomastown) (10:44): I would like to pay tribute to Peggy Decker, a long time Labor Party stalwart and adamant defender of workers rights who passionately fought for justice all her life. You would not want to get on the wrong side of Peggy if she thought you were not

genuine or your politics were too right. However, if you were with her in her fight for justice, she was a courageous, loyal comrade. I first met Peggy when I started working at the Food Preservers' Union when I was in my early 20s, and I especially enjoyed her rendition of *Solidarity Forever*. Peggy suffered ill health for a number of years, and we lost touch. However, I was so pleased when she and Phil accepted an invitation to my son's 21st birthday. My thoughts are with Peggy's husband Phil and daughter Lee and her grandchildren, who were the love of her life. Vale, Peggy Decker, and thank you for all you have done.

Sinhala language school concert

Bronwyn HALFPENNY (Thomastown) (10:45): It was a great pleasure to attend the annual Sinhala language school concert last weekend and watch some amazing performances from students who showcased not only their knowledge and confidence in the Sinhala language but also their considerable skills in dance, theatre and storytelling. The concert showcased the rich cultural heritage and language of the Ceylonese in Sri Lanka as well as ensuring that the next generation understand and are proud of their heritage. I would like to thank concert organiser and language school co-ordinator Mrs Himalee Karunasena and also the many volunteers that have worked so hard to make the concert a success.

The DEPUTY SPEAKER: I will just note before we move on that members statements are an important part of the day for members to represent their electorates, and as such I do not like interruptions. I would encourage members to remember to use proper titles at all times and to keep their interjections – well, there are no orderly interjections, but just do not be too loud.

Statements on parliamentary committee reports

Economy and Infrastructure Committee

Inquiry into Workplace Surveillance

John MULLAHY (Glen Waverley) (10:46): I rise to make a further contribution to the Economy and Infrastructure Committee's report on the inquiry into workplace surveillance, and importantly, to reflect on the Victorian government's response that was delivered yesterday. At the outset I again thank my fellow committee members, the chair and the deputy chair and the secretariat for their dedication. But today I want to focus not on the process – we have canvassed that in an earlier contribution – but on the broader policy significance of the government's response and what it means for Victorian workers, for employers doing the right thing and, critically, for the future fairness of our workplaces.

The government's response recognises what the inquiry made abundantly clear: workplace surveillance has changed dramatically. It is no longer just CCTV in foyers or call recording in customer service centres. It is AI-driven analyses of keystrokes, facial expressions, sentiment and behaviour. It is biometrics, third party data harvesting, GPS tracking, algorithmic decision-making and monitoring of workers in their homes through remote work software. The government's response acknowledges what we heard repeatedly: our legal framework has not kept pace. Victoria's key surveillance legislation was drafted almost 20 years ago, in a world before smartphones, before remote work and long before artificial intelligence could shape disciplinary decisions, performance assessments or even hiring outcomes without a human being's involvement.

One of the most striking issues highlighted in the government's response was the black hole around data protections. We heard evidence that many Victorian workers simply do not know who holds their data, how long it is stored for, whether it is shared with third party software providers or even whether it is sold. For many this data relates to intimate details, biometric locations, medical status, facial recognition patterns or emotional cues detected by algorithms. Much of this information is currently unprotected under existing law, particularly in the private sector, where the Commonwealth Privacy Act 1988 does not apply to employee records or to many small businesses. The government's commitment to strengthening data security obligations, restricting the sale of employee data and

expanding protections to the entire Victorian workforce, not just the public sector, is significant and long overdue. These reforms respond directly to the risks flagged repeatedly throughout the inquiry: the potential for misuse, data breaches, algorithmic discrimination and the chilling effect on workers' confidence and wellbeing when they do not understand how they are being monitored.

Another key area addressed by the government's response is covert surveillance. We heard disturbing examples of secret monitoring in Victorian workplaces, often deployed without justification, without legal oversight and without any clear purpose beyond exerting control. The government has rightly taken the view that covert surveillance must be tightly constrained, reserved only for clear cases of suspected unlawful behaviour, subject to a court order and accompanied by independent oversight. That is the modern standard. It is a reasonable standard, and it supports both ethical employers and workers, who deserve dignity and fairness.

The response also engages directly with the issue of automated decision-making, particularly for gig workers and platform workers whose employment status can be determined by opaque algorithms.

For many of these workers, a computer system can deactivate an account, issue warnings or apply penalties without a single human being ever reviewing the circumstances. The government's support for requiring human oversight is, frankly, a test for whether we are prepared to put real people, not machines, at the heart of our employment system. Workers must not be disciplined or dismissed by software.

Importantly, the government response also recognises that workplace surveillance disproportionately affects certain groups: women, young people, migrants, people with a disability and LGBTIQ+ workers, who are more likely to work in insecure jobs, more likely to be monitored intensively and less able to challenge unreasonable practices. This is a question not only of privacy but of equity and fairness. Stronger laws will help ensure that the rights of the most vulnerable workers do not depend on the goodwill of the most powerful employers.

I also want to highlight the government's commitment to meaningful consultation with business, unions and other stakeholders. Surveillance itself is not inherently bad. It can protect workers, it can protect clients, it can prevent theft, violence and misconduct, and many employers already act responsibly, transparently and ethically. But what the inquiry demonstrated and what the government has now acknowledged is that good employers should not be undercut by bad actors. A fair, clear and modern regulatory framework supports everyone.

Finally, I want to note the broader principles embedded in the government's response: that surveillance must be reasonable, necessary, proportionate and transparent. These are not abstract notions. They are the foundation of trust in any workplace. When workers feel respected, when they understand what data is collected and why, when they know that surveillance has limits and oversight, workplace culture improves, morale improves and productivity improves, as was made clear through the inquiry's evidence.

Public Accounts and Estimates Committee

Report on the 2025–26 Budget Estimates

Wayne FARNHAM (Narracan) (10:51): I am rising today to talk on the Public Accounts and Estimates Committee 2025–26 budget estimates report, tabled in October, and I will be leaning into recommendation 8 and finding 3. Congratulations to the committee and the secretariat – the PAEC is probably one of the most arduous committees you can be on, so congratulations to all the members on there.

I just want to start off by talking about the fiscal strategy of the government. We heard the Premier yesterday talk about the fiscal strategy and how well they are doing. But the problem with the government, when they talk about fiscal strategies and economic responsibility, is that they tend to fail. The government always have a five-point plan for fiscal strategies. I would like to point out the

previous five-point plan that the government has lived by for the last decade or so. Essentially, this government cannot manage money. They come out and they say, we have got a fiscal strategy. Their first fiscal strategy, as far as I am concerned, is constant budget blowouts. They cannot budget for anything. We are up to \$50 billion in overruns on construction. You have got to get these things under control.

Fiscal strategy number two: introduce more taxes; that is how we are going to get the economy going. But at the same time, the cost-of-living pressure it is putting on Victorians is astronomical. Fiscal strategy number three: \$21 million a day in interest. Everybody knows if you are going to get the interest down in the state, you have got to bring the principal down. But this government does not seem to want to work by those guidelines. They just want to keep borrowing. Fiscal strategy number four: build projects with no funding. We know the Suburban Rail Loop is not fully funded. We know they have this magic bubble of value capture, and we know the feds have not fully backed it yet. Even Infrastructure Australia is still not saying it is a good idea. Fiscal strategy number five for the government is to slash 3000 public service jobs. The government keeps forgetting to repeat that that is what is recommended, and the government will have to do that at some point in time. So the way this government is running the state of Victoria, when they talk about their fiscal strategy and their five-point plan, I just do not believe them. The rating agencies have got the government on notice – well and truly on notice. So it is time – maybe the government's fiscal strategy will work, but I doubt it very much.

Now I would like to go to recommendation 8, which actually says:

In future budgets, the Department of Treasury and Finance and the Department of Health outline reasons why a project schedule was revised in Budget Paper No. 4 when a project has a revised completion date.

That is relevant directly to the seat of Narracan and directly to the West Gippsland Hospital.

It is absolutely straight down the line. The job was meant to start in 2023, as per Daniel Andrews's election commitment in October 2022, but for 12 months –

A member interjected.

Wayne FARNHAM: It is not going well. The cows are still in the paddock. They will be baling hay soon. They have already done the silage. 2023 – we are now nearly into 2026. I could not get an answer for 12 months.

But clearly the recommendations are saying: give a reason. So give a reason. Tell the community why it has not started. Is it a lack of money – probably. Is it a lack of planning – definitely. Was it a false promise by then Premier Daniel Andrews – three weeks out from an election, all of a sudden they were going to spend \$675 million in the safest Liberal seat in Victoria? That is all it was. It was an empty promise by the then Premier Daniel Andrews, and that promise has not been backed up by the now Premier.

If we are going to have these reports and these recommendations come through this chamber, the government might want to start reading the committee reports, because there is a lot of information in here that the government ignores. They will not take up the recommendations and they will not be transparent, because that is not in their DNA. They like to cover things up with cabinet in confidence. Trying to get an FOI out of this government is near impossible; you have got to go to VCAT to get that. Here is a suggestion for the government: actually read a report, read the recommendations and implement them.

Environment and Planning Committee

Inquiry into the Supply of Homes in Regional Victoria

Juliana ADDISON (Wendouree) (10:56): I am delighted to contribute on today's committee reports to provide a report on the Legislative Assembly's Environment and Planning Committee

inquiry into the supply of homes in regional Victoria. I am delighted to see that some committee members are in the house today, including the member for Bass and the member for Narracan; although I do not agree with his previous contribution, I am delighted he is in the chamber at the moment.

As a proud regional Victorian, our inquiry into housing supply in rural and regional Victoria is not only close to home for me but an issue of great importance to communities in regional cities and towns across our great state. Across regional communities the alignment between housing supply and demand is increasingly unbalanced. I strongly believe our government must ensure that housing supply keeps pace with the momentum. The inquiry has shone a light on the evolving housing landscape in regional Victoria. With strong population growth, more families choosing to relocate from metro Melbourne to beautiful regional Victoria and changing household dynamics, the demand for housing, especially smaller homes close to services, is increasing.

On 2 December 2024 the Environment and Planning Committee resolved to inquire into this critical issue, and today as chair I tabled our final report, which contains 12 findings and 34 recommendations designed to address the housing challenges facing regional communities. This report would not have been possible without the strong cooperative approach by committee members from across the chamber. I would like to express my gratitude to my fellow committee members for their energetic and bipartisan approach to this inquiry. I wish to acknowledge and thank the deputy chair, the member for Morwell, for his great support and collaboration throughout the inquiry. We have been so fortunate to work closely and travel across the state with the members for Bass, Croydon, Monbulk, Narracan and Ripon. We know housing supply and housing insecurity are serious challenges in all our communities and share a belief in the solutions put forward in our report. Over the course of our inquiry we have had the opportunity to develop our understanding of the challenges of the supply of regional housing, learn from one another and, importantly, enjoy each other's company. I am so grateful to the members of the committee for their diligent approach to this inquiry and for spending so much time on the road to hear the voices of stakeholders from across the state. We went from Horsham to Bairnsdale and from Warrnambool to Castlemaine, with stop-offs in Colac and Traralgon and of course Ballarat.

I would also like to acknowledge the professional advice and support provided by the committee secretariat throughout the inquiry. I would like to commend the great work of our committee managers Igor Dosen and Dr Marianna Stylianou following Igor's departure to the Public Accounts and Estimates Committee, research officer Samantha Leahy and administrative officers Imogen Bacon and the returning Helen Ross-Soden.

I also want to acknowledge the input of our intern law student from Monash University Velika Kennedy for her contribution and research assistant Sarah Forbes. On behalf of the committee I genuinely thank you for your diligence and dedication to the inquiry, including research and evidence gathering, stakeholder management – including the committee – and report writing. We appreciate your outstanding support throughout our hearings, committee meetings and regional visits. Your assistance in uncovering evidence and developing a final report has been invaluable, and your patience with our unorthodox methods is most appreciated. I would like to acknowledge the member for Monbulk, who is in the Acting Speaker role at the moment and has played a fantastic role as well in our committee.

Throughout our inquiry we have explored the mix of housing forms needed to meet the needs of Victorians throughout their lives. We have investigated modern construction methods and ways to increase housing supply outside Melbourne. Through extensive site visits and public hearings across regional Victoria we saw firsthand the causes and consequences of high housing demand. I want to thank regional Victorians, local governments, builders and developers, community housing organisations, planning associations, professional bodies, academics and advocacy groups, who contributed more than 100 submissions to this inquiry. Your insights were invaluable. Regional

Victoria is growing. We are vibrant and full of opportunity, but housing supply must keep pace with the demand for affordable homes. I thank everyone for their contribution.

Public Accounts and Estimates Committee

Report on the 2025–26 Budget Estimates

Annabelle CLEELAND (Euroa) (11:01): I rise, like my colleague earlier, to speak on the Public Accounts and Estimates Committee 2025–26 budget papers, tabled in October. We have heard a lot about economic prudence in this chamber this week, and we tend to laugh not because it is a joke but because we feel like this government is not taking it seriously. When you dig into the budget papers and look past the gloss, you see a serious pattern of behaviour that is impossible to ignore. The state's debt burden is not a harmless number tucked away in a spreadsheet; it has ramifications on every Victorian family and every Victorian household. It is a weight that families in Kilmore, Broadford, Euroa, Seymour, Benalla – all households – are carrying. They feel it every single day through higher taxes, fewer services and the growing sense that even the basics are starting to slip out of reach.

It has now been 182 days since the budget was handed down, and in that time Victoria has added \$26.4 million to net debt every single day. Over 182 days it equates to about more than \$4 billion pushed onto the state's credit card, and that is signed in the name of every Victorian child, who will spend their entire adult life paying for this government's failures. Every dollar of that debt comes with a cost to our communities – \$20.8 million in interest repayments each and every day, and that is more than \$4 billion. That is money that could have repaired dangerous stretches of the Midland and Goulburn Valley highways. That is money that could have improved the lives of Victorians. It could have resurfaced the crumbling shoulders that have contributed to some of the highest road fatalities on record. It could have reopened Benalla's maternity services. It could have replaced ageing CFA tankers or supported SES units preparing for what will be one of the most concerning fire seasons in years. But instead it has evaporated into interest repayments because the government cannot manage money, and Victorians are paying the price. They are paying the price through the highest taxes in the country – more than 60 new or increased taxes – and that hurts every Victorian household and every Victorian business. It does not make sense.

Property taxes are skyrocketing while the housing shortfall grows every single year. It is an absolutely ludicrous idea that you tax the very people that are providing the supply that we so crucially need. Small businesses are crumbling under the weight of the taxes enforced by this government: Nestlé Broadford, ForestOne in Benalla, the Broadford paper mill and Seymour trailers. Every business, despite their size, is laying off staff because they cannot afford to service their tax bill under this government.

The fire services levy is punitive and completely unsustainable and punishing the very people that volunteer in Victoria to protect us. Family-run shops, farms and businesses that keep our country towns alive are not being backed; they are being bled dry by this government.

What do we get in regional Victoria in return? We get cuts – cuts to health, cuts to roads and cuts to emergency services –

Members interjecting.

Annabelle CLEELAND: Absolutely, across the board. If you want me to mention services, I am happy to. During a family violence crisis, we have our only Orange Door in the electorate closed and people are forced to travel without public transport into other regions – 12,500 square kilometres and we do not have an Orange Door in an area with one of the highest rates of family violence in the state. That is what a heartless government does, and that is what one that cannot manage money does. There are cuts to community health and mental health services – I am sorry, those on the other side want to argue about family violence figures in my electorate? That reiterates how heartless this government are and how they are abandoning regional Victorian families when they need it most. Millions have

been stripped out of the very programs that once kept people well by supporting intervention. We are losing our mental health counsellors at a time where we have lost too many young men's lives in recent years because they had nowhere to go, no-one to call. A two-year waitlist for a counsellor is unacceptable. Victorians have a choice. On this side of the house we will always support regional Victorians.

Economy and Infrastructure Committee

Inquiry into the Impact of Road Safety Behaviours on Vulnerable Road Users

Anthony CIANFLONE (Pascoe Vale) (11:06): Further to my contribution on 29 May 2024, I rise to make a contribution on the Economy and Infrastructure Committee's report on the inquiry into the impact of road safety behaviours on vulnerable road users. The inquiry and the subsequent report, recommendations and government response continue to be strongly welcomed by many across my community, because vulnerable road users deserve to be respected and safe when commuting along our local roads, streets, footpaths and neighbourhoods.

Whether cycling, walking, pushing a pram, utilising a mobility device or boarding a train, tram or bus, all vulnerable road users deserve our respect. However, as the inquiry highlighted, following on from the COVID-19 pandemic, the committee heard overwhelming evidence that we have continued to experience a dramatic increase in worsening driver behaviour via dangerous driving, aggressive driving, impatient driving, risk-taking driving, speeding, distracted driving, inattention, drink driving, drug driving and failure to wear seat belts, which when combined remain the largest contributing factors and causes of tragic fatalities, accidents, incidents and far too many near misses on our roads. As the committee also highlighted, it is vulnerable road users who continue to tragically experience the brunt of this deteriorating driver behaviour and disproportionately are represented when it comes to road fatalities, serious accidents, incidents and near misses across our state's and Merri-bek's roads.

The report found that in 2023 vulnerable road users made up 36 per cent of lives lost on Victorian roads. In 2022 they made up almost half – 47 per cent – and it is across Merri-bek that these issues are compounded and more hazardous, with council's submission highlighting five fatalities of vulnerable road users in 2022 and another in March 2023. From 2020 to 2022 there were 123 recorded fatal or serious injury crashes involving vulnerable road users across Merri-bek, 118 serious injuries and five deaths. Of those, 38 per cent occurred on local council-managed roads and streets and 62 per cent occurred on state-controlled roads, involving 28 per cent pedestrians, 38 per cent motorcyclists and 34 per cent cyclists. Additionally, 79 per cent of all fatal and serious crashes involving pedestrians and nearly all pedestrian lives lost in Merri-bek occurred on arterial roads during this time.

These statistics of course do not include the more recent tragic fatalities which have occurred on Moreland Road and Gordon Street with the death of a skateboarder; Moreland Road in the vicinity of the John Fawcner hospital with the death of a cyclist; Bell Street in the vicinity of the Coburg town hall with the death of a motorcyclist; Bell Street and Sydney Road intersection, which involved a truck and a vulnerable road user; and other ongoing incidents and accidents along our arterial corridors, including along Sydney Road, North Coburg, Murray Road and our other arterial corridors. These are simply not numbers. They are family members, neighbours, students, elderly residents and people out walking or riding, and they are far over-represented in this trauma data.

We heard directly from my local community of Pascoe Vale, Coburg and Brunswick West through the overwhelming submissions and evidence, including the dedicated public hearing we held at the Coburg town hall on 9 August 2023.

The committee heard that the Coburg High School's active transport committee numbers continue to rise – that is, the number of students who actively commute to high school in Coburg is one of the highest in the state, with 53.4 per cent of its 1255 students walking or riding the whole way to school and a further 23.3 per cent walking to school from a train station or bus or tram stop. That is nearly 80 per cent of students who actively commute to Coburg High School. However, the ongoing issues

with dangerous, aggressive driving behaviour and the absence of appropriate road safety measures continue to create risks and concerns for many. At the inquiry we heard from the crossing supervisor at the corner of Bell Street and Sydney Road, who said:

Each day I notice many vehicles speeding through the intersection, ‘running’ red lights and ignoring no right turn signs. It can be extremely scary with ... some motorists ... each day.

A local parent, Charlotte Pache, stated:

I am the mother of an 11 year old who attends Coburg PS [Primary School]. We live around 5 minutes by bicycle from the school and in the last two years I have become increasingly concerned about the massive increase in traffic on surrounding roads, increase in careless driving, serious incidents on Murray Road, Bell Street, Nicholson Street and Pentridge Boulevard, the prevalence of entitled behaviour from drivers and lack of safe crossings for children attending Coburg PS, Coburg High and other neighbouring schools. It appears as though the entire design of the roads around the schools in Coburg is to increase convenience for drivers at the expense of children’s safety going to and from school. I would like to see a significant increase in traffic calming measures, speed bumps, reduction of speed limits around schools, additional crossing personnel, and changes in traffic light sequencing to preference children ...

and families crossing the roads. We heard from Lisa O’Halloran, the Merri-bek Bicycle User Group convenor, who said 63 per cent of their surveyed members had reported increased mobile phone use and distracted driving since 2020. She said:

When you are on a bike you certainly notice the number of people that are staring at their phones a lot of the time, and it is really quite concerning.

I continue to draw the minister to the 61 findings and 56 recommendations outlined in the report so we can continue taking action to make our local roads safer for all.

Public Accounts and Estimates Committee

Report on the 2025–26 Budget Estimates

Jade BENHAM (Mildura) (11:11): It is time for the committee report of fortune. Again today, similar to last week, I am doing the Public Accounts and Estimates Committee report on the 2025–26 budget estimates. Let us see what I will talk about as my first subject. The Department of Health – that is a good one. It is no secret, and I talk about this often, that when we talk about the Department of Health and the public health system, there is a critical underfunding for infrastructure. I love these reports that come out. Every year they are just another way for the government to give themselves a pat on the back and say how well they are doing. Meanwhile those of us that can think for ourselves go, ‘That’s just simply not true.’

I have been saying in this chamber for three years now – the member for Narracan also illustrated the same thing – that critical health infrastructure investment is needed, particularly in the regions. 350 beds are what the Mildura Base Public Hospital has. We desperately need another 30, at a minimum. I had another email the other day about people waiting in emergency departments for over 24 hours. At the last election the Nationals and the Liberals made a commitment of \$750 million. With the state of the finances – the interest repayments and the debt levels – I have been saying, ‘You know what, as a bare minimum 30 beds are what we need.’ Thankfully, in all honesty, the administration at the Mildura Base Public Hospital have taken the initiative themselves, outside of their scope, and gone, ‘You know what, we actually need to move outpatient services off this campus to free up some administration, free up some room, and actually put extra beds in’ – because they simply cannot have people dying in hallways anymore. They are sick of it. The hardworking staff in that hospital should not have to deal with that on a weekly basis.

Next subject – let us see what I will bring up this time. No, that is health again; I was obviously very fixated on that. The Department of Families, Fairness and Housing. Housing – how are those targets going? Again, the level of delusion that comes from the other side with regard to every subject in this report is simply mind-blowing. It is almost like – I do not want to use the word ‘cult’, but that is what

it is like – if someone says something, everyone believes it and nods along and goes, ‘Yes, that’s right,’ when the reality on the ground is it is simply not true.

We have got people sleeping rough in tiny towns and regional centres like we have never seen before. Thankfully, in Mildura we actually have an organisation – and I sent them a shout-out yesterday – the Mallee Accommodation and Support Program, affectionately known as MASP. This is an organisation that was brought together as an amalgamation of three different organisations back in the 1990s, because there were a group of people dedicated to housing, in particular, youth, men and families trying to escape family violence. This is a community organisation that has brought together all of these needs, recognised the needs. It is a community-led solution, which is what we actually need – community-led, not data-led, because you can make data sing any way you want it to. MASP do such an amazing job. We have just opened another six units, called Doug’s Place, which will house those that are currently sleeping on the streets. They are just remarkable in the work that they are doing.

I say this all the time to the government: there are organisations already doing remarkable community-led work in every space. But MASP are doing it on the ground and literally going out and housing those that are sleeping rough, that do not have a home, that do not have a roof over their head, that need the extra wraparound support services, instead of the Department of Families, Fairness and Housing often working in silos alongside one another. I have run out of time; I could go for another half an hour.

Bills

Justice Legislation Amendment (Vicarious Liability for Child Abuse) Bill 2025

Statement of compatibility

Sonya KILKENNY (Carrum – Attorney-General, Minister for Planning) (11:18): In accordance with the Charter of Human Rights and Responsibilities Act 2006, I table a statement of compatibility in relation to the Justice Legislation Amendment (Vicarious Liability for Child Abuse) Bill 2025:

Opening paragraphs

In accordance with section 28 of the *Charter of Human Rights and Responsibilities Act 2006*, (the Charter), I make this Statement of Compatibility with respect to the Justice Legislation Amendment (Vicarious Liability for Child Abuse) Bill 2025.

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

Overview

Vicarious liability is a form of strict liability whereby a defendant organisation can be held liable for the wrongful acts or omissions of another person, even when the defendant was not at fault. In Victoria, vicarious liability claims for child abuse are currently brought under the common law. The common law applies retrospectively, which means that an organisation can be vicariously liable for historic child abuse perpetrated by their employees.

The Bill will expand the law of vicarious liability for child abuse to address the impacts of the High Court of Australia’s decision in *Bird v DP (a pseudonym)* (2024) 419 ALR 552. The High Court in *Bird v DP* overturned a decision of the Victorian Supreme Court, upheld by the Court of Appeal, that extended liability to relationships that are ‘akin to employment’.

The Bill will:

- amend the *Wrongs Act 1958* to retrospectively (and prospectively) legislate the law of vicarious liability for child abuse and expand it to include relationships ‘akin to employment’, and
- amend the *Limitation of Actions Act 1958* to enable affected child abuse victim-survivors who received a settlement or civil judgment between the *Bird v DP* decision (13 November 2024) and commencement of the Bill, to apply to the court to set aside their settlement or judgment and commence new proceedings, thereby allowing them to benefit from the reforms.

Human Rights Issues

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

The following Charter rights are relevant to the Bill:

- recognition and equality before the law (section 8)
- protection of children (section 17(2))
- property rights (section 20)
- right to a fair hearing (section 24), and
- retrospective criminal laws (section 27).

Under the Charter, rights can be subject to limits that are reasonable and justifiable in a free and democratic society based on human dignity, equality and freedom. Rights may be limited to protect other rights. As discussed below, I consider that any limitations this Bill imposes on Charter rights are reasonable and justified in accordance with section 7(2) of the Charter.

The right to recognition and equality before the law

Section 8 of the Charter outlines the right to recognition and equality before the law. In *Lifestyle Communities Ltd (No 3) (Anti-Discrimination)* [2009] VCAT 1869, Justice Bell stated that the equality rights in section 8 are the ‘keystone in the protective arch of the Charter’.

Section 8(3) of the Charter protects the right of every person to have equal protection of the law without discrimination and the right to equal and effective protection against discrimination. Discrimination is prohibited based on an attribute set out in section 6 of the *Equal Opportunity Act 2010*, including discrimination based on a person’s age.

The Bill promotes the right to recognition and equality before the law by expanding the law of vicarious liability to ensure that victim-survivors of child abuse perpetrated by people akin to employees have the same legal avenues to civil compensation as those abused by employees of an organisation.

The Bill only expands the law of vicarious liability to the extent necessary to address the direct impacts of the *Bird v DP* decision on affected victim-survivors of historic child abuse. It will only expand the law of vicarious liability in relation to child abuse, defined as physical and/or sexual abuse of a person who is under the age of 18 years. While this may engage the right to equality and recognition before the law, based on the attribute of age, I consider any limitation reasonable and justified in accordance with section 7(2) of the Charter.

The limited application of the Bill to child abuse recognises the special vulnerability of children, who must be afforded the strongest protections. The Bill focuses on ensuring victim-survivors of child abuse, including historic child abuse, can pursue civil compensation against organisations entrusted with their care.

Protection of children

Section 17(2) provides that every child has the right, without discrimination, to such protection as is in the child’s best interests and is needed by the child by reason of being a child. This right recognises the vulnerability of children.

The Bill promotes the protection of children by ensuring that victim-survivors of child abuse perpetrated by people who are akin to employees can pursue a vicarious liability claim against a relevant organisation. The new statutory vicarious liability provisions will complement existing avenues for civil litigation for child abuse, including negligence and breach of the statutory duty on organisations to prevent child abuse under Part XIII of the *Wrongs Act 1958*.

The Bill promotes the protection of children by ensuring that a vicarious liability claim for child abuse can be brought regardless of when the abuse occurred. It can take over 20 years for victim-survivors to tell someone about their abuse and the retrospective operation of the Bill recognises the lifelong effects of child abuse. The Royal Commission into Institutional Responses to Child Sexual Abuse found that survivors of abuse have faced substantial barriers to accessing justice through civil litigation, including the imbalance of power and resources between survivors and organisations, and complex legal procedures.

Property rights

Section 20 of the Charter provides that a person must not be deprived of their property other than in accordance with the law. Importantly, Charter rights apply only to natural persons and not organisations. However, there will be circumstances where a natural person could be exposed to liability under these reforms. This includes when they are the nominated or ordered to be the proper defendant to a claim or action founded on or arising from child abuse under the *Legal Identity of Defendants (Organisational Child Abuse) Act 2018*.

The Charter does not define the terms ‘property’ or ‘deprived’. In *PJB v Melbourne Health* (2011) 39 VR 373, Justice Bell noted that ‘On first principles, these terms would be interpreted liberally and beneficially to encompass economic interests and deprivation in a broad sense’. For deprivation of property to be ‘in accordance with law’, it must be authorised by law, and that law must be publicly accessible, clear and certain and must not operate arbitrarily.

The Bill will amend the *Limitation of Actions Act 1958* to allow affected victim-survivors whose claims were resolved in the period between the *Bird v DP* decision (13 November 2024) and commencement of the Bill, to apply to the court to have a judgment (including dismissal) or settlement set aside and commence another action. The court will be able to set aside previous judgments and settlement agreements, where this is just and reasonable. This could lead to a defendant having to pay a higher sum than it had previously paid under the set-aside settlement or judgment.

I am satisfied that any limitation on property rights under the Charter is reasonable and justified in accordance with section 7(2) of the Charter. Enabling victim-survivors to apply to the court to set aside affected judgments or settlements, ensures that victim-survivors impacted by *Bird v DP* can benefit from the reforms and are not left without meaningful legal redress for the abuse they suffered as children.

Any deprivation of property because of this Bill will be in accordance with the law. Any interference with a defendant’s property rights would be limited to circumstances in which a court has determined, in the exercise of its discretion, are ‘just and reasonable’.

The right to a fair hearing

Section 24 of the Charter provides that a person who is party to a civil proceeding has the right to have the proceeding decided by a competent, independent and impartial court or tribunal after a fair and public hearing. The right is concerned with the procedural fairness of a court or a tribunal in arriving at a decision (*Knight v Wise* [2014] VSC 76).

The Bill will expand vicarious liability for child abuse to include relationships akin to employment. These reforms will not change court procedures or affect judicial independence in deciding cases.

The Bill also enables a court, upon application, to set aside a judgment or settlement made between the *Bird v DP* decision and the commencement of the Bill, if just and reasonable to do so. In deciding whether to make an order to set aside a settlement or previous judgment, a court will continue to exercise its discretion, based on the evidence before it and the application of the law to those facts, and continue to adhere to prescribed rules and procedures. These reforms will not compromise a party’s right to a fair hearing.

Retrospective criminal laws

Section 27 of the Charter protects a person’s right not to be subject to criminal laws with retrospective effect. There is no corresponding prohibition on retrospective civil laws.

Under the common law, which operates retrospectively, child abuse vicarious liability claims can be brought whether the abuse occurred 50 years ago or recently, as long as the abuse was perpetrated in the scope or course of employment. The Bill simply expands the relationship capable of attracting vicarious liability beyond employment relationships to include relationships akin to employment. Given the new provisions will operate retrospectively (and prospectively), statutory vicarious liability claims for child abuse can be brought whether the abuse occurred before, on or after commencement of the reforms.

The Bill, however, does not relate to criminal laws and therefore section 27 of the Charter is not engaged. Further, a law does not operate arbitrarily merely because it operates retrospectively. Nevertheless, taking a broad view of Charter rights and acknowledging the general presumption against retrospective laws, I consider that a discussion of the retrospective operation of the Bill is helpful.

Retrospective civil laws can give rise to perceptions of unfairness and injustice by imposing potential liability for conduct that a person may not have been liable for at the time it was engaged in. However, to respond to the *Bird v DP* decision, the Bill must operate retrospectively to benefit affected victim-survivors of historic child abuse.

Affected victim-survivors are those who do not have a viable negligence claim, were abused by someone akin to an employee, and who are unable to bring claims for breach of the organisational duty to prevent child abuse under Part XIII of the *Wrongs Act 1958*. While the organisational duty applies broadly, it only applies to abuse that occurred since 1 July 2017. Some victim-survivors of historic child abuse may not have viable negligence claims, as these claims require proof the organisation had knowledge of the abuse, which can be difficult in historic cases due to the passage of time, the death of key witnesses or loss of records. Expanding the law of vicarious liability in the limited way that the Bill does is required to provide affected victim-survivors with a legal avenue to seek civil compensation through the courts.

The Bill and explanatory materials make clear the very limited nature and scope of the reforms. The new statutory vicarious liability is confined to child abuse, only impacts organisations that exercise care, supervision and authority over children, and only extends the existing law of vicarious liability by expanding it to encompass relationships that are akin to employment. These reforms are required to alleviate the impacts of the *Bird v DP* decision on victim-survivors of historic child abuse.

The Hon. Sonya Kilkenny MP
Attorney-General

Second reading

Sonya KILKENNY (Carrum – Attorney-General, Minister for Planning) (11:18): I move:

That this bill be now read a second time.

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

Incorporated speech as follows:

Child abuse has a lifelong and devastating impact on the lives of survivors, their broader family groups and supporters, and the wider community. It is a fundamental breach of the trust that children place in adults. For many victim-survivors of child abuse that occurred in organisational settings, it is important to have the option of pursuing civil litigation.

Victoria has been a leader in removing barriers to civil litigation for victim-survivors of child abuse. In 2015, we removed limitation periods for actions founded on child abuse and, in 2017, imposed a statutory duty of care on organisations to prevent child abuse. In 2018, we enacted laws to enable unincorporated organisations to be sued – thereby closing a loophole that had allowed some organisations to evade liability for child abuse – and, in 2019, courts were empowered to set aside unfair child abuse settlements and judgments. Further reform is now required to address the impacts of the High Court of Australia’s decision of *Bird v DP (a pseudonym)* (2024) 419 ALR 552 on victim-survivors of historic child abuse.

In December 2021, the Supreme Court of Victoria (and, in 2023, the Victorian Court of Appeal) found the Roman Catholic Diocese of Ballarat vicariously liable for a Catholic priest’s sexual abuse of a 5-year-old child at his parents’ home on two separate occasions in 1971. On appeal by the Diocese, the High Court was asked to consider whether, in the absence of a formal employment relationship, an organisation may be held vicariously liable for the unlawful actions of a person who is akin to an employee.

Vicarious liability is a form of strict liability whereby a defendant organisation can be held liable for the wrongful acts or omissions of another person, even if the defendant is free from fault. This stands in contrast to the statutory duty of care on organisations to prevent child abuse under Part XIII of the *Wrongs Act 1958*, where liability is fault-based.

Vicarious liability claims for child abuse are brought under the common law and as the common law has retrospective effect, organisations can be held vicariously liable for historic child abuse. Vicarious liability is imposed when 2 limbs are satisfied:

- there is a relationship capable of attracting vicarious liability – currently confined to an employment relationship (Limb 1), and
- the wrongful act took place in the course or scope of the role (Limb 2).

In November 2024, the High Court in *Bird v DP* overturned a decision of the Victorian Supreme Court, upheld by the Court of Appeal, that extended vicarious liability to relationships that are ‘akin to employment’. In doing so, the High Court held that a Catholic Diocese could not be vicariously liable for the abuse of a child by one of its assistant priests, because he was not an employee.

In making this decision, the High Court acknowledged that ‘[i]nsisting on a threshold requirement of an employment relationship for a finding of vicarious liability, including in cases such as the present, has been described as harsh.’ The Court also noted that ‘Reformulation of the law of vicarious liability is properly the province of the legislature’ – in effect inviting Parliament to make the necessary changes to address the ‘harsh’ outcome.

The *Bird v DP* decision has impacted a group of historic child abuse victim-survivors: those who do not have viable negligence claims (due, for example, to the passage of time, the loss of records and deaths of key witnesses); and those who were abused by a non-employee, who nevertheless resembled an employee. Claims on foot at the time of the decision have been significantly weakened or rendered unviable, with some plaintiffs at risk of costs orders against them. These victim-survivors now find themselves without any possible avenues for civil litigation.

We have heard from victim-survivors, members of the public, advocacy groups and peak legal bodies of the damaging impacts of the High Court decision on this group, who have called for legislative reform. It takes great courage for victim-survivors to report abuse, often at great personal expense, and some cannot now seek to hold organisations to account through the courts.

The *Bird v DP* decision has led to inequitable outcomes for victim-survivors based on an abuser's employment status. Those who suffered historic abuse by employees may bring vicarious liability actions against the relevant organisations, however, those abused in the past by people akin to employees, for example priests, cannot. Organisations that have not traditionally employed their personnel are able to evade accountability for historic child abuse, even though their relationship with these personnel, in essence, possessed the same fundamental qualities as a formal employment relationship. The decision also leaves Australia at odds with other common law jurisdictions, such as the United Kingdom and Canada, which extended vicarious liability to include relationships that are akin to employment over 20 years ago.

To address the impacts of the *Bird v DP* decision, the Bill will:

- amend the *Wrongs Act 1958* to retrospectively (and prospectively) expand vicarious liability for child abuse beyond employment relationships to include relationships that are 'akin to employment', and
- amend the *Limitation of Actions Act 1958* to enable affected victim-survivors to apply to the court to have their settlement or civil judgment that occurred between 13 November 2024 (the date of the *Bird v DP* decision) and the commencement of this Bill, set aside, so that they may benefit from these reforms.

Legislating vicarious liability for child abuse

The Bill will amend the *Wrongs Act 1958* to insert new 'Part XIII A – Statutory vicarious liability for child abuse'.

The reforms will only expand vicarious liability to the extent needed to address the effects of the *Bird v DP* decision and are therefore constrained in scope. The reforms will apply only to child abuse (physical and/or sexual) claims and to organisations that exercise care, supervision or authority over children, including the State.

The Bill will enable statutory vicarious liability claims for child abuse to be brought whether the abuse occurred before, on or after the commencement of the Bill. This retrospective operation is consistent with how the common law of vicarious liability operates. Retrospective reforms are necessary to remove the barrier to civil litigation currently faced by victim-survivors of historic child abuse who have been impacted by the *Bird v DP* decision.

Extending Limb 1 of vicarious liability to encompass relationships that are akin to employment

The Bill will extend Limb 1 of vicarious liability for child abuse beyond employment relationships to include those that are 'akin to employment'. This will ensure that organisations can be held accountable, not just for child abuse by employees, but for abuse by people who in all relevant respects resemble employees. Extending Limb 1 in this way ensures that organisations that do not formally employ their personnel can be held accountable for historic abuse.

The Bill sets out the criteria the court may have regard to when determining whether an individual is akin to an employee, including, but not limited to, whether the individual carries out activities as an integral part of the activities carried on by the organisation, and does so for the benefit of the organisation, and the extent of the organisation's control over the individual in the carrying out of their activities.

Depending on the circumstances of each case, the new akin to employee test is intended to capture relationships that resemble employment, such as priests and religious leaders who are not formally employed but otherwise resemble employees of their religious organisations.

In determining whether a particular person is akin to an employee, in addition to listing discretionary factors, the Bill makes clear that the court may consider any other matter or factor it considers relevant, thereby giving the court appropriate discretion to decide matters based on the unique facts of each case.

As independent contractors do not resemble employees, they are explicitly excluded from the akin to employee test.

Codifying Limb 2 of vicarious liability

The Bill will maintain the existing common law test for Limb 2 of vicarious liability, which requires that the relevant act or omission took place in the course or scope of the role, and gives the court appropriate discretion to further develop the test.

The Bill will provide that an organisation will be vicariously liable for child abuse if:

- the apparent performance by the employee or individual akin to an employee of a role in which the organisation placed that person supplies the occasion for child abuse, and
- the employee or individual akin to an employee takes advantage of, or uses, that occasion to abuse the child.

Under the common law, it is not sufficient that a role provided a ‘mere opportunity’ for the abuse to take place; it needs to have provided the wrongdoer with the very occasion for the abuse.

The Bill sets out criteria that the court may consider when determining whether the organisation placed the employee or individual akin to an employee in a role that supplies the occasion for the abuse of the child. This includes, but is not limited to, whether the organisation placed that person in a position or role in which they have authority, power or control over the child, the trust of the child, or the ability to achieve intimacy with the child.

Enabling affected victim-survivors to set aside judgments and settlements

The Bill will amend the *Limitation of Actions Act 1958* to allow affected victim-survivors whose vicarious liability claims were resolved in the period between 13 November 2024 (the date of the High Court’s decision in *Bird v DP*) and the commencement of these reforms, to apply to the court to have a judgment or settlement set aside and commence another action. Courts can set aside judgments or settlements where it considers this just and reasonable.

This reform ensures that victim-survivors whose claims were significantly weakened or rendered unviable following the High Court’s *Bird v DP* decision, can benefit from the reforms.

I commend the Bill to the house.

James NEWBURY (Brighton) (11:18): I move:

That debate be adjourned.

Motion agreed to and debate adjourned.

Ordered that debate be adjourned for two weeks. Debate adjourned until Wednesday 3 December.

Justice Legislation Further Amendment (Miscellaneous) Bill 2025

Statement of compatibility

Sonya KILKENNY (Carrum – Attorney-General, Minister for Planning) (11:20): In accordance with the Charter of Human Rights and Responsibilities Act 2006, I table a statement of compatibility in relation to the Justice Legislation Further Amendment (Miscellaneous) Bill 2025:

In accordance with section 28 of the *Charter of Human Rights and Responsibilities Act 2006*, (the Charter), I make this Statement of Compatibility with respect to the Justice Legislation Further Amendment (Miscellaneous) Bill 2025.

In my opinion, the Justice Legislation Further Amendment (Miscellaneous) Bill 2025, as introduced to the Legislative Assembly, is compatible with human rights as set out in the Charter. I base my opinion on the reasons outlined in this statement.

Overview

The Bill seeks to improve the operation of the Victorian legal and justice systems by implementing the following reforms:

- allowing the lower courts and VCAT to vary or revoke a ‘legacy suppression order’ made by that court or tribunal (to give effect to Recommendation 133 of the Victorian Law Reform Commission’s 2020 *Contempt of Court Report*)
- supporting the Coroners Court of Victoria to streamline investigation finalisation and reopening procedures
- enabling more doctors to register deaths and clarifying their death reporting obligations
- amend fines and tolling legislation, and make minor fines-related amendments to other Acts
- clarifying the delegation powers and acting arrangements of the Public Advocate in the *Guardianship and Administration Act 2019*

- amending the *Crimes Act 1958* to broaden the definition of ‘bestiality’ and prohibit the possession, production, distribution and accessing of bestiality or animal abuse material
- extending the operation of provisions supporting the County Court Drug and Alcohol Treatment Court, and
- enabling the Magistrates’ Court of Victoria to carry out certain administrative functions under the *Road Safety Act 1986* more efficiently.

