



Hansard

LEGISLATIVE COUNCIL

60th Parliament

Wednesday 15 November 2023

Members of the Legislative Council

60th Parliament

President

Shaun Leane

Deputy President

Wendy Lovell

Leader of the Government in the Legislative Council

Jaclyn Symes

Deputy Leader of the Government in the Legislative Council

Lizzie Blandthorn

Leader of the Opposition in the Legislative Council

Georgie Crozier

Deputy Leader of the Opposition in the Legislative Council

Evan Mulholland (from 31 August 2023)

Matthew Bach (to 31 August 2023)

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

¹ Lib until 27 March 2023

² LDP until 26 July 2023

Party abbreviations

AJP – Animal Justice Party; ALP – Australian Labor Party; DLP – Democratic Labour Party;

Greens – Australian Greens; IndLib – Independent Liberal; LCV – Legalise Cannabis Victoria;

LDP – Liberal Democratic Party; Lib – Liberal Party of Australia; LP – Libertarian Party;

Nat – National Party of Australia; PHON – Pauline Hanson's One Nation; SFFP – Shooters, Fishers and Farmers Party

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Wednesday 15 November 2023

The PRESIDENT (Shaun Leane) took the chair at 9:32 am, read the prayer and made an acknowledgement of country.

Petitions

Gas supply

David LIMBRICK (South-Eastern Metropolitan) presented a petition bearing 3808 signatures:

The Petition of certain citizens of the State of Victoria draws to the attention of the Legislative Council that the Government is wrongly abolishing natural gas supply to new homes as of 1 January 2024. This decision has been rushed with no parliamentary debate or oversight. The five months' notice has given little lead in time to Victorian homeowners, construction works and gas suppliers. Gas is a vital infrastructure need for Victorians as it is a source of heating and cooking and employs many workers to gas sites throughout regional Victoria. It must continue in the foreseeable future.

The petitioners therefore request that the Legislative Council call on the Government to reject the decision made to stop natural gas connection to new dwellings from 1 January 2024, conduct a parliamentary debate on the matter and reject any regulations created to enact this change.

David LIMBRICK: I move:

That the petition be taken into consideration on the next day of meeting.

Motion agreed to.

Papers

Papers

Tabled by Clerk:

Auditor-General – Employee Health and Wellbeing in Victorian Public Hospitals, November 2023 (*Ordered to be published*).

Interpretation of Legislation Act 1984 – Notice pursuant to section 32(3) in relation to Statutory Rule No. 107 (*Gazette G45, 9 November 2023*).

Ombudsman – Investigation into a Building Permit complaint, November 2023 (*Ordered to be published*).

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

Ballarat Planning Scheme – Amendment C235.

Campaspe Planning Scheme – Amendment C120.

Casey Planning Scheme – Amendment C288.

Greater Geelong Planning Scheme – Amendment C427.

Macedon Ranges Planning Scheme – Amendment C156.

Maroondah Planning Scheme – Amendment C144.

Melton Planning Scheme – Amendment C240.

Statutory Rules under the following Acts –

Environment Protection Act 2017 – No. 115.

Social Services Regulation Act 2021 – Nos. 113 and 114.

Subordinate Legislation Act 1994 – Documents under section 15 in respect of Statutory Rule No. 116.

Victorian Curriculum and Assessment Authority – Report, 2021–22.

Business of the house

Notices

Notices of motion given.

*Members statements***Remembrance Day**

Sonja TERPSTRA (North-Eastern Metropolitan) (09:45): I just want to remark and update the chamber that I attended in my electorate a very important and moving Remembrance Day ceremony on Saturday in the electorate of Croydon, which is in my region. It was fantastic to see the newly relocated war memorial that has been moved from near Coolstore Road to its new home near the library in Town Park. I give a big shout-out to the level crossing removal team for how they very lovingly and carefully moved that war memorial and restored it. Can I say all the veterans and the diggers who attended that ceremony on Saturday were so happy with the results. It is fantastic to see that this will now mean that more people can access this war memorial at times when they want to pay their respects to returned service people. Previously this war memorial was actually in the middle of a roundabout, which is pretty weird and random. Now that it has been moved to its new home at Town Park it is fantastic to see. It was a very well attended service, and it was fantastic.

I also got the opportunity to donate to the Croydon RSL a lone pine tree. I cannot wait to see them work with the council to find a home for that lone pine tree. It is such an important thing for those diggers and returned service people to reflect on and for all of us more broadly to commemorate and pay our respects to their service.

Remembrance Day

Joe McCRACKEN (Western Victoria) (09:47): I would like to pay tribute to those who served and have fallen as well, because Remembrance Day services were held across the country over the weekend. I attended two in Ballarat, and they were very moving services as well. One actually had the rededication of one of the small shrines at the Arch of Victory, which if you do not know is a well-known World War I monument in Ballarat. I also want to acknowledge all the volunteers that made it come together. It was a very, very significant service, and there were a lot of members of the community there.

Diwali

Joe McCRACKEN (Western Victoria) (09:47): Secondly, I want to acknowledge those that celebrated Diwali over the weekend as well. There were massive celebrations across Western Victoria. I certainly had representatives from the Indian community contact me. They offered me a beautiful gift for Diwali, so I want to put that on the record too – that a lot of our Hindu community should be acknowledged. We celebrate with them to bring the festival of Diwali to them.

Ballarat Nepalese community

Joe McCRACKEN (Western Victoria) (09:47): I also want to acknowledge the Nepalese community in Ballarat, who held their first community event just last week. I was very pleased to be guest of honour there. It was an amazing event, with lights and colour, singing and dancing and music and awesome food. I want to pay tribute to the Nepalese community, because it was the first one they have had, and it was a great community event. There were hundreds of people there, and it was just awesome to see them blossoming and growing in the Ballarat community. We support them 110 per cent.

Prawn eyestalk ablation

Georgie PURCELL (Northern Victoria) (09:48): I have been waiting for my opportunity to talk about prawns in this place. They are amazing creatures – so much so that I have one tattooed on my arm. But not everyone feels the same way that I do, and that is why I want to talk to you all today about eyestalk ablation and hopefully enlighten some in this place to take prawns off their plate. Eyestalk ablation is a practice performed by prawn farms that involves literally cutting the eyestalks off prawns without pain relief in order to make them breed faster and therefore produce more prawns. This is because a female prawn has a hormonal gland behind her eye that moderates reproduction,

only allowing her to breed when conditions are suitable. But the stressful environment on farms can make prawns reluctant to reproduce, and if this gland is destroyed by blinding, it forces her into sexual maturity more rapidly.

In 2017 the government committed to throwing out our Prevention of Cruelty to Animals Act 1960 and replacing it with a brand new, fit-for-purpose animal care and protection act by 2019. Since that announcement six years have passed by, along with five agriculture ministers, two elections and no delivery. However, since then they have committed to including decapod crustaceans, which are prawns and their various relatives, in this new act, as well as legislating sentence. I can only hope that, as part of that, eyestalk ablation will soon be a thing of the past.

Western Victoria Region community achievements

Jacinta ERMACORA (Western Victoria) (09:50): I am delighted to report to the chamber that there has been a flurry of winners in the south-west community over recent weeks. Building designer Donna Monaghan from Form and Function Building Design won a state design award for her building in Warrnambool's Dispensary Lane. Donna succeeded in building an old CBD lane back to life. Journalist Andrew Thomson from the *Standard* newspaper won Journalist of the Year and best print news story. His ability to cultivate contacts was commended by the Rural Press Club of Victoria in Geelong. Warrnambool West Primary School principal Clare Monk was named Outstanding Primary Principal of 2023 at the Victorian Education Excellence Awards. She was praised for transforming Warrnambool West Primary School into a vibrant and successful learning environment. Parkinson's advocate Andrew Suggett won the 2023 Victorian Senior of the Year award. He established the Warrnambool Parkinson's Support Group in 2009, cultivating an inclusive environment for those who need support. Finally, Wannon Water claimed a pair of prestigious awards in recognition of their customer and community engagement program. They won both the Australasian and international organisation of the year awards from the International Association for Public Participation. I congratulate these winners and the communities they serve, and I can confirm that Warrnambool and the south-west are an innovative and vibrant community.

Housing

David DAVIS (Southern Metropolitan) (09:51): I want to draw the chamber's attention to the extraordinary failure in public housing under this government. It is clear that the enormous Big Housing Build, the poorly named and poorly implemented project, is a dud. It is clear that it has delivered longer waiting lists and longer waiting times. It is clear that 394 is the total number of new properties in existence since 2018 amid promises of 12,000 new properties and the average waiting time now is 18.1 months, up massively. The waiting time for those facing domestic violence is up from eight months to 23.6 months. The waiting lists are up. The build is botched. It is a shocking outcome. The state government can never manage money. They can never manage major projects. Everything they touch is botched.

Darebin early learning centres

Sheena WATT (Northern Metropolitan) (09:52): Today I rise to express my deep appreciation for the community campaign to save the 18 community-run early learning centres throughout the City of Darebin. Darebin council's perplexing choice to shorten childcare centre leases from five years to a mere two, with a tentative option of an additional three, stands as a direct blow to our community. Once these two-year leases expire, these centres will likely be burdened with unreasonable taxes, fees and costs, posing an unjust strain on the families of Darebin from the local council. Last Thursday I attended a community event alongside my colleagues the members for Northcote and Preston in the other place and Darebin councillor Emily Dimitriadis. Together we listened to the local parents, the educators and the staff, who shared emotional accounts of the devastating impact that Darebin council's recent decision holds for local families.

The Allan Labor government knows the importance of high-quality early childhood education for local families and for each and every Victorian child. We must also acknowledge the childcare workers whose jobs the council is putting at risk. These childcare workers and ASU members have openly voiced their concerns about this change, and I will stand with them through these troubled times. During the heartfelt conversations last Thursday it was abundantly clear that the community stands behind this campaign. I am immensely proud to stand side by side with them in this crucial endeavour. Our community deserves better. I implore Darebin council to demonstrate their support for early learning centres by granting them five-year leases, maintaining the same conditions they currently enjoy.

Diwali

Sarah MANSFIELD (Western Victoria) (09:54): Last week I had the pleasure of attending the Indo Marsh Multicultural Association's Diwali event in Bacchus Marsh. I would really like to congratulate the organisers for all the work they put in in bringing so many people together. There was a really beautiful buzz in the Bacchus Marsh public hall that evening. We had a wonderful time, with dancing, music and delicious food.

One of the themes of the Diwali event that really resonated is that of light overcoming darkness. In our current world I think that is something we really need to hold onto. The evening was an opportunity to remember that there is so much light when we recognise each other's humanity and work together for the common good. Events like this, where the community comes together and reflects on what is important to us as individuals and as a whole, are vital for peace and prosperity. We have a proud and growing multicultural community in the west of Victoria that has enriched the fabric of our region, with contributions to our economy, culture and way of life, and all levels of government have a role in protecting and promoting diversity and inclusion.

Eastern Victoria Region

Tom McINTOSH (Eastern Victoria) (09:55): It is great to see the school group here in the house. Welcome to the Legislative Council.

It was a big week in Eastern Victoria. We had three brilliant ministers on the ground, starting in Traralgon. We had Minister Shing and Minister Tierney at the \$2 billion regional package forum. It was a full house. We came together to hear about worker accommodation, and we came to hear about the investment we are making in tourism and events and of course the big \$1 billion extra additional investment we are making in housing across the regions.

I joined Minister Symes in Mallacoota, where we met with Tracey, the leader of the CFA brigade, and where we met with MADRA, the Mallacoota and District Recovery Association, to hear about the work they have done post fires and ongoing for their community. We saw the new skate park; the new container deposit collection facility, which I am told filled a 20-foot container in its first week; the Wilderness Collective and the incredible co-working space that they have there; and Mallacoota Abalone, which is the biggest employer in town and after the fires was rebuilt thanks to support from the state government. And it is great that we have the Victorian seafood showcase in Parliament today.

On Friday I was delighted to cut the ribbon on the new Korumburra community hub. The state government, working with South Gipps council, have built this fantastic new community hub with incredible views in the centre of town, where Milpara Community House will find their new home, their brilliant new library is decked out and the historical society will be located. Much like all of this investment, the hub will be an incredible asset for generations of regional Victorians to come.

Mount Atkinson

David ETTERSHPANK (Western Metropolitan) (09:57): Last weekend I had the pleasure of spending some time with the lovely residents of Mount Atkinson. Mount Atkinson is one of three adjoining Stockland subdivisions about 20 kilometres west of the CBD. There are currently around

5000 residents, growing to 40,000 over the next decade. For these residents there are no shops, no schools and no doctors or other essentials. If you simply need a litre of milk, the closest shop is at Aintree or Caroline Springs, 9 kilometres away. The nearest public transport is the bus stop at Neale Road, a 50-minute walk with little or no footpaths, mainly along the rural-grade Hopkins Road. Unfortunately, that rural-grade road carries 27,000 cars and trucks a day, so it is a walk that ranges from the hair-raising to the suicidal. But that bus stop is the only access to public transport. There is no train station; there is not even a school bus service. So if you are a couple with kids and you do not have two cars, you are effectively trapped in your own suburb. If you do have two cars, you are effectively trapped with the cost of maintaining two vehicles in the middle of a cost-of-living crisis. Right across the western suburbs there are way, way, way too many Mount Atkinsons. Why cannot this government at the very least and at minimal cost ensure that communities like Mount Atkinson have access to safe, regular bus services?

Diwali

Michael GALEA (South-Eastern Metropolitan) (09:58): The South-Eastern Metropolitan Region is home to growing and vibrant Hindu, Jain and Sikh communities. Across my region and across Victoria these communities celebrated the joyous festival of Diwali. Diwali has fast become a fixture in the calendar of so many Victorians, like me, who look forward to it every year. So it was a privilege to join the Premier, many parliamentary colleagues and numerous community leaders to celebrate this festival of lights. The Premier's Diwali gala was an unprecedented success. The gala was a fantastic celebration of the Hindu, Jain and Sikh communities and the diversity, culture and strength that they bring to Victoria. I would like to also acknowledge a special thanks to my guests who did me the honour of joining me at the celebration: Pandeep Rajesh Chowdary, Jiwan Pandey, Jagdeep Singh Sukijah, Simar Bedi and Sathien Sachithananatham. I want to offer my warm wishes to everyone in the south-east who celebrated Diwali last week.

Remembrance Day

Michael GALEA (South-Eastern Metropolitan) (09:59): On another matter, I also wish to acknowledge Remembrance Day, which occurred on Saturday just gone. Like many other colleagues in this place, I was privileged to attend a local service in my community and take part and take a moment to reflect on the sacrifice that so many before us have made so that we can live in this wonderful, vibrant multicultural society of Victoria.

Diwali

Lee TARLAMIS (South-Eastern Metropolitan) (10:00): I have had the pleasure of joining with communities across the south-east to celebrate Diwali, the festival of lights. Diwali is derived from the Sanskrit word Deepavali, meaning 'row of lights'. Diwali holds profound significance for many in the south-east, across Victoria and around the world. Its annual observance brings families, friends and loved ones together to celebrate the triumph of good over evil, light over darkness and knowledge over ignorance. It is also a time for kindness, forgiveness and unity. The spiritual essence and values of Diwali, emphasising good, light, knowledge, kindness, forgiveness and unity are principles that resonate universally, no matter one's cultural heritage.

One of the aspects that makes Diwali so special is the ability to foster a sense of inclusivity, with the festival bringing people from all backgrounds together to revel in the rich traditions and culture that are part of this auspicious occasion. This inclusivity is something that I have personally felt as I participated in Diwali celebrations, including the Premier's Diwali dinner at the Sri Vakrathunda Vinayagar Temple in The Basin, the Shri Shiva Vishnu Temple in Carrum Downs, with the Victoria Tamil Senior Citizens Benevolent Society in Glen Waverley, the SSK Hindu Association Australia in Springvale and the Spirit of Diwali festival at Chadstone.

It is appropriate to reflect on the fact that the significant contribution these organisations and so many others make each and every day is the embodiment of what is being celebrated on the occasion of

Diwali. These are all things that flow from the contributions they make through their cultural education, benevolent and social activities for the benefit of the community, improving the quality of life, generating fellowship and promoting their vibrant culture and rich heritage. Diwali serves as a perfect example of the positive impact that cultural celebrations can have on multiculturalism, and I would again like to wish everyone celebrating a happy Diwali.

Production of documents

Energy supply

The PRESIDENT: We will move to item 4 on today's business program, and that is the short-form documents motions. To reclarify to the house, under new sessional order 6 up to two short-form production of documents motions may be debated today. I remind the house that the mover of the motion has 6 minutes and other speakers have 5 minutes, with a maximum time of 20 minutes. After that 20 minutes, whether it is with me or an Acting President, the question must be put forthwith.

David DAVIS (Southern Metropolitan) (10:02): I move:

That this house:

(1) notes:

- (a) recent announcements by the government in the Victorian energy sector, including the new contractual arrangements entered into or announced with Latrobe Valley based electricity generators since 2021 and the gas industry supply changes announced by the Labor government;
- (b) the agreements reached by the Andrews Labor government with coal-fired electricity generators in the Latrobe Valley, the details and costs of which have never been publicly revealed;
- (c) Victoria's *Gas Substitution Roadmap*;

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

- (a) agreements reached with the owners of coal-fired electricity generators in the Latrobe Valley, Loy Yang A, Loy Yang B and Yallourn, to continue generating electricity, including details of the payments made to each generator and details of payments to be made until the scheduled closure of the generators;
- (b) documents relating to Victoria's *Gas Substitution Roadmap*, specifically any modelling, assessments or examinations, including consultancies, on:
 - (i) the impact of Victoria's *Gas Substitution Roadmap*, including any modelling or assessment of its transitional impacts on current electrical and gas infrastructure;
 - (ii) the impacts on greenhouse gas emissions and energy affordability for consumers and businesses; and
 - (iii) gas supply reform advice provided to the minister for energy, including any modelling or assessments, including consultation, on the impact of implementation of the road map on current electrical and gas infrastructure.

I will be succinct, and these documents motions can be managed succinctly. This motion has effectively two sets of documents that are being sought under standing order 10.01. One relates to the agreements and the payments made to each generator in the Latrobe Valley. We know of at least two that have been made by government and potentially a third. It seeks that the details of those agreements, including the actual contractual arrangements, will be made available to the house. The government will no doubt seek to argue that these are commercial in confidence. I remind the government that commercial-in-confidence agreements are not necessarily protected from documents orders in the chamber. Given the scale of these payments – hundreds and hundreds of millions of dollars, by report – the full details of these also should be available. This is taxpayers money, after all, and the idea that the government would sign secret, dirty deals and not reveal the scale and the matters around the contracts to the public is absolutely shameful.

The second part seeks the documents relating to Victoria's *Gas Substitution Roadmap*, specifically the modelling, assessments and examinations, including consultancies, on the impact of the *Gas*

Substitution Roadmap, including modelling or assessment on its transitional impacts and greenhouse gas emissions. We want to see what the government has based its decisions on, the full details of that and what close modelling it had on how these plans that have been announced would be impacted. I would also include in that the government's current proposal to ban gas rebates: what modelling have they done on that, how are they implementing that, what will be the effect on greenhouse gas emissions, on what do they base these decisions and have they got the proper modelling that should have been done to inform these decisions?

The purpose of documents motions like this – I remind newer members of the house that the powers of the house are the powers of the House of Commons from 1856 to call for documents and papers. They should, if they wish, go and read the legal opinions that were obtained by the house from Bret Walker QC, as he was then – I think he is probably a KC now or an SC – one of our pre-eminent constitutional lawyers, who laid down the powers of the chamber to obtain documents of this type. I would be very disappointed if the government was to claim executive privilege over any of these matters. I think it is entirely within order to understand the bases on which government decisions are made and to see how taxpayers money is being spent. The idea that you would sign deals that would push forward the use of coal energy much longer than some people certainly had anticipated – it may be that the decision is justified. Well, let us see the basis of the contracts, let us see the details and let us see the scope of the payments. That is what we are entitled to see as a community, given it is taxpayers money and decisions to which we are all bound.

I can also make the point here that the government is struggling with some of its greenhouse approaches. It is causing enormous difficulty in the community. They are not implemented well, some of the gas matters, because there are real transitional issues. Even if you agree entirely with their direction – some do and some do not; I personally have some really significant reservations – this is not a motion about the overall policy. It is a motion about getting hold of the documents to examine that policy and to put us in a better position to debate that with all of the material the government has at its disposal on these matters. As I say, this is a straightforward set of documents that we are seeking here. It is a matter that the government should come to the party with, and it is clearly in the public interest that these documents be provided. That is all I need to say, I think.

Ryan BATCHELOR (Southern Metropolitan) (10:07): I am pleased to rise to speak on the first of these short-form documents motions that have been presented. I will need to be brief because the way the sessional orders are structured means that debate on these matters has been curtailed. The ability of members to make contributions has been, by the way that the terms of these motions have been put in place, limited in terms of both the number of speakers from across the chamber who may seek to make contributions on any such motions but also the amount of time that we have got to do so.

Mr Davis's motion relates to some documents he is seeking for the transition agreements that have been put in place with both the Yallourn and Loy Yang power stations, arrangements that have been put in place to minimise adverse impacts to the energy system, the workers in those stations, the regions and consumers that may arise as a result of the transition that we are making across our energy sector. The government has a very significant agenda to transition Victoria's energy sector towards renewables as our existing energy generation assets reach the end of their life. We want that process to be done as smoothly as possible to avoid some of the ways in which the closure of Hazelwood was managed, so it is designed to create that orderly transition. The agreements that are being sought will ensure that these generation facilities will continue to provide energy generation at Yallourn until 2028 and Loy Yang A until 2035, which will enable the state to continue to keep the lights on whilst we transition to renewable energy. They help remove the uncertainty that we saw previously with Hazelwood but that we also see in other states, where the plans of private power companies who own our electricity assets as a result of decisions taken by previous Liberal governments impact on power prices, and seek to provide a bit more certainty to Victorians about how that energy transition will be done. It will also, we hope and we think, absolutely make the transition easier for the local communities in the Latrobe Valley, their workers and their families.

It is important that we do talk about these issues. Mr Davis in his contribution seemed to spend more of his time critiquing and seeking to pre-empt the decisions that the government will have to take than justifying his reasons for seeking the production of documents. He did make an important contribution about the powers of the Parliament and the seriousness with which we all should take the powers that this Parliament has to compel the production of documents. The critique that I have, that we have, is that these new sessional orders have the potential to undermine the seriousness of that endeavour by limiting the ability of members to contribute to debates on these matters. I think it is important as we embark upon this process to reflect on and contrast the way the chamber in the past has treated the seriousness of an inability to comply with requests that have been passed and the consequences – and sanctions in fact – that the chamber in previous iterations has sought to put in place in those circumstances.

In doing so I think the process of using these motions sets us on a path that we will need to tread carefully, because there is a lot that is being sought in this motion – two quite separate requests for documents about two separate issues, put together in the one motion and given a three-week timetable for the government's consideration. We know there are serious consequences when governments do not or are unable to comply with the time frames that the Council has set out. There are important matters that we all should think about in doing that. I would be able to elaborate my views on that a little further given their seriousness and importance, but unfortunately due to the sessional orders I am being prevented from doing so.

Motion agreed to.

Housing

Samantha RATNAM (Northern Metropolitan) (10:12): I move:

That this house:

- (1) notes that the government's recent housing statement outlines an intention to demolish and redevelop all of Melbourne's 44 high-rise public housing buildings by 2051, including a plan to build a majority of private homes on these publicly owned sites;
- (2) requires the Leader of the Government, in accordance with standing order 10.01, to table in the Council, within four weeks of the house agreeing to this resolution, all documents relating to the redevelopment of the public housing across any of the 44 high-rise public housing sites, including but not limited to:
 - (a) those that provide a rationale for the decision to demolish and redevelop the 44 high-rise public housing buildings and associated sites, including documents exploring alternatives to demolition, including refurbishment and renovation;
 - (b) assessments of the condition of current public housing buildings;
 - (c) feasibility studies on the cost and options for refurbishment and renovation;
 - (d) assessments and modelling of the maximum number of public homes that can be rebuilt on each public housing building site;
 - (e) cost modelling and carbon footprint assessments for the demolition plan versus any alternative options – for example, refurbishment – including a breakdown of costs for public housing tower resident relocation, such as public housing stock acquisition or headleasing of private properties, removalist costs and amounts allocated to workforce redirection towards community engagement;
 - (f) cost modelling for the public-private partnership approach in Victoria's housing statement – for example, public sector comparator;
 - (g) those that provide a rationale for the decision to initially demolish the tenanted buildings in North Melbourne and Flemington;
 - (h) those relating to public housing tower resident consultation, including any information about whether any consultation occurred in the development of the demolition plan, and with whom – for instance, which organisations, representative bodies or individuals; and
 - (i) those outlining indicative time frames for the demolition and redevelopment of the subsequent 39 towers to the five already announced.

The announcement by the government that it is planning to demolish 44 public housing towers came as a shock to the thousands of residents living in those homes and to many in the community who appreciate the value of public housing. There are lots of questions about this plan, but the minister is reluctant to answer many of them, at least the ones that we have asked in the chamber. The announcement seemed to come out of nowhere. It certainly was not part of the government's election platform from less than a year ago. There also have been unanswered questions on the extent to which even Homes Victoria was involved in the development of the plan or indeed the consultants who are being paid \$5 million to provide services in relation to the ground lease model 2.

The minister keeps reminding us that this is the biggest social housing project in history, according to them, and it is indeed a significant project – significant because it is signifying the possible end of public housing in Victoria. With such big projects it is incumbent upon the government to be honest and transparent with the community, in particular the public housing residents who are having their lives turned upside down. They should know the basis on which the government made this decision. I have been meeting not only with residents of the towers but also architects and other housing experts, who are bemused, to say the least, but more often deeply concerned by the decision of this government.

This motion is asking the government to come clean with the residents and the community about the rationale, analysis and consultation that have occurred in the development of such a significant shift in housing policy. The government has been dismissive of experts suggesting some of the towers could be renovated or refurbished instead of demolished. We ask merely to see what work they have done to justify such a dismissal. The government is presenting their plan as the only alternative. In quite the Thatcher-esque manner, we have a government that underfunded public housing for years and did not keep up with maintenance now turning around and saying it is no good, that public housing must go and only the private sector can do this – a classic example of the Thatcher 'there is no alternative' principle in action. Well, we do not believe it.

This motion is asking the government to show us what alternatives were considered and demonstrate why the mass privatisation of public housing is the only solution. I expect we will be met by the government's excuse that a lot of the information we are asking for is unavailable as it is commercial in confidence. We have met this resistance when we have asked for information about the public housing renewal project and ground lease model 1 projects. This of course just reinforces one of the deep concerns many have with the mass privatisation of public housing – the loss of transparency and accountability. One of the benefits to governments of the privatisation of public goods is that they can keep their wheeling and dealing secret, and then once the public good is privatised they dodge any accountability. So what we are seeking with this motion today is that basic accountability for what is a significant decision is restored.

Harriet SHING (Eastern Victoria – Minister for Housing, Minister for Water, Minister for Equality) (10:15): Well, what we see by way of example is what we knew we would see. The sessional orders were changed last sitting week to dramatically cut the amount of time available to have these sorts of debates, and one of the things that I have just heard and that we have all just heard is what appears to be – well, it does not appear to be, it is – a debate on substantive issues.

Dr Ratnam in rising to address a documents motion has gone into the detail of the subject matter. Now, the great problem with this in terms of the changes made to the sessional orders last week in the name of efficiency is that if I were to stand with the time that I have available – because effectively we have been muzzled in relation to the opportunity to provide contributions – and read out motion 248, this documents motion which we are debating at the moment, I would not get to the end of it before I was told to sit down. And yet what we now see is that the Greens' Dr Ratnam has not only used the time available to her in what is typically cast by Mr Davis and others in this place as a 'relatively narrow motion' to go on an exposition about the subject matter but also in fact stood in this place earlier and endorsed an opportunity cut from those around the chamber to actually speak to it.

It is more than a little bit disingenuous to be having this conversation where yet again the Greens stand up and talk about social housing in a way that misses the point entirely about what this government is doing. The Greens are standing in the way of a record investment, a transformative investment, in social housing across this state. It is so disappointing that the Greens, a party that makes itself and inserts itself into the conversation about equity and about opportunity and about providing means to assist everybody across our communities, oppose social housing. And this is a great tragedy, because what we see time and time again are efforts by governments to invest in social housing, which the Greens oppose.

With the time available to me I would ask the Greens and indeed anybody else who is following this particular issue – as the cost of living, housing affordability, rental properties and the importance of investment in social housing continue to occupy the forefront of people’s minds – why it is that the Greens oppose social housing, why it is that the Greens do not support bringing new homes to communities where they are needed most, why it is that the Greens do not support use of land to address housing shortages across the board and why it is that the Greens oppose developments of social housing which will address that need and face the reality that we as a city and as a state are facing increasingly, with every year that passes, around availability of supply. The hypocrisy that we see will not put people into homes. What it will do, however, is take a narrative, take an ideology, take a theory and apply it in a way that means that people will not have the homes that they deserve.

This is the great disappointment that is the Greens policy on housing. We will proceed with the record investment that we are making to ensure that land across our 44 tower sites is able to accommodate up to 30,000 people to address the issues of population growth, to make sure that we have a 10 per cent uplift in social housing, to make sure that people have the homes that they deserve. What a tragedy, what a disappointment, that those that call themselves progressive in the Greens party cannot stomach the idea of supporting these policies.

David DAVIS (Southern Metropolitan) (10:21): I rise to support this documents motion brought by Dr Ratnam in the short-form documents motion format. This is an important motion. It goes very directly to some of the key documents that should be in the public domain regarding the government’s public housing building program. The government’s decision to redevelop 44 high-rise public housing buildings and associated sites is a very significant decision. It is a huge amount of public money that is associated with this. And, as a more general point, the government’s housing program is in chaos, as we see on the front page of the *Herald Sun* today. But this document is a narrower motion that seeks the documents.

Harriet Shing: He has not visited any of them.

David DAVIS: That is nonsense actually. This is a narrow motion that seeks a set of documents. There is no question that the chamber has the power to demand these documents, and it is also important to understand that it is in the public interest that some of these modelling documents, the background documents, the studies and assessments that have been undertaken, that in theory would justify the government’s decisions or may justify the government’s decisions on some of these points, be provided.

I would expect that the government would provide these documents. There is no reason why they cannot be in the public domain, and it is very much in the interests of transparent government to see these documents to enable local communities in those 44 sites to have a better understanding about their future and a better understanding about how the government proposes to proceed in their areas, the reasons for those decisions and indeed how those decisions were arrived at. We think this is a sensible motion. We think it is in the public interest, and we welcome Dr Ratnam bringing this short-form documents motion to the chamber and indicate that we will support it.

Ryan BATCHELOR (Southern Metropolitan) (10:23): Two for two – I am pretty happy that I am able to get up and speak on the second of the short-form documents motions today. I was not certain,

given the time limits and restrictions that have been placed on members' contributions to these debates, that I would, and others would, be given the opportunity to speak, but I am gratified that due to those who have been seeking the call I can make this contribution today. I will not hold my breath for the future.

Mr Davis characterised this as a narrow motion. If it is a narrow motion, then the nine subclauses of the second part of the motion cast an incredibly wide net for documents that are being sought. I reflected on the motion that Mr Davis moved previously, where two quite distinct things were trying to be brought in, and here we have got all of these issues.

I do not have an issue with members seeking information through documents motions. I think it is, as has been previously outlined, an important part of the accountability of the executive government to the Parliament, and one that all members of Parliament should be keen to uphold and protect. The concern I have is that it does not appear as if the members have been listening to the debate or been reading the information that has been put out in the public domain so far, because if they had been, they might have, for example, read the transcript of the evidence provided by the chief executive officer of Homes Victoria Simon Newport when he spent I think it was an hour, or it might have been longer, giving evidence before one of the Legislative Council's standing committees – this was public evidence; I am not disclosing any committee-in-confidence details here.

You can read the transcript; it is on the Parliament's website. He actually went into quite a lot of detail about the rationale for the reason to redevelop the 44 high-rise public housing buildings and associated types. He gave an assessment of the condition of the current public housing buildings, including the two that are uninhabitable at the moment because the sewerage system does not work, and they have been that way for some period of time. He talked about the feasibility and the costs and options for refurbishment and renovation of other sites – on the public record already.

As I recall from that hearing there were members of both the opposition and the Greens who were present to question the CEO of Homes Victoria about these issues. Indeed we did get quite extensive evidence about some of the barriers that exist in terms of both the cost and the feasibility of undertaking large-scale renovations – which I think is also salient to other matters that are raised in the context of this motion – including that, with the big concrete walls of these buildings and the sorts of tools that are required to do these kinds of renovations, the impact that has on noise and amenity means that the residents need to be relocated during any of that period. Concerns are expressed in the context of this motion about the impact of this on residents. The same impacts would be there if we were undertaking renovations. He also talked about the cost of that. He talked about the rationale for the decisions in North Melbourne and in Flemington, as to why they were next off the list.

I could go on, but I cannot because I am running out of time, because there is not enough time being given to members in this debate to discuss these issues. I do not know why the opposition and the Greens are seeking to gag members from making contributions about these issues in the context of important matters that they seek to bring into this chamber – extensive motions requesting documents – and are not providing members with sufficient time to properly debate them. It shows that this is all about politics and not about the substance of providing more homes for Victorians.

