



# **Hansard**

## **LEGISLATIVE COUNCIL**

**60th Parliament**

**Tuesday 14 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 <sup>1</sup>	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 <sup>2</sup>	South-Eastern Metropolitan	LP	Tyrrell, Rikkie-Lee	Northern Victoria	PHON
Lovell, Wendy	Northern Victoria	Lib	Watt, Sheena	Northern Metropolitan	ALP

<sup>1</sup> Lib until 27 March 2023

<sup>2</sup> 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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**Tuesday 14 November 2023**

**The PRESIDENT (Shaun Leane)** took the chair at 12:02 pm, read the prayer and made an acknowledgement of country.

*Bills*

**Gambling Legislation Amendment Bill 2023**

**Special Investigator Repeal Bill 2023**

**Triple Zero Victoria Bill 2023**

*Royal assent*

**The PRESIDENT (12:04):** I have received a message from the Governor, dated 8 November:

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

**30/2023** Gambling Legislation Amendment Act 2023

**31/2023** Special Investigator Repeal Act 2023

**32/2023** Triple Zero Victoria Act 2023

*Rulings from the Chair*

**Questions without notice**

**The PRESIDENT (12:04):** Before we start question time, I want to clarify the rules and processes of the house in relation to directing questions without notice to a single portfolio and to the responsible minister – that being both the substantive and supplementary question.

A member asking a question should clearly indicate which portfolio they are directing their question to. Members can seek assistance from the clerks if they need advice about which is the appropriate portfolio for their question. If a minister advises during the course of the asking of the question or in their response that a substantive question should be directed to a different minister, the Chair must accept that at face value. It is not the Chair's role to question a minister. The Chair will offer the member asking the question an opportunity to redirect the question. If they elect not to do so, the minister can answer as they see fit. Where a minister indicates the matter has been misdirected and should go to a different portfolio and the member does not agree, there are avenues for the member to pursue this – for example, moving a motion to take an answer into consideration or giving notice of a substantive motion.

Substantive questions and supplementary questions must be addressed to the same portfolio. If a supplementary question asks about matters outside the portfolio of the minister who was asked the substantive question, it is open to the minister to indicate that the matter does not fall inside their portfolio responsibilities and to decline to answer the question. In this instance, that is considered a response to the question and therefore the Chair will not rule that a written response is required under the standing orders. If the minister offers to seek additional information from the responsible minister, that is outside the standing orders and the minister should provide that information directly to the member when convenient.

*Questions without notice and ministers statements*

**Community safety**

**Georgie CROZIER (Southern Metropolitan) (12:07):** (343) My question is to the Minister for Multicultural Affairs. Minister, Melbourne's Jewish community is living in fear. Jewish kids are scared to go to school, families are afraid to go into the CBD and last Friday we saw rocks, bottles and punches thrown by vile antisemitic protesters outside a synagogue as people worshipped inside.

Twelve months ago your government made an election commitment to provide \$3 million of funding for security and education programs to combat antisemitism. Why has the government failed to deliver on its promise to deliver this funding?

**Ingrid STITT** (Western Metropolitan – Minister for Mental Health, Minister for Ageing, Minister for Multicultural Affairs) (12:08): I thank Ms Crozier for her question. I think that it is important to acknowledge that there is a lot of pain and distress right across the Victorian community at the moment given the terrible events that are unfolding in the Middle East. I do not want to add to that pain and distress by taking up any of the points that Ms Crozier has made around assertions around politics and the delivery of commitments. What I will say is that since 7 October the government has worked carefully and diligently to bring our communities together and to support those communities who are deeply, deeply distressed about the events that have been unfolding both in Israel and in Gaza and more broadly in the region.

We have existing election commitments to tackle antisemitism and also Islamophobia. These are incredibly important commitments that we made during the last election campaign. We have been progressing discussions with both the Jewish community and the Islamic leadership and Muslim community in Victoria about finalising those packages of support and indeed bringing them forward as early as possible, recognising that at the moment there is a lot of pain in the community. The other thing we know, which we have had confirmed to us by our agencies, is there has been a significant uptick in the level of Islamophobic and antisemitic behaviour that has been reported through existing helplines and the like but also through VicPol, so we are absolutely aware as a government of the need to support our communities to stand up against any form of vilification or hate. I am working closely, as is the Deputy Premier, with those communities, and we will have more to say very soon about those election commitments being acquitted.

**Georgie CROZIER** (Southern Metropolitan) (12:10): Minister, I think the Jewish community will be extremely disappointed with your response, so I ask: given this funding has not been available for 12 months and now antisemitic incidents have increased 988 per cent in the month since the 7 October Hamas massacre, what additional money will the government commit to ensuring the Jewish community feels safe?

**Ingrid STITT** (Western Metropolitan – Minister for Mental Health, Minister for Ageing, Minister for Multicultural Affairs) (12:11): Ms Crozier, I find that question troubling – the way in which you presented that to me and the tone that you took – because there are many ministers who have been working really carefully and consistently with the Jewish community over the last five or so weeks on this very issue. The Attorney has been working with the community. We have passed legislation in this place that banned the Nazi salute and the Nazi symbol because we recognise the pain that that represents. This is a collective effort, and it should be above politics, frankly. I have been working closely on those election commitments with the Jewish community. The police minister has been in constant meetings with the Jewish community about their concerns around security. I must say it is not just the Jewish community who are feeling this way. This is a sentiment right across the community, and our government will continue to support Victorians to feel safe.

### Housing

**Samantha RATNAM** (Northern Metropolitan) (12:12): (344) My question is to the Minister for Housing. Minister, over the last two months my Greens colleagues and I have spent time talking to residents living in the public housing towers your government is looking to demolish. Many of the residents I have spoken to are angry and confused. Many are distraught that they will be displaced from the communities that they know and love. Many are asking for one thing, and that is to live in and return to public housing. Public housing is housing that is owned and managed by the state. It has a maximum fixed rent cap of 25 per cent of income. Residents' rights are protected by law, and their landlord, the government, can be held accountable for breaches of that social contract by the community. Community housing has an important place in providing housing solutions to some



sections of the community but was never designed to replace public housing. You may be interested to read Michael Pascoe's recent comments in an article published in June when he surmised:

We've arrived at the present housing disaster rather like the Hemingway character explaining how he went bankrupt: "Two ways. Gradually and then suddenly."

The "gradual" part of the crisis started half a century ago when governments began to withdraw from ... public housing.

Minister, on behalf of these residents who are asking me: will there be any public housing rebuilt at each of the 44 sites where public housing will be demolished?

**Harriet SHING** (Eastern Victoria – Minister for Housing, Minister for Water, Minister for Equality) (12:13): Thank you, Dr Ratnam, for that question. Contrary to, perhaps, the belief that you may espouse and the belief that your colleagues might espouse, the question of access to a secure, accessible, modern, light and fit-for-purpose home is not a landscape that you own. It is important to note at the outset that we are investing in the largest reforms to social housing in the history of this nation. You can quote from Michael Pascoe all you want, but let us take a trip back in history to the time when the high-rise towers were built. You are not the only ones to be visiting and spending time in these towers. Constructed in the 1960s and 70s using a unique concrete slab construction method, these high-rise towers are at the end of their operationally useful life. That is notwithstanding a lot of the work being undertaken by maintenance crews, by housing officers and by Homes Victoria to make sure that they can be retrofitted, that we can undertake air-conditioning pilots and that we can in a number of instances, in particular in Richmond, be in a position to actually join up two different apartments to make sure that there are four-bedroom units. This work is happening every single day.

Dr Ratnam, for you to stand here and to talk about fear perhaps reflects on the campaigning activities that you have been undertaking and the proliferation of misinformation and disinformation about what this particular announcement means. As we support residents and renters in understanding what the long-term objectives are in giving people access to –

**Nick McGowan:** On a point of order, President, the minister is required to give an answer that is truthful. Not all the housing commission towers are made of concrete. Some of the housing commission towers are built of brick, like the ones at Nicholson Street and Johnston Street. The minister should know that if she does not already, or is she just believing the briefs she is receiving from the department?

**The PRESIDENT:** That is not a point of order. If you are going to call a point of order on a minister's answer and you have been yelling during her answer, which makes it nearly impossible for all of us to hear what the answer is, that makes it difficult.

**Harriet SHING:** When we talk about the work that is happening, let us talk about the engagement, because that is where your question kicked off today. We have had the first town hall renter forums at North Melbourne and Flemington. We have in the process of engaging with renters provided specific information in 10 languages, received over 1200 visits in the first week and recorded 17,000 visits by the end of September 2023. A dedicated 1800 –

**Samantha Ratnam:** On a point of order, President, on relevance, I would like the minister to respond to my question.

**The PRESIDENT:** I believe the minister has been responsive.

**Harriet SHING:** Dr Ratnam, go back to the beginning of your question and you will perhaps see that you are using question time as a starting point for what might be a rhetorical question more than anything else. It is really, really disappointing that the Greens continue to peddle a narrative that opposes more housing for our communities. Everybody in the state wants more housing for our communities. That is exactly what we are delivering. It would do you well and it would do your communities well to get on board.

**Samantha RATNAM** (Northern Metropolitan) (12:17): I note the minister has not responded to my question, which was quite a specific question about whether any public housing was going to be rebuilt at each of these sites. I will request, post question time, that a written response is provided.

Minister, a group of these residents that my colleagues and I recently spoke with are residents of the first towers your government intends to demolish, at North Melbourne and Flemington. Many of them are devastated at being forced to move away from their lives and livelihoods. They feel they have been pressured into signing documents without having the time to consider their situation properly. They are not being provided with clear information about what is happening to their homes, and they do not feel like the government understands why it is important that public housing land is not sold to developers and privatised and why they do not want to be placed in community housing. Minister, these residents have asked to meet with you so that they can raise these concerns directly with you. Will you meet with them, Minister? I am happy to supply you with the relevant contact information if you take up this invitation.

**Harriet SHING** (Eastern Victoria – Minister for Housing, Minister for Water, Minister for Equality) (12:18): Thank you, Dr Ratnam. As at 22 September we had visited every home – all 5800 households – to advise residents of the government’s policy. We have had housing support officers knocking on thousands of doors, and there have been more than 2600 conversations across more than 40 pop-up sites. When we talk about case studies, let us talk about those examples of moving from Flemington back to redeveloped community housing in Ascot Vale. Let us talk about Omar, a previous renter –

**Nick McGowan**: On a point of order, President, the question was whether the minister would meet with the individuals, not what the minister is now answering. I ask you to bring the minister back to the question that was asked.

**The PRESIDENT**: The minister to continue.

**Harriet SHING**: There are so many examples of residents. Omar has advised that the best part of his new housing is that a brand new, clean and comfortable year-round home is his own.

**Samantha Ratnam**: On a point of order, President, I appeal to you: on both questions now the minister has not answered my question or made an attempt to answer my question. What are our rights as members to require a minister to respond to a question? It seems that the minister is just reading preprepared notes that are not relevant to my question and not going anywhere close to my question.

**The PRESIDENT**: There is a provision at the end of question time where I determine if a minister should give a written response to questions. If the member that has asked the question is not happy with my decision, then of course they can raise a point of order then. There have been a number of rulings and practices over the years that the preamble forms part of the question, and members need to take that into account when asking the question as well.

**Harriet SHING**: I have been meeting consistently with residents. I would be delighted to continue to do that as part of this portfolio. As Awatif said:

We are very happy to move. These buildings are old. This is a very good project by the government. The current buildings are very hot and very bad for old people. I’ve toured the new homes at Victoria Street. I think they’re very nice, modern, good heating and cooling. The current buildings have a lot of problems.

#### Ministers statements: Middle East conflict

**Ingrid STITT** (Western Metropolitan – Minister for Mental Health, Minister for Ageing, Minister for Multicultural Affairs) (12:21): Today I rise as Minister for Multicultural Affairs to acknowledge the distressing events in Israel and Gaza and the ongoing impact on our communities here in Victoria. Many Victorians have lost loved ones, and many hold grave concern for the welfare of friends and family. Over the last month I have met with leaders from both the Islamic and the Jewish communities, and the common thread through all of these conversations was a desire for every human to live free

from the threat of violence. I also know that, sadly, these communities share a sense of fear for their own safety and that of loved ones here in Victoria during this troubling time.

We cannot always control what happens overseas, but each of us can make a contribution to ensuring that everyone can live free from the threat of violence or vilification here in Victoria. No matter our faith, the colour of our skin or where we were born, we all have the right to feel safe in our homes, in our schools and in our places of worship. We must not allow conflict overseas to become conflict in our streets. We must all show leadership during this challenging time to promote peace, empathy and understanding with and between our communities. I call on everyone here in this place to be part of spreading a message of unity and to support each other in this time of great need. Let us not give in to those who might seek to divide us. Let us stand together against attempts to plant the seeds of hate and division. We are stronger as a community, as Victorians, when we work together to ensure that Victoria remains a place where everyone can live side by side safely and in peace, where everyone can belong.

### **Decriminalisation of public drunkenness**

**Georgie CROZIER** (Southern Metropolitan) (12:23): (345) My question is to the Minister for Mental Health. Minister, why weren't the residents and the local community in St Kilda consulted regarding the opening of the sobering-up centre last Tuesday?

**Ingrid STITT** (Western Metropolitan – Minister for Mental Health, Minister for Ageing, Minister for Multicultural Affairs) (12:23): I thank Ms Crozier for her question. Of course the government has been in the process of building and rolling out a health-led response, as we took the decision to decriminalise public intoxication. We know that the previous laws were having a disproportionate impact on particularly Aboriginal Victorians, and we were absolutely committed to seeing these reforms through and to building an appropriate health-led response in the form of outreach services. Also Aboriginal-controlled health organisations will be playing a big role in making sure that public intoxication decriminalisation means that those individuals who need additional support are going to get that support.

The sobering-up service in St Kilda is part of that network of supports that we have put in place. It is an existing service that has operated out of that location for some decades now. It is run by an Aboriginal community health organisation, and they do have an excellent relationship with the local community around that facility. They will continue to deliver services to support Aboriginal Victorians at that particular site. Local residents have been communicated with not only by the department but also by the service provider. I would expect, as with any community health service provider right across the state, that it is incumbent on everybody in those service provider organisations to continue to make sure that they are working closely with their local communities. But I do know that this service has a long track record of providing health services to Aboriginal Victorians at that very location without any issues around the local amenity.

**Georgie CROZIER** (Southern Metropolitan) (12:25): Minister, the residents were communicated with four days before the opening – four days. They were given no consultation process whatsoever – they were just given something in their letterbox – and the council was not either. I mean, it is just extraordinary. Also, that current, existing site has Alcoholics Anonymous services out of it. The community are well aware what has been happening in that service. Now it is a 24/7 service. It is not even open now, as we speak. It is not even open. But my question is –

**A member** interjected.

**Georgie CROZIER**: I am just giving her some information, because she is not aware of what is going on. Minister, what modelling has been undertaken to determine that nine of the 10 sobering-up centres are for Indigenous Victorians only and to be in the sites that the government has determined?

**Ingrid STITT** (Western Metropolitan – Minister for Mental Health, Minister for Ageing, Minister for Multicultural Affairs) (12:26): There were a few questions in all of that, and you are indulging in your favourite topic of culture wars today. But I will say this –

*Members interjecting.*

**Georgie Crozier:** On a point of order, President, the minister might not like the questions I am asking and she might try to attack me personally, but I am asking these questions on behalf of the community. She wants to carry on and talk about culture wars. Just get back to the substance of the question.

**Ingrid STITT:** Thank you for gaslighting me as well. These are important services. The whole model has been led based on the data. We know – it is a fact, Ms Crozier – that the previous laws had a disproportionate impact on Aboriginal Victorians. We know where the data is across the state, and that is why we have placed those services in the areas that they are needed the most. We make no apology for doing that. In fact it was one of the key tenets of this reform.

### **Medicinal cannabis**

**Rachel PAYNE** (South-Eastern Metropolitan) (12:28): (346) My question is for the Attorney-General. Earlier this year, Attorney, I asked you whether you would consider adopting a scheme similar to the New South Wales medicinal cannabis compassionate use scheme, which is managed by their justice department. The scheme empowers police to utilise their discretion to not charge adults and their carers with the possession of cannabis, even when not prescribed, if they are registered under the scheme. To answer the questions that you raised in your response earlier this year, as of 1 October 2023, 27 terminally ill people and 44 carers were registered with the scheme in New South Wales, and from 1 July to 30 September 2023 police exercised their discretion under the scheme on 10 occasions. This scheme helps our most vulnerable avoid criminalisation and frees them of the significant costs of medicinal cannabis prescriptions. So my question is: with this fresh information, will the Attorney-General consider implementing a similar scheme in Victoria?

**Jaclyn SYMES** (Northern Victoria – Attorney-General, Minister for Emergency Services) (12:29): Thank you, Ms Payne, for your question, for your research and for your interest in this important topic. I think I did also indicate at the time that it is probably a matter for the Minister for Police. I did pass your question on to my department and said we should be thinking about this – that I would like some advice, probably similar to the advice that you just provided to me – and through your question today you have ensured that it remains on the agenda for consideration.

### **Ministers statements: bushfire recovery initiatives**

**Jaclyn SYMES** (Northern Victoria – Attorney-General, Minister for Emergency Services) (12:29): Recently I updated the house on the ongoing recovery work from floods, but as we approach the fourth anniversary I would like to acknowledge the ongoing recovery from the 2019–20 fires. Last week I travelled to Mallacoota with my Eastern Victoria colleague Tom McIntosh and the emergency management commissioner. Mallacoota was one of the hardest hit communities, as many people in this room know, with over 100 houses lost. Images of a red sky over evacuating residents have stuck with us, and there is no escaping the scarred landscape as you come into Mallacoota.

We met with local police and the Mallacoota and District Recovery Association, a dedicated group of people whose sole focus is helping their community to recover. What we heard is that even in a tight-knit community recovery is a long process that requires ongoing support and intervention. That is why after each disaster our government's focus is on tailored support services that are driven by what works for each community and what they tell us they need and when.

I would also like to acknowledge the impressive work of Bryce and the Friends of Mallacoota group, who allowed us to inspect their endemic garden, ahead of the grand opening this weekend – a new botanical garden that features rare and endangered plant species that are native to the area. Bryce and

his friends' work will ensure native flora has a safe refuge for generations to come. I would also like to give a shout-out to Charles at the abalone-processing facility, where, thanks to combined state and federal government investments, they were able to re-establish and maintain their regional employment and footprint in the international market for abalone.

As we approach the coming fire season, it was really important to have a sit-down with Mallacoota CFA captain Tracey Johnston, a very impressive local, and also representatives from the broader CFA and from Forest Fire Management Victoria to learn about the preparation for the upcoming season. I really commend their ongoing work for the safety of their community.

### Energy security

**David DAVIS** (Southern Metropolitan) (12:31): (347) My question is to the Minister for Ageing. I refer to the long, hot summer that confronts Victorians, the risk of interruption to energy supplies and the consequent risk to older and vulnerable Victorians, and I therefore ask: has the minister been briefed on the risk of blackouts and the impact that such blackouts may have on older Victorians, and if so, do those briefings advise on the likelihood of such blackouts this summer?

**Ingrid STITT** (Western Metropolitan – Minister for Mental Health, Minister for Ageing, Minister for Multicultural Affairs) (12:32): I do thank Mr Davis for his thoughtful question. I have not had a specific briefing at this point in time about those matters, but of course the welfare of older Victorians is absolutely paramount. Of course the government does take advice on things like the weather outlook and emergency services, including essential services and the like. I will certainly ensure that I am availed of any available information as we lead into the summer months. I thank Mr Davis for his prompt, and I will certainly follow that up with my department.

**David DAVIS** (Southern Metropolitan) (12:33): I thank the minister for her response and note the significance of this. A chief health officer report into the January 2009 heatwave showed that 374 Victorians, largely older Victorians, died in the heatwave, and I therefore ask: what steps will you actually take – and I think you have partially answered this – to ensure that no older Victorians die unnecessarily due to blackouts this summer?

**Ingrid STITT** (Western Metropolitan – Minister for Mental Health, Minister for Ageing, Minister for Multicultural Affairs) (12:33): I thank Mr Davis for that supplementary question. It is a very important issue, and I will be talking with my department about these matters. I do know that there are a range of programs, not necessarily in my portfolio but in other portfolios, that are designed to ensure that vulnerable Victorians have access to energy concessions, air conditioning, retrofits and the like. These are important programs that are available for eligible Victorians to avail themselves of. When we think about emergencies such as bushfires, we know that heatwaves also have a significant impact on Victorians, as the emergency services minister will attest to, as much as immediate emergencies, such as bushfires and the like. These are important issues. I will follow these up with my department, and I look forward to further exchanges with you, Mr Davis, on this important issue.

### Water policy

**Rikkie-Lee TYRRELL** (Northern Victoria) (12:34): (348) My question is for the Minister for Water. With the recent talk surrounding the federal Senate inquiry into the Murray–Darling Basin plan and its advocacy for more voluntary water buybacks and also the talk indicating the potential for compulsory buybacks, the requirement to find an additional 450 gigalitres for environmental purposes means that without question our irrigators are going to wear the brunt of this decision. What is the minister doing to ensure water security for our irrigators?

**Harriet SHING** (Eastern Victoria – Minister for Housing, Minister for Water, Minister for Equality) (12:35): Thank you, Mrs Tyrrell, for that question. At the moment, we are in a process of discussion and debate at a federal level about the future of the Murray–Darling Basin plan. At the heart of this discussion is a question about the future of the Murray–Darling Basin, which is an interlinked

system of rivers and waterways. It is important to note that since the plan was first signed up to by various jurisdictions, including the Commonwealth and Victoria, in 2012, there has been significant progress achieved, chiefly by Victoria, in recovery of water for the environment. In 2018 all jurisdictions party to the Murray–Darling Basin plan signed up to what is known as the socio-economic criteria, meaning that water could not be returned if it did harm to communities – that is, that any return would need to satisfy a test of positive or neutral socio-economic outcomes for communities.

Victoria remains committed to achieving the outcomes and the objectives of our share of returning environmental water to the plan in the terms that we agreed. Victoria opposes buybacks. We oppose buybacks for a range of reasons and based on modelling, which, despite some narrative to the contrary, withstands rigorous analysis, not only from Frontier Economics but also from the Murray–Darling Basin Authority’s own data around the impact of buybacks on communities and towns, showing that irrigated production job losses of over 40 per cent were observed in Victorian communities due to water recovery for the environment, including in Cobram, 40 per cent of job losses; Kerang, 43 per cent of job losses; Cohuna, 43 per cent of job losses; Kyabram, 42 per cent of job losses; Tatura, 42 per cent of job losses; Rochester, 42 per cent of job losses; Pyramid Hill, 66 per cent of job losses; Boort, 66 per cent of job losses; Shepparton, 61 per cent of job losses; Swan Hill, 53 per cent of job losses; Red Cliffs, 76 per cent of job losses; and Merbein, 50 per cent of job losses.

We are determined to continue our work to return environmental water and to maintain rigour, transparency and accountability through increased monitoring, enforcement and compliance in Victoria for water entitlement holders. It is also important to note that politics does not underpin the work that we are doing here in Victoria to return water to the environment. It is a shame that some people frame it in this way. We are determined to continue to work with all parties, noting that we cannot send water from the southern basin to the northern basin from Victoria; it is simply not possible.

### **Ministers statements: Fruit2Work**

**Enver ERDOGAN** (Northern Metropolitan – Minister for Corrections, Minister for Youth Justice, Minister for Victim Support) (12:38): I rise today to share the details of a successful social enterprise that is helping people turn their lives around. Fruit2Work is a fruit and dairy delivery service that provides employment opportunities for people upon their release from prison. I recently had the pleasure of visiting Fruit2Work’s warehouse in Laverton North, along with the hardworking member for Laverton Sarah Connolly and the member for Narre Warren North Belinda Wilson. Community safety is my number one priority, and we know just how important having a job is for people leaving prison and their successful reintegration into our community. Social enterprises like Fruit2Work play an important role in making the Victorian community a whole lot safer.

At the Laverton North facility I met with Rob Brown, Fruit2Work’s chief chance creator. His leadership has helped give over 100 ex-offenders a second chance. I also met with Simon Fenech, a former prisoner and now general manager of Fruit2Work. Simon struggled to find employment upon exiting prison. Fruit2Work offered an opportunity and a second chance for him. His story is among hundreds of others that Fruit2Work are able to tell us. Success stories are why Corrections Victoria is proud to work with and make referrals to Fruit2Work. At employment hubs in Victoria’s prisons, Fruit2Work vacancies are advertised. Fruit2Work is also a regular attendee at our centre of excellence employer expos run by Corrections Victoria.

I would like to congratulate Fruit2Work on their vital work in supporting the rehabilitation of people leaving prison and also their entrepreneurial success in creating even more jobs with their expansion and a new facility in Hallam due to open shortly. We look forward to continuing to partner with Fruit2Work and wish that all their future endeavours be fruitful.

### Clyde North house fire

**Georgie CROZIER** (Southern Metropolitan) (12:40): (349) My question is to the Minister for Emergency Services. Minister, on 15 January of this year Ariana Qayum and her family stood in front of their Clyde North house as it burnt to the ground. The member for Berwick wrote to you on 15 February to ask for details on the emergency response and put some specific questions to you. In your response to him some three months later you ignored one of the most important questions: why were CFA crews not aware that one road providing easy access to the property was closed for roadworks? The member for Berwick wrote to you on 22 June of this year to ask this question again. Some five months later, despite attempts to get a response, none have been forthcoming. Ms Qayum just wants some answers so she can try and move on with her life and that of her family. The following is a direct quote from Ms Qayum:

The trauma of watching my house burn will live with me forever. Why won't they answer? I'm a victim. Listen to me; hear me.

Minister, why haven't you answered Ms Qayum's questions from the 22 June letter?

**Jaclyn SYMES** (Northern Victoria – Attorney-General, Minister for Emergency Services) (12:41): Thank you, Ms Crozier. I am familiar with the situation, and certainly I express condolences and acknowledgement of the loss of the individuals concerned subject to the fire that they endured, and I certainly acknowledge the trauma. There has been some backwards and forwards between me and Mr Battin in relation to this matter. In relation to the road closures, I personally have asked for advice in relation to this so I can get an answer to the follow-up correspondence from Mr Battin. Actually I asked my staff last night: 'I'd like to really get this answer to Mr Battin. Have we got an answer?' They told me last night they would have it for me today.

**Georgie Crozier** interjected.

**Jaclyn SYMES**: I know, right? I would have it for you if I had read it prior to question time. I understand there has been some toing and froing in relation to getting some information out of the local developers, and we wanted to be really accurate in the information that I got for Mr Battin, so I understand that that response is ready for me to tick off today.

**Georgie CROZIER** (Southern Metropolitan) (12:42): Minister, I am very pleased to hear that, and I am sure Mr Battin will be very pleased to receive that.

**Jaclyn Symes**: It's been hanging around a while.

**Georgie CROZIER**: Yes, it has been hanging around for a while, as you just interjected and said. But, Minister, given the concerns around this devastating episode for the Qayum family, why is the government not being transparent and publishing the CFA and the FRV response times every quarter?

**The PRESIDENT**: I do not see how the supplementary has anything to do with the substantive.

**Georgie CROZIER**: On a point of order, President, in my substantive, if I may, I did say at the very start that the member for Berwick wrote on the 15th to ask for details on the emergency response, so it is about the emergency response times.

