



# **Hansard**

## **LEGISLATIVE COUNCIL**

### **60th Parliament**

**Wednesday 4 October 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, Nicholas	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



# CONTENTS

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COMMITTEES	
Public Accounts and Estimates Committee .....	3023
Membership .....	3023
PETITIONS	
Nepean Highway, Frankston, planning .....	3023
COMMITTEES	
Public Accounts and Estimates Committee .....	3023
Appointment of a Person to Conduct the Performance Audit of the Auditor-General and Victorian Auditor-General's Office .....	3023
PAPERS	
Papers .....	3023
BUSINESS OF THE HOUSE	
Notices .....	3024
MEMBERS STATEMENTS	
Housing .....	3024
Premier and Deputy Premier .....	3024
Commonwealth Games .....	3024
Refugee policy .....	3025
F Project .....	3025
Animal welfare .....	3025
Melbourne Fringe Festival .....	3026
Motorcyclist safety .....	3026
Premier .....	3026
BAPS Swaminarayan temple .....	3027
South East Community Links Youth Links Hub .....	3027
BILLS	
Planning and Environment Amendment (Soil Protection) (Solar Power Generation Facilities) Bill 2023 .....	3028
Statement of compatibility .....	3028
Second reading .....	3028
Residential Tenancies Amendment (Rent Freeze and Caps) Bill 2023 .....	3029
Statement of compatibility .....	3029
Second reading .....	3030
MOTIONS	
Government performance .....	3032
BUSINESS OF THE HOUSE	
Notices of motion .....	3050
MOTIONS	
Decriminalisation of public drunkenness .....	3050
QUESTIONS WITHOUT NOTICE AND MINISTERS STATEMENTS	
Medically supervised injecting facilities .....	3053
Commonwealth Games .....	3053
Ministers statements: foster and kinship carers .....	3055
Medicinal cannabis .....	3055
Land tax .....	3056
Ministers statements: Multicultural Community Infrastructure Fund .....	3057
Lake Eildon .....	3057
Australian flag .....	3058
Ministers statements: housing .....	3059
Water policy .....	3059
Malmsbury Youth Justice Centre .....	3060
Ministers statements: State Emergency Service Cobram unit .....	3061
Written responses .....	3062
CONSTITUENCY QUESTIONS	
Eastern Victoria Region .....	3062
Northern Victoria Region .....	3062
South-Eastern Metropolitan Region .....	3063
South-Eastern Metropolitan Region .....	3063
Eastern Victoria Region .....	3063
Northern Victoria Region .....	3063
Southern Metropolitan Region .....	3064
Western Victoria Region .....	3064

North-Eastern Metropolitan Region .....	3064
Southern Metropolitan Region .....	3064
Western Victoria Region .....	3065
South-Eastern Metropolitan Region .....	3065
Northern Victoria Region .....	3065
North-Eastern Metropolitan Region .....	3065
COMMITTEES	
Environment and Planning Committee .....	3066
Reference.....	3066
MOTIONS	
Decriminalisation of public drunkenness.....	3084
STATEMENTS ON TABLED PAPERS AND PETITIONS	
Department of Treasury and Finance .....	3101
Budget papers 2023–24 .....	3101
Department of Treasury and Finance .....	3102
Budget papers 2023–24 .....	3102
Yoorrook Justice Commission .....	3103
Yoorrook for Justice: Report into Victoria’s Child Protection and Criminal Justice Systems .....	3103
Deakin University.....	3104
Report 2021 .....	3104
Department of Treasury and Finance .....	3105
Budget papers 2023–24 .....	3105
Public Accounts and Estimates Committee .....	3107
Report on the 2023–24 Budget Estimates.....	3107
ADJOURNMENT	
Inclusive education .....	3108
Rural and regional health .....	3108
Sick pay guarantee.....	3109
Small business support.....	3109
Taxation.....	3110
Cohuna child care .....	3110
Teachers.....	3111
Frankston health services .....	3111
Western Victoria Region roads .....	3112
Crime prevention .....	3113
Barmah strategic action plan .....	3113
Mt Waverley Tennis Club .....	3114
Responses .....	3114

**Wednesday 4 October 2023**

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

*Committees***Public Accounts and Estimates Committee***Membership*

**The PRESIDENT (09:35):** I advise the house that I have received a letter from Paul Hamer, the member for Box Hill, resigning from the Public Accounts and Estimates Committee effective today.

*Petitions***Nepean Highway, Frankston, planning**

**David LIMBRICK** (South-Eastern Metropolitan) presented a petition bearing 516 signatures:

The Petition of certain citizens of the State of Victoria draws to the attention of the Legislative Council that the Minister for Planning has decided to pre-emptively place an overlay on properties on the Nepean Highway, Frankston prior to any independent review by Planning Panels Victoria and decisions

The petitioners therefore request that the Legislative Council call on the Government to withdraw the overlay placed on properties on the Nepean Highway, Frankston by the Minister for Planning and allow due process to take course.

**David LIMBRICK:** I move:

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

**Motion agreed to.**

*Committees***Public Accounts and Estimates Committee***Appointment of a Person to Conduct the Performance Audit of the Auditor-General and Victorian Auditor-General's Office*

**Michael GALEA** (South-Eastern Metropolitan) (09:36): Pursuant to section 35 of the Parliamentary Committees Act 2003, I table a report on the appointment of a person to conduct the performance audit of the Auditor-General and Victorian Auditor-General's Office from the Public Accounts and Estimates Committee. I move:

That the report be published.

**Motion agreed to.**

*Papers***Papers**

**Tabled by Clerk:**

Australian Criminal Intelligence Commission – Chair of the Board of the Australian Criminal Intelligence Commission – Report, 2021–22.

Office of the Victorian Information Commissioner (OVIC) – Report, 2022–23.

Subordinate Legislation Act 1994 – Documents under section 15 in respect of Statutory Rule Nos. 104 and 106.

*Business of the house***Notices****David Davis having given notice:**

**The PRESIDENT:** Can I see that written motion?

**David Davis:** Yes, you can. I will write it down. I will write it now for you.

**The PRESIDENT:** You will write it now?

*Members interjecting.*

**The PRESIDENT:** There does not need to be a conversation. Mr Davis, there was a ruling last term that motions need to be presented in writing and be able to be read. I would ask you, if you are going to write that out, that you write it out in a way that the table office can interpret it.

**Further notice given.***Members statements***Housing**

**John BERGER** (Southern Metropolitan) (09:39): It has been a massive couple of weeks in my community of Southern Metro. On 20 September we released our landmark package to boost housing supply and increase affordability as part of an affordability partnership to build 800,000 homes in Victoria. It is Australia's biggest and one of the biggest reforms to our housing sector in generations. Everyone wants to be a Victorian. When international students choose Australia as the place to study, they do so because of Victoria. When immigrants choose our shores to start a new life, they choose Victoria. We are the fastest growing state in Australia, and our population is going to hit 10.3 million by 2051. But that means we need to build and build fast: 2.24 million homes including a target of 425,000 homes across regional and rural Victoria. We have got a plan thanks to *Victoria's Housing Statement: The Decade Ahead 2024–2034*. It sets up a target of 80,000 a year. I commend the Andrews and now Allan Labor governments on this work, so vital to my community of Southern Metro, with some of the highest numbers of public housing in the country.

**Premier and Deputy Premier**

**John BERGER** (Southern Metropolitan) (09:40): I also want to congratulate Premier Allan on her election and Deputy Premier Carroll on his election.

**Commonwealth Games**

**David DAVIS** (Southern Metropolitan) (09:41): We in the chamber here have watched Jacinta Allan move from Minister for Commonwealth Games Delivery and Minister for Transport and Infrastructure. She botched both of those portfolios – massive blowouts, massive cost overruns in the transport infrastructure portfolio and then the king daddy of misadventure, the Commonwealth Games. Launching the Commonwealth Games, bidding for the Commonwealth Games and then after that pulling the –

**A member** interjected.

**David DAVIS:** It is a colloquialism; I do not think it is an unparliamentary point. But what has happened with the Commonwealth Games is the most extraordinary set of circumstances: the failure to properly scope the games, the failure to properly work out exactly how this would impact or work out where the games villages were going to be built, what sports were going to be there, how this would operate – and then suddenly this so-called massive cost blowout and a decision to pull the games and cause huge reputational damage to the state. I mean, this minister and now Premier has really got to explain how she could get it so wrong and do so much damage to the state.

### Refugee policy

**Sarah MANSFIELD** (Western Victoria) (09:42): I recently attended the Fairness Yet to Come forum in Geelong, exploring the unfinished business in Australia's refugee policies. Hosted by a combined refugee action group, Bellarine for Refugees and Queenscliff Rural Australians for Refugees, it focused on the 12,000 refugees who still live in limbo, without pathways to permanent residency in Australia due to the flawed fast-track temporary protection system. These local advocacy groups have been fighting for the rights of refugees and asylum seekers for decades. They provide invaluable support, including funding for legal assistance and advocacy, and many volunteers offer their homes for asylum seekers to stay.

After the meeting I spoke with representatives of a group of 22 Tamil and Iranian women currently walking from Melbourne to Canberra in the hope they can draw attention to the thousands still living in uncertainty. The women have contributed to Australia for over a decade yet still are denied the safety of permanency and basic rights. They should not have to leave behind their families and children and walk 25 days to receive a compassionate response from the federal government. We have made positive changes in this country, but it is time to finish what was started in February and grant all asylum seekers and refugees permanent visas.

### F Project

**Jacinta ERMACORA** (Western Victoria) (09:44): In September we celebrated Youth Fest across Victoria, and I was delighted to welcome Minister Suleyman, Minister for Youth, who visited the F Project in Warrnambool as she visited our region last month. Students from our region were absolutely chuffed to meet the minister and show her the exhibition of amazing artworks showcasing the artistic and creative talents of young people from some of our local secondary schools. The exhibition was curated by the students themselves in conjunction with the youth team at the F Project.