Michael GALEA (South-Eastern Metropolitan) (10:28): I rise with what little time I have today – to pick up from Mr Batchelor's comments – to discuss this motion. In doing so I also wish to acknowledge that the subject we are talking about today is public housing estates. That has been something that those of us who have been members of the Legal and Social Issues Committee have obviously been looking quite extensively at. I have to say – and I appreciate the contributions of the Greens member and participating member on that committee, and they have been quite engaged with it – I am absolutely astonished to see the absolute refusal to look the evidence in the eye. I believe I heard Mr Batchelor quoting before from Mr Newport from Homes Victoria, who came and spoke to the committee at our most recent hearing, just a few weeks ago, where he laid out in clear, explicit detail the reason why the Allan Labor government is going through the process of rebuilding these

44 ageing out-of-condition high-rise towers. He spoke to us of the decrepit conditions, the sewerage issues in many of them that have already become uninhabitable, that already have no people living in them because they are so out of condition they cannot reasonably have people living there. He told us about the heating and about the cooling. I note my colleague Ms Copsey asked questions yesterday about air conditioning.

These towers are not fit for purpose for cooling or for heating. Whilst we are undertaking works to improve that where we can for those towers, that will be at the later stage of this project; it is a long-term project to renew this. Those of us on this side of the chamber actually believe that people in public and social housing should have the same rights to basic living standards as everyone else. We do not think that just because you are in social housing you deserve to live in a house that is unfit – that is too cold in winter, that is too hot in summer, that is not disability compliant and that has issues with lifts. Every time that there is a lift issue, as we heard, people have to use the stairs for days, and sometimes even weeks, on end. That is part of the evidence that we heard from Mr Newport as well.

Perhaps most staggering of all is that – as we all know in this chamber – there is such a high demand and yet for each of these current units, when they become available, 10 to 20 offers have to be made before they can find someone to take up one of them, because they are unfit. Many of the people who are on our public housing waitlist have disabilities that obviously require reasonable accommodations. These towers do not provide those accommodations, and if you are saying to people, ‘Too bad. Because of your disability we’re not going to home you,’ that is not good enough. That is discrimination. That is exactly why we are rebuilding this tower, and that is exactly why there is going to be a minimum 10 per cent increase in the social housing provided as part of these rebuilds. This is, as the minister said yesterday, a nation-leading plan to rebuild these towers to make them habitable.

In spite of all that, we had questions from the Greens members on the committee back to Simon Newport saying, ‘Well, just renovate them.’ He was very clear on the reasons why that was not going to be practical either. If you do renovate them, even if you could fix all of these issues – and the expense would be ghastly, obviously, for no net increase in housing – they would still be so extensive as to require the residents to be relocated during the renovations anyway. The Greens are saying, ‘Don’t knock them down. Don’t rebuild them. Don’t provide them with the up-to-date and modern facilities that they deserve.’ The reason that they are giving is so that people are not relocated, and this would have to happen anyway. Honestly, growing up, like many young progressives, I saw the Greens as being quite logical, but this debate has once and for all proven to me that there is no logic in what is happening here. This is a far left-wing, populist movement that is trying to scare people and that is trying to undermine what is a very sensible, progressive reform. This is yet one more example of that in what we are seeing today.

Motion agreed to.

Motions

Deer control

Jeff BOURMAN (Eastern Victoria) (10:33): I move:

That this house:

(1) notes that:

- (a) around 150,000 game deer are shot by recreational hunters every year;
- (b) an impediment to Victoria’s 51,000 licensed deer hunters taking more deer is finding a use for the extra venison;
- (c) many food charities are struggling with increased demand and many families are approaching some of these charities to keep food on their plates;
- (d) there are existing programs in Victoria and other states that allow meat sourced from wild animals to be procured for human consumption;

- (2) calls on the government to commit to further discussions regarding the delivery of a pilot program to enable the commercial processing of wild-shot venison to be harvested and donated to food charities on selected government programs and whether funding could be provided for:
- (a) the training of accredited volunteers; and
 - (b) the necessary infrastructure, such as racks on vehicles and cool rooms.

I am not going to go through it word by word, but basically this motion is to utilise the meat from government-run culls of deer by having it processed suitably and then donated to charities – food banks generally. This motion presents basically a binary choice. It is not a debate about whether people should be able to hunt, it is not a debate about the efficacy of government-funded deer programs nor is it a debate about other much-needed initiatives to help the disadvantaged in our community. The binary choice: should the deer that the government is paying to have killed anyway be left to rot and waste or should the premium-quality meat be used to help relieve the cost-of-living pressures for disadvantaged people in our society? At the end of this debate you will be asked to stand up for what you believe in. We will no doubt hear some dancing around and misdirection that it seems like this vote is for something other than what it is for. At the end of the day, however, you either stand for beneficial use or wanton waste. That is the binary choice.

By way of some background, there are about 200,000 deer taken a year by recreational hunters, and there are about 50,000 recreational deer hunters in the state. When I first came to Victoria all those years ago, I heard about this strange thing called deer hunting, and it was only known to a very few out in Gippsland. If you did not know someone who knew where the deer were, no chance. Well, let us fast-forward from, say, the 1980s to now, and people are hitting deer in cars, so we have government-funded deer control programs. Some of these are targeted towards protecting assets; some of them are poorly targeted and frankly are a waste of time, money and particularly venison. I personally strongly oppose helicopter culling, as the meat is totally wasted. The shooters performing the cull can really only shoot to stop, not come back to find the animal later to finish it off, should they be able to find it and of course should it need it. I reiterate this is culling, not hunting, and to fulfil their obligations the shooter will need to do this to get as many animals as possible because helicopters are not cheap. I must say that I also believe that the professional shooters will make a kill shot if they can – they do not want the animal to suffer any more than anyone else – but they have a job to do. So there are literally tonnes of high-quality venison being shot in government-funded programs in easily accessible areas, other than the helicopter culls, that are then left to rot because the land manager is taking the path of least resistance, which is leaving them there or putting the ones that they do retrieve in a pit.

Without too much effort this can be put into the human food chain. Given that it is a community asset being wasted by the government, it is incumbent on the government to put that to better use. What we are talking about here is a win-win-win scenario. We get carcasses out of our public land reserves, we get premium-quality meat to families and charities who need it and we provide income and scale to commercial processors in regional Victoria. ‘Triple bottom line’ is a common buzzword of the government – environmental, social and economic. This proposal delivers triple-bottom-line benefits to Victoria, and the majority of the operation is already being performed.

One of the great progressive achievements of the Andrews government was the introduction of commercial processing for wild-shot game meat. Regulated cullers work under arrangements with primary producers to harvest on their properties and pay them a rate per kilogram for the deer they take. This is not a helicopter cull, where the situation demands some practicalities, but a ground-based cull, which is a much more precise way of taking animals. This initiative has seen overabundant wild deer go from being a problem for some farmers to being an income-producing resource. In a time when regional and rural economies are taking a pounding in areas such as Eastern Victoria, particularly Gippsland, and staring down the imminent departure of forestry and power generation and the downstream businesses that rely on them, this will provide tiny relief for some people – tiny, but relief nonetheless. This program will not have any effect on commercial harvesting, as these deer are already

being shot and any protein harvested from these animals will be given to charity and therefore will not impact any commercial arrangements that are in place.

In the last Parliament Minister Symes – or should I say Attorney-General Symes now – made changes to allow deer hunters to take harvested venison to commercial operators to have it processed and packed. This change means that hunters who lack facilities or time to process the spoils of the hunt themselves can pay for it to be done professionally for personal use. The catch with this is that processing cannot happen on PrimeSafe-registered premises. That seems to be counterintuitive – because it is. Surely the local butcher is best positioned to provide this service to hunters. The logical next step is to allow a dual-licensing scheme for butchers so that with appropriate protocols around cleaning and separation they can provide this service to hunters, making it more available and putting more money into regional economies.

Our brothers and sisters in New Zealand across the ditch already process hunter-shot meat to go to food charities. They are a little bit further along this path than we are. In New Zealand the Sika Foundation, a membership-based hunting organisation like the Sporting Shooters Association here in Victoria, provides over 100 kilograms a week of wild-shot venison to each of a number of local food banks to feed the less fortunate. In the short few years that the Sika Foundation's program has been running, close to 5 tonnes of clean, free-range, wild-shot protein has gone to families that need it.

I want to quote their website, and I apologise for the inevitable mispronunciations – New Zealanders have an interesting way of naming stuff:

Foodbank Support

In 2020, the Turangi Foodbank was the grateful recipient of venison mince made available by the culling of Wapiti/Red deer in Fiordland. It made a huge difference, which is why the Foodbank reached out to the Sika Foundation in April 2021 to see if we could help again.

As a result, an ongoing initiative was launched to provide free-range venison mince to families in Turangi and Taupo that are struggling to make ends meet. The aim is to provide up to 100kg of meat per week, which will cut the local Foodbank's weekly food budget in half.

Foodbanks are not government funded and rely on grants and donations to operate. They are experiencing high demand for emergency food parcels and Covid-19 is still having a huge impact on our communities. By feeding families we contribute to the wellbeing of the community, take pressure off families under stress financially and mentally, helping to reduce family harm, depression, and many other issues.

We –

being the Sika Foundation –

have been in touch with the Ministry for Primary Industries to check on the regulations for donating recreational catch and have received guidance for such meat donations. The packages are labelled according to MPI's instructions. The packaging for the mince parcels has been generously supplied at no cost –

I may as well give them all a plug –

by Stephan Pederson from Caspak, and Jaki Carson at Copy Solutions in Taupo has provided labels. The donated venison has been processed by Farm & Game Meats Ltd in Taupo.

Business sponsorship from Ashhurst Engineering & Construction and Genesis Energy ... has funded much of the ... processing costs. Lahar Wilderness Sika, Poronui Hunting –

I am just going to go for this one –

Maunga Tia Adventures and Robbie from Blood Origins have also made significant contributions.

By May, 2023, more than 4.5 tonnes of clean, organic protein has been delivered to families in need ...

And then they want to thank all their sponsors. But they go on to list what the requirements are to donate the protein:

1. Only meat that you would put on your own family's dinner table is acceptable
2. Meat needs to be cooled or chilled as quickly as possible after harvest

3. Meat should be delivered chilled or frozen – boned out is preferred
4. No damaged (bullet wounds) or contaminated meat (deer hair, dirt, fly-blown, microbial activity) will be accepted

There is a whole lot of things it goes into. But this is also recreational hunting, and one must wonder why I bring up New Zealand. Well, Australia and New Zealand share meat processing standards. If it can be done there, it can be done here. Any problems that we would have, they would have, and any problems they would have, we would have. And they are making it work, so we can.

We get on to the bureaucracy. The meat regulator, PrimeSafe, and associated bureaucrats within the Department of Jobs, Skills, Industry and Regions stand as major blockers to the better utilisation of wild shot game in Victoria. That is not a criticism as they are doing their job, and it is an important job to make sure that meat we buy is safe. But that does not mean we cannot progress or advance. Just a few short years ago the Victorian government changed the law to enable wild shot game meat to be processed for human consumption in Victoria. The public servants involved opposed this change, but it happened anyway. The government listened to them and took on board their concerns, but ultimately the government chose sensible incremental progress over stagnation. The role of the public service is to both administer government policy and provide frank and fearless advice to help shape it. The role of the Parliament is to make that policy. Hopefully we do that cognisant of but not mindlessly adherent to the advice of the public service.

We hear a lot about progressive government. We hear that it is almost exclusively a plea for the government to advance some self-identifying progressive's personal ideology and prejudice. Progressivism in its pure form is the advancement of the human condition through incremental change. I am not a progressive, but this motion proposes a progressive change. I say that I am not progressive, but neither are most of the people that say they are. It is really just a lot of reactionaries hiding behind the label of progressivism rather than advancing a genuine argument for a change that they seek.

This initiative will not fix wicked problems like homelessness, poverty or disadvantage; we would have to be out of touch and delusional to think it would. What it will do is send a very clear message that these issues are at the front of mind of government policy in all areas. We need to manage wildlife to address negative impacts. Where we can deliver other benefits from doing that it is not only a desirable thing to do, I would argue that it is a moral imperative. It is a mindset that I am really pleased to say is not foreign to my colleagues in this place across the political spectrum, and for the most I have had nothing but positive comments from pretty well everyone. Even the media, who are usually fairly tough on me, seem cautiously optimistic.

Anyway, in the last Parliament a committee of this chamber conducted a landmark investigation into homelessness. It was a lengthy examination that delivered a compelling report of over 500 pages. It was also an outstanding example of cross-party cooperation towards a common and I would say loftier goal than the cut and thrust of partisan politics. What is perhaps lost in the history of that inquiry is that it was my friend and former member Rod Barton of the Transport Matters Party who initiated that inquiry.

Also in the last Parliament we saw the unprecedented disruption of the COVID pandemic and associated lockdowns. In that confused environment it was the President of this chamber who kept his focus on the most disadvantaged people here in Melbourne. When the Salvos cafe just down the hill closed due to the restrictions, our President pushed forward a solution that not only kept our wonderful parliamentary staff working but also provided hundreds of thousands of meals for people in need.

Food charities in Victoria are struggling as families are increasingly battling with mortgage and rental stress and the general cost-of-living pressures – as we know, there is a crisis about the general cost of living. Whilst much of the broader financial settings that lead to this problem are beyond the control of state government, alleviating some of those stresses is not. In Doveton, in the south-eastern suburbs, the demand for the school breakfast program has tripled. Demand for the services of Foodbank has increased by over 25 per cent in the past few years. Members do not have to walk more than 50 metres

from the bubble of this grand building to be confronted with severe disadvantage. Even in my short time here I have seen an explosion in the number of homeless people up this end of town. This is an opportunity to help.

I read some criticism of this motion in the media over the weekend. What I read comes across as combative and misinformed. It is disappointing that rather than examining what is being proposed here objectively and on merit, some have resorted immediately to culture war rhetoric and the good old whataboutism. It is disappointing that rather than addressing this motion for what it is, it was taken as an opportunity to take cheap shots and push a false narrative against recreational hunters. I was also concerned at the openly simplistic conflation of the issue of homelessness and drug harm reduction. It might have seemed like a clever throwaway line to a friendly journo, but further stigmatising the homeless and grossly oversimplifying the complexity of homelessness really helps nobody but subeditors.

Recreational hunters pride themselves on sharing the spoil of their hunts. On the social media of my deer hunting friends you are far more likely to find pictures of the sausages, smallgoods, lasagnes, jerky, biltong and scores of other delicacies they craft with harvested venison than you are to find a grip-and-grin with a dead animal. Experiences overseas suggest that programs like Hunters for the Hungry encourage hunters to take an extra animal to share with those less fortunate, and this is what we would love to get into in Victoria.

But this is not what we are talking about today. What we are talking about today is using animals that are currently being shot to waste by the government to feed the less fortunate. Let us be blunt: those animals are going to get killed anyway; that is just the reality. This question is not about whether they should be killed, it is about whether they should be wasted. I commend my motion to the house.

Jacinta ERMACORA (Western Victoria) (10:49): I thank member for Eastern Victoria Region Mr Bourman for raising this interesting and worthwhile issue. There are two key reasons why I think this proposal is worth further exploration: one is economic and the other is environmental. I want to begin by framing up my argument in this way because there are some who argue these two things cannot mutually exist. For Labor, though, they can and must mutually exist.

First, the economic argument: without a doubt the cost of living is the single most pressing issue for families in our community, but it is an issue that does not just impact outer regional Victoria. We know that food insecurity is increasingly being felt across our state and our nation. In fact we should refer to it as food inequality. Foodbank's latest hunger report shows that an estimated 3.7 million Australian households have experienced food insecurity over the past 12 months, many of them for the first time. As Mr Bourman notes in his motion, with more and more families struggling to put food on the table, they are increasingly turning to charity. That includes Western District Food Share, which fortunately has another year of funding thanks to the advocacy of regional Labor MPs.

This incredible local organisation supports families experiencing food insecurity across the south-west region, from Casterton to Camperdown to Portland and in between. I had the pleasure of visiting the Western District Food Share warehouse in Warrnambool shortly after I was elected. On one hand, I was devastated to hear just how many schools and other organisations and individual families are on a daily basis using that service. On the other hand, I was blown away and uplifted by the amazing work Amanda Hennessy and her small team achieve. They are supported by a dedicated group of volunteers, some of whom have been helping out at Food Share for years. The well-organised donated food stocks, the cleanliness and well-run logistics are obvious the moment you walk in. I am grateful that their outreach is continuing to grow as they meet increased demand. Every week their army of dedicated volunteers redistribute surplus food from local bakeries, producers and supermarkets. Importantly, support also comes via generous donations from the local community. Many social clubs across the region support Food Share, and I can tell you the Christmas hampers reaching people at an often difficult time of the year are something special due to local support from many organisations.

Importantly, Western District Food Share helps to deliver our school breakfast program at schools across the south-west. We know how important it is for each child to start their learning day. A humble mug of Milo, a slice of Vegemite toast or a single piece of fruit can make a real difference to a young hungry tummy. It is why I am so proud of the more than \$39 million this government has invested to expand community food relief across Victoria since 2020, including in the Western District. In the 12 months to June this year Western District Food Share provided support to more than 35,000 locals. Of course we need to make sure that any donations from the public, including deer meat, and we will go on to deer meat, are safe and healthy and go through rigorous checks. I trust that any future change in policy will ensure that these safeguards and many more are included in the thinking.

Feral deer have emerged as one of the state's most serious environmental threats, and that is the environmental issue that I would like to raise, in particular the devastating impact hard-hoofed animals have had on our continent. Australia is lucky enough to enjoy some of the richest biodiversity on earth. In his book *Dark Emu* Bruce Pascoe writes that the special softness of our landscape was perfectly pliable for agriculture by First Nations people and perfectly in keeping with the nature of our native animals, because, uniquely, all of our animals and native fauna are soft-footed. It was not until colonisation that hard-hoofed animals ever set foot, or rather hoof, on our soil. Indeed all of the feral deer now living in Australia were first introduced in the 19th and 20th centuries, when English settlers brought them over hoping to make the bush a little bit more like the countryside at home.

Since then, these species have unknowingly wrought large-scale damage and destruction on the land. Preferring to live in grassy woodlands, many deer have taken up residence in our precious eucalypt and rainforest areas in the Otways – where I spent much of my youth camping, driving, hiking and holidaying – areas which are now infested with hordes of feral deer. In fact feral deer have emerged as one of the state's most serious environmental threats. Their impact on our environment is felt in a multitude of ways. Their hard hooves can damage the soil, leading to erosion and damaging local wetlands and streams. As herbivores they destroy native vegetation by nibbling on new shoots and they spread pests and weeds through the areas they range, forcing natives to contend with even more introduced species. They also provide challenges to farmers through the introduction of those weeds and sometimes the transference of disease to livestock.

A recent report from the Centre for Invasive Species Solutions sought to put a price tag on the impact, estimating \$91 million worth of damage, mainly to agricultural pastures. Thankfully, the motion we are discussing here today has the real potential to help limit this damage. At the same time, it is important to note that recreational hunting alone has not been proven effective in preventing or controlling deer population growth. Instead, long-term strategic planning is needed. In 2020 the government released its deer control strategy, providing the first steps towards a clear and coordinated approach to managing deer and their impacts in Victoria. Supporting the delivery of the strategy, the government has invested more than \$22 million in funding. It also builds on work being done at the national level, recognising that the threat of invasive species rarely respects interstate borders.

As I said at the outset, I believe this motion has two potential benefits for Victoria: one is economic and the other is environmental. In isolation this motion will not come close to solving the cost-of-living crisis, nor can it undo the damage of feral deer on our state's environment. But I do think it has the potential to provide some meaningful help, and as such I am pleased to support it.

Melina BATH (Eastern Victoria) (10:57): I am pleased to rise to put the Nationals and the Liberals names on this particular motion by Mr Bourman, motion 239 on the notice paper today. I would like to start by addressing the problem and the issue that Mr Bourman has raised, and that is food insecurity and the ever-increasing need and struggle for everyday Victorians to put food on their table. As Mr Bourman has said, this is not the catch-all solution to this problem, but it is certainly worth investigating on merit.

When we look at Foodbank Victoria – it has been quoted before and I would like to do so and put on record my sincere thanks to David McNamara and all of his team right across Victoria for the amazing

work they do to support individuals and families who are struggling to put food on the table. David McNamara recently said, in 2023, 'This is the worst I've seen it in 15 years.' There are many programs, and we certainly know the importance of those outreach programs and food distribution centres. I acknowledge that the current government made a commitment to a Foodbank distribution centre in the Latrobe Valley back in 2018. I think only now we are seeing advertising for that food distribution centre, so five years later it is coming on – much needed.

Let us look at some of the statistics around food poverty. We see in the Latrobe Valley, for example, 66 per cent of the population identified that they are experiencing food insecurity, with hunger nearly double that of the state average. Any average above zero is tragic, but Latrobe Valley is certainly experiencing that in manifold ways.

We know that at the Morwell Neighbourhood House 25 people present every single day to use the food pantry and support services. We know that the Enjoy Church, which is also based in Morwell, provide the Re.store pantry, and they have seen an exponential growth in use of the service over even the last two years. They partner with Foodbank Victoria to supply over 200 families and individuals at the open shop that they hold every month. We see that Wellington shire and the food pantry there are now delivering to 100 families, both in Yarram and Golden Beach. We see that in Bass Coast a recent survey provided evidence that nearly 10 per cent of adults experience food insecurity – 'with hunger' was the question – and that is almost three times the state average. The proportion of parents who rely on unhealthy but low-cost food – here is the thing, low-cost food – was 23 per cent, nearly 24 per cent, which is double the state's average. So we can really see the bite that is sincerely affecting many people in Victoria. We also know that the manager of PICAL at Phillip Island has been relating to us that the cost-of-living pressures on those households budgets mean that food insecurity is gaining more and more, and I could go on.

I will just digress slightly from the motion but keep on the issue in relation to counselling. Of course when people come in and request some support and request that counselling, they just cannot meet the cost of bills; costs are exceeding income. We know that the Financial Counselling Victoria service has requested from the current government \$1.5 million to provide 300 financial counsellors in addition to their 300 that already exist across the state. Now, these people do an amazing job, and it shows the absolute need in our regions, so we would support that in its entirety.

To the deer, deer are nature's survivors, without a doubt. They were introduced as a species. Victoria is paradise to deer, and we have seen that their number has grown from, once upon a time, a few thousand to now over 1 million. This has a cost. It has an environmental cost, it has a social cost, it has a cultural cost and it has an economic cost. To drill down into some of those costs, indeed a report released by Frontier Economics last year talks about a cost of \$1.5 billion to \$2 billion over the next 30 years unless we can control our deer population.

Particularly too now driving around Gippsland, as we do, many of the car yards and the panelbeaters deal with the effects of the deer population, and it can be quite damaging and very dangerous for people to drive our roads, not only at dawn and dusk but at other times. We know that socially deer can have a serious impact on the peri-urban areas. Not only are they just in the highlands in Gippsland, now they are encroaching on those peri-urban areas surrounding Melbourne as well as our regional towns. They certainly can destroy fences, and as I have said, they have a very serious implication for road safety.

Culturally, we know that they can impact soil and damage sensitive native plant species, and they certainly can attack cultural sites. Economically, they are grazing on crops and grazing on pastures, orchards, vineyards and market gardens. They are survivors, and they will do anything that they need to to survive. We have seen that in recent times. Post the fires we have seen around 4000 deer culled, so there are not only the recreational hunters but there is also the culling of deer and what to do with that meat, and that is the subject of our debate today.

One of the concerns that my Eastern Victoria colleague the member for Gippsland East Tim Bull has raised on a number of occasions is the fact that when Parks Victoria has employed shooters, some of the time – and these are all licensed, professional shooters – there have been incidents where they have shot deer on the edge of Lake Tyers in East Gippsland. These are pristine waters used for holiday-makers and fishers to a great extent, yet these culled deer are being left to disintegrate in full view. Not only is this an amenity issue but it is also a health issue with that degradation of those lovely waters. We call on the government, when it is implementing these culling programs, to make sure that it is doing it in a responsible way. The department's own environmental guidelines talk about 'target animals will not be controlled near waterways' et cetera, and Parks Victoria says that shooters will avoid shooting on wetlands and waterways. Let us make sure that that is implemented and we do not see that continue.

There is a whole raft of regulations that surround and include the deer control strategy, which was implemented in 2020. One of the current regulations that we see is that PrimeSafe regulates the commercial processing of wild deer for human and also pet food, which is a separate discussion and an important one to have. But it is necessary to look at what is going to be used with that culling. These deer are a problem in our environment and for our communities. We certainly endorse the continued enjoyment of hunters to do recreational hunting, but once that meat is on the ground, how can it be purposefully used? I have identified the need, particularly in my Eastern Victoria electorate – the need is there. This is a pronged attack, this is not a total solution, but it has merit.

What I would say in relation to the motion is it calls on the government to commit to further discussions regarding the delivery of a pilot program to enable the commercial processing of wild venison and then donation to food charities – no problem there. Mr Bourman, I am sure, has had conversations with the government, but what we want to see is clarity across the board for – (*Time expired*)

Rikkie-Lee TYRRELL (Northern Victoria) (11:07): Today I rise in support of this motion to the viability of utilising excess game meat for food charities. This concept is brilliant in its simplicity. This week we will be debating the government's Environment Legislation Amendment (Circular Economy and Other Matters) Bill 2023. That bill, and indeed the second-reading speech, places a high emphasis on the responsibility we have in embracing circular economies, and I concur. This pilot has the potential to become a self-sustaining economy that supports two government programs concurrently by utilising what is effectively a by-product to sustain a supply shortage in another sector.

Wild deer in Victoria have a detrimental impact on biodiversity, water quality, public safety, agricultural assets and Aboriginal cultural heritage. Acknowledging this, the previous Andrews Labor government supported the implementation of new eradication and control measures. The *Peri-urban Deer Control Plan 2021–2026* was the first of three region-specific plans developed to address the state's deer control response. The specific plan initially encompassed areas east of Melbourne where deer populations had become problematic. Some hunters on the ground now report the populations in these areas are reaching plague proportions. A key objective of this plan was to establish the most cost-effective methods for management and the most efficient target areas in which to focus the plan's efforts. This initiative has been a constantly evolving process that will need to be continually tested and adjusted accordingly. The original plan even states that:

The Plan will build on existing control efforts but with more strategic coordination of future control work. Both government and community will need to work together to achieve the vision for this Plan.

This five-year Plan is adaptive to respond to new information and will enable continuous improvement.

As such, there is already provision within the plan to alter or add additional considerations and programs. I believe this is the perfect pilot to implement in order to test this for viability as an ongoing solution to the food shortages reflected in the increasing demand from charity groups. We all know the current cost-of-living crisis is pushing many of our most vulnerable community members into homelessness and families to seek alternative food and shelter arrangements. This already dire situation is projected to get worse as inflation continues to rise and goods remain at a premium. It is

not often that a circular economy solution presents itself in such a tidy, obvious and mutually beneficial manner. I think anyone who disagrees with this motion is guilty of politicising an issue that has no truly objectionable grounds if they claim to have Victorians' best interests at heart.

John BERGER (Southern Metropolitan) (11:11): I rise to speak on member for Eastern Victoria Mr Bourman's motion that in broad nature refers to a proposed 'hunters for the hungry' program. Specifically, motion 239 in Mr Bourman's name:

- (1) notes that:
 - (a) around 150,000 game deer are shot by recreational hunters every year;
 - (b) an impediment to Victoria's 51,000 licensed deer hunters taking more deer is finding a use for the extra venison;
 - (c) many food charities are struggling with increased demand and many families are approaching some of these charities to keep food on their plates;
 - (d) there are existing programs in Victoria and other states that allow meat sourced from wild animals to be procured for human consumption;
- (2) calls on the government to commit to further discussions regarding the delivery of a pilot program to enable the commercial processing of wild-shot venison to be harvested and donated to food charities on selected government programs and whether funding could be provided for:
 - (a) the training of accredited volunteers; and
 - (b) the necessary infrastructure, such as racks on vehicles and cool rooms.

There are a variety of programs across the world that deliver similar items, and they have similar philosophies. There are programs that exist in the United States, run by various states such as Maine, Texas and Georgia, a whole range of them built similarly to one another. What do these programs look like? Basically, to put it in simple terms, the program is one where the hunters go out and hunt wild animals – such as deer – recreationally, and any surplus meats that come into their possession from hunting can then be passed over for donations to food banks and charities. Mr Bourman is proposing a pilot program of sorts to test the waters of whether such a program could work in Victoria.

There is a lot of potential in this motion for a lot of initiatives, from commercial potential or even just the expansion of existing programs to government programs and using the resources of the government to promote them. Mr Bourman has proposed that surplus meat from government culling initiatives throughout Victoria, but primarily Wilsons Promontory National Park, can be donated, particularly during the high cull season. That surplus can be donated to a 'hunters for the hungry' program, with the collected surplus given to food banks and selected charities that are willing to take it. The end goal is unknown, but it seems to be commercial. The pilot is not the end in itself. This has never been done in Victoria, so it is an interesting concept. How would it work in practice?

Back in my day, in 1985, I was a jackaroo in New South Wales. Although we are talking about venison here, the kangaroos were culled on a large scale up there. On the Hay Plains – if you can imagine how big that would be – they set up camps to effectively try a cull process and sell the meat commercially. One of the things that came out of that was that it became a bit selective. As you know, the older the animal is, the tougher the meat can be. When you are shooting kangaroos, predominantly it is done at night, and with lot of that work, you cannot determine the age, size or sex of an animal, you can only see between its eyes. A lot of animals were knocked off during that process, unfortunately. One of the problems around that culling process was that given the remoteness of the area, there was no power. You needed remote cool rooms to look after the meat once it was processed, and if you had generators that failed under those circumstances, it certainly did not provide a good outcome for the meat.

All the leftovers from the cull itself, what would happen to them? My experience was that they dug some pretty big holes and pushed all the remains into them, but I am sure given the requirements today and the standards that are around, a lot of this stuff could be overcome. My guess is that recreational hunters across the state would be able to donate their excess supply of meat from leisure hunts to various organisations casually or regularly, but then again it is open to experimentation.

The programs conducted over in the United States allow for recreational hunters to hunt and donate wild animals. By Mr Bourman's own estimation, over 120,000 game deer were killed in 2022. That is a lot of excess meat, a lot of which will end up going to waste under the current system. Mr Bourman made a clear and really good point in an article I read recently: there is only so much meat you can fit in your fridge. This proposal suggests wild-shot venison from hunters can be donated to a program similar to that in the United States, which the government should set up as an alternative to the meat just going to waste. According to the *Guardian* newspaper, a similar concept exists in the New Zealand North Island towns of Taupō and Tūrangi. It began last year – and I believe it is where Mr Bourman got the inspiration for the idea to use surplus meat from a deer cull – and it has worked. According to the same article, as of May this year our Kiwi hunter friends have donated more than 4.5 tonnes of venison mince to food banks, and this is exclusively meat that hunters have said they would have fed to their families. It must be high quality. On top of this, I want to thank Mr Bourman for his invitation to all members of this place and the other for a lunch hosted with the support of the Sporting Shooters Association of Australia (Victoria) – SSAA Victoria – as this motion is debated.

We know that with the cost-of-living crisis Victorians and Aussies are facing there are food insecurity issues. Those under the age of 45 are earning a low income. Victorians need reliable food sources. That means quality food, not scraps or something they cannot trust. This goes to the heart of section (1) of the motion. This week I attended the 50th anniversary of the Port Phillip Community Group's founding. I am sure that my colleagues in this place from Southern Metro have heard about it. One of the main functions of the Port Phillip Community Group is the provision of a food bank, and this was never more vital than during COVID. The Share the Food report of the Port Phillip Community Group from April 2020 to March 2021, during the height of COVID, talks about what they achieved. 16,765 parcels of food were packed by volunteers. This is \$1,140,000 worth of food. As the community struggled with unemployment during COVID or their mental health made it difficult to visit the supermarket and much more, the Share the Food program could support them thanks to the City of Port Phillip and others. The Port Phillip Community Group packed food relief that met families' needs, but their resources were limited, and now due to the cost-of-living demands it is bad again. They are seeing an increased demand for their services. Imagine how services like this could benefit from initiatives like this that are mainstream. It is worth seeing if this could be a solution.

One of the biggest issues flagged about similar programs overseas is the concern around health and safety standards. Hunters are donating meat from wild animals that are hunted in leisure to food banks. Some overseas raised concerns about whether it was viable and even safe to run such a program if wild meat was being donated, potentially from diseased animals unknown to the hunter or the consumer. But, as I said yesterday, we do not know what we do not know. Why not investigate and see what can be achieved? Who knows – through rigorous testing on particular game animals, perhaps it could be as safe as farmed animals. But we do not know, so let us investigate it. That is why this motion is important, and I commend Mr Bourman for bringing this pragmatic and principled motion to the floor.

Bev McARTHUR (Western Victoria) (11:19): I rise to support Mr Bourman's motion and congratulate him on bringing the motion forward. We struggle with the problem of feral deer in many of our national parks and areas where we have got to look after the environment, and deer are presenting a significant problem. The Invasive Species Council states that deer are having serious impacts on many areas of Victoria and that:

... deer are emerging as one of Australia's most serious environmental and agricultural threats and Victoria has possibly the largest deer population in Australia, estimated at more than a million animals.

The deer population is expanding rapidly and invading new areas. With a lack of predators, occurrence in vast and remote areas and great habitat flexibility, deer are set to become one of Victoria's and ultimately Australia's most damaging pest animal invaders.