**The PRESIDENT**: I do not consider it supplementary to the substantive.

### Housing

**Katherine COPSEY** (Southern Metropolitan) (12:44): (350) My question is for the Minister for Housing. Minister, the Labor government made an election promise late last year to install air-conditioning units across Victoria's public housing towers, with a \$141 million budget earmarked for this in the budget. We have been talking to many residents since your government's decision to demolish 44 public housing towers, and many residents are reporting that they are yet to see any sign of the air conditioners. For others, work seems to have begun in their homes and they have had holes

in their walls for months but no units. With an El Niño event underway, residents are very concerned about unbearable summer heat without a way to cool down. Given Labor's plan to demolish the public housing towers, many public housing renters are worried that this cooling initiative has been scrapped. Minister, will the government fulfil its promise to install air conditioning in the existing public housing towers across Victoria?

**Harriet SHING** (Eastern Victoria – Minister for Housing, Minister for Water, Minister for Equality) (12:45): Thank you very much for that question. I appreciate the opportunity to answer it, because it does link back directly to Dr Ratnam's question to me earlier about the housing towers. I just want to point out the poor insulation and indeed thermal heat capturing qualities of the concrete slab prefabricated construction that typifies these towers. This means that invariably – and many residents have actually talked to me and also to you about the impact of this – it takes a while for these concrete structures to heat up, but once they do they do not lose heat quickly at all, which means that in summer, as you correctly identified with an El Niño having been declared with those hotter, drier conditions, we will see that those temperatures will hold for longer periods of time.

In our public housing stock it therefore becomes increasingly important to provide people with respite from the heat. We do have that investment of \$141 million to install air conditioning throughout our high-rise estate, and we have begun work on that. As you may be aware, the electrical systems that are in place across these towers are not consistent with the energy required to develop and to deliver air conditioning across those entire stocks. That is where, again, those electrical upgrades are occurring at the same time that the air-conditioning installations are occurring, and we have got a number of areas where we have continued to develop and to deliver that air-conditioning pilot. You will note, when you go to those towers, that you can see those round vents in the sides of the buildings where those pilots are taking place and being rolled out progressively across towers.

Importantly, though, when we install air conditioning, it is subject in its success to the way in which we are also mitigating the loss of cooling from those areas. If you have got a vertical increase in heat throughout a tower and you do not have, for example, double glazing, that then means you are almost immediately going to lose any benefit that you would have through installation of, say, a split system. We are working through those issues around ventilated spaces for condensers, lower floor-to-ceiling heights and again making sure that we have got cabling and switchboard upgrades. That work is absolutely continuing. We want people to have a measure of comfort in public and social housing that they deserve, and that is another reason why the new buildings that we are delivering as we upgrade social housing as part of this record investment have the insulation, energy efficiency and split systems in place that will keep people comfortable, particularly people from vulnerable cohorts, such as those living with disability, people with little kids and indeed older residents.

**Katherine COPSEY** (Southern Metropolitan) (12:48): I thank the minister for the answer. Minister, we have heard elderly residents were told to purchase their own units and then that Homes Victoria would do the installation. Is this what your government is instructing residents to do?

**Harriet SHING** (Eastern Victoria – Minister for Housing, Minister for Water, Minister for Equality) (12:48): If you do have any specific examples of concern, I am always happy to talk about them. The work that we are doing, though, is about prioritising and installing air conditioners into towers. There may well be areas where priority cohorts are not identified but people still want to have an air conditioner in their home. I am not sure whether you are referring to installation of a split system, which would require a reconfiguration of the electrical and switchboard cabling capabilities, or indeed if you are talking about a portable air conditioner. I am very happy to talk with you further about that should you have specific examples. But we are in the process of continuing with that tender process for development of the revised air-conditioning installation program and making sure that that sits alongside the work we are doing with the housing statement. Again, this is why new development is so important across our social housing estates, for the comfort and the wellbeing of the people who will call them home.



**Ministers statements: baby bundles**

**Lizzie BLANDTHORN** (Western Metropolitan – Minister for Children, Minister for Disability) (12:49): I rise to update the house on the Victorian baby bundle program. The Allan Labor government understands that, while bringing home a new baby can be an exciting and joyful time, it can also be a challenging transition.

**A member:** It's terrifying.

**Lizzie BLANDTHORN:** It is terrifying. We know that supporting new parents during those crucial first months leads to better outcomes for families and for children, and that is why in Victoria all first-time parents, including foster and adoptive parents and carers, are eligible for a free baby bundle. The bundle contains Victorian-supplied products carefully selected by a panel of experts to ensure families are as healthy and happy as possible as they start their new life, including a nappy bag, a safe sleeping bag, an infant first-aid kit, a sunhat, a toothbrush and teething toys, four picture books by Victorian authors and a muslin wrap. Parents also receive a passport in the baby bundle with vital resources and contacts, including the maternal and child health line, through which families can access advice from a qualified maternal and child health nurse 24 hours a day, seven days a week; the Perinatal Anxiety and Depression Australia, PANDA, hotline, a free mental health service through the first year of parenthood; Raising Children Network and Kidsafe online resources; and information on fun activities, such as libraries, playgroups, parks and playgrounds.

Since July 2019 the baby bundle program has benefited around 35,000 first-time parents and carers every year, and we are ensuring thousands more will benefit thanks to a further four years of funding in this year's budget. This program is just one of the ways we are investing in Victorian families with the More Support for Mums, Dads and Babies budget package. We are also increasing universal maternal and child health hours, improving breastfeeding support with funding for lactation consultant training, encouraging stronger communities with grant programs for dads groups and multicultural story time sessions, expanding our early parenting centre network by establishing a new early parenting centre in Northcote as well as Victoria's first Aboriginal-dedicated early parenting centre in Frankston, and strengthening the capacity of not-for-profit organisations Nappy Collective and Olivia's Place in Gippsland with a one-off funding boost to continue their work. I am pleased to commend the program.

**Written responses**

**The PRESIDENT** (12:51): That ends questions and ministers statements.

**Samantha Ratnam:** On a point of order, President, I ask for a written response for my question to the minister, because I do not believe it was answered.

**The PRESIDENT:** I am happy to review that. I note that there was a very broad preamble, and I thought the minister was relevant. But I am happy to review that and come back to the house.

**Constituency questions**

**Southern Metropolitan Region**

**John BERGER** (Southern Metropolitan) (12:52): (536) My question is to the Minister for Outdoor Recreation in the other place, Minister Dimopoulos. Most of my community in the Southern Metropolitan Region lives close to the eastern coast of Port Phillip Bay, which means my community is best placed to take advantage of the Allan Labor government's \$96 million package to improve fishing, boating, piers and aquaculture. On top of all that, the little tackers of Southern Metro have their best chance ever to take up fishing. Just last week 95,000 free little angler kits were handed out to students. This \$1.5 million investment will help young kids to enjoy and learn about Mother Nature and our state. The kits come with a fishing rod, a tackle box, and a kids' guide to fishing, a book designed to show kids what they are likely to see when they go fishing. That is why my question is this: how many children in my community of Southern Metro have received the kit?

### Northern Victoria Region

**Gaelle BROAD** (Northern Victoria) (12:53): (537) My question is to the Minister for Transport Infrastructure and relates to fixing the mobile black spots on V/Line trains. The coalition allocated \$40 million to fix this issue back in 2014. Labor scrapped it, and then in November 2015 Daniel Andrews told his Facebook followers:

If you hate your phone dropping out on V/Line trains, don't worry we're onto it.

Today we've launched our \$18 million Regional Rail Connectivity Project that will fix mobile blackspots along the five busiest regional rail corridors.

Well, that was eight years ago, and it is still not fixed. If you have travelled from Bendigo to Melbourne by train, you will know the connection regularly drops out. Local business leaders want improvements across the region, because 30 minutes out of Bendigo you cannot get coverage. Where is the free wi-fi on V/Line trains, and what is the state government doing to deliver on the promise they made eight years ago to fix mobile black spots on regional rail services, including Bendigo?

### Northern Metropolitan Region

**Adem SOMYUREK** (Northern Metropolitan) (12:54): (538) My constituency question is directed to the Minister for Public and Active Transport and is regarding bus services in the northern part of my electorate. Like many other services, the provision of public transport is a major problem in the northern parts of my electorate, in suburbs like Broadmeadows, Greenvale, Roxburgh Park, Meadow Heights and Craigieburn. I have had numerous complaints from residents in these suburbs, particularly residents who work in the city and who must catch a train home after work. These residents are often stranded at their local train station when their train arrives after 9 pm because, for some bizarre reason, buses stop operating after 9 pm. I ask the Minister for Public and Active Transport to provide information on what the government is doing to rectify this unacceptable situation.

### Eastern Victoria Region

**Tom McINTOSH** (Eastern Victoria) (12:55): (539) My question is for the Minister for Emergency Services. Minister, Victoria is one of the most bushfire-prone areas in the world. Being prepared for the summer months is critical to preventing loss of life and property and protecting the environment. This is especially true in a drying climate and a return to El Niño weather patterns, which bring with them elevated bushfire risk. Minister, how is the Victorian government ensuring that East Gippsland communities are best prepared for the upcoming fire season? You and I recently got to see this work happening in real time in Mallacoota, where we spoke to CFA brigade leader Tracey and volunteers as well as the Forest Fire Management Victoria team about readiness. This included an inspection of the Mallacoota strategic fuel break. The work that these crews are doing to help at-risk communities get ready for the bushfire season will save lives and prevent the loss of properties in the event of another fire. I want to take this chance to thank all the volunteers, emergency services workers and communities who are working to prepare for the upcoming bushfire season, as they do every year.

### North-Eastern Metropolitan Region

**Nick McGOWAN** (North-Eastern Metropolitan) (12:56): (540) Consistent with my approach, my question comes from a constituent, and in this case it comes from Lachlan Rae. Lachlan has written to me in respect of the Suburban Rail Loop. He has a number of ideas about how the Glen Waverley train station might look in the future, so I thought it would be a good idea for us to pass these ideas on, given we are probably in the drafting stage or the predrafting stage or the pre-predrafting stage. Some of the ideas that Lachlan has include increasing the number of entry and exit gates to reduce bottlenecks during peak commuter times – that is a good idea to me; and building a dedicated low-incline ramp for wheelchairs, mobility scooters, bicycles and prams to better support accessibility for all commuters – that is a great idea too. Number 3 is widening the incredibly narrow main platform at the ticket entry to improve the flow of foot traffic in and out of the station – another great idea; moving the customer support booth closer to the walkway connecting Railway Parade and Coleman Parade;

and, last but not least, building a dedicated underground entrance at the west end of the platform close to the main car parks to reduce the foot traffic burden at the existing entrance. I would welcome a response from the Minister for Transport Infrastructure.

### Northern Metropolitan Region

**Samantha RATNAM** (Northern Metropolitan) (12:57): (541) My constituency question is to the Minister for Planning. One of my constituents Dr Clare Karunanithy, a long-time resident of Coburg, reached out to me as she has been observing the gradual dilapidation of the former Kangan Batman TAFE campus. The campus is located on publicly owned land that has been disused for over 10 years. We know that the property was leased to the Level Crossing Removal Project for redevelopment by the state government, but it has continued to sit unused since the Coburg section of the project was completed in 2021. An assessment of redevelopment options was planned for the site; however, it is unclear whether this assessment was undertaken. This part of Coburg, residents and the community tell me, is in need of a community space, and this site is perfectly situated for a library, an art gallery or even a school according to them. Minister, what is the government planning to do with this abandoned site, and will the community be consulted before any redevelopment decisions are made?

### Western Victoria Region

**Bev McARTHUR** (Western Victoria) (12:58): (542) My constituency question is to the Minister for Education, and I ask his departmental thought police to immediately rescind their stalking charge threats against the mothers of children at the Clifton Springs Primary School. They have every right to raise concerns about gender-neutral toilets at their school. This government, not content with handcuffing a pregnant constituent of mine during COVID over an innocent Facebook post, are now attempting to silence and make criminals of mothers concerned about the safety of their children. I call on the minister to immediately end this nonsense and apologise to those his department have threatened and intimidated.

### Western Metropolitan Region

**David ETTERSHANK** (Western Metropolitan) (12:59): (543) My constituent lives near Little River, south of Werribee. His question is for the Minister for Planning and concerns the proposed Little River logistics precinct. My constituent fears that this project has significant implications for what has been described as Australia's most endangered ecosystem, the grasslands of the Victorian volcanic plain. He says that the environmental vandalism of this project includes the clearing of 41 hectares of critically endangered natural temperate grassland, 300 vulnerable large-fruited groundsel and 1.3 hectares of critically endangered seasonal herbaceous wetland. The environmental surveys conducted appear to be woefully inadequate. With several state freight infrastructure projects in the pipeline, this project should be carefully considered to determine if it is necessary, and in the current location, and that its environmental impacts are understood and indeed justified. My constituent asks: will this project be referred for an independent environment effects statement or assessment so that the project can be considered thoroughly?

### Northern Victoria Region

**Wendy LOVELL** (Northern Victoria) (13:00): (544) My question is for the Minister for Roads and Road Safety, and it concerns the Euroa-Mansfield Road. On 3 August I asked a constituency question that raised a dangerous 4.9-kilometre stretch of the Euroa-Mansfield Road from Ridge Road to the Gooram Falls visitor car park. The minister's response on 21 August advised me that, following my question, the Department of Transport and Planning met with Victoria Police and CFA members on 11 August and that as a result of that meeting DTP determined that reducing the speed limit on this section of road to 60 kilometres was appropriate and that DTP would undertake the necessary steps to amend the speed. Unfortunately three months later that still has not happened, and on Cup Day two people were seriously injured in a single-vehicle accident on this section of the road. Surely installing a couple of speed limit signs should not take this long, and if it does, a temporary speed reduction sign

could have been placed on the road, which may have prevented the accident. Can the minister please explain why the speed limit has not been reduced as promised and when this change will take place?

### Western Victoria Region

**Sarah MANSFIELD** (Western Victoria) (13:01): (545) My question is for the minister for disability, ageing and carers. I have heard from food relief services in Western Victoria that from June 2024 the regional food relief sector is looking at the grim reality of receiving no state funding. This will significantly disrupt the logistical and delivery arrangements for these services, which are facing more demand than ever. Regional community food hubs do not just provide emergency food relief; they also upskill volunteers, creating community resilience and networks of local responders in times of crisis. In her answer to my previous question about recurrent funding for the food relief sector in regional areas like Western Victoria the minister conflated metropolitan agency funding with the sustainable operation of this sector in the regions. Regional, place-based funding on a recurrent basis is essential for this sector to thrive. When will the minister provide certainty to Western Victoria food relief services and commit to a sustainable funding model?

**The PRESIDENT:** Dr Mansfield, the disability and aged care portfolios have been separated, so –

**Sarah MANSFIELD:** Ms Blandthorn.

**The PRESIDENT:** Disability? We will make sure that it goes to the Minister for Disability.

### Southern Metropolitan Region

**Georgie CROZIER** (Southern Metropolitan) (13:02): (546) My constituency question is for the attention of the Minister for Police. It was revealed last week that 43 police stations across Victoria will have their opening hours cut, including several in Southern Metropolitan Region – South Melbourne, Southbank, Malvern, Camberwell, Oakleigh, Bayside and in the Cheltenham area. This is a concerning development that will compromise community safety. I am contacted regularly by constituents raising their experiences of criminal activity, including disturbing reports of burglaries, thefts and assaults. Julian in Glen Iris wrote to me last week after waking up at 3 am to a group of hooded young men in his front yard. While he scared them off this time, Julian and his family were shaken by memories of a previous incident when offenders broke into their house while they were asleep and stole personal belongings and a car. Victorians deserve to feel safe in their homes and their communities. We need a stronger local police presence, not a reduced one, and we need more numbers on the beat due to underfunding by the Labor government. My question is: why is the government cutting police resources at a time when local crime is on the rise and communities are living in fear?

### North-Eastern Metropolitan Region

**Aiv PUGLIELLI** (North-Eastern Metropolitan) (13:03): (547) My question today is to the Minister for Roads and Road Safety. My office was contacted by a constituent who is very displeased with the state of the road corridor alongside the Eastern Freeway. They mentioned a significant amount of rubbish and vandalism along much of the Eastern Freeway and particularly mentioned the area around Blackburn Road. When my team called VicRoads to report this issue, the person at VicRoads mentioned that they had had many similar reports from people regarding this stretch of the Eastern Freeway. Minister, what will you do to ensure that the Eastern Freeway corridor is properly maintained?

### Western Victoria Region

**Joe McCracken** (Western Victoria) (13:04): (548) My constituency question is for the Minister for Public and Active Transport, and it relates to the Ballarat railway station. I want to quote an article from 9 November, 'Is the Ballarat station upgrade off-track?':

Ballarat train station might not get its essential accessibility upgrades until after 2026, with public transport minister Gabrielle Williams unable to commit to any timelines on the project.

My question for the minister is: why is this case? Why can't you give us a time line on this? Speaking at the station, a passing commuter in his 80s said to the gathered politicians that the project might not even be completed in his lifetime. Why is that the case? It just seems unbelievable. Now, this is on top of the member for Wendouree actually apologising to disability advocates locally because the project has not been completed on time. So I want to know, Minister: can you please explain why this project is taking so long and when it will actually be done?

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

**Ann-Marie HERMANS** (South-Eastern Metropolitan) (13:05): (549) My question is to the Minister for Local Government, and I ask: when will the minister intervene to ensure that the responsibility to reinstate the \$20,000 slip-road outside the Sikh temple in Perry Road, Keysborough, is at the council's expense and not the responsibility of the Sikh temple, as has been suggested? Since the controversial Greater Dandenong council decision to upgrade Perry Road, council decided to remove the slip-road in the proposed upgrade of Perry Road, which is an 80-kilometre-per-hour road, and the slip-road currently allows safe entry and exit into and out of the temple. Now this is being removed, and according to constituents it has been suggested that the Sikh temple now be responsible for the \$20,000 bill to pay for the reinstalment of the slip-road when it is clearly a council and road development error.

### **Northern Metropolitan Region**

**Evan MULHOLLAND** (Northern Metropolitan) (13:06): (550) My constituency question is for the Minister for Roads and Road Safety, regarding lighting on roads in my electorate. Mickleham Road and Somerton Road are crucial state arterial roads that service thousands of commuters daily. My community have voiced serious concern about the lack of street lighting along both roads, which leads to poor visibility at night, increasing risks of accidents – of which there have been many. Without proper lighting, motorists have less time to react to threats on the road. On several stretches of road, like Alanbrae Terrace to Greenvale Drive on Mickleham Road, it is completely dark at night. In these dangerously dark sections drivers feel the need to use high beams at night, blinding oncoming traffic and putting motorists at higher risk of collisions. The lack of lighting on Somerton Road and Mickleham Road is a crucial safety issue posing an unnecessary risk to drivers. I ask the minister to advise if there are any plans to improve street lighting on Mickleham Road and Somerton Road, and if not, why not?

### ***Petitions***

#### **Barmah strategic action plan**

**Bev McARTHUR** (Western Victoria) presented a petition bearing 1044 signatures:

The Petition of certain citizens of the State of Victoria draws to the attention of the Legislative Council the immediate need for financial support to be provided to approved re-homers of brumbies and to stop current eradication plans from the Barmah National Park, Bogong High Plains and the Victorian Alps. 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. 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 deer, feral pigs, fire and humans are large compared to brumbies. 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 impacts. Parks Victoria should meet community demands, abide by the management plans for rehoming over shooting and undertake a revised number recount with credible methodology. Removal plans must also incorporate financial support for re-homers by the Government who insist on best welfare outcomes.

The petitioners therefore request that the Legislative Council call on the Government to direct Parks Victoria to recount brumby populations with improved counting methods and make provisions to assist approved re-homers with financial support.

**Bev McARTHUR:** I move:

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

**Motion agreed to.**

*Committees*

**Scrutiny of Acts and Regulations Committee**

*Alert Digest No. 14*

**Sonja TERPSTRA** (North-Eastern Metropolitan) (13:08): Pursuant to section 35 of the Parliamentary Committees Act 2003, I table *Alert Digest* No. 14 of 2023, including appendices and extracts of proceedings, from the Scrutiny of Acts and Regulations Committee. I move:

That the report be published.

**Motion agreed to.**

*Papers*

**Papers**

**Tabled by Clerk:**

Crown Land (Reserves) Act 1978 – Order of 13 November 2023 giving approval to the granting of a lease at Albert Park.

Duties Act 2000 – Treasurer’s Report of Corporate Reconstruction and Consolidation Concessions and Exemptions for 2022–23, under section 250B(4) of the Act.

Financial Management Act 1994 –

Minister’s reports that 2022–23 Reports have not been received, together with an explanation for the delay, under section 46(3) of the Act –

Minister for Education – Victorian Curriculum and Assessment Authority.

Minister for Energy and Resources – Mine Land Rehabilitation Authority.

Victorian Budget 2023–24 Quarterly Financial Report No. 1 (*released on 10 November 2023 – a non-sitting day*) (*Ordered to be published*).

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

Ballarat, Cardinia, Glen Eira, Greater Geelong, Hume and Mornington Peninsula Planning Schemes – Amendment GC221.

Banyule, Boroondara, Manningham, Nillumbik, Whitehorse, Whittlesea and Yarra Planning Schemes – Amendment GC223.

Bass Coast Planning Scheme – Amendment C162.

Corangamite Planning Scheme – Amendment C59.

French Island and Sandstone Island Planning Scheme – Amendment C12.

Greater Geelong Planning Scheme – Amendment C454.

Horsham Planning Scheme – Amendment C82.

Melton Planning Scheme – Amendment C239.

Mitchell Planning Scheme – Amendment C166.

Moyne Planning Scheme – Amendment C70.

Surf Coast Planning Scheme – Amendment C144.

Warrnambool Planning Scheme – Amendment C215.

Portable Long Service Benefits Authority – Report, 2022–23.

Statutory Rule under the Electricity Safety Act 1998 – No. 112.

Subordinate Legislation Act 1994 –

Documents under section 15 in respect of Statutory Rule Nos. 110, 111 and 112.

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

Notice to fix fees under section 73 of the Victorian Energy Efficiency Target 2007.

Order declaring water system zones in Victoria under section 6B(1) of the Water Act 1989.

Victorian Inspectorate – Report on surveillance device records inspected during the period 1 July 2022 to 31 December 2022, under section 30Q of the Surveillance Devices Act 1999.

Yarra River Protection (Wilip-gin Birrarung murrn) Act 2017 – Birrarung Council Review, September 2023, under section 58(3) of the Act.

### *Petitions*

#### **Inglewood ambulance administration building**

#### **Inglewood ambulance station**

#### *Response*

**The Clerk:** I have received the following papers for presentation to the house pursuant to standing orders: minister's responses to petitions titled 'Save Inglewood's ambulance administration building' and 'Save Inglewood's old ambulance station', presented by Mrs Broad.

### *Business of the house*

#### **Notices**

**Notices of motion given.**

#### **General business**

**Georgie CROZIER** (Southern Metropolitan) (13:19): I move, by leave:

That the following general business take precedence on Wednesday 15 November 2023:

- (1) notice of motion 239 standing in Mr Bourman's name on harvesting wild-caught venison for donation to food charities;
- (2) notice of motion given this day by Mr Mulholland on the Suburban Rail Loop;
- (3) notice of motion given this day by me on anti-Israel protesters in Caulfield South; and
- (4) order of the day 9, resumption of debate on the second reading of the Nuclear Activities (Prohibitions) Repeal Bill 2023.

**Motion agreed to.**

### *Members statements*

#### **Jack Xiao Zhou**

**John BERGER** (Southern Metropolitan) (13:20): I want to congratulate a Learn Local Awards finalist in my community of Southern Metro. I visited the Kew Neighbourhood Learning Centre in May to meet Callum Lydiard, the 2022 winner of the Ro Allen Award. It is great to see this community asset being recognised again. I want to highlight Jack Xiao Zhou. Jack migrated to Australia just three years ago for a new life, but when he was knocked off his bike, sustaining horrific injuries, including head trauma, his hopes were in tatters. After surgery and rehabilitation he became depressed, but his life changed when he took an English language class at the centre. It gave him a new sense of confidence and the ability to connect with others. Jack also completed a Jobs Victoria course in product management and was awarded a paid internship at Dulux. I wish him the best of luck at the awards next Friday.

**Men's sheds**

**John BERGER** (Southern Metropolitan) (13:21): For my community of Southern Metro, applications are now open for grants to build or improve a men's shed. Thanks to the \$1 million investment by the Allan Labor government, grants of up to \$100,000 will support communities right across our state. With more than 360 across Victoria, they are an asset. They build friendships and support networks, create a sense of community and improve the health and wellbeing of members. Get in quick, as applications close at 5 pm on Friday 8 December. Contact my office or google 'men's shed funding program' to learn more.

**Community safety**

**Georgie CROZIER** (Southern Metropolitan) (13:21): What occurred on Friday night outside a Caulfield South synagogue, at a time when members of the Jewish community and their families were gathering for prayer, was a disgrace. Never would I have thought that in Australia, let alone Melbourne, we would see such deliberate and instigated action at the level at which it was directed towards the Jewish community. Caulfield is in my electorate of Southern Metropolitan Region, but it is not just the Jewish community in Caulfield that has been affected, it is Jews in other areas of my electorate and indeed across the state and the nation that now, sadly, are concerned about their own safety. These sorts of actions must be condemned by all of us if we want our great country to be a place that is accepting, that thrives and where our freedoms are not threatened. Freedom to worship should not be subjected to the actions of those that deliberately threaten, intimidate and, as a result, cause heightened fear.

The Jewish community of Melbourne can be proud of what they have achieved in business, in academia and in serving our country at the highest levels of government and the military and for their generosity through philanthropy. There are just too many names of families and individuals, many of whom I know, to single out. To them all I say thank you. Thank you for your entrepreneurship, innovation, generosity, resilience, pride and dedication to our country, which you have contributed to in ways that at times go unnoticed and which we have all benefited from as a result.

**Ross Liebmann**

**Georgie CROZIER** (Southern Metropolitan) (13:23): On another matter, I also acknowledge and pay my heartfelt condolences on the passing of Ross Liebmann, who was a great Liberal and who died last week. He died at the age of 100. He was a terrific man and somebody I knew terribly well, and I just want to pass on my thoughts and condolences to his family.

**Northern Metropolitan Region crime**

**Adem SOMYUREK** (Northern Metropolitan) (13:23): Ever since I was elected as a member for Northern Metropolitan district I have been receiving complaints from frustrated and scared constituents about crime in the northern parts of my electorate. Therefore I was not surprised to read that these complaints are supported by the latest round of crime data published last month by the Crime Statistics Agency, which show that Hume recorded 18,257 offences in the year to 30 June, up 5.6 per cent, and Whittlesea had an increase of 8 per cent as well. I call on the government to devote more resources to making these communities safe.

**Housing**

**Adem SOMYUREK** (Northern Metropolitan) (13:24): On another matter, I take this opportunity to call on the government to get on with delivering its housing policy. One of the most important instruments any state government can utilise in facilitating the construction of more homes is a streamlining of the planning process. Before the release of its housing policy the government had signalled its intention to do this in its policy by seizing planning control of town planning applications for multi-unit developments. Except in limited circumstances, the government's housing statement back-pedals on this very important instrument. I have now read that the government is considering



assuming planning control as a means of building more than 60,000 new apartments. That is well and good, but it will not be until the end of next year, when more Victorians will be struggling to put a roof over their heads. I call on the government to act now rather than at the end of next year.