Human Rights Issues

Some of the Bill’s reforms involve technical amendments that do not impact Charter rights. The following rights are relevant to the Bill:

- recognition and equality before the law (section 8)
- the right to life (section 9)
- freedom of movement (section 12)
- privacy and reputation (section 13)
- freedom of expression (section 15)
- freedom of association (section 16(2))
- protection of families and children (section 17)
- property (section 20)
- liberty and security of person (section 21)
- humane treatment when deprived of liberty (section 22)
- the right to a fair hearing (section 24)
- rights in criminal proceedings (section 25).

For the following reasons, I am satisfied that the Bill is compatible with the Charter and, to the extent that any rights are limited, those limitations are reasonable and justified.

Amendments to the *Open Courts Act 2013* to implement Recommendation 133 of the Victorian Law Reform Commission’s 2020 *Contempt of Court Report*

The Bill amends the *Open Courts Act 2013* to improve access to justice for victim-survivors of sexual and family violence offences, and other interested persons. It promotes open justice by allowing persons to apply to the lower courts or the Victorian Civil and Administrative Tribunal (VCAT) to vary or revoke a ‘legacy suppression order’ made prior to the commencement of the Open Courts Act on 1 December 2013. The Bill refers to these orders as ‘pre-existing orders’.

Right to privacy and reputation

Section 13 of the Charter provides that a person has the right not to have their privacy, family, home or correspondence unlawfully or arbitrarily interfered with, and not to have their reputation unlawfully attacked. This right does not encompass lawful and non-arbitrary interference with a person’s privacy.

The Bill will empower the lower courts and VCAT to review a pre-existing order. Applications of this type are currently only able to be made to the Supreme Court under its inherent jurisdiction. This is costly for applicants. The Bill will mirror existing Open Courts Act provisions to allow applicants to apply to the lower courts or VCAT to vary or revoke a pre-existing order. This will uphold the principle of open justice, a main purpose of the Open Courts Act and a fundamental aspect of Victoria’s legal system.

A decision to revoke a pre-existing order would have the effect of removing the prohibition on the publication of specific information from a proceeding, including, for example, the names of parties or witnesses. This engages but does not limit privacy rights. The reforms also recognise that in certain situations, a person’s right to privacy outweighs the open justice principle.

Right to freedom of expression

Section 15 of the Charter provides that all persons have the right to freedom of expression. This includes the right of the media to attend and report on court proceedings. Open justice is a key purpose of the Open Courts Act and helps to maintain the integrity and impartiality of Victorian courts and tribunals, and strengthen public confidence in our justice system.

The making of a suppression order engages the right to freedom of expression, but is recognised as an appropriate limitation of that right. The Bill does not expand powers to make suppression orders under the Open Courts Act, but instead provides clarity on powers to review pre-existing orders. The reforms will enhance the freedom of expression of victim- survivors, their families, the media, and other interested parties,

by providing an accessible avenue to apply to vary or revoke pre-existing orders that may otherwise continue indefinitely.

Protection of families and children

Section 17 of the Charter provides that families are entitled to be protected by society and the State, and that every child has the right, without discrimination, to such protection as is in the child's best interests and is needed by the child by reason of being a child. The Charter and Open Courts Act define a 'child' as a person under 18 years of age.

The Bill promotes the rights of children by ensuring that, in circumstances set out in new section 37(4), a pre-existing order is not revoked where the person the subject of that order is a child who was the victim or alleged victim of a sexual offence or family violence offence. This recognises children's special vulnerability and protects them from harm, including the risk of undue distress or embarrassment associated with revealing their identity. The Bill will not affect the operation of important restrictions on publication of proceedings that relate to children, including section 534(1) of the *Children, Youth and Families Act 2005*.

Right to a fair hearing

Section 24(1) of the Charter provides that a person charged with a criminal offence or a party to a civil proceeding has the right to a fair and public hearing.

Pre-existing orders are suppression orders made prior to the commencement of the Open Courts Act on 1 December 2013. These proceedings have likely concluded, yet many pre-existing orders made as part of those proceedings continue to operate. The reforms are limited to the operation of pre-existing orders and do not engage rights associated with the conduct of a substantive criminal or civil hearing. The Bill nevertheless includes a provision akin to section 15(1A) of the Open Courts Act to allow a court hearing an appeal from a proceeding in which a pre-existing order was made and continues to operate, to review that order.

In *Knight v Wise* [2014] VSC 76, the Supreme Court held that the right to a fair hearing includes the common law right of unimpeded access to courts. The Bill promotes access to justice for victim-survivors and other persons by enabling the lower courts and VCAT to hear applications to review pre-existing orders made in those courts or tribunal. Currently, a person must apply to the Supreme Court under its inherent jurisdiction to review these orders. This attracts higher costs and may therefore limit access to justice. The Bill provides that relevant persons (those listed in section 15(2) of the Open Courts Act), are entitled to appear and be heard on a review of a pre-existing order. This ensures that all persons with a sufficient interest in whether a pre-existing order should be confirmed, varied or revoked are afforded procedural fairness.

The Bill does not introduce new powers to prohibit or restrict the publication or other disclosure of information in connection with a proceeding. To the contrary, it promotes the right to a public hearing by empowering persons to apply to the lower courts or VCAT to vary or revoke a pre-existing suppression order that may otherwise operate indefinitely.

Enabling the Coroners Court to streamline investigation finalisation and reopening

The Bill amends the *Coroners Act 2008* to:

- enable Victorian Institute of Forensic Medicine (VIFM) pathologists to register certain natural cause deaths with Births, Deaths and Marriages (BDM) at the direction of a coroner
- limit standing to apply for coronial findings to be set aside to applicants with a connection to the deceased or the investigation
- allow the Coroners Court to set aside coronial findings on its own motion where new facts and circumstances make it appropriate to do so.

Section 9 of the Charter provides that every person has the right to life. The positive duty to protect life carries a 'procedural obligation to undertake effective coronial investigations where required', as found in international jurisprudence and outlined by the Explanatory Memorandum to the Charter. To be effective an investigation must be prompt, accessible to the deceased's family, and the investigation process should enable a determination about the death to be made.

The Coroners Act amendment to allow VIFM pathologists to register certain natural cause deaths with BDM may promote the right to life by facilitating the finalisation of eligible death investigations as soon as possible by streamlining administrative processes.

The amendment to allow the Coroners Court to set aside findings on its own motion may promote the right to life by ensuring that the Court can further investigate deaths where required, regardless of whether an eligible person applies for findings to be set aside.

I do not consider that these rights are limited, and, if they are, I consider any limitations are reasonable and justified. These amendments will generate efficiencies for the Coroners Court and VIFM, improving

outcomes and reducing distress for families within the coronial system. Resulting efficiencies may also enable the Coroners Court and VIFM to direct resources to complex investigations where there may be opportunities to prevent further deaths.

Amendments to the *Infringements Act 2006*, the *Fines Reform Act 2014*, the *Road Safety Act 1986*, the *Marine Safety Act 2010*, the *Public Health and Wellbeing Act 2008* and tolling legislation will strengthen fines enforcement

The Bill will make relatively minor and technical fines-related amendments that do not directly engage any rights protected under the Charter. These include changes to allow more than one infringement notice to be withdrawn using a single notice of withdrawal, removing the requirement for applicants for an extension of time to deal with their traffic or toll fine to produce a statutory declaration or sworn or affirmed statement in support of their application, and clarifying that the first payment under a payment arrangement must be made before a driver and vehicle sanction that has been imposed on a fine defaulter will be removed.

The following amendments made by the Bill might appear to have the potential to engage rights relating to criminal proceedings:

- the changes to facilitate the service of certain fines-related documents through an online portal
- the changes to deem fines-related notices sent electronically to have been served in certain circumstances even if they have been returned undelivered
- the minor amendment to reinforce that infringement notices can be sent electronically
- the changes to clarify that enforcement warrants issued electronically do not need to be issued in the (hard copy) prescribed form, and
- the changes to clarify that the Director, Fines Victoria can apply for an enforcement warrant against a fine defaulter the subject of an existing outstanding warrant even if a notice of final demand has been served but not expired.

In particular, these amendments may appear to engage the right to be informed promptly and in detail of the nature and reason for a criminal charge, and the right to have adequate time and facilities to prepare a defence and communicate with a lawyer or advisor that are protected under section 25(2)(a) and (b) of the Charter, respectively.

These changes do not, in fact, engage the rights in section 25 of the Charter, however, because these rights only apply to persons charged with a criminal offence. Neither an infringement fine, nor a court fine, is a formal criminal charge. For this reason, I consider that these amendments are compatible with the rights contained in section 25(2)(a) and (b) of the Charter.

In any event, I note that the amendments will not result in fine recipients being treated unfairly or adversely impact on their ability to pay or otherwise deal with their fine.

In relation to the amendments to facilitate the service of fines-related notices through an online portal, this portal is only intended for use by enforcement agencies and other third- parties who agree to this form of information exchange – the portal will not be used to send notices to fine recipients themselves.

The amendment relating to the electronic service of infringement notices is minor and technical only. The change inserts a Note in the *Infringements Act 2006* to clearly state that infringement notices may be served electronically under the existing electronic service provisions of that Act. Those provisions support the electronic service of fines-related notices (including infringement notices) where the fine recipient consents to receiving the notice electronically, is of or over the age of 16, and has provided an electronic address for service.

These safeguards apply to any fines-related notices sent electronically, and notices will only be deemed to have been received if returned undelivered in these circumstances. Both the *Infringements Act* and the *Fines Reform Act 2014* already deem notices sent by post to have been received even if they are returned undelivered, in certain circumstances. For notices served under the *Fines Reform Act*, these circumstances include where the notice has been sent to an address supplied by the intended recipient themselves in a fines-related application. The proposed change will apply the same rule to notices sent electronically to an address supplied by the intended recipient themselves. The Department of Justice and Community Safety will continue to develop appropriate policies to guide the use of electronic service.

The amendments relating to electronic enforcement warrants do not impact adversely on a fine defaulter's ability to obtain relevant information about the warrant. Section 14 of the *Sheriff Act 2009* provides for the requirements for executing electronic warrants, including a requirement that the person the subject of the warrant be provided with specified details about the warrant and a copy of the warrant powers summary. The legislative provisions relating to the issue and execution of electronic enforcement warrants are well

established, and the changes simply address an anomaly that appears to require even electronic warrants to be issued in the form prescribed under regulation 23 of the Fines Reform Regulations 2017.

The changes to clarify the circumstances in which an enforcement warrant may be issued against a fine defaulter will allow effective and timely enforcement action against individuals who have demonstrated a failure to pay their fines despite having had many opportunities to do so. Where an enforcement warrant has already been issued to the person, they will have already had the benefit of the service and expiry of a notice of final demand to pay or otherwise deal with their fine.

Clarifying delegation powers and acting arrangements in the *Guardianship and Administration Act 2019*

The Bill includes amendments to the *Guardianship and Administration Act 2019*. The Bill inserts an example at the end of section 19(1) of the Guardianship and Administration Act to clarify that a delegation under that section includes the Public Advocate delegating to a specified class of Public Advocate employee all of the Public Advocate's powers and duties under VCAT orders made under Part 3 of the Act. This includes guardianship orders and other related orders. The Bill also enables a person to be appointed as an Acting Public Advocate under the Act during a vacancy in the office of the Public Advocate.

The operation of the Guardianship and Administration Act and the role of the Public Advocate has the effect of restricting the autonomy and limiting the rights of people with disability, including the right to equality (section 8), freedom of movement (section 12), privacy (section 13(a)), freedom of expression (section 15), freedom of association (section 16(2)), liberty (section 21), and to humane treatment when deprived of liberty (section 22). For example, a guardianship order may confer on a guardian a range of powers in relation to a 'personal matter' of a represented person, including powers to determine where the represented person lives and with whom the represented person associates. The exercise of guardianship powers conferred by a VCAT order may involve decisions that restrict the movement and liberty of the represented person for reasons such as health, safety or protection. These limitations are addressed in the Statement of Compatibility to the Guardianship and Administration Act.

The amendments in this Bill are technical and administrative in nature. They do not provide new powers to the Public Advocate that limit a person's rights, but may instead promote these rights by:

- ensuring guardianship powers conferred by VCAT orders can be appropriately delegated and exercised in a timely manner, particularly during an emergency or crises, and
- promoting consistency in the appointment of an Acting Public Advocate through a robust, independent and unambiguous process.

The Bill will improve the Office of the Public Advocate's service delivery and efficiency, improving outcomes for people who have the Public Advocate appointed as a guardian. The amendments will reduce the risk of delays and inaction where urgent guardianship assistance is required, promoting the human rights of people with a disability. All guardians are required to act within the rights-based principles in the Guardianship and Administration Act to ensure the promotion of the will and preferences and wellbeing of the represented person.

The Bill will also ensure that an Acting Public Advocate appointed during a vacancy is made independent of government and subject to the rigorous appointment processes of the Act, including a requirement for the Acting Public Advocate to take an oath or make an affirmation that they will faithfully and impartially perform the duties of office. These amendments will help safeguard the rights of individuals who are unable to make decisions for themselves due to disability by providing the most suitable persons to make those decisions on their behalf.

Amendments to the *Crimes Act 1958* will amend the definition of 'bestiality' and create new indictable offences to prohibit the possession, production, distribution and accessing of bestiality or animal crush material

The Bill amends the *Crimes Act 1958* to expand the offence of bestiality and criminalise the production, distribution, possession and accessing of animal abuse material. The reforms will introduce new offences intended to disrupt and deter the supply of bestiality and animal abuse material (including 'animal crush' material) in, and connected to, Victoria by ensuring that targeted laws apply to those who create, share and consume such content. The new provisions engage the right to freedom of expression (section 15) and the right to property (section 20).

Right to freedom of expression

The Bill defines 'animal abuse material' and contains new animal abuse material offences that criminalise the production, distribution, possession and accessing of animal abuse material, and exceptions and defences

applicable to those offences. These amendments engage the right to freedom of expression under section 15 of the Charter as they impose lawful restrictions on the freedom of expression.

Section 15(2) of the Charter provides that every person has the right to freedom of expression, which includes the freedom to seek, receive and impart information and ideas of all kinds. However, section 15(3) provides that special duties and responsibilities attach to this right, which may be subject to lawful restrictions reasonably necessary to respect the rights and reputations of others, or for the protection of national security, public order, public health or public morality.

In criminalising the production, distribution, possession and accessing of animal abuse material, the Bill does limit freedom of expression. However, the construction of the provisions ensures that freedom of expression is only subject to such limits under the new provisions as are lawfully necessary – in particular, for the protection of public morality. The definition of ‘animal abuse material’ inserted by the Bill incorporates an objective standard of the view of ‘reasonable persons’ and allows for the surrounding circumstances to be considered in determining the intent of the relevant material.

Additionally, the Bill provides for exceptions and defences that promote freedom of expression within acceptable lawful restrictions. These include an exception for classified material (e.g. film and video games) and a defence of public benefit or fair and accurate report. The latter provides a defence where the material has a genuine artistic, agricultural, educational, legal, medical, scientific or veterinary purpose.

The purpose of the new animal abuse offences, in addition to protecting animals, is to protect the public from being exposed to violent and shocking material by criminalising and punishing such conduct. I consider that this falls within the internal qualification of section 15(3) of the

Charter, including the protection of the rights and reputations of others, public order and public morality, such that the right to freedom of expression is not limited.

Right to property

New sections 61D to 61H allow for the court, on application of the Director of Public Prosecutions or a police officer, to make an animal abuse material disposal order in respect of a seized thing, or of electronic material contained in a seized thing. Such an order may provide that the seized thing or electronic material be forfeited and either destroyed or otherwise disposed of in a manner determined by the court. In addition, the Bill amends the *Confiscation Act 1977* in relation to the disposal of animal abuse material if a person is convicted of an offence set out in Schedule 1 to that Act. These reforms engage the right to property under section 20 of the Charter.

Section 20 of the Charter provides that a person must not be deprived of their property other than in accordance with law. This right requires that the powers authorising the deprivation of property are conferred by legislation or common law; formulated precisely; confined, clear and structured; and accessible to the public. To the extent that the provisions in the Bill may result in the deprivation of property, I am of the view that they do not limit the right to property as the deprivation will be in accordance with clear, accessible and precise legislated criteria, and subject to the oversight of a judicial officer.

Extending the operation of the County Court Drug and Alcohol Treatment Court

The Bill amends the *County Court Act 1958* and *Sentencing Act 1991* to extend provisions supporting the operation of the Drug Court which are due to sunset on 26 April 2026. The Bill will promote the right to a fair hearing under section 24 of the Charter.

Section 24 of the Charter provides that a person charged with a criminal offence has the right to have the charge decided by a competent, independent and impartial court after a fair and public hearing.

The Drug Court is a specialised court that targets the complex needs of offenders with a drug or alcohol dependency. To access the Drug Court, participants must plead guilty to drug and alcohol-related offences and engage in activities aimed to treat drug and alcohol dependence, such as detox and rehabilitation programs.

Some participants may not have pleaded guilty if the program was not available to them. If the Drug Court provisions were to lapse, participants may lose the benefit of a guilty plea made with expectation of access to the Drug Court, if the drug and alcohol treatment order were no longer an available sentencing option following their plea of guilty.

Enabling the Magistrates’ Court to carry out administrative functions more efficiently

The Bill amends the *Road Safety Act 1986* to enable the Magistrates’ Court to automate certain administrative functions by use of automated systems, such as its Case Management System (CMS). The amendments will allow the Magistrates’ Court to receive certain documents via the CMS, without requiring such documents to be received by a registrar. These documents include reports on the execution of search warrants under the

Road Safety Act, notices of applications relating to interlock conditions and notices of appeals against immediate licence suspension or disqualification.

Right to recognition and equality before the law

Section 8 of the Charter provides that every person is equal before the law and is entitled to the equal protection of the law without discrimination.

The Bill will promote the right to equality before the law by increasing access to justice for Victorians. Currently, court users may be required to travel significant distances to physically file documents with a registrar, or may have difficulty determining how documents must be provided to a registrar. The amendments will enable the Magistrates' Court to offer less complex and more convenient ways for court users to file documents, which may be particularly beneficial for court users with disabilities or from regional areas.

Right to privacy and reputation

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

The amendments relating to search warrants executed under section 84ZO of the Road Safety Act are confined to allowing reports on the execution of such warrants to be submitted to the Magistrates' Court, including via the CMS, without requiring such reports to be submitted to a registrar. The amendments do not alter or extend police powers in relation to the execution of search warrants under the Road Safety Act, and do not allow for arbitrary or unlawful interference of a person's privacy, family, home or correspondence.

The Hon Sonya Kilkenny MP
Attorney-General

Second reading

Sonya KILKENNY (Carrum – Attorney-General, Minister for Planning) (11:20): I move:

That this bill be now read a second time.

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

Incorporated speech as follows:

The Justice Legislation Further Amendment (Miscellaneous) Bill 2025 amends various Acts to improve the operation of the courts and justice system. The Bill will:

- implement Recommendation 133 of the Victorian Law Reform Commission's 2020 *Contempt of Court Report*
- amend the *Coroners Act 2008* to streamline investigation finalisation and reopening procedures
- amend the *Births, Deaths and Marriages Registration Act 1996* to enable more doctors to register deaths and clarify their death reporting obligations
- amend fines and tolling legislation, and make minor fines-related amendments to other Acts
- clarify the delegation powers and acting arrangements of the Public Advocate in the *Guardianship and Administration Act 2019*
- amend the *Crimes Act 1958* to broaden the definition of 'bestiality' and prohibit the possession, production, distribution and accessing of bestiality or animal abuse material
- amend the *County Court Act 1958* and *Sentencing Act 1991* to extend provisions supporting the operation of the County Court Drug and Alcohol Treatment Court, and
- amend the *Road Safety Act 1986* to enable the Magistrates' Court of Victoria to carry out certain administrative functions under this Act more efficiently.

Implementing Recommendation 133 of the 2020 *Contempt of Court Report* to promote open justice

The Bill will implement Recommendation 133 of the Victorian Law Reform Commission's (VLRC's) 2020 *Contempt of Court Report* (Report) to enable applications to lower courts and the Victorian Civil and Administrative Tribunal (VCAT) to vary or revoke 'legacy suppression orders' made by those courts or tribunal.

Suppression orders are an important function of court proceedings that prohibit or restrict the publication or other disclosure of specific information. The VLRC's Report uses the term 'legacy suppression orders' to describe suppression orders made under the common law or repealed provisions in court Acts, prior to the commencement of the *Open Courts Act 2013* on 1 December 2013. The Open Courts Act consolidated the

general powers of the Supreme Court, County Court, Magistrates' Court, VCAT and the Coroners Court to make suppression orders and closed-court orders, however it does not address legacy suppression orders.

Legacy suppression orders generally do not have an end date, unlike suppression orders made under the Open Courts Act, which operate for a maximum of 5 years. This means that legacy suppression orders still in force today will operate indefinitely or 'until further order', contrary to the principle of open justice. Open justice is a fundamental legal and democratic principle. Victim-survivors of sexual or family violence offences, the media, and other interested parties should not be unduly silenced, particularly where an adult victim is able and willing to share their lived experience. Upholding the principle of open justice also promotes personal responsibility by holding perpetrators accountable to the community, whilst simultaneously raising public awareness of these significant issues.

The Supreme Court's 2020 decision of *Chairperson of the Royal Commission into the Management of Police Informants v Director of Public Prosecutions Victoria and Others* (2020) 61 VR 490, handed down after the VLRC's Report was tabled, casts doubt on the power of the lower courts and VCAT to review legacy suppression orders. Therefore, currently, only the Supreme Court can review legacy suppression orders under its inherent jurisdiction in the *Constitution Act 1975*. Applying to the Supreme Court is a costly process that can restrict access to justice for applicants, including victim-survivors, and unnecessarily strain the resources of the Supreme Court.

The Bill will allow the lower courts and VCAT to review legacy suppression orders made by that court or tribunal. These are referred to as 'pre-existing orders' in the Bill. Further, where there is an appeal of a substantive proceeding, the appellate court will be able to review the pre-existing order made in the lower court or tribunal and make any order that that court or tribunal could have made under the Open Courts Act.

The amendments largely mirror existing suppression order review provisions in the Open Courts Act. This ensures consistent treatment of pre-existing orders and post-commencement suppression orders made under the Act. The Bill will allow a court or VCAT to review a pre-existing order on its own motion or on application by:

- the applicant for the order
- a party to the proceedings concerned, including the victim or alleged victim in a sexual offence or family violence offence criminal proceeding
- the Attorney-General, the Attorney-General of another State or Territory or the Commonwealth
- a news media organisation, or
- any other person who the court or tribunal considers has a sufficient interest in the review of the order.

The Bill empowers victim-survivors of sexual and family violence offences to take control of their story, by requiring the court or VCAT to revoke a pre-existing order if the victim-survivor gives permission for the revocation, is 18 years of age or over, and it is otherwise appropriate in all the circumstances for the pre-existing order to be revoked. The Bill will also allow the court or VCAT to confirm a pre-existing order, where appropriate. Where a pre-existing order is confirmed or varied, from that time it will be treated as a suppression order under the Open Courts Act unless otherwise ordered. This will futureproof these orders.

It is important to acknowledge that open justice is not absolute, and that competing considerations may necessitate the continuation of an order to suppress or restrict the publication of certain information, including, for example, the identity of a party or witness. Where a victim or alleged victim of a sexual or family violence offence applies to revoke a pre-existing order, the Bill would prevent that order being revoked if doing so would result in the disclosure of the identity of another victim or alleged victim in the same proceeding who does not consent to the disclosure, is under the age of 18 years, or where it is not appropriate in all the circumstances for the order to be revoked. The provisions will not interfere with publication prohibitions in other Acts, such as the *Children, Youth and Families Act 2005*, as is the case for suppression orders made under the Open Courts Act.

These important reforms will improve access to justice for victim-survivors, promote freedom of the media, and assist in holding perpetrators publicly accountable.

Enabling the Coroners Court to streamline investigation finalisation and reopening

The Bill amends the *Coroners Act 2008* to establish a new finalisation pathway for certain natural cause death investigations. Where a coroner exercises a discretion to use the pathway, a pathologist or medical practitioner under the supervision of a pathologist will register the cause of death and other prescribed particulars with the Registrar of Births Deaths and Marriages. This will promote administrative efficiencies, enabling eligible investigations to be finalised sooner. This amendment gives effect to Recommendation 4 of the Coronial Council of Victoria's *Review of Reportable Deaths in Victoria* report.

The Bill also amends the Coroners Act to limit standing to apply for coronial findings to be set aside to certain classes of applicant with a connection to the investigation, and to allow the Coroners Court to set aside coronial findings on its own motion where new facts and circumstances make it appropriate to do so.

Enabling more doctors to register deaths and clarify their death reporting obligations

The Bill amends the *Births, Deaths and Marriages Registration Act 1996* to clarify that doctors can notify the Registrar of Births, Deaths and Marriages of a person's cause of death, if they

are able to form an opinion as to the probable cause of death. The reference to 'probable' reflects the fact that a cause of death cannot always be definitively identified. This amendment aims to clarify doctors' existing cause of death notification obligations, rather than vary them.

The Bill also amends the Births, Deaths and Marriages Registration Act to enable doctors who have reviewed a person's medical history and circumstances of their death and satisfied themselves of the person's probable cause of death to notify the Registrar of the cause of death.

Strengthening fines enforcement in Victoria

The Bill introduces several reforms to the fines system to strengthen fines enforcement, further facilitate the electronic service of fines-related notices, address inconsistencies and streamline administrative processes.

The amendments will enhance existing provisions for the electronic service of fines-related notices under the *Infringements Act 2006* and the *Fines Reform Act 2014* by providing certainty as to when electronic service of a fines-related notice will be deemed to have occurred, including where the communication is returned undelivered. This will place the electronic service of fines-related notices on an equal footing with notices sent by post. The existing requirements for electronic service, such as a requirement for the recipient to be of or above the age of 16, have provided an electronic address for service, and to have consented to receiving the notice electronically, will continue to apply.

It will also make changes to support the giving of certain fines-related notifications and directions to fines system stakeholders via an online portal. Stakeholders, including enforcement agencies that issue infringement fines, and authorised third party representatives who manage fines on behalf of multiple fine recipients, will be able to choose to receive information regarding the status of the fines they manage through an online portal. The changes are intended to ensure that, where this method of communication is used, it is effective and that the time of the dispatch and receipt of any communication is clear.

The Bill makes changes to improve the current rules relating to the service of fines-related notices by post under the *Infringements Act* and the *Fines Reform Act*. The changes expand the list of addresses to which a notice may be posted and be deemed to have been received even if it is returned undelivered. For enforcement agencies, being able to rely on the 'deemed served if returned undelivered' provisions is important because it ensures that enforcement of the fine can proceed. Currently, however, if a fine recipient has provided their address in a statement nominating another person as the person driving a vehicle involved in an 'operator onus' offence, notices sent to that address will not receive the benefit of the deemed service provisions. The changes will address this gap, enabling notices sent by post to be sent to the most up-to-date address provided by the intended recipient themselves. These changes will extend to the service of notice provisions in the *Marine Safety Act 2010*, which also contains an infringement notice operator onus scheme.

The reforms will also remove the requirement for traffic or toll fine recipients to meet strict evidential requirements when applying to the Director, Fines Victoria for an 'extension of time' to deal with their fine on the ground that they were unaware that it had been issued. The integrity of the process will be maintained through the retention of the requirement that the Director be satisfied that the person was not in fact aware, more than 14 days before making the application, that the fine had been issued. The changes will enable more flexibility in the sort of evidence that can be accepted in support of an application. The Bill will also make it an offence to provide intentionally false or misleading information in an application.

Lastly, the Bill will make a range of minor, technical, and procedural type changes. These include:

- clarifying that enforcement warrants issued to fine defaulters electronically do not need to be issued in the prescribed form
- ensuring that the Director, Fines Victoria can take effective enforcement action against a fine defaulter who is subject of an existing unsatisfied enforcement warrant and has a history of failing to deal with their fines by clarifying that the Director may apply for an enforcement warrant in respect of their other fines before the expiry of a notice of final demand served on those fines
- clarifying that more than one infringement fine may be withdrawn by the enforcement agency that issued the fine using a single notice of withdrawal
- ensuring the adequacy of the delegation powers of the Director, Fines Victoria

- addressing the inconsistent treatment of court fines and infringement fines when enforcing company fines against a company director by making the date of service of a court fine collection statement as the relevant point from which the Magistrates' Court should assess whether the person took adequate steps to deal with the fine, and
- clarifying that if a fine defaulter on whom a driver and vehicle sanction has been imposed for failing to pay their fine enters into a payment arrangement, the sanction is not lifted until the person has made the first payment under that arrangement.

Clarifying delegation powers and acting arrangements in the *Guardianship and Administration Act 2019*

The Bill amends the *Guardianship and Administration Act 2019* to enable the Public Advocate to delegate their guardianship powers to a class of employees in a general instrument of delegation rather than creating a new instrument every time VCAT makes a guardianship order or related order. This will significantly reduce the administrative burden involved in delegating these powers and improve service delivery and efficiency of the Office of the Public Advocate. The Public Advocate is generally appointed as a guardian for a person who lacks decision-making capacity to make relevant decisions themselves, as a last resort in circumstances where there is no other person eligible to appoint. The appointment can involve an emergency or crises that requires an urgent decision, such as facilitating housing. The reforms will ensure that these important powers can be delegated and exercised in a timely manner, including during short periods of absence of the Public Advocate. This will reduce risks to people in urgent need of care.

The Bill also amends the Guardianship and Administration Act to clarify the process for appointing an Acting Public Advocate when the office is vacant. The Act, as currently in force, provides for the appointment of an Acting Public Advocate during the temporary absence or suspension of the Public Advocate. This does not include a situation where the Public Advocate role is vacant, such as the period between appointments, where the process for the appointment of an Acting Public Advocate is unclear. One alternative avenue for appointment in these circumstances is appointment by the Minister under provisions of the *Public Administration Act 2004*. This process bypasses the stringent requirements of the Guardianship and Administration Act, including appointment by the Governor-in-Council and the appointee taking an oath or making an affirmation that they will faithfully and impartially perform the duties of office. The amendments will provide consistency for Acting Public Advocate appointments under the Guardianship and Administration Act and promote a comprehensive appointment process that is independent of government. It will also streamline future appointments of an Acting Public Advocate appointed during a vacancy in the office who has previously held that position. The Bill will set a maximum acting appointment period of 12 months to encourage the timely appointment of a new Public Advocate.

Amending the definition of 'bestiality' and creating new indictable offences to prohibit the possession, production, distribution and accessing of bestiality or animal crush material

The Bill will amend the *Crimes Act 1958* to better protect animals from exploitative behaviours.

Currently in Victoria, acts of bestiality and animal abuse are illegal. However, the possession, production, distribution and accessing of content depicting these acts is not prohibited. This gap needs to be addressed. That is why this Bill introduces new offences that are intended to disrupt and deter the supply of bestiality and animal abuse material in, and connected to, Victoria by ensuring that targeted laws apply to those who create such content, as well as those who consume it.

The new offences will apply to material that relates to acts of bestiality, or an animal being crushed, burned, drowned, suffocated, impaled or otherwise killed, tortured or subjected to serious injury. To qualify as animal abuse material, the content must objectively appear to be intended to excite or gratify a sexual interest or sadistic interest in violence or cruelty.

The offences will be indictable offences, with the production and distribution offences attracting a 5-year maximum term of imprisonment, and the possession and access offences attracting a 3-year maximum term. These significant penalties reflect the harm this kind of conduct causes to animals, and send a clear and strong message that making, sharing and consuming material that depicts actual or realistic simulations of animal abuse is not acceptable.

Limited exceptions and defences to the new offences will be available. This includes an exception for material that is, or would be, classified other than 'RC' under the Commonwealth classification regime – such as films and video games – to ensure that Victorians' access to lawful publications are not inadvertently impeded by the reforms. There will also be a defence of fair and accurate report or public benefit. This defence is necessary to ensure that the reforms do not inadvertently criminalise people in the course of legitimate conduct – for example, people producing material with a genuine educational, medical or agricultural purpose.

The Bill will also amend section 54A of the Crimes Act to expand the offence of bestiality to prohibit sexual touching between a human and an animal, in addition to the penetrative acts to which the offence currently applies. This amendment addresses a gap in our legislation to criminalise non-penetrative forms of sexual engagement between humans and animals. The existing exceptions relating to veterinary, agricultural or scientific research purposes will continue to apply to the expanded bestiality offence.

Extending the operation of the County Court Drug and Alcohol Treatment Court

The Bill amends the *County Court Act 1958* and *Sentencing Act 1991* to enable the County Court Drug and Alcohol Treatment Court (Drug Court) to continue operating after 26 April 2026. Provisions which enable the Drug Court to operate are currently scheduled to sunset on 26 April 2026. The amendments ensure that offenders pleading guilty to drug and alcohol related offences in the County Court will have access to the therapeutic pathway provided by the Drug Court.

Enabling the Magistrates' Court to carry out administrative functions more efficiently

The Bill amends the *Road Safety Act 1986* to allow the Magistrates' Court to expand use of its Case Management System to perform certain administrative functions more efficiently. These reforms will modernise registry services and improve the efficiency of court operations by enabling certain documents to be received electronically.

I commend the Bill to the house.

James NEWBURY (Brighton) (11:20): I move:

That debate be adjourned.

Motion agreed to and debate adjourned.

Ordered that debate be adjourned for two weeks. Debate adjourned until Wednesday 3 December.

State Taxation Further Amendment Bill 2025

Council's amendments

Message from Council relating to following amendments considered:

1. Clause 1, page 2, after line 19 insert –
“(vii) to require the Minister to enter into a memorandum of understanding with each municipal council regarding the funding of active transport initiatives; and”.
2. Clause 18, line 15, omit “**section 34A**” and insert “**sections 34A and 34B**”.
3. Clause 18, line 24, omit ‘area.’ and insert “area.”.
4. Clause 18, after line 24 insert –

‘34B Memoranda of understanding with municipal councils

 - (1) The Minister, on behalf of the State, must enter into a memorandum of understanding with each municipal council whose municipal district includes any land that is in the levy area.
 - (2) A memorandum of understanding under subsection (1) must relate to an annual allocation to the municipal council for the purpose of funding active transport or other transport initiatives.”.

Danny PEARSON (Essendon – Minister for Economic Growth and Jobs, Minister for Finance) (11:21): I move:

That the amendments be agreed to.

We have received a slightly amended version of the State Taxation Further Amendment Bill 2025 back from the other place. I want to thank the Treasurer for her consistent work in introducing measures to balance Victoria's taxation settings. I note the amendments to the bill were moved by the Greens political party. We thank them for their amendments, and I note the government have supported those amendments. The amendments insert a requirement for the relevant minister to provide funding for councils included in the congestion levy zone to deliver projects to improve active transport access and usage via an MOU agreement. This proposal to utilise funds generated by the congestion levy to fund active transport projects in relevant council areas aligns well with the policy

intent of the bill. It will improve active and public transport alternatives, and it will build on this government's Big Build agenda. It will also further incentivise commuters to take up those modes. I do want to make the observation that when it comes to mode shift and when it comes to public transport in Victoria, the Labor Party is the only game in town when it comes to these sorts of investments. This leads me to why tackling congestion in the –

James Newbury interjected.

Danny PEARSON: I will come to you in a moment, sport. You just hold your fire. You can just see it. The Kmart Costello, the Judas from the Liberal Party, is warning up. You have had a big week, haven't you, son?

This leads me to why tackling congestion in the inner city is so important to the state's productivity. Despite those opposite not supporting the bill and even moving amendments to remove the congestion levy from the bill, it is worth noting that – I would say the new Leader of the Opposition, but for the benefit of today's discussion, is he the Shadow Treasurer? Is he the former Shadow Treasurer? Is he going to be the Shadow Attorney-General? You would not really know. We know he is the shrieking banshee from Brighton. We know that when the congestion levy was introduced in 2006 by the Bracks government, the levy was \$400 per space. But when the Liberal Party were in power they tripled that levy to \$1300 per space in 2014. For the last 11 years it has only been indexed by the government. Today, with the changes in this bill, many years later, we are not even doubling the rate. Those opposite are all over the shop when it comes to the congestion levy. On the one hand, they say it will not do anything to reduce congestion. On the other hand, they say that it is going to drive people away from the CBD. So really, which is it? Which of the two options are they putting forward?

They also say that it does not work, but there is evidence to show that it does. In 2018 Infrastructure Victoria, the state's independent infrastructure adviser, conducted a review of the last time the levy boundary was expanded, and they concluded that:

... the levy has been successful in reducing the supply of leviable car parking spaces ...

in the leviable area, which led to 3900 vehicles off the morning peak. In their 2020 report titled *Good Move: Fixing Transport Congestion*, Infrastructure Victoria further recommended that the congestion levy charge be increased and be expanded to include Richmond, South Yarra, Windsor and Prahran to tackle congestion.

The reality is that the Grattan Institute have consistently requested that Victoria align its policy settings with Sydney in relation to the parking levy because, they say:

Melbourne's parking levy is around half the cost of Sydney's.

The institute also believes a reduction in banked up cars will create a more livable city while improving road safety for pedestrians and cyclists. The reality is that by 2050 Melbourne will have a population the size of London's today. We know that by 2030 congestion will cost this state \$10 billion. You want to be investing in productivity-enhancing solutions like public transport and like active transport. You also want to make sure that people can be incentivised to engage in that mode shift, and that is exactly what we are doing.

This act will ultimately improve productivity. It will reduce congestion around Melbourne. It is important that the government actively and responsibly tackles this issue. We need to ensure that we increase the liveability of our city, and that is exactly what this bill will do. We have got a responsibility to tackle this issue. We are absolutely getting on and doing that, and I commend the amended bill to the house.

James NEWBURY (Brighton) (11:26): There is a rule in this place that, as a courtesy, the government will advise the chamber when it is dealing with matters before the chamber. I do put on record that at the start of the day the Leader of the House said to me that we would not be dealing with Council amendments at the commencement of the day; we would be dealing with them later today.

There has been no notification, of course – no common courtesy provided to the opposition. But would it surprise you that when it comes to a great big new tax, this government would be sneaky and underhanded, because that is the calling card of this government – sneaky and underhanded.

For the government to shuffle into this chamber sneakily and bring about a new set of taxes without telling anybody, hoping it would be just snuck through and that no one would notice, says everything about the government. I say to the Leader of the House, if you want to play sneaky games, if you want to stop any cooperation or consultation in relation to the operation of the chamber, you have just proved to me that is the path you want to go down. I am appalled that the government would not show the common courtesy, the basic set of courtesies, when it comes to this chamber. So all bets are off – if the government wants to sneak through taxes without any common courtesy, then guess what, that is the game that we will play too.

These amendments bring out great big new taxes and impose them onto more Victorians, in addition of course to the 63 new taxes and charges this government have introduced over their terms – 63 new or increased taxes and charges. This is a new one. It is a great swathe of new taxes that do not just apply to the city, where this was first applied. This new charge goes right across much of metro Melbourne. It is absolutely shameful what the government is doing with this great big new tax, a tax that will apply to private car parks far, far out – into Stonnington. I mean, what this government is doing is absolutely shameful. For the minister to come in here and say, ‘It’s the responsible thing to do’ – I have never heard any single Victorian say, ‘We’re gagging for a new tax, and it would be only responsible for you to impose it upon us.’ I mean, what a con. What a con artist that minister is. It is ‘responsible’ to impose new taxes. No, it is actually responsible to cut taxes. That is what is responsible, and this government is imposing new taxes.

Every time the government gets up and says, ‘How shameful it is that this opposition wants to cut taxes, and they want to cut them a lot,’ I sit there and I laugh, and I think: sell our policy, baby, because we will cut taxes. The idea that this government think it is responsible to increase them just shows how out of touch they are. We have made very, very clear how important we believe that message is to Victorians and how much they are hurting with the cost-of-living impact. For the government to come in here and try and sneakily impose new taxes and try to hide –

Members interjecting.

The ACTING SPEAKER (Daniela De Martino): There is far too much noise in the chamber.

James NEWBURY: Acting Speaker, if you would like me to speak up, I am only too happy to oblige. I understand the direction from the Acting Speaker.

Members interjecting.

The ACTING SPEAKER (Daniela De Martino): The volume in the chamber is too high.

James NEWBURY: I hope the Speaker and Deputy Speaker are listening. I have just been advised I do not speak loudly enough.

The ACTING SPEAKER (Daniela De Martino): Is that a reflection on the Chair?

James NEWBURY: No.

The ACTING SPEAKER (Daniela De Martino): I was asking the chamber to reduce the volume. It is actually quite hard to hear in this seat.

James NEWBURY: I completely understand, Acting Speaker, and appreciate your help in shielding.

What this government has done today is try to sneak in changes to this bill without common courtesy. The Leader of the House advised me herself that these changes would not be brought in at the start of the day. It is only common courtesy. Of course I am here ready to speak, because we are ready to

defend Victorians from this shocking great big new tax that is going to be thrown across car parks across Melbourne.

Steve Dimopoulos interjected.

James NEWBURY: That is right, Minister for Environment, thrown across car parks across Melbourne. Victorians are going to see this great big new tax, and they are going to be absolutely disgusted to find this tax out of nowhere – and so they should be.

Let me speak specifically to an element of the amendments. What the amendments do in no uncertain terms is buy the Greens vote. That is what they do, nothing else. These amendments do nothing other than buy the Greens vote in the Council. I am not reflecting on anybody by saying that. I think it is fair and reasonable for the house to acknowledge it. What these amendments do simply is ensure that there is a memorandum of understanding between the government and councils on how these new taxes are spent and that they be applied to active transport. What the Greens have gone to the government and said is, ‘We don’t support this state tax bill, so what we want is a clip of the ticket on the way through.’ I am not reflecting in any way in saying that. I think that is transparent; I think it is quite obvious. I would hope that the Greens would confirm that, because that is what it is. They have said, ‘If you want to collect a great big swathe of new taxes’ – and I think we all accept it is a great big swathe of new taxes, as the minister agreed, throwing a blanket of new taxes across parts of metro Melbourne’s car parks – ‘we want a clip of the ticket on the way through. We want to be able to go to our base and say, “We’ve clipped that tax ticket on the way through.”’ That is what these amendments are; they are a clip of the ticket, a clip of the great big new tax take, and the amendments do just that.

We tried in the other place to move a series of amendments to make sure that, obviously, these taxes were not imposed, because we do not support them. I think we have said that since day one. We do not support them, and we will not support them today. We do not support what is somewhere in the vicinity of \$100 million of new tax. This is not a couple of cents; this is not some loose change. This is \$100 million of new taxes.