...

There are now four wild species of deer in Victoria: sambar, red, fallow and hog deer. Of those, sambar is the by far the most populous and widespread, now occurring throughout most of eastern Victoria.

...

Deer are having serious impacts on peri-urban areas such as outer eastern Melbourne and regional townships where their presence can be intimidating. They destroy fences and gardens and are becoming a serious road safety issue. Irresponsible deer hunting activity can be very distressing for peri-urban residents and recreational users of public land.

So it is vitally important that we utilise the licensed deer hunters of Victoria. As Mr Bourman's motion suggests, 150,000 game deer are shot by recreational hunters every year, but there is a major impediment to Victoria's 51,000 licensed deer hunters taking more deer, and the impediment is finding a use for that extra venison.

This motion addresses the other issue that we are confronted with daily, which is the cost of living and the problem that food charities are having in feeding those people that cannot afford to put bread on the table, let alone venison. This does offer an opportunity for properly processed meat, a high-protein source, to be used by families in need, and that is a very good thing. So Mr Bourman is proposing that there be a pilot program to enable the commercial processing of wild shot venison so it can be harvested and donated to food charities on selected government programs, and hopefully maybe some funding could be provided for the training of accredited volunteers and the necessary infrastructure such as racks on vehicles and coolrooms.

I do know that the licensed deer hunters who have a special licence to be able to go onto agricultural properties to reduce the feral population of not only deer but also kangaroos are very well regulated and very highly skilled and, I must say, provide a very good service to many farmers who are impacted by this.

I would also say there is a lot of action by the government to destroy the brumby population in Victoria. Quite frankly, the deer population does far more damage. In the rutting season they ringbark trees, and they breed far more prolifically than one horse, lucky to produce a live foal in a year.

So we can reduce the deer population but make use of the meat. We do not need Parks Victoria or whoever is going to be responsible for going out and reducing the deer population on their feral control program to just leave this meat source on the ground, because all that does is attract wild dogs, wild cats, foxes and other feral animals that are then provided with a meat source. This proposal, with licensed shooters being encouraged to reduce the feral deer population and then make use of the meat in a very productive and resourceful way, is a very good idea and one that should be taken up by the government. We might see a better outcome in our parks and forests if we were to take up Mr Bourman's proposal, and at the same time the food charities would have another source of meat that is of course at no cost but is high protein and would be very useful in their production of food for those that need charitable food donations.

I must say I am familiar with the deer hunting operations that happen in the UK. Deer are not seen as vermin in any way in that area, and it is a very successful system of hunting. The meat is all used, and it is a highly regarded meat source for top-end restaurants as well. Deer are, in that area, a very useful economic tool in many agricultural areas that cannot farm in any other way – up in the high country of Scotland, for example.

I am very supportive of Mr Bourman's motion. I hope the government take up the suggestion that we embark on a pilot program to enable the commercial processing of wild-shot venison to be harvested and donated to food charities. I think that would be a wonderful thing, and at the same time we would help to reduce the population of deer, which are doing much to destroy our native forests and areas that we hold so dear.

Katherine COPSEY (Southern Metropolitan) (11:27): The Greens are not supporting this motion. Whilst it is an admirable attempt to shoehorn the interests of the shooting lobby into one of the biggest

issues facing our community today – the cost of living – it is a yeah-nah from the Greens on this one. Some of the measures that are actually being called for to tackle cost of living and food security are starkly different from this morning's unappetising serving suggestion from the shooters. One of our largest charities, Anglicare Australia, which runs community pantries and provides emergency food parcels, spends its social capital strongly advocating for people and families doing it tough, and it is specifically not calling for food donations – it is calling for an increase to social security payments to at least bring recipients above the poverty line and it is backing a universal basic income.

One of the solutions that we can progress in this Parliament to the rising cost of putting food on the table is to stop the supermarkets from price gouging. Prices for food and other essentials are now through the roof, and the supermarket duopoly continues to post record profits. It is obscene. When did profiteering from essential items become remotely acceptable in our community? The government has the power to act to stop price gouging, but it is currently choosing not to do so. The Greens will keep pushing to cut the cost of living and to make food affordable for everyone.

With regard to food costs, previous Victorian governments have stepped up to control egregious price rises. In the 1980s the Department of Consumer Affairs had a responsibility to deter excessive price rises, and the Cain Labor government in the 1980s tackled excessive price rises by setting a target or ceiling on grocery price rises, backed by legislation, which allowed the prices minister to set prices on declared grocery items. This was credited with Melbourne going from having the highest price increases in the country to some of the lowest in the space of just 12 months.

In relation to deer, which are an invasive species that causes damage to our environment, last year Labor had the perfect opportunity to address this issue in the *Victorian Deer Control Strategy*. Instead they once again caved into pressure from the shooting lobby, which has a vested interest in continuing populations of deer at high levels so that they can shoot them. So there are still more than 1 million roaming Victoria, damaging our ecosystems, our agriculture and occasionally, when they get really confused, people's living rooms.

Modernising our wildlife laws is a necessary step so that they can actually protect wildlife.

Bev McArthur interjected.

Katherine COPSEY: I will repeat it for Mrs McArthur, whose interjection just covered up my solution to this problem: modernising our wildlife laws is a necessary step so that they actually protect wildlife. Right now these laws consider native wildlife to be either a resource or a pest, while introduced species, like deer, receive protection. Where population control measures are required, these should be conducted by experienced professionals based on a scientific assessment of what is needed to protect our state's valuable and unique biodiversity, not the cut-lunch commandos whose idea of a fun weekend is killing animals. Amateur shooters roaming around close to population centres can create a pretty significant community safety issue. It impacts residents' amenity and wellbeing, and it plays havoc with the use of their neighbourhoods and their wellbeing, as we heard during the committee sessions into the duck-shooting inquiry.

The game shooting fraternity really likes to have it both ways. They say they are keeping populations down, but in actual fact they are lobbying hard to maintain those populations. This 'let them eat deer' motion is just another fig leaf for the interests of the shooting lobby, and that same fraternity has spent decades trying to justify barbaric recreational shooting by saying that shooters already use every bit of the animal. This motion simply puts lie to that narrative.

Georgie PURCELL (Northern Victoria) (11:31): My staff put my first line on this motion as: 'The first thing I have to say about Mr Bourman's motion is, deer me.'

Jeff Bourman: Oh, dear.

Georgie PURCELL: Oh, dear. While I commend his apparent willingness to help the vulnerable populations of Victoria and those experiencing hardship in what is an undeniable cost-of-living crisis,

there are many issues with this motion. What I would consider to be a more valuable and practical use of our time in this place – Mr Bourman already mentioned my comments – would be to look into more meaningful longer term reforms to help those groups, including drug harm reduction, addressing the scourge of family violence and affordable housing in this state. Of course I am in support of any program that genuinely supports individuals experiencing homelessness or requiring government support to meet their basic needs in order to live. Feeding them the offcuts of deer seems like a convenience for shooters and for the industry, and quite frankly people in need deserve much better solutions than this.

As I have raised many times, the shooting of animals of any kind in Victoria is not sufficiently regulated. It is geographically not possible. This motion could have focused on better regulation for the whole industry before seeking special consideration for what is essentially a human health risk. Those experiencing homelessness or hardship deserve more than the food safety risks that come with an animal killed, transported and stored in who knows what conditions before reaching their final destination. And let us not forget that deer are not a classified pest species. They were introduced to Victoria specifically as a game animal in the mid-1880s. 123,376 game deer were shot by recreational hunters in 2022, a 49 per cent increase on the long-term average. There is no closed season, and for all but one, there is no bag limit. It has been reported that there were many shot and left to rot, yet the consistent narrative from shooters is that they do this in order to utilise the whole animal. We want to know: which one is it? It seems to change frequently based on what suits their narrative, and I would suggest a better solution might be to stop shooting in surplus and instead focus on solutions that truly reduce populations of non-native species in the long term, because shooting has consistently shown us that it does not do this.

The Game Management Authority self-describes as ‘an independent authority responsible for the regulation of game hunting in Victoria’, regulating through ‘education, research and enforcement to achieve responsible and sustainable game hunting in Victoria’. It explains ethical hunting of deer on its website, purporting that:

... laws and regulations have been introduced to ensure that hunting is conducted in a safe, responsible and sustainable manner ...

But there is nothing sustainable about shooting an animal and leaving them to rot. This is not the solution. In terms of respecting killed game animals, the GMA outlines that once a deer is killed:

... it should be properly handled to minimise waste. Bring out as much meat as you can and ensure that the carcass is not left near a road track or a waterway. Never shoot an animal if you know you cannot carry it out. Avoid wasting a valuable game resource. Prepare game quickly and never leave game to waste.

It would appear that Mr Bourman’s motion is in complete contradiction with what the authority, the GMA, requires, again highlighting my point that this is an issue of regulation and shooter behaviour, not helping the homeless. Deer are also completely unprotected on private property, meaning that no permit is required to shoot and consume deer where they are considered a nuisance. Only commercial harvesters can use deer for commercial purposes, and they must comply with the PrimeSafe requirements and standards for the hygienic production of wild game meat for human consumption.

We all have lived experience of a global pandemic. Many do not want to acknowledge this, but its root cause was animals – the conditions that they were kept in and their consumption by humans. We are all aware of the undisputed fact that wildlife populations are the most significant source of emergent infectious diseases that impact human health. This year the CSIRO reported that:

Australia is currently free of many animal pathogens detected elsewhere in the world, such as those causing Foot and Mouth Disease or Lumpy Skin Disease ...

However:

... exotic diseases remain a major threat to Australia’s livestock industry as well as to human and wildlife health.

Their research found that:

... ongoing monitoring to determine the presence of pathogens in wildlife is crucial to identifying ... and preventing future disease outbreaks.

The CSIRO further states that wild deer populations in Australia currently pose a disease risk and further increases in size and distribution could increase that risk. However, data about the infection status of Australian wild deer populations are not clear, with only six studies reported before 2014, all of them identified in localised surveys conducted 41 to 56 years ago. The CSIRO explains in detail how deer are infected by and susceptible to many diseases, some of which are zoonotic, meaning that they can also affect humans. They summarise that:

... high wild deer densities ... may cause concern for human health via the transmission of infectious agents through direct contact, the consumption of venison, or contamination of the environment (particularly water) with faeces or urine.

Recent research from the Centre for Invasive Species Solutions also reveals that the risk posed by deer as hosts of exotic disease is very real.

In the United States most donated game meat is deer, but the presence of ammunition-derived metallic lead fragments in hunted meat is a big concern over there. Despite the risks involved, the vast majority of donated meat is not inspected beforehand so that contaminated meat can be discarded. Studies show that there is an alarming lack of food safety standards and that poses a significant risk to consumers who may already be disproportionately affected by elevated blood lead levels from lead exposure.

With regard to donating food, the Department of Health in Victoria considers meat a high-risk food. The national standard operating procedure on the ground shooting of deer explicitly states that care must be taken when handling feral deer carcasses because they harvest zoonotic diseases such as Q fever, salmonella and others which can affect humans and other animals.

Let us be clear: the majority of deer are shot to cull them, because we view them as an inconvenience that affects agriculture and economic interests. It is true that in some areas deer impact biodiversity, water quality and Aboriginal cultural heritage, yet there is no evidence to suggest that the environmental impact of deer is bigger than the elephant in the room – that is, clearing land for animal agriculture. If deer are such a problem, then why are we farming them in this state? Here in Victoria there are several deer farms that sell meat to the public, so one could deduce that perhaps shooters are not treating deer with the respect they deserve as part of GMA's commitment to sustainable hunting and instead are shooting for fun and leaving animals to rot and, finally, wanting an easy solution. This government should not invest any more of its bucks to chop up diseased carcasses to feed to the already vulnerable population of Victoria.

While I note this motion is in relation to government programs, recreational hunting alone has not proved effective in preventing deer population growth or range expansion. Accredited volunteer shooters are not generally deployed to achieve rapid knockdowns in deer populations, as this is evidenced to be more efficiently implemented using specialist contract shooting teams.

Before we go asking the government to commit any dough to this proposal, let us have a think about the many ways in which it could be better spent, including on community food relief programs that are healthy and disease and risk free, which I note are asking for donations of products with a long shelf life, and fresh fruit and vegetables.

It is clear that I cannot support this motion today, as there are simply too many risks involved. Vulnerable people and those experiencing homelessness deserve so much better than this. It is not apparent that the intention of this motion is to genuinely support those in need. It seeks to expand deer shooting and is using those experiencing hardship as its scapegoat. We can do so much better for people and for animals in this place.

Tom McINTOSH (Eastern Victoria) (11:41): I stand to support the motion put forward by Mr Bourman today. I have many, many conversations about deer in my region of Eastern Victoria. It does not matter whether I am talking to farmers or talking to First Nations or talking to people who are associated with environmental groups, it is a constant conversation. I was up in Bonang the other week talking to a farmer who had a serious investment in the electrification of fences to keep deer out of the property. I talk to other people working in planting in South Gippsland – Landcare and other groups – putting in plants only to see deer come through and mow them down. I will note Mr Bourman did mention that this motion should not be getting lost in all the other parts of the discussion, but I think it is worth raising them because there are a lot of moving parts with everything around deer and a lot of impacts.

I often talk about sustainability, which might be a bit too much of a word for some to want to hear in here. But even if we call it balance, Ms Ermacora made a really good comment before about the balance between environment and economy. It is really important that those two work together, and where they can work together we get a really, really good outcome, because economically when we do not value our natural resources, that economic productivity or that economic surplus coming from them will cease to exist.

I was down at Mallacoota last week at the abalone factory. That is really important. As an industry and a sector, they clearly understand the importance of managing a resource well and seeing that continued profitability. There are the local jobs and the families they are supporting as the biggest employer in town. They are supplying not only Australia but international markets, because we have looked after an industry where other nations wiped it out to a point where it did not exist. That sustainability or that balance between environment and economy is really, really important, because we want to be economically strong and we want to see a value on our environment. We value it through the multitude of ways we can get value from our natural environment, whether that is food in an agricultural sense or whether that is any other resource or whether that is tourism and people getting out into nature and enjoying it.

As I said, I support this motion, but I do just want to acknowledge the complexities involved and why it is important that the discussion is had around it. Mr Berger commented earlier on getting into remote areas, energy for coolrooms, distribution, abattoirs and having the capacity to do the work, but I think this is something we all need to work together on. Ms Bath and I often disagree in our contributions on a number of things, but I think her contribution that focused on the issue of deer today I would in large part agree with. So that is good. Where we have got an issue of sustainability or balance or whatever it might be, let us put the politics aside, particularly with what Mr Bourman is talking about – supporting people in need, something like that. Where there are ways that we can work through and get an outcome that benefits everyone, as I said before, whether it is farmers or whether it is our natural environment or our First Nations people, if we find ways that are a win-win for everybody involved that is exactly what we should be doing.

David LIMBRICK (South-Eastern Metropolitan) (11:45): I also rise to speak on Mr Bourman's motion. Effectively what this motion is seeking to do is to allow more use of a natural resource in Victoria, which is deer. They are an introduced species. It is quite an interesting solution being proposed here, and I am very glad to hear that the government is interested in looking at it. We have an environmental and economic problem of too many deer in Victoria. They are causing problems for farmers, and they are causing problems for the environment. We have hunters who voluntarily want to go out and hunt these deer and use the resource but, because of government getting in the way, at the moment they are not allowed to distribute that resource; they are only allowed to hunt it for themselves. Obviously for a family there is only so much deer they can eat and store, and this seeks to look at how we might enable the distribution of that protein.

In the motion it is for the purposes of charity. Ultimately I would like to see this go further and look at commercial uses. Maybe these hunters could even, God forbid, make money out of it and sell it to people and make gourmet products. If there is a way for them to make money out of helping the

environment by getting rid of excess deer, why not do that? Why not look at that? I acknowledge there are problems with food safety, and they clearly need to be looked at. But as Mr Bourman pointed out, New Zealand has looked at this and manages to do it. In the United States they manage to do it. I do not see any reason why it should not be possible. We should be able to have the technology and procedures to manage the distribution of this.

I am very strongly in support of this, and I am very happy to see that the government is willing to look at it and see whether it might be something that can work. On that basis, I will strongly support this motion.

Wendy LOVELL (Northern Victoria) (11:47): I rise to also support Mr Bourman's motion. I think that this motion makes a great deal of sense. Deer are an introduced species, as we know. They are not a natural species in Victoria, and people seem to have no problem with shooting brumbies and just leaving them to rot. The Greens have not stood up for the brumbies. The Animal Justice Party barely mention the brumbies, and yet here they are going to oppose the shooting of deer.

Deer do a great deal of damage to our environment. They are an introduced species that wallows and they damage the environment significantly. They ringbark trees with their antlers during the rutting season. I remember a few years ago when the government were proposing a ban on cattle in the high country and they produced a photograph that they said was of damage caused by cattle wallowing in the high country. The mountain cattleman recognised the spot where the photograph had been taken, and it was damage caused by wallowing by deer, not wallowing by cattle.

I recently attended a forum that was run by Mr Mulholland. It was a fantastic forum in Wallan. We had over 400 sporting shooters there. They were opposed to the government's proposal to ban duck shooting and the Animal Justice Party's proposal to ban duck shooting.

Harriet Shing: The government has not proposed anything.

Wendy LOVELL: Well, a government-dominated committee made a majority report that recommended the end of duck shooting. We are hoping that the government as a whole has more sense than those people who were on that committee.

Sporting shooters make a great contribution to our economy in regional Victoria. If you look at a report called the *Economic Contribution of Recreational Hunting in Victoria*, a report that was done by the Department of Jobs, Precincts and Regions in 2020, it shows that sporting shooting contributes \$356 million to our gross state product, and it also supports 3138 jobs. Deer hunting is the vast majority of that. Deer hunting is a \$201 million contribution to the state and supports 1761 jobs, most of those in regional Victoria, and we cannot afford to lose those jobs. If this motion was supported, we would see even more people visiting our region and supporting more jobs and contributing more to our regional economy.

The report goes on to say on the average trips per hunter that 55 per cent of hunters take six or more trips to the country to participate in their sport, and 45 per cent of them take between one and six trips. There are many reasons for those trips, and I will not go into those, because I need to leave some time for Mr Galea. But I would say that this is a sensible motion that will actually support more hunting activity, provide more opportunities for recreational sport shooters and also support the homeless to get access to more meat.

Venison is a very good meat. It is not my meat of choice, but many people pay a lot of money for venison in restaurants – a huge amount of money. I would just encourage Ms Purcell to also have a look at this report that I mentioned, which was conducted by Rendell and McGuckian, RMCg, in 2020. She will see that the vast majority of the sporting shooting activity happens in our region in Northern Victoria, and this makes a tremendous contribution to our region. Ms Purcell should get on board and support recreational shooters and their sport, particularly when it comes to deer – an introduced species, not a native species. This is an activity where sporting shooters actually shoot to

kill; they do not leave animals maimed. What we are seeing from this current government is aerial shooting of brumbies – aerial shooting that does not necessarily directly kill. It leaves animals dying, bleeding out in agony because they are not humanely disposed of. Recreational shooters would never allow that.

Harriet Shing: On a point of order, President, Ms Lovell has strayed into areas that do not actually relate at all to the species that are being contemplated by Mr Bourman's motion, so on that basis you might want to, were you so inclined, bring Ms Lovell back to the subject of the motion.

Wendy LOVELL: On the point of order, President, I can help you there. Ms Shing has actually used up some of Mr Galea's time, because I had concluded.

Michael GALEA (South-Eastern Metropolitan) (11:53): I rise to speak on this splendid motion brought to the house today by Mr Bourman, and I do thank Ms Lovell for generously yielding some of her time so that I might make a few comments as well. As I said, what a splendid motion it is. It is a sensible thing for us to be considering. I do think there are some things that warrant noting from some previous contributions. Much as I am grateful to you, Ms Lovell, for giving me the opportunity to speak, I will pick you up on the point that you mentioned – that \$201 million of the \$356 million that is generated to the Victorian economy by game hunting is by deer hunting. You did let the cat out of the bag: the lion's share of the economic contribution from hunting in this state is from deer hunting. What is more – and you can read all about this in the excellent select committee report that was released earlier this year – deer hunting is actually increasing as the contribution out of the hunting sector. What is decreasing on the other hand is actually native bird hunting. That has a much smaller economic impact, as our select committee found.

What our select committee also looked at was a recommendation which members of Ms Lovell's side actually voted against, and that was an explicit recommendation to support the Game Management Authority in expanding its role, in expanding opportunities for other types of game hunting – most notably and explicitly including deer. That was actually included in a draft of the report which was voted upon in our deliberations, and I note that it was Ms Lovell's colleague Mr Mulholland, who is in the chamber here with us today as well, who voted against that. So whilst I am delighted to see that the coalition are now in support of this motion, of sensibly using deer meat for a reasonable purpose, it was appalling to see them vote against that in the select committee's deliberations. We do know that is what they did, and it is on the record of that committee; it is on page 220 of that committee report. Anyone can go and find it themselves. It is a real problem. Those opposite might not agree. I am glad to see that they have come on board in supporting this today. That is very good. Deer populations are a real problem.

Another thing: deer are not a native species. For what it is worth, neither are brumbies, but let us not go into that whole field of discussion. Deer, unlike native birds, are not native; they were introduced. Let us be honest, it is not their fault that they were introduced. It was some ill-conceived approach by some settlers, no doubt, generations ago – some squatters – which we are now paying the price dearly for. They are a pest. People in my constituency – obviously I have a very urbanised area, but I do have some outer suburban pockets as well – in places like Upper Beaconsfield have told me how much of a problem the local deer populations are and what a pest they are for the local environment, for conservation and for agriculture as well. This is a problem that is affecting obviously our regional communities, as my colleague Mr McIntosh talked about extensively as well, but also our outer suburban communities in places like Beaconsfield and Upper Beaconsfield in my electorate.

Those of us on this side of the house support a responsible means of eradicating deer as best we can. This is in and of itself not a golden bullet solution to the food shortages that some people are facing. There are many, many other things that we can be doing and many other things that we are doing, for what it is worth, too. This is not what I think the government should be pinning its hopes on solely, but it is a sensible thing. I do actually agree with Ms Lovell on one point: I do not much like the taste of venison either. But it is actually a very good meat. It is a very healthy meat to eat as well. It is one

of the healthiest red meats you can eat in fact. So if you can stomach it, which I personally struggle a little bit to do, it is something that people definitely should consider trying for themselves, whichever way it is sourced, as long as it is responsible.

I also note in her comments Ms Purcell made reference to lead shot and issues arising from that. I do wish to note for the record that there are many different types of shot that can be used, and lead shot is not the only shot used when it comes to shooting deer. Perhaps as part of the government looking into the issue – which this motion seeks to achieve, if that is what this house agrees to today – the government should look at the types of shot that are used. I know in the duck-hunting inquiry as well that did come up as a point of interest – that whilst lead shot has already been abolished for most native birds, it has not actually yet been abolished for quail shooting. Perhaps that is something that can be looked at for deer hunting as well, because again, it is not their fault that they are here. But they are an absolute pest, and the more that we can do to eradicate them from our farms and from our national parks, the better it will be. This is a very good motion – as I said at the outset, a splendid motion. I do support it, and for the reasons that we have gone through as well.

Nick McGowan: What reasons?

Michael GALEA: Well, you should have been in the chamber, Mr McGowan, if you wanted to hear them all. There are far too many for me to go through again in the one-and-a-little-bit minutes that I have remaining, but there are some excellent reasons. I do wish to reiterate that those on this side of the house consistently support appropriate measures of deer and other similar species control, supporting the right of hunters to responsibly hunt species such as deer. As I say, they are not a native species by any means; they were introduced. Again, we did see members of the opposition vote against the expansion of deer hunting in that inquiry that we had –

Tom McIntosh interjected.

Michael GALEA: It was absolutely shameful, Mr McIntosh. We did see them vote against that, which was a great tragedy to see. I see Ms Bath is in the room as well. She also voted against that splendid recommendation in that report. Never mind. It is good to see some cross-party support for it here today. We have not got full unanimity, but I think we have got enough people that are speaking in favour. I do look forward to seeing this motion hopefully pass and to seeing the results of any investigation that comes as a result of it.

Business interrupted pursuant to sessional orders.

Questions without notice and ministers statements

Animal welfare

Jeff BOURMAN (Eastern Victoria) (12:00): (351) My question is for the minister representing the Minister for Agriculture in the other place. Minister, it is no secret the animal welfare legislation is under review, but it seems there is a secret activity happening regarding this legislative review. Today's *Weekly Times* reports on the government's secret consultation about the government's animal welfare reform with a select group of stakeholders that one person present described as a room full of animal welfare 'activists and their lawyers'. Can the minister advise who sat exactly on this secret working group?

Jaclyn SYMES (Northern Victoria – Attorney-General, Minister for Emergency Services) (12:00): Mr Bourman, I will pass your question on to the Minister for Agriculture for a response.

Jeff BOURMAN (Eastern Victoria) (12:00): I thank the Attorney-General for forwarding that on.

Georgie Purcell interjected.

Jeff BOURMAN: I am kind of asking this on behalf of the Animal Justice Party too, it seems. They got excluded as well. Anyway, Minister, DEECA's secret animal welfare legislation working

group excluded the peak representatives of recreational fishers, recreational hunters and livestock producers, transporters and processors – people who are clearly directly affected by this legislation. No-one I have talked to about this was included in the working group. Can the minister advise why the decision was made to exclude key stakeholders from this process in favour of those animal welfare activists and their lawyers?

Jaclyn SYMES (Northern Victoria – Attorney-General, Minister for Emergency Services) (12:01): I thank Mr Bourman for his question. What I would just add to that is probably just more generic information. Exclusion of people from a working group does not amount to exclusion from involvement in the process. I am unfamiliar with the members that were convened in the group that you have mentioned, but any suggestion that relevant stakeholders would be excluded from a process of policy development is certainly not something that happens under this government. I will allow the agriculture minister to ensure that you get an update on not only the membership of the group you have asked about but perhaps the consultation plan and the way that all groups will have a say in development of this policy.

Emergency communication services

Georgie CROZIER (Southern Metropolitan) (12:02): (352) My question is to the Minister for Emergency Services. Minister, ESTA have been plagued with problems for years, despite multiple warnings to the government – ESTA, now Triple Zero Victoria – and, sadly, as a result of your government failing to act, dozens of Victorians have died. Recently an outage in the radio system resulted in paramedics being unable to communicate properly and resorting to using their own mobile phones. On Monday paramedics were again forced to rely on their personal mobile phones due to another blackout. Minister, when will this be fixed?

Jaclyn SYMES (Northern Victoria – Attorney-General, Minister for Emergency Services) (12:02): I thank Ms Crozier for her question. Specifically the incident on Monday was a radio interruption that was resolved in around 90 minutes. It affected two of the regional channels used to communicate between ambulance and dispatchers and paramedic crews. As you have indicated, mobile phones were used to communicate to in-field crews, and ESTA advised that there was no adverse impact to dispatch delivery of services to the Victorian community during this time. Work has already started on preparing for Ambulance Victoria to transition to the digital radio across regional Victoria, and that is expected to start next year. I do thank those members who reverted to using their mobile phones to ensure that communications could continue during that disruption.

Georgie CROZIER (Southern Metropolitan) (12:03): I am pleased that there were no impacts, but, Minister, with these ongoing communication failures, how can Victorians have faith that the systemic problems that caused at least 33 deaths that we know of through delays in 000 calls will be solved? You are saying it is going to be transitioning next year, but how can Victorians have faith that your government is going to get this right?

Jaclyn SYMES (Northern Victoria – Attorney-General, Minister for Emergency Services) (12:04): Ms Crozier, we have spent a lot of time in this chamber talking about ESTA, and indeed the Triple Zero Victoria Bill last week was a good opportunity to talk about the continued investment and support that this government has for this organisation. We have a new CAD system that is close to finalising those tenders. We have had a lot of interest, and that is really promising, because you want to get the best value and the best product for Victorians so that they can rely on it.

In relation to the other issues that you have raised, I want to thank this amazing workforce because as we are making these investments, as they have encountered whether it is issues within their organisations or issues out of their control like an Optus outage, they have stepped up when they needed to to ensure that any workarounds, any contingencies, could be activated as a matter of urgency, because these people are motivated and absolutely dedicated to the safety of Victorians each and every day. It is an honour to be a government that is supporting them both financially and in other measures to ensure that they do the best work that they possibly can.

Ministers statements: Trans Awareness Week

Harriet SHING (Eastern Victoria – Minister for Housing, Minister for Water, Minister for Equality) (12:05): I rise today in my capacity as Minister for Equality to share the really important celebration, commemoration and engagement that we have this week as part of Trans Awareness Week. It is so important when we have conversations about the life experiences of transgender, non-binary and gender-diverse people that we are talking with a sense of engagement, respect and understanding around the importance of safety and inclusion. This week we collectively acknowledge, recognise, celebrate and amplify the voices of trans and gender-diverse communities. Sunday marked the first day of Trans Awareness Week, which is taking place from 13 to 19 November and culminating in the Trans Day of Remembrance on the 20th, an opportunity to reflect on lives lost, including as a result of systemic violence, discrimination, harassment, injury and exclusion.

When we talk about the progress that we have made, it is important also for everybody to commit to supporting and to making space for trans and gender-diverse people. This morning at Parliament it was a significant sign of progress to host Transcend Australia, its CEO Jeremy Wiggins and the extraordinary Frankie and her amazing mum Patrice. Frankie is 15. She is an exemplary leader. She is somebody who is prepared to share her vulnerability and her lived experience – the bullying and harassment and exclusion that she experienced from year 2 onwards, before finding the support, the care and the inclusion that she deserves. She and her mum are two such examples of why it is so important to make and to keep trans kids safe. That is something to think about not just this week in Trans Awareness Week but every day of every year.

Koala management

Georgie PURCELL (Northern Victoria) (12:07): (353) My question is for the minister representing the Minister for Environment. The koalas around Portland are dying. Starvation, road strike, no habitable trees and aluminium production that poisons the environment are just some of the factors affecting the struggling population. Now there are even reports of them walking into the ocean towards ships that carry their logged habitat and drowning. What is this government going to do to protect koalas in south-west Victoria?

Gayle TIERNEY (Western Victoria – Minister for Skills and TAFE, Minister for Regional Development) (12:08): I thank Ms Purcell for her question in relation to koalas around the Portland area. This is not a new topic, and as a member for Western Victoria I am very familiar with issues and incidents that have arisen in terms of koalas and their habitat. I will refer this matter to the Minister for Environment. I am sure that he will be able to provide written confirmation of the activities that the government has undertaken.

Georgie PURCELL (Northern Victoria) (12:08): Thank you, Minister, for referring that on. The koala management strategy was put into place in May 2023 in this state, and rescuers and locals on the ground are telling me that it is having no impact in this situation, so my question is: how much of the \$3.3 million allocated in the 2022–23 state budget has been spent on revegetation of koala habitat in south-west Victoria?

Gayle TIERNEY (Western Victoria – Minister for Skills and TAFE, Minister for Regional Development) (12:09): Again I thank Ms Purcell for her question, and that will be referred to Minister Dimopoulos.

Bushfire preparedness

Melina BATH (Eastern Victoria) (12:09): (354) My question is to the Minister for Emergency Services. During the devastating 2019–20 bushfires in East Gippsland, experienced CFA volunteers were extremely frustrated by government bureaucracy which impeded their ability to undertake back-

burns on Crown land and hence reduce the spread of fire. As well as fire behaviour analysis and incident control, plans for back-burns must be addressed by:

... Biodiversity and Cultural Heritage experts who ensure that sensitive areas are protected.

That is a quote from the government's fact sheet on the topic. Minister, what action will you take to streamline this process so back-burns can be used to better protect forests and communities from mega bushfires?

Jaclyn SYMES (Northern Victoria – Attorney-General, Minister for Emergency Services) (12:10): Thank you, Ms Bath, for your question. It might be appropriate for you and me to have an offline discussion in relation to the specific issues that you are concerned about. There are a range of experts – there are working bodies, we have a joint fuel management program – that advise me on where back-burning is appropriate and where it is safe to do. It is a very vexed issue. So to ask me what I am going to do, I would confirm that I continually have briefings and meetings with my colleagues that have an interest in this. We have a committee of cabinet that is regularly briefed by the agencies in relation to back-burning and the like. So I guess my answer to your question is that I will continue to rely on the experts and I will continue to go out and talk to local communities about their concerns. But it is an issue that I get a little bit concerned about when people say, 'Why aren't you back-burning?' and when I go and ask about a particular area, the advice comes back saying, 'We don't need to, because that's not a danger area.' You need to make sure –

Melina Bath: On a point of order, President, the minister is being relevant, but she is conflating or confusing back-burning with preparatory burns. I am speaking about back-burning, Minister.

The PRESIDENT: The minister was being relevant to the question. Minister, have you finished?

Jaclyn SYMES: Yes.

Melina BATH (Eastern Victoria) (12:12): Thank you, Minister. In January 2020 Bemm River CFA second lieutenant David Sturgess made repeated formal requests for permission to strategically back-burn on Crown land and thwart the advancement of a megafire from the east heading to the Bemm River township. Only at the last minute did government agencies relent and give CFA permission, in effect placing volunteers at unnecessary heightened risk. Minister, with the new bushfire season fast approaching and fuel loads at a three-year high, what will you do to guarantee that experienced volunteers are listened to and respected?