I wish to congratulate the Warrnambool City Council and the organisers of Youth Fest and acknowledge the vibrant contribution that many artists, such as Gareth Colliton and Des and Helen Bunyan, have made to the Warrnambool arts scene over the years. The F Project is a community-owned gallery and project. It is a place to visit in Warrnambool to see impressive exhibitions, and they have an amazing array of produce – unique gifts produced by local artists available in their gift shop. They are celebrating their 10th anniversary, 15 years since the idea was conceived.

Minister Suleyman, as Minister for Small Business and Minister for Veterans, also took the time to visit several small businesses in our region, and the Warrnambool RSL greatly appreciated her visit as she toured the expansion of their services. I thank the minister for visiting the south-west and taking such a keen interest in what our region has to offer.

### Animal welfare

**Georgie PURCELL** (Northern Victoria) (09:45): An animal protection adviser in every single representative's office, a dedicated animal welfare caucus and cross-party collaboration on bills to end animal suffering – these are all features of the United States Congress, which I was so pleased to visit over the parliamentary break. And right now a bill to end the import of our native icon, the kangaroo, and their skins is currently before them with strong support from both Republicans and Democrats. It is a message that we should be paying attention to.

Up until the late 1920s a commercial koala skin industry was operating in Australia, and it was American lawmakers passing a bill to stop their import that helped bring that industry to an end. Now across the country they are threatened and endangered. It is confronting to consider that if our overseas counterparts did not push us to act, our precious koalas could now be extinct. It is a reality we have been saying our own kangaroos could face if we do not act soon. Even though our own government is not listening it seems the rest of the world is, and it will give us no choice but to listen. I want to thank Animal Wellness Action and the Center for a Humane Economy for helping us learn more about the

advancement of animal protection legislation in other jurisdictions and importantly the bipartisan passion they have overseas for our native animals.

### **Melbourne Fringe Festival**

**Ryan BATCHELOR** (Southern Metropolitan) (09:47): The Melbourne Fringe Festival kicked off last night, and for the next three weeks in October there will be more than 470 events. 2500 artists, around 90 per cent of which are Victorians, will be showcasing their work in venues across the Melbourne metropolitan area and also in parts of regional Victoria on a program that is celebrating the inclusive and diverse nature of the artistic community here in Melbourne. We have got emerging artists, designers, makers of the wild and wonderful, and art that challenges us and confronts, inspires and celebrates.

On Monday night I got to go to a preview event at the Common Rooms at Trades Hall with colleagues from every corner of the Parliament to see a sample of the delights that await people who will be participating in the fringe festival this year. There were some certain delights – I can tell you that. And we know that of course Southern Metro is the heart of Melbourne’s cultural and creative community, from our storied institutions on St Kilda Road to the sticky carpets of our live music venues and the studios in smaller spaces where the artists who are performing in this year’s fringe are learning and plying their trade, coming up with this great celebration of creativity. I encourage all members to support the Melbourne Fringe and the creativity and the jobs that go with it. It is going to be a great festival in October.

### **Motorcyclist safety**

**Sonja TERPSTRA** (North-Eastern Metropolitan) (09:48): I rise to update the house on a recent inaugural event that I attended in my role as chair of the Motorcycling Community Engagement Panel recently at Skyline, Federation Square, on Sunday, because this month is Motorcyclist Awareness Month. Motorcyclists are a growing cohort of road users. They are growing in population, but of course they are vulnerable road users. Being on two wheels you do not get many second chances when you are on the roads. I think one of the most important points that was made over the weekend – and I will talk about the many initiatives the Victorian government is doing to keep motorcycle riders safe in a moment – and one of the most important things to remember is that what you may not know is under the helmet is someone’s mother, someone’s brother, somebody’s sister, somebody’s partner. Interestingly, women represent 15 per cent of all motorcycle riders now. In Motorcyclist Awareness Month make sure you keep an eye out and keep our motorcyclists safe on the road.

Now, some of the safety improvements the government has done since the inception of this committee include the MotoCAP, the world’s first protective gear rating program; a graduated licensing system; motorcycle safety campaigns; safety infrastructure programs; the introduction of the Australian design rules for mandating anti-lock braking systems; the motorcycle crash card; and much, much more.

I am really pleased to be able to chair this community engagement panel. They are a great bunch of people from a diverse range of backgrounds, and I am looking forward to working with them and also seeing more women being involved in that panel, because as I said, more women are getting on the road and being motorcyclists. It is Motorcyclist Awareness Month. Please look out for motorcyclists this month.

### **Premier**

**Rikkie-Lee TYRRELL** (Northern Victoria) (09:50): Today I am using my members statement to farewell the old and welcome the new. With the departure of Victoria’s 48th Premier last week we now see the 49th, Ms Jacinta Allan, step into the lead role here at the Parliament of Victoria – and boy, what a role it is she has taken on. With an estimated debt of \$135.4 billion, which is expected to reach \$226 billion by the end of this term, Ms Allan certainly has inherited quite a legacy indeed. Our new Premier has also been handed the responsibility of ensuring the Metro rail link completion by who knows when; the crumbling state of Victoria’s road infrastructure, along with an alarming rise in

fatalities; and an unprecedented housing crisis, just to name a few of what Mr Andrews has inflicted upon the people of Victoria.

I am happy to see that the Victorian Labor Party has elected a northern region member into this role. We can now rest assured that our regionally based Premier will equalise the priorities of both regional and metro Victorians alike. I look forward to seeing regional roads, housing infrastructure, health care and education receiving the equality in investment they have been denied for so long now. I would like to welcome our new Premier to her role and wish her all the best for achieving success in the future for all Victorians alike.

#### **BAPS Swaminarayan temple**

**Sheena WATT** (Northern Metropolitan) (09:51): It was a privilege to be invited by the BAPS Swaminarayan temple in Mill Park alongside the member for Mill Park Lily D'Ambrosio and the federal member for Scullin Andrew Giles to celebrate the 90th anniversary of their guru. The Mill Park mandir is the largest in the state and a hub for practising BAPS Hindus in the northern suburbs. I was grateful to be afforded the enormous opportunity to speak to the assembly about the importance of the upcoming Voice to Parliament referendum and why a yes vote is so significant and so essential. I also had the opportunity to witness the BAPS women's wing cultural assembly, featuring an array of captivating performances, including drama, dance and spiritual discourses.

Can I take a moment to thank BAPS for allowing us to visit and speak to their wonderful community of devotees and for so strongly and powerfully embracing the yes vote. I hope it is the first visit of many, and I look forward to welcoming them into the Parliament next sitting week for the Diwali celebrations.

#### **South East Community Links Youth Links Hub**

**Lee TARLAMIS** (South-Eastern Metropolitan) (09:52): Noble Park's new South East Community Links (SECL) Youth Links Hub is now officially open. I had the pleasure of attending the opening, which was a wonderful celebration of community spirit and showcased our amazing and inspiring youth. We all know how challenging school, learning and even life can be for young people. That is why it is so important that we have this new hub that brings the community together, providing a safe place for young people from diverse backgrounds to seek guidance, access opportunities and find a sense of belonging. The hub and its youth leaders are there to provide support and mentorship and to build confidence in our young people to chase their dreams.

The new hub is a welcoming and comfortable space for young people to hang out, relax, study, learn skills and get the help and support they need when they need it most. Thank you to the MCs, youth leader Diba Jalal and Farzad Kakazada, who brought so much energy to this event and are the embodiment of the bright, passionate and kind people you will find at the hub and at SECL. Thanks also to SECL CEO Peter McNamara for his unwavering commitment to our community. Peter's unrelenting passion for improving social and economic outcomes for our community has been one of the driving forces behind SECL, the Youth Links Hub and so many other life-changing initiatives. The dedicated and passionate SECL team have been delivering services and youth empowerment programs for more than 50 years, and I continue to be amazed at the transformational work they do to support our community, particularly for our young people. Congratulations again to the SECL team for their ongoing commitment to making a difference in the lives of so many and for working to address the ever-evolving challenges while creating opportunities for people, including our youth.

*Bills***Planning and Environment Amendment (Soil Protection) (Solar Power Generation Facilities) Bill 2023***Statement of compatibility*

**Rikkie-Lee TYRRELL** (Northern Victoria) (09:54): I lay on the table a statement of compatibility with the Charter of Human Rights and Responsibilities Act 2006:

In accordance with section 28 of the Charter of Human Rights and Responsibilities Act 2006, I make this statement of compatibility with respect to the Planning and Environment Amendment (Soil Protection) (Solar Power Generation Facilities) Bill 2023.

In my opinion the Planning and Environment Amendment (Soil Protection) (Solar Power Generation Facilities) Bill 2023, as introduced to the Legislative Council, is compatible with the human rights protected by the Charter Act. I base my opinion on the reasons outlined in this statement.

The Bill will legislate the preexisting solar energy power generation facility siting considerations, as per the Solar Energy Facilities Design and Development Guideline, October 2022.

This bill does not cause limitation to, or loss of any rights within the charter.

I consider that the Planning and Environment Amendment (Soil Protection) (Solar Power Generation Facilities) Bill 2023, is compatible with the Charter Act because it does not raise any human rights issues.

*Second reading*

**Rikkie-Lee TYRRELL** (Northern Victoria) (09:55): I move:

That the bill be now read a second time.

It is with great honour that I introduce this timely bill on behalf of all current and future affected Victorian communities.

The Planning and Environment Amendment (Soil Protection) (Solar Power Generation Facilities) Bill 2023 is relevant and necessary.

As the title suggests, the bill primarily seeks to protect the vital soils that provide us with some of the best produce in the country to ensure that this land remains viable, productive agricultural land – also, to ensure that we don't create a domestic and environmental catastrophe. Large swathes of land currently under proposal for solar energy generation facilities lie firmly within bushfire-prone areas and overlays. The concern here is that some of these harbour the additional danger of being in domestic water catchment supply areas.

Currently, the CFA's 'standard operational procedures' on the very real potential for future bushfires within solar energy generation facilities don't address this particular issue. I have previously raised concerns with the Minister for Emergency Services in this chamber about the lack of standardised training within the CFA on the potential for photovoltaic panel and battery ignition.