### Family violence

**Ryan BATCHELOR** (Southern Metropolitan) (13:25): Regrettably, too many women are still being killed in family violence incidents. Fifty-eight women this year across the country – recently five women in 10 days – have been killed by men known to them. There have been high-profile incidents, like the murder of 21-year-old sports coach Lilie James in Sydney, but many, many more do not make headlines. All women deserve to be safe, equal and respected; it is not negotiable. This is why we should all lend our voices to the 16 Days of Activism Against Gender-Based Violence, a global campaign led annually by UN Women, and support the range of events being held here in Victoria between 25 November and 10 December. I would encourage everyone to join the call to prevent and eliminate violence against women and girls.

Before entering the Parliament I had the honour of working in the public service on Victoria's landmark family violence reform agenda, which set nation-leading reforms, and I most recently served on the board of No to Violence, a men's behavioural change service provider. While violence against women is everyone's problem, it begins and ends with men. More men need to lend their voice to this cause. We have a duty to change the way we think about gender and power and to work together to change our culture. There is a long way to go, but we must continue to act to address the underlying drivers of this violence to stop this crisis from escalating. It starts and ends with us, and we must do better.

### Remembrance Day

**Bev McARTHUR** (Western Victoria) (13:26): On the 11th day of the 11th month at the 11th hour we remember those who gave their lives so we can be free today. 103,044 members of the Australian armed forces made the ultimate sacrifice for their country, and more than 514,000 Victorians have served in the defence of Australia. Last Saturday I laid a wreath and paid my respects to the fallen at the Waurn Ponds Memorial Reserve commemorative service. I rise today to thank the reserve committee, especially Jeff Harriott and Tom Welsh, for their sterling efforts to make the day so memorable for so many. I also thank every RSL branch, band, choir, bugler, piper, cadet, school group, refreshment provider and general helper across the Western Victoria electorate for their magnificent voluntary efforts in keeping the memory of our brave service men and women alive. Lest we forget.

### Wildlife Victoria

**Katherine COPSEY** (Southern Metropolitan) (13:27): It was a privilege and a pleasure to visit Wildlife Victoria recently, witnessing the vital public service that they provide. Operating 24/7, Wildlife Victoria takes 110,000 calls from the public each year for sick, injured and orphaned wildlife. This not-for-profit service saves the lives of thousands of native animals each year and day after day all across our state. They are the 000 for people who find injured wildlife in Victoria, and they fill a key gap that would otherwise exist in government services.

Demand for Wildlife Victoria's services has grown year on year and this spring has seen a 50 per cent increase in calls from the public compared to the same time last year. This is the grassroots impact of climate change, with variable weather patterns, extreme heat, storms and cold snaps as well as habitat loss and urbanisation. Our wildlife are incredibly important for our biodiversity and for environmental health. They are impacted daily at the grassroots level, and Wildlife Victoria is at the front line.

When I visited I got to interact with two of those animals, an orphaned baby ringtail possum and also an orphaned wombat joey named Apple. Both of those animals' mothers were hit and killed by cars. I got to sit in on and listen to calls from the public as Wildlife Victoria emergency response services responded, and I also got to meet the Wildlife Vic field vet team. Wildlife Vic deserve government's

ongoing support for their amazing, essential service and their sheer professionalism. They are deeply impressive.

### **Brendan Kenna**

**Wendy LOVELL** (Northern Victoria) (13:29): It gives me great pleasure to once again recognise and congratulate Brendan Kenna from the Wilmot Road Primary School in Shepparton, who has placed within the top 50 finalists for the 2023 Global Teacher Prize. Brendan is currently an assistant principal at Wilmot Road Primary School, where nearly 80 per cent of the students speak a language other than English at home. Last year Brendan was one of 12 teachers recognised as Australia's most inspiring teachers in the 2022 Commonwealth Bank Teaching Awards. During his time working in education Brendan was also a finalist in the 2013 Victorian teacher of the year awards. With a longstanding history of accomplishment, Brendan is truly an inspiration for his colleagues and most importantly his students.

### **Mildura Rural City Council Youth Awards**

**Wendy LOVELL** (Northern Victoria) (13:30): I am proud today to acknowledge the young people of the Mildura community who last month received awards acknowledging their valuable contributions to the Mildura community. This was the 10th annual youth awards hosted by the Rural City of Mildura, with winners across three categories: Youth Worker of the Year, Jackson Mugenzi; Endurance and Persistence Award, Tenay Davy; and Community Participation Award, Nick Coe. I would like to acknowledge all nominees for this year's awards night. Young people are not just our future but also valuable contributors to our local communities.

### **Mulgrave by-election**

**David LIMBRICK** (South-Eastern Metropolitan) (13:30): Last year, back when the Libertarian Party was known as the Liberal Democrats, a journalist was out interviewing random members of the crowd at one of our election launch events. It was then that I first saw a mum, holding a young child on her hip, speaking off the cuff about why she was attracted to the Libertarian movement. She spoke so eloquently I had to ask around to find out who she was. It turns out her name was Ethelyn King. She was motivated to join our party because of her firsthand experience of government excess. She is one of many smart young mums who I am delighted to say have invigorated the membership of the Libertarian Party in recent years.

I tell you this because Ethelyn is running for the Libertarians now in the seat of Mulgrave. I know the people of Mulgrave must be getting weary of elections, but voting for the Libertarian Party is one reason to be enthusiastic. She is an outstanding candidate who grew up in the area and does not need to look for Mulgrave on a map. I have no doubt that replacing the former Premier with Ethelyn King would be a terrific upgrade, both for the people of Mulgrave and for the Parliament of Victoria. I thank Ethelyn and our hardworking members for their campaigning and wish her well on the weekend.

### **Daylesford road accident**

**Trung LUU** (Western Metropolitan) (13:31): In my members statement today I would like to offer my condolences to the families and friends of the five people who tragically lost their lives in the Daylesford accident. I am deeply sorry for your loss and offer my prayers and support.

Last week I attended a vigil hosted by Wyndham City Council. The victims were members of the Indian community in Point Cook and Tarneit in my electorate. The vigil was attended by hundreds of people from all over Wyndham and Melbourne who came to share their love and sorrow. We gathered to remember Pratibha Sharma, her daughter Anvi and her partner Jatin Chugh. They were much loved and will be much missed. We also remember father and son Vivek and Vihaan Bhatia. They are survived by wife and mother Ruchi Bhatia and young son Abeer, who were injured but are recovering in hospital. We grieve for the husband, father and brother they have lost. May their souls rest in peace.

As Indian communities around Australia celebrate Diwali, the festival of lights, which symbolises the victory of light over darkness, for the family and friends who are moving through the darkness of grief, may the love and comfort of those around you be your light. You are in my thoughts and prayers.

### **Middle East conflict**

**Samantha RATNAM** (Northern Metropolitan) (13:33): Many of us from this house and the other place attended a vigil this morning in Parliament House organised by the Parliamentary Friends of Palestine to honour the lives lost in the unfolding war and to call for peace. Hundreds of thousands of Australians and millions around the world are also calling for peace. Civilians are paying the ultimate brutal price of war. The stories coming out of Gaza are horrendous: the targeting of hospitals and refugee camps and the continuing siege with so little food, water, fuel, health care and aid entering Gaza when they are so desperately needed. UN experts are warning of the risk of genocide. Nothing justifies the collective punishment being meted out. It is time to stop the killing, for an immediate ceasefire, for the unconditional release of hostages and for an end to the occupation of Palestinian territories. It is time for peace.

While we are hurting and while our communities are hurting, there is no place for antisemitism or Islamophobia in our community. There is no place for hatred in a movement for peace. We must always act with kindness and not turn on each other. What we saw on the weekend is a movement that is rising because there are so many of us who may have been children of war or colonisation; who may have experienced weak leaders turning to brutality and suppression to maintain power, status and wealth; who may have been subjected to racism or denial of our rights; who are tired of being told that it is too complex to fix. We see through the hollow words of our so-called leaders, their equivocations and weasel words. We see through their cowardice and demand more. Together we are growing the movement for peace.

### ***Business of the house***

#### **Notices of motion**

**Lee TARLAMIS** (South-Eastern Metropolitan) (13:35): I move:

That the consideration of notices of motion, government business, 171 to 241, be postponed until later this day.

**Motion agreed to.**

### ***Bills***

#### **Early Childhood Legislation Amendment (Premises Approval in Principle) Bill 2023**

#### ***Second reading***

**Debate resumed on motion of Lizzie Blandthorn:**

That the bill be now read a second time.

**Georgie CROZIER** (Southern Metropolitan) (13:35): I am very pleased to be able to rise and speak to the Early Childhood Legislation Amendment (Premises Approval in Principle) Bill 2023, because it is an important piece of legislation that we are debating. It is non-controversial. I want to say that my colleague in the other place Jess Wilson, who has spoken to the government and the department about this, highlighted in her contribution the importance of what the government is seeking to do here. She also acknowledged the issues that have been raised and provided to the department and government on any concerns. What this bill will do is ensure that the safety of children in early education and childcare settings is applied, and we see that as of great importance to the community, especially to children who are getting that early education.

As we know, this bill not only amends the Education and Care Services National Law to establish an approval in principle process for certain types of education and care service premises, it also amends the Education and Care Services National Law Act 2010 and the Children's Services Act 1996. There

are a number of things that the bill goes to, but it basically is looking at childcare settings and the safety issues around that. What we do know is that demand for early childhood education and childcare services is growing. We have got a growing population and we have got an expanding population in certain areas, and those early childhood care centres are in huge demand. We know that to meet those demands there have to be new premises built, and of course what comes with those are quality standards that need to be applied.

What is of particular concern here is that when we are talking about early childhood settings, we are talking about children who are sometimes incapable of accessing emergency procedures and being able to get out of a building, and this largely addresses those issues that have been raised. It is also important that there is regulatory certainty provided to organisations that are building these premises so that they actually understand what their obligations are in relation to this risk and safety management in the instance of emergency evacuations for children. What this bill does is give that clarity around those regulatory requirements, and it also provides an assurance to the community that the government and those providing these services understand that there need to be some regulatory requirements and appropriate safety measures in place.

We on this side – as I said, it is not a controversial bill – support the bill as it will improve the safety of children in early education and childcare centres, predominantly those that are housed within multistorey buildings, as well as improve the regulatory approval process for organisations seeking to establish new early education and childcare centres. It has been some time coming, and I understand that when we were debating the bill around early education in 2022 – this issue came out of the recommendations from the national quality framework review – it was highlighted that this issue was not being addressed at that time. The government deliberately undertook to ensure that they had a specific piece of legislation, which is the legislation we are debating today, around these particular safety issues.

As I mentioned, there are recommendations from the 2019 national quality framework review that was undertaken. That national quality framework was established in 2012 after a significant discussion with various state and territory and federal ministers around putting in a framework for early childcare settings. When we are talking about the early childhood education and care sector, we are talking about long day care, kindergartens, preschools and family day care as well as outside school hours care for school-aged children. That captures tens of thousands of Victorians – young people, young Victorians. That is why it is incredibly important to have this regulatory framework in place and to have legislation like this, which provides, as I said previously, certainty and for that framework to enable safety mechanisms to be in place.

National quality framework legislation, I might say, just by way of background, was passed in the Commonwealth and in each state and territory, and it did include a requirement for reviews of the quality framework to be conducted every five years. The first of these five-yearly reviews was conducted in 2019 and made these recommendations for reform. These recommendations, as I previously said, we spoke about last year. They were endorsed in May 2022 by both federal and state education ministers, which led to various pieces of legislation around the country to give effect to those recommendations. We, in this place, passed the Early Childhood Legislation Amendment Bill 2022 last year. It was introduced in August and then passed. At the time the Liberals and Nationals sought to make a number of amendments to the bill. We did not seek to oppose the bill, but we wanted to make some sensible amendments to the bill – because we thought that was important – around the certainty that the bill at that time was going to provide to the sector and to Victorian parents and to ensure that those education qualities and programs could be delivered.

Whilst most of the recommendations of the national quality framework review passed last year, the review did note a particular challenge in Victoria and the ACT regarding the location of early childhood education and care settings in multistorey buildings. This bill goes to those aspects – that those multistorey buildings need to have safety components set in place when building commences and to have that understood with the planning processes. That is what this bill does: it enables

organisations who intend to set up child care or early childhood education services in a new or renovated multistorey building to gain approval in principle for their premises before the building commences.

There are specific and unique evacuation risks for children, as I have previously alluded to, who attend a service housed in a multistorey building, particularly when the premises are located above ground level. These are little kids. They do not have an ability to understand how to evacuate. If you are in a multistorey building, it can be extremely concerning and quite terrifying for those that are in charge, but they have to enable those children to evacuate safely. Infants and very young children who cannot walk independently take longer to evacuate from a building, and they need extra help to do so. Of course we want that safety to be absolutely paramount. All of those early educators and those working within these facilities would absolutely have foremost in their mind enabling the safety of those they are caring for. That is what is required as we are developing and having these centres in these areas – building plans need to be carefully reconsidered. These factors ensure that building designs allow for the evacuation of children from childcare centres that are located in multistorey buildings to be undertaken both safely and appropriately. Now, we hope that that never arises, of course, but like with any building or any multistorey building, appropriate evacuation exits are required for people to exit the building in a safe manner.

This bill establishes a scheme that allows developers, builders or education and care service providers to obtain an approval in principle from the regulatory authority for a centre-based service proposed to be built or renovated in a multistorey building. It establishes a process by which the regulatory authority – which is the quality assessment and regulation division, colloquially known as QARD – of the Department of Education can participate early enough in the development process to ensure relevant safety standards are taken into account during the design phase of new multistorey builds or planned renovations in which a childcare centre will be housed. This means that safety can be the main consideration, as I have said. It will look at those safety requirements at the early stages of the build or the renovation and ensure that those safety aspects have been considered in full. Therefore when a building is being renovated or built developers will understand that they need to comply with the regulatory authority through that preapproval process and have the proper plans in place and the proper sign-off from all of those that are overseeing the safety mechanisms so that the build can proceed.

Once that has occurred it will provide clarity and confidence that the physical design and construction of the premises will meet the regulatory criteria when service approval is sought post construction. The improved clarity for the industry will help to improve investor confidence when deciding to build and operate in the early education and care sector, which will be critical to ensuring we can meet growing demands for these services across the state in coming years. We need to have that confidence and assurance for those developers and builders that undertake this work so they can feel that they are protected in what they are trying to do, so that we can meet the demand of a growing population and so that young children will have education and care settings that are of the highest quality in this day and age and they are not put at any risk.

The scheme set out in this bill will be voluntary and not a requirement for regulatory approval. I understand that it is not going to be made mandatory, but I am sure that those that will be undertaking this work will understand what the government is trying to achieve here in relation to having that appropriate regulatory authority and understanding of what is required so that risks are diminished for not only the educators but of course those children that may be in these multistorey settings.

I understand that there has been significant consultation with stakeholders throughout the process in relation to this legislation, and that includes not only from the early education sector but also from the property industry. From that consultation, no-one had concerns around the approval in principle scheme that I have just spoken about. They understand what the requirements are and are willing to work within what the legislative requirements are asking. As we know, the national quality framework has broad stakeholder support. It has been very well supported over a number of years and reflects a consensus position from not only Victoria but other states and territories that understand the

requirement to have that national quality framework. I mean, you are really looking at why you want to have standards at that national level that are of the highest order to ensure that our early education settings and those working within them not only have guidance but are also able to provide a safe working environment and a safe educational environment.

This legislation, which seeks to improve the safety of children, particularly very young children and infants, during emergency evacuations from premises in multistorey buildings, is a good thing. The legislation will provide clarity and improve the approval process for developers, builders or education and care providers prior to the construction of any multistorey building, and that is also a good thing. It will give greater regulatory certainty, which will improve industry confidence and help us meet the demands for more early childhood education and childcare centres in the coming years, and I believe that to be a good thing.

Throughout the process that has been undertaken there have been recommendations made by the national quality framework review. They have been taken very seriously, and they have broad support to ensure that quality early childhood education is delivered and that children are educated in a safe environment. For those reasons, this particular piece of legislation has come following the legislation that was introduced and debated last year. We understand the reasoning for that, and we support the government's intentions in providing that assurance and safety mechanism to not only the early education sector but, as I said, the building sector through the various planning processes.

I do not need to say any more about the bill. I also say to those that work in the sector that they do a terrific job. There is pressure in the system in certain areas, and I know that educators and families in my area have expressed concern around some of the issues around the delivery of programs. But that is not what this legislation is about. This is about the safety issues around new builds and the renovation of multistorey buildings, and we wish it a speedy passage so that those regulatory components can be put in place as soon as possible.

**Jacinta ERMACORA** (Western Victoria) (13:53): I am pleased today to speak in support of the Early Childhood Legislation Amendment (Premises Approval in Principle) Bill 2023. That is a bit of a tongue twister. This bill forms a facilitative role for our broader early childhood reforms and investments. The purpose of this bill is specific and straightforward: it will give effect to the recommendation agreed to by the Commonwealth and state education ministers as part of the 2019 national quality framework review, establishing a premises approval in principle scheme for new early childhood services in multistorey buildings. At its heart the national quality framework is about making sure that Australian children have the same quality of care whether they live in Warrnambool, Wagga Wagga or Whyalla.

Currently the number of early childhood services located in multistorey buildings is low, sitting at about 1 per cent. But as our population grows and the needs of our communities change, there is no doubt this number will increase. The bill aims to ensure that our planning rules keep up. For developers, builders and service providers it means less red tape and more certainty, enabling them to apply to the regulatory authority for approval in principle of their designs. For families living in and around multistorey buildings it makes it easier to establish new services that are closer to home, and for our children and early education workforce it means that in the unlikely event of an emergency, their safety will be given the priority it deserves.

I want to reflect for a moment on why this particular aspect of the bill is so important. Even now, 40 years on, many in my community still remember the deep devastation of the Ash Wednesday bushfires. Like so many other parts of our state, fires raged across the south-west of Victoria. In the small district of Nullawarre, about 30 kilometres outside of Warrnambool, emergency response decisions were made without external support or prior planning. There was no time to think things through, because the fire roared through that community very quickly. The school bus driver had to react to a situation that was changing minute by minute. It was in this situation that my father found himself driving along the road to pick up a young family member who had been dropped off. We can

only imagine how terrifying it would have been for this child, the bus driver and the community. This is an example of just how quickly an emergency situation can spiral out of control in the face of changing weather and fire conditions. That is why all these years later we plan our school buildings and our emergency procedures to minimise risk. We can never eliminate the chance of disaster, but we can prepare our buildings and procedures as much as possible. This is why we need to make sure appropriate protocols and procedures are in place, especially when it comes to our young people.

At the other end of the spectrum there are a number of inclusions in this bill that are significantly less dramatic but no less important. Not only does this bill ensure the relevant regulations are consistent across Australia; it will also ensure uniformity within Victoria. This bill will make consistent Victoria's two regulatory schemes for early childhood services, whether services are providing care to children on a regular or ad hoc basis. This includes amending the Children's Services Act 1996 to permit the issuing of infringement notices regardless of which regulatory scheme a service provider might fall under. Ensuring this kind of consistency is common sense. It also demonstrates our government's broader approach when it comes to education: delivering smart policy that solves multiple problems. This bill forms a facilitative role for broader early childhood reforms and investments by the Allan government. Take our commitment to build 50 low-cost government owned and operated early learning centres located in the communities that need them most. These centres are good news for our local kids, good news for family budgets and good news for employers who are crying out for workers.

In my part of the world the initial rollout includes the town of Murtoa, chosen as one of the first four sites. Set to open in 2025, design work on Murtoa College's new early learning centre is already underway. Once opened the centre will provide long day care, three-year-old kinder and pre-prep programs for local children. These programs will be delivered across three rooms, with space for up to 57 children each day. Because we believe in a commonsense, community-centred approach, not only will this service be co-located with the local P-12 college but it will also include a maternal and child health room for babies and their families. We often talk about these centres being the answer to the dreaded double drop-off, and as any parent will tell you, that is a very appealing proposition. I know when I had very young children I had to visit the maternal and child health centre in Kepler Street in Warrnambool, the kindergarten in Lava Street in Warrnambool and the primary school in Selby Road in Warrnambool – all different locations. How lovely it would have been to receive all those services within one service community.

I also want to talk today about what this kind of co-location means for children, not just parents and mums. For Murtoa's youngest residents it means a place that is wholly dedicated to them and their wellbeing, first as babies, through to child care, kinder, prep, year 7 and beyond. It is an investment that will significantly ease the transition at every one of these important life stages. It is also an investment that says regardless of where you live, this is a government that believes every young Victorian deserves a bright future. When it comes to the importance of early childhood education the evidence is very clear: in those first five years a child's brain develops more, and more rapidly, than at any other time in their life. We also know that if a brain's wiring is not well established in those crucial five years, or indeed if it is damaged in some way, a child's chance of reaching their potential is similarly reduced. It is certainly the case for children that experience violence and abuse at home or beyond. Those children go into protection mode rather than curiosity mode, and if you are like a turtle, hiding your legs and head in under the shell, you are really not going to see much, and you are not going to learn much either. That is, I guess, an example or a description of the damage abuse can do to a young, developing brain.

In short, what happens from ages zero to five can shape the child's entire trajectory. It is why the government has chosen to fundamentally reform early childhood education in our state. These reforms began with three-year-old kinder, which rolled out to rural and outer regional communities first in 2020. Now, just three years on, every single three-year-old child in Victoria can benefit. We are also delivering pre-prep. Part of our \$14 billion Best Start, Best Life reforms, it will mean a new universal

30-hour-a-week program of play-based learning for four-year-old children. Again, because we understand the difference it will make, we are rolling it out to regional Victoria first. In 2025 pre-prep will commence in six regional locations, including Ararat and Yarriambiack shires. For our little ones it will mean even more opportunities to learn and play.

There is an even longer list of local projects I would like to mention: a new kindergarten in Portland, an upgrade in Port Fairy, an outdoor space for kids at Mitchell Park in Hamilton, planning money for the Gunditjmara Aboriginal co-op's children's centre and a new kitchen for South Warrnambool kinder. Perhaps the biggest thing for my electorate is free kinder. These two simple words have been nothing short of life changing for local families. It is a change that means that up to 140,000 young Victorians are now attending three- and four-year-old kinder. Better yet, it is saving their families an estimated \$2500 per child per year. It also means tens of thousands more parents have been able to return to work, and many of these are mums. I will never forget sitting at the kitchen table doing the maths and realising that in returning to work and paying childcare fees for our firstborn I would be earning \$3 a week. I decided I would work pretty much for free to maintain my career. That really is absurd, but it is a scenario that too many women know all too well. That is why these reforms, from government-owned child care through to pre-prep and free kinder, are so smart and so needed. Not only will they benefit Victorian kids but they will also make a massive difference to parents and carers too, easing the pressure on family budgets, making it easier to return to work and addressing the shortage in childcare places all in one go. It is sophisticated, holistic, human-centred policy delivered by a government that gets it. I would like to take this opportunity again to commend the appointment of our state's first Minister for Children, Minister Lizzie Blandthorn. It is yet another example of this government thinking beyond the silos of bureaucracy and instead looking at the needs of people.

There is plenty more I could say about the incredible benefits of our early childhood agenda, but in closing, I want to pay attention to the direct employment opportunities. These reforms will create more than 11,000 new early childhood teacher and educator positions over the next decade. The government is determined to make sure we have the workforce we need to implement these reforms, investing close to \$370 million to attract new educators, upskill existing professionals and make it easier for those returning to work. That includes things like free TAFE places, university scholarships, supported traineeships and incentives for those moving to or rejoining the Victorian sector. It is a direct investment that will create the workforce of the future, many of whom will work in the kinds of buildings this bill aims to protect.

I began my contribution today by saying the intent of this bill was simple and straightforward, and it very much is, but that does not mean its content is unimportant. Rather it is one small piece of the government's much larger agenda: helping to make sure our kids and our dedicated early childhood educators have the quality facilities they deserve. I commend the bill to the house.

**Gaelle BROAD** (Northern Victoria) (14:06): I rise to speak on the Early Childhood Legislation Amendment (Premises Approval in Principle) Bill 2023, and I thank my colleague Georgie Crozier for her contribution earlier. This is a bill that the Nationals are happy to support. Having raised three children, thankfully all old enough to no longer require child care, I understand the challenge and the juggle of trying to find child care. But for many towns across Northern Victoria there are no options. I have spoken with parents who are driving very long distances at the start and the end of their work day taking their children to care. Across Northern Victoria we are facing workforce shortages, and it is clear that many parents want to get back into the workforce but cannot because they are unable to get their kids into child care.

Early education and child care is a crucial part of every community, and we will do everything we can to ensure the safety of children in these settings. It is common sense that as demand for early childhood education and childcare services increases, the children in these premises need a safe evacuation route in the case of an emergency. While we hope that no emergencies do emerge, it is important to be prepared in case the worst happens. There are unique evacuation risks for children attending a service housed in a multistorey building, especially when the service is located above ground level. Babies



and very young children who cannot walk independently take longer to evacuate from a building, and extra help is needed to ensure they are evacuated safely. Therefore building plans need to carefully consider these factors and ensure that designs allow for the safety of children during evacuations from these centres.

This bill also aims to provide regulatory certainty to organisations seeking to offer child care and early education services in multistorey buildings. This is a move towards making sure there are enough childcare and kinder places to meet growing demand over coming years. Therefore the bill will improve the safety of children in early education and childcare centres that are housed within multistorey buildings as well as improve the regulatory approval process for organisations seeking to establish new early education and childcare centres.

This bill implements recommendations from the 2019 national quality framework review. The recommendation aims to improve the regulatory framework that covers early childhood education and care across the country. It is important to note that the review framework has broad stakeholder support and reflects the consensus position of all state and territory governments. The proposed opt-in voluntary scheme would allow builders, developers or education service providers to gain approval in principle from the regulatory authorities for a centre-based service to be built or renovated in a multistorey building. In the electorate of Northern Victoria Region there are not a lot of multistorey buildings, but creating a mechanism where much-needed child care can be provided is clearly something we would support.

The Nationals are strong supporters of childcare services in the regions and have been highlighting for some time the challenges that our communities face. I know in Cohuna the community have been advocating for a childcare centre for nine years now to help the town grow. They have got teachers, police and nurses that cannot move to the region because of the lack of child care, and they are having to choose to live elsewhere. My Nationals colleagues, including Jade Benham and Annabelle Cleeland, have talked previously about the childcare desert that exists outside Melbourne. A childcare desert is defined as an area that has less than 0.333 childcare places per child aged four and under.

We have seen the situation in Charlton where a new childcare centre was promised in 2019 and subsequently built, but it has been sitting empty for the last 2½ years waiting for a childcare provider. Just recently it was great to see the Buloke shire announce that Shine Bright have signed an agreement to operate it, and Charlton child care will open in term 1. The Charlton situation is in fact a snapshot of what is happening in many areas, where a distinct lack of accessible child care means that women cannot contribute to a workforce that badly needs them. Charlton, like many towns, is in desperate need of teachers, nurses and accountants. There is a workforce on the ground there, but the lack of child care prevents women returning to work. Many teachers are also leaving the region, despite the fact that Charlton has a terrific school and a well-regarded trades program. There is a similar situation in Red Cliffs, where the nearest child care is in Mildura. This makes for a lengthy round trip for people who live and work in Red Cliffs but have to travel to Mildura for child care.