Jaclyn SYMES (Northern Victoria – Attorney-General, Minister for Emergency Services) (12:13): Ms Bath, I appreciate your interest in this matter, and I absolutely applaud your advocacy for the hardworking volunteers that you come into contact with that have views and expertise in this space. Their views are valued. There is a range of information that goes into these considerations – the Office of Bushfire Risk Management and within FFMVic. Many government agencies are involved in this, and they draw on advice from local volunteers. They are valued; they are a voice. I do not make these decisions, but I do ensure that all of those decisions that are made are made in collaboration with interested parties.

Ministers statements: Social Services Regulator

Lizzie BLANDTHORN (Western Metropolitan – Minister for Children, Minister for Disability) (12:14): As the house may be aware, the new Social Services Regulator will commence on 1 July 2024, which will streamline regulation and reporting requirements for providers of social services as well as strengthen the enforcement powers that protect vulnerable service users from harm. Last week the final regulations that will apply across the social services sector were made. This is an important milestone towards this reform. The services that the regulator will oversee include family violence, homelessness, disability services –

Members interjecting.

The PRESIDENT: Minister Blandthorn, can I ask you to stop for a second. Can we reset the clock. Minister Blandthorn, from the top.

Lizzie BLANDTHORN: As the house may be aware, the new Social Services Regulator will commence on 1 July 2024, streamlining regulation and reporting requirements for providers of social services as well as strengthening the enforcement powers that protect vulnerable service users from harm. Last week the final regulations that will apply across the social services sector were made. This is an important milestone towards this reform. The services that the regulator will oversee include family violence; homelessness; disability services; children, youth and family services; and supported residential services.

From 1 July 2024, for the first time, the providers of these services will have a single set of social service standards, a single registration and reporting process and an independent regulator. The regulator will also be empowered to recognise other regulatory schemes, providing a more coordinated and simpler system for those service providers which need to comply with more than one scheme. In the first instance the scheme will educate and provide guidance to all providers about the new standards. It will identify deficiencies in the delivery of services and work with providers to improve. It will issue fines to providers which breach their responsibilities and, where appropriate, initiate criminal proceedings for aggravated breaches of the standards. This reform will reduce red tape for the organisations, drive improvement in the quality of services and minimise the risk of harm to service users.

I would like to thank the members of the Social Services Regulation Taskforce, who continue to provide vital feedback from the sector to the government as we prepare for this streamlined and strengthened system. I would like to acknowledge the expertise and wisdom of the taskforce co-chair Susan Pascoe, who has facilitated open discussions between the representatives of this highly diverse sector. Throughout the life of the taskforce Ms Pascoe has been ably supported by previous co-chair Josh Bull, member for Sunbury in the other place, and current co-chair Iwan Walters, member for Greenvale in the other place and Parliamentary Secretary for Disability. A great many Victorians rely on these key social services, and this reform will ensure that the regulations that govern them are efficient and effective and minimise the risk of harm to people who use them.

Housing

Evan MULHOLLAND (Northern Metropolitan) (12:16): (355) My question is to the Minister for Housing. It was revealed today that since 2018 Victoria's public housing stock has increased by just 394, despite the state being three years into what is claimed to be the nation's biggest housing build. Given that the Big Housing Build promised to construct more than 9300 new social homes, can the minister advise when it is expected that that promise will be achieved?

Harriet SHING (Eastern Victoria – Minister for Housing, Minister for Water, Minister for Equality) (12:17): Thank you, Mr Mulholland, for your, again, sudden interest in social housing, which as a consequence of this unprecedented investment of \$5.3 billion across Victoria is really leading the nation as we continue to deliver on those homes as part of 12,000 additional social housing homes to come online, plus an additional \$1 billion as part of a regional housing build to provide at least 1300 new social housing units across rural and regional Victoria.

We are really determined to make sure that we continue this work, and across Victoria we are talking about more than 280 construction sites. We are talking about more than 10,000 jobs. We are talking about 7600 homes that are either completed or in the process of being completed and meeting that need in terms of accessibility and amenity and proximity to the communities where people can access everything from kinder and primary and secondary schools to health care right through to public transport. It is in communities such as Brighton, Mr Mulholland – notwithstanding the protests and the howls of derision that came from the other side of the chamber about whether people could fit in without the iPads and without the sneakers that they might otherwise have thought to be requiring in order to make it – Prahran, St Kilda, Port Melbourne and Flemington.

We are also moving to make sure that as we deliver on this commitment of 12,000 homes we are progressing this work in a way that creates jobs around the state. We are also making sure that we continue our progress, which includes moving more than 7000 households into social housing across the state between 2022 and 2023, which is an increase of 21 per cent on the previous year. It is also a really important thing to note, Mr Mulholland, that 60 per cent – not as otherwise reported, but 60 per cent – of the Big Housing Build has been allocated to date as at September. We are continuing to work on making sure that when and as we deliver that housing stock it is done in the ways that community need and in the ways that residents are asking for, that it sits alongside the maintenance and the upgrade work that we are doing, that it is taking place in partnership with the community housing sector and with the Commonwealth, which is funding more than 879 additional homes as part of a \$497 million investment, and that we are partnering with those important agencies and the private sector to deliver on this record investment.

Evan MULHOLLAND (Northern Metropolitan) (12:20): Minister, between June 2017 and June 2023 the average wait time for families on the public housing register increased from 10.5 months to 18.1 months. Can the minister advise when it is expected that wait times will fall?

Harriet SHING (Eastern Victoria – Minister for Housing, Minister for Water, Minister for Equality) (12:20): Mr Mulholland, we are continuously working to make sure that wait times are addressed and that people have what they need, including as that relates to areas of greatest need and vulnerability. We have continued to work to make sure, for example, that people who are victims and survivors of family violence, people who are in those immediate risk cohorts and people who have immediate need because of a risk to their safety or wellbeing are given access to immediate accommodation and to the wraparound services that they require. We have as part of the investment in the Big Housing Build, for example, provided more than 800 homes to –

Evan Mulholland: On a point of order, President, on relevance, I asked when it is expected that wait times will fall. The minister has not come to that answer.

The PRESIDENT: I am happy to call the minister back to the question, but during her substantive answer once again I could hardly hear her because of noise from the side of the house that asked the question. So if I get a point of order that she has not answered the substantive question, I will have to take that on notice because I cannot hear her. I call the minister to get back to the question.

Harriet SHING: It is important to note that every single day Homes Victoria and the community housing sector are indeed working across the state with our partners in homelessness and the social and community services sector to bring that register down and to make sure, as we are doing with specific cohorts, that those register waiting times are already coming down.

Drug harm reduction

Aiv PUGLIELLI (North-Eastern Metropolitan) (12:22): (356) My question today is to the Premier, via the Leader of the Government. Earlier today there was a gathering in this building of people from health services, from unions and from drug harm reduction organisations who came together to support a very generous offer from Harm Reduction Australia and Pill Testing Australia to run a free pill-testing trial at a Victorian event of your choice. It is a very generous offer – literally free. They cover the insurance. We know from other jurisdictions like Canberra that this will save lives. Will you take up this offer?

Jaclyn SYMES (Northern Victoria – Attorney-General, Minister for Emergency Services) (12:23): I will pass the question on to the Premier.

Aiv PUGLIELLI (North-Eastern Metropolitan) (12:23): Thank you, Minister. Last week on the ABC one of your federal counterparts, the federal health minister Mark Butler, publicly stated that there is evidence to support the life-saving benefits of pill testing. I have said before in this place – he is right – that there is a lot of evidence that shows just how beneficial pill testing as a service is to, for

example, young people who may choose to take drugs. Rather than taking commentary about it being a green light to drug use, in fact, as was stated in this building today, if anything, it becomes a red or amber light because there is a cohort who will receive information about what they are about to take – potentially something they were not expecting or potentially something that is contaminated – and then choose not to take that substance, countering that potential fear-based narrative that exists elsewhere in the community. Will this government also acknowledge the benefits of pill testing and introduce it here in Victoria?

Jaclyn SYMES (Northern Victoria – Attorney-General, Minister for Emergency Services) (12:24): I am sure that we can add that to the substantive question.

Ministers statements: TAFE funding

Gayle TIERNEY (Western Victoria – Minister for Skills and TAFE, Minister for Regional Development) (12:24): I am so pleased that a new-era skills and TAFE system is now a reality. Last week I was joined by Premier Allan and Minister O'Connor at Bendigo Kangan Institute Docklands to see and hear firsthand how the new skills agreement with the Albanese government is creating a world of opportunities. The \$105 million Commonwealth investment creates more than 62,000 free TAFE places for Victorians over three years. This is real collaboration around what we understand the importance to be with skills and TAFE. Victoria set the benchmark for quality, relevant, public provision of vocational education and training.

We know, now more so than ever before, that TAFE qualifications do lead to a great career. That is why I was also pleased to announce the addition of new courses, where we know that there are skills in demand, to be included on the free TAFE list for 2024: diploma of youth work, diploma of hospitality management, certificate IV in kitchen management and certificate III in tourism. Industry demand and career opportunities underpin why there are more than 80 courses on the priority areas of the free TAFE list. This government has removed financial barriers to ensure Victorians can access great training and skills in careers that are most needed by our communities. From agriculture to nursing and from building and construction to Auslan, free TAFE is changing lives, building careers and supporting our economy and society now and for generations to come. I am so pleased to be working with the Commonwealth, who have a shared respect and understanding of the power and purpose of public provision of TAFE.

Housing

David DAVIS (Southern Metropolitan) (12:26): (357) My question is to the Minister for Housing. Minister, how is it that, despite spending a staggering number of billions of dollars and pledging to build 12,000 new homes by 2024, there are only 394 additional public housing units? After all those years and the billions of dollars of expenditure, where has all the money gone?

Harriet SHING (Eastern Victoria – Minister for Housing, Minister for Water, Minister for Equality) (12:27): Welcome back, Mr Davis. It is always good to be graced with your presence in the chamber. As I have indicated in response to a number of questions which were asked last sitting week, when you were not here, the \$5.3 billion Big Housing Build has already delivered 7600 homes, either complete or in planning and construction, which are making sure that as part of that transformative investment we are providing not just homes that meet the needs of residents but homes that are there to be proud of. This is not something that happens in isolation, Mr Davis. This is an investment that is about partnering with all levels of government to make sure that we can take stress off the housing system overall by addressing the challenges of demand with additional supply and that as part of delivering on these 12,000 new social homes we are adding to them with at least 1300 additional social homes across rural and regional Victoria. This is an investment the likes of which Victoria has not seen. It is an investment which is leading the nation. It is an investment –

Members interjecting.

Harriet SHING: It is a shame that you laugh about this, in particular the Greens, who appear to be allergic to housing for communities by virtue of the narrative that unless it is 100 per cent one species of housing the entire thing amounts to a failure. This is about making sure that when we build housing we are doing so in a way that meets the needs of vulnerable Victorians, and this is why there will be a 10 per cent uplift in social housing across the board, why there will be 10 per cent of this housing made available to Aboriginal housing organisations and why women and children victims and survivors of family violence will have access to 10 per cent of this stock. It is also about making sure that when and as we bring these homes on line we are making sure that they meet the needs of communities in a variety of configurations and in a variety of different locations.

Mr Davis, right on your back doorstep there are right now housing developments being completed that you should pay a visit to. They are absolutely extraordinary. They have the excitement of the communities behind them. In fact just last week I was with Mr Batchelor and Elsternwick Primary School students to look at a development which is going to make a world of difference not just to social housing tenants and to their families but also to communities who will call these places home and take great pride in doing exactly that.

David DAVIS (Southern Metropolitan) (12:30): The public housing waiting list is higher than ever. Since 2018 Victoria's public housing waiting list has grown by 19,686 families. Who is responsible for this debacle?

The PRESIDENT: I am trying to determine how that is supplementary to the substantive question. But in saying that, I will let the minister answer as she sees fit.

Harriet SHING (Eastern Victoria – Minister for Housing, Minister for Water, Minister for Equality) (12:31): Mr Davis, social housing is being delivered right now across Victoria. We are making sure that more people are in a position to move into safe, accessible and fit-for-purpose housing in the state as part of this record investment. From 2021, when the Big Housing Build began, to 2023 the number of social houses in Victoria has increased by well over 3000, and at least 10 per cent of what we are delivering amounts to an addition to the Big Housing Build beyond what was already in stock. Mr Davis, Victoria is not the only jurisdiction where housing register lists are increasing. However, Victoria is the only jurisdiction where this record funding has been made, and hopefully we will lead the way with others following suit.

Decriminalisation of public drunkenness

Georgie CROZIER (Southern Metropolitan) (12:32): (358) My question is to the Minister for Mental Health Ms Stitt. Minister, reports earlier this month stated that four of the sobering-up facilities are still six weeks away from opening. Can you guarantee that these centres will be fully operational before Christmas, seven days a week, 24 hours, as you promised?

Ingrid STITT (Western Metropolitan – Minister for Mental Health, Minister for Ageing, Minister for Multicultural Affairs) (12:32): I thank Ms Crozier for her question and her interest in our public intoxication reforms. This is an important reform. As I have said in this place a number of times recently, it really is all about minimising harm and having a health-led response rather than a justice-led response to these issues in the community.

The latest advice I have in relation to our sobering-up services is that for Cambridge House in Collingwood, as a result of those small construction delays, the practical completion has now occurred, which is welcome. As with any new service coming on line, there are a small number of final preparedness activities that are being undertaken before the site can be safely operational. Staff onboarding is occurring and so on. As I have already stated, Cambridge House will be operational by the end of November.

For the sobering-up services in regional Victoria, there are a number of different providers, but I am advised that they are all working to have those sobering-up services or those safe places available as

soon as possible, and a number of the service providers have indicated that that should be by December. I am happy to keep Ms Crozier abreast of those operations as they are stood up.

Georgie CROZIER (Southern Metropolitan) (12:34): Thank you, Minister, for that assurance, because I think there is some confusion and some concern in some of these locations that they are not convinced that they will be fully operational by then, because there are no sites or they are not operational. What guidelines and protocols have been put in place to deal with demand, because the laws are now in place, at identified sites in Geelong, Ballarat, Bendigo, Shepparton, Mildura, Swan Hill, Latrobe Valley and East Gippsland?

Ingrid STITT (Western Metropolitan – Minister for Mental Health, Minister for Ageing, Minister for Multicultural Affairs) (12:35): In the 1 minute that I have got to respond to Ms Crozier's supplementary question, there are a range of different services available. As you would know, there is a central point run by VAHS, which triages and then deploys outreach teams as appropriate in different locations across the state, and there are commitments in some of those locations to also, over the next few months, open safe places or sobering-up centres. In some circumstances our providers are working with existing health services, so there are a suite of different arrangements that are available. This has all been rolled out and there has been a lot of work done with our emergency services – both VicPol and Ambulance Victoria – because of course this is a statewide system and they have been involved in the rollout of these provisions.

Ministers statements: Camperdown aged care services

Ingrid STITT (Western Metropolitan – Minister for Mental Health, Minister for Ageing, Minister for Multicultural Affairs) (12:36): I rise to update the house on the construction of a brand new public aged care facility in Camperdown, and in doing so I would like to acknowledge the work of my colleague member for Western Victoria Gayle Tierney, who has been a very strong advocate for this facility.

The brand new facility, backed by a \$39.6 million investment from the Allan Labor government, will feature 36 beds over two storeys and will replace an ageing Merindah Lodge at the Camperdown Hospital. Creating a safe and comfortable place for residents to call home, the new facility will feature dementia-friendly design. Residents will be accommodated in single bedrooms but will be incorporated into small households with dedicated kitchen, dining, lounge and breakout sitting areas. It means residents can age in place, an important approach to aged care for many older people, particularly in regional areas, as it allows residents to remain close to support networks and maintain family connections as their care needs increase. This project is being delivered by the Victorian Health Building Authority in partnership with South West Healthcare and is on track to be completed by 2025.

We are continuing to support regional communities to age in place by delivering several new or redeveloped residential aged care facilities across the state, and this year's budget allocated \$162 million in funding to deliver new facilities in Cohuna, Numurkah and Maffra. I am very proud of these investments in safe and comfortable facilities that allow our senior Victorians to age in place, and I look forward to seeing this new facility open in 2025.

Written responses

The PRESIDENT (12:38): Minister Symes will get Mr Bourman responses from the Minister for Agriculture on both questions and also from the Premier for Mr Puglielli's questions, and Minister Tierney for Ms Purcell's questions to the Minister for Environment, both of them.

Constituency questions

Southern Metropolitan Region

John BERGER (Southern Metropolitan) (12:38): (551) My question is for the Minister for Energy and Resources in the other place Minister D'Ambrosio. More than 250,000 Victorians have applied for the Solar Victoria rebate, which includes an interest-free solar battery loan to reduce the up-front

cost of installing a battery, and if you want solar panels you can get up to \$1400 plus the option of an interest-free loan. Thanks to our new partnership with the Albanese government, apartment residents will benefit too. With \$16 million delivering thousands of rooftop solar installations, up to 5000 Victorian apartments will benefit. This means grants of up to \$2800 per apartment, which will tackle climate change; build a cleaner, greener future; and help Victorians save on their energy bills, which is most important – now more than ever. That is why my question is this: how many residents in Prahran, Kew, Hawthorn and Malvern have taken up the rebate for solar panels, batteries and hot-water services?

Eastern Victoria Region

Renee HEATH (Eastern Victoria) (12:39): (552) My question is for the Minister for Police. The Hastings community has once again been neglected by Labor. The recent announcement that Labor would cut the hours of the Hastings police station from 24 to 16 hours per day has left the community reeling. A recent rise in crime has signalled the need for an increased police presence along the Mornington Peninsula. Community safety is paramount, and the closest station to our Hastings community is now nearly 30 minutes away in Frankston or Rosebud. The Victorian police force is in crisis after Labor's failure to invest in our forces led to a mass exodus of experienced senior police officers. Minister, what information from the Police Association Victoria have you received regarding the impact this will have on community safety?

Southern Metropolitan Region

Katherine COPSEY (Southern Metropolitan) (12:40): (553) My question today is for the Minister for Transport Infrastructure. In Fishermans Bend within a decade tens of thousands of people will need daily public transport options, with a total of 160,000 people by 2050, half of whom will be residents. Despite approvals for housing in Fishermans Bend already having been granted, the transport infrastructure plans are still nascent and missing in action. Fishermans Bend needs train and tram connections, and the tram needs to be delivered early in order to avoid car dependency and the congestion, pollution and gridlock that that brings. The tram service needs not just to go to the areas where people will work in the employment precinct but also to connect up all the precincts where current and future communities will live, like Sandridge and Wirraway. Could the minister please clarify for my constituents when the public transport connections for Fishermans Bend will be confirmed and funded?

Southern Metropolitan Region

Ryan BATCHELOR (Southern Metropolitan) (12:41): (554) My question is to the Minister for Ports and Freight. Can the minister provide an update on the planning for the redevelopment of the Hampton Pier? The old Hampton Pier is falling down. It is unsafe and has been blocked off to access for important safety reasons. The Labor government has committed to building a new pier in Hampton. Demolition of the pier is about to commence to make the area safe for summer, so that kids on the beach and people walking their dogs are not tempted by an unsafe structure and put themselves at risk, and also to support those who might be boating in the area. A new pier, which will be safer, modern and provide a better place for locals to go fishing, go boating or just simply jump off, will be in place in the new year, and that will benefit the local community greatly.

Northern Victoria Region

Wendy LOVELL (Northern Victoria) (12:42): (555) My constituency question is for the Minister for Public and Active Transport, and it regards the treacherous route that students from the Providence Field housing estate in North Shepparton must take to access their nearest school bus stop. Recently a young constituent from Harvard Drive reached out to me, expressing her distress over the danger posed to her and other students who must make the dangerous trek each day. Students are first confronted with crossing the busy Goulburn Valley Highway. They are then forced to walk along the highway and continue down Grace Road to the bus stop. There is no footpath on either side of the highway or

Grace Road, and with the closeness of motor vehicles travelling at up to 80 kilometres per hour, all it will take is for one tiny mistake and the fear these students have will be realised in a devastating way. With summer just around the corner, students will also be at risk due to the rise of snake movement on the sides of the roads. My question is: will the minister ensure a school bus stop is located closer to the Providence Field housing estate to ensure the safety of these students?

The PRESIDENT: Before I call the next constituency question, can I acknowledge previous member of this chamber Jenny Mikakos in the gallery.

South-Eastern Metropolitan Region

Rachel PAYNE (South-Eastern Metropolitan) (12:44): (556) My constituency question is for the Minister for Local Government Minister Horne. My constituent is a resident of Dandenong. They identify as non-binary and bisexual. My constituent recently signed the Victorian Pride Lobby's petition calling on the Greater Dandenong council to establish an LGBTIQ+ advisory group. My constituent is concerned that Greater Dandenong council is not following the example of many other Victorian councils and in doing so is failing to recognise the concerns and needs of the LGBTIQ+ community. In particular my constituent feels that it is important that there are education resources available locally in their own community, so my constituent asks: what steps has the minister taken to support Greater Dandenong council to establish an LGBTIQ+ advisory committee?

Western Victoria Region

Bev McARTHUR (Western Victoria) (12:45): (557) My constituency question is for the Minister for Local Government and concerns the outrageous cost to Geelong ratepayers of the government-appointed monitors at \$1296 per day. This must be one of the best lurks going around but obviously only available if you are a friend of the government. Why on earth are these two monitors still on the ratepayer drip? The new CEO has been appointed. Is she not up to the task? Previously I have asked when this rort is going to end. The CEO search, which was part of the monitoring process, apparently concluded five months ago. Surely now guiding council 'back to good governance' should not cost \$1296 a day, which is the current justification for this expense. So I ask the minister: when are you going to end this abuse of ratepayer money? I ask you to do it immediately.

South-Eastern Metropolitan Region

David LIMBRICK (South-Eastern Metropolitan) (12:46): (558) My constituency question is for the Minister for Roads and Road Safety. Constituents in the Narre Warren and Cranbourne area were very unhappy on 25 October when Narre Warren-Cranbourne Road was closed for 24 hours. People had delays of 90 minutes during peak hour, and many residents were arriving late to work. This closure during peak hour was so terrible that people were having to detour through Hallam Road and Clyde Road, which are already very busy roads, making them even worse. Not only was this closure so damaging to people's commutes, but no-one was even told about this closure in advance. People did not realise it was closed until they drove all the way to the point where the road was closed, realising they were going to be late for work. My question to the minister is this: will the minister investigate why the decision was made to close the road during peak hour and why nobody was notified about the closure in advance?

Southern Metropolitan Region

David DAVIS (Southern Metropolitan) (12:47): (559) My matter is for the Minister for Transport Infrastructure. It concerns the Surrey Hills and Mont Albert Level Crossing Removal Project on the edge of my electorate and the appalling and thuggish behaviour of the individual who threatened businesses – Lance Wilson, employed by the LXR – and the complaints that were made by people

to that authority, particularly Tony Chiodo from the Mont Albert and Surrey Hills traders association. He describes the total contempt of Mr Wilson for locals:

The fact that he still works for the public after what he did, how he treated the fish-and-chip people ... it's an absolute joke ...

That is right. The complaints were made. The thuggish, bullying behaviour by Mr Wilson occurred, and he should not be employed. In that context, I am asking: will the minister investigate, seek a report on Mr Wilson's behaviour and ensure that he is run out of the authority?

North-Eastern Metropolitan Region

Aiv PUGLIELLI (North-Eastern Metropolitan) (12:48): My question today is to the Premier. People in my electorate care deeply about what is happening in Gaza at the moment. Not only have I received hundreds and hundreds of emails from people who are calling for an end to the collective punishment of Palestinian people, but I have also been contacted by constituents asking for me to add my voice to the calls for an immediate ceasefire. I unequivocally support a ceasefire and an end to this occupation. Tens of thousands of people are turning up every weekend in this state at rallies to back these calls. Premier, when will you stand on the side of peace and advocate to your federal counterparts to support the calls for a ceasefire in Gaza?

The PRESIDENT: It is not the content, Mr Puglielli. I am just thinking that would be more appropriate in the adjournment rather than a constituency question. I cannot rule it a constituency question, but in the next two nights if you want to do an adjournment similar to that, I would invite you to do that.

Northern Metropolitan Region

Evan MULHOLLAND (Northern Metropolitan) (12:49): (560) My constituency question is for the Minister for Planning, and it concerns the Growth Areas Infrastructure Contribution Fund, which is contributed by developers and homebuyers. When I called the former Premier out for hoarding and sitting on half a billion dollars worth of GAIC money earlier this year, he actually said:

We don't rush ... funding to projects, we think about the best projects for a local community and we do that properly.

He made it sound like progress was underway, but I know that councils have only just been asked, 'What do you want?' I would like to ask the minister to strongly consider that the GAIC fund be used to build a pedestrian footbridge over the Merri Creek in my electorate in the suburb of Kalkallo so that residents can walk directly to Donnybrook station. This project is constantly raised with me as a no-brainer and an essential way for residents to access public transport without having to sit in the car for an hour and a half just to get out of their estate and around to the train station. Will the minister heed my community's call and use the owed GAIC money to fund this project?

Northern Victoria Region

Gaelle BROAD (Northern Victoria) (12:50): (561) My question is to the Minister for Police on behalf of local police officers who are concerned about recent changes to the public drunkenness laws. As it stands, in rural and regional areas police have no powers to deal with public drunkenness. Initially the government said the police would not be involved in such cases, only to later suggest a role as second responders. This lack of planning and confusion has left many puzzled about the practicality of these reforms. With the new sobering centre in Collingwood, it is clear that the government has prioritised services in metropolitan Melbourne and not given much thought to how police in rural and regional areas are to respond. The laws have already come into effect, yet support services are still being rolled out. People living in rural and regional areas of all backgrounds deserve the same level of support. The Police Association Victoria has described the new laws as a tragedy waiting to happen. I ask the minister to respond to their questions and outline what support services are available to assist police dealing with public drunkenness in Northern Victoria?

Eastern Victoria Region

Melina BATH (Eastern Victoria) (12:51): (562) My constituency question is for the Minister for Environment, and it is specifically in his portfolio under Parks Victoria. After significant lobbying in this place from the friends of the Wonthaggi State Coal Mine, there were sufficient funds to bring back the drift car, which is the underground cart, and hopefully get it up and running. But part of that funding from the state government was also to reopen the visitor centre cafe. On 27 July, when the government came to town, they said the cafe would be open in September. Then after discussion with friends of the Wonthaggi State Coal Mine they were told it would be open in November. Now we see the summer season is upon us. I know the friends are wonderful people. Sheila Ormerod from friends of the Wonthaggi State Coal Mine is desperate to see it open. Minister, when will that cafe be open?

Sitting suspended 12:52 pm until 2:02 pm.

Motions**Deer control**

Debate resumed.

Jeff BOURMAN (Eastern Victoria) (14:02): I want to thank most of those who made contributions to this from the opposition and the government, and I thank them for their support. Animal Justice's contribution was to be expected, but what blew me away was the Greens. They are people that say they are for the disadvantaged and people that say that they are for the homeless, and all I heard was them trying to make this about recreational shooters and how we are trying to feather our own nest – unbelievable. Not at one point in time does this mention recreational shooters. It mentions government-led culls. It just shows the complete privilege – that they actually think that that had anything to do with it. They had no actual answer for why this is a bad thing, so they just attacked my people – shooters, hunters. It is just unbelievable. This is something for nothing, and when I say 'nothing' I mean no extra animals are going to be killed. Nothing extra is going to happen except that the animals that are taken will be utilised. I think it is appalling. It actually shows who they are and what they are made of. It has become about politics. I want them to call for a division. I want them to show what it is really about. Vote for my motion too, please.

Council divided on motion:

Ayes (32): Matthew Bach, Ryan Batchelor, Melina Bath, John Berger, Lizzie Blandthorn, Jeff Bourman, Gaelle Broad, Georgie Crozier, David Davis, Enver Erdogan, Jacinta Ermacora, Michael Galea, Renee Heath, Ann-Marie Hermans, Shaun Leane, David Limbrick, Wendy Lovell, Trung Luu, Bev McArthur, Joe McCracken, Nick McGowan, Tom McIntosh, Evan Mulholland, Harriet Shing, Adem Somyurek, Ingrid Stitt, Jaclyn Symes, Lee Tarlamis, Sonja Terpstra, Gayle Tierney, Rikkie-Lee Tyrrell, Sheena Watt

Noes (5): Katherine Copsey, Sarah Mansfield, Aiv Puglielli, Georgie Purcell, Samantha Ratnam

Motion agreed to.

Suburban Rail Loop

Evan MULHOLLAND (Northern Metropolitan) (14:10): I am very pleased to move:

That this house notes:

- (1) the International Monetary Fund's advice for governments to appropriately manage their infrastructure pipelines to avoid interest rates rising further;
- (2) the comments of the federal Labor Treasurer urging state governments to better coordinate major projects;
- (3) the expert advice of economists and urban planners identifying the Suburban Rail Loop (SRL) as the most appropriate project to be paused;

MOTIONS

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- (4) that the Victorian Auditor-General's Office found the SRL business case does not 'support fully informed investment decisions', contained 'significant departures' from department of transport guidelines and, when costed to these guidelines, could lose 49 cents for every dollar spent;
 - (5) that the Parliamentary Budget Office found the first two stages of the SRL could cost 2.5 times what the Premier the Honourable Jacinta Allan MP originally promised;
 - (6) that the Allan government has not submitted its costings and business case to Infrastructure Victoria, despite the Andrews government creating the body to advise on major projects;
 - (7) that there is a \$9.6 billion shortfall in Commonwealth funding, with the federal Labor infrastructure minister confirming that no further funding will be guaranteed until the project goes through an independent evaluation;
 - (8) that the government should not sign multibillion-dollar contracts and allocate a generation's worth of infrastructure funding in the face of a volatile economic climate;
- and calls on the government not to sign any SRL contracts until it is independently assessed by Infrastructure Victoria and to pause the SRL to ensure that Victoria's infrastructure pipeline remains stable.

I am pleased to rise on this motion concerning the Suburban Rail Loop. This motion is an important one for those that believe that this place should act in the public interest. I think it is a motion that everyone in this place should be able to get behind, as there are many reasons why it should be supported. But we first must take a step back and consider the background of the sorry story that is the Suburban Rail Loop.

This project was not recommended by Infrastructure Victoria. This project was not on Infrastructure Australia's priority list, nor was it on the state government's *Plan Melbourne* long-term infrastructure planning blueprint. You would probably not be surprised if I told you the Department of Transport and Planning were not consulted, because they were not. In fact no transport or rail plan publicly available in Victoria in 2017 or 2018 identified the need for an orbital rail loop in Melbourne. Instead of this idea coming from a reputable organisation and going through the proper processes, it was conducted in secret. It was concocted in secret before the last election and only four ministers knew about it, including the now Premier Jacinta Allan. Even board members of the government agency responsible for delivering this project did not know about it until it was announced. Senior public servants enlisted to give advice were legally gagged from sharing it with their bosses. Instead of going through the proper processes, the government paid PwC to work on its so-called strategic investment of the SRL. These consultants even worked in a secret office and were required to sign non-disclosure agreements barring them from discussing the project with anyone outside of the team, and no documents were able to leave the locked rooms.

As many in this place would be quite aware, PwC is not known to have the most ethical business practices. After the PwC tax scandal where it abused Australian government secrets to enrich its clients, we have seen many Labor members elsewhere and federally criticise PwC. I think some members opposite would perhaps share that sympathy and should maybe chat to their senior ministers, who in the past five years have spent about \$80 million with PwC. Given PwC's reputation and the business they receive from this government, including on the SRL, one might suspect this assessment they developed was not one of frank and fearless advice but one that gave the government the answer they were looking for. There is not a lot of evidence to suggest that this is not indeed the case. As the Auditor-General noted:

The early development of the SRL business case was atypical for the state's largest ever transport infrastructure project because:

- no transport agencies were involved in the planning and development of the orbital metro line
- ...
- DPC, the agency that commissioned its development, has no record of its decision to do so, or of its review of the business case before it provided it to government in April 2018
- DTF was not involved in its development and did not provide any advice to the Treasurer when the business case was submitted to the Cabinet in April 2018.

When it comes to the business case's content itself, it is a bit of a sorry story. The Auditor-General found:

- the high-level problems and benefits articulated in the SRL business case lacked necessary and sufficient supporting evidence
- a narrow set of options were considered and analysed both before and as part of the business case development
- the economic analysis does not cover the entire SRL program and lacks consistency with the guidance in key areas.

The Auditor-General noted that despite the business case identifying some problems with Melbourne's transport network, these problems:

- are not supported with comprehensive evidence
- are not supported by detailed descriptions of their root causes or underlying drivers or how they may be impacted by uncertainty
- do not immediately point to the need for a transport-related intervention.

The Auditor-General also noted that:

- Infrastructure Victoria's independent 30-year infrastructure strategy released in 2016 did not include or signal a need for an orbital rail line in Melbourne
- the VIP released in October 2017 did not include an orbital rail loop in Melbourne
- no transport or rail plan publicly available in Victoria in 2017 or 2018 identified the need ...

for this loop. There are myriad issues with this business case, with this economic analysis. These include the use of a discounted rate of 4 per cent as opposed to DTF guidance of 7 per cent, which artificially inflates the benefits of the project compared with other benefits. It also includes wider economic benefits and urban consolidation benefits in the standard analysis when they are generally not included, making an unfair comparison with other projects. There are a number of issues with the business and investment case, which the Auditor-General raised. I would encourage members to read the *Quality of Major Transport Infrastructure Project Business Cases* report for themselves as there is much scope for this contribution.