The Greens, for their support in the other place, have said, ‘We want to clip the ticket and we want councils to receive a proportion for active transport.’ In no way am I reflecting on active transport. As an avid bike rider myself, I am always interested in making sure that I do not get hit by cars, as has unfortunately been the case in the past. So in no way am I reflecting on active transport. But what this amendment does is it says, ‘On this great big \$100 million of new tax, we want to take some and we want to push it in through active transport.’ I hope that in the debate there is an up-front conversation about what these amendments are about – ensuring that the vote was there for the government in the Council.

At its core, though, this bill is appalling. It is appalling because it is \$100 million, but it is \$100 million built onto the billions and billions of dollars that this government collects in tax – billions and billions and billions and billions and billions and billions in taxes that this government collects. This bill, which brings about \$100 million into our –

Members interjecting.

The ACTING SPEAKER (Daniela De Martino): Order!

James NEWBURY: The government benches are laughing at the billions they collect. The fat cats over there are laughing at the billions they collect. Can you believe it? Can you believe they are laughing about the billions they collect? The coalition is not ashamed to be opposing this.

Tim Richardson interjected.

James NEWBURY: Do not test me. The coalition is absolutely strong in opposing this; we are not ashamed of it. So every time, as I have said earlier, the government gets up and says, ‘You should be called out for your plans to cut taxes and the way that you oppose taxes,’ I laugh and I think to myself,

‘Sell our policy, baby. Sell our policy.’ Victorians know that they are being taxed too much. They say it; they know it. Every time they open a bill, they find a new tax on their bill. This year when they opened their rates notice, they found the emergency services tax. ‘Where’d that come from?’ they said. In many cases that tax was more than their rates notice – extraordinary. So Victorians know that they are being taxed way, way, way too much.

What this new bill will do and these amendments will bring about is taxes on people’s car parks. Not in the centre of the city, as the minister claimed. This new tax will apply across suburban Melbourne in a way that will shock people. The minister talked about needing to impose this new tax because it was the responsible thing to do. I mean, it is only responsible for this government in its mind to be imposing taxes at every available opportunity. But to bring about a tax, which in theory was designed for the centre of the city, and now expand upon that as far as they can go – I am sure this government will not rule out expanding this further. I am absolutely sure they are looking for an opportunity to expand it further and further and further, because as the minister just said, the government’s plan is to grow Melbourne from 5 million to 9 million people. That is what the minister just said. So there is no doubt that the minister wants to expand these taxes across all of Melbourne, where those 9 million people live. That is what the minister was implying. The minister can correct himself, but that is what he was implying.

When you bring about these taxes in a sneaky way – when you bring your amendments into the chamber without telling anybody and you just scuttle up to the dispatch box and say, ‘We’re going to move these amendments now,’ in contrast to the absolute commitment that was given to me that the amendments would be dealt with later in the day – all you can take from that is an absolute assurance that this government is behaving sneakily when it comes to these amendments.

In terms of the management of the Parliament more broadly, if the Leader of the House’s word to me is not worth anything, then I would say it will make for a very disruptive place moving forward, because it is only reasonable to expect that when your word is given about management of this place it will be kept, and in this case it was not.

But it does not surprise us on this side of the chamber. It does not surprise us that when it comes to a \$100 million tax the minister would scuttle up to the dispatch box sneakily and bring about these amendments to try and make them law as soon as possible while no-one is looking – \$100 million in taxes, sneakily. It is shocking. Every Victorian should be aware of it – just out of the blue bringing about this package of amendments and trying to pass it while no-one is looking. Well, we were watching, and we are here to say no, absolutely no. We do not support what the government is proposing. We will vote against what the government is proposing. This is \$100 million in new taxes. It is not responsible, as the government would claim and as the minister would claim. So we will be voting against this; we will be calling this out. What they have done is disgraceful.

Paul EDBROOKE (Frankston) (11:41): Ladies and gentlemen, what a performance from the next Leader of the Opposition. Give him a hand. Or is he the next next? To sit here and hear about underhanded actions and sneakiness – where was the member for Bulleen in the plans yesterday? There are a lot of people that feel left out about that, and I feel for them.

James Newbury: On a point of order, Acting Speaker, this debate is on the amendments before the house. It is not on any other matters outside this chamber; it is on the amendments before the house.

The ACTING SPEAKER (Daniela De Martino): Member for Frankston, I will bring you back to the bill.

Dylan Wight interjected.

Paul EDBROOKE: I will remind the member that we just –

Nicole Werner: On a point of order, Acting Speaker, the member interjecting is not in his seat.

The ACTING SPEAKER (Daniela De Martino): Member for Tarneit, you are not in your seat. Well noted.

Paul EDBROOKE: I will come back to the amendments to the bill, but I will remind the member opposite that we just spent 20 minutes with him calling his baby and having to go through him talking about riding a bike. I very much resent having to have the vision in my head of the member for Brighton in lycra. However, we will proceed.

To hear from members opposite that they would oppose these amendments is very disappointing. Perhaps it is worthwhile giving, with the six years of experience between the Deputy Leader and the new Leader of the Opposition, a bit of a history lesson. It was the Bracks government that introduced this original levy, the congestion levy, that they are talking about, but it was the Liberals that tripled this levy. They stand here today and talk about how they are the party of fiscal responsibility, and it is really a matter of history. We know – it is a documented fact – that in 2006 this levy was introduced by the Bracks government. The original levy was about \$400 a space. When the Liberals were given government, they tripled this levy, so to hear those opposite today talking about how disappointed they are when they tripled this levy is very ironic; it is thick to the walls with irony.

They cannot get a clear position on a congestion levy across the aisle. On one hand they say it does not work, while at the same time they are saying it will stop people driving in the CBD. For the party that are talking about their opposition to this, I think they need to get their facts straight. They need to get their heads clear on what this actually is.

We heard those opposite also speaking and verballing ministers about what the minister was implying. Let us just stick to the facts here. That was not what the minister was implying at all. People on this side of the house heard loud and clear what the minister actually said. He was very black and white. He was very clear about that, member for Brighton.

The divided Victorian Liberals have now elected their sixth leader in seven years.

James Newbury: On a point of order on relevance, Acting Speaker, this is a debate on amendments, not an opportunity for the government members to sledge, and I would ask you to bring the member back to the amendments that are before the chamber.

The ACTING SPEAKER (Daniela De Martino): Member for Brighton, the contributions thus far – and from you – have been a little bit broader than just the amendments. I will allow some latitude. I have ruled on the point of order.

James Newbury: On a further point of order, Acting Speaker, the leadership of any particular party is not in the scope of these amendments, and that would be a direct breach of the standing orders and years of rulings from the Chair. I would ask you to reconsider the ruling.

The ACTING SPEAKER (Daniela De Martino): I will rule on the point of order. Member for Brighton, I did not hear that part, as I was conferring for a moment there about another matter. I missed hearing that, so I did not hear that stray into that territory. Unfortunately, if that is the case, I will bring the member for Frankston back to the bill before the house.

Paul EDBROOKE: I thought talking about the bike riding of the member opposite – the lycra – was relevant. I have been speaking about the bill. I believe in the member for Brighton. My money is on him; I believe he can perform. I believe he has got the intellect to carry us through. And when he was speaking on these amendments I was listening –

Tim Bull: Acting Speaker, my point of order is on relevance. You just ruled that the leadership of any particular party was not relevant to the bill, and within 30 seconds the honourable member was straight back onto that topic. I would encourage you to reinforce your ruling and bring him back to the topic that we are meant to be discussing.

Paul EDBROOKE: On the point of order, Acting Speaker, I did not mention leadership. I said I believed in the member for Brighton, and wholeheartedly I do.

The ACTING SPEAKER (Daniela De Martino): On the point of order, member for Frankston, please come back to the bill.

Paul EDBROOKE: I do not want the cheese to slide off the cracker for the member for Brighton. I think that he makes some excellent points, but I think they are very, very misguided on this particular amendment. We definitely want to know, when we are talking about taxes, how the Liberals are going to fill their \$11.1 billion black hole. On one side you can have the argument that they will oppose these amendments, and I understand that. But when history shows that you were the government that tripled this congestion levy and now you are opposing the government indexing it, well, that is very, very rich. I look forward to hearing those on the other side of the chamber mount a successful argument to that effect as well.

I think the Minister for Finance outlined our position on these amendments. I support these amendments. We know that in their 2020 report titled *Good Move: Fixing Transport Congestion*, Infrastructure Victoria further recommended that the congestion levy charge be increased and that it be expanded to include Richmond, South Yarra, Windsor and Prahran to tackle congestion, and I know from personal experience that when you speak to local councils, when you speak to community members in those areas, they are actually concerned about this too. The Grattan Institute also has consistently called for the Victorian government to increase Melbourne's parking levy to match Sydney's, and I note that congestion is forecast to cost the Victorian economy \$10 billion by 2030. I ask those opposite: if we are standing still and not moving forward, what are we actually doing? What are we here for?

I want to thank the parties that have worked with the government on these amendments to make sure that we are actually governing for the future, not the past. Thank you to them for working with us in a pragmatic and proactive manner. I will leave it there, because I understand other people want to speak, but I commend these amendments to the house.

Ellen SANDELL (Melbourne) (11:50): The Greens of course will be supporting these amendments, as they are amendments that the Greens brought before the upper house which have now made their way down to the lower house. I want to say up-front that we are very proud to have worked to get an extra \$150 million over the next 10 years for active and sustainable transport to make it safer, easier and cheaper for people to ride, walk and catch public transport around the city. That is something that we are very proud of.

I was a bit confused by the contribution by the member for Brighton, who seemed to suggest that somehow this money is coming to the Greens. This money is going to local councils, to the community. This money – \$15 million guaranteed every single year, year on year – is an incredible boost for our local communities. It is going directly to councils to be spent on active transport projects that those communities desperately need funded. I come from a community where we have had several cyclist deaths in the last few years. We have had deaths of young people – 18-, 19- and 20-year-olds – who had their lives cut short because of a lack of safe bike infrastructure. They were just trying to get to uni, just trying to get to work, just trying to get home, and if there had been safer bike infrastructure in my electorate, those young people might still be alive today. I think that safe transport infrastructure is actually an urgent, urgent priority in my electorate, in all the inner-city electorates and right across our city, and we should be proud to be supporting that infrastructure.

Getting this \$15 million year on year was something that the Greens negotiated. It is an outcome of having Greens in the Parliament, and I think that is actually what the community expects. They expect their local MPs to get up and fight for the projects that their local communities need. It is a little bit sad to see the Liberal Party and the National Party will not be supporting this amendment, which is an amendment that simply says that a portion of the levy should go to councils for active transport

projects. I think the communities represented by the Liberal Party – the member for Prahran is a Liberal Party member who represents a community that is crying out for active transport infrastructure, and I think her community will be very interested to know that she and her party have voted against an amendment that requires the state government to share some of that revenue with her local council and with her local community, and we will be making sure that her community is very well aware that she has voted against this amendment.

This vote that we are having today is not on the bill, it is not on the tax; it is on the amendment. And what this amendment does is really important, and it is quite historic. What it does is require for the very first time in law, thanks to the Greens, that a significant portion of the congestion levy be given by the state government to the five local council areas that are covered by the congestion levy to be directly spent on active and sustainable transport – that is, safer bike lanes, safer footpaths and safer and more accessible links to public transport like our train stations. That is an excellent thing for our community, and it shows the power of having Greens in our Parliament, that we can get outcomes like this. This was not on the table initially, but we were able to sit down and negotiate and talk to the government about what our communities needed, and because the Greens fought for this, we will now have \$15 million a year, year on year, which is a guaranteed pipeline of funding to local councils for safer bike infrastructure and for more accessible transport.

Modern cities are reducing congestion and pollution in their inner cities. Look at London, look at Singapore; modern cities are doing this. They are reducing dependence on car use. They are reducing pollution. They are reducing air pollution, which is a huge cost to our communities. It results in increased deaths. Look at all of the reports that have come out over the last few years about how dangerous air pollution is for kids, for example, in our cities. Reducing pollution, reducing congestion and making our streets more livable, more safe, are all good things, and it is a surprise to see the Liberal Party does not want those things, but I guess that is what you get with the Liberal Party. With the Greens, what you get are MPs who are willing to stand up and fight and actually get outcomes for our community, like this \$150 million over the next 10 years for safer bike lanes, footpaths and accessible transport. That is an excellent, excellent outcome.

Modern cities are reducing congestion and pollution, and Melbourne should be absolutely proud to be doing the same. I want to thank the Treasurer and her office for the constructive engagement on this issue and the willingness to sit down with the Greens to get this excellent outcome, which is good for local councils, good for local communities, good for the climate and good for our health. It is good for all of us, and I am very, very proud to be supporting the amendments that have come before us today.

Tim BULL (Gippsland East) (11:55): I rise to make a few short comments on the amendments, which we do not support. It is interesting to hear the Greens member say that they have achieved great outcomes for their community. The great outcomes are increased taxes. I always thought the Greens tried to go in to bat for the battlers, but when you are celebrating increased taxes, that is very interesting.

It is concerning that we did not have a period of time to be notified as to when these amendments were coming back into the house. That is very, very disappointing. The reason why we oppose these taxes – and I pick up on some of the commentary from the other side – is that not many periods go by in this house when we come in here and we are not hearing about legislation or we are not hearing about speeches that are related to increased taxes, and we ask why we are getting these. When you sit back – I still struggle to get my head around this – and consider that the interest bill that we are paying at the moment as a state is \$1.2 million per hour, \$28 million per day and \$1 billion every six weeks, they are incredible figures. I have heard on the other side over the last couple of weeks some references being made to those on this side in their costings having an \$11 billion black hole. That has been the claim from those on the other side, which I do not agree with. What I want to point out is this: just for a moment imagine that that is the horrendous, horrible, terrible figure that those on the other side refer to; that is 12 months of their own interest bill. If it is such a horrible figure, consider it is a little over 12 months of their own interest bill that they are screaming about. We do not give that any kudos. We

do not believe that is true, but that is the figure. Is it a massive figure or not? Because if it is, you are racking that up every single year, and that is what needs to be taken into account.

The reason why we do not oppose these amendments – and people have asked the rhetorical question of why we are opposing them – is because we are sick and tired of this government raiding the pockets of Victorian families; we are just sick and tired of it. This is another \$100 million grab straight out of the pockets of Victorians. I do not know if those on that side or those sitting up the back here follow the media, but quite clearly we have had a number of cases of families coming forward time and time again saying how tough it is at the moment. We have families struggling to put food on the table. We have families struggling to pay soaring electricity bills. We have families that are battling to put their kids through education. And what do we have here? A \$100 million cash grab, and we have the Greens saying they have achieved an outcome for their communities. It is just staggering that you can draw that conclusion from yet another tax grab.

I promised I would not talk for too long on this. We know why the government is doing this and we know why the government is implementing these new taxes, and it is to pay the debt. Our debt in this state is far, far higher than any other jurisdiction in this country, and it continues to head north at an alarming rate, forecast by the government's own budget papers, not on this side, to hit a state debt level of \$192 billion. It is just staggering that we have got ourselves into a financial situation where we are staring that in the eyes – it is just not right. That is why we will not support these amendments, and that is why we will not support this bill. We are sick and tired of government raiding the pockets and the coffers of everyday, hardworking Victorian families. You cannot paint this up any other way. You cannot put lipstick on a pig. That is what it is, and that is why we will not support it.

Assembly divided on motion:

Ayes (55): Juliana Addison, Jacinta Allan, Colin Brooks, Josh Bull, Anthony Carbines, Ben Carroll, Anthony Cianflone, Sarah Connolly, Chris Couzens, Jordan Crugnale, Lily D'Ambrosio, Daniela De Martino, Gabrielle de Vietri, Steve Dimopoulos, Paul Edbrooke, Eden Foster, Will Fowles, Matt Fregon, Ella George, Luba Grigorovitch, Bronwyn Halfpenny, Katie Hall, Paul Hamer, Martha Haylett, Mathew Hilakari, Melissa Horne, Natalie Hutchins, Sonya Kilkenny, Nathan Lambert, John Lister, Gary Maas, Alison Marchant, Kathleen Matthews-Ward, Steve McGhie, Paul Mercurio, John Mullahy, Danny Pearson, Tim Read, Pauline Richards, Tim Richardson, Ellen Sandell, Michaela Settle, Ros Spence, Nick Staikos, Natalie Suleyman, Meng Heang Tak, Jackson Taylor, Nina Taylor, Kat Theophanous, Mary-Anne Thomas, Iwan Walters, Vicki Ward, Dylan Wight, Gabrielle Williams, Belinda Wilson

Noes (25): Brad Battin, Jade Benham, Roma Britnell, Tim Bull, Martin Cameron, Annabelle Cleeland, Chris Crewther, Wayne Farnham, Sam Groth, Matthew Guy, David Hodgett, Tim McCurdy, Cindy McLeish, James Newbury, Danny O'Brien, Michael O'Brien, John Pesutto, Richard Riordan, Brad Rowswell, Bridget Vallenge, Peter Walsh, Kim Wells, Nicole Werner, Rachel Westaway, Jess Wilson

Motion agreed to.

Parks and Public Land Legislation Amendment (Central West and Other Matters) Bill 2025

Council's amendments

Message from Council relating to following amendments considered:

1. Clause 1, page 3, line 3, omit "Mount Buangor,".
2. Clause 50, omit this clause.
3. Clause 54, line 29, omit "50" and insert "37".
4. Clause 54, line 30, omit "50 and" and insert "37 and".
5. Clause 54, page 37, line 1, omit "8A" and insert "8".
6. Clause 54, page 37, line 3, omit "8B" and insert "8A".

7. Clause 54, page 37, line 9, omit “8C” and insert “8B”.
8. Clause 57, line 14, omit “8C” and insert “8B”.
9. Clause 57, line 16, omit “8D” and insert “8C”.

Steve DIMOPOULOS (Oakleigh – Minister for Environment, Minister for Tourism, Sport and Major Events, Minister for Outdoor Recreation) (12:06): I move:

That the amendments be agreed to.

The government supports these amendments. They are amendments put forward by the Greens political party in the Council. The amendments will remove a relatively small area, 2865 hectares, from the area which would have been made available for deer hunting by stalking, specifically in Mount Buangor National Park. They are sensible amendments that we are happy to support.

On hunting, the bill provides over 130,000 hectares of public land access to recreational deer hunting by stalking through not only access to existing areas where it is permitted but also new areas. These once-in-a-generation changes, opening up the Snowy River and Errinundra national parks to seasonal deer hunting by stalking as well as revoking the game sanctuary status of the Mount Cole State Forest, are important changes for recreational deer hunting by stalking. That means you do not have animals, you just have the hunter. It is also important for the environment because deer are very problematic for the natural environment in many contexts, particularly in national parks.

Let the record reflect that the opposition voted against increasing public land access. No matter what they say, it is clear that they voted against providing more access to deer hunters in Victoria.

Members interjecting.

Steve DIMOPOULOS: It is absolutely fundamentally true. But even more than that, they voted again against creating new national parks in this state.

I could not be prouder, as Minister for Environment in Victoria, that this Parliament is about to pass a bill that creates three new national parks, Mount Buangor National Park, Pyrenees National Park and Wombat-Lerderderg National Park, and conservation parks: Cobaw Conservation Park, Hepburn Conservation Park and Mirboo North Conservation Park. It is creating the Wandong Regional Park but also adding land to the existing Bendigo Regional Park, adding land to Liwik Barring Landscape Conservation Area, adding land to the Brisbane Ranges National Park, adding land to Gippsland Lakes Coastal Park and adding land to Yallock-Bulluk Marine and Coastal Park.

I think what is important to note also is, just so the community understands the level of investment that this government has put into parks in general but national parks specifically, that Parks Victoria has appointed over 80 new park rangers since July. Parks Victoria is a modern, fit-for-purpose organisation with a great new board, an excellent CEO and a new executive team. We are very, very proud to announce that the organisation has put in over 80 new park rangers to maintain the public land estate as people expect – that is, it has got to be at a level that gives credence and support to the national parks legislation. That is what people expect, and that is what this government will deliver.

Simultaneously, though, this government will deliver more public land access for Victorians – not just for deer hunting, as I have outlined, but for other recreational land users. We are not buying into the binary debate of the Liberal–National opposition that either divides people by whether they are park users or conservationists or divides people by any other human attribute. We have seen that multiple times in the upper house. I thank our upper house colleagues and the Council generally for their support of this bill. I support the amendments, clearly, and I commend the amendments and the bill to the house.

Cindy McLEISH (Eildon) (12:11): The Liberals and Nationals do not support the amendments that have been brought forward through, I guess, what has been a horsetrading exercise in the other place. To get the things that they want through, the Greens have done a deal with the government. To

me, part of it demonises deer hunters, and that is very, very concerning. When this bill came into the Assembly here, we had quite a bit to say about it. There were some good parts, some not good parts and some stuff we could live with.

One of the things that sits behind this is the petition we had with over 40,000 signatures. It was pretty significant having a petition of that size saying no to new national parks. This was the petition made through a member from Eastern Victoria in the other place.

Steve Dimopoulos: On a point of order, Acting Speaker, I have enormous admiration for the member on her feet, but she has got the facts wrong. She has to be factual. That petition was for a different process. These national parks were committed to in 2021.

Members interjecting.

Steve Dimopoulos: Absolutely – completely different.

The ACTING SPEAKER (Iwan Walters): I will rule on the point of order. I am not entirely familiar with all the dimensions of this. I assume that all members are factual.

Cindy McLEISH: The minister and I clearly have a different way of viewing this bill, because we very recently had people signing the petitions saying no to the new national parks. They were put up by Ms Bath in the other place, the member for Narracan here and also Ms Lovell in the other place. I think we ended up with about 80,000 people all up saying no to new national parks.

This bill essentially is adding land to the national parks. One of the things that was a huge concern – and remains a huge concern to me, despite what the minister is saying – is the state of our existing parks. The staff of Parks Victoria – I feel so sorry for them, with the work that they have to do and the expectations of the community. They are constantly under the pump, because there is so much to do now without trying to add the additional national park land into this.

The deal that has seen these amendments come down to us is about the removal of deer hunting in a particular area. I have deer hunting in my electorate, and I know how valuable it is to small towns and communities. I would have expected that the area in question here, Mount Buangor National Park, was going to be opened in places for deer hunting. That was what the provisions were, and that was something that we were quite supportive of. Now they have been removed. Representing the High Country in my electorate, I know the fabulous contribution that deer hunters and the community make locally, whether you are in the small towns of Jamieson, Kevington or Woods Point. Woods Point does well out of having a very active deer hunting community.

In Mansfield itself we have specific shops set up, and people help to go out and guide people in the parks to stalk deer. It makes a big difference, and I will tell you the size of the difference it can actually make. Maybe 12 or 18 months ago Mandy Curley from Mansfield Hunting & Fishing, off her own bat, organised kind of like a trade show expo thing in the main street of Mansfield.

There were some 50-odd trade stalls and 8000 or more people turned up, just between 10 and 4, I think it was, and the town of Mansfield was just blown away by how many people came to the town. Shops sold out of just about everything. The number of individual transactions that was made in Mansfield, by Mansfield Hunting & Fishing, was really extraordinary. I hear from accommodation providers all the time about how much the deer hunting economy brings locally, and this is particularly important.

In the area where Mount Buangor is located, between Ararat and Beaufort, there are small country towns, and I would think that opening that area up to deer hunting would bring that fraternity there to hunt in different areas where they may not normally hunt. Sometimes it is locals doing the hunting, and other times it is people coming from the city; it is people coming from areas like Mordialloc, Greenvale and Cranbourne that come up to our areas to do the hunting. It is a recreational activity. It is very legal. Part of what I understand the Greens to believe – and I am sure the member for Melbourne will articulate her arguments shortly – is that it is not safe, because you have a mixture of camping as

well as hunting, guns, kids and people. Well, let me tell you, that exists now. That exists in the towns of Jamieson, Kevington, Woods Point and Mansfield in my electorate. These activities are able to operate quite easily side by side, and I think that in this case they could do the same. This is one of the key reasons why we oppose it. We know two things: we know that this is a really important economic driver in small country towns in the High Country and areas where they are open to hunting. We also know it is a wonderful activity, and that pretty well in the main, the hunters are responsible. They know what to do, they know how to do it, they have their licences, they have their hounds that hunt with them and they behave well. Occasionally you will have a rogue hunter, but they are usually not in a park; they will be on a main highway or on the edges of towns or something like that doing things that they should not be. I think this demonises, to a point, the hunters.

I will note that today in fact we have Hunters for the Hungry up on the terrace. This is where these organisations want to show the good stuff that they do, the game that you can eat and the food that they get when they stalk a deer and when they get a deer. It is used for food for themselves and for their families, and there is also pet meat in that as well. It is very disappointing that on one hand, the government are saying, 'Yes, we support extending deer hunting in national parks in some areas.' We have seen that over in East Gippsland in designated national parks. Snowy River and Errinundra were areas that were being expanded. That is a good thing for those areas, and I imagine that that will bring quite a great economic boon as well, having that. I am sure the member for Gippsland East would be able to elaborate more on that.

I see this as a lost opportunity in the areas around Ararat and Beaufort. If you look on the websites of those towns, they have lots of small accommodation hotels, and that is often where hunters stay. Sometimes they will stay in campgrounds. It is important that we have good campgrounds that are open, and it is also important for our motels, because it is tough doing business in regional Victoria. It is tough doing year-round business. We have different seasons where people get out for different activities, and it is great if we can have something across the year. These small towns, I have no doubt, would have been boosted by the changes that are being made to the bill here, the Parks and Public Land Legislation Amendment (Central West and Other Matters) Bill 2025. As I said, we have some 80,000 people saying no to new national parks, but a lot of those people want to be able to continue doing the activities that they have done in existing state forests, and that will include a lot of the deer hunters.

I have been quite careful here to keep my comments related to the amendments, because these amendments go to the heart of deer hunting generally in my area but to the heart of the area around Ararat and Beaufort, and a member of Parliament, I would expect, knowing that this would do great things in their electorate, would get up and oppose the government and would speak against these changes, because it is only going to be positive for those small country towns.

There are many, many sporting shooters in Victoria. As I said, it is a legal activity, and you need to have the proper firearms licences to do this. I am not sure how aware people are in this chamber of the difficulty of getting a firearms licence and maintaining that every couple of years. It requires quite a bit, and the area of Victoria Police that do that spend time making sure that the people who are issued with those licences, whether they are a sporting shooter or a clay target shooter or a deer hunter, are the right people to have the guns and that they are not handed out willy-nilly. And to think that these have been removed – the information that I have is that it was because it was a safety issue. It sounds like a little bit of a philosophical issue, and the government it seems are having a bob each way by trying to say, 'It's okay here, but it's perhaps not okay there.'

Deer hunting is legal, and there are many, many responsible hunters. I urge the government members and in fact members of the crossbench and even the Greens to go up and engage with the hunters from Hunters for the Hungry tomorrow and to hear what they do and how they do it, because I think they will be enlightened, particularly about how seriously they take it. They know that to have this activity maintained they have to be law-abiding and they have to do the right things, and they want to do the right things, which is why we have Field & Game Australia and why we have the sporting shooters

associations there who represent and lobby all political parties. This was one of the bits in the bill that we did like. It is very disappointing that the government have decided to pull this away.

I know there are other members who are keen to speak on this, so I will end my comments but reinforce my opposition to the amendments.

Luba GRIGOROVITCH (Kororoit) (12:23): From the outset I want to say a huge thankyou to the minister, Minister Dimopoulos, and his team not only for all of the work that he has done getting this through the upper house but also for the bill in full. This bill is one that is headed in the right direction, and the amendments that have been accepted are also good.

To the member for Eildon, who just spoke before me: it is another situation of ‘Don’t let the truth get in the way of a good story’. The reality is what was said was completely and absolutely wrong. What Ms Bath’s petition did in the upper house was get ahead of the government’s response to the work of the Great Outdoors Taskforce and to the work of the eminent panel for community engagement. These parks are completely different areas in Victoria to what the member for Eildon was saying, so clearly she was confused. Member for Eildon, it might be worth catching up with the minister –

Cindy McLeish: On a point of order, Acting Speaker, I would like to fact-check the member for Kororoit. She is misleading the house.

The ACTING SPEAKER (Iwan Walters): Much as in your contribution, it is not for the Chair to adjudicate on that. I assume all members are being factual.

Luba GRIGOROVITCH: As I was saying, the facts that the member for Eildon spouted off before were completely wrong. The parks that she was speaking about are in a different part of Victoria. I would guide the member for Eildon to actually arrange a meeting with Minister Dimopoulos and maybe sit down to get the facts right.

But anyway, circling back to the amendments, I would like to say that we completely support the amendments. The bill creates a once-in-a-generation opportunity, and it is one that we are really proud of. Hunting via stalking is important not only for people to get outdoors but also for the environment. And I am quite surprised: I know that the end of the contribution from the previous member was supportive of deer hunting, but it seems that too often the opposition is very much opposed to deer hunting but try to disguise it another way. That is something that I personally look down on, because I am very supportive of our hunters.

I am very pleased as well to let all those in the gallery know that I had the absolutely great pleasure just recently to draw the ballot of the Blond Bay Hog Deer Advisory Group. People from not only Victoria but all over Australia entered this ballot to be part of it because they were so keen to be randomly drawn to have the opportunity to be able to participate in this upcoming hog deer hunting that was happening. That was out at the Sporting Shooters’ Association of Australia in Springvale, and it was really a highlight. It was a great event to be part of, and it was good to see just how many passionate hunters got involved in this ballot draw. It was a real eye-opener for me not only to speak to everyone on the night but to be able to have the opportunity to draw that ballot, something I look forward to attending at future events. I am proud that this government has supported parks so greatly. I am very proud of the amendments that have come forward and look forward to working even more closely with the minister on not only parks but more things with outdoor recreation, because it is important that we utilise our outdoor spaces.

Ellen SANDELL (Melbourne) (12:26): I rise to speak briefly on the amended Parks and Public Land Legislation Amendment (Central West and Other Matters) Bill 2025. We very much support the creation of new national parks. These are three new national parks that have been a long time promised. It has been several years since they were promised, and we are glad to see them finally, finally be declared. The amendments that we have before us again are amendments that were brought forward by the Greens and supported in the Parliament, and we are proud to see them become law. The Greens

are proud to have introduced these amendments, which will remove recreational deer hunting from Mount Buangor national park. We did this because I think the government did not realise when they made this a national park – or they made a mistake – that there are school camps in the national park and there are several really important outdoor recreational businesses that would have been very much threatened should deer hunters have been allowed into that national park to shoot deer in close proximity to children on school camp, and that was a terrible outcome for everybody. It was only the Greens who actually picked this up and spoke to all of those stakeholders and brought an amendment to prevent that from happening. This amendment will secure the safety and sustainability of school camps, bush users and more than 30 local families that rely on that area for employment.

We really want to thank the Minister for Environment and his office for their engagement. We appreciate that the government has come to the table with the Greens and agreed to these commonsense changes to keep the kids and community safe from deer hunters and to protect our beautiful natural areas. We credit the amendment to the excellent advocacy from several groups, which I want to shout out to, including Outdoors Victoria, the Victorian National Parks Association, school camps Australia and the Pyrenees Shire Council. These groups rightly pointed out that deer shooting for fun is simply incompatible with existing outdoor recreation sites, and we thank these groups for advocating for the safety of local people, businesses, teachers and kids at Mount Buangor.

It does kind of raise the question: why are we allowing deer hunting in other national parks and other areas where other people are going in and trying to simply enjoy nature? We heard from the minister about how important it is for our economy, for our health and for our environment to have people go in and appreciate nature and enjoy nature and get out and enjoy our beautiful natural areas. I think it is quite difficult to do that while you have people stalking and hunting deer when you are walking along a path. And I think some of the answers that were given in the other place about how they were going to warn people that there would be deer hunting, where you might want to be wanting to go camping or bushwalking or doing other activities in the national parks – they say there will be updates on the website or there might be some signs put up. I think that is going to be pretty cold comfort to the people who are having bullets go past them as they are trying to enjoy nature. I think that those two uses are simply incompatible. I spoke more about that in my original speech, so I will not go too much into it now.

There were some other amendments that the Greens attempted to pass in the other place, particularly around logging and the continued logging and also around deer hunting. We are disappointed that they were not adopted, but we are very glad that these ones were adopted.

This bill is, as I mentioned, the result of a promise made many, many years ago, before this minister was in the portfolio, to create new national parks. We were worried that they would never, ever come. We are glad that they did come, but unfortunately the bill came with this gift to the shooting and hunting lobby tacked on, which is something that is pretty classic of the Labor government. They say, 'We'll do something for the environment, but we'll tack on this gift for the hunters and shooters,' and that gift was 140,000 hectares of Victorian land for hunters and shooters to be able to go and hunt deer. These amendments remove 2800 hectares of forest that are heavily used by schoolkids, teachers, outdoor recreation workers, hikers and campers. So it is a good thing, but hunters will get more than twice the amount of hunting zones just down the road.

These amendments are really the bare minimum. They keep schoolkids safe, which I think all Victorians should support. I would be surprised if the Liberals and Nationals do not want to support keeping kids safe from bullets and guns while they are on their school camps, but let us see what happens. It would be pretty disappointing if the Liberals and Nationals took that position, and I think schoolkids and their families would be pretty disappointed by that as well. The Greens want to reiterate that feral deer must be treated as a pest to be eradicated, not as protected wildlife or game to be shot for fun and then for those numbers to be kept up. That is what is happening now. I made some more fulsome comments about that in my original speech. Experts back in 2021, four years ago, called for Victoria to finally join every other mainland state and classify deer as pests. We know they are pests.

I am sure that almost every member in this place has seen deer on our roads, deer in our school playgrounds and deer in people's backyards – we have even had deer just down the road from Parliament – and they should be classified as pests, where we have a proper eradication program. Yet Labor has rejected that. They have rejected the recommendation. They have chosen to keep them as protected wildlife, which removes an obligation on landowners and the government to manage and eradicate deer, and I think that that is environmental vandalism. It is bad for a lot of reasons.

Some of the other amendments that we moved but that were not successful include those around closing loopholes to Victoria's ban on native forest logging. The Greens appreciate that Victoria has finally ended the destructive practice of commercial logging and has transitioned workers and industries to more sustainable plantation logging, but the job is not entirely finished, and we still see several loopholes in this policy. We see significant logging on private land. We see precious native forests being destroyed in other states, like Tasmania. People in this industry took transition packages, moved to Tasmania and destroyed old growth forests, and it comes back over here on the *Spirit of Tasmania* to be milled at sawmills here. That is creating significant environmental damage, and that is something that needs to be fixed.

It is more than a very live risk that with the Forests (Wood Pulp Agreement) Act 1996, which still exists on our statute books, all forest produce permits, if we keep them in our laws in Victoria, could be used by a future government – a future Liberal–National government most likely – to bring back commercial native forest logging. We do not want to see that. I do not think anyone in Victoria wants to see that. Not only is it environmental vandalism, but it is actually also economic vandalism, given that the industry loses so much money every year. We understand, from our discussions with the minister and his office, that some of those logging loopholes can only be fixed following an ongoing court case, once that is resolved. But we urge Labor to finish this reform in this term of Parliament so that the door is not left open to a future Liberal–National government to bring back native forest logging in Victoria, which would be a disaster. I commend these amendments, which are important Greens amendments, to the house.

Nina TAYLOR (Albert Park) (12:34): I am very pleased to speak on the Parks and Public Land Legislation Amendment (Central West and Other Matters) Bill 2025. I am really thrilled that the bill creates three new national parks, two new conservation parks and seven new or expanded regional parks, which is really important, obviously, for our threatened species. Many in the chamber perhaps can relate to some of their fondest memories of childhood in Victoria being walking through national parks with family – just simply walking through, whether it was just after a light rain or whether it was for bird spotting – and smelling the beautiful aromas and very simply just absorbing our beautiful natural habitat.

Seeing these important reforms come through is not only inspiring some terrific childhood memories but also current and future memories. It is very important for current and future generations of Victorians to be able to experience some of the greatest pleasures that nature can offer.

I will just make a qualification. I note that the member for Eildon was relating to matters regarding what Ms Bath brought forward pertaining to the Great Outdoors Taskforce and the work of the eminent panel for community engagement. Not to be patronising or to disrespect the advocacy on those issues, but it is not to be conflated with the purposes of this bill and the origination of this bill going back to 2021. Not to patronise that advocacy, but conflating it with the purposes of this bill simply is not a logical way forward, but I am not disrespecting the advocacy of those who will speak on behalf of their regions and are attempting to assert particular elements.

The other beautiful thing, I should say, is the new central west parks will add to the attractions for visitors to the region and nearby historic towns. Who does not love our beautiful mineral springs and wineries? But there still will be public access, because pertaining to that issue that I said from the outset, there is no – of course I am expressing an opinion, but one of the most beautiful delights that we can enjoy is walking with nature and helping to foster that deep nexus with our beautiful natural

environment from a young age. There will be a whole gamut of activities that can be enjoyed in the national parks, including walking, picnicking, nature observation, fishing, camping, car touring, four-wheel driving, trail bike riding, mountain biking, horseriding, dog walking – on leads – and seasonal deer hunting by stalking.

Obviously, we are here principally to talk about the amendments. This amendment provides a commonsense approach to deer hunting on public land in this state and in the area of Mount Buangor, and I hope I pronounced that correctly. I should say this amendment refers to about 2800 hectares; it is a commonsense amendment and I am glad that it is being incorporated into this bill. I think that we will find that it is a really important step forward. I have to reflect principally people in my electorate, but I do not think I am speaking out of turn to say that this should benefit all Victorians and of course visitors to our state, whether from interstate or whether from overseas, to be able to see what is unique and distinct and beautiful about our beautiful country and our beautiful state of Victoria, noting that it has so much to offer. And it is also good when we are talking about wellbeing. I mean, what better way to be able to just get that peace and serenity and to let go of the stresses and strains that people experience in everyday life? This is a nice organic way, if you like, of being able to enjoy our natural environment better, to be able to support our wonderful regions. Certainly there are many locals there that will benefit from the patronage of Victorians, interstate and otherwise, who wish to visit those beautiful towns and areas of Victoria, all the while fostering our biodiversity into the future, because we know that the trees are the lungs of the planet. So it is very important that we do respect nature and we do respect these very precious parts of our beautiful state.

Danny O'BRIEN (Gippsland South) (12:39): I am pleased to rise to say a few words on this, not the least because the government curtailed debate on this legislation when the bill went through on the second reading in this place, and I did not get a chance to speak, including about the fact that some forests around Mirboo North are being made into conservation zones under this legislation. This debate is, though, specifically about the amendment that has been moved in the other place, and previous speakers have spoken to it.

I just want to clear up a few things for the house. Both the minister at the table at the time and the member for Kororoit claimed that the then record petition against national parks, tabled by Ms Bath in the other place, was not about this at all.

I can inform you that, in part, the petition actually says:

In accepting the formation of three new Central West national parks, the Victorian Government has shown disregard for the interests of bush user groups who participate in traditional recreational activities, which not only contribute to rural and regional jobs but also have a positive impact on people's well-being ...

et cetera, et cetera, and:

The petitioners therefore request that the Legislative Council to call on the Government to not create any new national parks and keep state forests open to public access and traditional activities.

It was very clear that it was both about new national parks generally and about the Central West. So both the Minister for Environment and the member for Kororoit were completely wrong in their assertion about that very strong response by the Victorian community against new national parks and, by extension, against this legislation.

There are a couple of other things I want to pick up in the debate so far. The minister talked about how very proud the government is to be implementing this legislation – so proud that it has taken it four years to do it since it committed to. That is the reality of this situation. The Victorian Environmental Assessment Council report that recommended these national parks was handed down in 2021, and here are the government, who are so proud to be doing it that they have waited four years.

I note that government members and the member for Melbourne and others love to talk about how we are protecting these national parks. You do not protect a piece of land by putting a legislative line around it. That is not protection. What is it protecting it from? It certainly does not protect it from

bushfire, from weeds, from invasive pests, from all of those things. Mining can be allowed in certain national parks, as can prospecting and mining. Indeed the member in the other place unsuccessfully moved an amendment to allow the minister, as the minister can in every other national park, to allow prospecting and mining in the central west parks, and the government chose not to support that. But surprise, surprise, it chose to support the Greens.

I think every hunter in the state should be aware that while the government will be out there spouting off that they have moved legislation to expand the area that deer hunters can stalk into the Snowy River and Errinundra national parks, at the point where it had a little bit of pressure from the Greens in the other place to remove that hunting opportunity in Mount Buangor National Park – there it went. They agreed to it. They bend over backwards to do what the Greens want them to, and the Sporting Shooters Association and every other hunter in the nation and the Australian Deer Association all should be aware that this government will sell them out as soon as they get a chance.

We certainly support hunting in this place. That is why the Nationals and the Liberals are opposed to this legislation and to these amendments as well, because we do think that people should have full and fair access to all our public land. That is not to say we do not like national parks. We do. We think it is very important that we have an adequate, comprehensive and representative reserve system in this country and make sure that we are protecting those important environmental assets. But while the minister is saying that they are protecting these areas and they have added new staff, the facts say very much the opposite. There has been an increase in area of national parks of about 20 per cent in the last 10 years and a decrease in funding to Parks Victoria of about 35 per cent. You do not protect land by locking it up and leaving it, and that is the simple fact. On that point, I think we should all remember the Premier's statement at the *Herald Sun* bush summit in Bendigo in her hometown last year, where she said:

... I want to be very clear as Premier and as a proud country Victorian I won't be putting a padlock on our public forests. It's not who I am. It's not what I believe in.

Well, these amendments and this legislation put a padlock on for certain classes of Victorians, particularly hunters and many others, when it comes to these national parks.

James Newbury interjected.

Danny O'BRIEN: It is a broken promise, member for Brighton. So the Liberals and Nationals are opposed to this. This is just another Labor-Greens deal. As I said, hunters should be aware of it and should be very cautious about accepting commitments and promises from the Labor government. We will not be supporting it, and we will be opposing this legislation.

Assembly divided on motion:

Ayes (55): Juliana Addison, Colin Brooks, Josh Bull, Anthony Carbines, Ben Carroll, Anthony Cianflone, Sarah Connolly, Chris Couzens, Jordan Crugnale, Lily D'Ambrosio, Daniela De Martino, Gabrielle de Vietri, Steve Dimopoulos, Paul Edbrooke, Eden Foster, Will Fowles, Matt Fregon, Ella George, Luba Grigorovitch, Bronwyn Halfpenny, Katie Hall, Paul Hamer, Martha Haylett, Mathew Hilakari, Melissa Horne, Natalie Hutchins, Sonya Kilkenny, Nathan Lambert, John Lister, Gary Maas, Alison Marchant, Kathleen Matthews-Ward, Steve McGhie, Paul Mercurio, John Mullahy, Danny Pearson, Tim Read, Pauline Richards, Tim Richardson, Ellen Sandell, Michaela Settle, Ros Spence, Nick Staikos, Natalie Suleyman, Meng Heang Tak, Jackson Taylor, Nina Taylor, Kat Theophanous, Mary-Anne Thomas, Emma Vulin, Iwan Walters, Vicki Ward, Dylan Wight, Gabrielle Williams, Belinda Wilson

Noes (27): Brad Battin, Jade Benham, Roma Britnell, Tim Bull, Martin Cameron, Annabelle Cleeland, Chris Crewther, Wayne Farnham, Sam Groth, Matthew Guy, David Hodgett, Emma Kealy, Tim McCurdy, Cindy McLeish, James Newbury, Danny O'Brien, Michael O'Brien, John Pesutto, Richard Riordan, Brad Rowswell, David Southwick, Bridget Vallence, Peter Walsh, Kim Wells, Nicole Werner, Rachel Westaway, Jess Wilson

Motion agreed to.**Children, Youth and Families Amendment (Stability) Bill 2025***Second reading***Debate resumed on motion of Ben Carroll:**

That this bill be now read a second time.