My colleague Annabelle Cleeland has also highlighted the effects of the childcare desert in her seat of Euroa. Many towns in that area are struggling or simply have no childcare options at all. A recent survey conducted by Ms Cleeland showed the dire state of child care in that electorate. Some of the issues raised in the responses include multiyear waitlists, a lack of childcare providers in their town and families relocating to other areas to access better childcare options. The responses share overwhelming negative experiences, with 100 per cent of parents who shared their experience saying that they have been adversely impacted by the lack of available child care under this government. One hundred per cent of respondents shared that the limited childcare options had resulted in them being unable to get back to work or training at a level they would like. Of those that were working, the responses highlighted a significant reliance on family and friends for child care due to limited options in the area. Fifty-four per cent of respondents relied on family and friends a great deal, while 85 per cent were relying on friends and family in some form.

Since last year's election the Labor government has been sharing its plans to create 50 new government owned and operated early education centres, including one in Seymour. But the fine print reveals a deceptive time line that raises concerns about trust. It is disappointing that the early childcare centre promised for Seymour will not be built any time soon, after the Labor government chose not to include it in the first round of centres being established. The deadline of 2028 for the Seymour childcare centre's delivery shows a lack of genuine concern for the immediate needs of the community.

In summary, the Nationals are always very keen to support any measure that will improve child safety and childcare options in Victoria, especially in the regions. We believe this bill is a step in the right direction, but when it comes to providing greater access to child care in regional Victoria there is still much work that needs to be done.

**Sonja TERPSTRA** (North-Eastern Metropolitan) (14:13): I rise to make a contribution on the Early Childhood Legislation Amendment (Premises Approval in Principle) Bill 2023. I am very pleased to be rising and speaking in support of this bill. The primary purpose of this bill is to give effect to the recommendations agreed to by the education ministers meeting in 2019 in the national quality framework review to establish a premises approval in principle scheme for new early childhood services in multistorey buildings. As most of us in this chamber would know and many in our communities would know, the majority of early childhood centres are not in multistorey buildings. Nevertheless as our communities grow and expand we will see situations where perhaps early childhood services will be housed in multistorey buildings. Effectively this legislation is to address concerns around the need for those services to be in those buildings and to ensure that they align with the requirements of the national quality framework.

By providing for approval in principle, the changes ensure that applicants will have an assurance that their proposed premises designs are adequate to meet the physical premises requirements in the regulatory scheme. Again, this enables changes, where required, to design and building plans to ensure the completed premises in buildings meet the regulatory requirements of the national quality framework.

The national quality framework and those requirements are aimed at protecting the safety of young children in emergency evacuation situations and ensuring adequate supervision in services. As we know, in any emergency evacuation situation there will be a range of people who have different needs and may be able to evacuate quicker than others, but with younger children, if you have got a situation where a child cannot walk or cannot crawl, they need to be carried out of the building. Then you are going to have children with different requirements as they get a little bit older – they might be toddlers, but they are not really able to follow instructions properly or comprehend them and will need assistance to get out. Again, this is about ensuring that the requirements of a centre that is going to be in a multistorey development protect the safety of young children in emergency.

Importantly, the changes proposed in this bill will allow for any changes to be made before the commencement of construction works, and that is a really good thing because it will avoid the need for often expensive and time-consuming rectification works once the premises are completed. In other words, if we can make sure the standards that are proposed are met before approvals are done and before the building is built, there is a lot of cost saving and time saving. The people who are building those premises and providing them will not have to be confronted with the extra expense, and that also saves time. I will talk a little bit more in a moment about our Best Start, Best Life reforms and why this infrastructure is needed to support those reforms, but you can see this is another step in a range of things that we need to ensure happen to make sure that the rollout of Best Start, Best Life can be as smooth as possible.

Just in the context of what the situation is now – I touched on this a little bit just a moment ago – less than 1 per cent of approved early childhood services are currently located in multistorey buildings. As I said earlier, we do expect that the number of proposals for early childhood services in multistorey buildings will increase over time. When I was growing up there were not many families that lived or

brought their families up in multistorey buildings, but that is certainly changing. It is becoming more and more prevalent, particularly if we look at the increasing density that we see in our planning laws. We are trying to increase density in existing suburbs. Whether it is inner-ring or middle-ring suburbs, the idea is to increase density, to go up. You will have the availability of more multistorey dwellings, and if we can have those dwellings also having opportunities for early childhood services, it means that people in those communities can access the services they need where they need them to be. I can remember this as a parent. My second child has just finished school, and one of the things that I appreciated the most was seeing the end to the drop-off and pick-up after many years of having to do that, going through the drop-off and pick-up of kinder and primary school and secondary school. If you have got those services more conveniently located, it just saves a lot of time for parents, so that is a very welcome thing.

As I said, this scheme that is proposed in this legislation is expected to improve the early childhood service approval process for services in new or altered multistorey buildings. As I said, hopefully for the ones that are going to be built and proposed these standards will apply, but in existing ones if there have to be alterations, then that can happen as well. This supports the delivery of the infrastructure required for our Best Start, Best Life reforms, and that is what this bill is designed to do, and it will prevent that need, as I said, for expensive rectification works later on.

I might just talk a little bit now about why these things are necessary. I have outlined what the purpose of the bill is, but there was a particular set of circumstances with new service premises being built as part of these multistorey developments. As I said, it is a requirement of the national quality framework and the meeting of ministers and the national law. It was particularly an issue that got highlighted in the Victorian and ACT jurisdictions, where it was about recognising that there was compliance with the national law but not in regard to emergency evacuation requirements. It ensures that there is compliance with local planning laws, but again there may not be compliance with the national quality framework. So it is basically an effort to harmonise those schemes to ensure that the premises can be an appropriate premises to then accommodate the need for early childhood services. That seemed to be an issue in the Victorian and ACT jurisdictions, so again it is about working on legislation that will harmonise all of those jurisdictions. It is a great thing to have that right across Australia, but for Victorians it means that we can have those services in multistorey developments when they are built. As I said, often the compliance issues do not become obvious or apparent with the national quality framework. It is only apparent when the provider applies for the service approval once the premises have already been built or fitted out. So as I said earlier, that results in additional delays and costs, and delays in having the service up and running.

As I said, a building could potentially fail to meet the emergency evacuation requirements. The premises might not comply with the national quality framework, including those things that relate to things like outdoor space, natural environments, natural light and ventilation. I do recall a number of years ago now there were some concerns raised around potentially some childcare services having an outdoor space but with things like non-natural grasses, so synthetic grasses and the like. It is important to have a mix of environments for children to learn and play in, and some of those things become particularly important. That is just one environment issue, and that may have been addressed over time. But what is critically important when you are talking about the need for emergency evacuation is that those buildings are compliant. Obviously in a circumstance – it might be rare, but it does happen – that an emergency evacuation is required, you do not want any impediments getting in the way that mean that people cannot exit in a quick fashion and in a safe fashion.

As I said, the bill seeks to consistently amend both substantive acts that underpin the regulatory schemes to ensure uniformity across Victoria, and as part of this uniformity the Children's Services Act 1996 will be amended to permit the issuing of infringement notices. This is one of the areas where the Children's Services Act is currently not aligned with the national quality framework. This will be important to ensure that we can get the harmonisation of a range of schemes and a range of pieces of legislation.

Just in terms of our early childhood reforms and our Best Start, Best Life reforms, we have committed \$14 billion to expand kindergarten programs across the state under our Best Start, Best Life reforms, and we know that across Victoria there are a number of areas that I think were referred to as childcare deserts, where despite private operators operating in a range of markets there were clearly market failures, which meant that people living in those areas did not have access to child care. As part of the work that the government undertook to implement our Best Start, Best Life reforms, we identified a range of areas where we needed to build, own and operate a range of childcare services, so there will be 50 government owned and operated early learning centres. This is an ambitious plan to address the childcare shortages in the areas with the greatest need.

Where possible the early learning centres will be co-located with schools to avoid the double drop-off. I talked about that earlier. As a parent, I can very well remember not only the juggling and dropping off of one child and then another, but when you have got, say, a primary school age child and then you have got a younger one, also trying to avoid the sleep times, where one needs to go down for a sleep and you have got to put them in the car. It is really a challenge, so it is a great help to parents if they can try and avoid that double drop-off. It just means that they can try and balance those work and family responsibilities as well a little bit more easily.

Removing that double drop-off is a great help to parents. Kinders and childcare centres are not always located close to schools, so having them co-located is really important – another example of how the government is listening to parents about their needs in taking their kids to school or education. It is critically important. Our early learning centres could be co-located with schools, but in some cases they may be co-located with services like maternal and child health services and playgroups, for example. Combining services and access or close proximity to those services is always a great help as well.

The first of the four centres that the government has announced will open in 2025. A further 26 locations have also been announced, but the first four childcare centres announced will be co-located at Eaglehawk North Primary, Moomba Park Primary School, Murtoa College and Sunshine Primary School. A range of other municipalities have also been identified. The next 26 locations have been announced – they are not necessarily in regard to townships as such but more like LGAs. Some of them are in regional areas, but some of them, importantly, are in metropolitan Melbourne areas. I note some of them are where they are the most needed.

One of the communities in my electorate, Heidelberg West, is a community that will continue to need access to early childhood services, and I am really pleased and proud to say that the government is supporting that need and that demand in Heidelberg West and other areas like Reservoir and the like. There is a long list, and I will not read them all, because they are across a range of areas – Dandenong, Frankston North and the like – where there is a need. As we know, the outcomes for children from poor socio-economic backgrounds are greatly improved – their life expectancy outcomes, education, health and a whole range of things – by access to early childhood education and care. We know that really matters for ages nought to three but also nought to five more generally. The remaining 20 early learning centre locations will be based on need, and all the centres will be open by 2028.

You can see why this legislation is important. It sets the framework. It is part of the process to get ready to support these reforms as we continue along the path to implementing these early childhood education and care reforms. 2023 is a significant year in delivering on this reform, and the Victorian government's \$270 million free kinder initiative, which is available to all three- and four-year-old children enrolled in participating funded kindergarten programs, is also a key, important plank to this reform.

I might leave my contribution there. All I can say is that this is critically important legislation. It supports the rollout of our Best Start, Best Life reforms. I commend the bill to the house.

**Ryan BATCHELOR** (Southern Metropolitan) (14:28): I am very pleased to rise and speak on the Early Childhood Legislation Amendment (Premises Approval in Principle) Bill 2023. As my colleagues have outlined, whilst the bill is designed to undertake a range of amendments related to ensuring Victoria's compliance with the national agreements around early childhood and the national quality framework, it does sit in the context of an incredibly expansive early childhood reform agenda that this government is leading in this state and this state is leading in this nation. The contributions that my colleagues have made today demonstrate that the Allan Labor government is delivering for our children, making sure their early childhood is the best it possibly can be and that they do get the best start in the best life. We are leading the nation.

This legislation will amend the national law governing education and care services to establish a premises approval in principle process to allow builders, developers and early childhood service providers to gain approval in principle for proposed early childhood services. A couple of years ago, in 2019, the states, territories and the Commonwealth, who all participate in the regulation of quality standards that surround our early childhood sector, approved the findings of a review of the national quality framework. One of those recommendations was yet to be acted upon, in relation to this approval in principle process, so the bill in its substance seeks to implement that change. In addition to the planning amendment to allow this approval in principle for multistorey developments, the other significant element of the bill will amend the Children's Services Act 1996 to establish the ability for the regulatory authority to issue infringement notices for certain existing offences in alignment with the approach taken under the national law.

I want to just briefly spend a moment talking about the substantive planning amendments related to the approval in principle. The current rules that govern planning requirements for multistorey developments, and in particular the way that they relate to the early childhood quality and regulation frameworks, have created a series of issues in relation to the need and the goal to establish more early childhood services in multistorey buildings that are three or more storeys high. The current laws are making it difficult for childcare providers to establish services in multistorey buildings, and we know increasingly that in many urban areas we are having more and more high-rise developments. The Southern Metropolitan Region is home to many; in fact Southbank is the most densely populated part of our state. Residents in the communities that I represent and who live in all parts of our city in multistorey communities need access to child care too. It is increasingly difficult to find adequate spaces, and so the more that we can do to ensure that there are facilities in these communities to take care of our children, we should do, and that is what this legislation is seeking to do.

The review of the national quality framework in 2019 identified quality and safety issues with the design of early childhood services in multistorey buildings. There are site-specific challenges that you have in these environments that obviously did not arise when most of these facilities were in largely purpose-built or repurposed old houses on the ground floor with land. There are, when you put children in a multistorey environment such as this, things like evacuation risks when children are involved because of things you might not immediately think of, like the ability of children to access and safely use fire stairs in case of an emergency.

We had in the planning regime in this state a particular problem where new childcare services and new early childhood settings were being built as part of multistorey developments. Whilst they received planning approval because they met planning laws, there was a risk that they would not also be meeting the regulatory requirements of the national quality framework. The problem with the interaction between these two regulatory systems was that it was not becoming apparent that that discrepancy existed until after the service had been built and fitted out and sought regulatory approval under the national quality framework. By that time the proposed service had already been fitted out and it was quite challenging and difficult to make changes, and that resulted in delays, denying parents access to these services and involving increased costs, which often parents would bear.

What this change will do is introduce a system where plans can be assessed under both the planning framework and the national quality framework to make sure that things like the evacuation standards

and safety standards are being met by the proposed development. It will minimise the risk of providers of future childcare premises not meeting these requirements and having to undertake expensive and lengthy redesigns of their services and hopefully reduce the risk of providers being refused approval to run those early childhood services. What they will be able to do is apply under the national quality framework for an approval in principle of their service so that they can build in accordance with that approval in principle – obviously done within planning laws and approval in principle under the early childhood national quality framework – so that when the building is complete they know that, subject to having met those conditions, they are more likely to receive approval to operate that early childhood service.

What we hope this will do, what we think this will do, is better facilitate more early childhood services being made available in multistorey developments across Melbourne. As I said, parts of southern metropolitan Melbourne are some of the most densely populated in this state, home to many, many constituents who live in multistorey dwellings. Hopefully these changes will help facilitate an increased usage and increased take-up of early childhood services. We think that is absolutely fundamental. This government is fundamentally committed to improving the services that our children receive and principally ensuring the quality of early education and care that they receive. Whether they start very young or whether they enter the new and expanded three-year-old kinder programs that are being rolled out across this state and transition into the four-year-old pre-prep programs that we are also rolling out as part of the Best Start, Best Life reforms, we want our children to get the best start in life, and that is what these broader reforms are designed to do.

I think it is incumbent upon governments who support our children to be demonstrating their support through their actions, and I think that demonstration is required of all levels of government, whether it is the state government, who have got a \$1.5 billion investment in expanding kindergarten programs across the state as part of our \$14 billion commitment to Best Start, Best Life, or whether it is our federal government, who have recently made significant improvements to the childcare subsidy, providing more cost-of-living relief to families to help them with the cost of early education and to help them with the cost of child care. All levels of government should be investing in our young people, all levels of government should be ensuring children get the best start in life.

Recently we have had a concerning attitude from one in particular of the local councils in the Southern Metropolitan Region, the City of Glen Eira, who took an in-principle decision last month to shut down their three early childhood services, in Carnegie, Murrumbeena and Oakleigh. Over the course of the last few weeks I and many of my parliamentary colleagues at the state and federal levels – from all sides, I will say – have been out standing with the parents from these childcare centres in the City of Glen Eira demanding that the local council change its decision and save the childcare centres in Carnegie, Oakleigh and Murrumbeena. I want to thank the member for Oakleigh, the member for Caulfield and our federal colleagues the members for Macnamara, Goldstein and Higgins – I cannot forget Dr Ananda-Rajah – who joined with hundreds of families last week to have a community rally outside the Glen Eira council meeting to lend everyone's voice to support the parents, the 100 or so families, who are staring down the barrel of losing their childcare spot a week before Christmas, which is not the kind of Christmas present that any of those kids deserve.

It is devastating for these families, the uncertainty that it is creating for them – a decision that the City of Glen Eira made after the application process for spots in alternative local kindergarten programs had already closed. Families are now scrambling, not knowing what is going to happen for them at the end of the year. The kids, who were planning on going back and being with their friends again next year, are facing an uncertain future, as are the parents who were about to enrol their kids for the first time in these facilities, all of which – given we are talking about the national quality framework in this legislation – have an 'exceeding' rating under the national quality framework, these three centres that the City of Glen Eira is seeking to close down. This will force parents to both travel further and pay more to get the same level of support, the same level of service, that they are getting out of these childcare centres.

I lend my voice to the call for the City of Glen Eira to reconsider this decision. They have got time to change their minds, and no-one will criticise the City of Glen Eira for changing their minds. I know often in politics people get decried for making backflips. All I have got to say to the City of Glen Eira is: if you can perform a backflip on this one, we will stand there applauding you and give you a resounding 10 for that piece of public policy gymnastics. We think that these childcare centres need to remain open. The parents at these centres in the City of Glen Eira are desperate for that to occur. The staff, many of whom have worked there for years and years and years, are absolutely devastated. Whilst they were not able to join the protests at the rally last week, their union was there – the Australian Services Union – standing up for their rights, for their jobs, and we were standing there with the good members of the ASU, which has joined the call for this service to remain open. The quality of the care that these kids receive is because of the quality of the educators who give it to them. That is exactly what the members of the ASU have been doing at these centres for years, and we want to see that continue.

I say this not to make a point but just to illustrate the difference that you can see if you just look a little further across the way from the City of Glen Eira to the City of Bayside – because whilst the City of Glen Eira are closing down their centres, the City of Bayside are opening up some new ones. They are opening up new children's centres in the City of Bayside that have been partially funded by the state government. The state government is putting in resources to build new children's centres in partnership with local government in the City of Bayside. The City of Glen Eira is walking away from local children, walking away from local families and walking away from the talented educators who work at these early learning centres, and it is proposing to shut them down in the weeks before Christmas.

This legislation is about improving our early childhood system. It is about making sure that it works for families – that children and families get the services they need and deserve no matter where they live. It is a really important message that I hope the City of Glen Eira listens to. To those in the community who are campaigning to save their centres: we support you, we support your children.

**John BERGER** (Southern Metropolitan) (14:43): I rise to contribute to the Early Childhood Legislation Amendment (Premises Approval in Principle) Bill 2023. It seeks to improve the delivery of early childhood care in Victoria and provides for the introduction of a premises approval in principle scheme to allow for more flexibility and speed in the establishment of early childcare services and service centres. I am sure my colleagues in this chamber are aware that child care is a key priority of the Allan Labor government. We are dedicated to ensuring that our early childcare providers are supported to deliver the best care for our youngest Victorians.

Child care has a heavy impact on the trajectory of a child's life. The quality and length matters, and early intervention is key. This bill will provide the tools to ensure that this can happen. Children must be supported and inspired to ensure a passion for learning. If effectively delivered, early childhood education has the capacity to give an individual a leg-up in life – a valuable tool and right that no-one should be denied. We know that childcare policy overwhelmingly affects those from lower socio-economic backgrounds. We know that there is a cost burden to accessing these vital services and that this is a key contributor to class differences. Single-parent families and families where both parents work are often forced to put their young ones in child care, which traditionally has been very expensive. That is why we have introduced free kinder, something I am particularly proud to support. Free kinder addresses the wealth barriers for new parents returning to work and equity in early childhood education across socio-economic backgrounds. Families can save up to \$2500 a year under the free kinder scheme, a much-needed policy to ease the cost of living when it was introduced. We introduced the three-year-old kinder program and over the next 10 years are rolling out four-year-old pre-prep. Three-year-old kinder provides families with access to quality kindergarten for up to 15 hours a week.

Just yesterday I visited Anderson Park Community Hub in my electorate, in Hawthorn. After speaking to the electorate of Hawthorn, I know the people of Hawthorn dearly miss their hardworking, dedicated and passionate Labor member of Parliament John Kennedy. He is a man who understands education.

But yesterday I visited this hub, which houses Auburn South kindergarten, and had the opportunity to see something very special, which was the puggle group, a classroom of kids led by Judy Wood, the longest serving kinder teacher at the kinder. They were very impressive. They sat through all the grown-ups making boring speeches about upgrades, money dedications and much more. By the by, thank you to my friend Minister Blandthorn for the opportunity to represent her. I saw firsthand what a difference early childhood education makes to students. This year the kinder has 43 three-year-old enrolments, 42 four-year-old enrolments and one Early Start Kindergarten enrolment. Although they opted out of free kinder this year, they are opting in next year, and the difference will be massive. They will join 97 per cent or more of the 2750 funded kinder services across our state that are participating in free kinder, a service that is benefiting up to 140,000 children.

Pre-prep to prep is a program for four-year-olds to prepare them for their first year of official school in prep. The program is a transitional schooling experience that will equip Victorian kids with confidence as they take the often scary step into primary school. It was introduced so that all Victorian children can go through two years of quality education prior to entering prep, and we know how particularly important this is for vulnerable children and Aboriginal children. Sometimes they live outside those early rollout areas. They will be eligible for 30 hours pre-prep every week from 2026. This includes children from refugee backgrounds and children known to child protection, and I want my community of Southern Metro to know this. To find a kinder provider that is participating in these schemes, just look for the purple tick on your local childcare building or in their online advertising. Parents and caregivers can also speak with staff at these services to determine which services would be best for their child, and thanks to our investment, more parents and children can get the very best services possible. This is due to our delivery of 50 childcare centres across the state, with the first handful of these centres set to be opened in 2025.

This bill is another action by the Allan Labor government that is committed to child care. This bill primarily seeks to address the issue of supply and demand for child care. This amendment bill seeks to implement recommendations from the 2019 national quality framework review. I will get to that shortly, but first I want to explain that the national quality framework is a scheme that will regulate education and childcare services across the country. The national quality framework consists of two arms, those being the education and care services national law and the national regulations. Joining these together with regulatory frameworks ensures that nationally standards are met in the quality of child care.

The national quality framework regulates many Victorian childcare service providers and service centres but not all. The national quality framework applies to roughly 4600 childcare providers. This includes providers like kindergartens, long day care services, family daycare services and outside school hours care services. This does not include all providers in Victoria. It does not include 200 occasional and limited-hours childcare centres, which are often located in neighbourhood houses and recreational facilities. These centres are regulated by the Children's Services Act 1996. The amendments in this bill ensure that the Children's Services Act and the national quality framework in Victoria are aligned and that there are no legislative discrepancies in the implementation of the premises approval in principle scheme.

The explanatory memorandum sets out a few items that I believe are relevant to this bill's function. Under 'Division 2 – Application for approval in principle' it states:

Section 106 provides for the making of an application for an approval in principle.

...

Subsection (2) provides that an application under subsection (1) may be made if –

- the premises are for a centre-based service, which includes all education and care services other than family day care services; and
- the premises are, once the construction, alteration or repair is complete, to be located in a new or existing Part 4 building; and



- a permit or approval is required under a Part 4 planning law or Part 4 building law, or both, for the construction, alteration or repair of the proposed education and care service premises or the development of the land on which the premises or Part 4 building is located.

But it has taken a long time to get us here, and it has taken us a long time to get such a comprehensive bill, which even has a 39-page explanatory memorandum. As I mentioned before, in 2019 a review was conducted into the national quality framework, identifying key areas for improvement. The review included specific identifiers and recommendations on how to improve issues specific to individual states. This included a recommendation for Victoria and the Australian Capital Territory to implement a premises approval in principle mechanism to improve their planning systems. This premises approval in principle scheme will allow developers, builders and service providers to do something specific. The education or childcare service being delivered at the premises by these organisations can apply for the project's location to be approved in principle. This will promote the timely construction of the service centre, ensuring more childcare centres can be built in Victoria. This will be available for all proposed childcare service providers in multistorey centres, defined as three or more floors including a ground floor.

Similarly, the bill amends the Children's Services Act 1996 to introduce an identical premises approval in principle scheme provision to apply to all childcare services that are not accounted for under the national quality framework. This is to assure all childcare service providers in Victoria. Under these amendments an approval in principle for the premises will give developers and prospective service providers something very important in the development process: assurance, which all parties involved need. We want teams ready to build, ready to go. As these amendments take effect across Victoria, the Department of Education will provide ample support and information to those childcare providers. The department will to the best of their ability support these prospective childcare providers in taking advantage of premises approval in principle to bring about the best result.

It is important to note that a key aspect of this regulatory scheme is that it is entirely voluntary. As my colleagues will be able to recognise is outlined in the bill, it is at the discretion of the builders or service providers to opt in to the voluntary premises approval in principle scheme. This means that different builders will be affected differently, and that is the way it should be. The bill was drafted with the input of the national quality framework review, which conducted a robust community-focused review of the national quality framework. This included input from key figures within the planning, development and building communities.

Aside from being a response to the recommendations set out in the 2019 review, the bill is just one component of the Allan Labor government's \$14 billion Best Start, Best Life reforms. We understand that the first 1000 days of a kid's life are vital. I know firsthand too; I have six kids. Evidence shows that two years are better than one when it comes to early childhood learning, so that is what we are doing. Kids who start at three gain academic and social benefits that their peers who start their education journey later do not. It lasts into their school years and beyond.

The reality is simple: we are growing fast. Melbourne is Australia's fastest growing city in real numbers, and the rest of the state is following suit. Planning regulations pose a problem to the effective and fast construction of good-quality childcare centres. It is clear that supply is an urgent dilemma, and the childcare sector needs our help to overcome it. We need the space for more families. We need to build up in the inner city. We cannot always build out, particularly in densely populated areas. While less than 1 per cent of the early childhood services are in the sort of multistorey buildings that are commonplace in the CBD, inner city and increasingly in the suburbs, we expect this to increase over time. Particularly thanks to our nation-leading housing statement, we will be transforming our established suburbs, building more homes closer to places that people already live. This bill will improve the approval process for services in new or altered multistorey buildings, and it will support the delivery of infrastructure that is needed to implement our nation-leading Best Start, Best Life reforms. It will prevent unnecessary and time-consuming rectification works.

I do want to note before wrapping up today that this is not the only plan we have to address the supply of childcare centres. From 2018 we have placed 70 new kinders in new schools we have built across the state. This has been designed to target the dreaded double drop-off. It will save parents and kids time and cut down on fuel, a relief for parents and guardians across the state. For the kids, being so close to their kinder when they move up into prep and primary school will help ease some of the anxieties of transitioning to a new chapter in their lives.

To finish today, I have been a member of the Parliament for almost a year; I was elected almost a year ago. One of the greatest privileges of my office is the ability to open a new kinder or school or to reopen them better than ever and to see the children's eyes open and to hear them speak about the benefits they get from their school. They take pride in it. They stand up straight and strong, and it is fantastic. It is not just the students that take pride in their school or kinder, it is the teachers too.

I hope you will indulge me quickly, in talking on a piece of early childhood legislation, to talk about an early childhood educator in my own community. Last Friday the Minister for Children, Minister Blandthorn, celebrated the annual Victorian Early Years Awards, an important recognition that since 2006 has been celebrating the amazing and tireless work of Victoria's early childhood sector in areas that improve the learning, health and wellbeing of our young children and their families. There were 10 winners and 16 finalists, and I am proud to say that the Early Childhood Teacher of the Year award was presented to a teacher at Glen Education Glover Street kinder in Bentleigh. There is a teacher there named Rachael Gemmill, and she has led her team to achieve something special. Her team exceeded in all seven areas of the national quality standard for education and the care of children, and her team was awarded for using evidence-based, scientifically backed strategies to support children's wellbeing. Rachael has a masters in inclusion and uses her expertise to create a safe workplace culture that embraces and thrives on inclusion and equality and provides a quality education to all the children regardless of their needs and abilities. I hope to have the opportunity to meet Rachael soon. We know all about the rollout of free kinder and expanded pre-prep. We also need to simultaneously build a workforce of Rachael's and people like her. That is why we have set a time line that allows us enough time to develop a skilled workforce and the infrastructure to support them so that early childhood educators of the future can best succeed.