The minister did provide a fair response. However, since then, I've spoken to numerous CFA volunteers who have indicated that they are yet to receive any training and that their current 'actions on' for a solar farm fire will consist of disconnecting the mains power from the grid and doing their best to prevent the fire escaping the area, not actually extinguishing the blaze.

Burning or melting solar cells contain the carcinogens of cadmium telluride and gallium arsenide, raw lead, as well as the potentially lethal phosphorous. Inhalation of these toxic nanoparticles causes silicosis of the lungs and is recommended to be treated with the same precautions as asbestos. There is no intention to put the lives of firefighters at risk by trying to extinguish the burning infrastructure and base components in this scenario, and rightly so.

In the case of the proposed Meadow Creek solar farm in Bobinawarra, this particular proposal seeks to cover 566 hectares of land, comprising portions of Wangaratta's domestic water catchment supply,

bushfire-prone overlays and flood zones and is land that has previously been earmarked as 'strategic agricultural land' in the *Hume Regional Growth Plan*.

Local communities within the highly productive King Valley, Milawa gourmet region and many others across the state have genuine concerns that portions of land are at risk.

Apart from the loss of vital irrigatable land, the threat implied here is that toxic lead and cadmium leaching out of burnt cells, soaking into catchment areas and groundwater, will irreversibly damage plants and detrimentally impact entire communities' domestic water supplies. All of this is outside of the risks associated with melting lithium batteries within these facilities.

I'm not against solar power generation per se. This is just one example that I've used to illustrate the potential risks of a single-minded approach. Also, I give credit where credit is due. The consideration in this circumstance to utilise pre-existing powerline infrastructure is commendable. I simply believe that it's prudent for us here in this place to slow down and make measured, responsible decisions that encapsulate all factors relating to the government's desire for a diverse energy mix.

There are other locations in Victoria that are suitable for solar power generation facilities, ones that neither require additional infrastructure nor fall within the noted categories that this bill seeks to protect.

This brings me to the how this bill seeks to achieve its primary objective. As implied in the Department of Environment, Land, Water and Planning *Solar Energy Facilities: Design and Development Guidelines*, October 2022, the ideal siting considerations for these facilities should exclude land that the responsible authority considers agricultural land, land that is a water supply catchment area, land that is bushfire-prone land or land that is an area of land liable to flooding. To exclude any area of land on the determination that it meets two or more of these criteria is not unreasonable; it is in fact vital in order to ensure soil protection and food security for future generations. This bill simply seeks to legislate the pre-existing siting considerations for solar energy generation facilities.

I commend this bill to the house.

**Lee TARLAMIS** (South-Eastern Metropolitan) (10:00): I move:

That debate on this bill be adjourned for two weeks.

**Motion agreed to and debate adjourned for two weeks.**

### **Residential Tenancies Amendment (Rent Freeze and Caps) Bill 2023**

#### *Statement of compatibility*

**Aiv PUGLIELLI** (North-Eastern Metropolitan) (10:00): I lay on the table a statement of compatibility with the Charter of Human Rights and Responsibilities Act 2006.

In accordance with section 28 of the Charter of Human Rights and Responsibilities Act 2006 (the Charter), I make this statement of compatibility with respect to the Residential Tenancies Amendment (Rent Freeze and Caps) Bill 2023.

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

#### *Overview of the Bill:*

The purpose of the Residential Tenancies Amendment (Rent Freeze and Caps) Bill 2023 is to amend the Residential Tenancies Act 1997 to:

- a. to prohibit increases in rent and limit rent payable for a period of 2 years; and
- b. to limit the rate of increases in rent after that 2-year period; and
- c. to prohibit excessive rent for premises not previously let; and
- d. to repeal provisions allowing residential rental providers to give a notice to vacate because a fixed term residential rental agreement has ended; and

- e. to make consequential and related amendments.

*Human Rights Issues:*

The Rent Freeze Bill does not limit any human right, therefore it is not necessary to consider section 7(2) of the Charter. I consider that the Bill is compatible with the Charter.

*Second reading*

**Aiv PUGLIELLI** (North-Eastern Metropolitan) (10:00): I move:

That the bill be now read a second time.

Victorian renters cannot continue to face unlimited rent rises. Our housing system is in crisis and renters are under extreme pressure to keep up with rising costs and to keep a roof over their head.

Too many people are one rent rise away from homelessness. Too many people are cutting back on food and other essential items just to make sure that their rent is paid and they have a place to call home.

Every day we hear from people about just how dire it is to rent in Victoria. One in three Victorians rent their homes and so many of them have had awful experiences.

The price of rent continues to rise and the power imbalance between landlords and renters means that people are living in substandard homes because they are too scared to report crucial maintenance for fear of another rent rise or eviction for causing too much bother.

Rents in Melbourne have gone up 18.2 per cent in the last year – the biggest annual increase that we've had since the year 2000. These rises are unsustainable; renters cannot continue to weather higher and higher rents each year. Something has to be done and this bill is the circuit breaker.

This housing crisis has been created by the choices of successive governments that prioritise a landlord's ever-increasing return on their investment over everyone's basic human right to a secure, affordable home. Today, this Parliament has another choice: to lift some of the stress and uncertainty for people who are facing unbearable housing stress by limiting rent increases.

And this isn't some fringe Greens thought bubble to bring forward socialism. Sixty per cent of Australians support a freeze on rents. And 78 per cent of Australians support rent control by way of either rent caps or a freeze.

This is a reasonable and effective intervention that has been used before in our state and is currently being used elsewhere in Australia and around the world. During the pandemic Victoria froze rents, which was a lifesaver for so many. In countries around the world rent increases are limited and people have certainty. Sixteen European countries, including Scotland, Germany and Denmark, currently have some form of rent control, whether a fixed rate, tied to another index or based on a region-to-region formula. And right here in the ACT, a territory with a Greens–Labor government, rent increases have been capped since 2019.

This urgent situation here in Victoria needs urgent action. We cannot wait for more homes to be built to alleviate supply issues or to magically bring down rents. In fact, we currently have more dwellings per adult than at any other time in our history, and we are building at a faster rate than most other OECD countries, and yet affordability is at an all-time low. People need relief from unlimited rent increases now. That's why this bill will freeze rents at the rate that they were on 1 January 2023 and will put an end to out-of-control rent rises. This means that for a period of two years the going rent for a property cannot be increased. The rate is retrospective to prevent landlords from increasing prices in response to the legislation.

For properties that weren't being leased at the start of this year there are provisions to set the rent at the most recent rate since 2021. For a property that has not previously been let, the rental rate will be

based on similar homes in the same area at no more than 10 per cent above the median rate. Tenants will still be able to challenge a rate if they believe it to be excessive.

After the two-year freeze, rent increases will be capped to 2 per cent every two years to ensure that renting remains affordable and secure into the future. With 82 per cent of renters experiencing housing stress, this is a rate that allows wages the chance to catch up with the cost of rent, which has spiralled out of control and beyond the rate of inflation for too long.

Too many people are staring down the barrel of eviction or financial stress. People are going without medication or can't afford to turn their heater on this winter, because their rent is too damn high. These limits on rent increases will offer some relief from unlimited surges in rents.

Under this bill, rent will be linked to the property, not the tenant or tenancy, to avoid people being evicted to allow for rent increases.

Beyond freezing and capping rent increases this bill seeks to end no-grounds evictions at the end of a fixed-term lease. This will strengthen a tenant's right to remain in a secure, affordable home. Rental properties are people's homes. Renters set up a life and community around their home, their children attend nearby schools, work is within a reasonable distance, local friends and networks are formed. Many people rent for decades, some for their entire life. And with home ownership becoming increasingly unattainable it's important that rental homes are stable places to live and an opportunity to put down roots. That's why this bill ensures that rental providers will no longer be able to issue a notice to vacate just because a fixed-term residential rental agreement has ended. This is common practice elsewhere in the world where tenants can rely on continuing tenancy unless they stop paying rent or otherwise breach the terms of their tenancy.

Housing has been commodified. It is seen by many as an investment rather than a human right. We need these urgent actions to ensure that everyone has a safe, secure and affordable home. Addressing unlimited rent increases is just one part of this puzzle. There are still many other reforms needed to address the state's housing crisis. We need to regulate the short-stays industry to prevent greedy landlords from switching their rental investment property into an Airbnb so they can continue to cash in on the unregulated market while others are living in tents. We need a massive investment in public housing built by a public builder. We need property developers to pay their fair share by requiring them to include 30 per cent public and affordable homes in new developments and 50 per cent in special development zones. We need a legislated goal to end homelessness in Victoria by 2030 and more long-term funding for homelessness services. Our planning system should work to mandate better developments without stripping powers from local government. And our taxation system should be reformed to strengthen and properly enforce the vacancy tax, overhaul stamp duty and make some big changes federally to negative gearing and capital gains tax. And very importantly political donations from property developers should be banned at all levels of government.

And while freezing and capping rents will put an end to unlimited rent rises and ending no-grounds evictions will allow for more stable tenancies, there's still much more that needs to be done to make renting fairer. Renters are too often treated like second-class citizens. Rental standards are still lacking and poorly enforced. Cooling in homes should be mandatory. Renters cannot be expected to swelter through long, hot summers. We need to ensure that homes meet minimum energy efficiency standards, with insulation and draft prevention. Renters shouldn't have to put up with substandard homes that are damp or mouldy, have mushrooms growing in the bathroom or are infested with insects. Living in these conditions affects the health and wellbeing of Victorians and the Victorian Labor government has turned a blind eye for too long. A rental property is a home, and people have a right to expect a safe and comfortable place to live in.

It's time to take action. There's much to be done to make renting fair in Victoria, but the first and most important step is to stop unlimited rent increases. People cannot continue to wear hefty rent increases. The rising cost of living is impacting so many in the community. People are cutting back on all sorts

of essential items and doing what they can to make sure that rent is paid and they have a home. How long are renters expected to keep copping the endless rises in rents? It's not like they ever decrease.