Nicole WERNER (Warrandyte) (12:51): I rise to lead the debate on the Children, Youth and Families Amendment (Stability) Bill 2025. It is my first time leading the debate on a bill in this Parliament. I want to begin by saying that it is a genuine privilege to do so. To be given the responsibility to lead this debate on legislation goes to the very heart of the work that we do for children, young people and families, and it is something I do not take lightly. I note that I will have to pause for the lunch break and return to this, so I will just make some opening remarks before lunch.

This specific bill, which seeks to make some significant changes, has been something that I have really been considering and looking into deeply. I think particularly as a new mother, having had my first baby in January of this year, and as the new Shadow Minister for Children and also Shadow Minister for Youth and Future Leaders, this is something very significant to me. It is not lost on me how important the work that we do in this place is and how important it is particularly where it pertains to our most vulnerable, the children that we care for. This is an important opportunity to examine how our systems support Victoria's most vulnerable children who are in the care of the state, how we provide them with genuine stability and security and how this Parliament can do better when it comes to keeping children safe. This is arguably the most significant change to the child protection and out-of-home care sector since the reforms were introduced by Minister Wooldridge when we were in government in 2014.

[NAME AWAITING VERIFICATION]

Given the seriousness of this work and what it seeks to achieve for Victoria's most vulnerable children, I do have amendments I will be moving in the house, probably after the lunch break at this stage. Can I also just make a note of and thank the Minister for Children in the other place Minister Blandthorn, whose office has actually been quite exceptional in arranging the briefings for us. Liam in her office – if I can say a thankyou to him – has been very courteous and very helpful. I always appreciate that even though there might be robust debate in this chamber and in this house and words that fly back and forth, we can be respectful of one another and still be able to have good working relationships outside of the robust debate and theatrics that sometimes happen in this house.

What the bill seeks to achieve is to amend the Children, Youth and Families Act 2005 to revise the legal framework governing children who are subject to protection orders, with the stated aim of maximising safe, timely and sustainable opportunities for family reunification. The government has described this bill as a major reform, and it is. It represents the most significant change to Victoria's child protection system in more than a decade, and it fundamentally reshapes how the system will make decisions about stability and long-term outcomes for vulnerable children. The bill primarily amends the act in three major ways: firstly, by replacing the concept of permanency with the concept of stability, which actually is a reversal of reforms passed in 2014. That change is more than semantic. It introduces a new holistic definition of stability that includes legal, physical, cultural and relational components. It shifts the foundation on which all case planning, court decision-making and departmental interventions will be based. As I said, it is quite landmark.

The bill substantially changes the duration extension framework for family reunification orders. It allows the court to issue an initial family reunification order for up to 24 months, doubling the previous maximum of 12 months. It also permits the court to extend a family reunification order by additional periods of 12 months, and I will note that that is with no limit, as defined by this bill, on the number of extensions. Initially the family reunification order could be made for 12 months. It is now being

doubled to 24 months from the outset, and now the cumulative 24 months is being removed from that. So there will be the ability to then apply for additional extension periods of 12 months, with no limit on the number of extensions, provided the court considers this to be in the child's best interests. To enable this, the bill repeals the cumulative 12-month cap, as I said, and removes the requirement for there to be compelling evidence that reunification is likely in order to justify an extension.

Finally, the other key reform in this bill is that it removes adoption from the hierarchy of case planning objectives. This means adoption will no longer be considered as an option for children in the statutory child protection system.

These three changes directly reverse the coalition's 2014 reforms, which were designed to anchor the child protection system around permanency and ensure that children were not left to languish in uncertainty. The reason that these reforms were passed in 2014 – and again I note that these are what this bill now seeks to reform and reverse essentially – was because there were children adrift in the system. There were children in the care of the state that were adrift, languishing in the system, and in many cases in this state of limbo where they were not able to return yet to their families and were then in the system for a long time. It might have been because there were systemic issues where there were structural barriers or simply that their parents could not access services to get their lives in a place where they would be able to take on the care of their children again.

I will note here that every parent loves their child. That is not at question here. It is not about the love of a parent for their child, but it is the capacity to parent that we would like to underline on this side of the house. There are situations where the capacity to parent is not there or the ability to parent is not there, given the circumstances that perhaps the parents have undergone. Perhaps it is that the parent themselves is a victim of domestic violence. Maybe it is that the parents, in many cases, were children in the care of the state themselves. It is about the capacity of parents to be able to parent their children. For us on this side of the house, it is the child's best interests and the child-centred approach to those in the care of the state that we are arguing for today.

Before I go to the concerns about the bill, perhaps I will just quickly note that the government presents this bill as a pathway to better outcomes for children, but on closer examination it reveals several serious concerns, and these concerns have been raised by stakeholders. They have been raised by stakeholders, practitioners, those with lived experience and those from organisations that support vulnerable families every day. They go to the heart of whether this bill will actually deliver stability for children or whether it will simply change the language whilst perpetuating the very uncertainty that children in the system already face. That is why our position on this side of the house is to not oppose the bill but to move a reasoned amendment, and that is after careful consideration. We have also consulted with stakeholders, who have provided us with a lot of feedback and a lot of concerns that they have, noting that the issues that this bill seeks to address are serious, complex and deeply important. That is why we will be moving an amendment after lunch.

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

Business interrupted under standing orders.

The SPEAKER: I would like to acknowledge in the gallery – they are just arriving now – the High Commissioner for Pakistan, His Excellency Irfan Shaukat, and Consul General Wajid Hassan.

Questions without notice and ministers statements

Health system

Jess WILSON (Kew – Leader of the Opposition) (14:03): My question is to the Premier. Labor is spending \$21 million a day on interest. At the same time, nearly 59,000 Victorians are stuck on surgery waiting lists. How many surgeries can be performed for \$21 million?

Jacinta ALLAN (Bendigo East – Premier) (14:03): I thank the Leader of the Opposition for her question and an opportunity to discuss the health and hospital system and how we have a health and hospital system –

James Newbury: On a point of order, Speaker, on the relevance rule, the Premier has just said she is deliberately going to misuse this chamber and not answer questions in question time. This is not a discussion; this is question time, where questions are put to the executive government and they answer them.

The SPEAKER: What is your point of order?

James Newbury: Relevance.

The SPEAKER: The Premier has just commenced her answer. I think it is appropriate to give the Premier the opportunity to answer the question.

Jacinta ALLAN: I was asked about additional surgery in our hospital system. I remind the house of the state budget that was handed down earlier this year, a state budget that delivered an additional \$11.1 billion to our health system. That funding will be directed to many things in our health system: employing more nurses, employing more healthcare workers and delivering more surgery for more Victorians. That \$11.1 billion figure has a familiar ring to it because of course there are no surgeries being done under an \$11 billion black hole from those opposite.

Members interjecting.

The SPEAKER: Members are going to be removed from the chamber without warning.

James Newbury: On a point of order, Speaker, on relevance, this question was about the cost and impact of debt. The Premier is being evasive and is not answering that specific question. The Premier every day is misusing question time.

The SPEAKER: I ask the member for Brighton to state his point of order appropriately. There is a correct way to raise a point of order.

Mary-Anne Thomas: On the point of order, Speaker, it is clear that there is no point of order. The question to the Premier went to planned surgeries, and the Premier is being directly responsive and relevant to that question. The facts are that those on the other side of the house do not want to hear the Premier compare and contrast the investments that our government is making with the \$11.1 billion black hole that the Leader of the Opposition is delivering.

Danny O'Brien: On the point of order, Speaker, the Premier is clearly both debating and not being relevant to the question. It is very straightforward: how many surgeries for \$21 million?

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

Jacinta ALLAN: Again, we are making the investments in our hospital system to deliver more surgery, to employ more nurses and to deliver those nurses and midwives the pay rise that they deserve for keeping us safe and well in our health and hospital system. I know that this is difficult for those opposite to understand. Whenever they have had the opportunity, they have only ever cut funding to our hospitals.

James Newbury: On a point of order, Speaker, on relevance, we are seeing a pattern of behaviour where the Premier is refusing to deal with the substance of the question. What is the point of question time?

The SPEAKER: Manager of Opposition Business, I ask you to state your point of order succinctly. It is not an opportunity to make a statement to the house. The Premier is being relevant, but I do remind the Premier not to attack the opposition.

Jacinta ALLAN: I know it upsets the member for Brighton. I will do my best, Speaker. We are investing an \$11.1 billion additional amount of funding into our hospital system, and we are doing it precisely so we can treat more patients and provide more care. But beyond that, we also understand that we need to deliver new and different models of care closer to where people live, which is why the virtual emergency department is so important. It is why care at the chemist is so important. Because we understand, from being on the side of working people and their families here in Victoria, we invest in our health and hospital system, we back the nurses and healthcare workers who work in our system and we support the additional patients that need the care that they get in our world-class health system here in Victoria.

Jess WILSON (Kew – Leader of the Opposition) (14:09): Premier, how many graduate nurses can be employed for \$21 million?

Members interjecting.

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

Member for Point Cook withdrew from chamber.

Jacinta ALLAN (Bendigo East – Premier) (14:09): I am delighted to be able to answer this question, because the reason why we can talk about graduate nurses is because we back those graduate nurses. We back them with their university support. We back them too with the pay rise that we provided last year.

James Newbury: On a point of order, Speaker, on relevance, the Premier is picking words out of questions and refusing to deal with the substance of the question. How is that responsible?

The SPEAKER: What is your point of order?

James Newbury: The relevance rule has become completely ridiculous, Speaker.

The SPEAKER: If the Manager of Opposition Business has a concern about the standing orders, I invite him to bring those concerns to the Standing Orders Committee. The Premier was being relevant to the question.

James Newbury: On a further point of order, Speaker, on the relevance concern, I am raising it when it is being abused in this chamber, which is the appropriate time to raise it.

The SPEAKER: I am the Speaker, and I decide whether the answer is relevant. The question is in front of me; the Premier was being relevant.

Jacinta ALLAN: I want to thank not only the graduate nurses but every single nurse and midwife in our health and hospital system for the work that they do. We back them. We did not go to war with the nurses, like those opposite did. We backed them with a pay rise.

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

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

Jacinta ALLAN: As a result of our additional investments that we have made in the healthcare system, we have seen a 27 per cent increase in the number of healthcare workers who work in our hospital system since 2020. We support them, we back them and we thank them for the work they do every single day in our world-class health system.

Ministers statements: economy

Jacinta ALLAN (Bendigo East – Premier) (14:11): It has been a big, big week for building for the future of this great state. We have the Metro Tunnel opening earlier, on 30 November, which is the biggest upgrade to our rail network in more than 40 years – five new stations, faster services. Also,

across the road in the West Gate Tunnel, tens of thousands of people and families walked through for the first time on Sunday, celebrating a project that will take trucks off local roads and give us that long-talked-about alternative to the West Gate Bridge. Then of course there is the Suburban Rail Loop – a much-needed project for the growth of our city and state, a project that delivers homes, jobs and services and a project that has the backing from the Prime Minister, confirming additional federal funding for this much-needed project.

These projects are all about one thing: giving Victorians time – time not lost in traffic, time not swallowed up by long commutes, time spent with their families and those that they love. Work from home is built on that same idea too. It is about work fitting in around life and giving parents, particularly women, the flexibility that they need to stay in work. And while we are building a city and state for working people and families, there are some who want to drag us backwards and drag Victoria backwards – more concerned with the bosses in the boardroom than the workers in the tearoom, backed by colleagues who called working from home ‘professional apartheid’. That tells you just how out of touch and out of date these people are – out to make life harder for working people by cutting the sorts of projects our city and state need, like the Suburban Rail Loop. I am focused on building an economy that works for working people and families, with the infrastructure, conditions and flexibility that they deserve.

Community safety

David SOUTHWICK (Caulfield) (14:14): My question is to the Premier. Jack’s law, which gives police the power to stop and scan for knives at random high-risk locations, has been successfully implemented in Queensland, New South Wales, Western Australia and Tasmania. These laws are already saving lives, yet here in Victoria police are still restricted to searching for weapons in very limited circumstances. Premier, why won’t you implement Jack’s law?

Jacinta ALLAN (Bendigo East – Premier) (14:14): I thank the member for Caulfield for his question and the opportunity to discuss and point out to him and the house the measures that we are taking, on the advice of Victoria Police, to get more of these dangerous weapons off our streets. Alongside the rise in brazen, violent offending that is causing such great concern in our community, increasingly we know how knives, machetes and dangerous weapons are being used in this criminal behaviour. That is why, in terms of the actions we are taking here in Victoria to keep our community safe, again, as I emphasise –

David Southwick: On a point of order, Speaker, on relevance, I would ask you to bring the Premier back to answering the question: why won’t the Premier introduce Jack’s law here in Victoria? Simple.

Mary-Anne Thomas: On the point of order, Speaker, in raising points of order members of the opposition continue to defy your very clear ruling that a point of order is not an opportunity to repeatedly ask the question. The Premier is being entirely relevant. She has been on her feet for just over 40 seconds, and I ask that you rule the point of order out of order.

James Newbury: Further to the point of order, Speaker, I think the entire chamber is now frustrated that the Premier is refusing to deal with the substance of questions, and that is what is happening here.

The SPEAKER: That is not a point of order. In terms of the point of order raised by the member for Caulfield, I ask him not to repeat the question in his points of order. The Premier will come back to the question.

Jacinta ALLAN: As I was outlining to the house, based on the work that has been done with Victoria Police, Victoria Police already have the powers to stop and search without a warrant. Further to that, working with Victoria Police we are providing 800 handheld metal detectors to assist Victoria Police with their work to be able to detect these dangerous weapons with that sole purpose of getting them off the streets. And when you add this work to the work that has already been done with the ban on machetes, we have seen more than 20,000 of these dangerous weapons taken off the streets.

David Southwick: On a point of order, Speaker, on relevance, it is clear that the Premier does not know the difference between Jack's law and what is happening in Victoria. I am happy to table the document that shows the difference between what is happening in Victoria and –

The SPEAKER: Order! There is no point of order.

Jacinta ALLAN: As I have said, we are working with Victoria Police on putting in place laws here in Victoria. They have stop-and-search powers. We are giving them wands to strengthen those powers. We have banned machetes to get these dangerous weapons off the streets. And we will continue to work with Victoria Police and support them in keeping our community safe.

David SOUTHWICK (Caulfield) (14:17): Brett Beasley, whose son Jack was tragically killed in 2019 and whose advocacy led to Jack's law, has publicly stated that you will not meet with him. He is in the gallery. Will the Premier commit to meeting with Brett Beasley today?

Jacinta ALLAN (Bendigo East – Premier) (14:18): I thank the member for Caulfield for the opportunity to step through the actions I and my office have taken to reach out to Mr Beasley in acknowledging his powerful advocacy for keeping the community safe and honouring the memory of his son Jack, whose life was tragically taken, and I pass on my deepest sympathy. As a parent it is unthinkable to think about losing your child in that circumstance, and the way that Mr Beasley has taken that experience and is turning it into advocacy to keep communities safe is incredibly powerful. As I said yesterday when I was asked this question, I said publicly that I would welcome the opportunity to meet with Mr Beasley, and since then my office has made a number of attempts to contact Mr Beasley to make a time, and we are looking forward to that opportunity to thank him for the work that he has done. I am looking forward to Mr Beasley having the opportunity to respond to those messages.

Ministers statements: housing

Sonya KILKENNY (Carrum – Attorney-General, Minister for Planning) (14:19): The Allan Labor government is saying yes to more homes and more affordable homes for Victorians. We are opening doors for families, young people and essential workers who want to live in well-connected suburbs close to transport, services and jobs. We are making it simpler and faster to build all kinds of homes in all kinds of places, including in Kew, and as part of this we have introduced into this Parliament a planning bill to reform our planning system. Yesterday the new Leader of the Opposition identified housing affordability as one of her key priorities, and I genuinely welcome this. Housing is one of the most important issues facing our state. Her own deputy in the other place Mr Evan Mulholland put it clearly in his inaugural speech:

... it is immoral that large sections of our inner cities, flush with good transport, schools, health care ... remain almost flat, with obsolete overlays denying young Victorians a chance to buy their first home where they want to live.

Members interjecting.

The SPEAKER: Order! I cannot hear the Attorney-General. The member for Bulleen will leave the chamber for half an hour.

Member for Bulleen withdrew from chamber.

Sonya KILKENNY: I note that the Liberal Party is opposing the government's planning amendment bill, a bill that directly addresses housing affordability, modernises our planning system, boosts housing supply and will unlock more than \$900 million in economic value each year. Why? The position is not just inconsistent, it is an absolute barrier to the homes Victorians need. If the opposition are serious about housing, as they say they are, then they should match their words with action, and I call on the current Leader of the Liberal Party to support the planning amendment bill and join us in delivering more homes for Victorians, more affordability and more opportunity for the next generation.

Electricity prices

Jess WILSON (Kew – Leader of the Opposition) (14:21): My question is to the Premier. The Australian Energy Regulator reports Victoria has the second most expensive wholesale power prices in Australia. Does the Premier agree with the Treasurer that Victoria has the lowest wholesale price in the country?

Josh Bull interjected.

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

Member for Sunbury withdrew from chamber.

Jacinta ALLAN (Bendigo East – Premier) (14:22): I am very pleased to respond to the Leader of the Opposition's question about the work we are doing to invest in more renewable energy. I know renewable energy is a bit of a sore topic for those opposite and also –

Members interjecting.

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

Member for Tarneit withdrew from chamber.

Sam Groth: On a point of order, standing order 58, Speaker, says that you should not introduce matters extraneous to the question. The question did not ask about renewable energy; it asked about energy prices. They are not the same thing.

The SPEAKER: The Premier has only been on her feet for 15 seconds. The Premier to come back to the question.

Jacinta ALLAN: Wow! The member for Nepean might have a sense of the debates being riven through the Liberal Party around the country right now and know that renewable energy is directly related and directly part of the debate and discussion about how we need to keep energy prices down. This is central. The point I make is that Victoria has consistently had –

Members interjecting.

Jacinta ALLAN: The minister for energy would be delighted to answer this question, I know. She wants me to read them out. The minister for energy is right to point out that Victoria has consistently had the lowest wholesale and retail energy prices in the national market. A key factor for this, for the benefit of the member for Nepean, is our investments in renewable energy and renewable energy increasing as a percentage of our energy mix. It is because, you know what, we back targets on this side of the house for a whole bunch of things, and that includes driving renewable energy. We do not live in this denial world like those opposite do about the need to bring more renewable energy into our energy mix.

Members interjecting.

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

Member for Nepean withdrew from chamber.

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

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

Jacinta ALLAN: Also, further to that, when you discuss energy prices, not only has Victoria had consistently the lowest wholesale and retail energy prices in the national market, but under the default offer regime we are also delivering default offers to homes and businesses lower than other states on the eastern seaboard, and we are able to deliver this because of that investment in renewable energy that is driving more renewable energy into our energy mix. This is how you manage the pressures,

which I know are very real. I acknowledge that energy bills are a big cost to households, which is why we have initiatives like the power saving bonus to help support families with their power bills. It is why we have the default offer in the first place – the cheapest in the country. It is why we have a huge range of energy concessions to support vulnerable families with their power bills. It is also why we have a program to encourage households to make the switch to cheaper energy alternatives through the work that is being done.

Brad Rowswell: On a point of order, Speaker, with 10 seconds to go, the Premier continues to debate the question.

The SPEAKER: The Premier was not debating the question.

Jacinta ALLAN: We believe in supporting households with managing their energy bills. We also believe in driving more renewable energy into our energy mix, which you cannot say for those opposite.

Jess WILSON (Kew – Leader of the Opposition) (14:26): Power prices in Melbourne have increased by 15 per cent over the past 12 months. That is an extra \$210 on an average annual Victorian electricity bill. Why is the Premier's energy policy costing Victorians more?

Jacinta ALLAN (Bendigo East – Premier) (14:27): The Leader of the Opposition is presenting – *Members interjecting.*

Jacinta ALLAN: No, they are far from facts. You cannot rush off to Sky after dark and say one thing there and come in here and say another thing. By investing in renewable energy and by driving more renewable energy options, whether it is through the work of the SEC or by partnering with the private sector, we are driving more renewable energy, which helps keep downward pressure on those energy prices.

James Newbury: On a point of order, Speaker, this was a very, very specific question that set out some very detailed facts, and the Premier is debating that question.

The SPEAKER: The Premier was not debating the question, and the Premier has the opportunity to respond to both the supplementary and the substantive question in her response.

Jacinta ALLAN: I mentioned earlier the Victorian default offer. Even now, some years after its introduction in 2025–26, the VDO for households is still 10 per cent lower than what it was pre-2019. This is how you continue to support households, recognising that households deserve support, which is why we have the power saving bonus and the energy upgrades program and also continue to believe in the role that renewable energy has to play.

Ministers statements: Trans Awareness Week

Vicki WARD (Eltham – Minister for Emergency Services, Minister for Natural Disaster Recovery, Minister for Equality) (14:28): I rise to mark Trans Awareness Week and Trans Day of Remembrance, when we acknowledge and celebrate the trans and gender-diverse Victorians who make up our families, workplaces and communities and when those of us who value inclusion reinforce that trans and gender-diverse Victorians are loved, valued and welcomed. We also remember the trans and gender-diverse people whose lives have unnecessarily been cut short by hurt, stigma, discrimination and violence.

Around the world trans communities are facing increasing hate. In this place we have a leadership role in rejecting hate and standing up for inclusion, because the choices we make send a signal about whose side we are on. On this side of the house we are clear. We stand with trans and gender-diverse Victorians and recognise they deserve to feel safe and respected in our great state. We have strengthened anti-vilification laws. We have invested in the services that trans Victorians count on and made it easier to get identity documents that reflect who they truly are. The Allan Labor government believes in building communities, not fragmenting them. That is true leadership: leading for all,

speaking out against harmful words and behaviours and strengthening inclusion rather than stoking disunity.

The best leaders do not elevate those who fuel hateful narratives and do not reward those who oppose equality reforms or who work hard to undermine the rights of LGBTIQ+ Victorians. When you reward those who fuel this harm against trans and gender-diverse Victorians and their families, you are showing them you do not respect or value these Victorians. When it comes to hate or harm, you need to draw a line in the sand and you do need to be clear about whose side you are on. Under an Allan Labor government, equality is not negotiable.

Kensington Primary School

Ellen SANDELL (Melbourne) (14:30): My question is to the Minister for Education. Minister, back in 2021 Kensington Primary School in my electorate was awarded \$7.6 million to fund stage 1 of its master plan. Unfortunately, since then, with the steep increases in construction costs, the scope of works of that project was significantly reduced. Four years later there are substantial urgent repairs and works needed at the school just to complete this stage 1, including repairs to rotting window frames; wheelchair access to upstairs classrooms; desperately needed insulation, soundproofing and recarpeting; and black mould removal, amongst other items. Minister, will you commit to funding for Kensington Primary School to allow them to complete a project that really should already have been finished?

Ben CARROLL (Niddrie – Minister for Education, Minister for WorkSafe and the TAC) (14:31): I thank the member for Melbourne for her question on education. I have not had a question on education since the famous reshuffle over there, so it is very good that I am still getting questions on education, one of the most important policy areas for government. What I can say is the Allan Labor government has put in the biggest investment in school infrastructure and modernisation since federation – more than \$38 billion – our focus on equity and excellence. Also another \$18.5 million is being invested specifically on upgrading our schools right across our state – some 2300 upgrades done and completed under the Allan Labor government.

I will say I do know Kensington Primary School, and the member for Melbourne has been a strong advocate for that school. It is an important school on McCracken Street. I do know, as the member for Melbourne alluded to, we have provided a \$7.3 million investment in that school, which did provide disability access, a new lift and a new reception area for the staff. Since I became minister and the member has continued to advocate for that school, there was another \$300,000 in one of the Allan Labor government's budgets for the new outdoor kitchen, play area and community space to bring that great Kensington community together.

I will continue to work with the member for Melbourne – she has my commitment on that – and to do all I can to ensure that every child gets the best facilities, that every child gets to be in a school with dedicated teachers and that there are not any cuts on this side of the chamber when it comes to education. We are proud of our delivery and will keep investing in education because we on this side of the chamber know it transforms lives.

Ellen SANDELL (Melbourne) (14:33): I thank the minister for his answer, but families at Kensington Primary have been waiting years for these urgent repairs to be completed. Parents are fundraising themselves through sausage sizzles, parent social nights and fun runs, but parents really should not be asked to fundraise or dig into their own pockets for basic repairs for our public schools. The Kensington Primary School council would like to invite the minister to come to Kensington Primary to see the needs for himself. Minister, will you accept the school council's invitation to visit Kensington Primary School before the end of the year?

Ben CARROLL (Niddrie – Minister for Education, Minister for WorkSafe and the TAC) (14:34): I commit to going to Kensington Primary School to look at the investments that the Allan Labor government has done and will continue to do. While I am there, I will go past the Royal Children's

Hospital and look at that brand new school that has been delivered under the Allan Labor government. Then I might get on the train at Arden and look at the brand new high school we are going to build in the Arden precinct. So I cannot wait to get out to Kensington Primary School and look at all the schools and all the infrastructure – how we are transforming lives every day.

Ministers statements: health workforce

Mary-Anne THOMAS (Macedon – Leader of the House, Minister for Health, Minister for Ambulance Services) (14:34): I rise today to update the house on the Allan Labor government's commitment to continue to deliver thousands of new jobs in our healthcare system. As a Labor government, we are focused on creating good, secure jobs that Victorians can rely on, and we know that our public healthcare system plays a key role in delivering these good jobs while delivering world-class care to Victorians wherever they need it. In fact we have delivered more than 42,000 additional jobs in our healthcare system since coming to government – more nurses, more midwives, more doctors and more allied healthcare workers. We have grown that workforce by more than 50 per cent.

But behind these jobs are real people. These are mums and dads working in our healthcare system who now have high-quality jobs that they can rely on close to where they live, and it is all because of our government and its focus, the Allan Labor government's focus, on creating these good jobs. We have backed this in with an additional \$11.1 billion in this year's budget. But when I think about what \$11.1 billion does, I think about what an \$11.1 billion cut will do to our healthcare system. The latest Leader of the Liberal Party needs to come clean.

James Newbury: On a point of order, Speaker, you have previously ruled on this matter, and ministers statements should not be an opportunity for ministers to sledge the opposition.

The SPEAKER: I do not recall the minister mentioning the opposition.

Members interjecting.

The SPEAKER: You did? I ask you not to attack the opposition, Minister for Health.

Mary-Anne THOMAS: I was only making the point that when you make a decision to take \$11.1 billion from the budget you have to account for that somewhere. So the question is: how many nurses are going to be sacked? How many hospitals are going to close? They have done it before; they will do it again. Victorians know –

James Newbury: I renew the same point of order, Speaker.

The SPEAKER: I have ruled on the point of order.

Mary-Anne THOMAS: Victorians know that when it comes to investing in our healthcare system and creating good, reliable, secure jobs there is only one party they can rely on. The Allan Labor government will deliver those jobs.

Road maintenance

Danny O'BRIEN (Gippsland South) (14:37): My question is to the Minister for Roads and Road Safety. Boral has this week announced redundancies in its roadworks division, the closure of roadworks depots at North Geelong and Lysterfield and the mothballing of depots at Bendigo and Geelong. If the government is doing so much road maintenance, why are road contractors winding down their businesses in Victoria?

Members interjecting.

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

Member for Glen Waverley withdrew from chamber.

Melissa HORNE (Williamstown – Minister for Ports and Freight, Minister for Roads and Road Safety, Minister for Health Infrastructure) (14:38): Once again I thank the member for Gippsland South for the opportunity to outline just how much money we are spending on roads across Victoria. Just recently I was out in South-West Coast actually having a look at some of the investment out there with an asphaltting plant that has just gone in there. We are a government that has spent –

Members interjecting.

The SPEAKER: The member for South-West Coast can leave the chamber for half an hour.

Member for South-West Coast withdrew from chamber.

Danny O'Brien: On a point of order, Speaker, on the question of relevance, one of the depots that is closing is an asphaltting plant.

The SPEAKER: I ask you, Minister, to come back to the question.

Melissa HORNE: As you can appreciate, we are investing nearly a billion dollars this year, on top of nearly a billion dollars last year, in improving our roads across the state.

Danny O'BRIEN (Gippsland South) (14:39): Bronwyn Drummond from Pakenham was one of more than two dozen motorists who suffered damage to their cars due to a massive pothole on the Princes Highway at Nar Nar Goon last weekend. Ms Drummond said:

... it's going to cost us thousands and thousands ...

We're already behind on bills, we don't know how we're going to fix it ...

Why are Victorians like Ms Drummond and Boral workers who have lost their jobs paying the price because Labor cannot manage money and cannot manage roads?

Melissa HORNE (Williamstown – Minister for Ports and Freight, Minister for Roads and Road Safety, Minister for Health Infrastructure) (14:39): In relation to the incident that occurred at Nar Nar Goon, I would suggest that the person that you mentioned reaches out to the department of transport and lodges a claim through that. However, let us be really clear about our sustained investment over a decade into our road maintenance. Unlike those on the other side, who might invest in a road to Malvern, might invest in a road to Bulleen and currently are investing in a road to Kew, we have got a sustained 10-year investment in improving our roads.

Ministers statements: Respectful Relationships

Ben CARROLL (Niddrie – Minister for Education, Minister for WorkSafe and the TAC) (14:40): I start by congratulating the member for Kew on becoming the sixth leader of the Liberal Party in seven years.

Members interjecting.

Ben CARROLL: Six-seven. Shakespeare himself would be impressed. On this side of the house we do believe in teaching respect for everyone in schools through our Respectful Relationships program, but it seems those in the new Leader of the Opposition's inner circle would disagree with this approach.

Members interjecting.

The SPEAKER: Before I call the Manager of Opposition Business, I am very pleased that the Deputy Premier has started to talk about respect, because there is a lack of respect in this chamber. Members will come to order.

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

The SPEAKER: The Deputy Premier to come back to his ministers statement.

Ben CARROLL: As Minister for Education, I thought talking about Shakespeare, one of the greatest writers in the English language, was something that would be encouraged by those opposite. But anyway, I will get on with my statement, because what we are doing in the Allan Labor government –

Members interjecting.

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

Member for Malvern withdrew from chamber.

Ben CARROLL: is making sure that the Royal Commission into Family Violence, which recommended the Respectful Relationships initiative, is being implemented across our government, independent, Catholic and private schools, because we know respect begins at school and we know we have to do everything we can to make sure that our young people of today and our adults of tomorrow know about respect. But we also do know that the new Leader of the Opposition in the upper house Mrs McArthur only last month railed against gender ideology indoctrination in the Respectful Relationships program.

James Newbury: On a point of order, Speaker, the Deputy Premier is defying your ruling and is in breach of other standing orders in relation to behaviour towards members of the other chamber.

Mary-Anne Thomas: Speaker, on the point of order, there is no point of order. The Deputy Premier is taking the opportunity to outline the government's position in relation to the teaching of Respectful Relationships in our schools. He is contrasting this with the position of Mrs McArthur in the other place. This is factual information that is appropriate in this house.

The SPEAKER: I remind the Deputy Premier to be very careful about reflecting on other members of Parliament.

Ben CARROLL: I congratulate the member for Kew because, unlike the member for Berwick, she knows how to dance with the one that brung ya. We know it is okay to say something on High Street, Kew, but then you say something on Spring Street, Melbourne, to keep the French coalition together.

James Newbury: On a point of order, Speaker, this is outrageous. You have twice ruled that the Deputy Premier should not behave in this way in a ministers statement, and now for a third time, in very grubby, disgraceful behaviour –

The SPEAKER: Order! I will not call the Deputy Premier to conclude his ministers statement. The time for questions has ended.

Brad Rowswell: On a point of order, Speaker, I just noted the education minister said 'brung ya'. Does he mean 'brought'?

The SPEAKER: Resume your seat, member for Sandringham. The time for questions has ended.

Constituency questions

Brighton electorate

James NEWBURY (Brighton) (14:45): (1408) My constituency question is to the Premier, and I ask: when will the Premier act to solve Victoria's crime crisis, especially as it relates to knives and weapons? During question time I was advised that one of my schools, Elsternwick Primary School, has been put into lockdown because of youths in the Brighton area allegedly with weapons. The Premier is walking out of the chamber while I am in the middle of asking her a question. Youths with weapons have forced a school into lockdown. You can understand why our community is so concerned. You can understand why parents are concerned. The police I understand were there as

quickly as possible, but one of my schools is in lockdown because of the crime crisis in this state, because there were youths with weapons in the area. So I would say to the Premier: press releases mean nothing. When are you going to do something? Because our kids, our communities are in danger.

Laverton electorate

Sarah CONNOLLY (Laverton) (14:46): (1409) My question is for the Deputy Premier and Minister for Education. The Glasses for Kids program is probably one of our government's lesser known but incredibly popular student support programs. Under this program up to 108,000 students from prep to year 3 across 770 Victorian government schools will receive free vision screening at school followed by comprehensive eye testing and free glasses for those kids that need them. In fact I was recently at Ardeer South Primary with the cutest primary school students, who are receiving their glasses through this program – amazing. A big shout-out to you guys. I hope it is going well, and I hope you can see that blackboard in front of you. It also means parents can save on the cost of having to buy glasses for their kids, which I can tell you, as someone who has worn glasses since they were about 12 years old, can cost a lot of money. This program is not just great for kids, it is great for families too, and it is learning support and cost-of-living support rolled into one program. My question is this: how many students at schools in the Laverton electorate have benefited from receiving free glasses through this program?

Murray Plains electorate

Peter WALSH (Murray Plains) (14:47): (1410) My question is to the Minister for Skills and TAFE. When will the agricultural courses delivered by GOTAFE at Shepparton be properly staffed and resourced? GOTAFE at Shepparton has the only government-owned working farm for teaching agriculture, and it is going to rack and ruin because so many instructors are on stress leave because agriculture courses are understaffed and there is little support for those who are at work. I am told that when these issues have been raised and there have been appeals for help, the staff are told by the department, 'It doesn't matter, it's only agriculture.' Agriculture training does matter, and it should matter to the Labor government. Just telling agricultural students, 'You don't need a real working farm to learn; you can do it online with AI' is an appalling statement and shows a total lack of understanding of what is involved in teaching students how to work with large animals like stud rams with horns or cattle that can weigh up to a tonne. If the government sells the GOTAFE farm, agricultural training will suffer in northern Victoria, and there will be even less trained staff to produce the food we eat or export to the world.

Pascoe Vale electorate

Anthony CIANFLONE (Pascoe Vale) (14:48): (1411) My constituency question is for the Minister for Health. How is the Victorian Labor government's free community chemist care program helping to support local health, wellbeing and socio-economic outcomes across Pascoe Vale, Coburg and Brunswick West? On 25 October I had the pleasure to join the wonderful team at Community Health Pharmacy to celebrate an incredible 140 years of serving our suburbs, now located right next to my electorate office in Coburg North Village. Founded in 1884 as the Brunswick and Coburg United Friendly Society, the original building still stands on Melville Road, Brunswick West, highlighting the pharmacy's deep and longstanding roots in serving our community. As a mutual not-for-profit organisation, the team continues to reinvest every dollar back into the community through expanded healthcare services, facilities and member benefits, including by delivering treatments through our free community care program. Congratulations to all involved: Scott Franklin, the general manager; Charbel Tarabay, the pharmacy manager; Celia Torres-Villanueva, the board chair; and the entire team – Koula Pritsis-Pollina, Bonnie Lute, Caitlin Stephenson, Craig Simpson, Emma Gordon, Graeme Dixon, Jawid Satari, Julie, Michelina, Rosa, Sandra, Seungjoo, Simon and Vanessa.

Croydon electorate

David HODGETT (Croydon) (14:49): (1412) My question is for the Minister for Police, and I ask: when will my office receive a response to a letter originally sent on 9 July 2025? Minister, after sending the original letter in July, my office then sent a follow-up email on 15 August. I personally handed you a copy of the letter in September, as well as spoke to you about it in October, and we are still waiting on a reply. Not even an acknowledgement has been received to date. My constituent Ryan Sleeman has been patiently waiting to hear if an historical arson reward scheme payment that was due to be paid to his late mother, whose testimony led to the convictions of two arsonists in the late 1980s, will finally be honoured to the family, who have had to endure endless heartache, tragedy and loss and are finally due a reward for all their sacrifices.

Cranbourne electorate

Pauline RICHARDS (Cranbourne) (14:50): (1413) My question is to the Minister for Education, and the question I have is: how many students have benefited from homework clubs in my area? The Victorian African Communities Committee has done a power of work. A key recommendation of the committee was the implementation of homework clubs, and I am honoured that this pre-eminent body has been able to deliver on that commitment. I am going to take the opportunity to thank the members, particularly Tigist Kebede who has been the co-chair, Adongwot Manyoul, Anaab Rooble, Andrew Gai, Catherine Jonathan, Fred Alale, Mahamed Ahmed, Mohamed Semra, Selba-Gondoza Luka OAM, Tawana Basutu, Dr Tebeje Malla and a previous member, Dr Stephane Shepherd. This is a very important body, and I will be looking forward to hearing the minister's response.

Evelyn electorate

Bridget VALLENCE (Evelyn) (14:50): (1414) The Lilydale State Emergency Service is a wonderful 100 per cent volunteer unit of emergency first responders that help protect communities across the Yarra Ranges – indeed across Victoria – during storms, floods, road trauma, animal rescue and other emergencies. On behalf of the Lilydale SES volunteers and our community, my question is to the Minister for Emergency Services: specifically, how much capital and operating funding has been provided to the Lilydale SES in the past financial year and allocated in the 2025–26 state budget? It is disappointing that this year's budget papers again did not seem to have any specific funding allocation for this vital emergency service in Lilydale that serves my community and the state. The government may refer to its new emergency services tax, but every Victorian knows there is no clarity on whether any of the revenue will actually flow to the Lilydale SES or how much to VICSES generally, and a troubling aspect is that volunteers still need to pay the tax up-front despite supposedly being exempt. A shout-out to all volunteers at Lilydale SES.

Thomastown electorate

Bronwyn HALFPENNY (Thomastown) (14:52): (1415) My question is to the Minister for Economic Growth and Jobs regarding the role of Global Victoria on the African continent. During a recent visit to Abuja in Nigeria and Accra in Ghana it became obvious that there are many opportunities, along with the goodwill of those who I met, to further develop trade, investment, education and cultural exchanges. Victoria is well placed to do this, particularly with the support and guidance of Victorians of African heritage. Minister, what is Global Victoria doing to ensure we take up such opportunities for the benefit of both Victoria and African nations?

Euroa electorate

Annabelle CLEELAND (Euroa) (14:52): (1416) My question is to the Minister for Roads and Road Safety. Will the government commit to an urgent pothole and maintenance blitz across the Euroa electorate before the busy Christmas and holiday period? Right across our region our roads are a disgrace. Victoria is in the middle of a road safety crisis created by the Allan Labor government, and despite the gaslighting that we just heard, Victorians know that our roads are dangerous. The Midland Highway, the Murchison-Violet Town Road, throughout Nagambie, the Euroa-Shepparton Road, the

Seymour-Tooborac Road, the Goulburn Valley Highway and the Seymour-Avenel Road have become so unsafe to drive on. Drivers are swerving around potholes, shoulders are giving way and locals are reporting damage to their cars on roads that should be safe. With Christmas fast approaching, drivers, freight operators and emergency services need confidence that they can travel safely without putting themselves or others at risk. Every state-managed road in my electorate is slipping past the point of being car worthy and the government is forcing people into illegal driving behaviour. Locals are no longer driving on the left of the road; they are driving on what is left of the road.

Sunbury electorate

Josh BULL (Sunbury) (14:53): (1417) My question is to the Minister for Roads and Road Safety. Minister, what benefits and improvements can local Sunbury residents expect to see from an additional \$300,000 provided in the 2025–26 state budget for local road maintenance projects? I take this opportunity to acknowledge the importance of this funding, but I also express my significant frustration, concern and disappointment at Hume City Council, who have let our community down by walking away from minor maintenance agreements. This action was taken without consultation with the community or with the local member. As a lifelong local that knows and understands the importance of our community and the importance of these works, I do take the opportunity to remind Hume City Council just how important this work is. I look forward to the minister's response, and I acknowledge her support for the commitment of \$300,000.

Bridget Vallence: I do have a point of order yet again, Speaker, on questions that are overdue by ministers and yet to be answered. I still have 13 overdue answers from the Treasurer: questions on notice 2421, 2512, 2777, 2853, 2854, 2855, 2856, 2857, 2858, 2859, 2860, 2861 and 2862. I have previously raised a point of order on these being overdue, and I would appreciate a response from the Treasurer for my constituents. Answers to questions that are overdue by the Minister for Government Services are questions on notice 2763, 2764, 2765 and 2776. Again, I would appreciate responses for my constituents.

Bills

Children, Youth and Families Amendment (Stability) Bill 2025

Second reading

Debate resumed.

Nicole WERNER (Warrandyte) (14:55): It is my pleasure to resume the debate on the Children, Youth and Families Amendment (Stability) Bill 2025 and return to what I was last speaking about, my concerns about the bill that we are debating. I will be moving amendments in the house and, firstly, moving a reasoned amendment, the reason being that stakeholders have raised with us the issue of not being consulted. In fact the bill was introduced without the knowledge of key stakeholders in the out-of-home care sector, and for some, it took them by surprise. Broad stakeholders with lived experience as foster carers, kinship carers and permanent carers have not been consulted, and specifically these stakeholders have raised with me that the issue with this bill is that:

[QUOTES AWAITING VERIFICATION]

The voice of the child is missing from the bill, despite these changes critically impacting their future.

That is an issue that has been raised with me in this space by carers of all varieties, who have raised with me their deep concern that children in care are not afforded agency over their futures, the agency that they deserve as children, and that the lack of consultation on this bill with children with lived experience in the out-of-home care system, and who have been under the family reunification orders, highlights this further. Carers have written to me, distressed at their inability to have a voice despite the fact that they are the ones that are caring for these children. One foster carer wrote to me and said:

As carers we are effectively silenced. The mandatory code of conduct with our agency prohibits us from speaking publicly, preventing us from being able to advocate for vulnerable children or exposing systemic failures.