I believe in the other place those in opposition indicated they would be in favour of this bill. I hope that they will be today. Let us put aside the petty politics and do something straightforward and simple for our kids. I commend the bill to the house.

**Michael GALEA** (South-Eastern Metropolitan) (14:57): I also rise to speak on the Early Childhood Legislation Amendment (Premises Approval in Principle) Bill 2023, one that I note, from the interjections I hear opposite, we hope will have cross-party support, which is very good to see.

**Georgie Crozier:** You didn't listen to me either.

**Michael GALEA:** Well, no, I didn't listen to you, Ms Crozier. I do apologise. I might have been outside the chamber at that time. I do try and catch your speeches always – just like your entertaining contributions earlier today. But I do rise to speak on what is a thoroughly important bill, and that is another bill which is a step towards delivery on the Allan government's commitment and the former Andrews government's commitment to a comprehensive reform package for early childhood education. This commitment is reflected through the unprecedented Best Start, Best Life reforms – crucial legislative reforms and an unprecedented investment in making early childhood education free and more accessible than ever before.

This bill is another key reform to enable the minister and the government to deliver the early childhood education facilities that our communities need. Foremost amongst the reforms in this bill are those that act on the new recommendations made in the 2019 national quality framework review, the NQFR, to establish a premises approval in principle scheme for new early childhood services, ECS, centres in multistorey buildings. This recommendation was agreed to and was also endorsed at the national

education ministers meeting. As it stands, less than 1 per cent of approved early childhood services are located in multistorey buildings, so this, I am sure members will agree, is not a substantial percentage by any means of ECS approvals. The number of proposals, however, for these early childhood services in multistorey buildings is of course expected to increase by some figure in future years.

Being a participant in the Legal and Social Issues Committee's ongoing inquiry into rental and housing in Victoria, I do note in particular that we have heard from some witnesses who did discuss density in detail, and we have what is referred to as a 'missing middle' in development and a missing middle in our consciousness of development as well. It is not just all high-rises in Southbank at one end and single-family homes in Clyde North at the other. There is space for us to be looking at that more moderated range of three- to six-storey buildings in appropriate locations, be that around train stations, other activity centres or tramlines. I am sure that will excite you as well, Acting President McArthur – it is always good to have good, appropriate, sensible development in and around the tram tracks. But that is an ongoing discussion that will be had.

Along with other members of the committee, I am looking forward to the tabling of that report, which I believe is to be next sitting week in this place. We will obviously have much more to discuss in the wake of that. But it comes, even more significantly, in the wake of the landmark housing statement that was released by then Premier Andrews just a couple of months ago, which is a comprehensive rethink of the way in which we structure housing in this state, not just for metropolitan Melbourne but for all of Victoria. It is a real exciting change moving forward, and there will no doubt be further announcements to come along the way. But as we do shift towards planning our cities, our suburbs, our towns and our regional hamlets more sensibly, things such as multistorey buildings that contain childcare centres will become more common. That is why this bill in particular is such a timely intervention both as part of the explicit reforms in terms of early childhood and also in terms of that broader discussion that has been occurring in the Parliament and certainly outside of it in previous weeks and months.

As part of that, the creation of this scheme is expected to improve the early childhood service approval process for services in new or altered multistorey buildings. This improvement to the approval process will support the delivery of infrastructure required to meet the growing demand for early childhood education as Victoria delivers the transformational Best Start, Best Life program. In addition, the approval in principle will help to assure applicants that proposed premises designs are adequate to meet the physical premises requirements in the regulatory scheme. This will benefit project development by preventing the need for rectification works to be undertaken at completion, which would be cost prohibitive in some cases and also a big waste of time. We have a huge demand for childcare services in Victoria, and we do not want to be taking any more time than we need to. Any changes required to meet those national quality framework, NQF, settings can be made before the commencement of construction works, which will also minimise disruption to that completion date.

The bill will also provide for better delivery of ECS across our state and will work alongside other significant reforms such as the Education and Training Reform Amendment (Land Powers) Bill 2023, which was debated in and passed by this chamber just recently. These legislative reforms will contribute to the delivery of extra capacity and the availability of ECS places where they are needed the most. Ensuring that we have the facilities and the staff needed as we roll out free three- and four-year-old kinder into prep and pre-prep as part of the crucial Best Start, Best Life program is really critical to ensuring that families can benefit in my region and across Victoria. The Allan Labor government knows that this is not just about record-level investment – unprecedented investment, if you will – into early childhood education, it is about supporting the infrastructure needed to give every child that best start in their educational journey.

This bill is designed to align with the federal law, amending the Children's Services Act 1996 to mirror the amendments that were made to that federal law. This will ensure that the premises approval in principle process is available for all early childhood services provided in this state. Developers,

builders and ECS providers will be able to apply to the regulatory authority for approval in principle for a proposed ECS premises to be located in a multistorey building – that is, three or more storeys in height. This process will occur during the planning and design phase of the development. The bill also makes further amendments to the Children’s Services Act 1996 to mirror the infringeable offences in the national law to make early childhood services in Victoria subject to the same regulatory enforcement mechanisms. This bill needs to be passed in 2023 to enable time for regulations to be made to support the scheme commencing in the Australian Capital Territory from mid-2024. This scheme is expected to commence in Victoria in October 2024. The scheme is also an integral part of delivering a better ECS approval process that will enable the development of premises to avoid costly rectification works. Approval in principle will be a voluntary application process in Victoria and is not intended to be mandatory when it commences.

As it stands, two regulatory schemes for early childhood services operate in Victoria. These are the NQF, the national quality framework, which consists of the national law and the Education and Care Services National Regulations, and the Children’s Services Act 1996 and Children’s Services Regulations 2020, which regulate children’s services in Victoria that are outside the scope of the NQF. The NQF regulates education and care services that are provided to children on a regular basis. There are around 4740 such services in Victoria, which include kinders, long day care services, family day care services and outside school care services as well. These are the services provided to children on a non-regular or ad hoc basis, occasional care, or where children attend for very short periods – limited hours of care. There are around 210 children’s services, often located in settings such as neighbourhood houses and recreational facilities. Both acts will be amended consistently in this bill to match those 2019 national quality framework review recommendations and to ensure uniformity across the regulatory schemes.

Amending this framework to enable these facilities to be built with greater capacity to meet the growing demand is a really critical step as Victoria transforms early childhood education. It is important to note in this debate and to put this bill into the context of, as I have said, the unprecedented investment this government is making towards families, parents and children. We are delivering the Best Start, Best Life program, a nation-leading reform to early childhood education, which is critical to providing the educational outcomes our children need. I do wish to note the hard work of both the current Minister for Children Minister Blandthorn, in the chamber with us today, and her office, who have done an enormous amount of work, as has the previous minister in this space. I also note with some regret that we no longer have an education shadow in this chamber. We do miss the good Dr Bach already. We do not get to see those debates as we once did between Dr Bach and Minister Blandthorn when it came to a number of their overlapping policy areas, and I am sure that we will all miss them for some time to come. Never mind, I am sure we will see many more debates with whoever the Liberal Party may deem to replace him. Hopefully it will be a little bit smoother than the Monash preselection over the weekend.

For every dollar invested in early childhood education Australia receives back \$2 over that child’s life through higher productivity and earning capacity and reduced government spending on health, welfare and crime. That is why we are delivering a \$14 billion transformation of the education system at the early stages, which is Best Start, Best Life. As part of this, from year to year, free kinder has been rolled out for all three- and four-year-old children at participating services. Under Best Start, Best Life the Labor government has made kindergarten free. Under this \$270 million program, up to 140,000 children and families can access kinder for free this year, saving families up to \$2500 in fees per child per year. More than 2750 services across Victoria offer free kindergarten this year, which is 97 per cent of all services across the state.

I do wish to pick up from the comments of a previous speaker on this side, Mr Batchelor, who spoke with great passion about his campaign for Glen Eira to reverse their perhaps ill-sighted decision to remove themselves from the provision of early childhood education, echoing the similar calls we have had in this place for the City of Knox to reconsider their decision, which was very unwise in my view.

I do wish to also acknowledge the single Knox councillor, Sorina Grasso, who actually voted against what is a very regressive reform. In the face of an increase of demand but also an increase of government support for these early childhood services, we are seeing some councils decide that they do not wish to provide those services to their community. It is all too difficult for them, so they are walking away.

This is in spite of the fact that, as Mr Batchelor said, other councils such as Bayside and Kingston in my region are actually choosing to expand on those services – because they see the value that those services provide to their communities. So I also join Mr Batchelor in calling upon both Glen Eira and Knox councils to reconsider those decisions, because, for the reasons that I have just gone through, early childhood is such an important time. It is such an important time to get it right, to make that investment, because you get that investment back. That is exactly what these reforms will be doing.

The next step of these reforms will be to then transform four-year-old kindergarten into pre-prep over the decade. Pre-prep will be a universal 30-hour-a-week, play-based learning program available to every four-year-old child in Victoria. This will double the educational opportunities available for children in the year before school. It will mean that they have twice the amount of teacher-led, play-based learning time to develop critical social, emotional and cognitive skills that will set them up for the following years of their education and for life.

Greater access to this high-quality, teacher-led, play-based learning means better educational outcomes for all our young Victorians. From 2025 pre-prep will be rolled out, starting in the rural and regional communities of Ararat, Gannawarra, Hindmarsh, Murrindindi, Northern Grampians and Yarriambiack. More LGAs will soon follow, with families in metropolitan Melbourne being able to access up to 20 hours of pre-prep from 2030 and all children being able to access the full 30 hours of pre-prep from 2032. We are also making investments, reducing the need for the double drop-off, in other early learning centres right across this state.

This is a significant investment that is one step further in building the Education State for all young Victorians. That is why I commend this bill to the house.

**Lizzie BLANDTHORN** (Western Metropolitan – Minister for Children, Minister for Disability) (15:12): I am also pleased to commend the bill to the house.

**Motion agreed to.**

**Read second time.**

**Committed.**

*Committee*

**Clause 1 (15:13)**

**Georgie CROZIER:** I will ask all of my questions, which are not too many, under clause 1. What is the current approvals process for developers who want to include a childcare centre in new or refurbished multistorey buildings in Victoria? I am just wondering if you could provide us with what is required at present, prior to this legislation being implemented.

**Lizzie BLANDTHORN:** Let me just clarify one aspect. For the provision of the service, the regulation is obviously with the department. There is no current requirement on the developer.

**Georgie CROZIER:** There is no requirement for developers now. So there would not have been, in that case, any instances where they had to retrofit because there were no regulatory requirements. Is that correct? Am I correct in assuming that?

**Lizzie BLANDTHORN:** Not that I am aware of, and there is actually only a very small number of these multistorey services at the current point in time as well – less than 10, I am advised.

**Georgie CROZIER:** What are the key considerations regarding the emergency evacuation of children that inform the regulatory approval of childcare centres housed in multistorey buildings at present?

**Lizzie BLANDTHORN:** Just as a clarification, do you mean as it currently stands? Let me just clarify that.

It is currently the same as it is for all multistorey buildings for all people. But in terms of the actual service provision and the department regulating that service provision in the first place, they would have to be able to show that they had a safe way for all children – children of all-abilities – to both access the service and also leave the service in the case of an emergency.

**Georgie CROZIER:** You answered the next question I had, I think, in that response, so I thank you for that. Could you provide to the house what organisations were consulted on the design of the approval in principle scheme?

**Lizzie BLANDTHORN:** My understanding and advice is that consultation occurred broadly. Obviously this was a decision that was considered by the whole of the national education ministers forum. The consultation occurred across early childhood service providers and developers. It received positive support from the likes of architects across Victoria in that process. The Victorian government also undertook further targeted consultation back in April where key peak bodies and key stakeholders in the construction and building sector, including the Property Council of Australia, the Urban Development Institute of Australia and the Master Builders Association, were provided with the opportunity to comment on the scheme's design. No responses were received from those stakeholders. But more broadly it was well received, and we did not actually receive any concerns during the consultation approach.

**Georgie CROZIER:** How many developments per year does the government expect to make use of the scheme?

**Lizzie BLANDTHORN:** As I said, at the moment my advice is it is a very small number of current services, and obviously it will grow over time with the development particularly of metropolitan Melbourne. I was listening to Mr Batchelor's contribution before. When you consider housing developments like Docklands, for example, there is more and more of a need for these multistorey services. It will grow over time. I mean, it is 'How long is a piece of string?' in effect. The important thing is that there are the provisions there to provide for it and to provide for it safely.

**Georgie CROZIER:** For those 10 that you said that are in existence now, they are obviously very supportive of this. Have they indicated any concern about the scheme or potentially the building that they are in? I know that I have visited some early education centres in the city, in Docklands, as you mentioned just then. Have they got any concerns about their current requirements, or have they given any feedback to you?

**Lizzie BLANDTHORN:** My advice is that the consultation only received positive feedback. There were no concerns raised by anybody.

**Georgie CROZIER:** Minister, the scheme is currently voluntary. Does the government have any plans to make it a regulatory requirement for childcare centres proposed in multistorey buildings?

**Lizzie BLANDTHORN:** If I understand your question correctly: do we have a plan for it to be mandatory – is that what you mean? It is deliberately voluntary at this point in time. We will keep it under review and assess it, but it is anticipated that it be a voluntary scheme, unlike for example the ACT, which we know would like to move to a mandatory system. That is not our intention at this point in time.

**Georgie CROZIER:** That review process that you have just mentioned – will that be conducted in any particular way? As these multistorey buildings come online, is that what the government will be doing – reviewing how it is actually being rolled out and working?

**Lizzie BLANDTHORN:** When I say ‘review’, I am not referring to a formal review mechanism as much as our intention is that it be voluntary, and we anticipate that voluntary will work. As I said, there were no concerns raised during the consultation, so we expect that it will be a system that people will be signed up to.

**Georgie CROZIER:** Thank you, Minister; that is reassuring. What role will the regulatory agency play in the operation of the approval in principle scheme?

**Lizzie BLANDTHORN:** I guess the value of the system is that it will be done at an earlier stage, so the approval in principle process will allow for that toing and froing, as you would expect. The regulatory authority would ultimately provide the approval in principle in the same way they do for other types of buildings, but you would have that early conversation, which would give developers that confidence.

**Georgie CROZIER:** I could skip this question; we sort of discussed it. It was in the review process. Will there be any formal mechanism for feedback to have that review process? Is that what the government is planning, or how will that be conducted?

**Lizzie BLANDTHORN:** I have nothing further to add to what I indicated before. There is not a formal mechanism built into it as such. There were no concerns raised, so we anticipate there will be strong take-up and people will comply. If it was observed that there was an issue or a problem in the take-up, then we might consider other ways, but at this point in time we do not anticipate that. There were no concerns raised, and everyone seems committed to being able to provide developments that are safe for children. So there is not a formal mechanism as such.

**Georgie CROZIER:** Thank you for that; I think it is perfectly clear. The peak bodies will be monitoring this and getting that feedback from those that are involved, and then that would flow through to government, I would presume. If there were any issues, that would be highlighted. Is that what you are expecting as well in terms of that large support for the scheme and the process?

**Lizzie BLANDTHORN:** Yes. As I have said a number of times, it was obviously broadly discussed by education ministers across the country. Everyone was in agreement. There has been certainly broad agreement, and indeed no concerns were raised by stakeholders in the consultation process. In particular, as I said earlier, those developer organisations were consulted as well, many of which did not provide any response, so it is expected that there was no concern. Of course there will always be an open dialogue with both those who are building such developments and designing such developments and those that are running the services within them. If it became apparent that there was a broad-scale problem, then we would seek to revisit it, but at this stage everyone seems signed up and we do not see the need for this to be a mandatory scheme. Of course it is always under review, as all legislation and all regulations always are, as to whether they are achieving the outcome that is desired. But at this point in time everyone’s commitment is to a voluntary scheme that no-one raised concerns about and that everyone agrees is in the best interests of the safety of children.

**Clause agreed to; clauses 2 to 20 agreed to.**

**Reported to house without amendment.**

**Lizzie BLANDTHORN** (Western Metropolitan – Minister for Children, Minister for Disability) (15:26): I move:

That the report be adopted.

**Motion agreed to.**

**Report adopted.**

*Third reading*

**Lizzie BLANDTHORN** (Western Metropolitan – Minister for Children, Minister for Disability) (15:26): I move:

That the bill be now read a third time.

**Motion agreed to.**

**Read third time.**

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

**Transport Legislation Amendment Bill 2023**

*Second reading*

**Debate resumed on motion of Lizzie Blandthorn:**

That the bill be now read a second time.

**Evan MULHOLLAND** (Northern Metropolitan) (15:27): I rise to speak on the Transport Legislation Amendment Bill 2023. I would firstly like to thank my colleague in the other place Danny O'Brien for the hard work he has done on this bill and for formulating our position on it and also my colleague in the other place Matthew Guy for his input. This bill is a very large omnibus bill. The main element of the bill is an introduction of a legal process for a research trial for driving and medical cannabis use. It provides regulation of e-scooter and bicycle share schemes for local councils; clarifies governance arrangements for various transport agencies, including V/Line; makes various safety reforms, including allowing speed cameras and speed detection services to be used on bikes and e-scooters, and rules around alcohol interlocks; amends rules surrounding the sharing of data from commercial passenger vehicles and the public transport networks with respect to CCTV footage and Myki and travel data; and makes various other technical and consequential amendments.

Clause 56 of the bill grants the minister power to designate a road safety research trial by notice in the *Government Gazette*. Under the trial the usual rules under the Road Safety Act 1986 would not apply to participants in the trial, which will assess impairments and impacts from any drugs, alcohol or fatigue and inform the methods police could use to assess driving impairment. The trial would be in a closed-circuit, controlled driving environment; however, even off the road the Road Safety Act 1986 still applies in some cases, necessitating these amendments to make the trial exempt.

The government has not yet given further details of where or how the trial will run. I am looking forward to those details. In our view this is a vexed issue. We do not believe it is a simple problem, as some make it out to be. We do see both sides of the argument.

On one hand it is understandable that users of a legally prescribed drug see it as unfair that they are breaking the law by driving with THC in their system, even though they might be entirely free of impairment. In most cases users will only be impaired by medically prescribed cannabis for a couple of hours. The problem is that THC, as we have heard almost every day in this place, can remain in their system for weeks or even months, and it is not legal to drive with any THC in your system. Currently roadside testing is done for alcohol, MDMA, methamphetamine and cannabis. However, unlike for alcohol, the test for THC is a binary test – it either returns a positive result or it returns a



negative result. It is certainly concerning to many Victorians that they are taking medical cannabis and are therefore unable to drive, but on the other hand there is the aspect of road safety and the effect of an exemption for medical cannabis users.

If there were simply an exemption, it would be possible for users to use marijuana for recreational purposes and then show their prescription to a police officer to avoid punishment. There is also a risk of impaired driving, be that through driving whilst impaired by either legally prescribed cannabis or recreational cannabis. A recent parliamentary library report on the bill, which includes some of the history of the issue, mentions Victoria Police's submission to the inquiry on this matter, which says cannabis use remains a significant threat to road safety. It goes on to say that THC is likely to reduce a driver's ability to have full control of the vehicle. This is because THC slows down reaction times. It distorts perception of speed and distance and reduces concentration. The parliamentary library report goes on to say that this is affirmed by other agencies such as the Transport Accident Commission and VicRoads.

Whether it is excessive alcohol or excessive THC, we know there will be an impairment effect. Because of this the government and the opposition both opposed the Road Safety Amendment (Medical Cannabis) Bill 2023 earlier this year, but I will restate here that we recognise the unfairness that exists in the current situation and that we will keep an open mind on this issue. This bill sets up a process to further examine the issue. We do have a few questions around the detail of the trial, which I am sure will come in later stages, and I am sure those questions that we do have will receive very forthcoming answers from the government.

On the e-scooter and e-bike share part of the bill, the bill seeks to address some issues raised by the e-scooter and e-bike trials the government has been running for some time now in Melbourne and Ballarat. I am a big fan of e-scooters. In fact I used some of my early time as a member for Northern Metropolitan Region to advocate for our e-scooter community in the Victorian Parliament. I worked with our growing e-scooter community and successfully advocated for the rules to be changed to enable the riding of privately owned e-scooters. They were stuck in an e-scooter purgatory whereby it was legal and lawful for you to rent an e-scooter off a big multinational company in Melbourne's CBD but it was unlawful to ride around on one you had legally bought yourself from somewhere like JB Hi-Fi. I was very happy to see that change, and I am very happy that people with privately owned e-scooters, of which there are over 100,000, are now able to ride them around wherever they like.

E-scooters are a fun way to get around, but they are also an environmentally friendly way to get around. If we look at cars per household and think that that number is an issue, then a good way to reduce that is e-scooter ownership and the use of e-scooters and e-scooter share schemes. Especially if you live around our inner cities and like to get around, want to go to a friend's place or want to go on a picnic or to visit some friends, e-scooters are a great way to get around. I was pleased to advocate on behalf of people in my community and in my electorate to see that change fulfilled.

One of the issues identified is share scheme scooters being left on footpaths and other places that present a tripping hazard and can pose difficulties for those with a disability. I completely understand those concerns. We have a couple of concerns with the changes, as the bill appears to essentially shift the cost of the issue and all the complexities that come with that to local government. I guess that is a continuation of other areas of government where we have seen a shifting to local government, whether it be waste or whether it be maternal and child health, and all the costs associated with those getting pushed onto local governments in my community. I am looking forward to local governments in my community, including Hume City Council, Merri-bek City Council, Mitchell Shire Council and the Northern Councils Alliance, who have all expressed to me a great interest in submitting to the Economy and Infrastructure Committee inquiry into local government that was put forward by this side of the house – and it was successful in getting that inquiry up. I think it will be important to shine a light on how much more cost shifting is going onto local government.

The government has not provided guidance on those issues of pedestrian safety and clutter on our roadsides and footpaths, and that is reflected by the Municipal Association of Victoria, MAV, which actually came back to the opposition and said:

The proposed approach, which will require each council to assess the positive proposals and negotiate with potential providers individually, seems insufficient and appears to pass the compliance and financial obligations onto local government.

The MAV went on to say:

Without an agreed state or national standard, and consistent approaches between councils there is a risk of a patchwork approach to managing e-scooters across the State.

This is where our concern lies. The MAV also said:

The State should provide a model agreement with standard conditions to guide local governments.

We actually agree with this, and we understand that this might well be the case. With any new technology there will be some impacts and concerns raised by members of the community. E-scooters are a convenient and very fun way to get around, as I was saying, for many people, including many people in my electorate. They are also an environmentally friendly way to decongest our roads rather than adding to the growing traffic.

Many issues raised by those such as the AMA apply to other modes of transport like cycling, as well as activities in general. All modes of transport carry some risk, and the responsible use of e-scooters and e-bikes as well as responsible cycling and driving should be encouraged. Particularly around the time that I was advocating for the e-scooter community, we saw a hell of a lot of fearmongering about accidents, but if you actually deep dive into the data, you will see that the rate is pretty consistent with the rate of accidents in cycling. I think we need to use some common sense. We have great new technology in e-scooters, which, as I said, are a great way to get around the community. Cycling is not for everyone, and e-scooters provide an option for people that may be environmentally conscious or do not want to go and buy a car. Perhaps they live in Richmond or they live in Brunswick or they live in Preston and they want to get around in a different way. E-scooters and e-bikes provide an opportunity for people to do just that.

On bus driver accreditation, part 2 of the bill amends the Bus Safety Act 2009 to implement a revised bus driver accreditation scheme. This is designed to modernise the accreditation process and align it with the process for commercial passenger vehicles like taxis, hire cars and rideshares; provide exemptions for drivers on certain matters; and bring both buses and CPVs under one regulator, Safe Transport Victoria. But in our consultation with industry we learned that the government did not actually consult with the industry on the matter – interesting. That is something that we have become used to with this government. The good people at the Bus Association Victoria actually knew nothing about this when we called them. They knew nothing about it, and we understand that neither the Transport Workers' Union nor the other unions were involved – interesting; very, very interesting. Usually they are the first ones to know, before anyone else. Usually they get an inside run. It is a failing that the government has not consulted with industry or the drivers. Nonetheless, despite being a little bit grumpy, the Bus Association Victoria did not raise any concerns with these changes. I will leave the opinion of the Bus Association Victoria for other members.

On alcohol interlocks, speed detectors, e-scooters and free rego for apprentices, the bill makes a number of changes to various road rules and legislation to reinforce the dangers of drink driving and to target repeat offenders. Drivers who have had an alcohol interlock condition removed from their licence will face a further three years of the zero BAC condition on their licence. This is consistent with the current position of a disqualified drink driver when they return to licensed driving. The bill also clarifies that an exemption to the zero BAC requirement for unlicensed drivers renewing their licence only applies to drivers who have failed to renew an expiring licence and are still within the six-month renewal grace period. Anyone beyond this period will not be eligible for an exemption.

Clause 48 extends the use of speed cameras and speed detectors to all vehicles, which includes scooters and bicycles. Such devices can be used to fine e-scooter and bike riders for breaking the speed limit or to penalise e-scooter riders for travelling faster than the 20-kilometre statewide limit. Clause 47 bans the use of e-scooters on freeways, which is probably sensible. Clause 46 allows police and PSOs to prevent a person who is incapable of driving from driving not only their own vehicle but any other vehicle, regardless of whether it is motorised. Currently when someone is – the term is ‘incapable of driving’, but we will assume that this is from impairment – impaired from either drugs or alcohol or some other issue that may have occurred, police can take the keys effectively and stop them from driving their vehicle. The amendment stops them also from getting into another car or onto a bike or onto an e-scooter or something like that, whether motorised or not. That ensures that both that person and the general community on the roads are safe as well.

Part 7 corrects a problem of the government’s own making. Its free rego for apprentices policy raised concerns that without paying a TAC charge these motorists would not actually be covered by the TAC. This section corrects the anomaly to ensure they are covered, which is quite amusing and quite an unintended consequence, but that happens when you do not look over all the detail and have to come back here and clean it up.

This bill also formalises a number of arrangements relating to transport sector governance and repeals redundant provisions under preceding arrangements. These relate to changes the government has made to transport sector agencies in recent years, including establishing Safe Transport Victoria and converting V/Line from a board-managed state-owned enterprise to a statutory authority with the CEO reporting to the Secretary of Department of Transport and Planning. These were established via transport restructuring orders under the Transport Integration Act 2010. The government has clarified these changes to V/Line will help deliver better regional services and appointed a Labor mate Matt Carrick as the CEO. I think Victorians would question if these services have actually improved.

Despite my electorate being metropolitan – I am a member for Northern Metropolitan Region – due to the government’s inaction on infrastructure many of my constituents actually use V/Line. A growing number of my constituents use a V/Line service. In fact according to recent reports many constituents travelling from Wallan, Kalkallo and Donnybrook regularly have to stand for 50 minutes on packed trains. I have even heard from constituents that service conductors actually have had to stop people boarding and others have had to sit in baggage areas on a V/Line service. Some people that have reached out to me are having to change their work contracts and work arrangements to work from home more because of the delays in V/Line services.