Extraordinarily, the Auditor-General found that when the SRL economic appraisal was completed using information from the Suburban Rail Loop Authority at the standard discount rate of 7 per cent, the SRL had a benefit–cost ratio of just 0.51, meaning that for every dollar of taxpayer money spent the state and our society would be worse off by 49 cents. Remember when former Premier Daniel Andrews was banging on about the east–west link and was saying that because it was 84 cents for every dollar – even though it was actually \$1.40 for every dollar – this was the reason the government needed to establish Infrastructure Victoria? They said:

The new independent body will –

ensure –

... Victoria's immediate and long-term infrastructure needs are identified and prioritised based on objective, transparent analysis and evidence.

That is what they said in 2015. They said they were going to take the politics out of infrastructure. Instead they whispered to their mates at PwC, handed them a bag of cash and got them to come up with this ridiculous proposal that is going to take a hundred years to build and will stop any significant, economically valuable infrastructure opportunity from occurring in the next hundred years. Not only do they want to clog up all of their own infrastructure projects currently, which are all blowing out, they want to stop any government over the next hundred years from having their own infrastructure ambitions.

The Parliamentary Budget Office prior to the last election costed the first two stages at \$125 billion – 2.5 times what the former Premier promised for the whole thing. In fact the PBO estimated that with 50 years of operations it would cost \$200 billion of taxpayers money. It is not Labor's money, it is the Victorian people's money. Since then construction costs have increased, so this number will almost certainly be even higher now.

There are many other concerns around the SRL. Of course I think the most prominent, which all members should think very seriously about, is its effect on inflation and its effect on interest rates. The International Monetary Fund has called on state governments to manage their infrastructure pipelines at a more measured and coordinated pace, otherwise interest rates would have to be even higher, putting the burden of adjustment disproportionately on mortgage holders. We are in a cost-of-living crisis. Some of the constituents in my electorate, particularly in the outer north, are some of the most mortgage stressed in the state, and this will only make things worse, because we know the evidence of that.

Transport experts and economists have backed the IMF's call to scale back the government's record \$30 billion a year of public infrastructure, which is competing for scarce labour and materials, and have nominated Victoria's \$125 billion Suburban Rail Loop as a prime candidate for the chopping block. Even the federal Labor Treasurer is urging state governments to better coordinate projects and has said that the state government must make tough decisions to prevent inflation rising.

The inflationary impacts of Labor's spending have been known to the Allan and Andrews governments for over a year, with Treasurer Tim Pallas acknowledging in May 2022 that Victoria's construction market was close to tapping out. Victoria already has more debt than New South Wales, Queensland and Tasmania combined. Independent analysis from the PBO said that Victoria's state debt is set to rise 66 per cent to \$400 billion over the next four years, more than any other state by a long way. And then we saw reports last week of maybe a last-ditch effort by the government to save this project, revealing it might be planning on pursuing a public-private partnership. This comes off the back of a \$20 billion black hole that exists in the first stage, where there is a \$9.6 billion shortfall in federal funding.

I do not think many of the members opposite are too happy with the federal member for Ballarat, Ms King, the infrastructure minister – I know Mr McCracken knows her very well – who has actually turned around and said to Jacinta Allan and her Labor government, 'No, this is too much.' It is too much and it is having an effect on inflation, which is having an effect on everyday Victorians. The federal government said they will not commit to further funding until there has been an independent assessment, rather than a Labor-rigged one.

It is not just that the Auditor-General, the IMF, the federal Labor Treasurer and the infrastructure minister have raised concerns with the SRL; indeed a wider range of experts have disagreed with it. Just on the Labor point, we saw on the weekend an article in the *Age*, which actually said:

Privately, a growing number of federal cabinet ministers are fed up with Victorian government's obsession with the costly rail loop ...

I find that quite interesting. They would rather get on and hopefully fund pieces of economic infrastructure that would add value to the state in a sequenced way that is not tying up all of our labour and resources and making it impossible to build homes around the state. Yesterday we saw the Premier in the other place, Jacinta Allan, asked whether any part of the Victorian government is investigating or considering pausing or cancelling the Suburban Rail Loop. Investigating pausing or cancelling the Suburban Rail Loop – that is the rumour. Members of the government's backbench might not be aware, but that is the rumour. She was very careful to not confirm or deny this. I suspect, given the Premier's form, when she finally cancels it – because she will, she absolutely will, and you all know that she will – she will say, 'Well, actually, I was briefed on the cancellation the day after I spoke in Parliament.' Given she said that yesterday, she is probably being briefed right now, just like Ms Shing was briefed on the Commonwealth Games the day after she was spruiking it in Parliament – eight

days after the then Premier and his deputy were told about it. All these things seem to happen a day after they start spruiking it. I suggest members opposite be very careful in their wording or maybe find out from the Premier whether she has instigated an investigation and options for pausing or cancelling the Suburban Rail Loop. I suggest that very strongly.

But I want to touch on some of the experts that have spoken out against this. The Grattan Institute are usually to the left of Lenin, but they have criticised it. Marion Terrill, director of the cities program at the Grattan Institute, said:

The Suburban Rail Loop is a money sink. Time to bite the bullet and cancel it.

The institute has also said that political considerations have consistently outweighed public benefit.

Stephen Anthony, former chief economist for Industry Super Australia, said the SRL is ‘the worst infrastructure project of all time’. Michael Buxton, emeritus professor of environment and planning at RMIT, said the SRL will become ‘the greatest public transport infrastructure failure in Australia unless substantially altered’. And respected economist Chris Richardson has said:

I don’t think there’s been a credible analysis of the Suburban Rail Loop with economic benefits ...

It has always been a political exercise, much more than it ever was one recommended by experts, and we are talking losses here. But it remains significant early days that even if some money is spent, it’s better to ditch now rather than later.

The best outcome for Australia –

not just Victoria –

is a graceful exit.

The figures we are talking about in relation to SRL are massive, they are huge. They are in the order of hundreds of billions of dollars. Figures of this magnitude may seem ethereal, but they are not entirely meaningless. Of course everyone wants improved infrastructure. The problem is that when Labor blows out major projects, when it rigs business cases, it is Victorians that pay the price for that. They pay in higher taxes, less services, the wrong infrastructure in the wrong places or, in this case, increased inflation. And we get the cancellation of other projects because the SRL is prioritised. Cancellation of the airport rail, cancellation of Geelong fast rail and cancellation of the *Western Rail Plan*, which would have meant people on the Melton and Wyndham Vale lines could stop having to ride V/Line trains when they live in established suburbs.

This is why the opposition urges the house to support this motion. I say to members of the crossbench: we want to see an independent analysis by Infrastructure Victoria. I know this is something the Greens have spoken about on several occasions, making sure our infrastructure is properly assessed. I will also say that it is an opportunity cost: SRL means clogging a generation’s worth of infrastructure projects, not just this government’s infrastructure projects but future governments’ infrastructure projects and priorities. I say to my friends on the crossbench: if you are pushing for any projects like public transport in the western suburbs or more buses – I am a big supporter, like the Greens are and I know Dr Ratnam is, of duplicating the Upfield line and connecting it to the Craigieburn line and electrifying the track to Wallan – but we will not be able to do those projects if we keep going with the Suburban Rail Loop. It is just not possible.

I heard Mr Puglielli the other day pushing for Doncaster rail. None of these things can be done if the SRL blocks other projects from the infrastructure pipeline for the next 80 to 100 years. That is the reality: it will block every other project any Victorian or representative would like to see done in this state. Not content with clogging up their own infrastructure pipeline, they want to clog up every government’s infrastructure pipeline for the next 100 years.

This is having a massive effect on the entire economy. The infrastructure pipeline, even at the moment, is having an effect on inflation. We know this through the IMF, we know this through the federal Labor government, who have said as such, and we need to think seriously before taking up a

suggestion of a business case by your mates at PwC who have come up with this flawed business case that no-one thinks is credible. We have to seriously consider the value of this project.

So let us consider it. Let us ask for an independent assessment by Infrastructure Victoria. I think this is the least this house could do. We cannot saddle our future generations of Victorians with what is potentially the greatest boondoggle in our history. I commend this motion to the house.

John BERGER (Southern Metropolitan) (14:30): I rise to speak on Mr Mulholland's motion 247:

That this house notes:

- (1) the International Monetary Fund's advice for governments to appropriately manage their infrastructure pipelines to avoid interest rates rising further;
- (2) the comments of the federal Labor Treasurer urging state governments to better coordinate major projects;
- (3) the expert advice of economists and urban planners identifying the Suburban Rail Loop (SRL) as the most appropriate project to be paused –

by the way, I do not agree with this part of the motion in particular, but back to it –

- (4) that the Victorian Auditor-General's Office found the SRL business case does not 'support fully informed investment decisions', contained 'significant departures' from department of transport guidelines and, when costed to these guidelines, could lose 49 cents for every dollar spent;
- (5) that the Parliamentary Budget Office found the first two stages of the SRL could cost 2.5 times what the Premier the Honourable Jacinta Allan MP originally promised;
- (6) that the Allan government has not submitted its costings and business case to Infrastructure Victoria, despite the Andrews government creating the body to advise on major projects ...

There are points (7) and (8) in the motion, but they are not worth noting.

The Suburban Rail Loop has been voted on twice. I remember the Liberals saying in the 2022 election it would be a referendum on the Suburban Rail Loop. A referendum it was: we won and won convincingly. Well done to the Premier in her former portfolio, and I am looking forward to working with the new Minister for Transport Infrastructure Minister Pearson in the other place on this, as it affects my community a lot. The Suburban Rail Loop is a long-term commitment which future generations will thank us for. It is a bold vision for the future. It will build the transport infrastructure necessary for our growing and prosperous state and facilitate the creation of smaller cities and hubs right across metro Melbourne.

When most of Melbourne's rail network was built the concept it was based on was simple: you live in the suburbs and you take the train to the CBD for work, and then you go back at night. But Melbourne has moved on from that. The Suburban Rail Loop is at its heart rewiring our public transport network to orient how Melburnians move around the place. A significant portion of a Melburnian's commute is not back and forth from the CBD anymore; it is orbital travelling, in a ring through and around the suburbs. As the city has grown, more and more jobs and other centres of economic activity are not based in the CBD or the burbs. The SRL is an acknowledgement of this and is an investment toward the inevitable future of when more Victorians take this orbital route for work and leisure, which would be left rather unserved with the existing hub-and-spoke model. It is taking the old model of the central business hub and the suburban branches and saying, 'No, actually not everyone works in the city.' We are seeing people move between the suburbs for work in the various economic hubs across the city, and right now to use the rail network you must go to the city and then back out. That journey is not economical or efficient.

To meet the needs of the 21st century we need to be mature and acknowledge that, and we need to be mature and acknowledge that doing nothing in the short term will cost us even more in the long term. We do not sit here and debate the costs and merits of the city loop, because not only was it necessary, it has also become an indispensable element of Public Transport Victoria and our city. We cannot imagine our system without it. There is not a city in the world without a comprehensive public

transport system, and if we are to, as some projections say, hit the same population as London by the 2050s, we must have a modern, dynamic rail network – not a rail network fit for Melbourne in 1901.

Victorians have twice now endorsed this positive plan to help reorient the transit system around the suburbs, and this government is committed to seeing this happen. It is what people of Victoria want. They are calling out for it, and we are getting on with it and delivering our part. Victorians are sick of the commute – we all know this. It takes its toll. Do you know that up to 80 per cent of Melburnians will experience reduced travel times because of this project? By giving ordinary passengers this transport alternative, we can take more cars off the road – approximately 600,000 cars a day. This will in turn make more room for vans, trucks and the like to move more quickly through the streets and arterials to their destinations, also helping small business in the process. A journey from Cheltenham to Box Hill will take just 22 minutes with the SRL, connecting commuters along the eastern belt to Monash and Deakin universities as well as the major economic hubs they want to travel to. Right now you would have to drive through the congested peak-hour traffic or you would have to hop on a train from Cheltenham all the way to Richmond and then back out to Box Hill. That can take upwards of an hour, whereas the SRL will get you there in just about a third of the time.

But it has its benefits in the short term too – that is, jobs, and a lot of them. Construction is already underway on the eastern SRL, and that is expected to generate up to 8000 jobs throughout construction alone, with upwards of 24,000 over the life of the project from start to finish – and that does not even account for the opportunity it poses for businesses and suppliers in Victoria as work commences.

I said I would not mention parts (7) and (8) of the motion, but I think they are worth noting and refuting. Part (7) of the motion says:

... there is a \$9.6 billion shortfall in Commonwealth funding, with the federal Labor infrastructure minister confirming that no further funding will be guaranteed until the project goes through an independent evaluation ...

Well, the reality is that Victoria and the Commonwealth government have already committed \$14 billion to the SRL East. That is more than enough to start the main works with tunnel-boring machines in the ground in 2026, and we need to get it done.

I said I would not discuss point (8) of the motion, which says:

... the government should not sign multibillion-dollar contracts and allocate a generation's worth of infrastructure funding in the face of a volatile economic climate ...

Come on, really? This has been voted on twice. There is a mandate, and it is absurd to suggest otherwise. There is a lot of noise, but we are getting on with the job. We have already appointed Suburban Connect as the preferred bidder for the first package of tunnelling works between Cheltenham and Glen Waverley – Cheltenham, in my community of Southern Metro, and Glen Waverley, just over the border from it.

I believe I have talked about Suburban Connect in this place before, but just a reminder that it is a consortium of global leaders in tunnelling, tunnelling being something my community of Southern Metro, in particular Chadstone, knows all about as the training centre to learn how to tunnel is there. This consortium includes CPB Contractors, Ghella and Acciona, with extensive experience in Victoria and Australia, including the Caulfield to Dandenong level crossing removals, the Sydney Metro and Brisbane's Cross River Rail. This contract will formally be awarded by the end of the year. It is not long away at all. The tunnel-boring machines will start tunnelling by 2026, just in time for Victorians to vote again to support the Suburban Rail Loop.

Since mid last year we have already started works, and it has created its first local jobs, 800 of them. I am proud to say that more than 14 per cent of the hours will be worked by apprentices, trainees and cadets. Construction is underway in Box Hill, where a significant portion of early works across the new railway line will take place over the next three years.

To wrap up in the last minute of my contribution, the SRL East and SRL North will carry almost half a million passengers a day every day by 2056. Trains will run every 6 minutes in the peak and up to every 2 minutes if needed during maximum demand. It will put Melbourne, even more so, on the international map, making it easy for tourists to explore our city – all of it.

Communities support it; voters support it. Councils, unis and their students and residents overwhelmingly support the SRL. My daughter went to Monash Uni, and it is an important uni in Southern Metro, as Ms Crozier and Mr Davis would know. SRL East will deliver a train service to Monash for the first time. There has been talk of extending proper public transport to Monash Uni, Australia's biggest university, for decades, and now we will. I will not be in the chamber, but in 2041, if I went from Monash to Box Hill I would save 33 minutes off my trip, and 47 minutes from Dandenong to Deakin Uni, 31 minutes from Ringwood back to Monash Uni and 25 minutes from Glen Eira to Deakin. That is something worth celebrating in my community of Southern Metro, and I am proud to support it.

Katherine COPSEY (Southern Metropolitan) (14:39): This is obviously a really important discussion to be had around transport infrastructure planning and resource allocation in this state. However, the Greens will not be supporting this particular motion today. There are many valid questions to ask about this government's decision-making process for large infrastructure commitments and capital programs, not just in the transport space, and it seems that as the term progresses the need for transparency of both government decision-making and governance of these large investments of public funds only grows. We also need to ask questions about the comparative benefit delivered by competing priorities for transport funding, including large road projects like the North East Link versus the share spent on public and active transport and transport emissions reduction. These are the types of questions that would help determine whether the actions called for in the last paragraph of Mr Mulholland's motion – pausing the SRL or refraining from signing contracts – are the right course of action.

If we have a finite amount of budget for transport infrastructure, where and how should that be spent? What is the best return on investment across all the options, and what is going to deliver the best outcome for our community, including by lowering the skyrocketing emissions from transport and the air pollution associated with it? We do return to a perennial shortcoming in our state. The Transport Integration Act 2010 requires the department of transport to prepare and periodically revise the transport plan for Victoria. The problem is that 13 years later Victoria still does not have an integrated transport plan and the minister and the department seem content to flout their legislative obligations to provide one.

The Auditor-General's August 2021 report into integrated transport planning concluded that the Department of Transport's:

... assertion that its 40 separate plans and strategies presently meet the Act's integrated transport plan requirements does not withstand scrutiny.

The absence of a transport plan as required by the Act, during a decade of unprecedented investment in transport infrastructure, creates risks of missed opportunities to sequence and optimise the benefits of these investments to best meet Victoria's transport needs.

Our public transport system needs to be ready to accept millions of additional passengers just in the next decade as the city grows and becomes less car dependent and we respond to the climate emergency. Now, that demands action on all scales, from big city-shaping infrastructure to more nimble and easy-to-roll-out measures like local reform of bus networks. Every opinion poll that puts the options head to head has found that a majority of Australians prefer that public transport improvement have priority over new roads. Our government needs to listen and start ensuring that every Victorian has a genuine option of reliable, frequent, fast and accessible public transport, including by prioritising more frequent services on existing lines – and that would be more affordable if we stopped spending billions on new motorways.

With regard to the Suburban Rail Loop, as the PTUA – Public Transport Users Association – outlined so clearly, the size of the spend really underscores the urgent need for a coherent community-led transport plan, but we still do not have one here in our state. Do we accept permanent and irreversible environmental damage, the induced demand, car dependency, congestion and pollution that big roads cause – or do we embrace a life in a city that takes environmentally friendly alternatives seriously and funds them accordingly? Having an integrated transport plan for the state would help us all see where our future should be and help us determine which are the appropriate options to back as we go forward.

Ann-Marie HERMANS (South-Eastern Metropolitan) (14:43): I would like to congratulate my colleague Mr Evan Mulholland on this wonderful motion. It gives us an opportunity to address some very, very important issues that the Suburban Rail Loop actually raises. I think many of these have been clearly outlined by Mr Mulholland, particularly looking at the financial issues and the lack of a feasibility study. In fact even the lack of a genuine need for this, in terms of actually doing the research that is required to outlay such large amounts of money and to tie up the taxes of hardworking Victorians for many years to come, is one of the major issues with the SRL.

It has been well outlined in here that the Parliamentary Budget Office found that the first two stages of the SRL could cost 2½ times what this Premier the Honourable Jacinta Allan originally promised. Now, 2½ times is not something to be sniffed at when we are talking about billions of dollars. In fact knowing full well that the Allan government has not submitted its costings and business case to Infrastructure Victoria is of course another genuine concern. Knowing that we have got a \$9.6 billion shortfall in funding and no guarantee of further funding coming from the Commonwealth is another factor that we need to consider.

I really like the way these matters have been outlined in this motion. When I look at it, knowing full well that the Suburban Rail Loop is going to impact people in my electorate, I have a number of questions that I am very concerned about. Again, these have been outlined in this motion. We know full well that the Suburban Rail Loop is going to drive up our interest rates, and this is a genuine concern at a time when we have an economy that is falling apart in Victoria under this Labor government. I mean, if this government is spending all this money on infrastructure, the only thing that can happen is for inflation to go up and for interest rates to go up. It is going to drive that. It is a white elephant.

The Suburban Rail Loop is going to mean that with so many people working on these projects they are not going to be out there building homes, because quite frankly most of the builders cannot afford to pay what the people on the SRL are being paid. They cannot afford those wages, and that is why we have a genuine slowing down in the number of homes that are being built. If you cannot afford to pay the workers the sort of fees that the government is able to pay, it just does not make it a viable option for other people to implement. So now we have this state grinding to a halt as it panders to the needs of the unions that it likes to have back it up. It is not that having a union is a problem. It is when you are paying people exorbitant amounts of money and dragging it out so that it is impacting the budget and the hardworking wages that people pay in taxes and they cannot afford it. They are barely feeding their families. Meanwhile we are overpaying in other areas, and that is what this SRL is going to do.

This project never went through a proper cost analysis, and I know that many of my colleagues will have raised this. In fact even reputable organisations like the Grattan Institute say that this should not proceed. At the very best it should be delayed, or let us just scrap it. I mean, if you do not want to have money being wasted, then do not build the SRL for at least the next four years. Defer it – that is what the Grattan institute says. And you know what I say to this government? I say fix your financial problems in this state. Instead, it wants to use our taxes to break the Victorian system and the economy here by overpaying and making it so difficult to provide something that nobody asked for and that there was no genuine cost analysis for.

Also – and this is a real concern – this is all about building, eventually, high-rise apartments around a loop so that we can get rid of our democracy, because we want to eliminate the opportunity to have seats that are anything but dependent on a Labor government. Labor thinks this is going to cement its position in generations to come, but by doing this they will not be giving the working-class people that they say they represent anything. They will be giving them the scraps, because all the money is going on the SRL. They are just going to spend all the money on the SRL and there is not going to be enough money for hardworking Victorians. In fact all the working-class people who are crying out for this help – well, many – are not going to be benefiting because the money is going on the SRL. We are going to stall the whole of the economy for this particular situation, for this particular project.

Rents are going to increase beyond people's income in almost every capital city in Australia, and we know that we are already seeing that here in Victoria. Victoria's debt is \$116 billion and heading towards 25 per cent of the GDP. That is a ratio we simply cannot afford. When you have gone and cancelled the Commonwealth Games and delayed the Melbourne Airport rail and the Geelong fast rail indefinitely, maybe you should actually think about this particular project, because their combined cost of \$24 billion is nowhere near as expensive as even the first stage of the SRL, this Suburban Rail Loop. That is not me talking, that is the Grattan Institute.

If we look at the annual report tabled in Parliament last week, it shows that \$126.7 million was spent from December 2021 to 30 June 2023, with the body's key achievement being the use of a remote-controlled microtunnelling machine to lay a new 630-metre sewer pipe in Clayton as well as setting up a worksite. Seriously! A total of \$84.8 million was spent in the 2023 financial year, including \$42 million on wages for 538 full-time staff – \$42 million on wages for 538 full-time staff. Hello? That is a lot of money. This has included 68 executives who pocketed more than \$220,000, two of whom earned more than half a million dollars. The Suburban Rail Loop Authority spent \$41.9 million over the period from 1 December 2021 to 30 June 2022, including \$16.7 million on wages for 348 staff. Do you want those figures again, just in case? \$16.7 million on 348 staff, and you wonder why people are being taxed. Not only are people being taxed, this Labor government is back-taxing people five to 10 years on things. They simply cannot afford it. And why? So we can keep an SRL project going that nobody has done proper costings on. Nobody asked for it, nobody particularly wants it and we do not need it at this time when we are a state that is going down the toilet. Financially we are going down the toilet. If we were not, why would you keep bunging on more and more taxes? We are up to 53 new or increased taxes in this state under this government. This Labor government is absolutely taxing Victorians, and we are going down the toilet.

David Southwick last week mentioned the SRL, the Suburban Rail Loop. This is what he said to Minister Danny Pearson:

At a time when Victorians are doing it tough, how is paying over \$126 million to move some pipes and set up a worksite value for money?

I would like to ask the same question in this house: how is it value for money? The answer is: it is not value for money. It is not value for money. This is not good for Victoria. We do not need it. It is a waste of money. When we have 500,000 migrants moving in, we need to be looking at ways that we can actually build our economy and build the new resources and talents that are coming into this state, and this is not doing it. This is job for mates.

The best way to thread the needle –

as said by Mr Richardson in the *Australian Financial Review* –

is to pull back on where our infrastructure is dumbest.

(Time expired)

Sheena WATT (Northern Metropolitan) (14:53): I am delighted to get up here and talk about the Suburban Rail Loop – absolutely delighted. I have read the motion, and frankly I am not a fan. It is a

feeble attempt to undermine the transformative work of the Allan Labor government that is happening right here in our state to transform the way Victorians move around. The SRL is one of the most ambitious projects undertaken by any government of any time, and we are committed to getting on with it and getting the Suburban Rail Loop done. This project will deliver 8000 construction jobs and 24,000 jobs throughout the economy. What a fantastic number that is. Projects like the SRL keep the bills paid and the lights on and put food on the table for thousands of Victorians. The Allan Labor government creates jobs, unlike those opposite, who would see the thousands of jobs we are making gone – just simply gone – including those people that are already working on this project each and every day.

I have heard complaints from those opposite about workers being paid too much and whatnot. I will go to disputing some of those facts as they have come across us. But I will say that I am sure some members of this place would be simply delighted to hear that this project will take more than 600,000 daily car trips off our roads, slashing congestion across the entire transport network. What an extraordinary and incredible thing, slashing travel times to and from key cross-suburb destinations, including our universities, our hospitals and key employment centres. It will deliver \$58.7 billion – that is an incredible number, let me repeat that: \$58.7 billion – in economic, social and environmental benefit to the state. This is incredible. It will have a positive – what are we calling this? – benefit–cost ratio of between \$1.1 and \$1.7 for every dollar spent. To me, that sounds like a very, very good thing.

I understand that early works are absolutely underway on the SRL East between Cheltenham and Box Hill, and the Commonwealth government is onboard with their initial contribution of \$2.2 billion. How good it is to have friends in Canberra that believe in infrastructure investment and remember where Victoria is on the map. How good is that? I also want to remind members of this chamber that the Victorian people have in fact endorsed the Suburban Rail Loop not once but twice, including as recently as around this time last year.

The development we have already seen in this project has been just tremendous. Earlier this year we had exciting news with the appointment of Suburban Connect as the preferred bidder for the first package of tunnelling works between Cheltenham and Glen Waverley. Suburban Connect is a consortium of global leaders in tunnelling, with extensive experience in Victoria and Australia, including on the Caulfield to Dandenong Level Crossing Removal Project. Gosh, I could talk about that for quite some time. They have also been involved in the Sydney Metro and Brisbane's Cross River Rail. There you go. The contract will be formally awarded by the end of the year, with the tunnel-boring machines to start tunnelling in 2026. Won't that be an exciting sight! I know that many members of this side will be celebrating the beginning of tunnelling works in 2026.

However, there is a mass of construction work that has already been undertaken since June last year. The first stage of works is creating up to 800 local jobs – just an incredible number. More than 14 per cent of these hours are being worked by apprentices, trainees and cadets, and I know members of this side love to see opportunities for trainees and cadets supported so ably by free TAFE. It just looks like those on this side absolutely are entirely determined to continue to support the next generation of young talent through great initiatives like free TAFE and guaranteed numbers of hours on major projects for apprentices and cadets. What a good thing.

Box Hill is busy with construction already underway. A significant portion of early works on that new railway line will take place over the next three years. It is a massive construction blitz. My gosh, it is busy over there, with works also underway in Burwood and Heatherton, starting soon in Monash and returning to Glen Waverley and Clayton later this year. My gosh, it is all happening over that side of town. While efforts are made to minimise disruption to the community and local traders, at times disruption is unavoidable for the safe delivery of construction works. A big thankyou to all those folks that pass our construction workers on the road and go slow. I will remind you all to go slow around construction works for the safety of the workers. We are continuing to work with local traders and to support them with vouchers and discount programs. There are posters, there is street signage, there are hoardings and there are vouchers that have all been around to support these works. Thank you again

to the community for all their patience at this time. This government and all its projects will always be in touch with the community and ensure a streamlined delivery.

One of the very exciting bits about the SRL is the precincts – that is, the areas around the new SRL stations from Cheltenham to Melbourne Airport. They will be home to about 550,000 jobs by 2056, and it is not that long away – about the same number of jobs as there are right now in Melbourne’s central business district. 165,000 jobs will be in those areas simply because of the Suburban Rail Loop helping create more jobs close to where people live, all within a short walk from a station – bringing communities closer, giving them access to services, infrastructure and amenities. This work is vital for our state, it is vital to keep our suburbs going and vital for jobs – jobs that will be all over Melbourne suburbs.

Up to 24,000 of these jobs will be supported across the economy during construction of SRL East and North. Residents of the Northern Metropolitan Region will be very happy to have access to these jobs – jobs that the Allan Labor government is making. This government is providing so much for the mighty northern suburbs as it always has. We are listening to local communities, as is absolutely at our heart, as is the delivery of the SRL, and I will remind members here that the Suburban Rail Loop Authority (SRLA) has been speaking with and listening to the community and stakeholders since 2019 – that is right, since 2019. We will continue to work closely with them every step of the way as they oversee the delivery of SRL East and plans for the future of the areas around these new stations. I can only imagine how exciting that is going to be.

I must say the SRLA has regularly written to and spoken with affected landowners and tenants along the SRL East project corridor, updating them on project progress and what it means for them and their properties. Thank you to all those who have regularly met. Along with local councils there have been key institutions, peak bodies and advocacy groups all meeting regularly, as I understand, with the SRL East crew. They have answered over 3800 enquiries from the community via phone call and email, and that is not all. Since the establishment of the Suburban Rail Loop Authority they have spoken to 17,000 community members at pop-up and drop-in information centres, most recently at community listening posts, to support the engagement of these precincts.

As I said, the SRLA, through the SRL precincts and their discussion paper, held more than 785 meetings with key stakeholders – just incredible – and answered more than 3800 enquiries from the community via phone and by email. How good it is to see that they are very much responsive to the needs of the community. They have distributed thousands and thousands of works notifications to support site investigations and construction, and how exciting is that. The truth is that community is at the very heart of this state and the community will be consulted through every stage.

Ingrid Stitt: On a point of order, Acting President, I am really sorry but I cannot hear Ms Watt, and she is the closest person to me other than my friend Ms Ermacora. Can we please come to some order, Acting President?

The ACTING PRESIDENT (Bev McArthur): Yes. Ms Watt, continue please.

Sheena WATT: I only have some short remarks to go, and with that I will say that the SRL is the biggest public transport project in Australia’s history. Granted it will have its challenges, there is no doubt about it, as all things like this will do, but we know that those opposite will continue to use these challenges as an opportunity to continue their attacks on the project, on the jobs that it will create and on the Victoria that we must see in the future as we continue to grow. I would implore those opposite to curtail their messages of negativity on a project which will see the delivery of a project that Victorians have voted for not once but twice. Let me just say the Allan Labor government have the best track record of delivering infrastructure in this state and we are doing exactly what Victorians have voted for us to do, not once but twice. We are delivering the Suburban Rail Loop.

Georgie CROZIER (Southern Metropolitan) (15:03): I rise to speak to Mr Mulholland’s motion, which is a very important motion. I have just been listening to the member’s contribution – who

seriously is in la-la land with comments that obviously came out of talking points from somebody's office – in relation to what is being said about this project. This motion is incredibly important because it is about our state – about the rising debt that you and your government are putting not only the current generation but future generations into. It is not just us that says, 'Have a look at what you are spending, look at what you are doing and pause.' In Mr Mulholland's motion the first point says:

the International Monetary Fund's advice for governments to appropriately manage their infrastructure pipelines to avoid interest rates rising further

We have got a cost-of-living crisis in this state and in this country. In this state these sorts of projects, these vanity projects that members opposite are speaking about and that the Premier refuses to acknowledge are out of control, do not understand the economics of what they are doing. As a result we have got a rising inflation rate and we have got cost-of-living pressures, where basic things cannot be afforded.

You have not brought down energy prices; your government is driving up energy prices. There are so many issues that Victorians are facing because of the gross mismanagement of projects and the wastage of taxpayers money. Thirty billion dollars is an extraordinary amount of money, and those opposite just do not care. They seem to have no regard for taxpayer money. It is the mums and dads who are working hard to pay their taxes, which you continue to blow.

This project at this point in time should be paused, and that is what we are saying. We are calling on the government not to sign any contracts until this project is independently assessed by Infrastructure Victoria, a body that this government set up, and to pause the Suburban Rail Loop (SRL) to ensure that Victoria's infrastructure pipeline remains stable. This is responsible. What the government is doing is completely the opposite – completely irresponsible. Even your federal colleagues, as Mr Mulholland pointed out, are absolutely fed up with what you are doing because you are not being responsible in the projects that you are pushing forward.

As we know, this project is actually the most secretive, unscrutinised project in Victoria's history, and this is particularly important – the most secretive, unscrutinised project. It is so big, but it does not have any scrutiny. It was originally codenamed Operation Halo, and board members of the government's own agency responsible for its delivery knew nothing about it until it was announced. Senior public servants enlisted to give advice were legally gagged from sharing it with their bosses, and Labor MPs and ministers were kept in the dark except for the gang of five: the Treasurer Tim Pallas; now gone James Merlino; now gone Gavin Jennings, the Mr Fix-It; the now Premier Jacinta Allan; and the pull-the-pin Premier Daniel Andrews. That gang of five, who were responsible for all of this mess – well, there are only two left, the Treasurer and the Premier, and they need to do the right thing, because they have had their paws stuck right in the secrecy and have been up to their necks in it from the get-go.

As has been stated I am sure, Infrastructure Victoria's independent 30-year infrastructure strategy, which was released in 2016, did not include or signal a need for an orbital rail line in Melbourne, which is this vanity project of the government. What is also so alarming about this project is that the Victorian Auditor-General's Office has said that the business case does not support fully formed investment decisions, that it could lose up to 49 cents for every dollar spent and that VAGO identifies that there are problems that will flow on from this project. Now, I think everybody should be very alarmed at that, but they should be more alarmed that the Parliamentary Budget Office prior to the last election costed the first two stages of the SRL alone at \$125 billion – 2½ times what was promised for the whole thing.