And that is why, in this case where the stakeholders have raised with me that the voice of the child is missing from the bill – the very children that this bill impacts, the very children that these reforms will affect – there is not the voice of those with lived experience informing or having been consulted on this bill. And we know that the government often purports to support those with lived experience. So then I ask why it would be that many of the stakeholders who are the carers and the stakeholders that are leading the charge in this space have written to me saying they did not know these changes were ahead, they did not know that this was coming and, no, they were not consulted.

Stakeholders have expressed their concern about many elements of this bill. I read this recommendation from a specific group, Permanent Care and Adoptive Families, otherwise known as PCA Families, who have recommended that we should pause this bill and pause changes to the act until thorough consultation with people with lived experience and key stakeholders has taken place and clear evidence shows the changes are in the best interests of children. This is a key stakeholder that represents 3700 kinship carers, foster carers and permanent carers in Victoria that has recommended, because it has not been consulted, that there should be consultation that takes place with those with lived experience. These key stakeholders are asking for this. One stakeholder said to me, ‘Nicole, for these children, it is just so important that we get this right.’

One of the members of PCA Families also wrote, saying:

As a permanent care family, I am hoping PCA Families will oppose these changes. How is longer time for reunification a good thing for stability for the child?

Another PCA Families member wrote:

I strongly believe more robust safeguards are required in the act to ensure that a child’s best interest, including their need for stability, is genuinely prioritised.

If the government does as it purports to do and cares about lived experience, it would support these amendments and support this reasoned amendment that I will put to the house this afternoon to include lived experience in this bill. It being the case that children only have one chance at a childhood, it is so important that we get this right and it is so important that we consult with those with lived experience. Therefore we believe that the house should not proceed to debate this bill any further until the government has undertaken that broad and genuine consultation with all stakeholders, including those with lived experience as children in the system and those who care for them. These are the voices that were not adequately included in the government’s consultation, and these are the voices that carry the real-life consequences of the decisions that we make here in this place. Accordingly, I move:

That all the words after ‘That’ be omitted and replaced with the words ‘this house refuses to read this bill a second time until the government has consulted more widely with all affected stakeholders, including stakeholders who have lived experience as children in care.’

Additionally, under standing orders I wish to advise the house of amendments to the bill and request that they be circulated. The reasoned amendment specifically seeks to ensure that reforms of this scale are informed by the people that understand the system best and the children and carers who rely on it.

Now to the concerns at hand beyond that which is contained in the reasoned amendment: another concern of ours on this side of the house is that this bill is a parent-focused and parent-centred approach, rather than a child-centred approach. One of the most consistent concerns raised is that this bill takes that approach to decision-making. The focus of child protection must always be the safety, wellbeing and long-term outcomes of the child, yet the structure of this bill and particularly the open-ended nature of family reunification order extensions, being unlimited, place far greater emphasis on accommodating the needs and circumstances of adults rather than the rights of the child. Stakeholders have repeatedly warned that when systems prioritise adults over children, children become the ones that are left in limbo. That is why these reforms took place in 2014. This is why there was that reform

initially, which is now being reversed, and that is the risk that is being embedded in this legislation. To quote the story of a kinship carer who wrote to our office – they wrote to us of their lived experience:

[QUOTE AWAITING VERIFICATION]

After three years of exhausting court appearances, significant financial strain and deep family trauma, a permanent care order was finally granted for our grandchildren, giving us full parental responsibility. The journey to this point was harrowing. The word ‘reunification’ still triggers painful memories of repeated attempts to return the children to birth parents despite overwhelming evidence of harm. Each attempt failed, causing further distress to the children and wasting time and resources while we watched in disbelief as the system prioritised reunification over safety.

During these years our grandchildren endured supervised contacts that were anything but safe. They returned from visits traumatised, having witnessed drug use, violence and threats, including promises to kidnap and harm family members. Both children were born addicted and now live with lifelong disabilities caused by prenatal exposure, yet these contacts were deemed in the best interests of the child.

Reading this bill, which repeatedly uses that phrase, alarms us. Our lived experience shows that without clear safeguards and timeframes children remain in limbo, exposed to further trauma. No child should suffer what ours did.

These are the words of a kinship carer – her own words of her lived experience. This raises concern about calls for enduring reunification orders when there are experiences like this out there – and they are in the hundreds – from all of the different groups and bodies that have spoken to us. In departmental briefings it was acknowledged that some advocates even pushed for enduring reunification orders that would not require periodic review or extension. That proposal was not adopted in this bill, I do note, but its presence in consultation highlights the ideological framing of these changes.

For some groups reunification is viewed as the right of the parent, which is not a child-centred approach and is a matter of concern, as was raised in the lived experience of this specific family. Additional to that, there is also the concern of the long-term harm, backed by evidence, where research clearly shows that adverse childhood experiences are, if not the number one predictor, among the strongest predictors of negative life outcomes, including mental ill health and suicidality. Lifeline’s work and data around adverse childhood experiences is very, very clear, and that is why there must be a child-centred approach and why that is so important. A child-centred approach prioritises the reduction of uncertainty rather than prolonging it. With case studies, as we have seen and as I have just read out, the evidence is clear that the sooner a child experiences long-term stability, the better their health, wellbeing and life outcomes.

These adverse childhood experiences are what we must protect children from – they are the factors that it is incumbent upon us, as legislators, to protect children from. These are the adverse childhood experiences that lead to these negative life outcomes and negative health outcomes, which we are seeking to protect children from. Studies have shown that children who have been in permanent, safe and loving homes have had better short- and long-term outcomes for their mental and physical health. Each placement, move, that a child experiences reduces the likelihood – this is what research shows – of being in the typical range for physical, cognitive and socioeconomic development.

Additionally, another concern that we have on this side of the house is that a system in crisis cannot deliver stability. These changes are proposed at a time when the child protection system is in crisis. This has been reported on widely. There are chronic staff shortages, unsafe workloads, high turnovers in staff and unacceptable wait times for services across the state. In rural and regional areas in particular, families wait months, even years, for the very programs that are critical to reunification, including mental health support, alcohol and drug treatment, family violence interventions and parenting programs. Stakeholders consistently report that these delays create structural barriers for families that no legislation can fix. Extending the timeframes for reunification does not solve the problem. It is a bandaid on a bullet wound; it simply papers over the cracks of a system failure. Without the resources and capacity to support families in a timely way, these legislative changes will struggle

to deliver real outcomes. What this bill will do is excuse the service gaps by changing the law. Instead of fixing the system that is in crisis, the government has used system failure to justify legislative change.

Parents often fail to meet reunification requirements because they cannot access services. It is as simple as that. That is a failure of the government, not of these families. That is a failure of the government to protect these children, to create these structures, to have these services ready to go, to support these families with a wraparound service, in a wraparound way, and to have a holistic solution. It is patching over the gaps of this. Changing the law to accommodate inadequate services does nothing to fix the root cause of the problem. It leaves service gaps in place and leaves children bearing the consequences.

Additionally, as I have noted earlier, it is undoing the reforms that were brought by a Liberal government. It directly reverses the 2014 permanency amendments that were introduced by the coalition to reduce drift in the system and ensure timely, safe and permanent outcomes for children. Those reforms set clear statutory timeframes, because the court was granting extension after extension at the expense of children's stability. The reforms were child-centred and focused on long-term wellbeing. This bill removes those safeguards and reopens the door to the very uncertainty those reforms were designed to fix. Unlimited extensions of family reunification orders risk keeping children in prolonged states of uncertainty. Children need stable and predictable environments to heal from trauma, to heal from the vulnerable backgrounds they may have come from, and our concern is that these extensions will do the opposite. They will extend uncertainty, delay decision-making and expose vulnerable children to long-term harm.

Another concern on this side of the house is the removal of adoption as an option. The complete removal of adoption as a pathway is concerning. While the history of forced adoptions and stolen generations must never, never be repeated, modern adoption practices are entirely different. They are open, transparent and grounded in consent. Adoption can, in some cases, provide children with the lifelong stability and belonging they deserve. Removing adoption entirely reduces the range of pathways available to vulnerable children and conflates past wrongs with contemporary practice in a way that is inaccurate and counterproductive. Unfortunately, the government has repeatedly conflated historical forced adoptions with today's consent-based open adoptions or simple adoptions, but they are very different systems. Adoption by known carers is the form of adoption that is active now. It involves the full knowledge of the child and young person of the situation and maintains connection with the family. In Victoria, in fact, an integrated birth certificate is available which recognises both the birth parents and adoptive parents in relation to legal relationships. It is not a replacement birth certificate. It does not sever the child from their biological parents, their cultural background or their community. In fact, further to that, in Victoria the option is available to dissolve adoption should this choice be one that they want to make at a later date. There is nothing hidden about this form of adoption. Instead it is about belonging in two families, with the benefit of stability in the current carer home and the added layer of legal permanency.

Evidence shows that the outcomes for wellbeing for children adopted from out-of-home care are favourable compared to those who remain in out-of-home care. I also have a short testimonial from an adoptive family which highlights the clear distinction between open consenting adoptions and others, and how positive they can be. The adoptive family wrote to me and said:

[QUOTE AWAITING VERIFICATION]

My husband and I have adopted two children through local adoption in Victoria, now aged eight and five. We pursued adoption in the hopes to provide a family for children who needed one. Several years ago, we received a call about a six-month-old boy who needed a family. Shortly after birth, he had received a diagnosis of a rare genetic syndrome. We were given time to consider if we felt able to parent him, and we agreed that we wanted to move forward while knowing the journey may not be easy. Before meeting him we had the opportunity to meet his birth parents. After meeting us, they felt that we were the right fit to parent their son, and they gave us consent for the adoption to proceed.

Holding our son for the first time was one of the most memorable experiences of our life, and it was with great joy that welcomed him into our family. Over the past seven years his joyful and loving personality has been a gift to us. We have seen him grow and develop in amazing ways despite the limits of his diagnosis. Our lives and the lives of our community have been enriched because of him.

We see his birth parents and siblings every school holidays, and our son enjoys the connection he has with them. His birth parents bring a gift for him at every catch-up. We send through photos and regular updates, and we have mutual respect between our families. We will continue to support his connection to his birth family throughout his life, as we recognise the significance of these relationships.

Our second son joined us after being born into difficult circumstances, enduring a traumatic start to life. While helping a child navigate loss and trauma takes intentional effort and understanding, it is a privilege to help our son feel loved, safe and secure. We are committed to a lifelong journey towards his healing from a traumatic past. His birth parents have chosen not to take up the opportunity for contact with him. However, if at some point in the future they wanted to, we would support this connection. Part of our commitment is to write yearly updates with photos to store on file with Adoption Victoria to be available for the birth parents if they were to seek out further information.

We believe our sons will continue to thrive through our lifelong commitment to them, along with helping them to understand their history, culture of origin and supporting connection with their birth families. It is our joy to provide our boys with a loving family and we believe they both have a bright future ahead of them.

I know this family personally. This is a family where the mother of the family has chosen to give up her full-time work to be a full-time carer, to do everything she can to look after these vulnerable children that she has since adopted. These stories show the prioritisation of even the connection to the biological parents that they maintain, that they are so connected to. They make sure that there is that community connection and that cultural connection. I know the lengths that this family has gone to. But this is the story and these are the stories that children are missing out on by removing adoption from this legislation.

The government has cited four reports as the foundation for this bill. Yet their recommendations, that have been cherry-picked, ignore key findings, and that is a concern to us. The selective use of evidence shows in that whilst the government relied heavily on the '*...Safe and Wanted...*' report, even though it was conducted only six months after the 2014 reforms commenced, the report itself cautions that its conclusions are limited due to the short timeframe and explicitly calls for a longitudinal study. The longitudinal study then took place, the permanency longitudinal study specifically, which found that the 2014 reforms improved timeliness and delivered more stable outcomes for children, yet this has not been included in this bill. Policy based on selective evidence is not good policy and certainly not good policy for these children, whose lives depend on stability.

Again I raise the fact that there has been no evidence of consultation with foster carers, permanent carers, adoptive families, kinship networks, frontline child protection workers or residential care providers. These are the very people who are tasked with providing day-to-day care for our most vulnerable children, and good reform requires broad consultation. Reform of this magnitude demands it. That is why we have moved this reasoned amendment in the house and why we will move the amendments as to the timeframe for review.

This bill has not arisen in a system that is functioning well. It has not arisen in a context where children are consistently safe, where early intervention is strong or where the support systems surrounding families are operating as they should. It has arisen because the systems that should protect children are overwhelmed, because families cannot access the support they need and because early years services, mental health services, housing services and family violence responses are all stretched beyond their limits. It is so important that we get this right. It is so important that we consult broadly. It is so important that we have the timeframe for review reduced so that we can look after those that are most vulnerable in our care.

Natalie HUTCHINS (Sydenham – Minister for Government Services, Minister for Treaty and First Peoples, Minister for Prevention of Family Violence, Minister for Women) (15:17): I rise to speak on the Children, Youth and Families Amendment (Stability) Bill 2025. I want to begin by

acknowledging the Wurundjeri people of the Kulin nations as the traditional owners of the lands that we are all meeting on and also acknowledging that Aboriginal children are still over-represented in the child protection system and that we must all work better together to close that gap so that families can be together.

This bill is an example of what we can achieve when we work together to support reform which will close the gap. I thank everyone that has been involved in contributing to this bill. I am glad to support the bill, which takes another step to support children and families in staying together safely. I thank Minister Blandthorn for her leadership and dedication to working with and supporting children and their families. The Children, Youth and Families Amendment (Stability) Bill will improve Victoria's child protection system so families have a greater chance to stay safely together and to reunify. At its heart this bill is about putting the interests of the child first by maximising opportunities for safe, timely and sustainable reunification with their families.

The bill will ensure we prioritise stability over permanency and provide greater flexibility to family reunification orders. By doing this, we ensure that families have more time to make positive improvements in their lives so their children can live with them whenever it is safe to do so. We know that some families need additional time and support to be at their best to address intergenerational traumas. The bill will increase flexibility to these timeframes on the family reunification orders. It will do this by allowing the court to issue an order for up to 24 months in out-of-home care, followed by an extension of up to 12 months at a time where it is in the child's best interest. These orders aim to reduce the prevalence of removals of Aboriginal children by giving more families more time and support to come together safely.

We know that the connection to a child's birth family is absolutely integral to a child's development, identity and belonging.

That is why this bill will remove adoption from the hierarchy of case plan objectives. By removing adoption as an option, we are more clearly prioritising working to maintain relationships with the child's birth family. Cultural, physical and relational stability ensures children can have an ongoing connection to their culture, to their family, to their languages and to their religions. The bill will now ensure stability is prioritised over permanency by replacing the word 'permanency' with 'stability' throughout the act.

Consultation has been an important part that has led us here today. I know the opposition have quite a different view on this because they have tabled an amendment to that effect, but communities have been calling for these changes, and our government has answered the call through the introduction of the bill. First Nations organisations, such as Djirra, who work to prevent and address family violence have advocated for this reform. I would like to quote the CEO of Djirra Antoinette Braybrook. She said:

Closing the door on reunification after two years is punitive and causes significant harm to mothers and their children. In our work we see firsthand the impact this has on Aboriginal mothers escaping family violence ...

And:

Aboriginal children should be with their mums ...

The Yoorrook Justice Commission also considered the reunification of children with their families as an issue in their hearings. On page 226 of the *Yoorrook for Justice* report, it states:

... an appropriate balance can be achieved by reinstating the power of the Children's Court to override reunification time limits where necessary. This should support appropriate consideration of children's rights, including their best interests, without undermining the policy aims of the reforms.

Recommendation 25 of the *Yoorrook for Justice* report recommended that the Victorian government amend the act. At the outset this bill acquits this recommendation.

I want to just emphasise that whilst those opposite have said there has not been enough consultation, the government wants to reiterate the fact that there has been comprehensive feedback provided to the Department of Families, Fairness and Housing by the commissioner for children and young people, community service organisations, legal stakeholders and certainly from Aboriginal community controlled organisations. Specifically, the Centre for Excellence in Child and Family Welfare coordinated sector input into responses to a discussion paper that were fed into this bill. There was also feedback from Anglicare, MacKillop, Berry Street, OzChild, Uniting, Mallee Family Care, Meli, GenWest, Safe and Equal, Kids First Australia, the Victorian Aboriginal Children and Young People's Alliance and Victorian Aboriginal Child and Community Agency. I would say that is some pretty comprehensive consultation that has been undertaken.

The bill is consistent with the balance recommended by Yoorrook. It enables the court to extend the time provided to pursue family reunification as long as it remains in the child's best interests, and that is embedded throughout this act. Yoorrook also found that access to critical services is a barrier to reunification. Access to services will be a factor that the court will have to give consideration to.

Whilst those opposite have liked to talk a big game on closing the gap, now is the chance to support legislation that will really contribute to closing one gap in particular, and that is target 12, aimed at reducing the overrepresentation of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander kids in out-of-home care, a target that has been set at a reduction of 45 per cent by the year 2031.

This legislation of course follows many other reforms, and it follows the landmark Children and Health Legislation Amendment (Statement of Recognition, Aboriginal Self-determination and Other Matters) Act 2023, which came into effect on 1 July 2024. This nation-leading legislation puts Aboriginal communities and services at the centre of decision-making and service delivery. This government has backed this reform with the largest ever single investment to expand Aboriginal-led services and systems, with \$140 million in the 2023–24 budget.

Through the recently agreed treaty we will see not only the transfer of decision-making and resources to the community to grow stronger but also a mechanism put in place to make sure that the gaps that exist between Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal Victorians are closed at a much faster pace than they have been over the last 19 years.

I would like to conclude by putting on the record this government's commitment to improving outcomes for First Nations children in out-of-home care. We are committed to advancing self-determination and supporting families to stay together. This is a really important piece of legislation that is going to make a difference to the lives of so many families in this state, and I commend the bill to the house.

Emma KEALY (Lowan) (15:26): I rise today to speak on the Children, Youth and Families Amendment (Stability) Bill 2025. This is a comprehensive and complex bill in that the issues that I have dealt with in my 11 years as a parliamentarian that involve child protection, that involve foster caring or that involve adoption, whether it is recent adoption or many decades ago, can and unfortunately, in my experience, usually do involve deep trauma. Children are never removed from their families unless there is a dire reason to do so, and it is very, very difficult to manage that. Whether it is child protection services, whether it is the family unit that is involved or whether it is the health services and the mental health services that do reach out and provide those supports, it is very difficult to minimise the mental harm that can occur when children have been exposed to trauma during those formative years. That cannot be ignored when we are making contributions to this debate today.

We are dealing with an enormously difficult situation where one size certainly does not fit all issues that arise. It certainly is a situation where I think everybody in this chamber would come to an agreement that we need to do whatever we can to ensure the safety of the child is put first and foremost. But unfortunately we cannot be idealistic about this and think that because a child is in this world and has a connection to a family that relationship will ever be normalised, perfect or even compatible or

able to function, no matter how long a reunification process is open. Unfortunately, when children are exposed to trauma, sexual abuse, neglect, abandonment and not feeling safe and secure in their own family environment, there is no way that that can be undone. While I understand that in a perfect world there could be a way we could provide the mental health treatment, the health treatment and whatever other supports are required to help to build, mend and delete that trauma, I am not aware that it can be done.

While I understand the intent of this legislation, we do need to ensure that it is closely monitored when rolled out, and I assume the legislation will pass. We need to ensure that children are not being put at risk by seeking an ideal outcome that connections with family can be healed over time rather than trying to revert to a position where a child's right to have safety and security on a long-term basis and a new forever home, with a side connection to community, is still allowable.

I understand that this is not ideal for different cultures. Over particularly the past few months – the past few years, really, through the Yoorrook commission – we have learned so much about Aboriginal people's connection to family, which is much different than the family connections that we know and understand, and I absolutely respect that.

I am following the Minister for Treaty and First Peoples, who I acknowledge has done an enormous amount of work in this area. What she has sought to achieve is noble and is informed by the Yoorrook commission and Aboriginal peoples, but we also need to look at other aspects of evidence, of people outside of Aboriginal culture who also are going through the child protection system.

When you are working in the child protection system, it does not matter what your background is or what your culture is. You should not have child protection workers who are actively being predators and seeking to make contact with children who are on the child protection database. That is just wrong, and that is what we see under the Allan Labor government. We have seen media reports around this, where children who are in child protection have child protection workers who are looking to make linkages with them for the wrong reasons. That is disgraceful in this state. We have got situations where child protection has absolutely catastrophically failed to intervene when children were known to have been at risk – when they were known to have been exposed to drug use and abuse, when they were known to have been exposed to sexual predators and when they were known to have been pimped out by their carer at the time. We cannot talk about child protection without talking about the ugly side. In my view, I think that we will learn over time that the collapse of the child protection system in Victoria at this generation's time will require a royal commission. I hate to think what exactly is happening within child protection, and we do not know, because there is such a lack of transparency with the Allan Labor government.

I do note that the Minister for Treaty and First Peoples went through an extensive list of engagement and consultation that was undertaken in relation to this legislation, and I respect that long list, which does show a level of consultation. But there was one key group that was missing from the list, and that is stakeholders who have lived experience of being a child in child protection, of living with a foster carer, of being placed with an immediate family carer or of adoption. We know so well the times that adoption has not gone well, and it was catastrophic for so many Aboriginal people through the stolen generation. We understand that and we do not deny that in any way, but there are different experiences for different individuals who have gone through those various pathways.

We should have the same respect for those children who have got lived experience of going through the system as for the stakeholders who operate the system, who sit above the system and do not understand what it is like to be in a position where the family unit, which is where you should learn to feel loved and safe and secure, is not there. When you are relying and falling back on a government system to be there for you, to catch you and make sure you have a genuine and strong pathway into safety and security, that is so important. That is in my view more important than talking about the processes. This is about the people. This is particularly about the children who have been failed in some way or another. It is not a situation that many people actually go through, but those voices must

be heard. That is why I support the reasoned amendment by the shadow minister to ensure that lived experience stakeholders have the opportunity to have their say. They have something to give. So many times there have been decisions made for them without them. They deserve to have their voices heard now.

I have concern around the impact that taking away the opportunity for adoption may have on some children. There is no doubt that for some cultural groups that may be something that is absolutely not appropriate at all. But I know from speaking to some people who I know have been adopted that that gave them a sense of belonging that they did not have beforehand. It does concern me that taking away that option as part of the considerations may actually take away the opportunity for some people to have a sense of belonging.

As I said in my opening remarks, there is no simple solution to ensure that every child that is born in Victoria has a great upbringing, wonderful supports and a perfect family environment.

We know that is not going to be achieved, but we need to ensure that the government of the day can provide that safety net, that security, to ensure that when the family unit is unable to support a child, the government system is there to be able to provide a pathway to continue connection with their family – absolutely – connection with their culture and their religion and connection with their community but to make sure, first and foremost, that every child feels safe and secure and understands that they are loved and that they belong. That is what we should be seeking in all of this, better outcomes for children, rather than tweaking around the edges with processes. I urge the government to consider the reasoned amendment put, particularly around ensuring there is consultation with those with lived experience as a child in this system, before this bill is debated in the upper house.

Eden FOSTER (Mulgrave) (15:36): I am proud to rise today to speak in strong support of the Children, Youth and Families Amendment (Stability) Bill 2025, a bill that reflects the very best of who we are as a Parliament and as a community. It is a bill that actually puts children first, listens to families and recognises that every child, no matter their background, culture, circumstances or story, deserves the chance to grow up safe, loved, connected and with a sense of hope. And it is a bill that reflects what so many families in Mulgrave tell me every week: that children do better when we keep them connected to family, connected to their culture and connected to the people who love them. This is what our community values, and this is what this government is delivering.

The bill amends the Children, Youth and Families Act 2005 to ensure we give families more time, more flexibility and more opportunity to reunify whenever it is safe to do so. It places human rights, cultural understanding and stability at the centre of decision-making, and it reflects years of evidence that the current settings, introduced under the 2014 permanency amendments, have been too rigid, too limiting and, for too many families, too damaging. We are changing that, and we are doing it thoughtfully, carefully and guided by what is best for children.

These reforms did not materialise in isolation. They are the result of years of reviews, inquiries, advocacy and community leadership. They respond to the ‘...*Safe and Wanted*...’ report, to the permanency longitudinal study, to the inquiry into historical forced adoption and, overwhelmingly, to the Yoorrook Justice Commission and its historic *Yoorrook for Justice* report. Those processes showed us that strict inflexible timelines for reunification were disadvantaging families, particularly First Nation families, and were not always consistent with a child’s best interests. In some cases they were cutting children off from their culture, their kin and their identity, setting in motion a new generation grappling with disconnection and loss. In my former work as a psychologist, having met some of the victims of the stolen generation, I saw firsthand – and these were the children; they are now adults, but they were children at the time – what that did to them: the depression, the trauma, the transgenerational trauma that continued, the anxiety, the inability to hold down a job because of instability in their life. So we do have data from children that have been in these positions.

We cannot talk about child protection in this state without acknowledging the profound harm caused by the stolen generation, as I have mentioned, and also by forced adoption. The legacy of those injustices still reverberates, and the voices of survivors, advocates and Aboriginal community controlled organisations have been clear: rigid timelines, insensitive legal frameworks and Western notions of permanency have continued to echo those past wrongs. When families and communities tell us what is hurting them, we have an obligation to listen and to act. This bill reflects that obligation. It is respectful of culture, it is responsive to community and it is grounded in truth-telling.

One of the central reforms in this bill is the shift from strict, rigid timeframes to a more flexible child-centred approach to reunification. Under current law a family reunification order can run for a maximum of 24 months – an initial 12-month period and one 12-month extension – no more, no matter what.

We know life does not fit neatly into 12-month blocks. Trauma does not heal on a schedule like that. Services are not always immediately available, and some families, particularly families facing intergenerational disadvantage, mental health challenges, disability, poverty or racism, need more time and more tailored support. This bill removes those arbitrary limits and gives the Children's Court the discretion it needs to make decisions based solely on what is in the child's best interests. Under the new model the court can issue initial orders of up to 24 months, issue extensions of 12 months at a time and continue issuing those extensions for as long as reunification remains in the child's best interest. This is not a free-for-all; it is a considered, structured framework. In deciding whether to extend a family reunification order the court must consider the history of previous orders and their duration, the extent to which a parent has engaged with support services and any barriers beyond the parent's control that have impeded their progress, such as service delays or availability. This protects children from unnecessary delays, strengthens accountability for parents and for the system and recognises that sometimes the system, not the parent, has caused the delay. That distinction matters.

I used to work in a drug and alcohol counselling setting. I would work with mums or dads that had their children removed from them. Through no fault of their own, at times things get in the way. Sometimes things get in the way, whether it is processes, perhaps misunderstandings or miscommunications, and there have been times when there have been those miscommunications that have meant that their child has not been able to return to them. That is not necessarily all their fault. We need to consider these things for the child's best interests.

Another profound shift in this bill is the replacement of the term 'permanency' with 'stability'. This is not a cosmetic change; it is a philosophical change and an important one. Stakeholders have repeatedly told us that permanency has been interpreted too narrowly, focused on legal arrangements rather than a child's holistic wellbeing, identity, culture and connections. The term 'stability' better reflects what children actually need. It incorporates legal stability, like secure long-term care arrangements; physical stability, such as a safe and predictable home; cultural stability, including ongoing connections to cultural identity, country, language, values and traditions; and relational stability, trusting, loving relationships with parents, siblings, extended family and other significant people. All four elements matter, all are essential to safety and all must be considered together, not one at the expense of others. This is especially critical for First Nations children, who are tragically over-represented in out-of-home care. It ensures that stability for Aboriginal children is understood in cultural terms, not just legal ones, and that connection to community, kinship systems, elders and country is treated as an essential part of their wellbeing.

The bill also removes adoption from the stability hierarchy, a change long advocated for by survivors, families, Aboriginal leaders and the 2021 inquiry into historical forced adoption. Adoption, particularly when pursued by the state, permanently severs a child's legal relationship with their parents. That is an action that carries enormous weight and trauma for that young person and their family. Victoria's child protection system should never again be used to pursue adoption as a case-planning goal. That is the clear message from reviews, inquiries and the community, and this bill

reflects that message that adoption will no longer sit in the stability hierarchy. This aligns the law with longstanding practice, and it brings us closer to healing from the harms of the past.

I want to acknowledge in the last couple of minutes I have our frontline child protection workers. Their work is some of the hardest, most emotionally complex and most critically important work in government. Having, as I said before, worked in the field of psychology, I have worked closely with child protection workers. Having been a foster parent myself in the past, it is tough work – a child protection worker has it tough. Since 2014 we have funded 1180 new child protection practitioner roles.

We have invested \$14 million in the 2025–26 budget to support workforce recruitment, kinship engagement, Aboriginal cultural support advisers and litigation support, and over six budgets we have invested more than \$4.4 billion into the child protection and family services portfolio. That investment reflects our commitment not only to families but to the workforce that supports them. The evidence shows Victoria continues to lead the nation in key measures, with the second lowest rate of children in care, the highest rate of kinship care placements, the lowest rate of residential care use and the highest rate of home-based care. These outcomes do not happen by accident, they happen because this government prioritises early intervention and investment in what matters. I do not have a lot of time left, but this bill is important. We need to look after those most vulnerable, and this is how we do it. We give them hope – we give families hope – and when you give them hope, you see outcomes. I commend the bill to the house.

Roma BRITNELL (South-West Coast) (15:46): I rise to speak on the Children, Youth and Families Amendment (Stability) Bill 2025. Any step towards improving the lives of vulnerable children in care is welcome, and for that reason we will not oppose this bill, despite the fact that it repeals what the coalition put in place in 2014. At that time the coalition government introduced reforms to limit Children's Court powers to stop children languishing, to ensure timely, permanent decisions and to give children security. This legislation is not the solution our child protection system so desperately needs. It is a gesture – well-meaning, perhaps, but one that barely scratches the surface of a system that is deeply broken. The Allan Labor government has held power for 21 of the last 25 years, and in that time Victoria's child protection system has become a place where neglect is replaced with trauma, instability and abuse, and hope with life-long damage. That is the reality for too many children in care today.

This bill proposes to amend the timeframe for permanency from two years to whatever is in the child's best interest. It sounds compassionate, but in practice it risks legalising indefinite uncertainty. I have spoken with foster families who have cared for children for five, six or seven years. Permanency is barely achieved under the current law. This change does not fix that. It simply gives bureaucracy more room to delay. Two years is already an eternity in a child's life. Four years is a lifetime, and seven years is almost their entire childhood. A child has only a handful of years before adolescence begins to shape their world, and under this government's watch that innocence is often being shattered far too early.

Let me share what is happening right now in our system. I know of a case where a nine-month-old baby is picked up five days a week in the morning by a different child protection worker and driven across the city for over an hour to attend a court-ordered visit with their biological parent. More often than not, and sadly, the parent does not show up. The baby spends hours in the car distressed, off routine and confused, only to be driven back and handed to the foster carers, who are doing everything they can do to provide love and stability. These carers witness the trauma. They see the regression, but they have no voice in the care plan and no ability to inform the court of what they observe. That is not a child-centred approach; that is cruelty sanctioned by the state, and this bill does nothing to address that.

We all want to see parents in a child's life, but sometimes it is simply not best for the child. The government says this bill supports reunification and stability, but you cannot fix families by extending

timelines and ignoring early intervention. I saw this firsthand as a registered nurse working in Aboriginal health. I went into homes, before school and after school, helping parents, establishing routines and supporting families before they collapsed. That is what real prevention looks like. When the Liberals were in government, Minister Mary Wooldridge funded programs that put workers in homes – not behind desks – to stop families breaking down. Labor cut those programs, and now they claim they are investing in prevention. But the outcomes, the reports and the shattered lives of children tell a very different story.

Let me tell you about one young girl, a 12-year-old, who asked for help but instead was torn from family, school and community and placed into a residential care facility – not a home.

I have seen photos inside that house of bongs on her bedside table and dog faeces on the bed. What is called care becomes surveillance – locked doors, stripped autonomy, no privacy, no friends, no education. Staff rotate like strangers, reading journals and policing emotions, while the child is told they are the problem. Within a year she was introduced to drugs, for reasons I will tell you about in a moment. She had two pregnancy scares by the age of 13. That is what care looks like under Labor's watch. Isolation opens doors to exploitation. Whilst in care she experienced drugs, assault and rape. Men picked her up directly from the driveway of a state-funded unit. She overdosed, landed in hospital and thought of ending her life because the system keeps her alive but never safe.

She is now 17, and she has spent five years in residential care. She is traumatised, uneducated, unprepared and about to be abandoned into independence without basic life skills. I have spoken with this young girl. She is just a kid dealt a shitty deal. She overdosed again last week. The system that promised protection delivered exploitation, neglect and despair. This is not just this child's tragedy, it is a pattern. Residential care has become the default dumping ground for the most vulnerable, producing children who are leaving more traumatised than when they entered – criminalised, exploited and at risk of homelessness or death. Last week her caseworker told me she was raped regularly. She said it is hard to stand by while the system fails her.

The state is pouring millions into a system that harms children, strips them of hope and leaves them carrying the lifelong consequences of systematic neglect and living in residential homes where staff – good, compassionate people – tell me they are not supported, not resourced and often not even permitted to intervene when children leave the premises, knowing they are engaging in sex acts with men – 13-year-olds, 14-year-olds or 15-year-olds. This is sexual assault and exploitation, surely, in anyone's definition. I have read internal reports describing young girls returning drug-affected and angry, saying they were not paid for the sexual acts they were coerced into but that they do not want to report the coercion because they need the drugs. The police cannot do anything without a report, and the staff cannot stop the girls leaving. At the Public Accounts and Estimates Committee the minister said, 'We can't lock them in.' Minister, no-one is asking you to build a jail; we are just asking you to protect the children being sexually exploited under your government's care.

Residential care homes in Victoria have become feeding grounds for predators. Older teens introduce the young ones to the drugs and dealers and abusers wait outside the gates; everyone in the sector knows it. Workers document it and reports record it, yet it continues. One provider said to me, 'You can't say all the girls are addicted to drugs and are prostituting, but almost all are.' Almost all – that is not child protection, that is systematic abuse. These children in this life, through no fault of their own, are living a nightmare. And what is this government's response – spin and glossy reports. At budget estimates the government department claimed it was investing in addressing sexual exploitation in out-of-home care. Yet that same budget document admits that cases are rising, that demand for residential care is outpacing resources and that the government cannot even fill the positions of child protection clinicians and caseworkers. To make matters worse, the position of commissioner for children and young people, an independent voice for accountability, has been left vacant for months. Why – because this government does not want to hear the truth.

Two-thirds of the children in residential care end up in the youth justice system. This is not a coincidence. It is the result of neglect, instability and trauma inflicted by a government that has lost its moral compass. These are children who were supposed to be removed from harm and instead are being delivered into it. While the minister praises the workforce, let me be clear: it is not the fault of the frontline workers, the child protection officers, the carers and the clinicians. They are doing their best. The child protection system does not allow them to care the way they need to.

Foster families, who are opening their homes and hearts, are being treated as an afterthought, excluded from decisions. The number of foster families is declining, which equates to more vulnerable children in residential care.

If Labor respected these carers, they would listen to them. When a government knows that children are being sexually exploited, knows that drugs are rampant in the facilities and knows the predators wait outside its residential homes and still does nothing, that is a government that has lost its humanity. This is not about politics. This is about children – children who deserve love, safety and hope; children who are being failed not by bad parents but by a very bad system; children for whom the youth and family stability amendment bill does not address the deep structural failures.

I support the amendments introduced. We need to listen to those who have lived experience of this system, like the young girl I spoke of, and the legislation does need to be reviewed. This is not just a policy debate, it is a moral reckoning. And on behalf of the children – the voiceless, the forgotten, the innocent, the betrayed – I say to this government: you have failed them. You have failed Victoria, and history will not forget.

Nathan LAMBERT (Preston) (15:56): I rise in support of the Children, Youth and Families Amendment (Stability) Bill 2025 and to oppose the reasoned amendment by the member for Warrandyte for reasons that I will come to, and perhaps to at least push back on some of the comments from the member for South-West Coast. None of us would deny the extraordinarily difficult circumstances that our child protection system faces. None of us would deny that, in all the complex decisions that are made within that system, they are often a choice between one set of difficult circumstances and another set of difficult circumstances. But I thought the description of what we are trying to do was ungenerous and did not grapple with the fact that we are –

Roma Britnell interjected.

The ACTING SPEAKER (Wayne Farnham): Order! Member for South-West Coast, you have had your turn.

Nathan LAMBERT: The member for South-West Coast interjects. We could stand up in this place and describe some tragic and awful circumstances of people with cancer. All of us know what that is like. Then you could turn around and say, ‘Oh, that’s the Victorian government’s fault, because why haven’t they looked after these people properly?’ I think there is a need for the member for South-West Coast in her comments to recognise that we are starting in a hard place on day one. If there were magic wands to solve these problems, the government would be doing it.

Members interjecting.

Nathan LAMBERT: I am not justifying it in the slightest. And that suggestion – through you, Chair – from the member for South-West Coast –

The ACTING SPEAKER (Wayne Farnham): Order! The member for South-West Coast will come to order. Member for Preston, through the Chair.

Nathan LAMBERT: Through you, Chair, I am just suggesting that we are starting with things that are intrinsically difficult, and I thought that was not sufficiently recognised in the member’s remarks. As the minister noted in his second-reading speech, this is a bill that deals not only with child protection

but specifically with those decisions that are made by the Children's Court in relation to long-term care arrangements for the child.

I do want to acknowledge that before we ever reach that point, our child protection professionals have done an enormous amount of what is very difficult and challenging work. I want to make that point, in part because I think some of the commentary has been a little bit negative about the work they do. It is difficult work. The risk assessments, the information gathering and of course the engagement with families that they do is across some very complex matters. All of us will know that they do that also working with our maternal and child health system, they do that working often with professionals in the early childhood sector and they do it of course working closely with our schools and family service providers. I want to acknowledge that those professionals in those areas also support us in what we are trying to do to protect Victorian children. I was actually just speaking this morning to one of our schools about a number of child protection-related issues that they have there, and some specific work they are doing with First Nations children and children who have an interaction with the child protection system.

I think that all of us in this place know that if I describe the world generally, most people most of the time do not need any form of government support. There are some people who need a little bit of it, and there are always, at some point in time, a few people who need a lot of government support – intensive support. And we as MPs in this place know full well what that looks like because often here we are dealing with people who need a large amount of support. I just think it is important for all of us to recognise that child protection officers and child protection professionals are working in that area of people who need a high level of support every day of the week. That is of course why we as a government support them through the child protection wellbeing program and the child protection health program and why we support them with additional funding and policy reforms in their area, like the ones that we are bringing to the house today.

I will not repeat the nature of the three reforms that are found in the bill that we have in front of us. The member for Warrandyte covered them off in her remarks. But before getting into the details of those three reforms, I think there are two important points to make here. The first point that I would make –

The SPEAKER: Order! The time has come for me to interrupt business for the grievance debate. The member will have the call when the matter is next before the Chair.

Business interrupted under sessional orders.

Grievance debate

The SPEAKER: The question is:

That grievances be noted.

Economy

Bridget VALLENCE (Evelyn) (16:01): I grieve for Victorians, who have to suffer a government that cannot manage finances. Under Labor the economy is cooked. Labor has failed to manage the economy and as a result cannot keep Victorians safe, cannot afford to fix roads, has failed to deliver housing targets and has failed to deliver healthcare services that Victorians need and deserve. That is what happens when a government has no commercial sensibility, is financially incompetent – indeed financially reckless – and cannot manage money: Victorians pay the price.

The Allan Labor government has been in power now for 11 years. By the election it will have been in for 12 years, and Victorians will absolutely dread the thought of 16 years of Labor when they go to vote in just 12 months time. So after 11 long years of the Andrews and Allan Labor government, what have we got in terms of financial management? Under Labor Victorians suffer the highest taxes in the country and the highest debt in the country. There is deficit after deficit, cost blowout after cost

blowout on Labor government infrastructure projects. Not only have Labor run out of ideas, they have run out of money.

Victoria has the highest unemployment rate in the country and the worst credit rating in the country and year after year has been found to be the hardest place in the country to do business. All that does is stifle investment and stifle jobs. With skyrocketing debt soaring to nearly \$200 billion under this tired Labor government, the interest bill to repay that debt is eye-watering. Speaker, frankly, it is good that you are sitting down, because these figures are quite something else. The interest bill to repay Labor's debt is \$7.6 billion. That is nearly \$21 million per day, over \$864,000 per hour. By the time I finish this 15-minute speech the government will have spent over \$216,000 of Victorian taxpayers money on interest payments alone. Just think what could have been delivered with over 200 grand every 15 minutes – how many potholes we could fix, the community safety programs that we could implement, how many nurses we could employ and how many housing projects could be commenced. All it is doing is paying interest on Labor's debt.

And now, because Labor has run out of money, it is coming after the money of hardworking Victorians with at least 65 new or increased taxes under this tired Labor government. Just look at the state budget that was handed down a few months ago. Despite the Treasurer saying the budget included no new taxes, nothing could be further from the truth. It included the new emergency services tax, about which we have seen protest after protest here in the city, on the steps of Parliament, out in regional communities and out in suburban communities.

It included that emergency services tax. It is going to cost Victorians \$3 billion more. This is a shameful tax grab that will cost families and households 100 per cent more in this tax. It will cost businesses 100 per cent more in this tax. It is going to cost farmers 150 per cent more in this tax. Labor has no shame left. Labor's emergency services tax is wrong, and the Liberals and Nationals will scrap this tax.

Just last week in the Parliament the government introduced legislation to hike taxes – even more taxes – doubling their tax take on pet registrations and increasing the so-called congestion levy by 73 per cent, the car park tax from which Labor plans to grab nearly \$1 billion more from Victorians over the next four years. Again, Labor has no shame. Labor is addicted to tax.

Victorians are expected to pay nearly \$42 billion in taxes this year. That equates to around \$5900 per person – some impact in a cost-of-living crisis. Again, Labor plans to take \$42 billion in taxes this year, which equates to nearly \$6000 per every Victorian woman, man and child. Labor is addicted to taxes, and like any addict, it is looking for its next hit, hitting up hardworking Victorians for more taxes when they are already suffering as a result of the highest taxes in Australia. Labor's economic policy is to tax Victorians more. It is Labor's policies and financial mismanagement that are not only making the cost of living harder for Victorians but penalising Victorians for Labor's mistakes.

In recent days again we have heard the Premier trying to pull the wool over Victorians' eyes about delivering on Labor's fiscal strategy. The fact of the matter is they are failing on every measure. Members may recall the so-called fiscal strategy of Labor, something the former Treasurer Tim Pallas dreamed up a few years ago. The former Treasurer was forced to develop this fiscal strategy after the credit rating agencies told him that Victoria's credit rating would be cut and downgraded. I ask: what good is a fiscal strategy if the Labor government cannot even follow it?