Freezing rents for two years will provide immediate relief for renters in increasingly uncertain times and buy the government some time to address the broader issues faced by renters.

I commend this bill to the house.

**Lee TARLAMIS** (South-Eastern Metropolitan) (10:10): I move:

That debate on this bill be adjourned for two weeks.

**Motion agreed to and debate adjourned for two weeks.**

### *Motions*

#### **Government performance**

**Georgie CROZIER** (Southern Metropolitan) (10:10): I move:

That this house:

- (1) notes that the Honourable Jacinta Allan MP as Premier takes over the biggest state debt in the country, larger than New South Wales, Queensland and Tasmania combined;
- (2) expresses concern at Premier Allan's ministerial legacy of waste, blowouts and mismanagement;
- (3) further notes that Premier Allan has been responsible for nearly \$30 billion in major project blowouts, including:
  - (a) \$3.6 billion on the Metro Tunnel;
  - (b) three years and \$4.7 billion on the West Gate Tunnel;
  - (c) \$13 billion on the North East Link;
- (4) condemns the culture of secrecy, disdain for integrity and the hatred of anti-corruption agencies that permeated in the former Andrews government; and
- (5) calls on the Premier to overcome her legacy of waste, blowouts and mismanagement, return integrity to government and begin to undo the nine years worth of damage for which she is responsible.

I rise to speak to my motion, which is a motion on the Premier, Jacinta Allan. We know the Premier is just a couple of days into the job after the former Premier, who announced his retirement last week, just up and left Victoria in this diabolical state that we find ourselves in. It was an extraordinary move but not surprising given that the man himself said so much to Victorians but you could never actually believe a word he said. He said just a few weeks ago that he was going to run in the 2026 election, and yet he pulled the pin last week. Now we have a new Premier who is not much different from her predecessor. In fact it is the same old, tired Labor government. There is no new vision.

In fact the first couple of days have been a shocker for the Premier. Yesterday said it all. Look at what the Treasurer did. He blindsided the Premier and those sitting around the cabinet table with the Premier by introducing yet more taxes to Victorians, the 52nd and 53rd taxes. Again I go back to the former Premier, who gave a promise in 2014: 'I promise you no new taxes.' This government is out of control with the debt that it has placed on current Victorians and future generations of Victorians. It is not just the opposition saying it, it is agencies who have credibility, and I want to come to that. But the first issue of my motion talks to this very big point that the Premier takes over the biggest state debt in the country, larger than New South Wales, Queensland and Tasmania combined. These deficits and budget blowouts that have been overseen by this government are going to have an impact, and isn't it telling that the Property Council of Australia really came out hard and absolutely said how it is? In fact there was a statement from them this morning: 'Victoria's trust bonfire on tax'. The statement goes on to say:

Here's a tip for state governments trying to reach ambitious housing goals in partnership.

Don't "do a Victoria".

...

... this week's hidden tax grabs are a major trust-burner.

The industry wants to work collaboratively with the government, and they were absolutely blindsided by the Treasurer's announcement yesterday when he sat at a breakfast. And look at the shemozzle that happened here in the house yesterday. The Premier said she knew about it, yet Danny Pearson stood on the steps just out here and said, 'I've got no detail about that. I don't know what you're talking about.' It was just extraordinary. They are not even talking to one another. This government is in chaos. They are at war with one another, and they are meant to be instilling confidence in Victorians. Well, what a way to start this new premiership by this Premier who has overseen so much damage.

This statement from the Property Council goes on to say that clearly a partnership was important to them, but:

Sadly, 8 business days later, the Treasurer, who was a signatory to the Partnership, has announced the introduction of new and expanded taxes without any consultation ...

That flies in the face of what the former Premier said just a few days ago about their housing statement and how they had been working in consultation with stakeholders –

**Evan Mulholland:** For months.

**Georgie CROZIER:** for months. You cannot believe a word this government says, and the history is there to prove that. The legacy is there to prove that.

**Matthew Bach:** Not a Comm Games legacy.

**Georgie CROZIER:** The Comm Games legacy, Dr Bach, comes into it too. Again I say what a shocker of a day yesterday was for the Premier. Not only was she blindsided by this tax, but then the reports came out about the \$1.3 million in legal fees. The government sent lawyers over to London to can the Commonwealth Games. Then of course it was topped off by the Malmsbury riots. That has been an absolute debacle, and what a history that has been. As the former Shadow Minister for Youth Justice when the former Minister for Health had that portfolio – pizzas and Coke we had, with riots all the time. Well, look, it is happening all again. Yesterday was a very serious incident, and this government has failed young people and failed those in youth justice for years. They have had years to fix this problem, and all they do is cause more chaos with what is going on in our streets and in our prisons with a lack of services to provide meaningful rehabilitation and get young people off that spiralling crime cycle.

I want to return to the first point of my motion about the biggest state debt in the country. We saw the recent budget. I am not sure we can believe that budget because of the Commonwealth Games debacle. In the budget papers it was \$2.6 billion and then a couple of weeks later it was \$7 billion, so I am very dubious about what this government has provided to Victorians in the form of the budget. But what we know is that that budget did not provide any relief to Victorians. It was a brutal budget – more taxing, spiralling debt, cutting services, a billion dollars out of health – and we are seeing that through the actions of this government. I mentioned yesterday the dire situation at the Alfred hospital where rats, mice and other rodents and snakes have been found in that complex. The whole thing is just disgraceful.

**John Berger** interjected.

**Georgie CROZIER:** You have not read the story. You should see the FOI, Mr Berger. A 25-centimetre worm is quite a big worm. I would say it is a baby snake.

I will go back to the rats and other rodents and bed bugs and mice faeces over patient beds – the whole thing. This is the state our health services are in. A pre-eminent hospital, a major trauma centre for the country, and we have got this crumbling, dire situation where surgeons and senior physicians have

spoken out about the need to upgrade. This government is ignoring those pleas. They are pushing along with their vanity projects that do not have business cases and do not stack up when clearly our health system remains in crisis.

We have a health tax going on to doctors. What an insane and ludicrous issue. Our health system is crumbling, and this government is hell-bent on taxing doctors. Doctors have told the government for months, 'If you do this, 30 per cent of GP clinics will close.' What is that going to do? It is going to push more people into our already struggling emergency departments. How absolutely insane. Our health system is crumbling. It is struggling now, and this government's only vision for the state is to tax, tax, tax. They are taxing everything. That is going to have a massive detrimental effect on the standard of living. In fact our standards are falling. Whether it is education, as Dr Bach knows; whether it is housing affordability, as Mr Mulholland knows; or whether it is health, our standards are falling in this state, and you should all be ashamed of it.

Victorians know the cost of living is rising. We just heard the Greens banging on about – quite rightly actually – the increase in the cost of energy and housing rentals. The cost of living in this state is rising every day, and the only answer the government has is to put more pressure on by taxing business and families, and that is not the way to go. And now we are seeing a tax on doctors. I mean, seriously, this government is out of control, and this Premier has been a part of it. Her legacy is there. We have got that rising debt. As has been confirmed by the Parliamentary Budget Office, we have the highest property taxes per capita – \$2120 per person. That is the highest property tax per person in the nation, and it will probably go up even further now with this latest little tax grab. We already pay the highest taxes per person of anywhere in the country. This government is irresponsible in their fiscal management – there is no responsibility being taken.

If you look at the Premier and what she has been responsible for in contributing to those blowouts, it is her management of the infrastructure projects. The West Gate Tunnel Project, the Metro Tunnel project and the North East Link are all her legacy. She has been sitting around those projects as Deputy Premier and understands exactly what she is responsible for – over \$30 billion in cost blowouts. The now Premier was the responsible minister for roughly 88 per cent of those cost blowouts – all \$27 billion. We have got a woman in charge who is responsible for these mass blowouts, and we are not going to have the ability for our state to recover when it needs to. We need the confidence. We need to recover. Yet the confidence, as the Property Council has said, and the trust have been blown. The worst thing you can do is to continue to tax. But that has been evident from day one of this government, and this is the legacy that they are leaving generations of Victorians. It is a sad state of affairs.

I want to just go on to talk a little bit about the North East Link, which I know that Mr Mulholland and Dr Bach know about. That was promised at a cost of \$5 billion. The Victorian Managed Insurance Authority valuation was \$18 billion. The current budget blowout equates to \$13 billion. You can see the basics that are here that have not been understood by the Premier and this government. This is not their money, it is taxpayers money. It is taxpayers money that they are using like Monopoly money. There is no accountability or responsibility for these decisions that they are making and the massive blowouts that are occurring that generations of Victorians will have to pay for.

There is just so much to say. The West Gate Tunnel revised project cost was \$5.5 billion. The 2022–23 budget came in at \$10.2 billion. The current budget blowout is \$4.7 billion. We know the rorting that has gone on and the corruption inside these projects. They were working through COVID, so you cannot blame that. The government did the sweetheart deals with their union mates – and they have done that time and time again – yet these budget blowouts continue. The government will continue to blame COVID, but they cannot. They cannot blame COVID any longer.

While I am on COVID, I have to talk about the extraordinary actions that the government took throughout that dark period for Victoria. Whilst COVID affected the entire world – we were not alone –

**Evan Mulholland:** She was in the super-cabinet.

**Georgie CROZIER:** She was sitting around that table. She was one of the eight in that cabinet making those decisions, Mr Mulholland; you are absolutely right. When you look at what the Ombudsman found about the locking down of public housing towers and the disgraceful way that the government breached human rights and what they did and the curfew decision that was a go-alone captain's pick by the former Premier – the lockdowns – we had the harshest of restrictions and the worst outcomes of anywhere in the country.

We need a royal commission into this, but this government will not do it. The Prime Minister promised one; he will not do it because he knows his Labor mates were up to their neck in mistakes and absolutely awful situations that arose out of decisions that were made by this government, whether it was the effects on children's mental health and education or the economic effects on small business, business and our city. Yes, we have had the grand final and it was thumping, but it is a pretty sad state of affairs when you walk down the streets and shops are empty – they are dirty – and we have got a lot of homeless people milling around the city streets. It is not the glorious days that Melbourne once had, and I think it is going to take a long time for our wonderful city to recover.