We have got this Premier in charge now who has botched every single project she has touched. They have blown out, and as a result we are now taxing doctors, for God's sake. We are taxing our health system because of the Premier's mismanagement and the botched projects and the budget blowouts. The state is so broke, they want to go ahead with this project and we are applying a health tax on the very people that need to help Victorians and care for Victorians. The government is trying to plug the

haemorrhaging bottom line, and they are going after GPs and other allied health professionals. How daft is that. That is going to put more pressure on the public health system, it is going to put more pressure on already sick Victorians and it is going to put more pressure on those caring doctors and their teams that look after sick Victorians and their families.

I have called on the government to scrap the health tax. I listened to the minister's answer in question time today, and all she did was deflect and blame others – no responsibility for a decision made by this government about applying a health tax that is going to close clinics. It is going to end bulk-billing. It is going to drive up costs for patients at a time when they cannot afford it. We have got a cost-of-living crisis, as I have said, and pressures are on households, pressures are on every Victorian. It is going to drive patients into already struggling emergency departments. That is the impact this health tax is going to have, and that is not me saying it; that is the AMA, that is the Royal Australian College of General Practitioners, that is the GP Alliance – as Dr Bach says, a bunch of doctors are saying it. They are saying it, and I am hearing from them. I just wish the minister would get out of her ivory tower, go and speak to these GPs out in rural and regional Victoria and understand the enormous pressures that they are under. She is meant to be representing a seat in regional Victoria. Well, she needs to get out and speak to these GPs like I am, and I can tell you now they are not happy with this health tax. They know what it will do. They know that it is going to close clinics, drive up costs and put patients who are already struggling with their health needs in a more dire situation.

This motion goes to the suburban rail link. This orbital rail line project, which nobody even identified as a need, needs to be paused, and we seriously need to look at these contracts until they are independently assessed. This motion is a commonsense motion that is in the interests of all Victorians. Taxpayers money is not Monopoly money. This is a serious issue that we are talking about. It is hundreds of billions of dollars at the end of the day that we are talking about, and you keep rolling off these 'It's going to do this, that and the other thing.' Well, you have not delivered a project on time. They have all blown out. Go and ask anyone in the western suburbs. Mr Luu will tell you. These are big promises. But the whole thing has blown out, and Victorians are paying for it, as I said.

Those members opposite say that Victorians voted for this. They sure did not vote for a government that are absolutely lying through their teeth, and we have seen that with the Commonwealth Games debacle. They promised Victorians they were going to deliver them, and it has cost us at the very least \$600 million, and rising, to cancel the games. It has ruined our reputation internationally. And there are all of those communities that have been incredibly let down, because this government actually lied to them when they went to the 2022 election. So do not lecture us on this side about what the Victorian public voted for. They did not vote for a white elephant, and they did not vote for a health tax that is going to close down GP clinics, raise patient costs and force more patients into already busy emergency departments.

Michael GALEA (South-Eastern Metropolitan) (15:13): Tempted as I am to directly respond to some of the comments made by Ms Crozier, I will start instead by quoting from one of our fair newspapers in this city, the *Age*, an article which says:

The Victorian Government's plan for an underground railway has been attacked in a Melbourne University report which warns that to go ahead at present would be a serious mistake.

It continues with a quote:

"Many of the arguments put forward to support the construction of the underground loop line are misleading or irrelevant," it says. "The evidence is strong that to proceed with the underground at present would be a serious mistake."

This report was published in the *Age* on 10 August 1968. The loop it refers to is the city loop that we now have today, one of the most important pieces of our rail network that countless Melburnians and countless Victorians rely on –

Members interjecting.

Michael GALEA: got you there – a vital piece of our city’s infrastructure that this city’s rail network could not today operate without, that had people in the 1960s saying, ‘No, no, no, we don’t need it. It’s costly. It’s a mistake.’ ‘It’s a white elephant,’ I think she said – outrageous. I am sure that just as this article 55 years on is as ridiculous as it is – with the benefit of hindsight we can say that article is an utter farce – in 50 to 55 years time maybe people with more esteemed minds than ours will be sitting in this chamber commenting on articles and contributions made by members opposite.

Tom McIntosh: How will you guys be remembered? David Davis will still be here.

Michael GALEA: It is possible, Mr McIntosh. Yes, some members may still be here. I am sure even for him that would be quite an achievement. In 50 years time I am sure there will be people waving around articles and waving around *Hansard* from this year saying, ‘Look at those fools. They were speaking against this. What an important part of our city this already is. Can you imagine the city without the Suburban Rail Loop?’ – just as we cannot imagine our city without the city loop that we have today. Once again we see this sort of backwards thinking from the opposition. Frankly – and I will pick up one of Ms Crozier’s points here – let alone not being prepared to look into the future, they are not even prepared to look to the next election. Their strategy, it seems, for winning back the seats of Box Hill and Glen Waverley is, ‘You’ve got this big transport project coming. We’re going to take it away from you. That’s how we’re going to win back our old heartland.’ That is an incredible strategy, and I am sure if they keep pursuing this line of argument they will say goodbye to those seats probably for a much longer time than they had first hoped.

If we are going to start bringing all sorts of other arguments into this debate – I mean, it is your motion and you cannot even stay relevant to it yourself. You are talking about the Commonwealth Games, you are talking about health and you are talking about anything but the Suburban Rail Loop, because deep down I am sure you know this is a very good project that the voters actually want. I know you cannot bring yourselves to admit that publicly, but I think deep down you know. But let us talk about health and how wonderful it is to have a member for Glen Waverley who believes in science, who will get the jab. Lord knows what is going to happen over there if you get your way in that seat next time, if you are going to have another anti-vaxxer coming into the place who is going to refuse to attend Parliament because he refuses to get a vaccine that is widely accepted by scientists and by the health fraternity to be safe. That just shows the sorts of ridiculous antics over there that they like to inflict upon this place. Granted, perhaps not as ridiculous as the disgraceful thing we saw yesterday by the member for Richmond in the other place. You are not quite down at that level yet. But really, what is your plan?

Speaking of the city loop, this is an integral part of our infrastructure today. What is going to be another integral part of our city’s rail network in just a few years time is the Melbourne Metro tunnel that has been built and delivered by the Andrews and now Allan Labor government – ahead of schedule, mind you. It was originally scheduled to open in 2026. They said it was never going to happen, just as they said the level crossing removals were never going to happen. That will be open before we know it, and it is going to be a fantastic addition to our rail network. What did those opposite do when they were in government? The plan did emerge in the later years of the Brumby government, but they mucked it up completely. They said, ‘Well, we’ll build it’, ‘No – no, we won’t’, ‘No, we’re actually going to do it, but we’re not going to put the Pakenham line straight through the city through to Cranbourne; we’re going to take the Frankston line and we’re going to send it halfway across the other side of the city to Fishermans Bend before it even gets to the city, and then we’re going to send it to Southern Cross, and then it can kind of go this way’ – an absolutely ridiculous looping zigzag which flies in the face of all respectable transport planning ideas about how you design a network.

It took the election of the Andrews Labor government to fix their mistake. Four wasted years. That Metro Tunnel could be open right now had it not been for the Baillieu–Naphthine governments mucking around, delivering nothing, as was their wont, and actually making the project worse – that would have reduced the overall benefit from the project. It took the Andrews Labor government, as it was at the time, to come in and fix their mess once again and get the Metro Tunnel back on track. That is exactly

what is going to happen when that tunnel opens in coming years. The Metro Tunnel, for my constituents in particular, will have a huge impact for those living in the south-east, improving their connectivity with the city and also places beyond, such as the universities district – including our good friends at Melbourne University, who were not so keen on the city loop itself back in the 1960s – through to the hospital precinct and of course to the western suburbs as well.

The next stage of that is the Suburban Rail Loop. Why is that so important? It is important for communities, and it will be important for communities right across Melbourne. It is particularly going to be important for my communities in the south-east, because if you are a uni student in Cranbourne and you want to get to Monash University or Deakin University, this will make it so much easier. It will make it possible for more students to study. If you are in Pakenham and you work in Glen Waverley or if you are in Frankston and you need to go to work in Clayton, this makes it possible, and it means that you do not have to rely on your car to do so.

Of course it is also going to promote transit-oriented development. We are not the leaders of this. There are many other wonderful examples of this around the world, notably our Canadian friends who have pioneered in that space in particular, as well as examples in Europe. There are opportunities for development and regeneration and regrowth in these areas, which is going to be so crucial. I am sure Mr Mulholland would be very excited. We have had many good debates in here about nimbyism. If Mr Mulholland wants to see continued development in our middle-ring suburbs, I actually agree with him on that point; it is a good thing. But people are still going to need to be able to get around, and this is going to be a central part, a backbone, of our rail network. People for generations have been saying all our rail lines are radial and that we need some sort of outer circle to come back. This is a government that actually delivers and does not just navel-gaze.

Members interjecting.

Michael GALEA: Lots of people have said it. Well, lots of people have said it to me.

A member: Who? Name one.

Michael GALEA: Many people. In my previous iterations as a public transport advocate, I have heard many, many people say this to me, both those with a vested interest and those without. It has been a common refrain. I am quite sure I have seen countless letters in good newspapers as well over the years. Now course we have got a government that has actually got a plan to deliver it – to bring it in – and once again we have an opposition who is saying, ‘No, no, no. We’re going to oppose. We’re going to oppose. We’re going to oppose.’ There are travel time savings as well.

There are so many trips that will be taken via the SRL that have not even been contemplated yet. But for those trips that still take place, as I have said, if you are a student in Cranbourne going to Deakin University or if you are on the Frankston line and you need to get Clayton – any of these sorts of options – as these centres in our middle ring build and grow and develop, as they should, that will be made easier by the SRL. In fact the travel time from Cheltenham to Clayton, just that alone, will be under 10 minutes. There was a wonderful video on YouTube. I do not get to watch YouTube much at all these days, but I did happen to see a terrific video by a Melbourne video maker by the name of Taitset, who made a good video about the Broadmeadows runaway train 20 years ago, in 2003. That was the train that made an unscheduled trip from Broadmeadows right into the front of another train at Southern Cross station in the record time of 11 minutes – a very, very troubling event. Fortunately there were no fatalities out of it, but it is a very good video that I can recommend members watch. The Suburban Rail Loop will take you from Cheltenham to Clayton safely, in a properly run train, in less time than that runaway train.

I could go on talking for many, many minutes more – many hours more in fact – about the transport projects that are going on in this state. They say, ‘You’re not going deliver it. It’s never going to happen.’ That is exactly what they said about level crossing removals. We have delivered more than

we committed to originally. There are many, many good reasons. Once again we find a Liberal wanting to talk about great Labor projects, so I thank him for bringing this motion to the house.

Matthew BACH (North-Eastern Metropolitan) (15:23): It is really good to rise to make some comments on this important motion. The motion calls on the government not to sign any Suburban Rail Loop (SRL) contracts until it is independently assessed by Infrastructure Victoria. It has been noted in this debate that Infrastructure Victoria is an excellent creation of this government. Similarly, Infrastructure Australia was an excellent creation of Mr Albanese personally when he was the relevant minister under Kevin Rudd. In putting forward this motion, we are not being negative Nellies but, rather, we are asking the government to do what the government has previously said it would do.

When the government established Infrastructure Victoria, it said that the body would play a key role in recommending infrastructure projects and approving and analysing infrastructure projects. In fact I would recommend all members of the house look back at the debate on the relevant legislation some years ago, in 2017. The contributions of numerous Labor members are instructive. The contribution of Mr Pakula, a dear friend of Mr Galea, is particularly instructive. What Mr Pakula said is that were any future government not to seek independent assessment for a major project from Infrastructure Australia, that would be, in his exact words, ‘economic vandalism’.

Mr Galea talked about the Metro Tunnel, an excellent project. It has been botched from start to finish by this government and by Minister Allan and it is billions of dollars over budget, but it is an excellent project. There are numerous projects underway right now that, contrary to the comments of Mr Galea, have always experienced full-throated, bipartisan support from the Liberal Party. Certainly the Metro Tunnel is one of these. We have provided our support previously for airport rail, which weirdly in the middle of the election campaign was rebranded ‘SRL Airport’. Well, the branding has changed and now that has been cut.

But there are important points to make. I know there is some truth, being a member in Melbourne’s east and north-east, to Mr Galea’s assertion and the assertion of others opposite that the SRL is undoubtedly popular in some circles. But I am struggling to buy the argument from those opposite, who concede that not one expert body recommends this project. Infrastructure Victoria has never recommended it. Infrastructure Australia thinks it is a dog of a project. Marion Terrill, the country’s foremost transport expert, wrote in the *Age* newspaper the other day that this should be scrapped. The Rail Futures Institute – I could go on and on and on.

Through the period of the COVID pandemic we were lectured by those opposite time and time again that politicians should be powerless vessels of experts – that is what they said. Time and time again they came into this place and berated us on the basis that we had an opinion, and we were told time and time again it was not the role of politicians to have opinions about anything; we should simply listen to the experts and follow the science. Well, if we are not to be populists – and on transport policy those opposite are populists; many of the things they have put forward are popular. I dare say the SRL, in certain segments of the community, is very popular; I concede that. Hanging murderers in the public square is very popular. It does not necessarily make it good policy. You are not –

Sonja Terpstra: On a point of order, Acting President, I note that we are having a debate on the Suburban Rail Loop, and I do not think hanging murderers in a public square can be remotely relevant to the motion, so on relevance –

A member interjected.

Sonja Terpstra: Yes, it is a bit outside the scope of this motion, so I would ask Dr Bach to contain his comments to the motion, which is about the Suburban Rail Loop.

The ACTING PRESIDENT (Bev McArthur): Yes, it has been a rather wideranging debate, but I will call Dr Bach back to the matter in hand.

Matthew BACH: Of course, Acting President. Because the government itself has previously repeatedly said that all major projects must be independently assessed by Infrastructure Victoria or Infrastructure Australia – Labor creations, excellent Labor creations – those opposite, lest they be entirely hypocrites, must vote in favour of this motion.

This motion specifically also talks about a Commonwealth contribution. Now, when I was shadowing Minister Allan in the period of the election campaign I repeatedly said that the federal Labor government would not pledge a single additional cent for the Suburban Rail Loop. She denied that. She denied that repeatedly, she denied that on live television with me, she denied it time and time again. And at the time of course you might remember this Labor government was waging a campaign against Mr Morrison and the Liberals – ‘miserable’ Morrison, they called him. They said, ‘It’s impossible to get money out of this Liberal government in Canberra. It’s like foreign aid; you’ve got to go with your begging bowl.’ That is what they said time and time again.

However, now Labor’s federal mates are saying exactly what the federal coalition did. In fact they have gone further: Labor’s federal mates are cutting infrastructure spending to Victoria. They are not going to spend a single cent on this project, and that is what I said at the time. Now, I said that because I was in close communication with key figures at Infrastructure Australia. If those opposite think this is a good project – they do not – but if they think it is a good project, other than politically, they should do a business case. There is no business case. Do a business case, send it to Infrastructure Australia and ask for an assessment. To do any less would be ‘economic vandalism’ – not my words, the words of Minister Martin Pakula. Labor set up Infrastructure Victoria. They set up Infrastructure Australia. I praised them at the time; I have always praised Labor government, state and federal, for setting up those bodies. If you are going to argue that when it comes to COVID and other policy areas you must listen to the experts but then on transport and infrastructure, when we are thinking about an expense of perhaps \$200 billion that we do not have, that all that matters is whether it is popular – well, that is not feasible. It is not feasible for our state, because we find ourselves in the economic malaise that we do. It is not a legitimate form of argumentation, if we are being fair, to continually say we must listen to experts, but then, when it suits you, to engage in the most obvious, crass, populist politicking.

This is a straightforward motion. We are seeking that the Labor Party commit to doing what they have previously said they would always commit to doing – having an analysis of the project carried out by their dear friends at Infrastructure Australia. They set up Infrastructure Australia. Good on them for doing it. Infrastructure Australia is fabulous. So is Infrastructure Victoria. So if Labor is real about this, if those opposite actually think that the benefits they have been discussing in this debate will flow through to the Victorian community maybe in 2080, maybe in 100 years, 150 years – who knows – if they are genuine about that, what is to be feared from finally writing a business case and sending it through to one of these expert bodies that either they or their federal colleagues actually created? Lest they be entire hypocrites, they must vote for this straightforward and important motion.

Sonja TERPSTRA (North-Eastern Metropolitan) (15:31): I rise to make a contribution on this motion about the Suburban Rail Loop (SRL) in Mr Mulholland’s name, motion 247. I am sad because I have only got about 4 minutes on the clock and I will not be able to fully address all of the things that Dr Bach talked about, because I normally would enjoy the opportunity to completely debunk a lot of what was said over there. I heard Dr Bach just talking a little bit about the Commonwealth government in his contribution and saying things like there is a \$9.6 billion shortfall in Commonwealth funding. I think this is one of the points in Mr Mulholland’s motion:

... the Federal Labor infrastructure minister confirming that no further funding will be guaranteed ...

Well – bah-bow – not true. The Victorian and Commonwealth governments have already committed \$14 billion to SRL East. That is more than enough to start main works and have tunnel-boring machines in the ground in 2026. Then the last point:

... the government should not sign multibillion-dollar contracts and allocate a generation’s worth of infrastructure funding in the face of a volatile economic climate ...

Victorians endorsed the SRL. We went to an election with it. We said we would build the Suburban Rail Loop, and the Victorian community said, 'Actually, we want to vote you in for another term.'

Matthew Bach interjected.

Sonja TERPSTRA: Dr Bach, I know it is sad. I guess the thing is that if you look at our record, the Labor government's record, whether it is the Andrews government or the Allan government, when we say we are going to do something, we do it. We are building things. That is why the Victorian community has confidence in us. I can talk about all the things we have done, and I can also highlight all the things that you have not done. The fact is that we need better access to public transport. The Suburban Rail Loop will in fact transform the way that people get around. I just want to get this on the record, because I have got 3 minutes or thereabouts left. This project will not only transform the way that people move around. Of course, you and I are in the same region, the North-Eastern Metropolitan Region, and I would like to see an increase and improvement in public transport, particularly rail. The Suburban Rail Loop does that by connecting Clayton and Box Hill. That is going to be a huge game changer for people who live in those areas, particularly for young people who might want to get to university. They will be able to jump on the train and get to universities like Deakin and others.

For example, the Suburban Rail Loop will create 8000 construction jobs and support another 24,000 jobs across the economy. That is amazing, because the more jobs we create, the more money that actually pumps into the economy. It will take more than 600,000 daily car trips off our roads, slashing congestion and travel times across the transport network. That is really critically important. People do not want to be stuck in their cars on lengthy trips home from work or whatever. As you would know, in the North-Eastern Metropolitan Region, particularly in areas like Manningham and that, there is not a full availability of public transport. There are buses, but if I could get on a train that turned up every so often that just got me there quickly, I would take that rather than being in my car. I would take it any day over driving in a car. It will deliver \$58.7 billion in economic, social and environmental benefits to the state, with a positive cost-benefit ratio of between \$1.10 and \$1.70 for every dollar spent. I know the rhetoric of those opposite is just to say that we have not got it together, that all our costs of projects are blowing out and all this kind of stuff.

Nevertheless, it is a game changer, because a modern city does need to have modern rail. Other people have talked about if you go to Japan, there are turn-up-and-go-type systems, even the Métro in Paris. We do not have those sorts of things. It is time in Australia that we kind of grew up a little bit and had these modern, impressive rail projects that will get people where they need to be, and people coming from overseas will be able to utilise rail in ways that they have not been able to before. I think the Suburban Rail Loop should continue. It will provide enormous benefits to people in my region but also across the broader economy.

Evan MULHOLLAND (Northern Metropolitan) (15:36): We have had an interesting array of contributions, some swaying far from what the topic actually was. We had people like Mr Galea basically admitting that this project, regardless of what the experts say – economists, transport experts – is more about the politics. They are admitting this \$100 billion project is a pork-barrelling exercise. This has got to be the biggest pork-barrelling exercise in Australian history. This will tie multiple generations down in terms of infrastructure spending for a century. Mr Galea spoke about the Broadmeadows runaway train. This is a runaway train in itself, because it is not actually getting to Broadmeadows until 2052. I know the planning minister was out in Broadmeadows last week, and I believe Hume City Council asked her about where the tunnel would go so they can plan their new activity centre precinct. The minister did not know – of course no-one knows. Maybe while she was there she could have told them about when the Broadmeadows train station is being upgraded, since Frank McGuire promised it but never delivered it.

In terms of the SRL, I do not know, maybe Jacinta Allan, just like at Bendigo station, will create her own office at one of the SRL stations. I heard Ms Terpstra say, 'It doesn't matter what the experts say, this is something that we need. We need this kind of public transport network.' Well, if you are forward

thinking in that way, have a look at what the former Liberal government did in New South Wales – driverless, automatic trains to growth areas where people actually need public transport. Instead you have left our growth areas with V/Line trains, where multiple trains are cancelled every morning. That is no way to do infrastructure. You are putting a train around inner-city suburbs, and those opposite have basically admitted – as Dr Bach said, it is popular – that this is a political exercise.

You have the IMF calling on state governments to better manage their infrastructure pipelines at a more measured and coordinated pace, otherwise interest rates would have to be even higher, putting the burden disproportionately on mortgage holders. We are in a cost-of-living crisis. If members opposite vote against this motion, don't you dare come back and talk about the cost of living and how much people are struggling. This is what they are forcing on the Victorian people and the Australian people, because they have botched the delivery of infrastructure across the state. They are sucking the supply and labour out of every single other project, out of our ability to build homes for people, and they are going to trap Victorians for a century with this infrastructure pipeline so they can build the former Premier's and the current Premier's pet project. It is a disgrace. It is economic vandalism, what they are doing.

We have had so many experts. Mr Galea liked to quote universities, so I will just quote an urban professor at RMIT Jago Dodson.

It looks almost like a complete failure in metropolitan planning that a project of this financial magnitude could be decided to proceed with almost no [wider strategic] planning whatsoever.

This is an outrageous project. We know through the IMF and we know through ratings agencies who have commented on it that this project will have an effect on our credit rating and this project will have an effect on interest rates for people not only in this state but across the entire country. It is serious economic vandalism, and what we are saying and what I would say to those opposite and my crossbench colleagues is: this project needs to be paused to go to Infrastructure Victoria – a body you set up, as Gavin Jennings said in this place, to take the politics out of infrastructure. Instead of taking the politics out of infrastructure you set the politics with a bag of cash, gave it to your mates in PwC, sent them up the road, locked the door and said, 'Come up with this project for us.' And you took it out onto the former Premier's social media, and he said 'This is what we're going to do', without any consideration for bankrupting future Victorians by tying our state down with this project.

Council divided on motion:

Ayes (15): Matthew Bach, Melina Bath, Gaele Broad, Georgie Crozier, David Davis, Renee Heath, Ann-Marie Hermans, David Limbrick, Wendy Lovell, Trung Luu, Bev McArthur, Joe McCracken, Nick McGowan, Evan Mulholland, Rikkie-Lee Tyrrell

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

Motion negatived.

Business of the house

Notices of motion

Joe McCracken (Western Victoria) (15:47): I move:

That the consideration of notice of motion, general business, 246, be postponed until later this day.

Motion agreed to.

*Bills***Nuclear Activities (Prohibitions) Repeal Bill 2023***Second reading***Debate resumed on motion of David Limbrick:**

That the bill be now read a second time.

Ryan BATCHELOR (Southern Metropolitan) (15:48): I am pleased to rise and speak on Mr Limbrick's bill to repeal the Nuclear Activities (Prohibitions) Act 1983 – the act that guarantees that Victoria does not play a part in the nuclear fuel cycle, that we do not have facilities to support a nuclear industry here in Victoria and that we do not produce nuclear power here in Victoria. It is an important piece of legislation – just as important as it was when it was passed 40 years ago.

I thought I would begin my contribution to today's debate by reflecting on the reasons that the then responsible minister, the Minister for Minerals and Energy the Honourable David White, spoke of when he made a contribution in this very chamber on 9 December 1982. In moving the second reading of the Nuclear Activities (Prohibitions) Bill, as obviously it was then before its passage, Minister White at the time opened his remarks by reflecting on the terrible legacy of Hiroshima and Nagasaki. While I do not think that is going to be the focus of the contributions today, I do think we should start by remembering those who died at the hands of atomic weapons at the end of the Second World War in Hiroshima and Nagasaki, which in the words of the minister at the time showed the world 'the destructive potential of nuclear energy'.

The minister's second-reading speech goes on to talk about other matters associated with the nuclear fuel cycle and particularly nuclear power. I think the words that he said at the time, 40 years ago, are as salient today as they were when they were first spoken in this chamber, so I would like to read some of them out:

The development of nuclear power reactors was originally held out as offering the promise of convenient, cheap, and plentiful electricity. However, experience so far has been otherwise. Reactors have been proved to be very expensive, difficult to locate in the face of public opposition, and there is the unresolved matter of waste disposal and attendant problems. In addition, there is the problem that the growth in the number of reactors has increased the risk of nuclear weapons proliferation through the wider spread of nuclear technology and the risk of nuclear materials being diverted for weapons purposes.

The minister went on to say:

Beyond these considerations is the complex matter of safety. The reactors themselves have proven to be technically difficult to operate, and prone to minor mishaps ...

I will pause here and just reflect that these comments were made before Chernobyl demonstrated to the world the problems of nuclear meltdown in nuclear energy facilities. Several years before Chernobyl, the minister in this place was talking about these reactors being:

... prone to minor mishaps which can threaten to cause disastrous accidents.

The minister then went on to say that:

... a strong body of public opinion has developed opposed to the establishment of a nuclear industry here.

He said:

This opinion finds expression in all political parties and in all sectors of the community. The Labor Party has for some time held to a policy of opposition to the development of nuclear activities in Victoria and it is interesting to note that the previous Liberal Government –

so that was the Thompson Liberal government –

also recorded its opposition to the establishment of either nuclear reactors or enrichment facilities.

The minister's second-reading speech – I will not quote it in full – does go on to describe the various elements of the bill, which was introduced to do a range of things, including prohibiting exploration and mining for uranium or thorium, the construction and operation of nuclear reactors and facilities for milling uranium or thorium or concentrates, the storage or disposal of nuclear fuel, and the possession, sale and transport of certain nuclear material. It made consequential amendments to other acts, including the State Electricity Commission Act 1958, to prevent the introduction of nuclear energy into our energy mix.

The remarks of the minister in 1982 are relevant to today's debate because the fundamental issues that the Cain Labor government was concerned about in 1982 relating to both the efficacy of nuclear power and the safety of the nuclear industry and its attendant problems have not gone away. On the effluxion of time, it is interesting to note from a scientific perspective that the passage of 40 years has very little relevance to the nuclear fuel cycle, because the half-life of these products is much, much longer, and the danger and the destruction that nuclear fuel and nuclear energy and nuclear waste bring span greater periods than just 40 years. They do not only span our lifetimes; they span multiple generations. It is not something that we can lightly think of removing – the important prohibition against Victoria's participation in the nuclear industry, the nuclear fuel cycle, the creation of nuclear energy and the storage of nuclear waste. Those remarks and that legislation are as important today as they were 40 years ago, and we must oppose all attempts to remove the prohibition on nuclear energy here in Victoria and other sorts of activities associated with the nuclear fuel cycle and be steadfast in our opposition.

I will come to the reasons why, but I think it is fundamentally important that none of the reasons why a former Labor government moved the bill for the act that is sought to be repealed today have changed. In fact over time many of them have become even more stark. Simply wishing away the problems of the nuclear industry does not make it better. Denying the problems of nuclear power does not make it safe. We do not need to look very far back to see the consequences of the dangers of the use of nuclear energy in our fuel cycle, and I will come to the devastating effects that the accident at the Fukushima nuclear power plant had a little over a decade ago. We do not need to go back to Hiroshima and Nagasaki, we do not need to just remember what happened at Three Mile Island and we do not need to just remember what happened at Chernobyl. This century we have had problems with nuclear energy and the devastating consequences it has. This is a problem for today. This legislation is as important today as it was 40 years ago when this Parliament had the good sense to pass the Nuclear Activities (Prohibitions) Bill 1983. I might say it was a Parliament that the Labor Party did not control; this chamber was not under the Labor Party's purview at the time of its passage.

David Davis: Until '85.

Ryan BATCHELOR: Correct. I remember that very well, but I am not going to get distracted by nuclear issues like that, Mr Davis. What I want to do is go through some of the issues as to why it is important to maintain our prohibition on nuclear power and nuclear energy and participation in the nuclear fuel cycle and debunk some of the dangerous myths that are being peddled by the proponents of nuclear energy in the wider community – and we may see it in the course of this debate.

The first one is about the cost of nuclear energy. People should not make any mistakes, nuclear power will mean higher power bills for Victorians for two simple basic facts: nuclear energy has higher costs to build the reactors and the nuclear power plants, and those nuclear power plants are then more expensive to run on a day-to-day basis. So the proponents of nuclear energy have got to come into this place and explain to us why we should be shouldering generations of Victorians with higher power prices because of a fantasy they have that somehow nuclear energy is a solution to the climate crisis. We have seen independent evidence presented, like the findings of the South Australian government's recent royal commission into the nuclear industry, which found quite clearly that nuclear power simply was not viable in that state because it was too expensive. We have seen it internationally with the development of nuclear energy and nuclear power stations, notably the Hinkley nuclear reactor in the United Kingdom, which is at this stage – 11 years since it was first announced – still not built and

billions and billions of pounds over budget, costs that the British consumers of that energy will be paying for generations thereafter. Nuclear power means higher power bills, and proponents of nuclear power need to explain why they support higher power bills for ordinary Victorians.

The other thing – and I briefly mention this – is that nuclear reactors for nuclear power are expensive to build and take an inordinate amount of time to get off the ground. It is not an answer to the problems that we are facing as part of our energy transition. If people are worried about energy security here in Victoria and if people are concerned that there will not be enough power when the ageing coal-fired power stations in the Latrobe Valley come to the end of their life, nuclear is not an answer to that problem. Because even if we thought it was a good idea and even if we started on the dangerous nuclear energy path today, those coal-powered plants would be long gone before the nuclear power came online. They are not a solution to that problem.

The third thing I will say is that there is this kind of fantasy being peddled now by the nuclear industry that somehow we have got new technology that is going to fix all of these problems. Even if you accept that it took too long and was too costly to build the nuclear reactors of yore, of old, suddenly we have got brand new technology – these small, modular reactors that are sweeping the world and somehow transforming nuclear energy across the world. Well, they are a chimera. They are a mirage. They do not exist, and people who peddle small modular reactors as the solution to our energy transition are charlatans.

There are a couple of things I will say about small modular reactors. People might not have picked it up in the name, but a small modular reactor is small. Let us do a point of comparison. A small modular reactor, if they existed, would have the capacity to generate around 300 megawatts of power. Loy Yang A, which is what some people are saying these nuclear reactors could replace, currently generates 2200 megawatts of electricity – 2.2 gigawatts. Small modular reactors generate 300 megawatts, so you would need eight small nuclear reactors to replace Loy Yang A. You would need eight or nine to replace the energy that is proposed to be brought into the grid by the Star of the South, for example. The question we have got is should we build one new offshore wind facility or eight nuclear reactors? That is the comparison that we should be making.

I say that is a comparison that we should be making, but it is not a real comparison, because, unlike things like the offshore wind industry and other renewable projects, small modular reactors, small nuclear reactors, do not exist. There is not one that works anywhere in the world – nowhere. When people come in and say, ‘Oh, they’re the solution. Small nuclear reactors are the solution’, they cannot point to one that exists, because there is not one anywhere in the world. Only last week one of the projects designed to demonstrate just how fantastic small modular reactors are, in the United States, collapsed, fell over, was cancelled. Just to read you some of the headlines – I probably do not have time to go through all of the articles – this is from the *Guardian*: ‘Small modular nuclear reactor that was hailed by Coalition as future cancelled due to rising costs’. In the *Australian Financial Review*: ‘Flagship US nuclear reactor project collapses owing taxpayers \$930m’. In the *Sydney Morning Herald*: ‘US reactor project fail heats up Australia’s nuclear power debate’. I do not think it does heat up Australia’s nuclear power debate; I think it puts it to bed.

Interestingly, if you read the article in some depth, these projects were only sustainable because of the massive government subsidies that they were receiving. When people come into this chamber and decry the amount of money that governments give to industry in what some people would call forms of corporate welfare, what we see from the experience in the United States is that the solutions that they advocate are only sustained by the very subsidies that they decry, and then the projects fall over and there is nothing left to be seen. Small nuclear reactors are not real, they are imaginary. They do not exist, and they should not be taken seriously in any debate about what to do with our energy transition.

I have mentioned briefly the problems with nuclear energy and nuclear power, but they should be worth remembering, because if we are to have eight nuclear reactors built here in Victoria to replace

Loy Yang A or as an alternative to Star of the South, my question simply is to those who argue they are a good idea: where should we put them? Who is putting their hand up to have a nuclear reactor in their community? I hear stunning silence from across the chamber, because no-one is putting their hand up to have nuclear power in their backyard. No-one is putting their hand up to have one nuclear reactor in their community, let alone eight – eight – nuclear reactors that we would need to replace the power that is coming out of Loy Yang A or the power that could be going into our grid by something like the Star of the South offshore wind project. So people who propose nuclear reactors need to tell us where they are going to go. Mostly we know that they need to be in places that are near water, because what is one of the things that nuclear reactors need in order to generate nuclear energy? They need water.