The first step of this so-called fiscal strategy was to reduce unemployment. Under Labor unemployment is forecast to increase to 4.75 per cent – an increase of half a percent – and it is above the national average. That is right. In fact Victoria's unemployment rate has been the highest in the country for such a long time now. That is not the gold standard that we want. We want to see unemployment going down, but under Labor they are forecasting unemployment to go up. A high unemployment forecast means that more Victorians are going to be out of work this time next year under this Labor government.

The second step was to return the budget to an operating surplus. Whilst back in March the Department of Treasury and Finance were predicting a \$1.8 billion cash deficit, this figure has miraculously turned around in the budget papers to about a \$620 million cash surplus, and you will hear the Premier say this. But such a massive turnaround deserves closer interrogation. It is not because this government has suddenly adopted any fiscally responsible measures or put in place any structural reforms. The turnaround is a result of a deficit and accounting trickery by this Labor government. Not only did the government receive a GST windfall, but many property owners received their annual land tax bills twice in the one year. By making Victorians pay their land tax twice in one financial year, all that did was just make Labor's bottom line creep up into the black. It is trickery. It is an absolute disgrace. How can this government say that it is helping with the cost of living when it is forcing Victorian families to pay land tax twice in the same 12-month period? It is an annual land tax bill, and Labor made people pay it twice in the one year. Under Labor Victorians already pay the highest property taxes in the country.

The third step of Labor's doomed fiscal strategy is to return to operating surpluses. Again this is a spectacular fail from this tired 11-year-old Labor government. The government have not recorded an operating surplus since 2019, and they repeatedly demonstrate that they are incapable of making the financially responsible and hard decisions to introduce structural reforms to curb spending or cut waste.

Where is the Silver review – the review into Victoria's public service Labor commissioned? It cost over \$2 million in consultancy fees for a report that Labor is still keeping secret. When is Labor delivering its promised \$3 billion of savings from the Silver review, and how many public service jobs is Labor going to cut? If Labor is not willing or able to implement the recommendations of the Silver review, it will fail this fiscal strategy measure.

The fourth step of Labor's so-called fiscal strategy was to stabilise debt. The government said it was going to do this by introducing a COVID debt levy. The former Treasurer said this was necessary because, according to him, 'some did better out of the pandemic than others'. Well, to this day I have not found anyone in my community or in my travels around Victoria that was better off after the pandemic than before it, and if they were, they did not live in Victoria. This Labor government wants to keep this COVID debt levy, after the longest lockdowns, the worst results of COVID of any state in the country, the worst health results and increasing mental health issues for Victorians, particularly our youth. To pay down debt, every property owner and employer have been forced to pay a COVID debt levy on top of their land tax bills and on top of their payroll tax bills. Even though COVID finished in 2021, many, many years ago now, Victorians will still be forced to pay this COVID debt levy, this COVID tax, because of Labor's incompetence and financial mismanagement. At this stage the Labor government wants to keep this COVID debt tax in place until 2033. It is just a disgrace.

One of the fiscal strategy measures was to stabilise debt. Well, instead of stabilising debt, this Labor government is increasing debt, so it is failing on this measure too. It was quite something to hear the Premier claim that Labor is delivering on its fiscal strategy when the budget papers show in black and white that debt will be skyrocketing to a record \$194 billion by 2029. Debt is completely out of control in Victoria under Labor, and it is crystal clear that this Victorian Labor government, the Allan Labor government, has no idea how to fix this debt debacle. Only the Victorian Liberals and Nationals have the credibility to tackle this debt bomb of Labor's making.

Labor's last step in their fiscal strategy, which was added on late last year, was to reduce debt as a proportion of gross state product, GSP. Currently, debt as a proportion of GSP is 22 per cent. However, instead of reducing, the Labor government's budget forecasts it to increase to a staggering 25.1 per cent of GSP in the 2025–26 year. That means net debt now makes up a quarter of Victoria's entire economy. If that is not shocking enough, the budget forecasts say it will remain at 24.9 per cent in the 2028–29 year.

Back in 2019 Labor promised to stabilise net debt at 12 per cent of GSP. Instead Labor has broken that promise and more than doubled debt as a proportion of GSP. Victoria now suffers the absolute embarrassment of a quarter of its entire economy being made up of debt. Debt soaring to \$194 billion equates to around \$71,000 per Victorian household. And what comes with debt? Again, an interest bill – an interest bill that must be repaid. Interest to service Labor's debt will increase by \$10.6 billion in 2028–29. That equates to nearly \$29 million a day or \$1.2 million an hour or more than \$300,000 after a member of Parliament has finished their 15-minute speech.

Labor's fiscal strategy is not worth the paper it is written on, and there is a major risk under Labor that Victoria's credit rating will once again be downgraded from its current AA credit rating from Standard & Poor's after Labor delivered a budget that forecasts net debt will increase by \$38.5 billion over the next four years.

Let us not forget that under Labor, this Suburban Rail Loop project, this pet project of Labor's, is not funded. They even had the Prime Minister come and visit, but he will not say whether he will commit any money. It is not funded, and the only way that Labor will fund the Suburban Rail Loop is by taxing Victorians more.

The Treasurer, after delivering the last budget, hightailed it, just like the last Treasurer did. The new Treasurer hightailed it to the United States to plead with the ratings agencies not to downgrade Victoria again. The risk of course is that Victoria will have its credit rating downgraded, and what that means is that it is only going to cost more to borrow and it is only going to cost more in interest repayments, and that means Victorians pay the price.

The debt and waste in Victoria under Labor must end. The Liberals and Nationals, the coalition, are the only parties committed to rebuilding Victoria and providing Victorians with cost-of-living relief and lower taxes. The Victorian Liberals will stand up for Victorian families and make Victoria a stronger and safer place to live.

Liberal Party leadership

Tim RICHARDSON (Mordialloc) (16:16): It is a chance to rise today and grieve for the people of Victoria if the Liberals' reckless, radical and ruthless behaviour ever finds its way to government. I thought there was a line in the sand today. I think we might need to get another line in the sand, or a couple, maybe a few, more – maybe a few sandcastles.

What better day to bring your united team together than to hear the member for Kew's address on the grievance debate? I was so excited last night. I was up until 11:30 writing some notes. I just thought, 'Here we go. We're going to have the member for Kew' – but she is nowhere to be seen. Remember when the five former leaders past all took this opportunity to lead and move forward and show unity? Well, I do not know where they are. I do not know if they are gone or what is going on. As one Liberal MP said to James Campbell, which is in the *Herald Sun* today:

I thought we had hit rock bottom last December but this is worse.

Yet here they are again, the same old Liberals – self-serving, self-loathing. That is their party.

Bridget Vallence: On a point of order, Speaker, I take personal offence to being called old.

The SPEAKER: No point of order, member for Evelyn.

Tim RICHARDSON: Today's Victorian Liberals would put the series *Nemesis* to shame. It would only be a pilot episode compared to their efforts. Remember that series with Tony Abbott, Malcolm Turnbull, Scott Morrison and the hero of the member for Kew Josh Frydenberg, the former Treasurer? The plotting, the carnage and the chaos is more fitting of a *Game of Thrones* episode.

Today is the ever present reminder of what it means to be a Liberal in Victoria, and it is worth taking a journey back 46 weeks to just after Christmas in December 2024. At that time unnamed Liberals were circling around the member for Hawthorn, and they had hit rock bottom. Well, it was going to

get worse. Bedrock had been hit, and we are going further. When Victorians were having their downtime during that time, the Liberals were destroying each other. That spill motion got up with 18 Liberals supporting the spill motion, just like the member for Kew's 18 supporters of the spill motion – hardly a resounding endorsement of change or stability going forward.

When the member for Berwick emerged from his party room victorious and purposeful, he uttered these immortal words:

[QUOTE AWAITING VERIFICATION]

I want to thank the member for Hawthorn for what he has done for the party over the last two years. He is a true believer of our values and is a man of his word, and he has worked tirelessly between now and obviously up until now. We now have an obligation to move forward –

sounds very familiar –

and I am thankful for the support of my colleagues in the party room to ensure that we can come together united, get on message, for a message we need to have.

Well, that was only 327 days ago, only 46 weeks. It was on the 325th night of the member for Berwick's leadership that the coup was in full flight. Remember, the member for Berwick now is the shortest serving leader of the Liberal Party in over 90 years. The member for Berwick was meant to be the hope, the way forward, the line in the sand, as the member for Kew had stated in every media appearance. Yet here we are with another display of full chaos, carnage and callousness by Victorian Liberals.

Shockingly, the new Leader of the Opposition, the member for Kew, has claimed that this humiliating treatment of the member for Berwick was on the back of colleagues approaching her to run. We need to play this out a bit. We need to dig a little deeper, because in Shannon Deery's piece on 17 November 2025 he said a senior Liberal told him the plot had been in train for the last two months.

This means when the member for Kew was appointed Shadow Treasurer at the expense of the ever-talented and ever-present member for Brighton, the plotting was halfway through. When the member for Berwick was in China the plot was three-quarters complete. Remember when the member for Kew suddenly withdrew from that China trip?

And then there was the *Herald Sun* piece where James Campbell wrote, today:

The secrecy with which the coup was executed may have been necessary for its success but the sudden move on Monday ... blindsided even MPs as senior as ex-leader –

the member for Bulleen –

... and health spokeswoman Georgie Crozier, who were both enraged by it.

Given the standing in the Liberal Party leadership of the member for Bulleen and Ms Crozier in the other place to senior leaders and a senior moderate in that court, as well as Ms Crozier, what kind of colleagues do we think approached the member for Kew?

Campbell goes on to write that the member for Bulleen and Ms Crozier in the other place:

... worked the phones on Monday night, trying to shore up support –

for the member for Berwick –

... and to stop the veteran right-winger Bev McArthur ...

from becoming upper house leader of the Liberals.

Here lies the secrecy and the plot. Here is the riddle solved before our very eyes. This was not colleagues coming and approaching in unison, this was the dark arts of factional hits like we have never seen before – because as colleagues will recall, it was Mrs McArthur who was reported to have gone along to that cross-factional colleagues meeting to inform the member for Berwick that he would be ambushed in the morning.

So let us be clear: a fellow moderate like Ms Crozier was not aware of this plot and neither was an elder statesman like the member for Bulleen, who has led this party twice, significantly, to elections. This was a brutal backroom deal to seize the office of the Leader of the Opposition, with Mrs McArthur installed as one of the most senior figures in the Liberal Party leadership. Why else would the member for Berwick be so humiliated and so horribly treated other than for power, personalities and Liberal politics? He was apparently leading in the Freshwater poll. He was apparently leading in the DemosAU poll. That is a leadership coup that we have seen. Remember when he came out at 8 pm and was ambushed by the media? The member for Berwick said that it was ridiculous that there would be a challenge and asked what the media had heard. To this moment we are yet to have one explanation – one single explanation – of why the member for Berwick was so brutally torn down.

Even the media asked dozens of questions. Tom Steinfort from Channel 9 asked the new Leader of the Opposition what the member for Berwick was doing wrong – ‘Why did you get rid of him?’ The member for Kew responded, ‘Brad was doing nothing wrong, but the reality is we have to put our best foot forward,’ the implication being that he was not the best foot forward.

But it gets so much stranger. We head over to Sky News, that huge conservative media organisation. The member for Kew stated the member for Berwick:

... has done a terrific role, and I thank him for his service. I thank him for his leadership but more broadly for his service to the Liberal Party over many years.

So this is a Leader of the Opposition who is described as doing a terrific role, who has done nothing wrong. If politics had a jurisdiction for wrongful dismissal, the member for Berwick would be up for millions of dollars in compensation. And here lies the truth and the tragedy of the modern-day Liberal Party: a leader can be described as doing nothing wrong, as having done a terrific role as opposition leader, worthy of universal praise, but be utterly humiliated, ambushed and blindsided like we have never seen before and be the shortest-tenured Liberal leader – under a year, 11 months – in more than 90 years.

We know that the member for Kew was supported by the member for Sandringham. Remember that piece in the *Age* back then, when they told the member for Berwick and the member for Polwarth that they had the numbers? They did not count it then. The member for Kew finished third behind the member for Mornington and the member for Berwick at that time, well behind. If the member for Kew’s office is listening, do not put the member for Sandringham in – the first round of that count was well off, finished third. I would just caution. The member for Brighton is up for it, though. If anyone is tuning in around the country, the member for Brighton is absolutely up for coming back to Treasury.

We know that the member for Sandringham was joined by Mrs McArthur, Dr Heath and Mr McGowan and sent that extraordinary message to the member for Berwick.

So why didn’t the member for Kew go and see the member for Berwick herself? Why not have the dignity – this is someone that you think has done a terrific job, who has done nothing wrong – the courtesy, the kindness and the compassion, as the Shadow Treasurer, to go to that person, who you respect, and give them that message? No, it was an absolute backdown like we have never seen before, and the impacts were extraordinary. It was not until later on, when the coup was in full flight, that then the member for Kew picked up the phone to the member for Berwick to describe what was to take place in the morning. It is a truly extraordinary thing. Just remember, the member for Bulleen and Ms Crozier had no idea about this. They panicked and rang as many people as they could to support and protect the former Leader of the Opposition, the member for Berwick. So who were the colleagues banging down the door then of the member for Kew? There are only 31 to count, so it is not like a Cluedo mystery – who was in the library with a coup, or who was in the Leader of the Opposition’s office, telling the member for Berwick what was going on? Only a few hours earlier the member for Berwick was with the member for Warrandyte and the member for Caulfield, declaring themselves gangs’ worst nightmare – remember that one? Remember that time they were the gangs’ worst

nightmare? Well, in reality, the member for Kew would be the member for Berwick's worst nightmare, like we have never seen before.

The new Leader of the Opposition has so many questions to answer: what deals have been done to secure the critical support from Mrs McArthur, who was instrumental in securing the leadership from the member for Hawthorn to install the member for Berwick? What has been said to have Mr Davis knocked off and Mrs McArthur installed as the leader? Remember, it was only three Liberal members of Parliament who changed their mind, changed their support and supported the spill motion. Victorians deserve to know exactly where the member for Kew stands and who she stands with, not statements about lines in the sand or the hollowness of looking forward – haven't we heard all those fateful words uttered by Liberal opposition leaders past. Because while the member for Kew tries to talk a big game about modern Liberal values, we cannot help but wonder whether she is taking the member for Berwick's place at the Conservative Political Action Conference. Let us be clear: that is the conservative bastion of the far right of the Liberal Party. They market themselves beautifully, like real estate agents: 'a values-based, non-profit organisation' with a mission 'to protect liberty and opportunity for all'. That sounds right. I will hold off on my Donald Trump impersonation of what that looks like, but this could not get any more off the reservation of being a Liberal.

But let us look at the speakers line-up of this organisation in Brisbane. We have got Barnaby Joyce and Pauline Hanson as the headliners. The US President, Donald Trump, has addressed the American conference multiple times, and it has been described as the road map to the Make America Great Again movement. That is the company they keep, the ideology that they promote, and Victorians are entitled to know where the member for Kew stands with her political comrades.

The installer of today's Leader of the Opposition is Mrs McArthur. Let us trail back through some of Mrs McArthur's views. Remember that time, 16 August 2024, on Sky News? She made that crystal ball hypothesis about the Liberal budget and what it would mean. She said:

Current spending is simply not sustainable ... we're at record debt ... That means we're going to have to make cuts when it comes to our health services. Schools aren't going to be built or even fixed.

That is on the record. That is the cuts narrative of the new leader of the Liberal Party in the Legislative Council. I will repeat that:

... that means we are going to have to make cuts when it comes to our health services. Schools are not going to be built or even fixed.

Does the member for Kew endorse the cuts narrative that has seen an \$11.1 billion black hole in their budget? Will the member for Kew back the radical policies of Mrs McArthur and cut from education and cut from health? It is on the record as clear as day. Then there are the utterly awful comments from May 2023, when Mrs McArthur was criticised after suggesting that First Nations people should be grateful for the wonderful things that have been enabled via colonisation. Do we remember this? Does the member for Kew, a supporter of the Voice, stand with the comments of Mrs McArthur about colonisation and First Nations people? Mrs McArthur is one of the most prominent voices against trans Victorians. Remember when she crossed the floor to vote against outlawing gay conversion therapy? Yet the federal seat of Kooyong, which almost entirely covers the seat of Kew, voted 73.7 per cent for marriage equality.

This was well above the average for Victoria, which was 64.9 per cent at the time. How on earth does the member for Kew front her progressive constituents and Victorians knowing that to get the role as opposition leader she had to elevate Mrs McArthur to the most senior role in the Legislative Council? This is not a whip role, this is not a shadow portfolio role out on the flanks; this is absolutely at the centre and in the tent of the Liberals. Now we are to believe that the member for Kew is suddenly a moderate? Victorians will not be fooled by these contradictions. Let us be clear, as Chip Le Grand reported in the *Age*: you dance with the one you brung. We know that it is absolutely clear that the member for Kew is compromised by the conservative flank and leadership of the Liberal Party. There are only 18 that supported the spill motion. If the member for Bulleen and Ms Crozier, with their

political talents, had been given another 12 hours, they would have stopped one of the most brutal political takedowns and savage impacts on a political career we have seen. The member for Berwick has been horribly treated. It is the political game playing and the hatred in the Liberal Party that has defined them and defines them into the future.

Disaster preparedness

Tim BULL (Gippsland East) (16:31): Well, what a wasted contribution that was, with all the problems we have got going on in the state at the moment. With all the issues we have got going on in the state, we get a 15-minute contribution on the leadership of another party from someone who has been overlooked for a ministry position, I think, 30-something times, Tim. So it is obvious you are not held in very high regard, mate. Obviously you are not held in very high regard in your own party. But I will get on to some of the issues in the state rather than wasting my time. With all the issues in Mordialloc, we had a 15-minute contribution on that rot.

I will now cover off on some of the issues that are impacting the state. First of all, fire services and the fire season is the first topic I would like to cover. We are now heading into another fire season. One asks: are we better prepared than we were in 2009 when Black Saturday hit? Let us have a look at some figures. In 2009 we had 39,000 operational volunteers in this state, and now we have 28,000, a reduction of 11,000, or more than a quarter of our volunteer firefighters in Victoria. It has come about as this government declared war on the volunteers, including the period when many hung their uniforms outside CFA stations right around the state in protest. Even in the last five years alone we have had a reduction of 5000 CFA operational volunteers. What does that mean on the ground? I will tell you what it means. It means it has a great impact on the surge capacity of the CFA. The ability to send strike teams into areas where fires are endangering communities and lives is compromised when we have this reduction in CFA volunteers. In past years we have relied heavily on strike teams to come from other areas of the state, but that capacity is dwindling under this government.

We had a royal commission that said we needed to burn 5 per cent of the bush to give us a reasonable level of safety. We are burning a quarter of that. It cannot end any other way when you get your summer lightning storms. When you are only burning a quarter of what the bushfires royal commission recommended it can only end one way, and that is in another megafire. The policies of this government have set us up for that. So we have got less firefighters, we are not getting the level of burning done that should be done and now we have the issue with firefighting vehicles – 349 G-Wagons and Unimogs taken offline. We are told that a handful have returned. We are also told that some have been written off.

We are asking the minister to tell the Victorian community what the current situation is. His comments of simply saying ‘Well, we’re ready’ do not wash. I have got in my electorate chambers of commerce, business and tourism groups, individual businesses, CFA volunteers – I have even got Department of Energy, Environment and Climate Action staff – asking me what the situation is. Rather than giving us the motherhood statement that ‘We’re ready’ – this is fire season; this is life-and-death stuff – our communities need to know what the situation is. I doubt we have had many fires through the electorate of Oakleigh, and I doubt the minister has seen many fires or experienced firsthand the trauma that comes with them. He tells us to be fire ready, but when we are asking for detail on how fire ready the government is, we get nothing.

We know the minister did not crack the chassis or break the chassis on these trucks. We are simply asking for a bit of honesty to tell us what the truth is. We are told we have had 30-odd replacement vehicles from New South Wales and about 10 from South Australia, but that does not replace 349. We want to know what the real situation is. In relation to our vehicle fleet and the CFA, at a briefing this week we were told we have got the oldest fleet in Australia. In Victoria we have got the oldest fleet in Australia – older than the United States and older than the UK. The renewal is not being done.

I want to get on to housing. The government has talked a big game on housing, but let us have a look at how things have played out on the ground. The social housing waiting list in 2023 was 52,000 –

that was only, what, nearly three years ago now or two and a half years ago. It is now at 67,000. It has gone up 15,000 in less than a little bit over two years at the same time that the government is saying it is solving this issue. We are not meeting the promised build targets. In Gippsland, which takes in the member for Morwell's electorate and the local government areas of Latrobe, Wellington and East Gippsland shire councils, we have got less social housing homes in our electorates than we had in 2016. How is that fixing the problem? We have got less. It is just absolutely out of control.

We can talk about homelessness. Let us look at one of the contributing factors to that, the cost-of-living crisis in Victoria. On power prices, we have the minister coming in here saying the prices are going 'down, down, down'. That was the energy minister's comment: 'down, down, down.' It is bit like the Coles slogan. But what we are seeing is prices going higher and higher. That is the slogan. I think Jackie Wilson sang that, didn't he? I think 'higher and higher' was the lyric in that song. It is just smoke and mirrors; it is not the truth that is coming. We have seen massive, massive increases and, on top of that, an array of new taxes. At the top of the list is the emergency services levy that is ripping money out of the pockets of people that are already struggling. We had another tax debated in here today, with another \$100 million coming out of the pockets of Victorians, and it is all to service this massive debt.

We have got crime that is out of control. We heard from the minister saying that the police academy is full. The trouble he has got is that he is losing police at a rate higher than that at which he can churn out new ones. We support our police, but they are frustrated by the lack of support. I was at a send-off for a local policeman last Sunday. The whole police community was there, and they are sick and tired of locking up offenders and having them released. They are sick and tired of that. They want the move-on powers back. They want sentencing in line with community standards. All this is while we have had a \$50 million cut to the police budget. It is just not right. Labor says we have the toughest bail laws. They are not as tough as when Labor came to government. They are not the toughest bail laws that we have had under this Labor government. Since they got wound back, they have not been restored to the same level.

On crime, the latest figures that came out in the last month have total offences up 47 per cent and crimes against people up 63 per cent. The anti-mask laws that were promised have been watered down. They have not restored the move-on laws, which the police want. We have got more experienced officers leaving every day, so we are getting a younger and more inexperienced police force to deal with these issues. We know police across the state are down 2000 in numbers, so you cannot correct this. The deficit of 2000 police cannot be corrected when you have got more leaving than are coming through the academy. It is only going to get worse. To prove the point, in 2020 we had 16,284 full-time police. Now that is down to 15,909. That is 375 less, when the Victorian population has grown by 460,000 – nearly half a million more people and 375 less police. They are very, very damning figures.

What has been interesting over recent times is that we have had members coming into this chamber talking about a new type of crime, with youth crime and aggravated attacks. I mean, who are they kidding? It is a great attempt to rewrite history – but a new crime? Youth performing aggravated attacks – I think we have been talking about that in this chamber for a long, long time.

But I will tell you what has changed. What has changed is how we hold people to account. I was rather alarmed this week to see reports that two youth offenders serving time on community corrections orders for very violent crimes had a trip to the Gold Coast to visit the theme parks.

A member interjected.

Tim BULL: Yes, a trip to the Gold Coast to visit the theme parks. And it is not the first time it has happened. When the Premier was asked about this at a media conference, she said, 'Oh, that was a federal decision.' Well, it was done with the authorisation of the state government. The state government facilitated it. When it got uncovered the Premier wanted to blame the federal government,

but it was the state that did this – sending violent youth offenders to the Gold Coast's theme parks. I mean, goodness gracious, what has this world come to?

Before I finish, I want to talk for a little while about roads. I note that the Minister for Roads and Road Safety is at the table. A couple of years ago we had the member for Eltham stand up in this place and say that the poor condition of our roads was an imagined fantasy. That was the commentary that she used. Now we have had a similar brain fade. This time it was Sonja Terpstra, a member in the other place. I will just provide a little bit of background before I talk about what she said in the upper house.

We had a massive pothole that damaged the rims of 20 cars. They were all pulled over on the side of the road. There was video evidence of this posted far and wide; I am sure the minister saw that. The people who were impacted rang in to talkback radio and spoke extensively about their experience. Some blew out two tyres and had to be towed away, because they obviously only had one spare. There was a lot of damage done to the rims of these vehicles. There were people saying they could not afford to pay for the repairs, that the costs were excessive, they simply were going to be out of pocket and it was a bill that they could not afford. But Ms Terpstra got up in the other place and actually questioned whether it happened. She spoke about it like it was some sort of conspiracy theory. She said that she saw no potholes on the road, and had driven the road weeks before to collect some chooks, I believe – I do not know how that was relevant – but never saw any potholes. And her comment was that now there is 'magically' some 'outrage'. So we have got Victorian families who have had their cars damaged and cannot afford to pay on the side of the road ringing tow trucks to tow them to the nearest garage – magically some outrage, she described that as. Is she inferring that they called the tow trucks when they did not have to? I am not sure. Is she inferring that the road crews out fixing the pothole that some described as half a metre deep – there might have been a bit of mayonnaise on that, but it was clearly a very serious pothole – were out fixing a pothole that did not exist? Is she inferring that the damage to cars at a combined cost of tens of thousands of dollars is fantasy – because she referred to it as it 'magically' creating some 'outrage'.

I note in his previous contribution the member for Mordialloc was indicating that he would like to know if members of the Liberal Party stood by the comments of some other members of the Liberal Party. I would be interested to know if members of the Labor Party would stand by the comments of Ms Terpstra in the other place, because I will tell you what, they are very, very interesting comments. How do some people get in here?

Anyway, I will finish up by saying that on every count that I have mentioned here today, and there are a few that I have not gone into, this government has failed. We have got a lot less emergency services workers, the CFA volunteers, to protect our country communities. We have got cars off the road that we rely on over summer, with the minister not telling us when they are coming back. The fuel reduction burns have not been done. Government policies have created another recipe for disaster in relation to this summer. If it does not happen this summer, it is inevitable, because you cannot have these policy positions and not have any outcome other than a megafire. On housing, the issues are the public housing waiting list has grown 15,000 in the past 2½ years. In some areas like Gippsland, we have got less public housing homes overall.

Power prices have gone through the roof despite the promise that they would be coming 'down, down, down'. We have got police leaving at a greater rate than we have police coming through the academy at a time when we are already 2000 police down in this state – not 20, not 200, but 2000 – in the face of a crime wave. It is an absolutely damning statistic. And then we have roads. I know a lot of truck drivers and bus drivers from my electorate; we do a lot of freight in my electorate. I see a lot of these drivers socially, and they say they have never seen the Victorian roads in a worse condition. We get 20 mils of rain and our roads fall to bits. It is not even floods that are causing the issues.

I have not mentioned a whole range of other areas. I have not mentioned the cuts to parks and our fisheries offices, which is leaving a greater scope for those poachers who want to do the wrong thing to go about their business. I have not mentioned our health services and the crisis that we have within

our health service, which we are all hearing about in our electorate offices every week. The point I am making is that no matter what measure you apply to this government's performance, it has failed on every count. And that is why I grieve for the people of Victoria.

LGBTIQA+ equality

Nina TAYLOR (Albert Park) (16:46): I grieve for the state of Victoria were the far-right fringe of the Liberal Party to get into government. We know that they have repeatedly attacked programs designed to teach respect for women, queer people and minorities in schools, and we know that the new Leader of the Opposition, the member for Kew, is relying on the support of the far-right fringe of the Liberal Party. We can only imagine the catastrophic impact that would have for the state of Victoria. I will unpack that in further detail. You do not have to go too far, because I tell you what, the far-right fringe are not shy in terms of sharing their views on these matters. Let me tell you, one of the saddest elements is the way they literally trample on some of the most vulnerable people in our community, with no care whatsoever about driving a tractor through the rights of trans people, let me say, on many occasions. Let us go to that issue of equality to start with. Member for Northern Metro Evan Mulholland called for politicians to focus more on those who voted against same sex marriage, saying:

The No vote in the same-sex marriage plebiscite was higher than the primary vote of either major party. For either party to simply ignore the 38 per cent of Australians who voted No would be a grave mistake.

The member was not backward in coming forward and very, very clearly elucidated exactly his position when it comes to equality. I would dare say that equality in his frame is absolutely negotiable – which is the complete opposite of our party, because we know as a Labor Party have been absolutely consistent when we say that equality is not negotiable in the state of Victoria. I will provide references for Hansard after my speech.

I go further, because there are other members on the far-right fringe of the Liberal Party. Member for Western Metro Moira Deeming, on a couple of occasions at least – I will just spell out what she has said – has called programs designed to support queer students 'catastrophic' and 'disgraceful' and has called for the tracking of queer students who socially transition in school. That was 15 October. On 12 October – I am sorry for the reverse order of that – she called for the tracking of queer students. I can only imagine how humiliating that would be when we think about the fact that we back in our LGBTIQA+ community for all the right reasons, not least because we do not want them to be discriminated against, persecuted, put down, isolated or in any way excluded. And if we were to track, how would we do that? Would we insert a microchip? What would this look like, and who would be called upon to track the queer students? I mean, how would that be rolled out? I can see that there is little care or concern for how that would be rolled out, and we can see a clear agenda with that statement.

I go further. The member for Western Victoria, Bev McArthur, spoke at an Australian Christian Lobby forum on 3 October:

... standing against the gender ideology indoctrination and sexualisation of children in schools through the Respectful Relationships program and Sexuality Education.

So we can see there again a gross distortion, actually a mythical representation, of what the Respectful Relationships program is actually designed for and what it delivers. I want to do some myth busting here because I think it is extremely sad and it is manipulative and it is cruel to distort these very much evidence-based programs. It is actually topical – even more topical when we think about the next 16 days and the objectives in terms of tackling gender-based violence and family violence in the state of Victoria.

Myth 1: Respectful Relationships teaches radical gender theory. Fact: Respectful Relationships does not teach radical gender theory. It is a primary prevention initiative to reduce family violence. So when you think about the far-right fringe of the Liberal Party finding every which way they can to undermine

the very program to foster respectful relationships and equality in schools, it does beg the question: why? Why would they want to plug out these incredibly destructive agendas? Noting the significant issue of the rates of family violence and the number of women that die and children who die at the hands of family violence, surely they would want to be backing in sound, evidence-based programs to make that major cultural change that we need to see. Schools involved in the Respectful Relationships initiative are building a culture of respect and gender equality by looking at their practices and policies to drive meaningful change. And I go further: the Victorian Royal Commission into Family Violence recommended respectful relationships education be introduced to all government schools – recommendation 189. Evidence presented to the commission showed that family violence is the most pervasive form of violence perpetuated against women in Victoria. I am going to go further, because there have been many myths peddled. It is extremely damaging and it actually takes Victoria back. We then have to fight again to validate what is true and proper when it comes to improving outcomes for all children in Victorian schools.

Another myth: education cannot solve the problem of family violence. I think in anyone's language that is a furphy; we know that. Fact: Respectful Relationships is not intended to be the whole solution to addressing family violence, but it is an important primary prevention initiative, just like other major social and health issues such as smoking and road tolls. Evidence shows that gender-based violence can be prevented by working with the whole population – and in this case, all schools – to address the attitudes, beliefs and knowledge that support the prevention of violence. Studies show that school-based violence prevention and respectful relationships initiatives can produce lasting changes in attitudes and behaviours. Why would anyone want to undermine that? Respectful relationships education in schools was trialled across 19 schools, reaching 1700 teachers and 4000 students. The trial found that the initiative had a positive effect on student attitudes, knowledge and skills, as well as school policies, culture and ethos.

A further myth: the resources are seeking to make children gay, non-binary or trans. This is one of the worst and most destructive myths, I have to say, of all the myths, because it is a fundamental misunderstanding of human beings and how they behave in any case. Fact: this is not true. Longstanding evidence is clear that children develop their understanding of gender from a young age and that by the age of four they largely adhere to gender norms. The point of primary prevention is that it prevents problems before they emerge. Respectful Relationships as primary prevention seeks to ensure that children and young people are not forming the attitudes that evidence shows are the core drivers of family violence. That is the purposive element, fundamentally, of the Respectful Relationships program.

It is absolutely a travesty that it has been distorted and manipulated and really used as a little lever to try and assert certain destructive and pervasive agendas that I am going to say quite emphatically do not serve the better interests of the Victorian community. I should say that this is developmentally appropriate and this initiative is not seeking to make children gay, non-binary or trans. That statement of itself is inherently, as we can see, problematic in the sense that of course it is not seeking to make children gay, non-binary or trans, because that is not how human beings fundamentally evolve and exist in any case.

A further myth: it is inappropriate to teach young children about consent. Fact: for younger children consent education includes an age-appropriate focus on what it can look or sound like to ask for permission or consent and to refuse permission or consent and to understand that consent cannot be obtained by pressuring people to do something they do not want to do – for example, giving or denying permission to borrow a pencil. Consent education also includes learning activities that support prevention of child sexual abuse by teaching about bodily autonomy, body boundaries, the difference between safe and unsafe secrets and the importance of seeking help from trusted adults if children's early warning signals are sending a message that they might not be safe. Again, I can only see validation in what underpins this very important program in terms of empowering young children to recognise that they are allowed to have autonomy over their bodies and that they do not have to endure

abuse. Fundamentally, fostering that kind of empowerment has got to be a good thing. Research shows significant increases in knowledge and improved self-protective behaviours occur when students are taught their rights to be safe from abuse and their right to say no or to tell even when someone in authority over them abuses them. We can see here a couple of key themes: fundamentally, helping a cultural change to foster a family violence-free Victoria, one, and empowering young people to know that they do not have to endure abuse and there are pathways to get help.

Another myth: the Resilience, Rights and Respectful Relationships teaching and learning materials are not age-appropriate. Fact: the Resilience, Rights and Respectful Relationships teaching and learning materials were developed by leading education experts who tailored the materials to each year level from foundation to year 12 and made sure all information is age-appropriate and grounded in evidence. Instead of perpetuating rather discriminatory and bigoted positioning on elements that fundamentally cut through in a way that is extremely destructive, particularly for the LGBTIQ+ community, on the contrary, this is making sure that we have evidence-based programs to foster healthier relationships into the future.

Myth: students will use the Resilience, Rights and Respectful Relationships teaching and learning materials like a textbook. Fact: the Resilience, Rights and Respectful Relationships teaching and learning materials are designed to support teachers to deliver Respectful Relationships education in the classroom. Teachers use their experience and knowledge to deliver this material in the most suitable way for their students, and I think we have to give credence to our teachers. Fundamentally, as part of their training, I can say as a former teacher from another century, this is part of the training that they receive. Yes, there are textbooks, but you do not just plant a textbook in front of a student and magic happens; that is part of the art of teaching. I think a little bit more respect for our teachers in terms of being able to deliver this content would be appropriate. I add further: materials were developed by nationally and internationally recognised experts from the University of Melbourne's Graduate School of Education.

I go further with a further myth: the Resilience, Rights and Respectful Relationships teaching and learning materials are not based on evidence.

This is untrue. The Resilience, Rights and Respectful Relationships teaching and learning materials have been developed by experts from the University of Melbourne's Graduate School of Education, which I just said – and I am going to go further to unpack that – based on evidence from reputable research bodies and leading authorities, including UNICEF, VicHealth, the Australian Bureau of Statistics, the Office of the United Nations High Commissioner for Human Rights, the Australian Institute of Health and Welfare and UNESCO. These are reputable authorities, we can say, and I certainly think that relying on that evidence fundamentally underpins and gives credence to the Respectful Relationships program.

Another myth: Respectful Relationships education will mean less time for literacy and numeracy. On the contrary; I will wholeheartedly refute this. The fact: the Victorian government is committed to improving literacy and numeracy outcomes for our students, which is why we have recently launched our *Literacy and Numeracy Strategy*. It provides greater investment and support for teachers through teaching resources and professional development opportunities. I have seen it for myself. I have seen the literacy training in schools, and I have certainly had fantastic feedback from teachers about how this is making a difference for Victorian students. It will only continue to grow and get better, and backing in Respectful Relationships is good for the Victorian community.

Government performance

John PESUTTO (Hawthorn) (17:01): I grieve this afternoon for the people of Victoria. I grieve because under this Allan Labor government life is getting harder. As we near the conclusion of this government's 11th year, on every measure Victorians are feeling the pain. They are paying the price of Labor's financial incompetence, its at times corrupt behaviour by and through its agents and its failure to build for the future of this state. In any aspect of life, whichever part of life you look at, we

are a shambles, and Victorians are having to deal with services that no-one in this country should have to contend with.

Let us start with health. Why is it that after 11 years of this government the waiting list for planned procedures is at least 59,000 but probably more? As Georgie Crozier in the other place has repeatedly pointed out, because of changes to reporting and transparency, the wait list is far more than 59,000. Last week the government's own infrastructure adviser, Infrastructure Victoria, sounded the alarm on the state of our hospitals, and in particular the Austin, the Alfred and the Royal Melbourne. They are just a few; this could apply right across the public health network. And what did Infrastructure Victoria say? In essence it contends that despite the hard and dedicated workforces who do great work under and in those facilities, the quality of health care is being jeopardised by the deteriorating infrastructure we see in our health space. Even the government's own infrastructure advisor has pointed that out.

We also saw the government fall short of its own COVID catch-up plan. Remember that? It spruiked \$1.5 billion to perform 240,000 procedures to catch up after COVID – a government that regularly and still to this day uses COVID to paper over its never-ending list of failures. And yet it fell short – 209,000 procedures. We see ambulance response times. We have the best paramedics in the country working under the worst performing government in the country. If you take code 1s – code 1s should be responded to within 15 minutes in 85 per cent of cases – they are only being responded to in 65 per cent of cases. It is not good enough. In health Victorians are paying the price for incompetence.

In education, this government, it can be said, is at least a non-discriminatory cost escalator. What do I mean by that? I mean that whether you send your kids to a government school or an independent or a Catholic school, this government is making you pay more. Do you know that it costs more in Victoria than any other part of our country to send your kids to a government school? We know that because of the government's payroll tax grab that applies to the independent and Catholic school sector, Victorian parents, many of them working really hard and making huge sacrifices so they can send their kids to independent and Catholic schools, are having to pay more. Many are falling out of the independent and Catholic sector because they cannot afford it, and many schools have had to respond.

This government, in addition, while spruiking its commitment to education, appallingly has welshed on its deal with the Commonwealth over Gonski funding. It has pushed out to as early as 2031, from 2028, and possibly out to 2034, \$2.4 billion of funding that should be there for government schools. Those opposite should be ashamed, because not only is it becoming more expensive to send your kids to a government school, it is going to get even worse as pressure grows on enrolments right across the government school sector, again, with the best teachers in the country having to deal with a government that is short-changing education. Look at the infrastructure program this government spruiks on government schools. They talked about \$850 million for government school upgrades before the last election. You will know, Deputy Speaker, that even in the area of Boroondara, in the areas we jointly represent, many schools are crying out for funding, and those that have been promised funding are yet to see a cent. This government, even in education, is making life harder for Victorians.

Roads – take another example. I said every part of our lives; well, roads – let us take that. We spend \$1500 per kilometre less than the national average on roads, and this government, and in particular the Minister for Roads and Road Safety, like to talk about the \$964 million that was promised for road maintenance and resurfacing last financial year. We know around only two-thirds of that money actually made it to the roads. This government promises big, but nickels and dimes things never-endingly, so Victorians are driving on the nation's worst roads, many incurring significant damage to their own vehicles and risking harm by driving on Victorian roads.

If you look at the business sector, stakeholder group after industry group are all pointing out how difficult it is to invest in this state and employ Victorians. The Business Council of Australia's latest *Regulation Rumble 2025* report puts Victoria at the bottom or near the bottom on just about every measure. Whether it is payroll tax, land tax, regulation, compliance, you name it, Victoria is down the bottom. The NAB survey of business confidence puts Victoria at the bottom. CommSec, on many of

its measures, puts Victoria at the bottom. Any number of stakeholder group surveys, including the Property Council of Australia in recent weeks, have produced reports showing that Victorian businesses are struggling more than they have ever struggled under this government or looking, if they can, to relocate their operations elsewhere, and Victorians pay the price for this.

If you look at renters, renters are paying, in median terms, rents now of over \$600 in many cases. Why? The tax base in Victoria, in particular the government's land tax grab, is forcing landlords to pass that on or vacate the market altogether. We have had a massive drop in active rental bonds, as you would know and as I have spoken about previously. So even in terms of business investment and the cost of doing business in Victoria, Victorians will pay the price. Is it any wonder that the latest figures from the Australian Bureau of Statistics on unemployment again put Victoria at the top of the list in seasonal and trend terms alike: 4.7 per cent above the national average and the highest in the country. How proud should Victorians be of that? Well, we are not, and it is this government that is to blame.

I do want to address things the Premier said in question time yesterday when the Premier spoke about the government's fiscal strategy. I know the member for Evelyn talked about this too, and I certainly want to address this, because it needs to be highlighted time and again. The government's five-point plan to get the Victorian budget back on track – what a hoax it is. Step one, creating jobs, reducing unemployment and restoring economic growth: well, let us just look at the record and the forecasts on this. Creating jobs – we have the highest unemployment in the country. But more than that, the government's own budget forecasts have unemployment over the forward estimates rising. The government's own forecasts have employment over the forward estimates declining, and economic growth, growth state product (GSP), is actually anaemic over the forward estimates. So on step one – fail.

Step two, an operating cash surplus – let me tell you why the government put 'operating cash surplus' in there. It is because the operating cash surplus excludes money paid in terms of capital outlays. Sure, the government says, 'But look, this financial year and in the years ahead we've got an operating cash surplus. This year it's \$6 billion.' But when you add in, as the government should, outlays on capital projects, what do you see? You see a fiscal cash deficit of \$10 billion and deficits into the future. Why is that important? It is important because this government has delivered fiscal cash deficits for the last eight years and it appears these will go on and on, and as the Victorian Auditor-General has pointed out, ongoing, continuing and prolonged fiscal cash deficits jeopardise the state's economic security and financial prosperity. They have a real impact. So in terms of the operating cash surplus, do not be fooled when the government says it has met step two; it has failed on step two.

The operating result: the government points to a small surplus. But again, how was that surplus produced? There is nothing structural, nothing that is due to the government's good work. What the government has done is profit from the GST reallocation. Okay, we will take that. But it has also ripped dividends out of agencies to prop up its own operating result, and that is not a good way to run the state's finances.