We often see government media releases, including from the new Premier Ms Allan when she was Minister for Transport Infrastructure, boasting that V/Line is the fastest growing rail service in Australia. That is right; it is the fastest growing rail service in Australia. You would think that is because of government efficiency or government investment – you know, ‘How good is this state government?’ That is what it sounds like when the Premier says that V/Line is the fastest growing rail service in Australia. But when you take a deep dive, you can see why it is the fastest growing, because it is no longer just a regional service. We have established suburbs in my electorate like Wallan, Beveridge and Donnybrook that are all covered by V/Line – there is no electrification even planned – and we have got established suburbs in places like Melton and Wyndham Vale that were meant to be part of the *Western Rail Plan* connecting them to a Metro service that are not. So you have got tens of thousands or hundreds of thousands of people moving into growth areas across Melbourne that are serviced by V/Line. No wonder it is the fastest growing rail service in Australia, when government inaction has left growth suburbs on a regional train line. That is actually what has happened in Victoria.

Let me remind you – my colleague Trung Luu will be quite interested – the *Western Rail Plan*, which is now an evolving promise they seem to have backed away from, was promised by the Labor Party at two separate elections. They went to the good people of the western suburbs and they said, ‘We’re going to deliver electrified services to Melton and Wyndham Vale, because we do what we say and we say what we do’ – except for the *Western Rail Plan*. They also had several Labor candidates, now

Labor members, promoting the *Western Rail Plan* – how good is Labor for the western suburbs! – just like they were all promoting the airport rail link.

This government have failed regarding regional services and they have failed regarding V/Line, especially in its capacity to deal with growth areas and the amount of people moving into these growth areas. I invite people on the government side to come with me to either Wallan station or Donnybrook station and watch the cancellations – watch people get incredibly frustrated because those cancellations mean that even when a V/Line train does rock up it is packed and they cannot get on. This is no way for people in growth areas to live. Young people who move out to the outer suburbs to get a home for themselves and migrant families who move out to the outer suburbs to start a family are forced to deal with government inertia causing mayhem on our rail lines that should have been electrified a long time ago. The state government loves to take the credit for all these investments, but well over 80 per cent of the Regional Rail Revival was actually funded by the former federal Liberal government.

This bill has a range of other amendments, such as to improve clarity and transparency around the sharing of data and the transport sector, including round-trip data informing the State Revenue Office on the commercial passenger vehicle service levy with respect to public transport network data such as CCTV footage and the Myki ticketing system. There are multiple other minor amendments that clarify the right of drivers to a review of decisions under the Commercial Passenger Vehicle Industry Act 2017; provide further regulation-making powers under the Marine (Domestic Commercial Vessel National Law Application) Act 2013; formally abolish the infrastructure reference panel under the Road Management Act 2004, which disbanded in 2019 and had not met since 2018, and instead require the minister to consult on codes of practice with relevant ministers, utilities, road authorities and public transport providers; change clauses to use gender-inclusive language; and of course multiple consequential amendments to correct name and agency changes in various acts.

It is worth actually mentioning, while I still have time, that this government has failed dismally on roads across Victoria, especially regional roads and those in my electorate in Melbourne's north. I contributed to a great edition of the *North Central Review* last week – a paper that covers my electorate in Wallan and Beveridge – which was basically a huge exposé on the lack of investment in roads. Anyone who has driven up to Wallan – I know Acting President McArthur has, and I hope others that might also be members for Northern Metropolitan have – will know that if you drive along the Northern Highway, on Watson Street or on Old Sydney Road your first requirement is to have a four-wheel drive, and even if you do it might still be damaged. I have seen, at one point, five cars lined up on Watson Street because of potholes on the Northern Highway.

In the state budget that came out in May we saw a \$150 million cut to road maintenance. We see a serious lack of investment in our regional roads. We are seeing that play out across the state. Certainly the feedback I get is that people are at breaking point. And let us not forget that it was those on the other side who blocked a parliamentary inquiry we tried to put up this term looking at our regional roads. I will keep fighting for investment in those roads because people are desperate. People in my electorate, in Wallan, after complaining several times to VicRoads, were forced to fill a massive pothole with a garden bed, with a little tree and a sign that said 'Wallan Botanical Gardens, sponsored by VicRoads'. After weeks of complaining, surprise, surprise, it was removed within 24 hours – funny, that. This is the kind of thing we expect from this government. The opposition is not opposing this bill, but we do have some questions around the cannabis trial for the committee stage.

**Jeff BOURMAN** (Eastern Victoria) (15:56): I will be very, very quick. I might sum up Mr Mulholland's comments about regional roads as 'In the city we drive on the left of the road; in the country we drive on what is left of the road.' It is appalling. I do a lot of country kilometres. It does not matter whether you go north, east, west or south; it is getting dangerous. But that is not what I want to talk about today. I am going to confine my brief comments to new section 99C, the road safety trial to do with drugs. My understanding is that this is not new, that it has been done before. To put it in context, in 2023 to date we have lost 258 lives. For the whole of 2022 we lost 213 lives. That is a

21.1 per cent increase to date, and there is still a month and a half to go. We can have our beliefs on recreational drugs and medicinal drugs too, but I just do not think this is sending the right message at a time when our road toll is going up not by a little bit, not by a statistically irrelevant amount, but by a lot – 20 per cent. That is getting close to a quarter. I will be opposing that part in the committee stage.

**Sonja TERPSTRA** (North-Eastern Metropolitan) (15:58): I rise to make a contribution on this bill, the Transport Legislation Amendment Bill 2023. It is an omnibus bill that seeks to amend a range of acts. I will go through the main points of what the bill is seeking to amend. The purpose of this bill is to amend the following acts: the Road Safety Act 1986, the Road Management Act 2004, the Transport Accident Act 1986, the Bus Safety Act 2009, the Commercial Passenger Vehicle Industry Act 2017, the Marine (Domestic Commercial Vessel National Law Application) Act 2013, the Transport (Compliance and Miscellaneous) Act 1983 and the Transport Integration Act 2010.

I acknowledge Mr Bourman's contribution and his concern around road safety. I think that everyone in this chamber would share concerns around road safety. The government continues to work on driving down – pardon the pun – driver behaviour that is unsafe and that can lead to the causes of the increased road toll, accidents and the like. That is of concern to the government, and we are continuing to work hard on bringing the road toll down.

The purpose of the bill, however – back to the bill – is to do a range of things. It will enable research trials to support evidence-based road safety policy, particularly in relation to medicinal cannabis trials, and the government is currently undertaking a trial in regard to that. That is a bit of a tricky area, because worldwide I guess what we have got to try and figure out is – and this is from what I understand, and this is what the trial is about – how do you measure fatigue or impairment? They are things that are quite tricky. There is a lot of good work being done in that space to analyse that and to look at that and also to establish a legislative framework for local government authorities to manage issues in relation to vehicle-sharing schemes, such as for e-scooters. I have had some inquiries from constituents around this. When we talk about e-scooters, there are also e-bikes. Some of these can be quite powerful, and there are enduring questions around how they use the roads, what parts they can use and cannot use and the like. There are some questions that I know constituents have raised with me around some of the larger e-bikes. People are taking them on trains – is that allowed? Obviously when you have a trial around these sorts of things, that is where you can figure those sorts of things out and look at what is happening around the world perhaps.

Then we are, importantly: implementing important bus driver reforms, making changes to commercial passenger vehicle laws in relation to information sharing, enabling Safe Transport Victoria to designate waters for the purpose of the national standard for commercial vehicles, and clarifying that persons exempt from paying the transport accident charge to the TAC are still fully covered for traffic accidents – that goes to our recent announcements around apprentices not having to pay rego. Currently if you are an eligible apprentice, you get your rego for free, which is a very welcome initiative, but we just need to clarify that apprentices are still covered by the TAC as road users when they are on the road. Of course the TAC is the connection there. If you are paying registration, there is a connection there so that if you have an accident the TAC covers you, so we just need to clarify that.

In terms of other changes, they will: reform the process for determining the disclosure and use of information in relation to the public transport network, support the efficient administration and regulation of the transport sector through a number of other improvements to the operation of transport law – as you can see, it is an omnibus bill that seeks to do a range of things. Like I said, there are a lot of changes to various acts and pieces of legislation, but I might just focus on the one for the moment about the cannabis trial overview, which I think people will have a lot of interest in, because it is an area that, for example, people who may be taking medicinal cannabis still feel concerned about – if they are pulled over and tested for drugs, because cannabis is still currently illegal, what that might mean for them as a road user. Effectively this is what the trial will look at, nutting out some of these issues.

In terms of road safety, Victoria has always had a strong track record in leading life-saving road safety policies and initiatives. In 1970 we led the world in becoming the first jurisdiction to introduce mandatory seatbelts, for example. In 1976 we were the first state to introduce random breath testing. In the late 1980s Victoria again was a world leader in introducing speed cameras. In 2004 Victoria was the first state to introduce mandatory roadside drug tests. In 2008 Victoria introduced its graduated licensing system. As you can see, there are a number of things that we have done over many decades, and we will continue to act to improve road safety and bring down the road toll. These initiatives have been found time and again to have saved countless Victorian lives.

I can remark, and I have made this contribution in this place in another context in another debate, that as the chair of the motorcycle community engagement panel during motorcycle safety awareness month I had the pleasure and the privilege of going down to Anglesea to look at the latest ANCAP safety testing and some of the safety initiatives that are being looked at. Vehicle manufacturers want to achieve a 5-star safety rating. Some of the vehicle technology that is available from a safety perspective is quite amazing. For example, if you were parked on the side of the road and you went to open your door but there was a cyclist coming, there would be a mechanism that would actually override you and prevent you from opening the door until that cyclist, whether it was a motorcyclist or someone riding a pushbike, had actually passed you. There are vehicles available now that would detect that, but the next step is that it would prevent you from opening the door and potentially save that person from injury. There are a number of people who ride bicycles who have been what they call 'doored' – where someone has not seen them and unwittingly opened the door – and not only does it injure that person, but they can be knocked under a moving car.

That is just one example of some of the safety mechanisms that are being looked at and assessed under the ANCAP system. Also evasive action for cars – if you do not see a motorcyclist and you try to turn across it, it would take evasive action and take over the steering. These are all impressive safety improvements. Again, motorcyclists – whilst they are a very small proportion of our road users and licence-holders, they are disproportionately represented in the road toll. That is something this government is very much aware of, and we will continue to look at ways that we can improve safety and prevent harm to people on our roads.

As I was saying, the strong record that we have has continued this year with a suite of reforms targeting driver distraction and seatbelt wearing. These offences come into effect in April, and further road safety initiatives are enabled through this bill as well. One of the key reforms in this bill will enable the minister to designate road safety research trials. This then gets to the point about what is happening in this space for cannabis. It could be for the purpose of informing the development of methods used by police officers to assess whether someone is impaired by drugs, alcohol or fatigue. That is the key point: what is impairment and what does it look like? I have made the point in here in the context of another debate about being fatigued. I know when we have been in here doing lengthy debates late into the night, I am tired and the next day I am fatigued. I often worry about driving home but also the next day. It takes me a day or two to recover from a really late night like that, and I am fatigued on the road. I know that I would be distracted. I am not affected by drugs or alcohol, but fatigue is a very real concern. We continue the work in this space to look at all ways and any ways that we can assist road users to continue to operate their vehicles in a safe way and protect road users from injury or harm.

This amendment, in terms of this bill, will be important. It will enable the government to run world-leading research trials, not just relating to medicinal cannabis but also in other areas where there is scope for research, to support the ongoing work and address some of the most difficult challenges that road users face in this safety space, ultimately to make our roads safer for all road users. I was just mentioning fatigue. The bill particularly talks about detecting fatigue at the roadside and also detecting impairment at the roadside for both illicit drugs and prescribed medications. Some vehicles already have fitted to them the ability to detect if you are not paying attention to the road – so if you are moving your head from side to side or you are distracted. Some people might be reaching for their coffee cup in the middle of the console or, unfortunately, reaching for their phone, which they should not be

reaching for. The car could detect you moving your head or not looking at the road dead ahead, and it would issue some kind of warning. Even a vibrating steering wheel is one example I was told about the other day. If you are distracted and veering off the road, the steering wheel can vibrate. So there are already a range of technologies available to help you when you are operating your vehicle. But as I said, this world-first, world-leading research at the roadside can help detect impairment for both illicit drugs and prescribed medications. This amendment is crucial to these sorts of reforms, because it allows for the process that can change how the Road Safety Act and its regulations apply to trial participants – that is, specified provisions of the act or regulations, and how they might apply, or might not apply, to trial participants in any very particular form.

In the context of a closed-circuit medicinal cannabis trial that was announced by the Allan Labor government earlier this year, this will enable trial participants to drive in a controlled environment after taking their prescribed medicinal cannabis, without the fear of breaking the law, whilst participating in valuable research to inform Victoria's approach to drug driving and medicinal cannabis use into the future.

Delta-9-tetrahydrocannabinol, also known as THC, is the primary compound in cannabis, which is capable of producing intoxicating and impairing effects. Some forms of medicinal cannabis contain THC. Depending on the prescribing medical practitioner, some forms of medicinal cannabis oil contain the THC, and some do not. Depending on what the condition is that the person is requiring treatment for, the doctor may prescribe something that has THC in it, and that can produce intoxicating effects. But likewise, some prescription medications for pain relief also can make road users drowsy. So it is important that we gather information from the trial to inform our response going forward.

Under the current presence-based drug driving laws, any detectable amount of THC constitutes an offence under the Road Safety Act, including if it results from taking prescribed medicinal cannabis – so again, prescribed by a GP for a particular purpose in regard to pain management and the like and those sorts of things. The current regime is about detection of THC; it cannot and does not measure impairment.

The Allan Labor government has acknowledged the challenges with balancing individual health and driving needs with road safety outcomes, and we are committed to establishing an evidence-based policy position on medicinal cannabis and safe driving. A closed-circuit track trial will provide valuable information while also mitigating possible risks to all road users on the public road network. The proposed closed-circuit track trial and other ongoing road safety research initiatives are intended to provide the research required to work through this problem without increasing road safety risks. These are unknowns, and we think it is a good and appropriate mechanism to have a trial. It is a closed-circuit track – not on open roads – because we do not know how different people might react or perform under different circumstances.

Some of the circumstances that someone might find themselves driving in, which you would hope and likely expect that the trial would analyse, could include if someone is driving at night in the dark, if someone is driving during heavy rain or a storm or if somebody has been awake for a period of time and is sleep deprived as well as being on THC. These will all be invaluable things that I hope the trial will evaluate and then look at how they impact driver response times and whether someone is distracted by those sorts of things. Again, it has got to be about safety, and we want to make sure not only that the driver is safe and their driving performance is not impaired but also that other road users are going to be safe as well.

The proposed medicinal cannabis trial will be developed and implemented by independent research organisations with governance provided by the Department of Transport and Planning, road safety partners and experts and health professionals, as is appropriate. I know the clock is about to beat me. With about 30 seconds on the clock, there is a lot more that I could say about this trial and also about the other reforms that are contained in the bill, but I will not have time to do that. I know many of my

colleagues will also be speaking on this bill, and I look forward to their contributions. Having said that, I will conclude my contribution there and commend this bill to the house.

**Matthew BACH** (North-Eastern Metropolitan) (16:13): Like Ms Terpstra, I also commend this bill to the house. It was some time ago now, wasn't it, that we were last talking about these broad issues. I think when we were discussing a bill put forward by Mr Limbrick, we said, on this side of the house, 'Look, we do honestly and earnestly empathise with the range of issues that are put forward. People are prescribed medical cannabis, and at the moment the rules are so unfair.' We talked about that at the time, but we said that, because at the same time we cared deeply about road safety and did not really see a clear way forward, we were not in a position to support what was being put forward. However, today's bill is a little different, and so I am pleased that we are in a position to support it.

I think that we must be really mindful as our rules change – certainly around medical cannabis – of seeking, as best we can, to enable those people who are experiencing pain and a range of medical conditions to go about their lives as best they can. We have understood for some time the issues at play. In your contribution just before, Acting President Terpstra, and in the contributions of others, we have heard about these sorts of issues and that, in particular when it comes to medicinal cannabis, THC stays in your system for some time. Therefore you may well not be impaired in any way, but you could be booked.

In effect, the rules as they stand at the moment stop people who are legitimately prescribed a painkilling medication, first and foremost, from going about their daily lives. We understand why that is the case, and until now we have supported that because we care desperately about road safety. It is good to see the government responding to increasing community concerns about the current state of play with innovative ways we could go forward to seek to make sure that those people who are entirely legitimately prescribed medicinal cannabis can go about their lives.

I have had a thing or two to say recently about drug law reform, and I received some feedback about the things that I have had to say about drug law reform. I note that some other Australian jurisdictions, notably Canberra, are moving in a different direction more broadly when it comes to drug law reform and law reform when it comes to cannabis and the personal use of cannabis. I note that, I think in my final week in this place, next week we will be debating a bill from the Legalise Cannabis Party to legalise cannabis, which, as I have said previously, I support. Erroneously, some people who have provided me with uninvited feedback have put it to me that this position of mine is a left-wing position. I was thinking to myself as I was reading some of my emails about this matter that the people in the past, in particular in the late 20th century, who were the strongest advocates of drug law reform and in particular the decriminalisation of cannabis, potentially even other drugs, were in fact neoliberals, and we hear neoliberalism attacked in this place and elsewhere on a daily basis.

I have talked about my love for the economist Milton Friedman on many occasions.

**Melina Bath:** Good old Milton.

**Matthew BACH:** Good old Milton – a wonderful economist. I thought to myself that I am sure when I was reading my copy of *Capitalism and Freedom*, which is so dog-eared that it is hard to turn the pages, I vaguely remember him saying something about drug law reform. And he did. I looked it up; I took it off my bookshelf. And he said this in response to queries about what would occur if you were to engage in meaningful drug law reform:

I see America with half the number of prisons, half the number of prisoners, 10,000 fewer homicides a year, inner cities in which there is a chance for these poor people to live without being afraid for their lives ... citizens who might be respectable who are now addicts not being subject to becoming criminals in order to get their drug, being able to get drugs for which they are sure of the quality. You know, the same thing happened under prohibition of alcohol as is happening now.

That is the position of Milton Friedman, the famous neoliberal economist. So I am glad that in this small respect today we are acknowledging the real challenges of people who are experiencing pain



and who need medicinal cannabis. Dr Friedman – indeed Professor Friedman – went on, and I thought this was interesting as an adherent also of Mill. He said:

... the case for prohibiting drugs is exactly as strong and as weak as the case for prohibiting people from overeating.

That is what Milton Friedman said.

We all know that overeating causes more deaths than drugs do.

Well, that is true.

If it's in principle okay for the government to say, 'You must not consume drugs because they'll do you harm,' why isn't it all right to say, 'You must not eat too much because you will do harm'? Why isn't it all right to say, 'You must not try to go in for skydiving because you're likely to die'? Why isn't it all right to say, 'Oh, skiing, that's no good, that's a very dangerous sport, you'll hurt yourself'?

I think it is an interesting conversation. It is obviously a conversation that this chamber is going to have to grapple with in my absence next year. My understanding is that we will debate the bill put forward by the Legalise Cannabis Party next week, and then potentially at some point next year we will have debates and discussions about this.

Now, these issues are really challenging, because if we are to make changes – as, for example, changes have recently been made to our rules regarding public drunkenness – it is absolutely essential that the police have the tools they need and also that if we are going to talk about a health response, that that health response is there, is funded and is ready to go. Previously I have met with the head of the Police Association Victoria, and to me, as he has done in public, he criticised the government for what he has called 'policy by media release'. So it is well and good to make changes, and I advocate changes now, as I did in my very first speech in this place, when it comes to our drug laws. But we cannot simply make changes without putting in the hard work beforehand to make sure that those changes will actually lead to better outcomes for the poor, vulnerable and disadvantaged Victorians who overwhelmingly find themselves addicted to various substances or addicted to alcohol – or having a problematic relationship with alcohol – who therefore perhaps will rub up against the forces of law and order, as is the case under our new public drunkenness laws, but also vulnerable and disadvantaged Victorians who use various other illegal drugs.

So, as you have said, Acting President Terpstra, and others before you, I welcome this bill coming before the house. I note the range of concerns that Mr Mulholland expressed, and I agree with him entirely, and those of other members of the coalition in the other place. But nonetheless I think, given we on this side of the house have expressed the views that we have on the previous bill, that it is right and proper that we welcome this bill but also that we look forward to upcoming debates – broader debates and frankly even more substantive debates – for the future of our state that will occur not only next week but also in our sitting weeks next year.

**John BERGER** (Southern Metropolitan) (16:22): I rise to speak on the Transport Legislation Amendment Bill 2023. This bill delivers several reforms to our transport legislation, from technical amendments that improve the effectiveness of our transport legislation to introducing the legislative framework to begin researching technology to facilitate reforming certain safety parameters.

I want to begin by noting that I care deeply about the transport industry. In fact I am from the industry. I started on the shop floor more than three decades ago in fact, and I got my first start as a baggage handler 37 years ago. I spent 11 years at Ansett Australia. It was a great time, and I met some great people there, such as the Captain, Bill and Deano. The transport industry has a lot of heart and does a lot of good, and it is keeping our state running. I have a keen interest in legislation that affects our transport system and legislation that ensures our transport network is effective and safe. We all have a responsibility in this place to act diligently and to ensure that the laws that we make here protect workers. That is why today I want to discuss the reforms that we are proposing in that spirit.

This bill will enable research and subsequent trials to support the investigation of evidence-based road safety policies specifically regarding medicinal cannabis and medicinal cannabis testing. We have come a long way since the backward thinking of the war on drugs. We are a modern state. I recognise that this place has two democratically elected members of the Legalise Cannabis Party, the two members Mr Ettershank and Ms Payne, who are dedicated to legalising cannabis – and we know that – but also to educating and bringing light to many issues facing our state and to ideas that I had never considered before my life. For instance, I have sat down in this chamber during many contributions in Parliament and have learned a lot about the hemp industry. I have also learned about hemp through my participation as a member of the Economy and Infrastructure Committee, in particular through the investigation into the hemp industry. Earlier this year we discussed a similar bill from Legalise Cannabis that was introduced by my colleague Mr Ettershank, the Road Safety Amendment (Medicinal Cannabis) Bill 2023, and during that conversation we undertook to conduct more research into the area. Minister Shing said at the time:

... this is a really complex area. Careful thought and consideration of this issue has been undertaken for some time now, and it is also necessary and appropriate that that work continue. We want it to be put to good use in this conversation about public health, about access to treatment and about making and keeping our road environments safe.

That is what we have done and we will continue to do. This legislation will support a world-leading trial to assess the effects of medicinal cannabis on road and driving behaviour. As announced last month, we will be running a closed-circuit trial to investigate when individuals who use medicinal cannabis, which contains THC, can drive safely. This is an important next step, and it is important for me personally. I know Ms Payne cares. Mr Ettershank has spent a lot of his life in industrial relations all around our country, in training and industrial officer roles. He was on the waterfront in 1998, and he has worked at the ACTU, the ASU and United Voice, including with my friend Senator Tony Sheldon in Queensland. I know Mr Ettershank cares about workers safety. That is why it is important we conduct this trial and get it right, so that we can look forward to the day when people who are using medicinal cannabis for their health can participate in our society fully, as members equally, by using our roads. The trial will be developed and monitored by an independent research organisation with the Department of Transport and Planning, road safety partners, experts and health professionals overseeing it from the governance and logistical perspective. Comprehensive design work will create a controlled driving environment for the trial. It will be physically separated from public roads, and there will be important safety considerations for workers – in this case, the research staff and the participants.

This bill will also establish a state legislative framework for local city and shire councils to manage vehicle-sharing schemes, specifically the issues that they present in relation to amenity and accessibility. Additionally, the bill will update and clarify the Road Safety Act 1986 to provide improved road safety outcomes for all Victorians; and it will support the reform and reorganisation of our transport sector agencies and regulation schemes, with the intention of establishing a more efficient transport sector administration and regulation. The bill will amend the following acts: the Bus Safety Act 2009, the Commercial Passenger Vehicle Industry Act 2017, the Marine (Domestic Commercial Vessel National Law Application) Act 2013, the Road Management Act 2004, the Road Safety Act 1986, the Sentencing Act 1991, the Transport Accident Act 1986, the Transport (Compliance and Miscellaneous) Act 1983 and the Transport Integration Act 2010.

Seven years ago the then Andrews Labor government – this side of the chamber – made history by being the first government in Australia to legalise prescription-based use of medical cannabis. Medical cannabis is a net positive for our state. It is playing an increasing role as a therapeutic option, with a documented increase of more than 700 per cent in the number of patients prescribed medical cannabis in our state in just the last two years. We did it because we listened to health experts, and with this legislation we are listening to experts again. Users of medical cannabis almost uniformly report positive outcomes from taking medicinal cannabis for a range of conditions, from anxiety to treating side effects of chemo. However, many medical cannabis users face major issues due to the

cannabinoid's ability to stay in the bloodstream for long periods of time after they have consumed cannabis. Medicinal cannabis users are unable to use their vehicles without the fear of returning a positive on a blood test for the presence of drugs.

If we can develop technology to measure the level of cannabis in their system, then drivers who use medicinal cannabis can return to the roads without fear of penalisation. This will be done by giving powers to the Minister for Roads and Road Safety Minister Horne in the other place to establish this road safety research trial. We do not know what we do not know, and this trial will show us how to get to the place where we know more. These research trials will not stop just at medicinal cannabis impairment but will address several other road safety-related trials. These trials will be flexible and adaptive. They will study the effectiveness of a range of policy programs and technologies. This will ultimately provide the Minister for Roads and Road Safety with a library of information on how to best legislate reforms that deliver the best outcomes for all Victorians. Evidence-based reform is the best way to move Victoria forward in key ways that affect our lives. This power will be delivered through an amendment to the Road Safety Act 1986, along with several other provisions, to allow for the trial to be performed with the utmost ease.

The bill will also find a solution for a problem that many city councils have been facing as we change the ways that people move around this great city, that being the issue that vehicle-sharing schemes pose to amenity and accessibility. In our inner-city suburbs e-scooters and electric bikes are now a familiar part of the landscape. This mode of transport offers a viable and green alternative to commuting or travelling by car. Their adoption has been widely popular, with the average day in Victoria seeing 8600 trips made with e-scooters. E-scooters are effective in helping Melburnians get around town cheaply and sustainably when public transport is not an option – and I like them a lot. I remember fondly my time at the Transport Workers' Union national council in the Northern Territory scootering around the city on an electric Neuron bike. They are effective and cheap. They also help ease traffic congestion on our roads, an issue that many transport workers face on the job, and a very frustrating one. However, the introduction of e-scooters and electric bikes has created issues surrounding accessibility of public areas, and we are going to address this through reforms that deliver a legal framework for local councils to address the negative effects of vehicle-sharing schemes.

With this model local councils can best determine what their local community needs and create by-laws to that effect. This means that we can avoid statewide policies that, despite working well in the cities of Yarra or Melbourne, are not effective and are counter-productive in a city like Boroondara in my community of Southern Metro. This will be implemented through amendments made to the Road Safety Act 1986, specifically introducing part 7C, which outlines the legal requisites for operating a vehicle-sharing scheme and the powers local councils have in the authorisation process for vehicle-sharing schemes. It outlines the penalties for failing to abide by the rules set out by the relevant local councils. This is an important step forward towards promoting accessibility in our inner-city suburbs while maintaining the benefits we get from these vehicle-sharing schemes. The bill also addresses inefficiencies in the organisation and function of Victoria's network of transport sector administration and regulation bodies. This will overall improve the function of transport bodies in the state of Victoria. It will align regulatory schemes and bring the standard of Victoria's transport sector industry up to best practice.