Harriet Shing: Not just a little bit.

Ryan BATCHELOR: And not just a little bit, says the Minister for Water, with a very helpful interjection – not just a little bit. They need large volumes of water to participate in the cooling of the reactors and to generate the power that people claim is so lucrative, which they bring. So my next question is: where is the water coming from? There are two sources of water that we can use in the production of nuclear energy. We can use seawater, which requires vast amounts of additional power to desalinate in order to put it into the reactors –

Harriet Shing: Something they've opposed.

Ryan BATCHELOR: Desalination – something that has been opposed but also something that takes up a large part of the output of the nuclear reactor. So you set up these nuclear reactors – eight of them – in various locations across the state. If they are on the coast, which is where the sea is, I do not know which coastal communities you are saying need to have nuclear reactors next to their –

Harriet Shing: Brighton.

Ryan BATCHELOR: Maybe. Who knows? Beach boxes, nuclear reactor – who would have thought? But a lot of that energy is then tied up in making sure they can actually use the water to produce the remainder of power.

Of course the second source of water that we did not have to desalinate would need to come from agricultural production. My question to those who participate in this debate is: what are you telling the farmers? What are you telling the irrigators, who would have to have their water for agricultural production diverted into these nuclear power plants? They are the people who will end up paying the most for this, because you cannot just turn these plants off. You cannot decide in five years, 'Actually, we don't have as much water as we used to. There have been some climatic changes which have reduced the amount of rainfall and reduced the amount of water available now in our environment. We don't have enough to both sustain our nuclear power plant and irrigate our crops. Can we switch it off, please?' Unfortunately you cannot. You cannot turn them off. They are there for all of their life. If you divert the water away from these nuclear power plants, they melt down, like what happened in Chernobyl and like what happened at Three Mile Island. Then suddenly these communities are not just left with more expensive power, they are left with a radioactive landscape. That is the future that you are proposing. That is the future that could await if the nuclear prohibitions act is repealed.

The other, and probably last, point that I will make – so that others have a chance to contribute to this debate – is that in addition to the eight small nuclear reactors that we would need to build here in Victoria, we still do not have a solution for our radioactive waste, for our nuclear waste. That is the other question that people have got to ask and answer: where are you going to put the radioactive waste that you generate from these facilities?

Again, no-one in the course of this debate who gets up and advocates for nuclear power is willing to put their hand up and say, 'I want a radioactive waste dump, a nuclear waste dump, in our community.' None of the people participating in this debate are willing to do that. If we generate nuclear energy in

Victoria, we should have the waste in our state – but we do not even have it in Australia. There is no national radioactive waste management facility anywhere in the country, despite decades of trying to get there. But of course if we are using small nuclear reactors, they actually produce more waste. So not only do they use our drinking water, and not only do you need more of them, but if they existed, they would actually generate between two, three, maybe 10 times as much radioactive waste because of the methods that they use to enrich the uranium and make the reactions than other sorts of nuclear energy facilities. Again, where does the waste go? In whose communities will it sit? Those are the questions we need answered in the course of this debate – if people are willing to do it.

There are enormous numbers of reasons why nuclear energy is a bad idea for everyone, and especially why nuclear energy is a bad idea for Victoria. There is a choice – it is always good to have choices in politics, because they are pretty stark. This government has a plan to transition our energy mix towards renewable energy. We think the future is renewable, not radioactive, and we have got a plan to generate more renewable energy here in Victoria. Not only do we have a plan, we are actually doing it, and I am sure that others in the course of this debate and others in the course of other debates have demonstrated quite clearly just how far Victoria has come, with the most rapidly decarbonising energy system in the nation, smashing our renewable energy targets and taking carbon out of our electricity generation. What we should not replace it with is something like radioactive materials that are thirsty for our agricultural water for a lifetime and that have got radioactive waste that we do not know what to do with.

All the while, if all of those problems were not bad enough, what Victorians would be left with is higher power bills forever. That is the choice: cheaper renewables or more expensive radioactive energy. Unless people can come into this chamber in the course of this debate and tell people where the eight nuclear reactors are going to go, where the radioactive waste dump is going to be located and where the water is coming from to make it all work, they cannot be taken seriously. Nuclear power is dangerous, it is expensive, and it should not be part of Victoria's future.

David DAVIS (Southern Metropolitan) (16:13): I am pleased to rise and make a contribution to this debate on the Nuclear Activities (Prohibitions) Repeal Bill 2023, and I compliment Mr Limbrick on bringing this bill to the chamber. It is a private members bill, and it follows the work of an inquiry by the Legislative Council's Environment and Planning Committee during the last Parliament. That inquiry I think had a variety of different points made by different members who were part of it, so to that extent, the inquiry itself was inconclusive. I note the minority report of Mr Limbrick, Mrs McArthur and Dr Bach, which did support a repeal of that act. We have heard about the 1983 period and the promulgation of the act. I would argue that a great deal has changed since then, and I will explain that as we proceed.

The Nuclear Activities (Prohibitions) Act 1983 does much more than prohibit nuclear reactors. It actually has a whole set of consequences that go much further than the nuclear power cycle. There are two distinct questions here. The first distinct question is whether you think at some point a safe nuclear energy approach could be adopted, and that is a point that many will have different views on and different debates. I make one point in response to Mr Batchelor's point about small mobile reactors and so forth: they are exactly the sort of reactor that exists on the submarines that the Australian state has actually indicated we will use and take part in. They are very similar, the small modular reactors. They are not dissimilar, and they are actually in the mode of these sorts of steps. However, I accept that there is a legitimate debate about the viability of a nuclear industry. I think there are some who say it is viable and others who say it is not. There are also, through this act and its restrictions, a number of unintended consequences, and I will come to those in a moment.

Let me just make some comments about the impact of blocking out any options in this area. Most of the regulations, as people will understand, are actually Commonwealth in this field. Most of the decisions around regulation of nuclear energy and nuclear activities are actually Commonwealth – not all. The Radiation Act 2005 – I am a former health minister and I am well aware of it. I am somebody who actually had a radiation licence once upon a time. I am well aware of the aspects that are regulated

by the states, but most of the regulation is actually done by the Commonwealth. To a great extent this act is duplicative of much of the Commonwealth material. It blocks out the prospect, even at a future point or where significant hurdles are cleared, of a nuclear approach to energy generation, which may well be feasible in the relatively near future even if you do not believe it is feasible now. Let us just be clear that there is a legitimate debate about that at the moment.

Let me be clear about people's interest in potential nuclear power, because many of the good and supported approaches that use renewables – there are several points here – do not always produce the reliable power that we need in terms of certainty and predictability of supply, so base load or firming power of some type may well be needed as we go forward. We know that there are challenges and issues with respect to the decline of brown coal and the viability and life of our current power plants. There is an acceptance I think more broadly that we will move to a position where we are seeking to lower emissions significantly in line with international arrangements, and in fact –

Harriet Shing: International arrangements – we're setting the pace.

David DAVIS: Well, you're not, actually. You are actually struggling is the truth of the matter, but that is another point. I am just talking about the general direction here. Let us be clear: there are international agreements, and there is a broad acceptance that there will need to be lower emissions. That will mean more use of renewables and more use of a range of those technologies: wind and solar and related. But there will also need to be firming power. There will also need to be reliable supplies that can actually assist. Batteries will have a role, but currently they are struggling to provide the scale that is needed for that firming. That is one reason why we see the likelihood of a significant role for gas into the future. There are also other mechanisms. Snowy Hydro – the costs have blown out, but the concept of a storage system is important. I am just laying out some general principles here, and nuclear may well have a role in that field. If small modular reactors are able to be brought forward in the near future in a way that is useful, that is a reasonable prospect if the safety standards can be met. And they are largely controlled by the federal government.

In that sense, if I can also then turn to the other clear point I want to make, there are a number of unintended consequences from the nuclear prohibition act, and these could not have been foreseen, to be fair, in 1983. I am going to enumerate three of them as important ones. The AUKUS deal and defence-related matters may well see industry that is able to be developed in this state, certainly within this country, and if Victoria has a blanket ban on any nuclear activities at all, it will mean that we are not able to participate in that enormous potential defence option. So with this act nobody was thinking about this in 1983 – I get that – but actually today –

Harriet Shing interjected.

David DAVIS: Well, we did have some renewables then. We did have hydro. But let me just be quite clear: the AUKUS opportunities, potentially significant defence industries, will be completely and utterly counted out if the government or the state does not take some sensible steps in this regard. It is also true that some of the space industries that require the use of concentrated levels of radioactive materials will be counted out as well. That is another industry that should not be counted out and should not be blocked through an unintended consequence of this bill.

Harriet Shing: You don't believe what you're saying, Mr Davis.

David DAVIS: I sure do. And finally, the minerals approach that could be taken by this state to build downstream industries with a number of the key rare earths and other minerals should not be counted out. At the moment the act explicitly counts out the development of those industries, it prevents the development of those industries. I am going to read here from the Minerals Council of Australia, who have sent me a significant amount of material in recent days.

David Ettershank: What a surprise!

David DAVIS: Well, they are actually the ones that develop minerals, to be clear. Not surprising, is it? So you would talk to that industry to understand the impact on that industry. If you did not talk to that industry, you might not have the understanding that is required. Their communication to me on 10 November made the following points:

The Act impacts not just potential uranium mining –
so that is energy that we were talking about a minute ago –

but the potential for value-adding and processing of minerals and mineral products essential for other vital zero emissions energy technologies including wind and solar and battery storage in which Australia is looking to play major supply chain roles.

So there is a strong argument that unless we actually have a clear and unequivocal signal that we are prepared to allow some of those mineral industries to not just extract the rare earths and the mineral sands but export them, we will not be able to develop or at any point in the future have the option of developing a processing or downstream industry. The truth is if you concentrate these minerals the radioactivity will mean that this act is triggered. You cannot transport materials if this act is triggered. You cannot process materials if this act is triggered. So this act is a straight and clear blocker.

Now, you might argue that some exemptions could be provided, and theoretically that is possible, but it is not at all clear that they would be, and it is not at all clear that there is a sensible way forward here. The truth of the matter is that the signal provided by this act means that no large firm is going to consider the idea of a processing facility here. So I want to be clear about this bill: this bill seeks to repeal the nuclear prohibitions act from 1983. There is an energy component to this and a debate –

Harriet Shing interjected.

David DAVIS: We are indicating that we do support the repeal of the act and we support it for a number of reasons, and I am laying them out quite clearly. There is a potential for small modular reactors at some future point, and I am not counting that out, but I am making the clearest point that there are three areas where the bill prohibits – clearly prohibits – the development of other industries.

Now, these were not, as I say, intended or focused on at the time of the act passing in 1983. In fact some of these are quite new industries. Nobody had considered AUKUS in 1983. Nobody had considered Australia, the UK and the United States signing a defence agreement that would provide nuclear-powered submarines to the Australian navy and the consequent supplier industries, the consequent support industries and the consequent management of those submarines – the supply and support and related industries. So if we want to count Victoria out from having any role there, the best way to do that is to keep this act clamped to stop us having that role.

If we want to move to a situation where our significant mineral sands and deposits can be fully maximised for the state – and I do not just mean the extraction of those mineral sands; I mean potential longer term downstream processing industries – we want those downstream processing industries. They are banned under this act now. Let us be quite clear: they are banned; you cannot do them here, because you cannot concentrate those minerals in a way that would see the radiation levels rise. You cannot even transport those materials lawfully. So if we want the option of downstream mineral sands processing, rare earths and others that are in huge supply – we know that there is at least one processing plant in Western Australia, but most of the processing of these mineral sands is done in China – if we want to have a more independent process here, where actually our mineral sands are processed in Victoria or in Australia, we actually need to be thinking about how we can change this act and get rid of these impediments when that is an obvious focus for us into the future.

I want to be quite clear here. We have very clear correspondence. I have spoken to a number of people in the minerals industry, and they are quite clear about the impact of the restrictions in this act on any development of mineral sands processing in Victoria. It is counted out. You cannot do it. This act blocks it. These are very reasonable points. I understand the attitudes in 1983, and nobody in 1983 was

thinking about defence in this way. Nobody was thinking about space industries, and nobody in 1983 was thinking about the processing of mineral sands for a whole range of new products, whether they be the issues around renewable energy, mobile phones or all of the other issues for which rare earths are important now and into the future.

So we want a sensible way forward. We think that this act is too restrictive, and in that context we see that there is a logical way forward to remove the act and allow the Commonwealth to regulate some of these areas. The state would regulate the prospecting and other steps in the normal way for things like mineral sands, and if a production industry was established here, that would be regulated and controlled with the normal environmental standards that you would expect for any such processing industry. But it would not be counted out automatically, permanently and totally as this current act does at the moment.

David ETTERSHANK (Western Metropolitan) (16:29): I rise on behalf of Legalise Cannabis Victoria to make a brief contribution to the Nuclear Activities (Prohibitions) Repeal Bill 2023. Can I start by commending Mr Batchelor on his thoughtful and passionate contribution. While this bill would not of itself allow for the construction or operation of nuclear reactors in Victoria, it would send a message that Victoria is welcoming a nuclear future with open arms. This bill would open the doors and invite in the vampires of the nuclear industry. I struggle to think of a class of elements that has caused more acute devastation for humans than nuclear materials. History unequivocally shows us that when humans get nuclear wrong, we get it catastrophically wrong. In an unpredictable and changing environment it is impossible to get it 100 per cent right all the time. Let us be clear: climate change is the biggest collective threat we face, but nuclear power is not the answer.

As I have already alluded to, when we get nuclear power wrong, we create wastelands, which in extreme cases remain uninhabitable for tens of thousands of years. The exclusion zone around Pripyat, the township home to the Chernobyl power plant, will remain unsafe for human habitation for more than 20,000 years. The extreme levels of radiation in the environment have caused extensive biological mutations to the flora and fauna in and around Pripyat, fundamentally changing the course of that environment forever. Then there is the elephant of the room, or rather what is called the elephant's foot, resting under what was reactor 4 at Chernobyl. It is the most radioactive object on the planet, a literal hotspot comprising elements that previously formed the reactor's core and concrete containment structure. The elephant's foot is so dangerous that there remains no way to safely contain it.

Past catastrophic failures such as Chernobyl are often wiped off or disregarded as poorly designed systems or operator failure. However, it is important to remember that the Fukushima Daiichi power plant in Japan operated what was considered prior to 2011 one of the best engineered and maintained reactors in the world.

Ryan Batchelor: Whoops.

David ETTERSHANK: Yes – oops! That is an inconvenient reality, isn't it. Volatility makes radioactive materials an incredibly efficient energy source, but it also creates extreme risk with even the slightest alteration to their correct containment or use. As much as we try as a species to control every variable of a situation, we simply cannot, and we will never be able to control every variable in the containment or use of these highly radioactive materials. The extreme earthquake and tsunami that caused the triple meltdown in Fukushima in 2011 should be the only deterrent we need from promoting nuclear proliferation of any form anywhere in Australia. These melted-down reactors will continue to have hundreds of thousands of litres of water pumped through them every day for years, for decades, possibly for centuries, and the exclusion zone around the plant will remain uninhabitable for the foreseeable future. As Mr Batchelor quite correctly identified, where is this water going to come from?

I also would suggest that the very real challenge that is put up to the proponents of this bill is where will these reactors, where will these storage facilities, be? I would love to see someone put up their

hand and say, 'Yes, our electorate will have it. We'd be delighted to. What a great opportunity.' Of course we would not want to hold our breath waiting, because it is not going to happen.

I will just go back to a little bit about the industry. Even as recently as March this year a power plant in Minnesota leaked 400,000 gallons of radioactive reactor coolant water into the surrounding environment. These are real things happening in real time. It is pointless pretending that they are not there, that they do not exist, and yet this bill seems to do just that. But I digress.

These are all examples of international catastrophes. How lucky we are not to have to live in fear of the conventional reactor in the next town melting down. But let us talk about small reactors. Let us talk about the nuclear proponents' latest buzz about the small modular reactors, or SMRs, and their being put forward as the answer to the downfalls of conventional reactors. This proposition is deeply misguided. SMRs are often touted by advocates as being safer, cheaper and cleaner in terms of radioactive waste produced. Of course not all nuclear reactors are created equal, and while some designs come closer to reaching these lofty expectations, none of them quite do. Studies have found that SMRs are highly expensive, slow to come online, have higher rates of neutron leakage and often produce more radioactive waste than their conventional counterparts. They are also typically five to 10 times as expensive per megawatt generated than renewable alternatives, even after allowing for the provision of storage.

Let us also recognise that Australia seemingly cannot find a way to correctly store even low-level medical nuclear waste, as the recently scrapped Kimba facility shows. Let us be honest: nobody wants a nuclear waste dump in their region, let alone their backyard, least of all one that needs to safely store depleted but still highly radioactive plutonium for thousands and thousands of years. So how could we expect to run a safe nuclear power industry or introduce and safely manage a new technology like SMRs? Apart from this bill being fundamentally flawed, it would send a message that Victoria is pro nuclear. I would hope that our collective memories are good enough to remember the events leading Australia to become an antinuclear state and why it should remain as such.

Before I conclude, I want to pick up Mr Davis's point about mining. This bill seeks to allow for the extraction of principally thorium and uranium in Victoria. Aside from these practices being highly environmentally degrading, Victoria has almost no significant uranium deposits and, comparative to the rest of the continent, a tiny amount of thorium deposits. We do not need to get too tied up on environmental issues if that is going to cause problems – just let the economics of the industry point out to us that this is dead on arrival. I struggle to understand the rationale for creating another extractive industry in Victoria for such a small amount of resources – which would inevitably be shipped overseas – further degrading our environment. For Mr Davis to suggest that Victoria will be a downstream processor of radioactive materials is fanciful. This is neither financially viable nor environmentally desirable.

To conclude, we will not be supporting this bill. And we will never, ever support any attempt to turn Victoria into a nuclear state.

Bev McARTHUR (Western Victoria) (16:38): I rise to speak in support of the Nuclear Activities (Prohibitions) Repeal Bill 2023, introduced by David Limbrick of the Libertarian Party, and I congratulate him for bringing it forward. I have been in favour of nuclear energy for years and do not subscribe to the out-of-date, cold war mentality that still pervades some quarters here in this place –

Members interjecting.

Bev McARTHUR: Absolutely. That is the mentality you subscribe to, you lot; you are so out of date. You will want to look at the latest opinion polls on this. Even young people think that we should have a nuclear industry in this country. You are absolutely out of date.

I support the bill for several reasons. It enables the approval of exploration and mining for uranium and thorium in Victoria under and subject to the requirements of both state and federal legislation. It

creates Victorian investment and job opportunities in the Australian space industry with the Australian government and aims to grow it to a market size of \$12 billion by 2030.

It allows Victoria, this state, to participate in the defence industry – otherwise you lot will shut it out – partnerships from the AUKUS nuclear submarine deal worth billions of dollars. It is a step towards national recognition that nuclear energy is the cheapest and most reliable zero-emission clean energy source of minimal impact. It is inevitable – let alone the rare-earth and critical minerals issue. While the moratorium does not prevent exploration and mining to occur, it does mean that the act triggers processing problems, and repealing the Nuclear Activities (Prohibitions) Act 1983 will help provide certainty to the rare-earth and critical minerals industry.

Mr Limbrick has already explained how this bill creates extraordinary opportunities in Victoria. I would like to complement his contribution by talking about what has changed in the energy landscape and why the arguments in favour of nuclear generation are now stronger than they were a few years ago. While of course the technology is still developing and the advent of small modular reactors is extremely promising, what has actually changed most in recent years is the revelation of how limited our low-carbon alternatives really are. Although most of this has become clear in the last couple of years at most, I feel I should also note that some of us have been alert to it for quite some time.

In the minority report authored by Mr Limbrick, Dr Bach and me and published in November 2020, the cosignatories noted that:

There are serious challenges in decarbonising electricity production and excluding nuclear technology means that we cannot explore the advantages it yields, such as small land use, low carbon intensity, high level of safety, and extremely long infrastructure lifespan.

Importantly and more relevantly in Victoria, we wrote:

Whilst a social license would need to be obtained for usage of nuclear technologies, it is also unknown whether a social license exists for some of the infrastructure required for large scale variable renewable technologies. There is already resistance to new transmission infrastructure required for variable renewable energy technologies, which may be amplified further if large scale pumped hydroelectric dams are also required. This may be a step too far for some communities.

I am energy technology agnostic. We need to increase supply in this country, not reduce it. You lot have reduced energy supply in this country, and you are dependent on one source. Open your minds to the variety of sources that are available. The minority report concludes:

... the desirability of nuclear energy in Victoria cannot be meaningfully considered while the legislative ban on nuclear energy remains in place. The substantive report makes it plain that a business case cannot be mounted while the ban remains. A business case would be necessary to enable an assessment of Victoria's nuclear energy potential.

So what are the problems with other forms of low-carbon energy, which make nuclear even more attractive – perhaps even essential if net zero remains the political dogma that we have to embrace? In theory it is easy to build renewables, but practice and recent developments are making them less and less attractive. Onshore wind faces enormous challenges with noise complaints, where legal action continues, and environmental issues. The Willatook wind farm precedent widens turbine-free buffer zones for broilgas and bats, reducing the output and financial viability. The five-month moratorium on construction throughout the broilgas breeding season blindsided the industry and has been described as a death knell to wind energy development.

Offshore wind is struggling too. The impact on marine ecosystems, including on whales, is receiving even more coverage, as is the impact on construction and the ongoing consequences for fisheries. We have seen significant public protest against offshore proposals, and now the South Australian government's decision is to oppose them.

The grid implications are immense. Satisfying 95 per cent renewables will require brand new transmission network infrastructure – 10,000 kilometres of new transmission wires across this country,

according to the Australian Energy Market Operator (AEMO). One of the many reasons for my support for nuclear power is the fact that it fits better with our existing transmission infrastructure. In my view, if we give proper weight to environmental consequences of transmission as well as generation, then technologies which can re-use the existing grid would become greatly more attractive. The problem we have at present is that the impacts of generation and of transmission are considered separately. Worse still, analysis of transmission line impact has until recently taken account only of the wire and poles construction and maintenance cost, not the enormous economic, environmental, health and social cost.

The inadequacy of the current grid is already causing a crash in investment in renewables in Victoria. Recent modelling by AEMO shows that this year 29 per cent of wind generation and 25 per cent of large-scale solar generation in the Western Victoria and Murray River renewable energy zones respectively will be wasted due to inadequate transmission capacity. Institutional investors will not pay to see these assets stand idle. So you can talk about your net zero proposal with renewables but it will not happen, because it has become so difficult to invest in this state.

Nor should land usage be forgotten. This is another respect in which nuclear is impossible to beat. You might think it does not matter, that space is not a premium in our country, but you would be wrong. It is hard to exaggerate the vast transformation of Victoria which would be required to adhere to a 95 per cent renewables target provided by onshore wind and solar. Fortunately, we do not need to. Instead I can quote the Department of Environment, Land, Water and Planning, now the Department of Energy, Environment and Climate Action, which published its *Offshore Wind Policy Directions Paper* in March 2022. On page 19, figure 7 states that to achieve the 60 gigawatts of generation needed for the state's 95 per cent renewable energy target using only onshore wind and solar would require up to 70 per cent of Victoria's agricultural land. The government itself says 60 gigawatts of electrical generation will be required for energy decarbonisation, yet DEECA's own commitment to offshore wind is just 4 gigawatts by 2035 and then 9 gigawatts by 2040. That leaves an enormous gap to 60 gigawatts, one which can only be bridged by a massive increase in onshore wind and solar. What on earth is our agricultural sector, indeed our whole state, going to look like then?

There are further systemic challenges to renewables projects which have substantially increased in recent times. One is the increased cost of capital: these are massive projects requiring huge up-front investment. A second is inflation in construction costs, in labour, but also equipment, resources and materials. For all of these reasons it is clear that renewable generation is not the panacea for Victoria's energy needs. In this perspective nuclear power becomes far more attractive. In contrast it is smaller, has no massive footprint and will not require 70 per cent of Victoria's agricultural land to be swallowed up. It can be built to take advantage of our existing grid without need for 10,000 kilometres of new powerlines. The environmental benefits are not limited to avoiding the need for a brand new and vast transmission network; they are also evident in the reduction in mining required.

Around the world nuclear is used. I mean, you have talked about the fact that it is so terrible. Then why, as of May 2023, are there 436 nuclear reactors in operation in 32 countries around the world? France has the greatest share of nuclear power in total electricity generation of any country worldwide. In 2022 nuclear energy accounted for 62.6 per cent of France's total electricity production. In Finland it is 35 per cent. As a result, the two countries in Europe with the lowest electricity prices were Finland and France – the lowest prices in Europe because of nuclear energy. In February 2022 France announced plans to build six new reactors and to consider building a further eight. As of June 2023 there are 57 nuclear reactors under construction worldwide; 21 are under construction in China. It is totally hypocritical to reject nuclear energy. For heaven's sake, we export uranium. If it is so evil, so awful, so unconscionable, how dare we export it? After all, we have all signed up to the nuclear submarine AUKUS agreement.

Perhaps even the environmentalists are coming around to it; you want to cotton on to them. Simon Holmes à Court said:

I don't believe there is a compelling case for Australia's nuclear ban.

Green icon Greta Thunberg has recently adopted a pro-nuclear stance, arguing that Germany shutting down its nuclear plants was a mistake. Democratic Socialist congresswoman Alexandria Ocasio-Cortez said that reducing nuclear power would result in the increased utilisation of dirty hydrocarbons. Others on the left heard the evidence of the inquiry into nuclear prohibition – your own union leaders are in favour of it. Geoff Dyke of the Construction, Forestry, Maritime, Mining and Energy Union was supportive. The Australian Workers' Union was also very supportive. They made fantastic submissions; you should all read them.

We have been brought up terrified of radiation, not realising that we get a dose of radiation every time we eat a banana or stand near a concrete wall. They are ridiculous, the arguments against it. Those who continue to oppose it are hopelessly naive. They believe there is some alternative which can achieve zero carbon at no environmental cost and at reasonable financial cost. Well, that is just not possible; it does not exist. They are all fantasists. We acknowledge that nuclear energy is difficult, it is expensive and it will take time, but you have to lift the ban to open up the discussion on nuclear energy, and Victoria should not be left out of the argument. We know all zero-carbon solutions are expensive, but financially it can work, technically it is possible and the product – consistent base load power – is worth the cost. Dump the moratorium is what I say.

Tom McINTOSH (Eastern Victoria) (16:53): For 20 years the Liberal coalition have slowed, stalled and blocked action on climate change, but now we stand here and the Victorian Liberal Party is calling for opening up for nuclear reactors in Victoria. They are so ideologically opposed to renewables that they want dozens of nuclear reactors to be built around the state. Every major population base would have a nuclear reactor next to it, even though in practice this does not exist anywhere in the world and the cost would be absolutely phenomenal.

To the problem: we accept the problem of climate change and what it is going to do to farmers and their ability to produce food; to our consumers, who will suffer the raised prices; and to our people, our elderly, who will suffer through heatwaves. We have a solution in this country. There is a lot of talking going on about foreign opinions and about other countries and their situations. In this country we are blessed with an abundance of sun, and we have some of the best wind resources in the world. Renewable energy is clean, renewable energy is cheap and renewable energy sees our jobs stay local.

I am not surprised that for 20 years now those opposite, as I have said, have slowed, stalled and blocked action on climate change, specifically in the energy sector. Whether it is the national energy framework that for the last decade has shuffled back and forth with various policies, whether it is action on our natural environment and some the vandalism that has been allowed to occur, whether it is resource extraction and backing our farms being fracked and some other high-emission activities or whether it is vehicle emission standards and trying to slow EVs, we know that for those opposite it is an ideological hatred for action on climate change and it is an ideological hatred for renewables and even for some things like electric vehicles. It is absolutely lost on me. If we brought the two technologies to the market and said, 'Do you want to use petroleum or do you want to use electricity for something in your car?', those opposite would prefer to go to the big oil producers.

The biggest oil producers in the world are Russia, Saudi Arabia and Iraqi. Those opposite would rather import what we use to create the energy that moves our vehicles than put our people to work and to pay our farmers to create energy on their land to power our vehicles. They would rather ship it halfway around the world and be exposed to any sort of conflict around the world and blockages of shipping, when Victorians could wake up and see a 10 or 20 per cent jump in their energy costs. I do not understand what goes through the heads of the opposition and why there is this ideological opposition. I cannot even explain it. It is an opposition that is so lost for rationale. They would rather build nuclear reactors than have clean, cheap renewables power this state, even when we know the technology does

not exist, even when we know the costs are absolutely exorbitant and even though we have industries galloping along – because we have identified the issue. We have set renewable targets, and we have given industry clear goals that they are working to. We are going to train tens of thousands of people to work in the sector, and we are going to have generations of families supported with industries like offshore wind, which will see \$10 billion to \$60 billion worth of investment.

I mean, today I was going to ask: where do those opposite stand? We know where they stand. They want nuclear reactors near the population bases of Victoria. They do not care about what it is that people want. They do not care what it is that is best for our people. They want to continue their ideological hatred of renewables and ideological hatred of jobs. I think the coalition really need to stand up and say where they stand on industries like offshore wind. When I speak to business, the biggest impediment to offshore wind is the coalition, because they do not know where the coalition stand. There is this back-peddalling, fearmongering and false information, and they are some of the biggest impediments not only to Victoria's energy security but also to jobs in this state – jobs for Victorians to work in this space, to let people make money off the generation in this space and to ensure that we are set up not only with the energy that helps us grow and electrify our energy sector but with the energy that ensures those jobs stay right here and support Victorians. That will be my contribution.

Gaelle BROAD (Northern Victoria) (16:59): I rise to speak on the Nuclear Activities (Prohibitions) Repeal Bill 2023, and I want to thank David Limbrick for introducing this bill and I want to thank all those that have contributed to the debate. Saying the word 'nuclear' often raises eyebrows. I remember doing a project on it in primary school and learning about the issues as well as the benefits. The repeal of the Nuclear Activities (Prohibitions) Act 1983, in full or in part, would have no effect on the existing Commonwealth prohibitions on the use of nuclear energy for electricity generation and construction and operation of certain nuclear facilities, which would continue to apply. However, this change would enable approval of exploration and mining for uranium and thorium in Victoria under and subject to the requirements of both state and federal legislation.

The current act places restrictions on Victoria that do not apply to other states. In Victoria the current act limits any development of a new defence industry connected with the AUKUS agreement, and I know Thales in Bendigo is part of the defence industry and provides significant employment opportunities in the region. A further unintended restriction of the current act is to limit the development of processing of mineral sands derived from Victoria's current and future mineral sands industry. I met with Gannawarra shire earlier this year with the Leader of the Nationals and local member for Murray Plains Peter Walsh, and locals are excited by the opportunities that exist in the region to grow mineral sands processing.

A further limitation of the act is to restrict any development of nuclear energy. We need secure, reliable and affordable energy in Victoria. Over the last nine years under this Labor state government we have seen power prices increase dramatically for households and businesses. The gas supply is uncertain, prices are increasing and this government's ban on gas in new homes is making it even harder for families and will add to carbon emissions. Like other countries we should not rule out options, because we need affordable, secure and reliable energy. The federal coalition has moved to open debate on the role for nuclear as part of the future of energy generation in Australia, and we need to explore the options and weigh up the costs and the benefits.

As we look to the future and the growing need for energy, we also need to consider the growing need for food security, not just in Victoria and Australia but around the world. Our agriculture industry is first class. We produce food and fibre and export it around the world. We are the envy of many countries, and we need to care for the rich resources that we have. As we charge ahead with renewables we also need a practical conversation about the social and economic costs of new transmission lines and marking prime agricultural land for development. Right now there are project proposals across the state that will see thousands of acres being filled with solar panels and pristine green pastures used

to accommodate lithium-ion batteries the size of football fields. Yes, we need action, and we also need to get the balance right.

As the world transitions to a lower carbon economy, demand for critical minerals, especially rare-earth elements, is growing as they are essential inputs to electric vehicles and wind turbines. Victoria is rich in mineral sands resources and contains sources of rare-earth elements used in smartphones, televisions and computers as well as medical devices such as X-ray machines, medical lasers and fibre optics. These mineral sands deposits also contain small amounts of naturally occurring radioactive material, which means mining and processing mineral sands deposits are captured by the act.

Currently the act creates uncertainty for mineral sands investors and stymies potential value-adding and processing in Victoria, putting at risk the state's ability to be a global supplier of critical minerals and rare-earth elements. If you have an electric vehicle, use energy generated from wind turbines or use a smartphone, a television or a computer, then you should be supporting this bill. If you vote against it, the benefits of this industry will move elsewhere, to other states or other countries. I commend this bill to the house.

David LIMBRICK (South-Eastern Metropolitan) (17:03): I thank everyone for their contribution to this debate today. I find some of the debate from the government side rather alarming – alarming in both its ignorance about this technology and its ignorance of the opportunities that are already being lost in Victoria. Earlier this year there were news reports that the government was complaining that Victoria is not getting anything out of this \$300 billion AUKUS sub deal. Well, why would anyone do anything in Victoria with nuclear submarines when we have a total prohibition on nuclear activities in the state, as Mr Davis pointed out earlier? Secondly, the other opportunity which has been mentioned many times is that Victoria has world-class mineral sands deposits that are used, quite ironically, for wind turbines and electric cars – neodymium. One of the problems with this is that in processing there are small amounts of radioactive materials which are also in situ, in the ground with the neodymium, praseodymium and these other rare-earth elements. We will never see this sort of processing in Victoria. They will ship it to South Australia or China and we will not have this downstream processing. This is a huge opportunity lost for Victoria with these world-class deposits that we have – another opportunity that the government apparently seems ignorant of. I am quite shocked by that.