Then we come to the two last measures, stabilising net debt as a proportion of GSP and then reducing net debt as a proportion of GSP. Well, let us just break this down a bit. The truth is Victoria's debt continues to rise. What we are seeing in the budget papers, again, as the Auditor-General's reporting on this shows, is whilst the general government sector, which is what most commentators look at, might have come in a bit shorter than forecast originally at \$150 billion last financial year as opposed to \$155 billion, make no mistake: what this government is doing is shifting debt off the general government sector's books and into what we call the non-financial public sector. To give you an example of what I mean, the government points to the 2024–25 result and says, 'Well, that came in at less than 24.5 per cent; it came in at 23.7 per cent of GSP. So we are reducing debt as a proportion of GSP.' But no, when you look at debt overall, as the government's own financial report which it tabled in this place last month shows, it actually went up as a proportion of GSP from 25.6 to 27.6 per cent

of GSP. So you have got to look beyond the government's rhetoric when you look at the way this government runs the books.

I point out that the Auditor-General has, in a different report this year, sounded the alarm on just how reliable and, frankly, how accurate the government's budget papers are. You get a picture that debt is actually continuing to increase; it is just where you will find it. The government, through all of its delivery agencies, particularly in infrastructure, is basically shifting that debt burden. What does that mean? Well, as anyone will point out, if you are continuing to increase debt, as this government is, and in particular if you look at its borrowing program to support debt, the government this year and in the next three to four years is borrowing either for new financing or to refinance existing debt over \$123 billion. Not only is that just gargantuan in itself, it is having to be borrowed at higher bond rates. In recent years the Treasury Corporation of Victoria was paying about 3.6 per cent on that debt, but as of September last year that went up to about 4.8 per cent. So with all of that new debt and the debt that has to be refinanced, they are massive numbers, right? It is more than the operating revenue of the government in its own budget this year, which will be around \$108 billion – far more than that. It is having to borrow at much higher bond rates.

What does that mean for Victorians? Well, as I started out, this manifests itself. As complicated as all of these things might be – budget papers 5, 3, 2, whichever one you want to refer to, and the workings and operations of the Treasury Corporation of Victoria are all very complicated – at the end of the day, the consequences are very simple. It is why those roads are in such a state of disrepair.

It is why you have to wait so long, whether it is at an emergency department or whether it is for an ambulance. And if you get the ambulance on time, it is how long you have to wait to be offloaded to our great staff at our hospitals. It is why you are paying more to send your kids even to a government school. It is why you are paying more, for all the sacrifices that you might make, to send your kids to a non-government school. It is why, if you are a young person looking to rent a home, you are having to pay some of the highest rents in the country – if you can find a place to rent, one that you can afford. That is why. All of these things come home to roost.

I grieve for Victoria, because it is time for a change. How long can this charade of mismanagement go on? Well, it does not need to go on much longer if in November 2026 Victorians take that opportunity to vote for something new, something different – a change that will restore our finances so that we can give Victorians the services and the facilities that they all need, because unless we do, Victorians are going to continue to pay more in taxes, more for their education expenses and more for health care than anybody else in the country is paying or should pay in this country and certainly in this state. I grieve for Victorians. We can do better and we must do better.

Climate change

Sarah CONNOLLY (Laverton) (17:16): I am so glad to stand here and join this grievance debate. I am going to talk about something pretty important. It is funny, because this morning I was at a school with our Premier, and I was thinking about the grievance debate. It is just so relevant for this debate this afternoon. I stand here and I grieve for the wonderful people of Victoria should those opposite ever, ever find themselves in charge of our energy transition – God help us.

Just this morning down at Sunshine College I was with the Premier, the Deputy Premier, the Attorney-General and the Minister for Youth. We were there of course to announce that we are putting in early intervention officers, highly specialised social workers, as part of our violence reduction unit. This is an early intervention and prevention strategy that we are working hard on. There at Sunshine College we had an opportunity before the press conference to go ahead and ask students in year 7, year 9 and I think year 10 and 11 questions at a little bit of a roundtable. It was a bit strange, surrounded by all the cameras. It must have been really intimidating for these wonderful schoolkids. But the Premier asked them if they had any questions for her, and one bright, fabulous young woman, only 13 years old – I was shocked; she seemed a lot more mature than 13 – piped up and said, 'I have a question.' We all turned and we all leaned in, and guess what that question was? It was about climate change. It

was about the environment. It was about the importance of protecting this planet and tackling climate change and having strategies in place, like every responsible government should have, to go ahead and reduce our greenhouse gas emissions. She said this was something of real importance to her. It really meant a lot. This is a 13-year-old. Everyone around the table agreed.

The Premier said, ‘What a great question. I’m so glad you asked.’ The Premier went on to talk about what our government is doing to tackle climate change. She started off with, ‘Great question. It is a really complex issue, but there are a lot of things our government is doing.’ She started to list some of them off, talking about the need to invest in renewable energy, reduce our emissions and ensure Victoria can transition away from coal-fired power stations. Our Premier brought up the SEC. I know she loves the SEC, with the history of her dad. And the Deputy Premier, he jumped in there too. It was about what we are doing to help individual households switch to solar and energy-efficient appliances. It was a great conversation. This young girl really conveyed passionately how she felt about the planet and climate change and the importance of preserving our planet, not just for her generation but for generations to come. If you have children – and I know that the new Leader of the Opposition and member for Kew likes to point out that, yes, she is a mum now – this is a conversation that happens when you talk to kids, including your own kids, and when you are at schools. Regardless of whatever grade you are talking to students from, they always ask about climate change and the environment, and they convey to you how important this is. You are a politician, you are in government and you represent the community; you are also there as a mum. And you need to do something to save the planet.

It was great to be sitting next to the Premier as she talked about what this Labor government has been doing for the past – I am counting up now – 10, 11 years in government to tackle climate change, and the students were really happy to hear that. I was sitting there. The cameras were around. We had to leave, and then we got roped into this press conference. But I could not help but sit there and think: what would the member for Kew say to that question? How would the new Leader of the Opposition respond to that question? In fact the member for Kew has come here on quite a few occasions over the past three years to talk about her visits to schools, talking to schoolkids, and I really do have to wonder what she tells young people about the views and policy of the Liberal Party, the party that she is now heading up here in Victoria, and what they would do to tackle climate change, to protect the environment, not just for this generation but for generations to come.

This is a really interesting question, because I think that the member for Kew may consider herself a more moderate leader than her predecessor – I am not sure about that – but we have seen at the federal level moderate leaders, or those claiming to be moderate leaders, just like the member for Kew, totally beholden to absolute fossils in their party who continue to undermine Victoria and this country’s strategy for lowering emissions and reaching net zero. You probably know where I am going to go with this. It is a very uncomfortable narrative for those opposite that consider themselves to hold a more moderate position than some of those who have totally extremist views about climate change. The Leader of the Opposition just yesterday, fresh in her role, appeared to echo the same kind of commentary as her federal counterparts in Canberra. It was very interesting to watch.

In fact the new Leader of the Opposition in the Council, God love her, Mrs McArthur has been one of the leading climate sceptics in the Liberal Party for many, many years now. It is something she is entirely proud of. She voted to scrap net zero at the Victorian Liberal Party state council. That was just two months ago. This was not years ago; this was two months ago, in September. According to Mrs McArthur, climate has always been subject to natural variations and we should not blame coal and gas for every extreme weather event, and she has even called for nuclear power in Victoria. Can you imagine that narrative coming out of the mouth of the member for Kew, the new Leader of the Opposition, and her speaking openly about that kind of view – likely the view that she is going to be forced to hold with the likes of Mrs McArthur standing very closely at her back? Imagine having that narrative, taking that view, having chats to kids all around this state about nuclear energy and nuclear power plants and saying that we should not be blaming coal and gas for every extreme weather event

and that the climate has always been subject to natural variations. I have to say, Victorian students are smart, kids are smart, and the member for Kew will soon realise that as her children continue to grow up. Children are smart, and they are learning about the environment; they are learning about climate change and the importance of tackling this challenge, this issue, for generations to come. They want us to do something. They want action to be taken. The first action that they want is an actual belief that it exists and that it is not some furphy that has been made up by leftie scientists.

But Mrs McArthur is not alone in this kind of scepticism. Earlier this year we had Mr Davis, also in the other place – himself a former opposition leader there – actually move a motion endorsing Chris Uhlmann's Sky after dark documentary *The Real Cost of Net Zero*. That really does sound like a program on Sky after dark, doesn't it?

You can imagine what that documentary actually was. It was an ideology-riddled, erroneous, ignorant piece that basically calls for governments to abandon climate action. Can you imagine going and speaking with 13-year-olds, 14-year-olds, 16-year-olds and 17-year-olds about abandoning action on climate change because it does not exist? Imagine having that conversation with a classroom of kids. Those kids may not be eligible to vote right now, but should the Leader of the Opposition ever find herself in the seat of Premier here in this state, it would be very interesting to see what kinds of conversations she has been having if that is indeed the policy of the new reformed Liberal Party that she now claims to lead with a line having been drawn in the sand.

I do not know if anyone here can – I know certainly on this side of the house we could not; I do not know about that side of the house – but I do not think I can actually name, after being here for the last seven years in this place, a single policy that those opposite have championed or taken to an election that would ever deliver real climate action and reduce electricity prices.

Paul Edbrooke interjected.

Sarah CONNOLLY: Oh, I am sorry. I knew there would be one on this side of the house: nuclear. Let us go nuclear in Victoria. Let us build nuclear power plants. We saw what that was like here in this chamber. We were actually trying to determine where in Victoria they would be built. What an outrageous proposition that you can be a complete denier of climate change and then say that the one thing that will fix it all will be to put nuclear power plants here in Victoria. Well, we know Victorians do not want that, and we, Allan Labor government, have been so clear here on this side of the house, continuously clear, that we will never stand for, we will never support, we will never invest in and we will never back nuclear power plants here in Victoria. We do not need to, because the science and the facts are clear. We are investing in renewable energy, and it is working.

Years ago – it feels like a long time ago after being here in this place for nearly eight years – I worked for 13 years across the country in the energy sector. I remember a time up in Queensland before we started rolling out solar panels on every rooftop in homes across the south-east. I was in Brisbane at the time, and we were talking about solar-powered energy, we were talking about batteries and we were talking about electric vehicles before really they were even on the road and how we would charge them. Rolling out charging stations across the country: would it be possible? We know it is possible; it is happening. Where there is a will, there is a way. I can tell you from my experience in this industry for over a decade that the claims in that documentary on Sky after dark were absolute rubbish. It is absolutely ridiculous that Mr Davis's motion in the other place called on the minister here in this place to consider these claims. It just gets more and more ridiculous.

There are the elder statesmen – I was going to say statesmen; there are so many elder statesmen in the Victorian Liberal Party, but let us call them statespeople, to be fair – in the Victorian Liberal party room who are calling the shots quite clearly on climate policy, just as they do in Canberra, and we know how that has played out in the past couple of weeks in Canberra. It is appalling to watch. It is actually quite sad watching the now federal leader of the coalition, who quite clearly believes in climate change and taking action, now having to try and endorse a policy where they are not allowed

to mention net zero because they have got so many climate change deniers who have taken over the party. Her days, quite frankly, are numbered. So one has to ask oneself: what position will the member for Kew be taking? What position will she be taking on climate change to the election? I do not know if folks in her electorate would accept that she is a climate change denier and that she thinks we should do absolutely nothing on climate change here in this state, let alone this country, because it does not exist. But one has to wonder: will the member for Kew be able to make those policies up on her own?

Because here in this chamber, I have no doubt, and definitely in the other place, they have people who have quite extreme views on climate change. I have just talked about Mr Davis and Mrs McArthur. Mrs McArthur would be quite open to talking to folks about it. She thinks climate change does not exist but is more than happy to roll out nuclear power plants here in Victoria.

It will be interesting if the member for Kew makes it. You could take a bet either way after there being – what did we say – six or seven Liberal Party leaders over the past couple of years. Is it six or seven or is it 10? Who knows what it will be next November. But it will be really interesting to see the member for Kew stand up and try to talk strongly about climate change and her position on climate change and the party's position on climate change. I suspect that if she takes a moderate approach she will not be leading that party to the election in November.

So I do grieve for Victorians. I grieve for Victorian kids, the kids that I met today. You can sit around and have a sensible, rational, realistic, science-driven conversation with young people – as young as 13 – at school about the importance of preserving the environment and tackling climate change. I grieve for Victorians if those opposite ever get into power.

Economy

Rachel WESTAWAY (Pahran) (17:31): I rise today in concern for the direction of our state under a government that has absolutely lost its way. I am grieving for Victoria with Melbourne Grammar students here today. We are all grieving. I am grieving for them and our future. The Allan government's decade of failure has driven Victoria to the bottom of every national ranking that matters, while creating an environment for corruption in construction that costs taxpayers hundreds of millions of dollars. There was a time when Melbourne was the envy of Australia. Sydney was green with jealousy at our vibrant laneway dining, our nightlife, our thriving hospitality sector and our new businesses that chose to invest in our state. We were destination number one for business, for talent and for ambition. While this government has sleepwalked through a decade of waste and mismanagement, other cities have looted our best and brightest with lower taxes and less regulation. Sydney has reclaimed the crown, and Brisbane is booming.

The evidence is damning. For the third consecutive year the Business Council of Australia has ranked Victoria dead last for doing business, and that is just outrageous – eighth out of eight states and territories. This is not a close call; this is not margin-of-error territory. Victoria is comprehensively the worst place in Australia to run a business because of the Allan Labor government's mismanagement. The BCA's chief executive Bran Black was blunt: Victoria's business environment has deteriorated significantly. He pointed to our regulatory burden, tax settings and infrastructure chaos. In Victoria a cafe owner needs 36 separate licences and approvals before they can pour their first cup of coffee – that is 36 separate licences. This is not an exaggeration. This is from the BCA's *Better Regulation Report* of 2025.

Other states streamline approvals, but what does Victoria do? It adds red tape. Other jurisdictions attract investment, and Victoria simply drives it away. And this is not just about large corporations; this is about the small business owners in my electorate who want to expand their cafe into the neighbouring shopfront but face lengthy planning approvals and costs that make it commercially unviable, this is about the hospitality operator who cannot justify hiring additional staff due to payroll tax and compliance burdens and this is about the retail businesses facing onerous requirements that make additional trading hours economically impossible. Chapel Street was once Melbourne's premier retail and hospitality destination. Today small business operators are closing their doors because this

government has made Victoria uncompetitive, unsafe and unworkable. I have witnessed family businesses that have operated for decades close – not startups that failed to find a market, not businesses that were poorly managed but established operations, some family-owned for decades, that simply cannot afford to operate profitably under this government's regulatory and tax regime.

Victoria now carries the highest state debt in Australia, both in dollar terms and per capita. The 2024–25 budget projects net debt will reach \$187.8 billion by June 2028. Victoria's net debt is growing by more than \$2 million an hour. That is \$48 million of debt a day. Victorians are paying \$17.8 million every single day just in interest on this debt. And what have we received? Cancelled projects and cost blowouts: the Big Build became the big botch-up; the North East Link, originally at \$15.8 billion, now tracks towards \$26 billion; the Metro Tunnel, late and over budget, serves fewer passengers than projected; and the West Gate Tunnel has blown out by more than \$4 billion. Project after project, there is cost overrun after cost overrun.

Let me put those numbers in perspective for the families and businesses in my electorate of Prahran. These infrastructure blowouts are equivalent to building dozens of new hospitals. They are equivalent to employing tens of thousands of additional new nurses and teachers for the next generation of kids coming through. They are equivalent to funding essential services for years. Instead, it is a debt that will be serviced by our children and our grandchildren while core services in my electorate go unfunded. This budget's mismanagement has real-world consequences. A hospital bed shortage means a grandmother waiting 12 hours in the emergency room. A teacher shortage means overcrowded classrooms. A police shortfall means a Chapel Street business owner robbed three times and no longer able to get an adequate response.

A Liberal government will be smarter with the budget, investing in frontline services and preventative measures that save money in the long run, investing in preventative healthcare education so that every child reaches their potential, and community policing so crime is deterred. But this is challenging when interest expenses were \$272 million higher than budgeted for the 2024–25 period and employee expenses were \$2 billion over budget. Meanwhile essential services in my electorate go unfunded. Local schools are waiting for maintenance. Community facilities are deteriorating. St Kilda Primary School needs a new multipurpose hall. Prahran Mission need additional support for their homelessness services. Our local sporting clubs need facility upgrades, but there is no more money. The money has been spent on cost overruns, cancelled contracts and projects that were never properly costed in the first place.

This is a government that prioritises vanity projects over core services, debt over delivery and photo opportunities over fiscal responsibility. How does this government respond to its debt crisis? Well, by hitting Victorian families and businesses with more taxes. Payroll tax thresholds have not kept pace with wage growth, dragging more small businesses into the net. The congestion levy expands to capture more businesses without improving a single road. The interest bill on state debt now exceeds what we spend on TAFE, and we are borrowing to pay interest on borrowing. This is mortgaging Victoria's future to pay for Labor's failures today, and it is not fair. These are the issues that I am grieving about for our next generation.

It is not just businesses feeling the squeeze. Victorian families are struggling with the highest cost-of-living pressures in the nation. Electricity bills have skyrocketed. Council rates are rising faster than inflation. And every new state tax, every fee increase, every regulatory impost flows through to the family budget. This government talk about supporting working families, but every policy decision makes life harder for the people they claim to represent. Now this government wants to extend the congestion levy to Stonnington, capturing Chapel Street and Prahran businesses. This levy is designed for the CBD, not for suburban shopping precincts that the community and businesses are striving to revitalise. This is not congestion relief. This is a revenue grab. Chapel Street vacancies are sitting at up to 16 per cent. We are working hard to revitalise this iconic precinct, and the government's response: 'Let's just make it more expensive.'

James Newbury interjected.

Rachel WESTAWAY: Absolutely, member for Brighton: ‘Let’s just tax us all and make it more expensive for customers to visit.’ While Chadstone shopping centre offers free parking, this government wants to slug Chapel Street visitors with a higher cost.

My traders are telling me that they are trying to negotiate with Stonnington to get better deals on parking because their retail staff who come from other areas and cannot always take public transport are feeling the hit because the cost of parking has increased. Sixty-four per cent of spending in Prahran comes from visitors outside of the area, and they drive here. This levy will send them elsewhere, killing the precinct we are fighting to rebuild. The consequences are absolutely clear: Victoria is losing businesses to Queensland and New South Wales. Businesses are voting with their feet. The amount of people that tell me they want to leave Victoria and move to Queensland is astounding. That is not what we want for this beautiful state. We want to retain people. We want to grow. We want people to enjoy what Chapel Street, Prahran and Victoria once were. Companies that built their success here are relocating. Startups are bypassing us absolutely entirely. The professional services firms that once anchored our economy are opening Brisbane offices. The technology companies that should be driving our future prosperity are establishing in Sydney. Young professionals graduating from our universities are looking interstate for opportunities. Even students are going to other states so that they can study there. It is cheaper and life is better in other states, the way this government is pushing this state.

In Prahran I have witnessed family businesses that have operated for decades close, not because they have failed commercially but because the regulatory burden, tax imposts and operating environment made continuation impossible. Business owners in Prahran tell me the regulatory burden has become overwhelming. One hospitality operator walked me through their monthly compliance requirements. Listen to this: licensing renewals, payroll tax calculations, superannuation reporting, WorkSafe documentation, food safety audits, council permits – hours chewed up that could be spent more productively in their business. That is the reality. That is testimony I hear week after week in my electorate office. Time and money that could be spent on growing their business, hiring additional staff or improving their customer experience is instead consumed by navigating bureaucratic processes that add no value and create no jobs.

Then there is the CFMEU scandal, which exposed not just corruption but economic sabotage: bikies employed as union delegates on Labor’s Big Build, systematic workplace thuggery, violence and intimidation as a standard operating procedure. Every dollar extracted through dodgy deals is a dollar not spent productively. Every delayed project is economic activity foregone. The Premier received a letter in April 2022 from an Indigenous labour hire firm detailing violence and intimidation by CFMEU officials. Her office took six months to formally log it in, and it did not get logged until October 2022. The public only learned of this correspondence in July 2024, when Nine newspapers revealed the extent of the CFMEU corruption and the two years and three months during which Victorian projects became synonymous with cost overruns and delays. A government that tolerates corruption has lost its mandate to govern, in my view.

I must briefly address the crime crisis, because it directly impacts our economic recovery. A criminal offence occurs in every Victorian retail environment at least once every 5 minutes. Workers are leaving the hospitality industry because they no longer feel safe, and Chapel Street businesses have installed costly security measures, reducing their capacity to invest in growth and employment. New South Wales has had online crime reporting since 2016, and what do we have? Nothing. While other jurisdictions invest in preventative policing, Victoria plays catch-up with announcements that never materialise into action. Business confidence requires community safety. We cannot rebuild Victoria’s economy while businesses and workers operate in fear. Earlier this week our leader Jess Wilson set out a clear vision for Victoria, a vision built on four priorities: getting the budget back under control, ending the crime crisis, ensuring access to quality health care and giving every Victorian the opportunity to own their own home.

Getting the budget under control means living within our means. It is what we have all been taught we need to do. It means prioritising core services over vanity projects. It means ending the waste and corruption that has characterised Labor's Big Build. It means budgets based in reality, not budgets designed for the sound bite and press release, only to be found wildly inaccurate.

When we control the budget, we can ease cost-of-living pressures and invest in police, nurses and teachers rather than servicing debt and funding union slush funds. Victoria's economic decline is not inevitable. It is a result of policy choices – policy choices that can absolutely be changed. We need to cut red tape, not create more of it. We need to attract businesses, not drive them away. We need competitive tax settings, not the highest impost in Australia. A Liberal government will tackle the regulatory burden that is strangling Victorian businesses, will examine payroll tax settings to support small and medium enterprises, will fix the planning system so businesses can invest with confidence and will deliver infrastructure that serves the community: roads that reduce congestion, public transport that works, not vanity projects with cost blowouts that cripple the budget for absolutely decades. The next election is just 12 months away. Victorians have an absolutely clear choice.

Liberal Party leadership

Paul EDBROOKE (Frankston) (17:46): I rise this afternoon grateful for an opportunity to contribute to this grievance debate because I am deeply worried about where the Liberal Party is going in this state. I worry about the way members in this house and members of different parties treat each other. I wonder if in other areas in the private sector, what we have seen over the past couple of days would be accepted – whether that is respectful behaviour. We can talk to our wits' end about six leaders in seven years, but a member who I think was widely respected in his community, certainly – I am going to say here, the former opposition leader is a Liberal; I am Labor, but I can see someone who works hard. I can see someone who is trying to bring their party back to the middle. I can see someone who is trying to meet some of the same goals the government does, just in a different way.

What I saw yesterday was someone who was stabbed in the back in a cold factional hit. He is a former police officer. He is a former manager and owner of a Bakers Delight – he is a small business owner – and he got some positive polling, almost like the former member who was a leader, the member for Hawthorn, who got some positive polling too. But it just shows that you do not need to be doing well. You do not need positive polling for those opposite to roll you, to steamroll you and to stab you in the back. We still do not have an answer as to why the opposition changed their leader yesterday. We do not know why Mr Battin was ambushed. Maybe he does not have the right pedigree. Maybe the member for Berwick did not ride on the right person's pony when he was a child, as we have heard. But just like the member for Hawthorn, he was polling quite well, then was killed off by his party.

So the question is: who actually runs their party? I do not think it is their leaders, that is for sure. The sixth leader in seven years – that is anarchy, that is an absolute debacle. If you cannot govern yourselves, there is no way you can even consider governing for the great state of Victoria. For us on this side, I think it is really sad to see these kinds of changes when there are people all over this Parliament – in the upper house, in the other place, in here – that are trying to do good work for their communities, but they are steamrolled, they are run over and they are stabbed in the back because someone has the right pedigree. Someone's dad was an MP. What exactly is it that the member for Berwick did wrong? No-one can tell us. We have heard the new opposition leader tell us that he was doing a fine job. Well, then, why didn't he keep that job? We know on this side of the house that it is a case of same horse, different jockey.

There is no plan, there are no slogans, and we know they cannot govern themselves. The question going forward, in my mind, is: what did the new opposition leader promise Mrs McArthur in the other place for her support? We will find that out. There will be a wedge issue sometime soon, and we will find that out.

What I want to know, though, right now is: were there deals done by the new opposition leader that will put people who made good from gender equality reforms and equality reforms from this

government and from some of the massive reforms that this government has put forward in family violence and the LGBTQIA+ sector at risk? Are they at risk because the opposition have got the hard right running their party? Is the deal that promises have been made to roll back those equality reforms? Is the deal that reforms like banning gay conversion therapy will be rolled back? We need to know that.

When I talk to workers in my electorate – ambos, nurses, teachers, sparkies, childhood educators, people in retail, hospo workers – they are not asking the world. They are asking for a fair go at work and a decent wage that keeps up with the cost of living. They are asking for safe conditions and a bit of security so they can plan their future, and that is what this government delivers.

What a week it has been: the Metro Tunnel announcement about delivering it early; the West Gate tunnel support by the federal government; more support for the SRL; delivering on treaty, the first treaty in Australia's history – Australia being the only Commonwealth nation without a treaty – justice reforms; and just over 100 pieces of legislation through this Parliament by the Allan Labor government, a government I am extremely proud to be part of. Business conditions and confidence have risen in September and are in positive territory, regardless of what you might hear from those opposite. Victorian business conditions and confidence have both improved since the beginning of the year following, yes, interest rate cuts of course, but conditions in the construction sector have picked up modestly as well. Lo and behold, it is official that Melbourne this week was ranked as the happiest place in Australia – except if you are in the Liberal party room. Melbourne has also been ranked the 10th happiest place in the world.

We have heard a lot about tax from those opposite. I have been listening keenly. I am in the middle of doing an MBA and some of the financial modules. I love it, love maths and love getting the calculator out, and I have got the calculator out on some of the promises by those opposite. We heard about some payroll tax and land tax issues. I just want to work through some of my own analysis that really goes to show that this government has been working hard for our community. In contrast, you will hear that every single time there has been a choice of backing workers or backing those who profit from their labour, the Liberals always choose the top end of town.

This government has made an increase to the threshold for annual payroll tax returns from \$10,000 to \$40,000. We reduced payroll tax to 3.65 per cent for regional businesses. We have abolished the land tax transfer duty. We further reduced the regional payroll tax to 2.425 per cent. We then reduced that payroll tax rate again to 1.2125 per cent, phased in over three years, but then we decided we would move that forward. We have increased the payroll tax exemption threshold to \$700,000 over three years. We brought forward the regional employer payroll tax of 1.2125 per cent, as I formerly spoke about. We have allowed a longer tax exemption where construction or renovation of a principal place of residence is delayed. We have dealt with standalone tax exemptions for social and emergency housing. Bulk-billing payroll tax exemptions have been put in place for GPs. We have raised the payroll tax free threshold to \$900,000. We have introduced family violence tax relief measures. We have raised that payroll tax free threshold again to \$1 million. The list goes on. Even today we have addressed a bill that came back with amendments in regard to 50 per cent concessions for conditionally free parking, which is essentially the congestion levy we spoke about, land tax exemptions for principal places of residence and non-permanent shelters and the Dinner Plains exemption from the vacant residential land tax.

As we have talked about, the issue is that there is a lot of opposition but no plan. We heard on the Raf Epstein show this morning the opposition leader was interviewed. The opposition leader was asked what the plan is. Raf Epstein has basically gone across and given a dialogue that if you need to fill your \$11.1 billion black hole, how are you going to do it? He asked, 'So what will you stop spending on?' He is asking, 'What are you going to cut', essentially. And the Leader of the Opposition says, 'We need to stem the bleed at the executive level.' And Raf Epstein says, I think quite reasonably, 'So cutting the number of public servants?' And the opposition leader says, 'No, looking at the growth in

the executive level of the public service.’ Raf Epstein retorts, ‘There are billions to be saved on debt in a couple of inflated executive salaries?’

So this is the plan: ‘We’re going to cut a couple of inflated executive salaries to fill that \$11.1 billion black hole.’ No, this is not a fresh start. We can fill the gaps in the story; we know the gaps in this story. That \$11.1 billion black hole commitment by the opposition needs to be filled, and history shows us what they will cut: they will cut TAFE, they will cut training, they will cut schools, they will cut hospitals. We have already seen Mrs McArthur, the now powerbroker who owns the opposition leader, say this in the other place. They will cut public sector jobs hand over fist, and they will make sure that the services that Victorians in my community and every other community rely on are at risk. They will cut infrastructure. They will cut the projects that create jobs in our communities – communities like mine.

They call it budget repair, but in reality, that is a term that really stands aside from the fact that the damage is not just on a spreadsheet; that damage is to real lives and to our communities. And I know that too well, because we heard another member say that the Premier and the Deputy Premier were speaking about their childhoods and the effect the privatisation of the SEC had on them. Well, I was an SEC kid too, and my father was a union rep dealing with the voluntary departure packages of people down in the valley. I am not here to argue the point over who started that privatisation, who started breaking things up – it does not matter to me. As a 14-year-old kid, I saw my community die off because of so-called budget reforms, budget reforms that on a piece of paper looked fine and dandy, but when you are living in that community – it killed off that Latrobe Valley community. We have heard the member for Morwell talk about his community. We have heard members in the other place, in the upper house seats, talk about their communities. They are still coming back from these.

The cruel irony is that the same Liberals who say, ‘We won’t be able to afford nurses or teachers or ambos or people in the public sector,’ are the ones who have only ever worked in politics. The cruel irony is that when I read the *Herald Sun*, I am looking for some kind of pedigree for someone who could become the opposition leader or the Premier. What I see is someone that has only ever worked in Liberal offices, has only ever worked for a business council, has never, ever experienced life outside of Kew or Mont Albert. And it is nothing personal, but it shows me and it tells me that some of us are just living in a bubble. Some of us see things on paper and they do not see the effect of their decisions out in the community. What the Liberals do not say in this chamber is how they are going to cut, and what they are really saying is, ‘You’re on your own.’ And we have seen that this week. There is no plan. They keep on telling people that they are responsible managers, but they cannot answer anything unless they say they are going to cut it. The truth is really simple: the modern Liberal Party is not a moderate party anymore. It is not the party many of the MPs across the aisle joined; it is an extreme party. It is extreme in its ideology; whether that is about climate or nuclear power, it does not matter. We have heard it before.

It is extreme in its willingness to sacrifice workers’ livelihoods on the altar of an accountant’s spreadsheet, because that is all it knows. And it is extreme in its refusal to accept that the government does have a role in building a fairer, more equal society.

I feel like we should be grieving, just like some of those across the aisle are, because I know there are some decent people over there now who have not had a great week. They have seen this change – they have seen a decent person rolled as leader – and they have seen someone else, an unknown, put into that spot. I tell you what, in those two question times we have seen in the last two days there has been a lot of eye rolling on that side of the chamber. There were a lot of angry looking people who were guaranteed that this would be a change going forward, that performance would improve and that this leader would be the new leader that brings them an election victory. I look across the aisle, and I definitely do not see that reflected in the faces of those opposite. I see people who are dejected and I see people who no longer feel like they have control of the policies their party puts up, and I grieve for any time that they could have a chance to govern Victoria.

Question agreed to.***Bills*****Children, Youth and Families Amendment (Stability) Bill 2025***Second reading***Debate resumed.**

Nathan LAMBERT (Preston) (18:01): Prior to the grievance debate I was about to make a few points in response to opposition speakers on the Children, Youth and Families Amendment (Stability) Bill 2025, and I will return to those. First, I think it is very important to point out that the best interests of the child remain paramount in any decision that the Children's Court makes with respect to family reunification orders, and that certainly will remain the case in the act as it would be amended by this bill. We spoke last week in this place on the importance of that best interest principle in the context of amendments to the national laws for the early childhood sector. It is a principle that is very close to the heart of all of us in the Labor Party and I know very close to the heart of the minister, and we repeat our commitment to it here.

Secondly, I would just like to briefly highlight the additional considerations that form part of the best interests tests that are set out in clause 10 of the bill. When making those more flexible family reunification orders, the court will consider the duration of any previous order, the extent to which a parent has engaged with services and supports and any circumstances that have impeded the progress of family reunification. That last factor is of course one that we must always be conscious of. In order for family reunification to occur safely it often requires that the parents of the child have meaningfully engaged with the appropriate supports, but in order for that to have happened of course those supports and those services have to be available and have to be available in a culturally responsive way, and that is something that we are also very committed to as a government.

Then, on a third point just touching on the subject of consultation, which is indeed the subject of the reasoned amendment moved by the member for Warrandyte, I think it is very important to be clear that this bill picks up on a considerable body of work, starting perhaps with the 2017 '*Safe and Wanted...*' report by Liana Buchanan and Andrew Jackomos. I had the opportunity in an earlier life to work with Andrew Jackomos. I know this is a topic that has been of importance to him for a long time, and that report did some very important work. There is also of course the 2021 Legal and Social Issues Committee inquiry into responses to historical forced adoptions in Victoria. This bill acquits recommendation 56 of that review. There are the 2022 permanency longitudinal study from the University of Melbourne, the 2022 Monash University *Stronger Together* report, a 2023 review of the permanency settings and of course the 2023 *Yoorrook for Justice* report, and this bill before us acquits recommendation 25 of that review. The member for Warrandyte in her contribution touched on the further history of these matters, going back to the discussions in this place during the life of the previous Liberal–National government. I say all that just to say that these are things that the government has considered deeply and the minister has considered deeply. She has consulted widely, and I do not think anyone familiar with this issue over a long period could suggest in any way that a wide variety of lived experiences and perspectives have not been considered. They have been documented and they have been highly appreciated throughout all those reviews and inquiries that have led to the bill that we have here today, and so I oppose the reasoned amendment from the member for Warrandyte on those grounds.

In wrapping up my remarks, I would like to stress that nothing in the bill that we have in front of us changes the vital importance of permanent care orders and indeed permanent carers for the children they look after but for our society more broadly. Obviously it is the hope, when a family reunification order is made, that the protective issues will be addressed and that the family will be unified. But as previous speakers have noted, that hope is not always borne out, and we know that permanent carers provide a safe, supportive and secure environment for many children who have endured difficult and

complex situations in their young lives. And if it was not for the support, the generosity and the love of those carers, those children would face very different set of circumstances. So I just want to make absolutely clear our gratitude for the role that permanent carers play, and particularly I wanted to commend the role of Permanent Care and Adoptive Families, the representative body, their permanent carer members and their adoptive family members, who provide similar support and love. And I thank CEO Wendy Mason, chair Kellie Burns and deputy chair Chris Lockwood, who hails from Darebin, from our part of the world, for the role that they play supporting their members but also for the very important role they play in administering and delivering the flexible funding program, the PCA Families Helpline and the Better Futures program.

The member for Warrandyte did also circulate some textual amendments to clause 15 that adjust the review period, I think, from five years to three years. I have made the point in other debates that of course if this chamber wishes to return to any legislation, it may do so. I did feel that, having spoken in her remarks about perhaps different safeguards, certainly those textual amendments did not set out any, and nor did her speech, so again, I would oppose those textual amendments if we got to the opportunity to debate them at a later stage.

I just want to thank, in finishing, the Minister for Children in the other place for her work. I know this is an area and issue that she cares deeply about. She has got a great team and a great department supporting her. They have done some good and important work and very considered work on this bill. So I commend it to the house, and in particular I commend it to the house because ultimately – and I think this is a point upon which we are all in agreement – it is something that will act to support and protect vulnerable children, and that is one of the most important things that any government does.

Chris CREWTER (Mornington) (18:07): I rise to speak on the Children, Youth and Families Amendment (Stability) Bill 2025. This bill represents the most significant change to Victoria's child protection system in a decade. It will have real consequences for vulnerable children and families across Mornington, Mount Martha, Mount Eliza, Moorooduc, Baxter and Tuerong in my electorate of Mornington but also across Victoria. Many carers and carers and families in our electorate already struggle with long waiting lists for support and inconsistent access to services, which means any reform must be carefully considered. This bill reverses a major part of the coalition's 2014 permanency reforms, which were designed to prevent children from drifting in the system for years without a secure long-term plan.

What does this bill do? First, this bill replaces the concept of permanency with a broader and more subjective concept called stability, which includes legal stability, physical stability, cultural stability and relational stability. It also allows the Children's Court to issue an initial family reunification order for up to 24 months, which doubles the previous maximum period and significantly changes how long a child may remain in temporary care. The bill removes the previous cumulative 24-month limit and allows unlimited extensions of family reunification orders, which means a child could remain in uncertainty for years. Adoption is removed entirely from the case planning hierarchy, which reduces the number of pathways available for children who need a permanent, secure and loving home. And the bill returns large amounts of discretion to the courts, which Parliament intentionally restricted in 2014 in order to protect children from prolonged instability.

On the history and background of this, before the 2014 reforms the system was in crisis, with the Cummins report showing children waited on average five years for a permanent outcome, which left many children drifting in care for far too long. The coalition reforms in 2014 deliberately introduced clearer timelines and a stronger focus on permanent outcomes so that children could achieve certainty sooner.

The permanency amendments longitudinal study later showed that these reforms were working by reducing the time it took to secure permanent care orders and improving stability outcomes for children. The government is now relying heavily on early reports that were conducted only months after the 2014 reforms began while overlooking the later long-term data that shows positive results.

So what are the key concerns? First, the bill shifts from a child-centred approach to a parent-centred approach. Children need timely decisions about where they will grow up and who will care for them because long periods of uncertainty can lead to trauma and long-term harm. Allowing indefinite extensions of reunification orders risks keeping children in prolonged uncertainty and may prioritise adult needs over the child's right to stability and safety. Evidence from research into adverse childhood experiences shows that extended instability leads to poorer outcomes in mental health, education, wellbeing and lifelong opportunity. And we all know about the crucial development of children that happens particularly between the ages of zero to five and that children can lose their hope, their purpose and their chances to utilise their gifts in life without this stability and without this opportunity.

Second, the bill returns broad judicial discretion that was previously limited for a reason. The 2014 reforms restricted the court's discretion because repeated extensions had been granted even when children were suffering from the instability that resulted. The experience with past bail laws shows that a very broad discretion can lead to outcomes that do not adequately consider community safety or victim impact. Without clear timeframes the child protection system may again allow children to drift, which was the exact problem that the coalition reforms were designed to fix.

Third, the bill changes the law to compensate for service failures rather than fixing the services. Families in the Mornington electorate and beyond regularly report difficulty accessing mental health assessments, family violence programs and drug and alcohol support within a reasonable timeframe. Parents often wait many months for specialist services, which means the delays are created by service shortages, not by statutory time limits. Instead of improving access to support services, the government is changing the law so that children remain in temporary care longer, which leaves children to bear the consequences of system failures.

Fourth, the removal of adoption reduces important options for children who need permanent care. Modern adoption usually is open and consensual and for some children provides a pathway to lifelong belonging, identity and stability. Removing adoption entirely from the hierarchy fails to recognise that, in certain cases, adoption can provide the best long-term outcome for a child who cannot safely return home and who wants the guarantee of permanent long-term care and to be part of a family. This change reduces the number of legal options available to child protection workers, carers and the courts when determining what is best for the child.

Lastly, consultation was narrow and did not include many groups most affected. The Labor government consulted mostly with legal and Indigenous organisations and did not adequately engage with foster carers, permanent carers, kinship carers, adoptive families or frontline child protection staff. Many carers in our community and across Victoria have shared that they were not approached for their views, despite having direct experience navigating the system with vulnerable children. Some organisations have said privately that they have hesitated to speak about this bill or against this bill because they fear losing funding or appearing unsupportive of self-determination frameworks.

On the local impact on the Mornington electorate, foster carers in Mornington, for example, have raised concerns that children already face delays in receiving assessments and support, which means extended timeframes and timelines will only increase uncertainty. Permanent carers in Mount Martha have told me that stability is essential for children who have already experienced trauma and that long waits for decisions only compound their challenges. Young families in places like Mount Eliza often struggle to access parenting programs, mental health treatment and alcohol and drug support, with many reporting wait times of six months or longer. Indeed community workers in places like Baxter, Moorooduc and Tuerong also report that service shortages make reunification slow and difficult, which shows that extending legal timelines does not address the real problem.

Across the electorate there is strong support for reforms that remain firmly centred on the best interests of the child and not on administrative convenience. On the coalition's position, the coalition will not oppose the bill outright, but we have serious and carefully considered concerns about its potential to create poorer outcomes for vulnerable children. We indeed believe that amendments need to be moved

in the Legislative Assembly, calling on the government to pause the bill until proper and inclusive consultation is undertaken with all the stakeholders, including children and families with lived experience. These steps reflect a balanced and responsible approach that focuses on protecting vulnerable children while allowing for proper scrutiny of the changes.

In conclusion, every child in Victoria deserves safety, stability, certainty and the opportunity to grow up in a loving, supportive and stable home. Children in Mornington, Mount Martha, Mount Eliza, Moorooduc, Baxter, Tuerong and across Victoria deserve a system that puts their wellbeing first and does not leave them in limbo or in the lurch. The government should address service shortages, invest in timely access to support and strengthen child protection capacity, rather than extending legal timeframes that keep children waiting for permanent decisions. Our position in the coalition is clear and principled: we support a child-centred approach that delivers stable, loving and timely outcomes for vulnerable children, and we will continue to advocate for reforms that reflect this priority.

Ros SPENCE (Kalkallo – Minister for Agriculture, Minister for Community Sport, Minister for Carers and Volunteers) (18:16): I move:

That the debate be adjourned.

Motion agreed to and debate adjourned.

Ordered that debate be adjourned until later this day.

Justice Legislation Amendment (Family Violence, Stalking and Other Matters) Bill 2025

Second reading

Debate resumed on motion of Sonya Kilkenny:

That this bill be now read a second time.

James NEWBURY (Brighton) (18:17): I rise to speak on the Justice Legislation Amendment (Family Violence, Stalking and Other Matters) Bill 2025. I note that this is an important bill, and I hope that many members have the opportunity to speak on it. Members on our side will try and give each other an opportunity to speak. Noting that we only have tomorrow's debate time, we will shorten our contributions a little bit to make sure we get through as many members as possible. We have a lot of people who want to speak about this because this is an important bill. This is a really important bill, and we are not opposing this bill, because we very strongly believe – and I very strongly believe as the shadow – in both the measures in relation to family violence, but also the start of what I hope we can see in relation to a broader reform around stalking.

I know that many members of this place came out from both sides of the chamber and sat on the steps of Parliament with Aggie, who was commemorating her daughter Celeste Manno, who died in what was one of the most horrid cases of crime that frankly shocked not only I am sure the state, but the country, and led to her brave mother Aggie leading so powerfully a case for reform on stalking. The case of her daughter showed that we need reform, that we need change in the law, in terms of resourcing but more broadly in terms of cultural change. It is true that this government prioritised family violence and led on family violence in Australia with a number of reforms and also the royal commission, but that change and that advocacy is also needed in relation to stalking.