Now on to transport restructuring orders, or TROs. TROs can be used to create new transport sector agencies, alter the constitution and membership of transport agencies and modify the application of transport legislation. Yet governments cannot abolish transport agencies using a TRO. This can lead to a bloated administration in government. This bill seeks to rectify that and gives the government the power to abolish transport agencies. This will make our transport sector more flexible. Many reforms that have changed the face of not just Victorian public transport but Victorian life in general have been achieved through the implementation of a transport restructuring order. For example, two years ago a transport restructuring order facilitated the restructuring of V/Line, converting it from a corporation with a board to a single-member corporation. As a result we could include V/Line projects in our Big

Build project and so much more. It only makes sense that we should empower the government to slim down government and make it more efficient.

Additionally, the bill seeks to provide more transparency on how and why information is shared in the transport industry. This update to information sharing will be introduced to ensure the public have the confidence in how and why information is being shared in the public sector – information that has been shared to make our system run efficiently, particularly in the public transport system. This can range from the use of closed-circuit cameras to trip information retained via Myki use. Currently the power to use this information is with the minister. This bill seeks to extend the situations that agencies can access such information and to restructure the minister's involvement in the information-sharing process. Additionally, updates to the legislation will be made to allow for the State Revenue Office to access certain information relating to the commercial passenger vehicle service levy through Safe Transport Victoria. This is to ensure that the state revenue schemes are applied evenly across commercial passenger vehicles. Whilst this provision exists in some part already, this bill clarifies the explicit power of Safe Transport Victoria to share commercially sensitive trip data with the State Revenue Office. Again, this will ensure the function and efficacy of the commercial passenger vehicle service levy.

One of the aspects of the bill that I take a lot of interest in is in relation to bus driver accreditation. I worked very closely with the public transport industry in Victoria, specifically our amazing workforce of bus drivers. During that time I was lucky enough to speak to many bus drivers across Victoria and to listen to what they needed to improve their working conditions and then deliver for them. It was the work of the bus drivers in the Transport Workers' Union that resulted in all Victorian buses requiring a safety screen for the protection of the driver. I am glad that I am still able to advocate for transport workers, but now from Spring Street, and I will continue that today. I am proud that this bill will improve the working conditions of our public transport bus drivers. The bill adjusts bus driver accreditation requirements to be fit for purpose and modern, facilitating a smooth transport system. A similar reform was delivered six years ago when we modernised the commercial passenger vehicle accreditation scheme. This bill seeks to bring Victorian bus accreditation into the future and in line with commercial passenger vehicle regulation.

Victoria has a history to be proud of. We have led the nation for over 50 years in life-saving road safety policies. In 1970, for instance, we led the world to become the first jurisdiction to introduce mandatory seatbelts. In 1976 we were the first state to introduce random breath testing. In the late 1980s Victoria again led the world by introducing speed cameras. In 2004 Victoria was the first state to introduce mandatory roadside drug testing, and in 2008 we introduced its graduated licensing system. These initiatives have been found time and time again to have saved countless Victorian lives. This strong record has continued this year with a suite of reforms under the Allan Labor government targeting driver distraction and seatbelt wearing offences, and further road safety programs have been established because of this bill. We will get on with it and deliver. I recognise the considerable interest in this bill, so I am looking forward to hearing from my community about how we can deliver the best outcome. That is something that we all should be excited about, because as Minister Horne said, the new laws will enhance our understanding of how medicinal cannabis affects driving behaviour, informing future reform. Let us get it done.

**Melina BATH** (Eastern Victoria) (16:36): I am pleased to rise this afternoon and make a contribution on the Transport Legislation Amendment Bill 2023 and concur with my colleague Mr Mulholland that the Nationals and the Liberals will not be opposing this bill. It really is quite a thick bill. It is an omnibus bill that contains many elements. I will touch on just a few of most interest to the people in my Eastern Victoria electorate. The bill certainly looks at the legal process – and we have heard this in quite a lot of detail – about a research trial of driving and medicinal cannabis use, and I will touch on that. It provides regulation around e-scooters and bicycles in their share schemes with local councils and the problems that are occurring with those. It aligns bus driver accreditation with commercial passenger vehicle drivers. It clarifies the governance arrangements for various

transport agencies, including V/Line, and I know that is a particular interest of my Eastern Victoria Region constituents. It also makes reforms around speed cameras and speed detection devices to be used on bikes and e-scooters, and it also looks at the rules around alcohol interlocks and makes various other amendments.

I would like to take my contribution to the topic of medicinal cannabis, noting that it was I think in the 58th Parliament that the government brought through the use of medicinal cannabis noting its very important use as a prescribed drug to support those people who have significant pain from serious cancers and conditions – nausea and the like that can often happen during chemotherapy – and also those who have epilepsy and other severe conditions with seizures. There is a demonstrated improvement in quality of life and pain management for those coping with those very serious conditions. Indeed in terms of the assessment of driving while under the influence of a drug, certainly it is the only legally prescribed drug that is screened either by a swab or by a blood test. Those users, if they are found with medicinal cannabis – or THC, which is the psychoactive component of cannabis – in their blood, it is either an on or an off. Either you either have it in your blood and therefore can be charged or you do not. But the important detail is around the effect it has on the body of the driver when in charge of a car, and that can only be for a short period of time – a matter of hours. However, THC can actually be in the blood system for anywhere up to 24 hours. Therefore somebody can be driving completely, I will say, safely and completely aware of their actions but still record that particular drug in their system.

We know and we have heard from you, Acting President Terpstra, about the introduction of safety measures in terms of seatbelts and blood alcohol limits that have been introduced in Victoria in years past and the importance of those. We also note that there is no blood alcohol percentage test available for more serious drugs such as methamphetamines and also MDMA. So the context around this analysis and this trial I think is an important one. Of course the devil is always in the detail, and it is up to the government to refine this, but certainly proposing an off-road research trial in a safe environment to test those sorts of impediments or test drivers under the influence I think would be a better outcome for all motorists and safer for all Victorians. So we certainly are not in opposition to that. Again, it is always in the detail, and like all members of the community, we would like to be kept abreast of how those trials will be conducted and of the method behind those trials but also of the reports and the responses from those trials. There needs to be transparency from the government in pushing this and conducting those trials.

Indeed, we have seen very recently the tragedy of a road toll that is at a 15-year high, with 258 lives lost on Victorian roads this year. That is 258 families and communities that have been absolutely traumatised by these losses. There is not one figure, there is not one issue; there are multiple issues that lead to crashes – not accidents, they are crashes and they are fatalities. Alcohol can be involved, certainly drugs can be involved, and fatigue and driver distraction. There is always a need to be mindful in any situation that we are to keep our eyes on the road and not be distracted. Speed is also an element that is of concern, as is not driving to the road conditions. But may I also say in this house that our road conditions – the condition of our roads – even on a fine, calm, mild day are absolutely appalling in this state, and we have seen the government cut road maintenance funding again and again.

If you want to look at road tolls, we can also see that unfortunately of those 258 deaths on our Victorian roads, there is an over-representation of rural deaths – 153 of those deaths occurred on rural roads. We used to have a saying, and it still holds true: if you want to save country lives, fix country roads. That has never been more true than it is today. I implore the government to look at its road maintenance funding and increase it back to a reasonable standard – not just a line that occurs in a media release – and help fix those country roads. I know there have been, through lobbying in my own small way, some small interventions, particularly in the Walhalla district and others, where there have been improvements to road safety – barriers and the like – but really it needs a whole-of-government response to put this down. It is a multipronged issue, but we cannot continue to see an increase and an exponential rise in deaths on our roads, which are tragedies for families and communities.

The other part that I would like to take us to is the clarification of the sector governance and data use in terms of V/Line. If it was just so simple to fix V/Line by changing up the governance arrangement, I would run around with my hands in the air, applauding the government. However, we have seen over a period of time – and I will give you an example – the deterioration of our V/Line services, and many Victorians absolutely count on having a reliable and punctual service. We see in Gippsland that it just is not the case. The punctuality target across Victoria for V/Line is 92 per cent, so 92 per cent of the time train should – that is the V/Line punctuality target – arrive on time. What we see from the performance data in Gippsland is that – we will go back in time and then to the present day – in 2014, when the then Liberal and Nationals government was in Parliament, the punctuality was at 87.5 per cent. These are not my figures; these are V/Line figures. You can look them up. The government inherited 87.5 per cent. It was not 92 per cent; there was still a way to go. There were still improvements that needed to be made. We move forward nine years, and we see that the average punctuality target to date – so the year to date – is 79.9 per cent, so less than 80 per cent of trains arrive on time. There was one time when we scanned these in my office, because we are always interested in looking for good service. In January this year, 2023, the government met its punctuality targets. But, guess what, it was the only month when there were no trains arriving. The punctuality target was met when there were no V/Line trains. It was actually a bus service, a coach service, that was delivered. The other thing that we have seen over time by this Labor government is the tweaking of the timetable. In Gippsland we had 62 services, but what the government did was they actually increased the length of the journey. They increased the time allowable for that service to arrive, which in effect enabled punctuality to be there when it was not actually there.

We see the regional revival issue as well. We know that my colleague in the federal sphere Darren Chester, at the time when he was minister for transport, provided some very significant funding, over half a billion dollars, back in the day when \$1 billion was worth something. The government have been claiming that ever since. We do not really mind where the money comes from, but we want to see those improvements and we want to see better punctuality targets. I know that the bill looks at changing from a V/Line service, where there is a board-managed, CEO-based, state-owned enterprise, to a statutory authority. On 16 June 2021, the then Minister for Public Transport the Honourable Ben Carroll said:

... we want to ensure that we have a strong V/Line to match that investment.

Move on 2½ years, and we have got still today 79.7 per cent punctuality in Gippsland. That is not a strong V/Line to match this investment outcome. A gentleman, Mr Carrick, has been the CEO. He has not delivered in this context. Let us hope that moving to a statutory body will actually produce some better results for the people in country Victoria.

In finishing off, there are a couple of other things that I want to touch on. I want to discuss the topic of e-scooters. You will be aware that country MPs often stay in Melbourne when they are down here, because it is too far to drive home – 2 hours to drive home – during a sitting week. We walk around the streets et cetera, having a look around and enjoying a little bit of Melbourne life now that it has opened up after being completely closed down during the COVID lockdowns. What you do have to watch out for is the occurrence of e-scooters that are left fair smack in the middle of the pavement. I do not want us to turn into a nanny state by any stretch, but I also do not want to see additional people going into emergency departments because they have tripped and fallen over e-scooters that have just been left willy-nilly.

It would be interesting to understand how that is going to be worked through. I see that the bill provides no real guidance at this stage, so it might be a question that we have for the government about how operators of these e-scooters and councils will address concerns about footpath clutter, pedestrian hazards and also in relation to dumping. A while ago there was an article in the newspaper around the poor Yarra River, which ended up becoming like a natural habitat for new aquatic life because there were so many e-scooters and bikes dumped into it. Now, that is not an outcome that any of us want, so we want to understand how that is going to be worked through. Certainly I know that the AMA has

raised concerns about the lack of regulation in relation to these electronic mobility scooters and about incidents at emergency departments increasing.

In finalising my contribution, in relation to the bus accreditation I understand that neither the bus industry nor the Transport Workers' Union were consulted on these changes. It is disappointing, and I hope that the government will now provide that level of consultation to assure the bus industry, a very important industry for many, many Victorians, that level of clarity. Other than a plea for a greater level of service and punctuality on the Gippsland line, I hope to see this pass through the house.

**Rachel PAYNE** (South-Eastern Metropolitan) (16:52): I rise to make a contribution to the Transport Legislation Amendment Bill 2023 on behalf of Legalise Cannabis Victoria. This omnibus bill includes a significant number of legislative changes that I will not canvass. Instead I would like to single out the aspect of this bill that responds to the work of Legalise Cannabis Victoria in this Parliament: the creation of a closed-circuit research track trial in medicinal cannabis and driving. This trial is a step forward for medicinal cannabis patients to safely get on the road in Victoria. It is a slow step, but it is a step. Daily we get calls from medicinal cannabis patients who continue to be impacted by the current road laws, and I do look forward to seeing the outcome of this trial in due process.

In relation to this bill, it advances the preceding work of the medicinal cannabis and safe driving working group that was established in 2019. Their 2020–21 report recommended an assessment of driving behaviour of medicinal cannabis patients. Most notably, this trial is a direct response to the Road Safety Amendment (Medicinal Cannabis) Bill 2023 we introduced earlier this year. That bill was adjourned upon a commitment from this government to address the unfair treatment of medicinal cannabis patients. It is good to see this commitment being delivered on, but it is a slow process and thousands of medicinal cannabis patients in Victoria will continue to be discriminated against under the current driving laws. They are treated differently to every other patient prescribed a medicine in Victoria, irrespective of how impairing those other medications may be.

It must be said that we expect this trial to have a similar outcome to the dozens of studies – replicated many times over, internationally and domestically – that demonstrate medicinal cannabis patients can drive safely. There is nothing about this driving trial that is necessarily unique. While this government works to replicate existing research, thousands of medicinal cannabis patients must wait until the end of 2024 for their chance to legally drive. Victoria was the first state to legalise medicinal cannabis in 2016, and ever since then patients have had to wait for equal treatment on our roads. I appreciate that both sides of the chamber today have raised this valid point. The fact is that we have medicinal cannabis, that it has been legal since 2016 and that we need to find a pathway forward for these patients, because there is no reason why a patient should be treated any differently based on their medical choices.

We hear from patients, many patients, about how bitterly disappointed they are by yet another delay in getting back to normal life. These patients are prescribed medicine by their doctor, manage their use so they do not drive impaired and yet they face the risk of losing their licence and being fined or detained just because of the way medicinal cannabis can be detected in the body for days and in some cases weeks after it was ever capable of having an impairing effect. It is the young mother with chronic pain doing the morning school drop-offs for her kids. It is the tradie with a bad back on his way to a job site. It is the cancer patient driving to her doctor's appointment. They all take a legally prescribed medication, never drive while impaired and yet they all live in fear of losing their licences under our current driving laws. We will always advocate that absolutely no-one should be driving impaired, but people who have been prescribed a medicine and can drive safely should be allowed to drive. This is how we treat every other single prescription medication in Victoria except medicinal cannabis, and it is time for this to be corrected.

I understand from the debate in the Legislative Assembly that many members of the opposition had an appetite for further detail on this trial – who it would include, how participants are able to travel to

and from the trial and where it will be. I can assure you that this is an appetite we share, and we look forward to working alongside government in co-designing all elements of this process.

I thank the minister and her staff for their ongoing dialogue on this issue. Legalise Cannabis Victoria lends its support to this bill whilst pushing government to get out of the slow lane and have this trial finalised as quickly as possible. There should be no barriers for medicinal cannabis patients who can safely get on the road.

**Sheena WATT** (Northern Metropolitan) (16:57): Thank you for the opportunity to rise and contribute to the Transport Legislation Amendment Bill 2023 and further add to this state's long and proud history of progressive law reform and reform that enables Victorians to move around our state safely. This bill before us seeks to amend a range of current legislation that will enable research to be undertaken to support evidence-based road policies, implement reforms for bus drivers and make changes to vehicle sharing platforms like e-scooter and e-bike platforms and more administrative changes to ensure the safe operation of all facets of transport within our state.

This bill will be making this package of reforms by amending a whole range of transport-related bills such as the Road Safety Act 1986, the Road Management Act 2004, the Transport Accident Act 1986, the Bus Safety Act 2009, the Commercial Passenger Vehicle Industry Act 2017, the Marine (Domestic Commercial Vessel National Law Application) Act 2013, the Transport (Compliance and Miscellaneous) Act 1983 and the Transport Integration Act 2010.

While the effects of alcohol on driver impairment are well known, the effects of other drugs on fatigue and impairment are less well understood. I have spoken on these matters a number of times in this place, and like those last times I affirm the Allan Labor government's commitment to making our roads safer for all road users. We need to ensure that this government's decisions are based on robust evidence. This requires research and trials on the effects of drugs and alcohol, including the combination of drugs and alcohol and fatigue on driving. To allow such research trials to be lawfully conducted, the bill proposes to empower the Minister for Roads and Road Safety to designate road safety research trials. This will allow participants in these trials to undertake behaviours which would otherwise be unlawful under the current road laws. The Minister for Roads and Road Safety will be required to consult with affected ministers before declaring a road safety research trial. This will ensure a coordinated, collaborative approach to road safety enforcement.

This bill will also ensure that the existing three-year zero blood alcohol concentration requirement, or BAC as it is known, for all drink drivers is applied from the time the alcohol interlock licensing condition is removed. This will avoid circumstances where repeat or high-risk offenders are not subject to zero BAC requirements simply because the length of period of the alcohol interlock condition has been applied.

This bill will also improve the management of e-scooter and other vehicle-sharing schemes. Currently local councils, outside of a few trial sites, do not have a mechanism to influence how such schemes might operate within their municipalities. You must only recall the oBikes littering our footpaths a few years ago to understand the problem that councils face with these types of schemes. This bill aims to address this problem by requiring operators of vehicle-sharing schemes for e-scooters or bicycles to have an authorising agreement in place with local councils. Under the proposed framework councils will be supported by guidance from the Department of Transport and Planning on what to include in the contents of such agreements.

One of the key reforms and most significant reforms in this bill will allow the relevant minister to designate specific road safety research trials. These trials could be for the purpose of determining to what degree it is safe for someone to drive a vehicle when a combination of drugs, alcohol and fatigue are impairing the driver. It could also be for the purpose of informing the development of methods used by police officers to assess whether someone is impaired by drugs, alcohol and/or fatigue so that we can better protect Victorian road users.



No-one deserves to die on the road, and the changes we are making will ensure that we can further understand driving impairment and its critical impact on ensuring Victorians stay safe on our roads. This amendment before us is both important and exciting as it enables the government to run world-leading research trials, not just relating to medicinal cannabis but also other areas where there is scope for additional research to support ongoing work to address some of the most difficult challenges in the road safety space. The Allan Labor government is committed to making our roads safer for all road users. As an example, this could include detecting fatigue at the roadside and detecting impairment at the roadside for both illicit drugs and prescribed medications.

In the context of the closed-circuit medicinal cannabis trial that was announced by the Allan Labor government earlier this year, this will enable trial participants to drive in a controlled environment after taking their prescribed medicinal cannabis without fear of breaking the law while participating in the valuable research to inform Victoria's approach to drug driving and medicinal cannabis into the future. THC, which is the primary compound in cannabis, is capable of producing intoxicating and impairing effects. Some forms of medicinal cannabis contain THC and may have a negative effect on a driver's ability. Ensuring that the government knows about these effects and the science behind them will be crucial in informing future decisions about Victoria's road rules. Under current, present-space drug driving laws, any detectable amount of THC constitutes an offence against the Road Safety Act, including if it has resulted from taking prescribed medicinal cannabis. This is why these research trials are so important, so we can further understand what the effects are of cannabis impairment when driving, so the road safety laws can reflect the scientific evidence. Medicinal cannabis can be detected in a roadside presence test regardless of whether the driver is in fact impaired. That is why these changes need to be made to ensure that impairment is known and backed up by the evidence.

The Allan Labor government has acknowledged the challenges with balancing individual health and driving needs with road safety outcomes for the entire community. We are committed to establishing an evidence-based policy position on medicinal cannabis that includes safe driving for all Victorians. A closed-circuit track trial will provide valuable information while also mitigating possible risk to all road users on the road and on public road networks. The proposed closed-circuit track trial and other ongoing road safety research initiatives are intended to provide the research required through this complex problem without increasing the risk on Victorian roads. The proposed trial will look at the level of driving impairment as well as evaluate driver performance. It will be conducted in a controlled driving environment that is physically separated from our public roads – that is really important for our members here to know – with safety conditions and considerations for all participants and research staff of the utmost priority. This amendment is crucial to these sorts of reforms because it allows for a process that can change how the Road Safety Act and its regulations apply to trial participants – such as learning how THC contained in medicinal cannabis impacts driving performance in different patient cohorts and under different circumstances and how this translates into risks on the road, and the relationship between THC concentrations, driving performance and road safety risk – to aid potential regulatory reform. Progressing this reform is important, because we understand that medicinal cannabis is playing an increased role as a therapeutic option for individuals with certain health conditions who have a genuine driving need.

In December 2020 you may recall the Victorian government established the medicinal cannabis and safe driving working group, made up of senior representatives across the government's road safety partnership as well as health professionals and road safety and academic experts. Despite a vast amount of research on THC and driving, the working group heard that research on medicinal cannabis and driving is currently limited and therefore no definitive conclusions on safety implications can be made at this stage. Whilst a strong proven relationship exists between BAC impairment and crash risk, which informs our drink-driving legislation – we all know it is as the .05 BAC – no similar relationship has been established for THC that is in fact universally accepted. That is why it is essential that the impairing effect of medicinal cannabis on driving behaviour is investigated in a fully controlled environment to understand the effects of medicinal cannabis on driving before considering any changes to legislation. Can I acknowledge my colleagues on this bench, the Legalise Cannabis Victoria

Party, thank them for their steadfast advocacy on this issue and join them in showing my support for the changes contained in this bill.

Another element of this bill is changes to the regulations for the use of the electronic scooters. Electronic scooters, or e-scooters, have become increasingly popular on our roads and shared paths, with the uptake and popularity rising across Melbourne. This government has undertaken a trial to allow e-scooters on our roads and determine if they are to be a safe part of our mobility system. The safety of road users is of course quite central to that trial. The Allan Labor government has introduced appropriate road rules to regulate their safe use, and the trial has found that e-scooters can be safely used when the rules are followed. If you just go into our bustling Melbourne CBD, you will see no shortage of people zipping around on e-scooters. I am sure that perhaps – I am having a bit of a guess here – many in this place may have hopped on them once or twice. Can I also remind users of the importance of using their helmets when zipping around town.

I have got to say these scooters provide a valuable and very fun service to the public, but it is important that operators work closely with local government to determine the nature of their service. Too many scooters or e-bikes – well, they lead to clutter, like what we saw with the oBike hire scheme, where the City of Melbourne could not stop the provider degrading local amenity with too many of them finding a home at the bottom of the Yarra River. For this reason the bill requires sharing scheme operators to have an agreement with local councils authorising them to operate a sharing scheme in their areas, which will see a combination of local council and community being approached for their schemes to be implemented. This creates a flexible system of regulation that can operate differently in different parts of Victoria; you see, inner Melbourne areas have different needs to regional communities and our rural shires. This allows communities to have a say in how the scheme operates near them and to cater to specific community needs. This will allow local government to prevent vehicle-sharing schemes from operating at all if that is in fact what the community wants. Local government can simply decline to make any authorising agreement with any operator. This gives the power to the people to decide whether these services are something the community wants and allow greater consultation between our local shires and councils and Victorians. The system will also make it possible to require sharing scheme operators to have sufficient insurance for riders and third parties, including pedestrians. We have seen just far too many accidents on our roads – and a big shout-out to our trauma medical professionals.

Can I just say that with this bill before us we will see that local councils will be able to require this insurance as a condition of their authorising agreement and the Department of Transport and Planning will provide guidance to councils which will assist them with making these decisions. The Allan Labor government is firmly committed to providing safe and viable transport options all around the state in all sorts of ways, and this bill reflects just that. I finish by commending this bill to the chamber.

**Lee TARLAMIS** (South-Eastern Metropolitan) (17:09): I move:

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

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

### *Adjournment*

**Ingrid STITT** (Western Metropolitan – Minister for Mental Health, Minister for Ageing, Minister for Multicultural Affairs) (17:09): I move:

That the house do now adjourn.

### **Southern Metropolitan Region school principals**

**John BERGER** (Southern Metropolitan) (17:09): (580) My adjournment is for the Minister for Education in the other place my friend Deputy Premier Carroll. The action I seek is for the Deputy Premier to join me in the community of Southern Metro when I host a principals morning tea at the beginning of next year's school year.

One of my favourite opportunities as a new member of Parliament has been visiting our great local schools, because it is an exciting time for our education system. We are transforming it from the ground up. Our side of the chamber has invested \$31 billion into the education sector since being elected in 2014, from developing our next-generation understanding of STEM – science, technology, engineering and mathematics – to our massive investment in school infrastructure, all \$15 billion worth, to upgrade or build new schools just like Prahran High School, which I can see out of my electorate office window, which we built for 650 students, a school that first opened in 2019 with a group of year 7s. They will be graduating next year by the way. And do not forget our \$80 million Inclusive Schools Fund, which has funded 385 projects across Victoria. The fund was created so that schools could modernise with 21st-century facilities fit for purpose for those with a disability, removing an unnecessary barrier to accessing quality education. The fund was established on the principle that every student deserves the opportunity to gain an education.

We have changed the face of education for the better in our state, from funding indigenous plant gardens and introducing sanitary items in all government schools to supporting families through subsidised school uniforms, essential school learning items and so much more. We are on track to open 100 new schools by 2026. But we could not achieve this without our school principals and their dedication and hard work to keep our government schools thriving. I have had the opportunity to meet and speak to some of the best in the state this year, from my partnership with Janet Gale from Camberwell Primary School to the strong advocacy of principal Andrew Wood to transform Belle Vue Primary School into a community hub and the passion for staff and student wellbeing at Auburn Primary School of principal Tim Sawalaga and assistant principal Allison Blackley, and of course there is Glenferrie Primary School principal Tanya Gurney's advocacy on road and community safety. I am proud to be a member of a government that supports them.

Part of supporting our educators is by listening to what they need and working collaboratively together. That is why next year I will be hosting a principals morning tea to connect principals right across my community of Southern Metro with each other and to their government, so that we can talk together and create the best outcomes for our kids. I know the school principals would deeply appreciate the attendance of the Deputy Premier at this event.

**Debate interrupted.**

*Questions without notice and ministers statements*

**Written responses**

**The PRESIDENT** (17:12): There was a point of order by Dr Ratnam during question time around an answer to her question to Minister Shing. Having looked at *Hansard*, I believe Dr Ratnam's point of order should be upheld. Therefore I order a written response from the minister. I will give it two days, given the late time of day, compared to the one day prescribed in the standing orders, and that is for the substantive question only, not the supplementary.

*Adjournment*

**Debate resumed.**

**Cost of living**

**Gaelle BROAD** (Northern Victoria) (17:13): (581) My adjournment is to the Premier about the need to increase support services for those struggling with rising living costs. In Victoria the National Debt Helpline received a 47 per cent surge in phone calls in the first half of the year. The rise based on the same period last year is just the tip of the iceberg. Financial Counselling Victoria recently came to Parliament to meet with the Nationals about the service, which supports families and individuals suffering from significant financial distress. Qualified counsellors provide free non-judgemental advice to people struggling with debt who need a plan. They advocate on behalf of their clients to banks and mortgage brokers and connect with other support services.

Many are reaching out to these services for the very first time. As interest rates rise, many families and individuals are struggling to meet the repayments as well as facing rising energy bills and fuel costs. For some it is getting harder to put food on the table. Just last week I visited Moira FoodShare in Cobram with local member Tim McCurdy. They now provide food to 3500 people every month, and the demand is increasing. When I visited Bendigo Foodshare earlier this year, they were also experiencing a growing demand for services. Once self-sufficient families are now finding it difficult to afford essentials like food. Many must now choose between paying for housing, bills or groceries.