Another opportunity which was mentioned is the space industry. This is a rapidly growing industry worldwide. Apparently the government is ignorant again. Planetary exploration requires nuclear batteries. You may wonder why the Viking probes that were launched in the 1970s are still working. It is because they contain a very small amount of plutonium and use that heat to generate small amounts of electricity for powering the computer systems and sensor arrays. We will never have a serious space industry while we have this prohibition.

On to the subject that everyone seems to be most focused on, which is nuclear energy electricity production. The government still seems to be stuck in this mindset from 1983 unfortunately. Mr Batchelor brought up the risk of nuclear proliferation. Luckily we have something that will prevent that – the laws of physics. The output from nuclear reactors is not suitable material to be used in weapons; it is simply not the case. They also brought up the issue around water consumption. What the government apparently is ignorant of is that the water is not consumed by the reactor – it flows through the reactor and is cycled.

Harriet Shing: Are you going to put it back on your crops?

David LIMBRICK: Yes, you can. It is totally safe. The only difference in the water – you laugh at this, but the people watching this will laugh at you, I am telling you. You do not understand what you are talking about. In nuclear reactors that are active right now around the world the water just cycles out, and the only difference is it is slightly warmer, because it is used to cool.

Small modular reactors – yes, there have been failures in this technology. But these submarines that we are getting, guess what, are powered by small modular reactors – amazing. I urge the government to at least educate themselves on these things. It is quite obvious who attended the briefing that I offered to all of the members here, because the members that did not attend seemingly do not have a clue about these opportunities that Victoria is missing out on. We have massive technological opportunities in this state that we can take advantage of right now. Ignoring nuclear technology totally and just looking at space, mining and these other industries, we are just cutting ourselves out of them. Why would we do that? It is madness. We are giving it to South Australia and China.

The other thing that was spoken about was subsidies. I am, like, ‘These industries only survive on subsidies?’ This government subsidises everything to do with energy. Everything to do with electricity is subsidised and controlled by the government. This argument is absolute nonsense.

I would also say on the subject of cost, as it has been brought up, that France and many other jurisdictions throughout the world, such as Ottawa in Canada, have very, very high nuclear power penetration in their grids. They also have very low prices. If your goal is decarbonisation, then you need to look around the world at the reality of decarbonising electricity grids, because the only places throughout the world that have significantly decarbonised their electricity grids have done it through a combination of hydro-electric, other renewables and/or nuclear – places like France, like Ottawa in Canada and other places throughout the world.

On this scare campaign that the government seems to run – ‘Where are you going to put a reactor?’ – the CFMEU and the AWU actually put in submissions to the inquiry. They said that you should put it right where you have the coal power plants now. Utilise the existing infrastructure. This idea that the public is terrified of nuclear – you are carrying forward this Cold War fear from 1983. You might want to have a look at the Resolve poll that was only published two weeks ago. The majority of Australians support nuclear energy. The government is ignorant on this issue. They are out of touch, and they need to get up to date.

Council divided on motion:

Ayes (16): Matthew Bach, Melina Bath, Jeff Bourman, Gaelle Broad, Georgie Crozier, David Davis, Renee Heath, Ann-Marie Hermans, David Limbrick, Wendy Lovell, Trung Luu, Bev McArthur, Joe McCracken, Evan Mulholland, Adem Somyurek, Rikkie-Lee Tyrrell

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

Motion negatived.

Business interrupted pursuant to sessional orders.

Statements on tabled papers and petitions

Portable Long Service Benefits Authority

Report 2022–23

Ryan BATCHELOR (Southern Metropolitan) (17:16): I rise to speak on the Portable Long Service Benefits Authority report, which was tabled yesterday, 14 November 2023, and details the operations of the Portable Long Service Benefits Authority for 2022–23.

A member interjected.

Ryan BATCHELOR: I don’t know; I’m excited by it. Victoria is home to one of the largest portable long service leave schemes in Australia. The Portable Long Service Benefits Authority in the annual report reported that there are now over 3000 registered employers covering over

290,000 registered workers. Nearly 200,000 of these workers are employed across the community services sector, with the remainder in contract cleaning and security services. The Victorian government introduced portable long service leave for those industries through legislation several years ago – the authority came into effect in 2019 – and since that time it is very clear that employers in these industries, in community services, in contract cleaning and in security, have embraced portable long service leave and the scheme as a way of both attracting and retaining staff in obviously an increasingly competitive labour market.

Portable long service leave schemes like the one in Victoria operate particularly in those industries where, through the nature and structure of the market force services, so to speak, contracts pass between agencies often on a three-, four- or five-year cycle. As members are no doubt aware, the qualification period for long service leave requires, under the Long Service Leave Act 2018, for individual workers to spend longer than those contracts normally run for with a single employer, which means that prior to the introduction of portable long service leave, every time a contract changed and a worker moved between employers – often doing the same job but for a new employer, whether that is in the community services area, whether as a cleaner or whether as a security guard – they would lose their accrued entitlements.

The introduction of portable long service leave covers the workers in those industries, who are often some of the lowest paid in our community doing some of the hardest jobs in our community, either in the caring sector – the disability sector or aged care, for example – or as security guards and contract cleaners. We could not operate in our lives without the work that they do on a day-to-day basis. It is often little remarked upon but incredibly important, and sadly it is often very low paid. Workers who spent long times in these industries were being denied access to long service leave because of the structure of those industries and the nature of contract lengths and contract terms, which was largely driven as a result of government decision-making about contracting out of government services.

The introduction of portable long service leave was designed to ensure that the benefits of long service leave are not denied to these workers. It was an incredibly important commitment of this Labor government to set up this scheme following significant advocacy from the trade union movement and particularly from the Australian Services Union and the United Workers Union, who represent these exceptionally hardworking and, disappointingly, lower paid workers in our community.

What the report tabled yesterday demonstrates is that the scheme is working. In reading the report, there are incredibly moving case studies of people who are feeling a greater sense of security in their work because of the benefits the scheme will bring them when their qualification period rolls around. They will be able to access long service leave like so many others in the community who work in different professions and in different employment arrangements and are not subject to the same sort of insecurity that people in community services, contract cleaning and security face. Workers in these industries, thanks to the Portable Long Service Benefits Authority, thanks to the Labor government, are getting access to long service leave for the first time, and it is a great benefit to them.

Department of Energy, Environment and Climate Action

Report 2022–23

David DAVIS (Southern Metropolitan) (17:21): I want to talk about the Department of Energy, Environment and Climate Action annual report and the lack of measures for the performance of the SEC.

Members interjecting.

David DAVIS: Yes, the new body that is surging and soaring electricity costs. It is a body that seems to be delivering more costs to consumers, to households and to small businesses and more negative outcomes for consumers and small businesses. In one of these statements on reports sessions before, I pointed out that the Public Accounts and Estimates Committee report directly pointed to the

failure of the government to have any reporting measures for this new \$1 billion SEC. We have got a \$1 billion SEC, we are spending \$1 billion of public money and we have no reporting measures. How will this body be successful? How will it achieve its objectives? What precisely are its objectives? All of this is totally unclear in terms of reporting for \$1000 million of public money to be spent.

I have given some gratuitous suggestions. I think that it should be about the price of energy and the reliability of energy. We should have basic measures for this new SEC, and what we would want to see is reliable power, secure power supplies, 100 per cent of the time. We would like to see prices falling. Actually what is happening is prices are going up at the moment. They have gone up 25 per cent since this announcement was made, so the costs are greater than they were before. Families are feeling the energy costs. The affordability issues are huge. Businesses are suffering.

The minister has cooking schools for things now. That is all very nice; we wish her well with that. But the truth of the matter is the gas industry strategy that was released the other day has got some really little concerns in that. The government has announced that the SEC will be bound by the competitive neutrality policy. This will mean that the so-called 'public entity' – and I will say something about that in a minute – is going to be bound by the same rules and regulations as private entities. Fair enough, but this will mean that the cost structures are not going to be any different from the private bodies as well. It is not clear how it is going to lead to cheaper energy or more reliable energy, a couple of the key objectives that we would want. We would want to see support for renewables. That is all good. We are not opposed to renewables. We see they have got a very significant place, and there is a transition going on, but what are the measurement things? How is the SEC to be judged?

We also know the government has set up a shelf company – a \$20 company – with one share owned by the Minister for Energy and Resources and one share owned by the Premier. The shelf company is there to run this organisation. Let me be clear about this: the old SEC structure as a statutory authority is still there. It still reports to the Parliament, and now we are establishing a shelf company, a private company, that will not be accountable to the Parliament in the same way. Will that private SEC be FOI-able? Here is a question: will the private company be FOI-able? I can tell you, it will not be. Will the minister allow us to see the books of the private company and actually find out who has been paid what and how? I do not believe they are going to be transparent with that.

There is \$1 billion of public money. They say they are going to take superannuation money and make it \$2 billion. Let us just propose that that is true for a minute. How do we track how that \$2 billion is going to be spent? How do we track how the \$2000 million is going to be spent and what we are getting for it? We actually want to get a good deal for \$2 billion – \$2000 million – half of it public money and half of it, according to the government, super money. So a shelf company, registered the day before announcements – a \$20 company – is going to run the whole thing. It is not going to be the old SEC statutory authority structure that is set up under an act of Parliament; it is going to be a private company that is running it. We will not be able to FOI it.

And what are the measures? I want to see proper measures in place. I actually want to see an outcome where prices are reduced – gas, electricity, whatever source of power is being delivered and wherever it is coming from; renewables. We actually want reliable power to consumers at a price that is lower than now. We do not want the surging costs. I would argue that anyone in this room, anyone in this chamber, in the gallery, outside on Bourke Street, wherever – everyone – knows that energy costs have surged in the last period.

Department of the Legislative Council

Report 2022–23

John BERGER (Southern Metropolitan) (17:27): Last week we were all handed a report, and its title was the Parliament of Victoria Department of the Legislative Council annual report 2022–23. In it the Department of the Legislative Council outlined its strategic priorities and achievements over the 2022–23 period, which so happens to be the first time I have ever had anything to do with the

Legislative Council. The Legislative Council is a vital part of Victoria's democracy, and the department gives us, the members of the Parliament, the ability to do our job and make it as easy as possible.

There is a lot to talk about, so I will be quick. I want to thank the department staff for all their work. The newly elected members, like me, were inducted and prepared for our roles and responsibilities going into 2023. The ongoing support of our parliamentary staff has been integral to the efficient functioning of the Council this year and the work that we are doing on non-sitting weeks. I am on three committees, one as a voting member and two as a participating member. I sit as a member of the Economic and Infrastructure Standing Committee and see firsthand the incredible work the staff do. Michael Baker, the committee manager, is diligent and prompt with all of his responses, and then there are Ben Huf as inquiry officer, Caitlin Connally and Julie Barnes as research assistants and so many more. Sixty committee hearings, 10 reports, 18 public hearings and over 11,000 submissions were made in a year. That is very impressive.

There are other staff in this place, including the two Annes: Anne Sargent, who helps us fill out all the forms, and Annemarie Burt, the manager of chamber support, who helps my staff when I want to file things at the last minute. The Usher of the Black Rod Sally West every morning keeps us on track. Then there is Richard Willis, who is diligently serving the chamber, as well as Keir. Thank you for keeping me updated on the best practices of procedure when I am the Acting President. I also want to particularly thank Greg Mills, a long-serving parliamentary attendant. My staff greatly appreciate him bringing me documents in a rush, and also thank you to Peter Anastasiou, Jim Bowman, Philip Stoits and Chris Welstead, a great team. I apologise if I have left anybody out.

The Legislative Council has done exceptional work in facilitating public participation through multiple inquiries in 2022–23. I would like to note the efforts of the Environment and Planning Standing Committee secretariat in their submission-writing workshops at Seymour, Rochester and the Maribyrnong council through 2022–23. Thanks to the tireless work of the committee, we had received over 800 submissions at closing.

The Legislative Council is committed to reconciliation. Currently appropriate education is a focus, and I commend the work in this space, particularly with the Aboriginal change makers education resource, produced in partnership with the Aboriginal college. This was expanded as an engagement opportunity by our Parliament's support of an excursion to Worawa Aboriginal College by students from Northcote High School who have been using this resource, undertaking a program by elder and resident Dr Lois Peeler to enrich their understanding of Koori political history. As a resource, it educates students about the incredible perseverance, activism and self-determination of the Koori community throughout history. This will ensure that our future generations hold the values and respect and tolerance for Indigenous Australians.

And then there is the Youth Parliament, who in partnership with my good friend the Minister for Youth in the other place, facilitated young people's engagement with their democracy. The 37th Youth Parliament brought over 120 young people here from right across the state. They developed, passed and delivered 18 bills for consideration by the government. Parliament hosted the State of the Future youth forum in May with over 60 young Victorians delivering recommendations and advice on matters including housing, climate, mental health, inclusiveness and much more in front of and directly to over 20 MPs in attendance. The Parliament Prize, which I promoted in my community of Southern Metro, saw over 1000 students submit their 90-second members statement, and the winning entries were great, with a focus on workers' rights, environmentalism, transport and infrastructure.

I commend the ongoing commitment and the integrity of the Integrity and Oversight Committee for ensuring the integrity and proper conduct of government. I commend the Council's engagement with our Pacific partners. Keeping up the dialogue with our democratic friends and allies in an increasingly contested region is vital. I trust your work in Fiji, Nauru and Tuvalu was productive. I look forward to the next three years in this place and look forward to seeing what the people here achieve.

Wild horse control*Petition*

Bev McARTHUR (Western Victoria) (17:31): This morning I was proud to table petition number 495 which calls for immediate financial support to be provided to approved rehomingers of brumbies and to stop the senseless and heartless eradication plans in the Barmah National Park, Bogong High Plains and the Victorian alps. 1044 Victorians supported this campaign. In previous years several similar petitions have been tabled with a total of 18,288 signatures. The change.org petition has grown to an enormous 200,594 signatures. The government should take note of this. All of these people appreciate the inadequacy of the ecological arguments, regret the lack of effort put into alternative solutions and are appalled by Parks Victoria, Department of Energy, Environment and Climate Action and former minister D'Ambrosio. Current minister Steve Dimopoulos will hopefully redeem some credibility and end this barbaric cull. Those supporting the petition acknowledge the inherent cruelty in current shooting campaigns and call for financial support towards rehoming of wild populations. Not only does rehoming provide humane alternatives to lethal control, but they also prove to be more effective than current aerial and ground shooting campaigns involving moving targets which cannot be killed humanely. This leaves brumbies dying slowly, foals aborted or left to starve and carcasses left to rot or be eaten by wild dogs, cats and foxes.

Just in September Parks Victoria resumed its shooting of brumbies in the Barmah National Park. The bodies of the horses have been left where they were inhumanely shot. It is incredible that parts of the park remain open. No public warnings were given to the shooting operation. This is careless and dangerous. Parks Victoria have failed to answer questions about the cull, the reason the bodies are not removed from the forest, the numbers of horses left or about any risk to public safety by conducting shooting while some parts of the park were still open to the public. The Barmah strategic action plan and the *Feral Horse Action Plan 2021* have seen hundreds of brumbies either shot or sent to slaughter unnecessarily. Parks Victoria has stated that a key component of these action plans was to maximise rehoming opportunities. This has not occurred. Under this plan Parks Victoria is expected to consult with the Barmah Brumby Preservation Group on rehoming brumbies, but president Julie Pridmore said they have had no contact at all with Parks Victoria this calendar year and little productive contact last year.

A *Wildlife Biology* article titled 'Use of density-impact functions to inform and improve the environmental outcomes of feral horse management' highlighted that:

... combined impacts associated with the sign of deer, feral pigs, fire and humans were large compared to that of feral horses.

Therefore removing brumbies:

... to reduce their direct impact is unlikely to be beneficial without complementary management to reduce the effects of these other agents of impact.

Parks Victoria should meet community demands, abide by the management plans for rehoming and overshooting and undertake a revised number count with credible methodology. It is certainly not credible now. Removal plans must also incorporate financial support for rehomingers by the government, who insist on best welfare outcomes for everybody except themselves.

I am very proud to support this petition to call on the government to direct Parks Victoria to re-count Brumby populations with improved counting methods and make provisions to assist approved rehomingers with financial support. To do anything else is criminal.

Department of Families, Fairness and Housing*Report 2022–23*

Wendy LOVELL (Northern Victoria) (17:36): I rise to talk on the Department of Families, Fairness and Housing annual report and particularly this government's failure in public housing. What

we have seen today exposed by the Shadow Minister for Housing Richard Riordan is the absolute farce of this government's supposed Big Build, which is more of a big let-down when it comes to public and social housing. What we have seen is Labor promise that they were going to build 12,800 new homes, but what we know is that since 2018, with more than half the money – nearly all the money – spent, they have added just 394 additional public housing properties statewide. We know that they knock down houses, we know that they sell off houses and we know that they lease some houses, and they hand those leases back too. They are very reticent to tell you about those things, but that is why the numbers differ. They only tell you about the new additions; they do not tell you about the ones that they have disposed of.

What we have seen also is a disgraceful rise in the length of time that people are waiting to be allocated public housing. For a woman who is escaping a domestic violence situation, probably with children as well, that time has blown out since 2018 from 8.8 months for her to be housed to 23.6 months. That is two years. Imagine staying in a situation where you are unsafe for two years waiting for this government to find you somewhere to live, somewhere you can take your children and be safe. It is an absolute disgrace.

In my own region we have seen huge growth in public housing and social housing waiting lists and very little offered to help with that in the way of new housing. Since 2018 in Shepparton we have seen the priority access list grow to 1549 families. That is a growth figure of 1129 additional families who have priority status – they are escaping domestic violence, they are homeless or they have a disability or a special housing need – and what have the government added in the way of social housing stock? Ninety-six – 96! – but 1129 families have joined that list, so it is going to be a very long wait for people. In Seymour their priority list has grown to 906 families. That is an additional 774 on the list. Just 30 homes have been added in the Seymour area. In Benalla and Wangaratta there are 981 families on that priority list – an additional 742 since 2018 – and there are only 85 additional properties. In Bendigo we see 2194 families on that priority housing waiting list, but the government have added only 70 new properties since 2018. In Mildura there are 1029 families on the priority list, up from 234, so an increase of 795 families on that list, and only 26 new homes added to the stock in Mildura.

This government is failing Victorians when it comes to providing adequate social and public housing. They like to talk big, but their failure is also big. It is not the Big Build, it is the big let-down, and the government need to do a lot more. The minister needs to get across her brief. We have seen in question time that she really does not know much about this portfolio, and I do not think she likes the portfolio very much by her attitude in question time. She is more intent on attacking other people than she is on assisting Victorians who are in desperate need of housing. I would say to this minister: reprioritise your priorities. Prioritise your thoughts to the people who are hurting, the people who need your assistance, rather than prioritising smart alec comments across the chamber and attacking other members of Parliament. The social housing portfolio is a very serious portfolio. It provides assistance to some of our most vulnerable Victorians, and the minister should start to focus on it.

Petitions

Hydrogen Energy Supply Chain

Sarah MANSFIELD (Western Victoria) (17:41): I move:

That the petition be taken into consideration.

Labor's coal-to-hydrogen project is a climate disaster. Before we get into why, can I first thank Friends of the Earth, Save Westernport and the thousands of Victorians who signed this petition to force this debate. It was in fact a very easy petition to get signatures for. People were appalled to find out that Labor is even considering a new coal project in Victoria. It is perhaps telling that we had to force Labor to even discuss the Hydrogen Energy Supply Chain project – or HESC, as it is known – and I suspect that is because it knows the Victorian public will not buy it. If this project goes ahead, an international consortium of companies will waste billions of dollars burning the dirtiest coal in Australia, generating

huge amounts of emissions, all to make a very, very small amount of hydrogen gas. The HESC will then waste even more money and more energy turning that small amount of gas into an even tinier amount of liquid hydrogen, which will then be shipped all the way to Japan, where eventually it might be burnt to power something useful.

The HESC will also waste even more money and more energy on industrial-scale, widely discredited carbon capture and storage technology to inject its emissions into disused gas and oil wells in the Otway Basin. Carbon capture and storage is one of the fossil fuel industry's favourite Trojan horses. It is a furphy designed to keep coal and gas on life support. Despite billions being thrown at it from Australian governments, it has never come even close to 100 per cent efficiency on an industrial scale. Just yesterday we heard that Chevron's Gorgon gas project in WA, the world's largest, has only captured about a third of its promised emissions. Even assuming the HESC system could work at its theoretical capacity, the Australia Institute found that it would still leak up to 3.8 million tonnes of emissions annually.

The climate crisis is here now. We cannot afford any new fossil fuel projects. While some in Labor know this and behind closed doors are arguing against the HESC, others are going in to bat for it. After gifting the ill-fated pilot project \$50 million of taxpayer money in 2018, in March this year the Treasurer flew over to watch the industrial-scale proposal receive \$2 billion from the Japanese government and throw his support behind it. In the same month, the Legislative Council passed the Greens resolution requiring Labor to provide all briefings, analyses, modelling and consultancy reports on the HESC. Surprisingly, Labor did not meet this requirement, citing time constraints. Back in April they told us they were preparing a response, and we continue to wait. Publicly Labor remains silent on the HESC, neither supporting nor condemning it, but the Treasurer is still keen. He was spotted touring that hydrogen tanker last month along with federal resources minister Madeleine King and other politicians after it secretly returned to Western Port Bay for a free Japan-Australia business summit.

We cannot afford for Labor to keep having it both ways. The world cannot afford the HESC or any new fossil fuel projects. As UN Secretary-General António Guterres perhaps put it best this year:

The dog days of summer are not just barking, they are biting.

...

Climate breakdown has begun.

The World Meteorological Organization announced we will likely exceed our make-or-break 1.5-degree limit within just five years without drastic, truly unprecedented change. Breaching this limit will be cataclysmic. We must work across all political parties, all levels of government and businesses to limit every fraction of a degree above this threshold.

As the Greens have often said, Victorian Labor is taking welcome action on renewable energy. While limiting warming to 1.5 degrees demands even stronger targets, they are certainly doing a lot better than most of our state and federal counterparts. But increasing renewables is only half the equation; the science demands no new fossil fuel projects. That includes the HESC, and it is long past time for Labor to do what anyone with even the barest concern for the environment, the community or even economics would do: bin it. Bin this ludicrous, polluting, inefficient coal project and get on with creating cheap, green electricity.

Interjections from gallery.

The PRESIDENT: Can I just let people know in the gallery that this is a workplace. There are not just MPs working here. We do not have any contributions; it is not an audience participation place. One set of applause – that is it for now. And if there are any other contributions from the gallery, I will be suspending this sitting, so thank you for complying with that.

Melina BATH (Eastern Victoria) (17:47): I rise to support the Hydrogen Energy Supply Chain project, as the Nationals and the Liberals do. Now, as you are aware, there was federal and state funding of \$50 million each some few years ago in support of this, and I was happy to attend in the Latrobe Valley – the place that has been the powerhouse of this nation, this state, for almost 100 years and still supplies a great degree of our electricity on a daily basis – the launch of the HESC project. I was pleased to see the Treasurer the Honourable Tim Pallas also there, along with the Japanese consortium.

We know that the pilot project came to fruition and delivered a successful outcome earlier this year, and we also are aware that there is a feasibility study that is now being undertaken by the Japanese government, which is prepared to put \$2.35 billion on the table for investment into Victorian energy supply. There is a feasibility study that is due out in April of next year, and we look forward to that; \$2.35 billion is a significant fund of investment at a time when this state has a massive deficit.

However, let us talk on the merits in relation to the hydrogen supply chain project. We know that there has been in the initial pilot project the gasification of coal, the treatment of it, the liquefaction of it in the Latrobe Valley and the transportation of it through to the Port of Hastings to be taken off to Japan. We also know that the whole discussion around transitioning away from fossil fuels into the future and transitioning towards, we will say, renewable energies, new technologies and the role that clean energy transition can play should be agnostic about the content, and the outcome should be about reducing carbon dioxide emissions.

That should be the long-term goal and focus, but the Greens seem to sit on an ideological hill, always casting aspersions at the Latrobe Valley, which I find quite offensive. What we want to see is a reduction in global CO₂ emissions, and indeed this project can deliver those reductions. It can also deliver long-term jobs to support that transition in the region of the Latrobe Valley and also in Hastings. We know that Yallourn power station will be coming off line in 2028 and Loy Yang A in 2035. These important jobs can then transition over to this very adaptable and important potential for energy.

The other thing that we want to look at is the fact that if the technology is there and the infrastructure is there then the hydrogen can be used for, we will call it, green hydrogen. In a way I would like to get away from those different terms. We should all be talking about carbon intensity. But it can then be used when there is excess electricity formed through wind and solar. That can also in the future be converted into hydrogen for a supply chain. It also is a great opportunity not only for earning export dollars but also for a domestic energy market in a changing environment.

On top of that, we have heard the Greens talk about carbon capture and storage and the lack of credibility. Well, I dispute that in its entirety. I went to the CarbonNet cooperative research centre near Colac, and I walked with and listened to the scientists there. For the last 10 years it has been storing carbon as a prototype, as a test, so there is absolutely the opportunity in the future. There are currently around 200 various stages of development with this carbon capture and storage. Again, let us be agnostic about this. Let us be pragmatic about this. Let us ensure that there is a future and that hydrogen can be on the table.

David ETTERSHANK (Western Metropolitan) (17:52): I rise to speak in support of this petition on behalf of Legalise Cannabis Victoria, but before I do, let me just highlight that as far as we understand it this is the first time ever that by operation of our standing orders a paper petition has formally triggered debate in the Parliament of Victoria and the second time ever that a petition has caused debate on a citizen-initiated issue to be had in this place. This is wonderful for democracy. It is wonderful that, as of this term of Parliament, if enough citizens express their support for an issue, they directly cause debate on that topic in our state Parliament. Democracy should be accessible to the citizenry. People should feel that they can engage directly in politics and in Parliament. This is what is happening now. But we could also learn much more from other jurisdictions on how we can advance this type of access to our Parliament. In Scotland once a petition is tabled it goes a petition committee,

and then that committee considers the actions the parliament should take on it. If a petition tabled in the German parliament received over 50,000 signatures, there would be a public hearing. How wonderful it would be for democracy if a sufficiently high threshold was triggered in Victoria that it caused our Parliament to act on an issue. That we hear and that we act on what Victorian petitioners ask of us is fantastic.

With those points made, let me say on the subject of this petition – and I will speak very briefly here – that burning a lot of coal to make energy, as proposed, is basically a bit nonsensical. We have heard of green hydrogen made from renewables, and that sounds like a potentially spankingly good idea. We have heard of blue hydrogen, which is made from natural gas, and that is being sold as sort of green. But in terms of gas, I think it maybe has more to do with gaslighting than a bona fide environmental initiative. But what is being proposed here, if we stick with the colour analogy – and I am conscious, President, that you have warned me about colourful language in the past – with colour coding, this is brown hydrogen. This, to put it bluntly, makes no sense. Now, let us be clear: we should absolutely be supporting the communities and the workers of the Latrobe Valley. We owe them that. But this is just a bad idea, and it will not be sustainable either commercially or financially in the long run. Let us invest in real renewable energy for the benefit of this planet. We simply do not have time to waste in this most urgent of climate crises.

Interjections from gallery.

The PRESIDENT: I am going to walk out and it is going to finish, so it is all up to you going forward.

Renee HEATH (Eastern Victoria) (17:56): I rise to speak on the Greens' petition to stop the hydrogen energy supply chain project. I would like to start by saying I support jobs in the Eastern Victoria Region, I support cleaner, cheaper and more reliable power, I support the use of resources in our region and I support the HESC project. Long term, this project would mark the start of putting Victoria at the forefront of the hydrogen market to export cleaner energy from coal to the world. Along with funding from the federal and state governments, the Japanese government along with industrial and energy corporations have committed to funding these projects. Clearly they recognise the importance of Australia's natural resources in providing energy with lower emissions. The Japanese government invested \$2.3 billion from its Green Innovation Fund, and this investment is not only capital but information, technology and skills. Once this is expanded, it is a realistic step towards cheaper, reliable energy.

Most research indicates that this form of hydrogen produces two to three times less-expensive energy than renewables, something that is very important during a cost-of-living crisis. You would think from all this talk about the energy crisis in this state that we are actually having one, but the facts are our nation is so rich in resources that we should not be having one at all. We are lucky to live in a country with an abundance of natural resources. Our key geographical position in the Indo-Pacific region puts us in prime proximity to export this energy to global markets. When I hear that we are experiencing an energy crisis, I find that hard to stomach, because it is not one that is being created due to lack of resources, it is one that is being created by ideology.

This means that the energy crisis is us putting our thoughts and our beliefs above what the community actually needs. While we export our coal to the world, allowing others to benefit, Victorians are currently having a cost-of-living crisis, and we often hear from the Greens that people in this state have to choose between whether or not they buy groceries or whether or not they use heating and cooling. According to the Hydrogen Council, hydrogen could soon supply one-fifth of the world's energy needs and generate a market worth US\$2.5 trillion by 2050. This is something that we should have a stake in.

Our abundance of brown coal puts us in a prime position to produce liquefied hydrogen at a scale to supply the world. As we enter the so-called energy crisis, activists have continually intimidated

ordinary Australians into having to pay for expensive imported energy. Liquid hydrogen is a cleaner alternative. Hydrogen is a clean energy source of the future. Scare campaigns have sought to demonise this project as the second coming of coal burning in Victoria, but gasification sees hydrogen extracted from coal and biomass under high pressure and temperature with the inclusion of oxygen. Under this project the majority of CO₂ is captured and will be safely stored in soon-to-be-made carbon net zero CO₂ storage systems. The pilot project was successful. As the CSIRO notes, the pilot project for this technology was successful in 2021 and 2022. At possible future scale the HESC project has the potential to reduce global CO₂ emissions equal to that of getting rid of 350,000 cars. That is a good thing. Questions have been asked about the project's practicality at a commercial level, but the Greens are calling to scrap this project before a feasibility study has been conducted. To me this seems extremely irresponsible and very wasteful.

Lastly, with my last 30 seconds, jobs in the Eastern Victoria Region have been under attack for many years. While nothing can reverse the damage that Labor's war on Gippsland's power industry has done, this project will offer employment and hope to those devastated communities. Modelling from KPMG found more than a thousand jobs per year would be created in the operational phase, and the number would increase during construction. These jobs would be split between Mornington and the Latrobe Valley, and these are areas that desperately need them. Businesses in regional Victoria have repeatedly had their communities ripped apart by successive Labor governments. First it was the power industry, then it was the native timber industry – *(Time expired)*

Samantha RATNAM (Northern Metropolitan) (18:01): I am pleased to speak in support of this petition to oppose the government's coal-to-hydrogen project, and I thank the thousands who signed it. Firstly, it is really disappointing that the Labor government did not have the guts to front up to this debate today. They have not put even one speaker forward as yet in this debate.

This petition is about Labor's continued support for new coal and gas projects in a climate emergency. Fifty million of Victorian taxpayer dollars was given to the pilot of this project by this Labor government, and earlier this year the Labor Treasurer Tim Pallas travelled to Japan to meet with their government and explicitly express the Victorian government's support for this project. Labor do not want Victorians to know they are supporting new coal and gas, because they know it is unconscionable in a climate crisis, and if the community knew they would be furious. But the community is now starting to find out. In fact this petition has thousands of signatures of people who now know that Labor is supporting new coal and gas, and these community members will not be silent. In fact their voices will only grow louder.

Sadly, this is not the only coal and gas project Labor is supporting. Labor actively signed off on new gas drilling near the Twelve Apostles. Labor actively signed secret deals that no-one is allowed to see with the Loy Yang and Yallourn coal power stations to keep them open beyond when the market would probably shut them down. Nobody knows what is in these contracts. A few years ago they extended the life of licences for brown coal mining in Victoria by several years, and Labor actively lifted the moratorium on conventional gas drilling across Victoria. It was banned; now it is not.

We now have over a dozen new gas drilling projects on the cards here in Victoria, both onshore and offshore. This is unacceptable in a climate crisis. The eight hottest years on record have been the last eight. The summers are getting hotter. The winters are getting hotter. Sea levels are rising. Sea temperatures are warming. Ice shelves in the Arctic are melting. The rains are getting heavier. The fires are starting earlier. We can barely recover from one disaster before the next one hits. Just talk to the people of northern Victoria, who fear that every heavy rainfall event now will mean another devastating flood. Countries are starting to prepare for the safe movement of people when the whole-island countries they live on get submerged. That is the world we are living in. That is the future we are facing because these old parties have refused to care about the future of young people. They have plundered and exploited this earth and are leaving devastation for future generations to inherit. They have refused to talk about coal and gas – the fossil fuels that are driving the climate crisis – and they refuse to stand up to the fossil fuel lobby, their donor mates in fact.

PETITIONS

Wednesday 15 November 2023

Legislative Council

3937

All power to the students striking for climate this week – those young people who had the courage to come to Parliament yesterday and the young people who will take to the streets this Friday and in the coming months. You have our full support. You are the hope for the future. Keep raising your voices and keep taking to the streets, because that is how we are going to create change, and that is how we are going to save our climate.

Interjections from gallery.

The PRESIDENT: I am vacating the chair, and I might come back tomorrow at 9:30.

House adjourned 6:10 pm.