Though this bill just starts that process, we know that it is only a very small step, if I might say – an important one; I do not want to downgrade that step, but it is a first step only. I will talk about that in a little bit more detail. We know that, in relation to family violence, in 2023 Victoria Police responded to 94,170 family violence incidents, which represents one every 6 minutes. There is a shocking need to always be reforming here and to be stepping strongly into this space and looking for further ways to do better. This bill does that in a number of ways.

I will talk to those amendments. Firstly, by way of a lot of the substance on the family violence reforms, this bill amends things like family violence intervention orders, family violence safety notices and

personal safety intervention orders. I will touch on a number of the measures contained therein and also go through some of the Law Institute of Victoria, the Criminal Bar Association and also the Australian Lawyers Alliance's assessments of those changes, because they are worth putting into the record and are worth noting, because they are important additional contributions. All have noted the speed of the bill and have provided advice on the bill, which has been very much appreciated – the law institute, the Criminal Bar Association, the lawyers alliance and more – but felt that the speed with which the bill was put to them did not allow them an opportunity, as would always be the case with other pieces of legislation, to deal with it in more substance. I very much thank them for their speedy turnaround in terms of their assessments, and because of that, I feel very much that they should be commended for the work that they have done.

On those points, the law institute has noted – and it is worth saying – that although it has concerns in relation to certain elements of the bill, overall the law institute commends the Victorian government for pursuing these reforms. It is important to put that on record. Though, as the Criminal Bar Association said, the bills were not the subject of proper scrutiny, and often the resulting legislation has unforeseen, unintended or undesirable outcomes. They further point out that with an endemic delay in the hearing and determination of applications for family violence intervention orders, it is a real problem, because you need to think of these things in conjunction, don't you. You need to think of reforms but also the practical outcome in terms of how these matters are heard and how they are considered in a hearing and on a daily basis, for want of a better explanation.

In terms of the matters in the bill, there is a new default length for family violence intervention orders, which does align with states like New South Wales – a default length of two years. It has been suggested by the law institute that the Victorian government must ensure that there are additional resources provided, which is not unreasonable, especially in terms of legal assistance and legal aid. Those points I think have been consistent ones across the whole gamut of the amendments being made. I should actually mention, on the two years, that the lawyers alliance did feel that it was worth recommending that it should be explicit that the order duration must be the least restrictive period reasonably necessary to ensure safety and that the two-year period is a guidance rather than presumptive.

The law institute did make similar points around that two-year period – that rather than the two-year period becoming a default, there should be some guidance to ensure that there is the capacity for the court to consider the matter on its merits and on the specifics of the matter.

Another change includes allowing the court to make family violence intervention orders conditional in relation to animals. I think there were a number of issues in relation to the changes. It is not that those changes, in my view, are unwelcome; I think they are important issues that have been captured by this legislation. However, it is worth thinking through how those changes will flow through in the practical sense. For example, as the law institute has pointed out, where a family pet is registered under the name of the perpetrator but has close ties to the affected person, the pet would remain in the perpetrator's possession, so there may need to be further clarification about how those issues are managed. The intent of course is welcomed in this bill; it is about how that would be managed in that circumstance, so some of the practical elements in relation to that.

Further, on the minimum age of 12 years for respondents of family violence intervention orders, there have been mixed views on the issue. The Australian Lawyers Alliance does have concerns and, it should be noted, proposed 14 years. We accept the proposal in the legislation. It is worth noting that we are not pushing the proposal put by the lawyers alliance. As a courtesy to them, they have noted that they believe it should be limited to 12- to 13-year olds only in exceptional circumstances. Obviously, we support the government's proposal, but they have suggested that.

Another amendment relates to allowing the courts to make orders for alternate or substituted service, which is a matter that has been hotly contested by the experts in terms of the practical application of service. Because service is a serious issue, it does need to be made clear where service has occurred,

as the law institute has put, so as to avoid unintentional breaches of orders where the respondent is not made aware of the order. That makes sense, because if we are moving to a place where we are creating a model for alternate service, we need to think through how that will practically operate when we perhaps move to alternate services or, as has been suggested, potentially in the future private providers. Do they have the expert understanding of the subject matters they are dealing with in terms of service? Those general points are not necessarily concerning in relation to the bill, but because a framework is being created and effectively foreshadowed, these are issues we will need to think about in the future.

On allowing the courts to make interim and final orders regardless of whether some of the offending occurred outside of Victoria and one affected family member was outside and one was inside, currently both have to be in the same place.

This is actually a really important part of the reforms in this bill. The community awareness of this reform perhaps has not been highlighted, but it is a very important reform, because though we will see issues in terms of managing cross-jurisdictional matters – of course we will see that – no doubt there is cooperation between law enforcement across jurisdictions. It is a really important signal in this bill to say that the Victorian Parliament and more broadly we as Victorians would expect that where offending has occurred, that is captured by our law and that loopholes cannot exist in relation to whether or not someone is in the same state.

As the law institute points out, the proposed amendments do not specify whether extraterritoriality is limited to Australian states or is also international, which is a note. I read it as interstate in that there are other constitutional issues in other places and constitutional power limits in relation to this Parliament, believe it or not. But this is perhaps a point that is worth noting, because it is an important point and we do not want those loopholes to extend any further than they need to.

Another reform relates to providing Victoria Legal Aid to conduct cross-examination of the affected family member on behalf of self-represented respondents. It is another very important reform that ensures that people affected, victim-survivors, are not put in a position they need not be in. But again, to reinforce the point from the law institute, the Victorian government must ensure that legal aid has adequate resourcing, as they say, and further, broadly, current legal assistance funding in Victoria is not sufficient. Placing additional requirements on legal aid to provide legal assistance on such matters will only place further strain on an already stretched system. So it is an important point to note that though this bill does do important things in relation to these matters, there is still the capacity provided to those services. When I speak briefly about stalking, that will become clear as well.

There are a number of other minor amendments in relation to the family violence issues. I think I have touched on a lot of the broad-based issues. There are a number of amendments in relation to things like jury directions, which I will not go into in any great detail, but there are jury direction changes, including in relation to non-fatal strangulation, intimate image offences and historical sexual offences. There are also some changes in relation to where certain offences have occurred it would be open for a jury to find an accused guilty of an alternate offence, which is also an important reform that perhaps has not been widely understood by the community. So in relation to, broadly speaking, the family violence matters, I think I have touched on the majority of the major reforms contained in the bill. As I said, those matters are supported by the coalition, and the coalition will not be opposing the bill.

In relation to stalking, I did touch on at the start our view that these stalking reforms, which go to two of the Victorian Law Reform Commission's final report recommendations. For background: led by Aggie after the tragic death of her daughter Celeste, the law reform commission conducted what can only be described as a groundbreaking report a few years ago, released a final report into stalking and released 45 recommendations. It is a significant, significant piece of work in relation to the need to take a very strong set of forward steps in relation to stalking.

I should note, and I say this as constructively as I can, the government has not substantially dealt with the 45 recommendations in the commission's report. This bill acquits two of the recommendations in

relation to recommendations 26 and 33 – 26 relates to amendments of personal safety intervention orders, and recommendation 33 is the change in relation to the offence of stalking. We do accept and we do support that you cannot see change in relation to stalking unless you look to the primary offence and reform it where it needs that reform. So we accept that on that particular resetting out of the offence of stalking it is a significant reform, but it is only a start, which is why earlier on I said that it was a first step in relation to the work needed on stalking.

Both the Law Institute of Victoria and the Criminal Bar Association have understandably put out strong views on that. I will start with the law institute. They have said a couple of things which are worth noting and recording. They said that they:

[QUOTE AWAITING VERIFICATION]

... support the reformulation of the stalking offence, which would amend the current Crimes Act section into a single offence rather than creating separate offences. The Law Institute emphasises that the proposal provides for clear, understandable and modernised language –

Frankly, I accept their assessment of that reform. They further said:

The LIV is satisfied that the proposed restructuring provides clarity with respect to the intentional, reckless and objective fault elements of the existing stalking offence. Furthermore, that the fault element is much clearer without detracting the meaning of the offence or adding any unnecessary complexity, such as, for instance, requiring changes on maximum penalties and sentencing practices for stalking.

This is a very clear endorsement of what is a very, very complicated restructuring of the offence. When you then go to the Criminal Bar Association's assessment, they have described it slightly differently. They say:

[QUOTE AWAITING VERIFICATION]

The modifications to the offence of stalking involve the creation of a criminal offence which is at odds with contemporary notions of criminal responsibility.

To unpick that very, very briefly, the modernisation, frankly, does bring about change. But my very strong view is that there is a significant problem with stalking, and there is a significant need for change in relation to stalking. Though of course, with respect, I accept the assessment, we sadly live in a time where non-family-violence stalking offences increased by almost 10 per cent in the year to June to nearly 1200 cases. Family violence increased by nearly 7 per cent at 1800 cases. This is a very, very serious offence and one that affects a lot of people. The modernisation of the section has required, frankly, a step to be taken that perhaps some might have felt went into new territory, but it is worth, and only fair to record, the bar association's concerns.

I will be very brief because I know I promised my colleagues more time than I have given them. I definitely promised them more time than I have given them, but this is really important to get on the record. In terms of the Law Reform Commission's report, I did want to note a couple of points that they went to in their executive summary but also in their recommendations. Very succinctly, their view is that:

The criminal justice system is not dealing effectively with stalking.

That is a very powerful sentence. It is a very powerful sentence when you read it. I think it stands on its own, and I think it is true. Action is needed. Further:

For too long the response to stalking has focused on what the victim survivor is expected to do to avoid being stalked.

If you think about that sentence and you think about the current framework, that is also true. The recurrent response to stalking has focused on what the victim-survivor is expected to do to avoid being stalked. The onus is on them. This amendment to the concept of stalking is a first step, but as the commission has pointed out in a number of ways, we will only improve with systemic change, with a government that leans into not just a reframing of the offence as a first step but quite a dramatic

intervention into this space. We do require a very dramatic intervention here, and that will include things like public education in a similar way, frankly, to family violence and strong government investment into the area and also to all of the adjacent services to ensure that the resources are properly equipped.

There are many other recommendations, and though I am tempted to them read in, others I am sure would prefer to take the opportunity. But I do note for the house's interest that it is worth looking at the work of the commission. It is an astonishing piece of work, and I think most of it you could pick up today. Not every single recommendation in its entirety works to perhaps what we would need to implement if we had a magic wand tomorrow, but a lot of it you could immediately pick up and it would bring about significant reform to this issue.

In my brief remarks on the bill, I again note that the coalition will not be opposing the bill. I have gone to a number of amendments that I think are very strong in this bill, though in relation to stalking it is a step rather than many steps and I do hope this is an area for future reform.

Ros SPENCE (Kalkallo – Minister for Agriculture, Minister for Community Sport, Minister for Carers and Volunteers) (18:43): I am very pleased to speak tonight on the Justice Legislation Amendment (Family Violence, Stalking and Other Matters) Bill 2025, and I am really pleased that the Shadow Attorney-General has indicated that those opposite will not be opposing this really important bill.

This bill, as we have heard, delivers reforms across our justice system to improve how we respond to family violence, stalking and sexual offences. It strengthens protections for victim-survivors and it closes the gaps in the law. Our government is committed to ending family violence in all forms. We have implemented the 227 recommendations of the Royal Commission into Family Violence, and we have made the largest investment of any government across the country into both prevention and response. But we also know that the job is not done. Family violence remains the number one law and order issue in our state.

This bill reflects extensive consultation with experts, advocates, front line workers and, most importantly, people with lived experience. I want to take this opportunity to thank them for their contribution and their courage. From a family violence perspective, this bill broadens the definition of family violence to include stalking, the mistreatment of animals and systems abuse. It ensures that young people do not age out of their parents' family violence intervention order on their 18th birthday, and I know that this initiative in particular will be welcomed by young victim-survivor Conor Pall, who has advocated for this change. I would recommend his book *The Shadow that Follows* to anyone who is interested. It is a book that I have provided to all of my schools in my electorate, and I encourage others to do so.

The bill clarifies that courts can make family violence intervention orders when the offending behaviour occurs outside of Victoria, and it improves the service of family violence intervention orders so that protection can start sooner, including to perpetrators who are in prison. In relation to stalking, the bill updates the stalking offence to improve clarity and application. It extends witness protections currently available in sexual offence and family violence proceedings to stalking matters. In relation to sexual offences, the bill improves jury directions, including cases involving non-fatal strangulation and intimate image offences. It allows for alternate verdicts in sexual offence trials – for example, an alternative verdict of sexual assault can be made in a rape trial. It helps to safely include parents, guardians and carers of people who have experienced sexual violence by allowing notice to be provided to someone other than the protected person. These are substantial reforms, and each plays a really important role in strengthening our justice system and improving safety.

As the minister with responsibility for animal welfare in Victoria, I want to speak in more depth about the strengthened recognition of how animals are used in the perpetration of family violence. It is well recognised by researchers, frontline workers and by many victim-survivors that animals are often

targeted as a tool of coercion and control. Under existing law, courts have broad discretion to include conditions on a family violence intervention order relating to animals. But stakeholders have been really clear: the legislation needs to do more to ensure the everyday, often less visible forms of harm involving animals are properly recognised and prevented. This bill delivers that.

First, it expands the definition of family violence to include the mistreatment of animals, not just direct violence, but the behaviours perpetrators commonly use: withholding food, water or medication; threatening to harm or dispose of an animal; or selling, abandoning or surrendering an animal in order to cause distress or exert control. Second, it clarifies that the courts may impose specific conditions on family violence intervention orders that directly address these behaviours – for example, prohibiting a perpetrator from using an animal to commit family violence, preventing a perpetrator from coming within a certain distance of an animal, or directing a perpetrator to return an animal along with any necessary supplies for the animal’s care and wellbeing.

Importantly, these protections apply to any animal, not just companion animals as defined in the family law act, and that is deliberate. We know perpetrators will target the animal that will cause the greatest anguish or have the most impact, whether that is a pet, an assistance animal, livestock or wildlife. Any animal that is relied on emotionally or for livelihood can be weaponised by the perpetrator. This reform recognises the full spectrum of how animals are used through family violence to inflict harm. It ensures our courts have the tools they need to intervene.

Alongside legislative reform, community organisations play a crucial role in supporting victim-survivors escaping from family violence with their pets. I would like to take the opportunity to thank them for this important work. In particular I want to acknowledge Second Chance Animal Rescue, or SCAR, in my local community. It is just outside my electorate, but it is in the very safe hands of the member for Greenvale. SCAR runs the Safe House for Pets program, providing emergency boarding for animals when their owners are facing crisis, including family violence. This service means that a victim-survivor does not have to choose between escaping violence and keeping their beloved pet safe. SCAR not only provides care and comfort during emergencies, it works to reunite pets with their owners when it is safe to do so, and it partners with local agencies and provides resources to people fleeing violence. Their work reflects the deep bond that people share with their animals, and the painful reality that perpetrators exploit that bond.

I was talking to SCAR CEO Marisa Debattista just this week about what this bill means to them, and she was very clear that this was an important amendment to the current settings. They are seeing more frequent instances of animals needing emergency boarding for family violence reasons. Last week alone, they provided family violence emergency boarding to 12 animals. The abuse towards the animals that they are seeing is physical, such as being thrown against a wall, verbal, which can result in an ongoing fear of loud voices, and even sexual.

All of these forms of abuse are abhorrent, and sadly it is common for these animals to present with a fear of men. This bill also goes to the other forms of abuse that SCAR are frequently seeing, such as emotional abuse and threats – threats of violence, threats of removal, threats to kill the animal or threats to kill the person and the animal. I thank SCAR and every organisation like them for their compassion and for the practical support they offer when it is needed most, and I am pleased that this bill recognises the broader mistreatment of animals as family violence.

This bill strengthens our justice system. It improves protections and better supports those who have experienced the trauma of family violence, stalking and sexual offending. It reflects the voices of victim-survivors who have told us with courage what needs to change. It takes away yet another tool for manipulation and coercion and another reason why victim-survivors feel unable to leave an unsafe environment. It reflects our government’s unwavering commitment to listening, learning and acting to prevent violence and to support all of those that are affected by it. The reforms relating to animals are a critical part of that work. They acknowledge the reality of how perpetrators operate, and they ensure our laws provide clear, robust and compassionate protections. I commend the bill to the house.

Michael O'BRIEN (Malvern) (18:51): This is a very important bill that has come before the house. I do note, with deference to my friend the member for Brighton, the current Shadow Attorney-General, that I am the former Shadow Attorney-General, and I remember three years ago when the Victorian Law Reform Commission (VLRC) handed down its very important report on non-family related stalking. Of course the genesis of that report was the tragic death, the shocking murder, of Celeste Manno. I pay tribute to Celeste's mother Aggie Di Mauro, who has never wavered and never given up in her fight to see justice for her daughter.

James Newbury interjected.

Michael O'BRIEN: As the member for Brighton said, she is an amazing individual. I have met with Aggie. She is a very powerful and passionate advocate for her daughter, and she does not want anybody else to go through what her daughter and her family have had to go through as a result of that murder. I think that the matter is now concluded before the courts, even though the perpetrator did try a lot of tricks and legal technicalities to try and put off his day of reckoning. If that individual ever sees the outside of a prison, it will be a day too soon.

As a result of the advocacy of Aggie, the government referred this matter to the Victorian Law Reform Commission, because of course Celeste Manno was working at a call centre and the person who became fixated on her was a fellow employee – in fact somebody who was I think sacked. It was as a result of that work relationship that this individual became aware of Celeste's existence, and that was what then ended up in the tragic murder of Celeste.

While we rightly treat family violence as an extremely serious matter, there was I think seen to be a gap in relation to non-family violence stalking matters. So the government, I think quite rightly, in response to Aggie Di Mauro's advocacy, referred these matters for a report by the Victorian Law Reform Commission. That report came down in September 2022, three years ago. I remember asking questions in this place and putting out press statements and having my colleagues in the other place ask questions of the then Attorney-General, the now Treasurer, about when the government was going to respond to the 45 recommendations that were made by the Victorian Law Reform Commission.

The fact is the government to this day refuses to respond to those recommendations. The government has decided that it is going to cherry-pick. It might pick up one or two here or there. I think this bill acquits two out of those 45 recommendations. What is the status of the other 43? I think that not just Aggie Di Mauro but all Victorians deserve an answer to that question. There were 45 recommendations in that report – not two, 45 – and the government really I think has an obligation.

The government can say it does not have a legal obligation to respond to a VLRC report. I think it has a political and a moral obligation, particularly when we are talking about a subject matter as critical and important to the safety of Victorians, particularly Victorian women, as non-family violence related stalking. So I do ask the government not to think that we are going to let this slide. Do not think that acquitting two out of 45 recommendations is going to be sufficient for this side of the house. We believe those recommendations were all as a result of a lengthy process by the VLRC, consideration by experts and consideration by and consultation with the public and various stakeholders, and I think it is quite disrespectful to the Victorian Law Reform Commission for the government to fail to respond to the remaining 43 recommendations. I think that should be done. We are already three years late, member for Brighton, aren't we? But those recommendations should be responded to and responded to quickly.

In relation to these matters, we do think that there are some positive changes in here. The bill makes a series of amendments in relation to family violence matters that we do not think should be opposed. We are concerned that the additional measures in relation to stalking perhaps do not go quite far enough to achieve the systemic change that we are looking for, that I think Victorians are looking for and that I think the VLRC is looking for as well. I know there are a number of recommendations in the VLRC report that call for additional funding for the Magistrates' Court to be provided to assist

them. The Magistrates' Court is really the workhorse when it comes to dealing with a lot of family violence and non-family violence related matters, as in stalking, and some of the recommendations in that VLRC report directly go to the question of additional funding for the Magistrates' Court to implement a number of programs.

Unfortunately, far from increasing funding to the Magistrates' Court, we have seen the funding to Court Services Victoria being reduced. We have seen cuts to courts from this government. In fact the CEO of Court Services Victoria appeared before the Public Accounts and Estimates Committee earlier this year and admitted that this Labor government's cuts to courts were going to have an impact on the operations of courts. I do not think I am paraphrasing Ms Anderson too much when I say her response was, essentially, 'We have to work out which of our current operations we are going to stop doing,' because that is the impact of those financial cuts being imposed by this Allan Labor government on our Victorian court system.

We heard some members from the western side of Melbourne loudly proclaiming how proud they are of the new Wyndham law courts. I remember going out there – I think it was over a year ago now. The Wyndham law courts were finished; the trouble was that this government did not have the money to actually fund the opening of them. It like an episode of *Yes Minister*: the most efficient hospital in *Yes Minister* was the one that did not have any patients. This was a very efficient law court which was not open to the public, was not open to the profession, did not have any magistrates. It was a beautiful shiny building. If anything sort of sums up this government's inability to get things right on things that matter, it is having a brand new set of law courts which are absolutely desperately needed in the west of Melbourne given the population growth there, but seeing that the opening of those courts was delayed significantly by months and months and months because this government failed to fund the operations of the opening of the courts.

I note that one of the recommendations of the Victorian Law Reform Commission was that:

The Victorian Government should provide all necessary assistance to the Magistrates' Court of Victoria to enable the Court to develop evidence-informed guidance for identifying and prioritising non-family violence stalking in personal safety intervention order matters.

That is a really critical recommendation, and it is not addressed in this bill. The government has failed to indicate whether it supports that recommendation and whether it will in fact provide that additional funding and additional support that is required. And there is an explicit recommendation that:

The Victorian Government should resource the Magistrates' Court of Victoria to implement Recommendation 11.

So the VLRC –

The DEPUTY SPEAKER: Order! I am required under sessional orders to interrupt the member now. The member for Malvern will have the call when the matter returns to the house.

Business interrupted under sessional orders.

Adjournment

The DEPUTY SPEAKER: The question is:

That the house now adjourns.

Wombat protection

Nicole WERNER (Warrandyte) (19:00): (1429) My matter is for the Minister for Environment, and the action I seek is the reinstatement of ongoing adequate funding for Mange Management Victoria. It is an adjournment matter that I have raised before, and again I am here to fight for our local wombats in Warrandyte and across the state. The plight of our local wombats was raised with me by a fierce local wildlife crusader Michelle Evans from the volunteer-run organisation Mange Management Victoria. I met Michelle months ago at a trivia night for Warrandyte High School with

her husband Tim, who had forewarned me at the start of night that his wife was needing to speak with me about a political issue. Of course that can mean anything in the life of a politician and sometimes can be an ominous warning to receive, but in this instance I was very glad to meet Michelle and for her to raise the issue of mange management in wombats with me.

Since I last raised this issue I acknowledge that the government has indicated it will provide some funding to mange management, and I was so glad to receive that happy news from Michelle, who wrote to tell me so on World Wombat Day, which was very special. That is a positive step, and as always the volunteers are ever grateful. However, the amount that they have been given is not enough to meet the reality of what they are dealing with on the ground. The team at Mange Management Victoria have written to me to say:

The government has pledged \$50K per year for two years to support wombat treatment ... we're still waiting on the formal funding agreement. We will use the funds equally to cover our part-time admin person and the other half for medicines and treatment kits. We haven't been given a reason for the \$50K limit.

While we're of course so very grateful for their support, there will still be a shortfall of around \$100,000 just to maintain our current work. As you know, medicines are expensive – around \$100 per treatment – and with 1,600 cases reported last year, the costs add up quickly.

They then go on to say:

The NSW Government has recognised the seriousness of this crisis and committed \$2.8 million to its Curb Wombat Mange program, funding research, training, and treatment across the state. Here in Victoria, the problem is just as widespread, and the need is real.

Unfortunately a token contribution cannot sustain a statewide response to a disease that is spreading, accelerating and entirely fatal to wombats without treatment. Again, I thank Mange Management Victoria for their work. They have built a practical community-based response that empowers landholders, wildlife carers, farmers and volunteers to treat affected wombats and save their lives. It was wonderful to see their work honoured at the Community Bank Warrandyte's annual awards night, where just this week secretary Katja Gutwein spoke about the incredible work they do. So the action I seek is clear: that the minister not only reinstates the funding but ensures that it is adequate, ongoing and reflective of the true cost of managing sarcoptic mange.

Delacombe housing development

Juliana ADDISON (Wendouree) (19:03): (1430) My adjournment matter is directed to the Minister for Housing Ms Shing in the other place. The action I seek is for the minister to visit my electorate of Wendouree to see the progress of the Delacombe estate revitalisation project, part of the Allan Labor government's landmark Big Housing Build. With demolition complete and site works already underway, it would be a great time for the minister to visit. The Delacombe estate, particularly the Leawarra neighbourhood, has long been home to many families in Ballarat; however, much of the housing stock, which was built in the 1970s, is no longer fit for purpose. That is why the Allan Labor government is investing in a transformation of the estate, ensuring that residents have access to safe, modern and sustainable homes. This redevelopment will deliver 181 new homes in Delacombe, including a mix of one-, two-, three- and even four-bedroom dwellings; accessible housing, with at least 5 per cent of homes specifically designed for Victorians living with a disability; energy-efficient and environmentally sustainable designs, reducing costs for renters and supporting Victoria's climate goals; upgraded open spaces and high-quality streets, improving connectivity and creating a welcoming neighbourhood for families. This redevelopment is not just about bricks and mortar, it is about dignity, opportunity and community. It is about ensuring that older women, Aboriginal Victorians, people living with a disability and those at risk of homelessness have access to secure housing in Ballarat. Minister, I look forward to welcoming you to the Wendouree electorate to promote how the Allan Labor government is delivering more social and affordable housing in my community.

Protective services officers

Michael O'BRIEN (Malvern) (19:05): (1431) My adjournment is directed to the Minister for Police, and the action I seek is for him to list which of the 11 train stations in my Malvern electorate will have protective services officers stripped away in whole or in part by the Allan Labor government. The introduction of PSOs on metropolitan train stations from 6 pm to the last train was a very important policy of the Baillieu Liberal–Nationals government. Years of neglect under Labor had seen train stations become places of danger, not places of safety. Too many people, particularly women and children, did not feel safe at night waiting for a train on a dark station platform or walking through a dark car park. Tragically, very serious crimes occurred. As an example, in 2019, 8798 offences were committed on public transport in Victoria, including a homicide, 10 rapes and over 1200 assaults. So the Liberal government hired over 940 new PSOs to ensure that every metropolitan train station and major regional station had at least two PSOs patrolling from 6 pm until the last train, seven days a week. This initiative made a massive difference to the safety of public transport users, but it was opposed by the then Labor opposition. A former Labor Minister for Police, no less, derided PSOs in this very chamber and disgracefully called them plastic policemen. Well, Labor was wrong, our policy worked and Victorians were safe, and Labor once elected felt compelled to continue with our PSO policy.

But Labor has always looked for an opportunity to crab walk away from a Liberal policy that they always opposed, and now they are doing just that. The *Age* reported on Sunday 16 November in 'Most train stations to lose permanent night patrols' that 120 train stations across Melbourne are to have their PSOs stripped away. Instead, one team of PSOs are to be spread across six stations every night. So commuters will only have a one-in-six chance of having a PSO presence when they get off a train at night at 120 stations. This is Labor's PSO lotto, but they are playing games with the safety of Victorians. Researcher Dr Rumana Sarker said:

Our research showed having a PSO at a train station is what made women feel safest.

Labor is now stripping that away. The Police Association Victoria secretary Wayne Gatt also criticised Labor's policy. The police minister said crime in train stations largely occurred in the afternoon. That is the point: when you have PSOs at every station at night, you get less crime. Labor's PSO lotto policy will put commuters at greater risk of serious crime, and I want to know which Malvern stations are having that protection stripped away by an uncaring Allan Labor government.

Werribee electorate schools

John LISTER (Werribee) (19:08): (1432) My adjournment matter is for the Minister for Education, and the action I seek is for the minister to provide me an update on the school upgrades funded by the Labor government in this year's budget in my electorate. I know better than most that having a proper learning environment is essential. No government in the history of this state, nay, our federation, has invested in our school infrastructure like this Labor government. The City of Wyndham saw the most new schools open anywhere in Victoria last year. We are not just constructing the space for learning but also funding the programs to build supportive school communities, including the recently announced work around new schools that have opened that are expanding their hours and programs, running outside of school time, which is something I am proud to see. In my first few months as an MP I advocated for school upgrades to Riverwalk, Walcom Ngarra and the mighty Manorvale Primary School. Between meeting with the Victorian School Building Authority, the minister's office and the department, I was pleased to see these projects included in the budget. These projects are not just about having four walls and a roof, they are about creating a space where people can thrive and learn and call it their own. I look forward to receiving this update from the minister, and I will continue to work in government, fighting for my community.

Rubicon solar farm

Cindy McLEISH (Eildon) (19:09): (1433) I have a matter tonight for the Minister for Planning, and the action I seek is for the minister to meet with local landholders in Rubicon to discuss their

considerable concerns about a solar panel farm being established along the Taggerty-Thornton and Rubicon roads in Thornton. Residents are desperate for you to understand their concerns and realise why the establishment of such a huge project is inappropriate in the Rubicon Valley. There is a proposal currently by SREA, a subsidiary of the Samsung conglomerate – I guess you would say that is a corporate giant – to construct an industrial-scale solar farm and battery energy storage system in the Rubicon Valley. This is not about being anti-renewables at all, this is about considerable concerns that local residents have.

I attended a meeting with residents at the Thornton football club on 8 November, and there were probably about 30 or so people there. I was hearing that when they had had meetings with the representatives they did not have any answers to the questions that were raised by the community. It looks like it is a 300-hectare project, which could have between 140,000 and 200,000 solar panels. This is in a very beautiful, idyllic part of the state. People are worried, because they have said that Samsung and SREA have a poor global sustainability and ethical record, and this further undermines their confidence in their ability to manage this project responsibly.

The fire hazard concerns were very real; the proposed site lies within a very high bushfire risk area, and it is surrounded by farmland in one area and dense forest and steep terrain on the other. The inclusion of lithium batteries and transformers introduces a severe fire and explosion hazard. The district has only one road in and out, making evacuation during a fire or emergency event very dangerous. They also lack the resources and capacity to contain a transformer or lithium battery fire, which could endanger lives, destroy property, and cause long-term environmental damage to this part of the state. Further, there are two schools in that area, Camp Jungai and the Rubicon Outdoor School, and they are one road in, one road out. It is very difficult to evacuate people should there be a need. Residents asked me to ask the Minister for Planning if she would come to Rubicon or meet with them in Thornton to look at the area and to meet with the residents and understand their concerns. They realise now that they have very little say and the sign-off rests with the Minister for Planning. Council do not have much of an input, and they want the Minister for Planning to absolutely understand their concerns for this project.

Women's health

Alison MARCHANT (Bellarine) (19:12): (1434) My adjournment matter is for the Minister for Health, and the action I seek is for the minister to provide an update on how the recently released findings from the landmark inquiry into women's pain will benefit women and girls in the Bellarine. Just before I continue, though, I would like to acknowledge Alison Vong, a student from the University of Melbourne who has assisted me in preparing this adjournment for tonight.

The women's pain inquiry was the first of its kind in Australia and led by Safer Care Victoria and the inquiry into women's pain subcommittee in collaboration with Victorian Women's Health Advisory Council and the Department of Health. The inquiry gathered insights from over 13,000 women, girls, carers, healthcare professionals, peak bodies and researchers and unveiled the experience of women and girls with pain conditions and accessing pain relief. The findings were striking: over 90 per cent of respondents reported experiencing pain lasting longer than a year, with 54 per cent living with pain every single day. Even more concerning, 71 per cent of participants cited widespread dismissal from healthcare professionals. Overall, the report found five key learnings: unmet healthcare needs, gaps in research and representation, gender bias in health care, barriers across communities and a call for change. While these findings are not entirely surprising, I am relieved that we now have robust research confirming what women and girls have been saying and experiencing for years. The report has also made 27 recommendations aimed at guiding system-wide improvements to bridging the gender pain gap and ensure that women's pain is recognised, understood and appropriately addressed. I look forward to receiving an update from the minister on how these findings and recommendations, including in the inquiry into women's pain report, will benefit the women and girls across the Bellarine.

Melbourne electorate cultural relocations

Ellen SANDELL (Melbourne) (19:14): (1435) My adjournment matter tonight is to the Minister for Development Victoria and Precincts, and the action I am seeking is for the minister to cease the plans to evict two important local cultural institutions in my electorate: Victoria's heritage fleet and the Royal Melbourne Philharmonic Choir & Orchestra. They are being evicted from government-owned buildings in locations in my electorate.

Victoria's heritage fleet in Docklands is an invaluable community asset. The fleet contains consists of three ships: the *Alma Doepel*, the *Enterprize* and the steam tug *Wattle*. For more than a century these ships have played an iconic part in Victoria's maritime history. The *Alma Doepel* has been a regular sight in Victoria Harbour in Docklands since 1916 and has had her home at port here since 1975 – 50 years; in fact people may not know that the height of the Bolte Bridge was determined due to the height of the *Alma Doepel*'s masts.

These ships have gone from being active trading vessels to training ships, offering transformative learning experiences for young Victorians. Not-for-profit operators have been restoring the *Alma Doepel* in Docklands for the past 16 years.

But the fleet faces an existential crisis. Earlier this year Development Victoria gave operators just four months notice to vacate the wharf to make way for Lendlease's ongoing Collins Wharf development. They got a brief stay of execution, but now have only until 18 January to vacate their shared workshops. Development Victoria has provided next to nothing in the way of relocation and rent support. The next best location is Seaworks in Williamstown, which is not available until mid 2026, so they do not have a home until then, and is also not affordable. Labor cannot evict this fleet. It is an important part of Melbourne's history, and it is time for the minister to step in.

Sadly, Labor stands to evict not just one but two iconic cultural institutions in my electorate. The Royal Melbourne Philharmonic choir and orchestra is one of the oldest continuously run cultural organisations in the entire world. Since launching in 1853, they have performed all sorts of historic events, including the Great Centennial Exhibition of 1888, the opening of the Australian Parliament in 1901 and the 1956 Olympic Games. And the fun fact? The RMP also holds the world record for the number of unbroken annual performances of Handel's *Messiah*. It will be their 246th performance this year, but sadly it also might be their last unless the Labor government reconsiders an eviction notice, because this government wants to kick out the RMP and several other organisations from the Drill Hall in the CBD just so they can repurpose the venue.

RMP still has not found a new home or received any support from the government. In fact none of the groups know why they are being kicked out or what they are meant to do now. They want to know why the Labor government does not value these organisations in the same way it values the grand prix, greyhound racing or the Melbourne Cup. I call on the minister to stop the eviction of the Royal Melbourne Philharmonic orchestra – (*Time expired*)

Coburg development

Anthony CIANFLONE (Pascoe Vale) (19:17): (1436) My adjournment matter is for the Minister for Planning, and the action I seek is for the minister to visit my electorate to further consider local views and community feedback in relation to our vision to revitalise central Coburg. Further to my previous contributions, I continue to very much elevate and convey the views of all locals who have continued to contact me in relation to these central Coburg and Sydney Road, Brunswick, draft activity centre plans for Sydney Road with the Coburg and Brunswick community reference groups calling for the revitalisation of Coburg Street mall; better local transport services, including via the Upfield line; accessible trams and buses; better and safer connections and provisions for cyclists, pedestrians and vulnerable road users; measures to improve community safety and perceptions of safety, including through lighting, CCTV and other measures; and the need for ongoing local consultation and close engagement as plans are finalised and progressed over future years, including with key stakeholders

through the central Coburg precinct, such as the Presentation of Our Lord Greek Orthodox parish within central Coburg.

Along with this feedback, I also draw the minister's attention to the views I have received from other residents throughout Coburg, including those residing in the vicinity of Moreland station and the Glencairn Estate, who were advocating on (1) better public transport – again, the Upfield line; (2) about issues around congestion, traffic and car parking; (3) local infrastructure around health – and I acknowledge the federal government's Medicare urgent care clinic commitment for Coburg, our free pharmacy program for our community and our commitment to deliver a future adult mental health hub in Coburg; (4) more open spaces, parks and tree canopy; (5) mitigating issues around potential new development, heights, density, overshadowing and privacy; (6) preserving and enhancing local heritage, ambience and livability; and (7) the need for the final activity centre map catchment and zones to better reflect and complement existing local nuance, streetscapes, built landscapes, density and heritage profiles, particularly where existing low-rise neighbourhood and heritage areas are proposed to interface with the train and tram core zone, the inner catchment zone and the outer catchment zone. This is a particularly important priority for those residing in existing streets that are narrow in width, dead-end in length or originally designed for smaller or moderate-scale housing developments.

Locals have raised concerns that some aspects of the proposed activity centre plans are not sensitive enough to current pressure points and future needs of the area, with many highlighting the need for appropriate and sensitive height transition between the catchment zones. Many call for a more street-by-street analysis that recognises the opportunities and differences but also challenges within our micro neighbourhoods.

I look forward to highlighting these priorities with the minister, but I want to reassure residents, firstly, these are draft plans, which is exactly why we are consulting and listening. No decisions have been made. The maps have been released in draft to ensure locals' knowledge can help further refine the boundaries, heights and safeguards before anything is made final. Secondly, I have been informed that community feedback will very much be closely considered as the plans are finalised next year. Thirdly, these long-term plans are to help guide future housing development over coming decades, not overnight. The fact is what is being proposed is not a development plan, but rather a planning amendment. This means giving parameters around future planning applications rather than directly proposing or instigating developments. It also means gradual growth over decades to come, close to public transport. Fourth, it is about highlighting and continuing to invest in local services.

Mornington Tourist Railway

Chris CREWTER (Mornington) (19:20): (1437) My adjournment matter is for the Minister for Public and Active Transport. The action I seek is for the minister to visit Mornington Tourist Railway to meet with volunteers and me and to support them to repair and reopen the existing railway line between Baxter and Moorooduc stations. My electorate in Mornington along with the electorate of Mildura, where I used to live, are the only two electorates in the whole of Victoria with zero passenger rail services. We are fortunate though in the Mornington electorate that the Mornington Tourist Railway have maintained and upgraded the line between Moorooduc and Mornington for tourist railway services with diesel and steam trains, and they continue to do that on a regular basis. The original Mornington line was closed in 1981, before I was born, but the Mornington station where it is now – even though the original Mornington station has now been built over – and where the tourist railway goes is now the epicentre of Mornington, given significant growth on the eastern Nepean Highway since that time over 40 years ago.

The Mornington Tourist Railway have basically said that all they need is about \$8 million to \$9 million, versus hundreds of millions of dollars if this was done by government, to fix the railway line that is there now between Baxter station and Moorooduc station. This would enable trains to get to Baxter as they do already. You get a Metro electrified train to Frankston, and then you get the

V/Line train to Baxter. Then people can get on the tourist railway line and enjoy that, whether it is diesel or steam, between Baxter and Mornington. What is more, it actually opens up the way for the return of passenger rail services, but on a very cheap scale; that is, people can then get a regular passenger rail service through to Frankston and then potentially continue on a V/Line service from Frankston all the way through to Mornington via Baxter.

This has strong support in the community, and it is the strong support of the community that I support as well. For many, many years now I have been a significant advocate for passenger rail. When I was in Mildura in the north-west of Victoria I advocated for the Murray Basin rail project, which was not only for freight but also would have opened the way for passenger rail services. While that was not done well and had a significant overspend, I would hope that services can be reintroduced there, and I state that in particular as the Shadow Assistant Minister for Public Transport. But I also used to be the north-west rail line spokesperson calling for the rail service to be restored between Maryborough and Mildura.

I will go back to the local railway line, though. This is a railway line that needs to be restored. We have a significant lack of bus and rail services in the Mornington electorate. In the past I was an advocate for the Baxter railway service duplication and electrification, which was scrapped by the Albanese Labor government – even though I secured hundreds of millions of dollars for that project – because it was not also supported by the state Labor government. Fortunately though I was able to ensure that the Kananook and Frankston commuter car parks were able to go ahead to help service the people who have to drive up to those stations to get railway services. I do urge the minister to take seriously the concerns of my local constituents.

Creative industries

Meng Heang TAK (Clarinda) (19:23): (1438) My adjournment matter is for the Minister for Creative Industries, and the action I seek is for the minister to provide the latest update on Touring Victoria funding for 2026. There is always great interest in this funding stream in Clarinda district. We have some fantastic local businesses and tour companies, such as Nicholas Clark Management, a great local business that works in tour development, management and bookings across the state and across the country. I catch up with the company director Nic from time to time when he is in Melbourne, and it is always fantastic to hear about the brilliant creative work taking place in this company and the amazing performances that they have completed recently and have coming up.

I know that they have an exciting tour program proposed for next year, with visits planned across the state with performances, workshops and community engagement. I understand that next year they will also be visiting western regional Victoria, which will be exciting for some of my colleagues here. Their program is headlined by a tour of the Helpmann Award-winning *Robot Song*, which is featured in the 2026 Victorian Curriculum and Assessment Authority VCE playlist for secondary schools and fresh from a season at the Brooklyn Academy of Music in New York. As well there is innovative regional Victorian circus with *The Farmy Farm*, *Level Up* and *In Common*. Also return touring is my favourite, *IMAGINE LIVE*, adapted from the book by iconic Victorian Alison Lester OAM; *Velveteen Rabbit*, by the celebrated Born in a Taxi; and *The Alphabet of Awesome Science*.

The creative arts are alive in the electorate of Clarinda and across Victoria, and you can see that on display with Nic's passion. I am really happy that Creative Victoria has supported projects in the Clarinda district previously and has delivered a lot of positive benefits locally in our community and across the state. I thank the minister and look forward to his response.

Responses

Vicki WARD (Eltham – Minister for Emergency Services, Minister for Natural Disaster Recovery, Minister for Equality) (19:26): The member for Warrandyte had an adjournment matter for the Minister for Environment to provide additional funding for mange management of wombats in her community. The member for Wendouree's matter was for the Minister for Housing and Building,

asking the minister to visit her community of Wendouree's Delacombe estate redevelopment. The member for Malvern sought for the Minister for Police to advise as to whether any of the 11 stations in his electorate will not be staffed by PSOs of an evening. The member for Werribee asked that the Minister for Education get an update on school upgrades in his electorate funded in this year's state budget. The member for Eildon's action was for the Minister for Planning, asking that the minister meet with the local landholders in Rubicon regarding a solar farm. The member for Bellarine's adjournment matter was for the Minister for Health, and the action she sought was an update on how the landmark inquiry into women's pain will support women in her community. The member for Melbourne sought for the Minister for Development Victoria and Precincts to walk away from redevelopment plans at Collins Wharf in her electorate which means the relocation of community groups. The member for Pascoe Vale's action was for the Minister for Planning, inviting the minister to visit his electorate and discuss planning issues with his local community. The member for Mornington's matter was for the Minister for Public and Active Transport, asking for the minister to visit Mornington and discuss the reopening of the Mornington Tourist Railway. And the member for Clarinda asked for the Minister for Creative Industries to provide the latest update on Creative Victoria funding that can support his community. I will refer these all on to the relevant ministers. Thank you very much.

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

House adjourned 7:28 pm.