I go to the fourth point of my motion in the time I have left:

condemns the culture of secrecy, disdain for integrity and the hatred of anti-corruption agencies that permeated in the former Andrews Government ...

And isn't that right? Never has a government been before an anti-corruption commission like the government the Premier sits in, and she has been responsible. Operation Sandon and Operation Watts – she knew all about that. Of course we could not get to look at those ministers in the lower house because of the blockage, but they were up to their necks in what was going on. The Operation Richmond report has not come out, but it is an extraordinary level of corruption that this government has overseen. The politicisation of the public sector – the Ombudsman has done reports into this, and she has been scathing about the former Premier's response. In fact in April of this year the Ombudsman slammed the former Premier, calling a recent report into his government's conduct 'damning' and saying the state had fallen behind in parliamentary integrity. I think that says a lot about the culture of this government, the constant cover-ups and the lies that have been told to Victorians.

We know they have been lying to Victorians. The Commonwealth Games is the most glaring and obvious example of that. You cannot go to the Victorian people and promise them something, put it in the budget just a few months ago and then a few weeks later say, 'Oh, no, that's not right. We've got to cancel it now.' When you see the reports today, you know that this government knew what was going on, yet they tried to – and they did – con Victorians.

Integrity is critical for any good democratic process. I think there are people around the country wondering, and I get people asking me from interstate, 'What is going on in Victoria? What the hell is going on?' When you explain to them the level of corruption, the level of cover-ups, the lies, the deceit and what has gone on, they are floored, because this country prides itself on good democratic principles. But there is no moral compass in this government that the Premier now leads. If she had a moral compass, she would tell the truth, and I do not think she has told the truth on the Comm Games. If she was really wanting to show that level of integrity, then she should front up to the parliamentary inquiry into the Commonwealth Games and put her case so that the Victorian people can actually understand what she is saying in public to the people through her spin doctors. Rather, she needs to come before that inquiry and those members of Parliament that sit on that inquiry and explain to Victorians exactly what went on. Every Victorian deserves to understand the decisions made by this Labor government, of which the Premier has been an integral part. She was the minister for the delivery of the Commonwealth Games and she is now Premier. She knows what went on. She needs to have the strength and the fortitude to be up-front with Victorians and tell the truth, and I hope she does that. I have faith that she will do that, and I think that is what every Victorian deserves and would expect.

What has happened under Daniel Andrews is a shameful period for Victoria because of the number of IBAC investigations into this government, what happened behind closed doors and what the Ombudsman has said about parliamentary integrity. We must instil that faith back into the Victorian public, and we have seen that today through the Property Council's words. They say, 'Don't do a Victoria' and that the trust has gone, which is not good for confidence in building this state back after COVID and building this state back after the destruction that the government has put upon Victorian taxpayers and upon Victorian families. The cost of living is going up. It is getting harder and harder, and with the 52nd and 53rd taxes it is not getting any easier under Premier Allan. It is getting harder for Victorians – for every single Victorian.

This motion is an important one. It sets out the legacy of the woman who is in charge of our state. She needs to have the strength and fortitude to be up-front and truthful to the Victorian public and tell us what went on. But her legacy is there for all to see, and it is not a good one.

**John BERGER** (Southern Metropolitan) (10:30): I rise to speak on the motion moved by Ms Crozier. This motion talks about the debt the state government has and what the Premier has inherited. It also speaks to the legacy of Premier Allan as a minister of the Crown. It speaks to the culture of the former Andrews Labor government. Well, Premier Allan has a lot to be proud of as she inherits a fantastic legacy.

Former Premier Daniel Andrews first became a member of the Legislative Assembly in 2002, for the seat of Mulgrave. While Collingwood may have lost the grand final that year, I am proud to say that this year we have done well. But Labor certainly did not lose the election. In Daniel's inaugural speech he said things that remain truisms to this day. Speaking of the government that the Victorian people had just endorsed, Daniel said that the government had:

... stayed focused on the things that are important to us all, the services we all rely on no matter where we live or what we do for a living: hospitals when we are sick; schools to give our kids the best start possible; and a police force that is given the resources it needs to fight crime and make our community safer.

Fast-forward 20 years to when Daniel was our Premier. Having led us through bushfires, floods, a once-in-a-century pandemic and more, we arrived at this third pitch to the Victorian people. It was summarised in a simple phrase, and it encapsulates the man and the party he led – 'Doing what matters' – because the schools that our children go to, the hospitals that look after us when we are sick and the police force that keeps us safe are what matter. The motion talks about the major projects of the Andrews Labor government – the Metro Tunnel, the West Gate Tunnel and the North East Link. These are the things that matter. They have always mattered. They did on that day in 2003, and they do now in 2023.

As part of my preparation for my remarks in this speech I had the opportunity to reflect more on the former Premier. I came across an article from June 2014 in the *Age* newspaper, just a few months before our famous electoral victory in November of that year. After just one term in opposition Daniel and Victorian Labor did what many thought not possible: beat a first-term Liberal government, something I am sure that those on the other side remember too well.

In Daniel Andrews's term as Premier the government achieved a first in Australia: his cabinet became almost two-thirds women and our caucus became more than half women, something he pointed to at our state conference earlier this year. If you call that mismanagement, if you call that nine years' worth of damage, then I cannot imagine what the Liberals would consider success. I imagine for those opposite success would mean the massive privatisation efforts of former Premier Kennett, which would mean cuts, cuts and more cuts – no Metro Tunnel, no West Gate Tunnel, no North East Link, some of the projects that Victoria and Victorians will enjoy for decades thanks to the vision. The Andrews Labor government had projects like the level crossing removals – we got them done and we set targets to beat them year on year, and it is something that Premier Allan can be incredibly proud to have achieved. The major roads projects, upgrading important arterial networks across the state, is a legacy that I would be proud to inherit.

We have honoured our election promises. In 2018 the campaign slogan, so to speak, of the Victorian Labor Party's campaign was simple: 'Say what you do, do what you say', and we continue to do that. We promised to cut regional public transport fares to bring them into line with metropolitan tickets – fairer fares. I am proud to announce we have done that.

Premier Allan has so much more to be proud of from her own history. She was 25 when elected in 1999, which is the age of my office manager. That was the election where Victorian Labor won what was undeniably an unexpected victory over the Jeff Kennett-led coalition. Over the next 27 years – by the time of the next election – the Victorian people will have given Premier Allan a mandate in her own seat for all those years and a Labor government for all but four of them. Premier Allan has considerable ministerial legacy to be proud of, going all the way back to 2002, and I am quite thankful the Liberals have given me the opportunity to speak on this.

In 2002 she was elected Minister for Education Services and Minister for Employment and Youth Affairs and became the youngest minister in the state's history. In fact she became the youngest Victorian government minister since Alfred Deakin in the 1880s. In 2006 Premier Allan became the Minister for Women's Affairs and then received a promotion to Minister for Skills and Workforce Participation, Minister for Regional and Rural Development and Minister for Industry and Trade. Premier Allan has a long history of service to this state, and Premier Allan has a long legacy of properly managing her ministerial portfolios. I congratulate her on all of those achievements. Right across Melbourne 110 level crossings are being removed by 2030, with 72 already gone for good – delivered under budget and ahead of schedule. That is good economic management. That is getting things done. And the Major Transport Infrastructure Authority has built or upgraded 47 train stations across the metro and regional rail network since 2014.

When Daniel Andrews announced his resignation, he said something that I remember all too well. When the former Premier was asked about one of his highlights in office, he talked about the moments that you did not see and that were behind closed doors, where all the work was being done. He said that one of the best moments happened to be just 13 days ago, on a Thursday, when he got to test the train in the new Metro Tunnel. There was no media presence and no fanfare. He just wanted to see what was being done, because it is all about the work. It is always about the work. Talking about testing the train, the Premier said:

I went from Arden and I travelled underneath the city at 80 kilometres an hour on a train that was made right here in Victoria ...

And he said that tunnel is nearly finished. This is a legacy that Premier Allan can be proud of. Once completed it will mean more trains can use the network, and it will reduce travel times by a lot. By running the Cranbourne, Pakenham and Sunbury lines through the new tunnel we can move more people very quickly. As the former Premier said, he stopped at each station, and he got off and thanked all the workers for the proud work they have done. That, for the former Premier, was right up there amongst the moments because, as he said, and I could not agree more, it will change our city. That is a legacy to be proud of and it is a legacy Premier Allan helped build.

One day, maybe after my time on this earth, maybe even after my time in this chamber, there will be a loop that wraps around the city. It will wrap around our state, helping people get from hub city to hub city – because we will have many, many cities then – from Box Hill to Frankston and from Geelong to Sunbury. The Suburban Rail Loop will be a fixture of everyday life for Victorians, and future Victorians will sit back and think, 'How could this not have been built?'

In the Premier's last few weeks as the Minister for the Suburban Rail Loop she awarded the preferred bidder for the Suburban Rail Loop the tunnelling contract. The tunnel-boring machines are on track to start digging in 2026, and the Premier had this to say:

We promised Victorians we'd get on with building the Suburban Rail Loop and that's exactly what we're doing – this first major works contract is a major step towards tunnel boring machines being in the ground by 2026.

SRL will not only transform our public transport network, it'll reshape how Melbourne grows in the decades ahead – taking thousands of cars off roads, delivering 24,000 jobs across the life of the project and boosting hundreds of small local businesses.

From the Chandler Highway being widened to six lanes in 2019 to the completion of Union station in 2023, the Premier has much to be proud of, just like former Premier Daniel Andrews has much to be proud of.

Today to end I would like to quote Chris Kenny. Talking on *Sky News*, he said about Daniel Andrews:

All his enemies trying to claim his scalp are kidding themselves. They lost, he won.