Financial Counselling Victoria has 310 financial counsellors statewide, yet many are part time and cannot keep up with the increasing number of people needing support. Bendigo Family and Financial Services are a community service that seek to help people experiencing economic disadvantage to become financially literate, but they now have waitlists of between six and eight weeks at their centres in Bendigo, Cobram and Shepparton. I know of other centres in regional Victoria that have had to close their books and turn people away. When someone finally makes the call and reaches out for help, they are often in a dire situation and need immediate support. Tracie Driscoll at the Bendigo centre told me that people are struggling with mortgages, basic living costs, purchasing schoolbooks and uniforms and keeping their cars on the road. While both parents might be working, all it takes is for one of them to get sick or to lose a few hours of work and they fall behind in paying their bills. Tracie has worked for the service for 15 years, but she has never seen this level of demand for support.

Just last week we saw another interest rate rise. We know that it may take up to 12 weeks for these changes to flow through. Local services are concerned that this interest rate hike will hit again, this time enough to tip more people over, which will see a further spike in the need for services in the new year. Financial Counselling Victoria recently wrote to the Premier seeking funds to increase the number of counsellors over the next three years and provide a pathway for more graduates to enter the system. The Nationals endorse the requests of Financial Counselling Victoria, and I ask that the Treasurer respond to this need to help those struggling with rising living costs. Victoria is lagging behind other states, and we need more financial counsellors working alongside individuals to develop the skills they need and find a way through the financial challenges they face.

### **Soil protection**

**Rikkie-Lee TYRRELL** (Northern Victoria) (17:16): (582) My adjournment matter today is for the Premier. After her disappointing comments on *Sky News* last week stating that new National Farmers Federation president David Jochinke needs to explain why he would support my proposed amendment to the Planning and Environment Act 1987 to protect soils, I now have serious concern for the advocacy of our farmers, since the Premier herself did not seem able to reconcile that an elected One Nation member could possibly be the chosen bastion of recourse for said farmers. Since she is so cavalier in her disregard for the opinions of both the NFF president and those of the farming communities that inspired the bill, I would like to extend an invitation to the Premier to join me at the next Meadow Creek Solar Farm community meeting and explain to the community how she and Minister Kilkenney know better about what farmers really want.

### **Timber industry**

**Bev McARTHUR** (Western Victoria) (17:17): (583) My adjournment matter is for the Minister for Agriculture, and it concerns the Labor government's latest overreach, whereby they are now instructing builders to stop using sustainable native hardwood in preparation for their catastrophic early ending of native timber harvesting by the close of 2023. In a recent letter to the Housing Industry Association the Allan Labor government strongly recommends builders cease using native hardwood varieties in flooring, staircases, beams, doors, windows, architectural features, decking and cladding. Not satisfied with the near death of a whole industry and the massive repercussions for rural communities, this government is now killing off the building industry that need timber in their builds. The government now strongly recommends that builders stop using native hardwood and requires the builders themselves to explain to their clients the state government's appalling decision to close

Victoria's timber industry. Imagine telling that to ARM Architecture, which won the overall prize in the Australian Timber Design Awards last week for its incredible refit of the Sydney Opera House Concert Hall using brush box, a native hardwood no less. Imagine telling that to Australian Sustainable Hardwoods in eastern Victoria, which has been behind so many innovative and sustainable timber-based building projects across Australia, including St Clare's Primary School in Officer, Eliston Family and Community Centre in Clyde and many beautiful homes in the Geelong region.

Whether Labor or the tree-hugging Greens like it or not, the reality is that Victorian hardwood is enjoyed and appreciated by many in homes and community facilities. Victorian hardwood is regularly preferred by builders and consumers for its bushfire-resistant properties compared to overseas alternatives harvested under less stringent environmental standards. The government's all-out war on native timber only makes way for unacclimatised rainforest timber with highly questionable conservation credentials from the Solomon Islands, Papua New Guinea and Indonesia. This timber is far from the best practices and current standards held by our timber industry. Victorian hardwood deserves to be recognised as a sustainable and economic solution, not an ideological football. The arrogance of this Labor government expecting builders to cease using native hardwood earlier than necessary only suspends the consumer's free choice by manipulating product demand to justify its destructive decision to close Victoria's timber industry. The action that I seek is for the minister to cease the dictatorial rhetoric and to reverse its senseless ban on native timber logging in Victorian forests from 2024.

### **Voluntary assisted dying**

**Sarah MANSFIELD** (Western Victoria) (17:20): (584) My adjournment matter is for the Minister for Health, and the action I am seeking is for her to use the upcoming review of Victoria's voluntary assisted dying legislation to consider amendments to address barriers to access. The Greens have long been strong advocates for voluntary assisted dying, or VAD. Colleen Hartland, in this place before me, campaigned tirelessly with communities to introduce what was a landmark piece of legislation to this chamber. This Parliament was brave in passing these laws in 2019, and that will always be a point of pride. Since then, many Victorians and families have been afforded choice and dignity at a time of immense grief and loss. For some even the knowledge that they have the option is enough.

The latest reports from our oversight boards in Victoria demonstrate that VAD is operating safely and as intended. However, this does not tell the whole story. As the first legislation of its kind in Australia, it took an understandably conservative approach, but four years later, as the rest of the country has caught up, our legislation now lags behind other states in terms of access and eligibility. Recently I attended the inaugural VAD conference in Sydney. Participants included healthcare workers and services, policymakers and families of those with lived experience. All identified numerous challenges with Victoria's current system. In particular the gag clause in Victoria's legislation prevents practitioners from instigating conversations about VAD, denying patients with a terminal illness the right to know the full range of options available.

Our narrow prognostic criteria of six months are another significant barrier. The time it takes to jump through the required hoops means many people die before they can access care, particularly if they live rurally. Prognostic criteria are inherently fraught. Other states have a 12-month time frame, and the ACT is moving to abolish them altogether. Currently in Victoria two doctors are required to assess and confirm a person's eligibility to access VAD. One of them must be a specialist in the relevant disease – another major barrier, especially in rural and regional areas. VAD assessments cannot be accessed via telehealth, meaning terminally ill patients may have to travel hundreds of kilometres to see a specialist who is willing and able to perform the assessment. Even in a city the size of Geelong they have to rely on several infrequently visiting specialists. With the sole mandated review of Victoria's VAD legislation occurring next year, it is critical that the government explores the need for the act itself to be amended, at the very least to ensure equity of access for all Victorians.

**White Flat Oval**

**Joe McCracken** (Western Victoria) (17:23): (585) My adjournment matter tonight is about White Flat Oval in Ballarat, and my adjournment matter is to Minister for Police. I ask the minister to take urgent action to make sure that the criminal activity that is going down at White Flat Oval is stopped immediately. I met with a number of concerned locals again just last week. This includes the all-abilities football team. Kids with intellectual disabilities go down there and play footy. They have a great time down there. They go kick the footy. They look after each other. It is a beautiful, beautiful sight to see them actually looking after each other. But unfortunately they are heckled by some people that reside close by, who, in unfortunate circumstances, have camped near the grandstand there. It is resulting in these really, really foul exchanges happening and threats to these poor young kids. Those threats have been levelled at the cricket club users as well, and they have also been levelled at locals. It is really, really quite frightening. I was down there the other night when the swordcraft group was practising. They actually had to have a line down the oval to not go over a particular part so that they could cordon off the area to stay far enough away from some of the people that were taking residence there.

The local MPs have done nothing about it. Council appears to be disinterested. I really want to make sure that action is happening, because apart from being a really, really nice community asset, this is something that is concerning community safety. There has been a lot of talk locally about access to CCTV cameras, and the question was raised with me: who controls them? No-one really knew about it with some adjoining buildings. It turns out that the adjoining buildings are actually monitored, of course, by the police station. Who would have thought? The police can actually check the CCTV cameras and find out what is going on for themselves. I do not think that has actually happened yet, and I would ask that the minister actually intervene – that he checks the footage, sees what is going on and takes action – to make sure that this stops. It is really quite a serious matter, and I hope that the matter is taken care of urgently rather than being just another issue that is on the backburner, like so many other things in Ballarat are.

**Cost of living**

**Aiv Puglielli** (North-Eastern Metropolitan) (17:25): (586) My adjournment matter is to the Treasurer, and the action that I seek is that he steps in and regulates prices of everyday groceries at the supermarket. Recently I rallied with workers, with unions and with other community members outside the Coles annual general meeting. We wanted shareholders to hear our calls for Coles to stop price gouging and profiting off worker exploitation. While so many are struggling to keep up with the cost of groceries, Coles has raked in \$1.1 billion in profits in the past year – gouged, gouged, prices are gouged. It is obscene. It is obscene that they can make such mega profits while people are accessing food relief in record numbers and so many are having to choose between putting food on the table or paying for other essentials like rent or their medication, and this includes their workers. Their workers, people who work for the supermarket chains, should receive decent pay and decent conditions. They should be able to afford the groceries that they are selling.

It is time to hold these big supermarkets to account and make it loud and clear that we will not back down until people are prioritised over profit. The Labor government has the power to act. It is time to stop supermarket greed. It is time to make sure that supermarket workers can afford the food on their shelves and that everyone in our community can access everyday groceries. Treasurer, where does your government stand in this battle royal – on the side of everyday people who just cannot keep up with rising costs or on the side of the bloated, greedy supermarkets who continue to make megabucks off the backs of their workers and our community?

**Road safety**

**Wendy Lovell** (Northern Victoria) (17:27): (587) My adjournment is for the Minister for Roads and Road Safety and concerns safety on Victorian roads, including both driver behaviour and the current standard of roads and the lack of road maintenance. The action that I seek is for the minister to

ensure the government increase road safety messages in the media and community and for the minister to immediately invest additional funds to ensure the adequate maintenance of regional roads.

This year Victoria has recorded the highest number of lives lost on our roads in the past 15 years, and while we all know the state of Victoria's roads is disgraceful, it is not just the state of the roads that has led to this devastation. Many people have commented to me that they believe driver behaviour has severely declined in recent years or, as they more specifically point out, post COVID, and I find myself having to agree. With such a large electorate I spend a lot of time on the road, and I am continually surprised by the amount of cars that cruise past me even though I am travelling at the maximum speed. I am also often appalled to see cars speeding and weaving in and out of vehicles on the ring-road and freeways that I travel on.

Earlier this year five lives were lost in a single-vehicle accident at the intersection of Labuan Road and the Murray Valley Highway in Yarroweyah. Yet despite all the publicity about the dangers of this intersection and Moira shire reducing the speed limit on Labuan Road to 80 kilometres per hour, just last week it was reported that the police had pulled over a driver doing 169 kilometres per hour on Labuan Road near the same intersection. That is more than twice the speed limit.

To 12 November, 258 lives have been lost on Victorian roads this year; 153 of those lives, or 59 per cent of all deaths, have been lost on rural roads. Alarming, in my electorate we have seen 18 lives lost in just four accidents alone – five at Yarroweyah, five at Daylesford, four in Chiltern and four at Piries near Mansfield. As I have been reflecting on this issue over the past week, it occurred to me that I had not seen a single road safety advertisement on the TV for some time. So I went to the TAC to look at their current campaigns, and I had not seen a single one of them. I am not sure whether the government has stopped or reduced TAC ads – but if it has, it is a mistake – or the ads they are running are not effective. Many previous campaigns have been confronting but also obviously effective, and safety on the road is not something that we can tippy-toe around.

Safety on the roads also requires our road network to be safe, and it is well documented that regional roads have deteriorated and that they are not being adequately maintained. This is another area the government must invest in to ensure the number of lives lost on country roads does not increase even more. Road maintenance is the first step to ensuring that Victorians have safe roads to drive on, but as many communities that have suffered tragic losses will tell you, this is not enough alone. Safer driving campaigns are essential to safety on our roads.

### *The Little Grey Film*

**Georgie PURCELL** (Northern Victoria) (17:30): (588) My adjournment matter this evening is for the Minister for Racing, and the action I seek is for him to be my plus one at the Victorian premiere of *The Little Grey Film*, an award-winning documentary about Australia's greyhound racing industry written and directed by Indy Davies. This wonderful event will be hosted by community rescue Greyt Greys on 2 December from 4 pm at the Thornbury Picture House. This film features a series of candid interviews with politicians, including me, my Greens colleagues, rescue organisations and foster carers. It follows a human guardian of a curious greyhound who discovers the truth about the greyhound racing industry – something that I have highlighted here many times in this place, online and now on billboards and rock posters all around Melbourne since the day of my election. Not only that, the film showcases the wonders of adopting a greyhound as a companion – something else I am deeply passionate about and want to share with not only the minister but all of my colleagues and the entire world.

It is well known that greyhound rescue groups in Victoria are facing a serious rehoming crisis, with the industry breeding up to four times as many dogs as it has the capacity to rehome. Community rescues have endless waitlists, pounds and shelters are full and industry participants are trying desperately to rehome dogs online. As a result, countless greyhounds can languish in racing kennels for up to 12 months waiting for someone to open their home up to them.

This little film is doing its big part to share the joys of opening your home to a quirky and lazy long dog with the wider community, because once you meet, foster or adopt a greyhound your life is forever changed. These magical sleek hounds awkwardly sneak their way into your heart, and your life will simply never be the same again. And so, because of this, this event is, not surprisingly, sold out. But with a spare ticket I can think of no-one better to be sitting next to me at *The Little Grey Film* than the minister himself, and I hope he will accept my offer. I will even shout him a little treat.

#### Police resources

**Matthew BACH** (North-Eastern Metropolitan) (17:33): (589) My adjournment tonight is for the Minister for Police, and the action I seek is for the minister to rule out further cuts to police staffing and advise when full policing services will be returned. In my electorate police stations in Forest Hill and also in Greensborough, in Eltham and in Boronia are being forced to reduce their coverage – that is, hours open to the public – because of police officer vacancies. The police station in Mount Waverley will effectively close, with no reception services and residents being directed to the nearest 24-hour station. The minister must explain to the community why 43 stations will be forced to operate with reduced hours because there are not enough police officers to serve our community. As the Shadow Minister for Police in the other place has said, ‘Victorian communities are being punished for Labor’s incompetence.’ There is great concern within the community about public accessibility to police services, and rightly so. This is particularly at a time when there are heightened concerns for community safety, so I ask the minister: when will full policing services be restored across our state?

#### Victorian high-ability program

**Nick McGOWAN** (North-Eastern Metropolitan) (17:34): (590) My call to action comes tonight from two young awesome students from Heathmont East Primary School Bas and Luke. They wrote directly to the Minister for Education, and they said:

Our names are Bas and Luke, and we are Level five students at Heathmont East Primary School. Just a few weeks ago we asked our teacher about the Victorian High Ability Program (VHAP) for when we are in Grade six and she told us that once you have done VHAP once in Primary School you don’t get to do it again. This means that because we are in Grade five, we can’t do VHAP again. We were shocked and annoyed at this, so we wanted to write a letter.

We know that students in levels 5 and 6 can be selected to be in the VHAP program. This program helps high ability students minds to prosper. VHAP gives high ability students a chance to come together from schools all over Victoria and for us kids to be challenged in our learning outside of our classrooms. It’s a great idea and we have loved being a part of it. Some things that we have liked about VHAP is ... 1. The challenge, we have liked thinking about different things it’s not breasy or easy and we weren’t bored like we can be in a regular classroom. 2. We are not alone in being smart. 3. We liked working with other people. 4. We got to talk about interesting things like in VHAP maths we can turn any number into binary code and in VHAP English we talked about the hero’s journey of facing evil and returning on the other side of the story as a different person. That was really cool!

We have loved being part of VHAP and having a masterclass in person with another school. Even though VHAP has been amazing, it was for only 1 term. We felt bummed that it ended. We are in grade 5 and now that we have found out we can’t do this in grade 6 and that it’s over we are feeling annoyed. Kids who are good at sport get to keep playing sport, they don’t get cut off after 1 term. We need to be with other like-minded kids for more than 1 term only. Have we been forgotten about?

Can you please consider extending the VHAP course so that we can have the chance to continue to work with other like-minded peers and not just for 1 term?

Thank you for listening to us.

Kind regards,

Bas and Luke from Heathmont East Primary School ...

a fantastic school in my electorate in Ringwood headed by an absolutely stand-out principal Anita Elliott as well.



### Victoria Police enterprise bargaining agreement

**Trung LUU** (Western Metropolitan) (17:36): (591) My question is for the Minister for Police. The action I seek is for the minister to engage with the Police Association Victoria and come to an agreement that ensures that experienced officers stay in the force. I have spoken before in this Parliament about the number of police officers leaving the force. I am concerned that as the number drops, the level of service Victoria Police can provide will not meet the community's expectations. Under this Labor government, stations are closing and investigations are piling up. Recent changes in government policy are making it harder for police officers to do their job. Morale is low and getting lower. More than half of serving police officers are thinking of leaving the job for alternative career opportunities; I was one of them. As people leave, the demand grows on those that remain. While their pay remains the same, their workload grows. They are overloaded and underpaid.

Working as a police officer is an honourable profession and a fantastic career path for those who want to serve our community. I had a great time in the police force, and I wish more people would put on the uniform and take the oath to prevent crime and preserve the peace. But the government needs to address the real concerns of currently serving police officers. The government needs to make sure pay matches the expectations of the job and the work-life balance is tailored for people who are committed to things such as raising a family.

Negotiations between the police and the government have broken down, but both parties must come back to the table. I urge the minister to listen to the association about the police officers' concerns and come to an agreement to ensure that new officers are excited to join the police force and experienced officers are pleased to stay and serve our community.

### Housing

**Evan MULHOLLAND** (Northern Metropolitan) (17:38): (592) My adjournment tonight is directed towards the Minister for Planning in the other place. This tired old Labor government has been in power for almost a decade. In that time homes and rents have become less and less affordable. That is why, supposedly, Labor released its housing statement. As the former Premier said, 'The status quo is not an option', but I would say that Labor is responsible for the status quo. I have spoken to the minister about Darebin City Council before. I am glad the minister has now approved Assemble's great development proposal for Preston on St George's Road, but I am afraid I am going to have to speak to the minister again about Darebin City Council.

This comes as Darebin council voted against a sensible development in Thornbury in my electorate. This development was for two two-storey townhouses, set to replace a single detached dwelling. This is a case study of a disconnect between councillors and Labor's own housing statement. I wanted to note the councillors who voted against this: Emily Dimitriadis, Tim Laurence and Julie Williams, who are all Labor councillors for the City of Darebin. It is like they did not actually read the government's housing statement or the intention in that housing statement. Cr Dimitriades even described the development as an overdevelopment. They also discussed using overlays to block development – a real 'saying the quiet part out loud' moment. You really have to wonder if Labor councillors consider a two-storey townhouse in inner-city Thornbury to be overdevelopment.

How can the Allan government ever expect to meet its housing statement target of 80,000 homes a year when their own Labor councillors are rejecting two-storey townhouses in Thornbury. I am really hoping that VCAT sees sense. The government set a target of building 220 homes every day, including weekends and public holidays, for 10 years and is having Labor councillors already causing a roadblock on a proposal for two two-storey townhouses in the inner city. I seek this action from the minister: to explain why Victorians should expect Labor to meet its housing target when Labor councillors object to even the most reasonable developments.

### Medically supervised injecting facilities

**Renee HEATH** (Eastern Victoria) (17:42): (593) The latest coroner's report details that 2022 was Victoria's worst year for overdose deaths in a decade, up over 42 per cent since the Andrews–Allan government came to power, with illicit drug overdose deaths up a staggering 88 per cent. The three worst years for illicit drug overdose deaths in Victoria have come since Labor, supported by the Greens, opened the drug-injecting room in Richmond. There has been a 21 per cent increase in illicit overdose deaths in the four years since the injecting room opened compared to the four years prior. Over 2100 Victorians have died from overdoses since the opening of the injecting rooms. That is a tragedy for all of those individuals and in the ongoing devastation that their loved ones suffer. None of the six objectives of the medically supervised injecting rooms (MSIR) have been achieved. Those six points were reduced deaths, better health outcomes, better amenities, less discarded paraphernalia, less transmission of bloodborne viruses and less stress on local health facilities.

The recent report sadly confirms another concern about the MSIR in that it would increase experimentation with harmful substances. In 2022 a record 77.6 per cent of overdose deaths were due to multidrug toxicity. These record high statistics have come just as the government has extended its licence for the first injecting room and is planning on opening a second. Once again we see the pattern of socialist big government. The problem is identified, politicians get involved and the problem worsens. We saw this with record lockdowns in Victoria during COVID and with interference in the rental and energy markets, and now tragically we are seeing it with illicit drugs. We sincerely hope that every MP of whatever persuasion wants better outcomes for drug-affected and drug-addicted Victorians, but the current ideologies are perpetuating and exacerbating the problem in this sector and in our community. The report, however, details that Frankston and Darebin councils have reduced heroin overdose deaths by a third despite not having a drug-injecting room. Surely taxpayer funds would be better spent on working with these councils to find out what they are doing and how that can be implemented across the state.

So my adjournment is for the Minister for Mental Health, and the action that I seek is that the minister provide a report on how many of the 230 people who died from heroin overdoses last year and the 173 who died the year before were clients of the medically supervised injecting room.

### Community safety

**David DAVIS** (Southern Metropolitan) (17:45): (594) My matter for the adjournment tonight is for the attention of the Premier, and it relates to the terrible incident that occurred in Caulfield on Friday night and the failure of the government to bring into place and spend the \$3 million of additional security money for the Jewish community. There are a number of key components to that: the \$900,000 for the Jewish Community Security Group and the focus by Victoria Police on all of the matters that need to be dealt with. Here we have a state government that in the lead-up to the state election promised \$3 million of security money to the Jewish community. Ms Crozier will well remember that David Southwick, the member for Caulfield, led the way on this, and the government effectively copied there. We have no problem with this being a bipartisan matter, but actually it has not been delivered. Now we have serious concerns for the safety of the Jewish community and for the safety of people right through that section of our mutual electorates. I have no doubt that some Labor members are also concerned about this, as are some other members in this chamber.

So what I am calling on the new Premier to do is get off her tail and spend this money – the money that has already been promised – and actually make sure that all of the different items in this battery of security measures are put in place. Maybe it is partially the police that are responsible here and partially other agencies, but the money was promised by the then Premier. That is why I am calling on the Premier to respond. The Premier obviously has overall carriage of this package of security measures. This includes security measures at schools and elsewhere. I can tell you that the Jewish community now is feeling very, very much in need of these measures. I do not know why the government has been so slow in implementing them. It may be tardiness or incompetence or

whatever – I do not know – but I think everyone is now over it and wants these measures in place. It is not a matter of new money being allocated; this is money that has already been committed. They just need to get off their tail and do it. I am calling on the Premier to get active to ensure that every cent of that \$3 million that was promised is spent, and spent very, very quickly, because the Jewish community need that help.

### Health services occupational violence

**Georgie CROZIER** (Southern Metropolitan) (17:48): (595) My adjournment matter is for the attention of the Minister for Health, and it is in relation to occupational violence in our hospitals and across our health services. Occupational violence is defined as any incident where an employee is abused, threatened or assaulted in circumstances arising out of or in the course of their employment. Unfortunately over the past few years we have seen an increase in occupational violence. Indeed prior to last year's election the Australasian College for Emergency Medicine were calling for 24-hour security guards in every Victorian emergency department because they understood the level of violence that was occurring in our emergency departments, which was threatening staff and threatening other patients. This is completely unacceptable, and it delays the delivery of good health care to those patients in need, despite the efforts of doctors, nurses, admin and clerical staff and others, who are all trying to do their work and look after those patients.

What we do know is this government has failed to meet the needs of the Victorian community in providing assistance with mental health. Certainly we have seen those mental health numbers skyrocket through Victoria. There are not enough rehabilitation beds and assistance. Often the police will tell you they are dealing with a lot of unwell patients who are violent, and this is causing a massive issue in our emergency departments. But the occupational violence is not just in our EDs, it is in wards, where patients, for whatever reason, become violent. I have been looking through a number of annual reports that were tabled in the last week, and in some of our health services there is a definite increase in occupational violence.

In 2018 the government undertook the *Occupational Violence and Aggression Case Study: Security-Trained Personnel as an Effective Control*, I think it was. They did a number of things. They looked at risk assessments, security-trained personnel as an effective control, the outcome of those security-trained personnel and flexing up to effectively control risk and then reviewed for effectiveness. The action I am seeking is for the minister to direct the Department of Health to undertake another review into security arrangements in our hospitals, given that the Australasian College for Emergency Medicine called for this 12 months ago and given that the latest statistics in some of the annual reports that were tabled in the Parliament last week indicate an increase in occupational violence and the risk to staff and of course patients.

### Responses

**Ingrid STITT** (Western Metropolitan – Minister for Mental Health, Minister for Ageing, Minister for Multicultural Affairs) (17:51): There were 16 adjournment matters this evening to 10 separate ministers, and I will refer those adjournment matters to the relevant ministers for a written response in accordance with the standing orders.

Dr Heath raised an important issue around overdoses, which I am happy to acquit now. Can I say from the outset that of course we are committed to trying to prevent every death associated with drug use and drug harm in our community. Every single life lost to overdose is an absolute tragedy, and it is incumbent on all of us to work really hard to try to bring these numbers down. Of course the recent data that was released by the Coroners Court shows that, very sadly, the figures are high this reporting period. There were 549 fatal drug overdoses in Victoria in 2022. We really need to reflect on that and look at all of the programs that we are pursuing and investing in to make sure that we try and prevent these tragedies from occurring. Whilst the numbers remain far too high, it is important to note that the government is making significant efforts to reduce this drug harm and the toll of overdoses and other drug harms. We have doubled the investment in our alcohol and other drug services across the state.

In the 2023–24 state budget we invested \$255 million in additional funding over the next four years. That is in addition to the \$372 million into our drug and alcohol services, which represents a doubling since 2014–15.

We have introduced the life-saving medically supervised injecting room in North Richmond, and this is where I think I probably take a different view to Dr Heath. I actually see the medically supervised injecting room as part of the ongoing effort to bring down that overdose toll. The statistics that are provided through the North Richmond service very strongly indicate that we have been saving lives as a result of that service. There were 6500 overdoses treated at that facility, and the service estimates that 65 lives were saved as a result of the interventions and the supports that are in place through the medically supervised injecting room in North Richmond.

In addition, we are also investing in completing Victoria's naloxone reforms, meaning that frontline harm reduction workers will be able to directly dispense life-saving medication to people at risk of opioid overdose. We are also reviewing our pharmacotherapy program to stabilise and expand access to these critical support services for people who are struggling with addiction, whilst also keeping an eye on emerging drug trends, obviously with an acute awareness of the overdose hazards that are currently being experienced in places like North America with the opioid epidemic over there through some of the pharmaceutical-grade opioids.

We will continue to prioritise a health-led approach to drug use. We know that that will yield positive results and help change people's lives. I am absolutely committed to doing whatever we can to drive down that terrible loss of life, and all of our services work very hard in that regard.

**Renee Heath:** On a point of order, President, I am not sure what the procedure is here, but will I still get a response to my actual question, which is how many of those 230 in 2022 and then 173 were clients?

**The PRESIDENT:** The minister can acquit her adjournment matter in real time if it is a matter for her, so it has been acquitted.

**Ingrid STITT:** Dr Heath, in my answer I took some issue with the assertion that the supervised injecting room did anything other than save lives rather than cost lives. I think I have acquitted the matter, but it is open to you to ask me these things in any manner you choose to do so.

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

**House adjourned 5:56 pm.**