And Andrew Bolt, talking on *Sky News*, referring to those opposite, said:

... they never beat him. They never beat him. He's now going to leave as a winner.

Because that is what Victorian Labor does: we win.

**Evan MULHOLLAND** (Northern Metropolitan) (10:39): I am thrilled to speak on this motion. We have a new Premier here in Victoria, but unfortunately it is the same old, tired Labor government. I know Mr Carroll, the member for Niddrie in the other place, was keen to take her job, but Jacinta Allan has taken on the biggest state debt in the country, larger than that of New South Wales, Queensland and Tasmania combined. State debt continues to spiral out of control, with net debt forecast in the budget to reach \$171 billion in 2026–27. Unfortunately only those with short memories could be sympathetic to the Premier for the situation she finds herself in. Jacinta Allan, the Premier, has been responsible for nearly \$30 billion worth of major blowouts, including \$3.6 billion on the Metro Tunnel. The cost of the West Gate Tunnel has blown out from \$5.5 billion to \$10.2 billion, and the project has been delayed by five years. The cost of the North East Link in Dr Bach's electorate – a project that affects my electorate as well – has increased from \$5 billion to \$18 billion, an increase of 260 per cent. How can you get that so wrong?

The Premier, in her media blitz, on radio said the level crossing removals are under budget, which is just blatantly false. The budget papers show a \$330 million blowout on Labor's promise to remove 50 level crossings. The Murray Basin rail project is still yet to be completed and has a blowout of \$226 million.

I noticed Mr Berger saying about Andrews's comments, 'Say what you do, do what you say'. Say what you do and do what you say. That must be except for the Commonwealth Games. That must be except for the *Western Rail Plan*, the electrification to Wyndham Vale and Melton, which Mr Andrews took to two separate elections. Say what you do and do what you say. How about the airport rail? Say what you do and do what you say. They even rebadged the airport rail at the election to 'SRL airport'. They kept the worst elements of the Suburban Rail Loop and cancelled the airport rail, which Victorians wanted. You had so many western suburbs Labor MPs in every lower house seat saying 'How good is the airport rail going to be?' and 'Labor is going to deliver it because we say what we do and we do what we say' – except for airport rail, the *Western Rail Plan* and the Commonwealth Games.

**Trung Luu:** All cancelled.

**Evan MULHOLLAND:** All cancelled. Last week it was revealed, as a result of an FOI application by the opposition, that the Premier had been writing the CFMEU into tender documents for the athletes villages – it is absolutely unprecedented that a government would do that. It is not just me saying it is unprecedented; many building industry sources are saying it is completely unprecedented. But this is what she was doing with the Commonwealth Games, basically using it as a factional base to shore up her leadership against Mr Carroll. Jacinta Allan was the Minister for Commonwealth Games Delivery, not the most apt name if you ask me. They were not delivered, they were totally bungled – an embarrassment to our state. Now we hear that sometime in June the government hired lawyers, paid over \$1 million for lawyers, and sent them over to London pre announcement. You had the Premier

at the Public Accounts and Estimates Committee saying it was completely all good and the Premier at the budget saying it was going to be \$2.6 billion, no worries. We had Ms Shing in the Parliament on 21 and 22 June –

**Matthew Bach:** Misleading us.

**Evan MULHOLLAND:** Probably – boasting about how good the Commonwealth Games were going to be when at the start of June, it looks like, they hired lawyers to cancel the games. The new Premier must not have trusted the Minister for Commonwealth Games Legacy enough to let her know that they had lawyers in to cancel the Commonwealth Games. It is either that or she has misled the Parliament.

We have seen so many blowouts. We have definitely seen it in my electorate – like the Mickleham Road project, where the Premier has been strident in her defence of the blowout. It is \$222 million for 1.6 kilometres of road, which makes it the most expensive road duplication in the state. I will put that in comparison. The government were able to duplicate 6.6 kilometres of Plenty Road – over budget, still – for \$145 million. So why is it that in the outer north it costs so much? That would be major cost blowouts; CFMEU shenanigans, as we saw on the front page of the *Australian Financial Review* multiple days in a row; and standover tactics on the Mickleham Road site. We definitely saw that in my electorate, and people are sick of it. And the same shenanigans are going on at the moment with the Craigieburn Road duplication, all under the Premier's watch.

There was another project she cancelled, which a lot of people are annoyed about, which is the Geelong fast rail project. There are so many projects that Labor promises at elections: 'We say what we do and do what we say.' They did promise a Melton hospital at the 2018 election, and they delivered on that. Do you know what they delivered? Just before caretaker mode, before the last election, they put up a fence saying 'Site of your new Melton hospital'. This is the legacy of this government and this Premier. It is a tired, old Labor government.

I want to talk about housing, because we see the shambolic nature of this government. Yesterday Mr Pallas, maybe as a bit of revenge for not getting the Deputy Premier position, went and announced a new tax on housing at a Property Council breakfast. Now, if this is the way the government is going to go, it is going to go to the Field and Game Australia conference and announce a ban on duck hunting at a duck hunters conference. They announced a new tax on housing at a Property Council breakfast. It is fair to say it received a pretty frosty reception. In an extraordinary response, the Property Council of Australia described it as a trust bonfire. They said:

Don't go slow on housing and approvals for the past few years and then seek redemption through a partnership with industry that you set on fire inside a fortnight.

They said:

Don't "do a Victoria".

That is what they said. They were partners. They signed an affordability partnership with the government. They signed on the dotted line, and so did the Premier. Just like with the Commonwealth Games, they break contracts, they break agreements they have made – affordability agreements they have made in the housing statement. The housing statement was a glossy brochure, but it is clear they have left all the nasties till later on. We saw Mr Pallas announce that tax. We see in the *Herald Sun* there are probably two more taxes to come. They have hit their half century of new or increased taxes, and they are going for gold. I think they are up to about 53.

*Members interjecting.*

**Matthew Bach:** On a point of order, Acting President, my personal view is that given how difficult the last few days have been for Mr Galea from a factional point of view, we should have some empathy for him; however, he has been interjecting incessantly during Mr Mulholland's contribution. It is a

contribution that I am interested in listening to, as I was interested in listening to Mr Berger's contribution previously. Humbly I would submit that Mr Galea be made to pipe down.

**The ACTING PRESIDENT (Sonja Terpstra):** Dr Bach, thank you for that very entertaining point of order, but I might say that despite the preamble, which was really not relevant to anything remotely to do with a point of order, I do take your point that perhaps there is a little bit too much noise coming from this side of the chamber. So if I could ask that Mr Mulholland continues for the last 26 seconds in silence –

**Evan Mulholland:** Just on the suburban –

**The ACTING PRESIDENT (Sonja Terpstra):** Sorry, Mr Mulholland, I did not give you the call yet. I was actually finishing on the point of order, but now you may have the call.

**Evan MULHOLLAND:** On the Suburban Rail Loop, you have even got the Grattan Institute, which are usually to the left of Stalin, saying to cancel the project, and you have got every infrastructure expert possible. It was never in *Plan Melbourne*. Infrastructure Victoria did not recommend it, and neither did Infrastructure Australia.

**Jacinta ERMACORA (Western Victoria) (10:49):** I am pleased to address this motion put forward by Ms Crozier. I am not surprised to find that it is written entirely from a negative perspective. Ms Crozier never seems to propose things for our state. She does not seek to debate with alternative propositions or solutions. Instead, once again, we have a motion that is simply a political attack.

I do not believe the people of Victoria find the opposition's relentless attacks to be constructive, and they certainly offer no vision for our state. I am happy to contrast that with the incredible progress and results Premier Allan has actively been working towards for many years, results that do take time and do cost money, because when you do something, take the big decisions to make major investments and employ thousands of people, you do this knowing that you will be addressing inherent risks throughout the project. But these infrastructure projects are vital for the economy of this state.

A reasonable measure of good governance is how adaptive we can be in a changing environment, in changing circumstances, and no amount of one-dimensional attacks – as if the world does not change – from the opposition will stop our government from continuing to invest and look after the priorities of our community. Sometimes the scope of projects changes – this can be determined by circumstances – and others will give dividends that you did not even expect. I know I am a regional person, but this example is quite a beautiful example. Level crossing removals have become a very apt example of that. They are not just a huge traffic management solution but they have also resulted in new connections between communities across railway lines, as well as those found in the improved livability of these spaces. This was unexpected. Since 2015 the Labor government has removed 67 level crossings, built 37 new and upgraded stations, created 50 kilometres of walking and cycling paths and unlocked 20 MCGs of open space to deliver massive improvements for communities across Melbourne, all ahead of schedule. This good work is continuing. The Allan Labor government is getting on with removing level crossings right across Melbourne, with 110 dangerous and congested crossings to be gone for good by 2030, including 70 by the first half of this year.

The impact of Premier Allan as infrastructure minister has been enormous and profound across our state, and I admire very much her vision and ability to look holistically at our infrastructure needs for the state. The different parts of infrastructure work progressing across our state are starting to come together, and it is very exciting to see where the vision is going as all of the pieces of the puzzle start to come together. Just look at the investment that has been made in our major roads. In 2023 the first tunnel-boring machine arrived to deliver the North East Link, which will change the way people will move around Melbourne. Tunnelling was recently completed in the West Gate Tunnel, with the twin breakthroughs of the boring machines. This will improve travel to and from Melbourne's west.

Anyone who takes the West Gate Bridge on a daily or weekly basis will absolutely appreciate the importance of the Allan government's investments in the west of Melbourne. Whether they are living in the west of Melbourne or living in the west of Victoria, less traffic congestion across the West Gate Bridge will bring relief for so many. The West Gate Tunnel will also have incredibly important implications for the transportation of our freight. Food and Fibre Great South Coast is a representative body for food and fibre production businesses and their vast supply chains across south-west Victoria. As their website states:

South West Victoria is Australia's top agricultural production region, delivering over \$4.6 billion in output annually.

There is no doubt that that is an absolute economy driver in the state of Victoria. Currently the West Gate Bridge must cope with the transportation of this freight as well as logging trucks and aluminium products. These trucks represent a huge contribution to the economy of Victoria: logging, aluminium, dairy, grain – enormous. The West Gate Tunnel will direct those trucks straight into the Port of Melbourne, providing an important logistical link straight into international markets. This tunnel represents an incredibly important logistical link into our export markets, and it is great for commuters. I simply do not understand how the opposition can twist this around and try to make political negatives out of it.

Stage 1 of the Warrnambool railway line upgrade – the V/Line upgrade – has been completed, allowing for a fifth train to return on a weekday service, and the impact for my community across the south-west has been enormous.

I would also like to address the tone of the accusations in clause 5 of the motion. It is disappointing to me to see such brutal negativity of tone. It is almost unparliamentary in the way that it accuses. If there was any substance to those accusations that the opposition has made, no-one would be game to build anything for fear of having to deal with the complexities of major transformative capital projects in this state. Oh, wait, the Baillieu–Naphthine government did nothing. I will tell you about a day that I spent under the Baillieu–Naphthine government as mayor of Warrnambool. All of the mayors and CEOs of the state were called to Melbourne to hear from the state government. I as mayor and CEO at the time Bruce Anson from Warrnambool City Council travelled to Melbourne. It was held – and I sound very regional here – at one of those fancy hotels at the top of Collins Street. We were all there in a big hall. The session turned out to be a lecture on how the government had no money and that we should not ask for any money. This might sound familiar to some in the chamber today. There was no presentation on strategic priority, no vision for the state or what the government was expecting local government in Victoria to do or to prioritise and no proposal of what role we could play as councillors and community representatives. I know myself that I wished I could have that day in my life back, and we discussed that in the car on the way home the next day. It was a total waste of time for me and the CEO, costing ratepayers money, including accommodation, without any prospect of gain for the good citizens of Warrnambool. So I put to you: I prefer to be in a government that builds infrastructure that supports the economy and community of this state than one that wastes their time in government and does nothing.

**Gaelle BROAD** (Northern Victoria) (10:58): I do want to congratulate Jacinta Allan for her appointment as the Premier. She has been a career politician, working for Labor MPs before being elected at just 25 years of age. She is actually my local member, and in 2018 we stood on polling booths together. I certainly wish her well in her role and hope that she can bring about the change that Victoria desperately needs.

But Jacinta Allan has been deputy leader and part of the leadership team of this government, which has led Victoria into a very deep hole. Our state debt is now more than Queensland, New South Wales and Tasmania's combined. We are heading towards over \$170 billion of debt, and that is going to be \$22 million per day in interest payments alone. After saying that this government would introduce no new taxes, they have already introduced 52 new taxes. You think of the payroll tax and the pressure

that that has placed on business and on schools. Now we have got GPs. One practice manager received a bill for \$800,000, and there is concern that a number of clinics will be forced to close.

When we look at the WorkCover tax and the impact of that there are premium increases of 42 per cent by this government. I was talking to a local business that described this tax as basically a kick in the guts for them. Then there is the Airbnb tax. Only recently I was speaking to a lady who was saying that she could not work due to the COVID restrictions and so she set up to get income from Airbnb, and now that puts her income at risk as well.

In her first days as Premier she has introduced yet another tax – a tax on vacant land that is going to apply to all of Victoria by 2025.

Labor has been in government for a very long time, and our state is struggling. When you think about the health crisis at the moment, hospitals are under pressure and there are very long waiting lists for surgery. When you look at our social housing, Victoria has a very long list – we are the worst in the country. In our justice system our courts have got a huge backlog of cases. With Victoria Police we have got rising crime happening in this state and over 500 officers leaving each year. Education is under pressure. We have now over 2000 vacancies for teachers in this state, and they are struggling. We have got an energy crisis. We have got a government that is very keen on closing down coal and gas and placing significant pressure on our energy system, and we are facing a summer of blackouts. Our native timber industry is being closed under this government, yet we are importing timber from other states. It just does not make any sense. Families and businesses are struggling with rising living costs, and this government is just making it a whole lot worse.

We can look at the pressure of taxes on businesses. We were speaking with a very large business recently, and they were just saying how when they have got businesses across different states, in Victoria it is the worst. They have got over \$4 million worth of taxes and costs before they even generate a single cent. But instead of supporting business to get the state moving, this government has just been focused on destroying business and getting them to pay for the costs incurred by this government.

The track record of Jacinta Allan as a minister has not been good – over \$30 billion of cost blowouts on infrastructure projects under her watch. The motion does talk to \$3.6 billion for the Metro Tunnel – three years over; \$4.7 billion on the West Gate Tunnel; and \$13 billion wasted on the North East Link. When you think about the Murray Basin rail project, we have had over \$400 million wasted on that project. An Auditor-General report found that it was over budget and years behind schedule and that it is costing farmers a lot more in additional freight costs each year. The Level Crossing Removal Project – again, there is incorrect information there – in fact has been over budget. Now an airport rail is also on hold. It has already cost a significant amount, but nothing has been delivered.

As Minister for Commonwealth Games Delivery Jacinta Allan failed to deliver the games. Usually you get the sack if you do not deliver in your role, but instead she has been promoted to the top job. It was intended to be a regional games that shone a light on regional Victoria across the world, but in fact nothing has been delivered in the regions. There have been no legacy projects to date. Local businesses and councils are still confused as to what projects are actually going to be delivered in our areas. All we have got to show for it is over \$380 million spent on compensation to get out of the games, and now we have seen a \$1.3 million legal bill.

As a leader you need to think about the impact that your decisions have on people. This government locked down our state harder than any other place in the world. It destroyed businesses, and it certainly left young people particularly with severe anxiety issues. When Jacinta Allan was Acting Premier during COVID she closed Victoria's borders on New Year's Day with just hours notice, forcing young families and people who were elderly to drive for hours or be locked out of their own state, and this decision put people at risk and left people queueing in cars for hours. As Premier, as the leader of this state, it is very important to listen to the experts.

The Suburban Rail Loop has been talked about a lot. The Auditor-General released a report which certainly showed that there was not a business case that was sufficient for this project. Even the Grattan Institute have suggested cancelling it. Then when you look at the Parliamentary Budget Office, they estimated the first two stages would not cost \$50 billion, as Jacinta Allan had indicated, but in fact more like \$125 billion. But when they came out with that information, Jacinta Allan just called the PBO tricky, deceitful and underhanded, which was very disappointing, because the Parliamentary Budget Office are independent and apolitical and are there to provide advice on project costings. I encourage the Premier to change that attitude and listen to the experts.

We have a housing statement that was released very recently. I think it was Premier Daniel Andrews's last-minute, last-ditch attempt to tick something off his list before he got out the door, but it is another pie-in-the-sky announcement. It is just a statement, a housing statement, and I fear that that is all it will be, not a reality – 800,000 homes in 10 years is a target of 219 homes being built a day. Housing experts have criticised plans to knock down over 40 housing commission towers to relocate people, because where will they go? We have such a significant shortage of housing in this state, and under this government building companies have collapsed.

We need transparency in government. There has been a lot of talk about the cover-ups and the need for this government to change direction. We need to stop the waste and rein in our state debt. Victorians are getting very tired of the spin. They are tired of a government that is just looking for media headlines without doing the homework first. They are tired of a government that has a revolving door of ministers and changing portfolios.

Certainly I wish the Premier well. I hope that she is able to achieve change in this state over the next three years until the next state election. I am an upper house member, so if she needs any advice on state government matters or any assistance, I am happy to assist.

**Tom McINTOSH** (Eastern Victoria) (11:07): Well, here we are. It is quite incredible that we are here having this debate, a debate that I certainly look forward to engaging in for the next 10 minutes. I wish I had more time to discuss it, because some of what I am hearing from those opposite is absolutely laughable, and I will go through some of that in detail. I will also touch on some of the contributions made from this side, particularly from Ms Ermacora. I think she started with a very, very good point and one I do want to pick the opposition up on. I know that to them, as we saw at the last election, women seem to be a niche issue. We on this side are proud to have a woman leading the government. We are proud to have a woman as our Premier.

**Georgie Crozier:** Just like Joan Kirner.

**Tom McINTOSH:** Thank you. You just took me to my next point – just like Joan Kirner. So we are going to reference a Premier from – I do not know the exact years – let us say 32 or 33 years ago. We are going to reference a woman from 32 or 33 years ago and that is the link between this Premier and that Premier – because she is a woman. That is why we are going to make the direct link. Do not worry about what skills she brings to the job, do not worry about the decades of experience that have been mentioned – decades of experience leading major, major government infrastructure investment; a proven leader in the Parliament – she is a woman. That is the line we are going to draw.

I went into the lower house yesterday – I thought I would have a look at our new Premier – and, boy, was she good. I actually do not pay too much attention to the opposition in the lower house given their relevancy, but I did go in and I was blown away. I was blown away looking at those on the opposition benches – old white men. Now, it is not lost on me that I am also a white man, but I am a young white man, a progressive young white man. Conservative old white men were sitting there, stale, with no ideas. I am going to come to ideas when I get to the end of my contribution, because those opposite lack any ideas, and that is the fundamental point that I want to get to in this debate. I think we have made it very clear that the Premier is there in her own right because she has huge experience, she is very, very capable, and she is a beloved local member.

*Members interjecting.*

**The ACTING PRESIDENT (Sonja Terpstra):** Order! Sorry, Mr McIntosh. There is a lot of interjection on my left. I would really appreciate it if Mr McIntosh could continue his contribution in silence.

**Tom McINTOSH:** As I was saying, a beloved local member. Now, it is not lost on me. It occurred to me that the Leader of the Opposition lost his seat at the last election. Our leader, a local leader, a regional leader, has been returned to her seat five or six terms in a row and has increased her margin every time, because not only does she lead her portfolios actively in the government but she is active on the ground and respected on the ground.

This brings me to the next point, which Ms Ermacora also made: she is a brilliant regional leader. That is what this state government has done since the Bracks government came in, when the Premier entered Parliament. We have focused on regional communities, ensuring that the infrastructure and the services they need are there, because we all remember what happened under Kennett. The Nationals and the Liberals ripped the guts out of regional communities. First they took the train lines – the train lines went out. Then they cut the community services. Then, lo and behold, what did the banks do? ‘Well, if the government is ripping everything out of the regions, why don’t we do the same?’ So then the banks left, and then of course the droughts hit. The small farms had to sell, the big farms took stuff up, houses were left to rot, community sports clubs were just losing players and pubs had to close. We know that history. The people of Victoria remember that history and will not forget that history.

The record that the Premier has had in transport and infrastructure is absolutely phenomenal. We get on with delivering infrastructure that this state needs because this state is growing and it is prospering. We ensure that everyone in this state – that is something we believe in on this side – gets access to equal opportunity to get on with their lives. Whether it be their education, their training and their ability to work, or whether it is people in their retirement, everybody gets a fair go. On the metro side of things, there is so much to go through I do not even know where to start. I mean, even the opposition are referencing level crossings – 72 already gone out of 110. We know this is so popular because it helps people in their day-to-day lives, but it also improves the productivity of our state. Forty-seven train stations, metro and regional, have been upgraded, giving better access to public transport for people right around Victoria.

I think Ms Ermacora or Mr Berger referenced earlier the metro trains running under Melbourne. This is a significant investment in the future of our city and our state, because it does not matter where you are coming from in the state, whether we are taking people out or bringing people in, you need that capacity to keep the train system moving. Those line upgrades to enable all this to happen have been occurring in metro and regional Victoria. I visited with the member for Pakenham Ms Vulin recently the Pakenham station, where VLocity trains built in Newport are commissioned and run out of Pakenham. We are keeping the jobs here – good-quality jobs with good pay – where we know the quality of the content that we are delivering for Victorians is second to none. I know those opposite do not like it. They would rather offshore things. They would rather not worry about the quality. They would rather sign a contract: ‘Oh, well. They won’t be delivered for another term, so let’s not worry.’ We saw that happen when they were last in government, but we will not do that.

Regional rail – \$4.5 billion has been invested to upgrade every line of regional rail. I have already touched on what happened under the Liberal–Nationals. Rail lines closed down. People still talk to me – just in Korumburra the other day they talked about what a blow it was when the Kennett government closed the line to Leongatha. And of course one that is raised with me regularly is fairer fares. It does not get much fairer than that, and it does not get much better than that – equity for regional Victorians with our metropolitan brothers and sisters, so that we can all travel on public transport for the same rate.

*Members interjecting.*

**Tom McINTOSH:** Those opposite mock, and they say, ‘Let’s all hold hands’, but I think it is really important. It does not matter where you live, you get equal access to public transport – equal access. In Eastern Victoria in particular, the Avon River bridge upgrade, level crossing removals – I could go on and on and on.

I have only got 2 minutes and 43 seconds left, and I have got to get through all the work that this Premier has done in her recent portfolios without even going back further: major roads, the North East Link, the West Gate Tunnel, the South Gipps Freeway – one I am passionate about – and the Princes Highway. There is so much major infrastructure work, as I already said, connecting people, getting people where they need to be and improving our state’s economic productivity. But it is also putting people in jobs, good quality, well-paid jobs that ensure when they go home to their families they know that they can service their families, get their kids looked after, get them to school, get them to their local sports and put food on the table. Around families who are secure in their employment, who have well-paid jobs, you build communities, and that is how you build thriving communities. It builds a thriving state, which is what Victoria is – a place where people want to be, a place where people want to live and they want to raise families and a place that respects everybody and values everybody.

This is the culture that we are trying to build from this side, not those opposite, who try and divide people, who try and be negative about people. It is a positive, inclusive place, and as we saw with the Collingwood Football Club on the weekend, when there is leadership that builds a really, really good culture, do you know what you get? Do you know what you get when you have great leadership and good culture? You get great results. You get winning outcomes. That is exactly what you get, and that is exactly what this Premier is delivering for Victoria. I could not be prouder of this state government. I could not be prouder of the Collingwood Football Club either, but I will come back to that in another statement. Do you know what? Above everything, while the other side worries about people – and we have seen it I do not know how many times now – fighting amongst themselves about who gets this position, that position or whatever it may be, this side is about delivering policies. It is about delivering outcomes for every single Victorian. It does not matter whether it is housing, whether it is jobs, whether it is transport, whether it is action on climate change or whether it is education or health. No matter what it is, we have got a very, very clear focus on getting outcomes for every single Victorian, and that is why I am so passionate about supporting our Premier in the work that we will go on and continue to deliver for Victoria.

**Matthew BACH** (North-Eastern Metropolitan) (11:17): It is good to rise to join this motion, and it is good to follow Mr McIntosh. I agree with some of the things that Mr McIntosh was saying. Principally I agree with some of the points he was making about the Collingwood Football Club and their excellent leadership and great culture. Mr McIntosh will, I dare say, not be surprised to learn that I had a lot to do with that. I taught at Carey and was a member of the football program there when Darcy Moore, the excellent captain – outstanding captain and a fine young man – of the Collingwood Football Club, was going through. I was coach of the second 18 at Carey Grammar when young Nick Daicos came through the program. Of course I never got the pleasure of coaching Nick myself, because he was always in the firsts, where he belonged, but nonetheless I had a great deal to do with the development of leadership and culture at that place, which obviously now has moved to Collingwood, and we saw a great win on the weekend.

But one of the points Mr McIntosh raised that I would take issue with was the comparison between our new Premier and Mrs Kirner. That is a comparison that the Premier herself invited I think at her very first press conference, and for our Premier I do not think the comparison works. Mrs Kirner has received so much in my mind oftentimes unfair and negative criticism, especially from elements of the right-wing press. As Mr Mulholland was saying, when Mrs Kirner came to power the state’s finances were ruined. That actually had very little to do with Mrs Kirner, because Mrs Kirner most recently had been in the education department, where she did some very good things. There were things she did that I disagree with, but she also did some very good things. She introduced the VCE, for example, a great reform. It was not Mrs Kirner’s fault that Victoria’s finances were ruined when

she came to power; that was on John Cain. That was on the blokes – all of them pale, stale blokes – that she had running the Treasury. It was not Mrs Kirner's fault.

I listened to what Ms Allan said comparing herself to Mrs Kirner, and I thought the comparison works on one level of course because Victoria is broke – our finances are shot – but on another level, as Ms Crozier's motion shows, the comparison does not work, because Mrs Kirner had nothing to do with it, but Ms Allan is the principal driver of our current economic malaise. Mrs Kirner, to her credit, understood that Victoria was broke and understood that Victorians would have to deal with some harsh measures in order to fix the finances. These are things that Ms Allan clearly does not understand. Mrs Kirner started the state's privatisation program. Under Mrs Kirner and Labor that program was botched – I recognise that – but nonetheless she started that privatisation program because she understood that we would need to take a different direction from the Keynesian direction taken by Mr Cain and those pale, stale old white men that he put into the Treasury, who ruined the state financially. The comparison does not work on that level.

Mrs Kirner was somebody who could work with others. I had the great privilege of getting to know Mrs Kirner when she chaired a committee reporting to Minister Wooldridge. I was Minister Wooldridge's adviser, so I worked closely with Mrs Kirner. It was a great honour to meet and to get to know Mrs Kirner. I was terrified as a young Liberal adviser to meet the former Premier, but she was a person who worked with the previous Baillieu and Napthine governments closely because she wanted good outcomes for the Victorian people. Even the best friends of our new Premier recognise that she is a highly partisan figure. I note that Ms Allan has invited a comparison between her and Mrs Kirner. There were many things Mrs Kirner did that I would disagree with, but clearly Ms Allan is no Joan Kirner.

On the specific content of the motion, I do think it is important to recognise that many of the projects that Ms Allan has overseen have blown out by large amounts. I think governments should in some respect be reflective, and when a government has a new leader that is a reasonable time to reflect. Of course members opposite can point to successes, but I think any government should be reflective enough to also understand where things have gone wrong. Mr Mulholland referenced some of the commentary of the Grattan Institute recently. There was an opinion piece in the *Age* newspaper I think it was last week based on some excellent research from the Grattan Institute, which says that the Suburban Rail Loop should be scrapped. I agree: the Suburban Rail Loop should be scrapped. There was excellent investigative reporting at the *Age* years ago now demonstrating how poor the process was, overseen by Ms Allan. She said, when she first took this to the Victorian people – I think it was in 2018, wasn't it? – that the Suburban Rail Loop would cost up to \$50 billion. Now analysis by the independent, apolitical Parliamentary Budget Office says that the first two legs alone will cost \$125 billion, meaning the whole project will cost something in the order of \$200 billion – that is before running costs. It is a blowout in the magnitude of 400 per cent. We cannot afford that. There is no business case for this project. Previously members opposite like Mr Pakula, who I like and respect, have said that to take forward a major project without an independent analysis by Infrastructure Victoria would be economic vandalism. That is what Mr Pakula said. At a minimum, why doesn't the new Premier do what Ms Crozier is asking? Why doesn't the new Premier submit the business case, if she has one, for the Suburban Rail Loop to Infrastructure Australia, an excellent invention of Mr Albanese?

Unlike those opposite, I will not say that current and former Labor governments have never done anything right – that is a ridiculous thing to say. Mr Albanese, when he was the minister under Kevin Rudd, set up Infrastructure Australia, and that was a very good thing. Labor members in this place lauded Mr Albanese and Mr Rudd at the time for setting up that excellent body. To be fair to this current government, tired and old as it is, mired in corruption scandals as it is, it set up Infrastructure Victoria. Infrastructure Victoria does not recommend the Suburban Rail Loop. Infrastructure Victoria has never seen a business case for the Suburban Rail Loop.

I am focusing on this particular project, this mangy dog of a project, because of course we need to carry on with the Metro Tunnel and of course we need to carry on with the North East Link. And I do not disagree with some of the comments of members opposite that ultimately these projects will yield benefits for the Victorian people. We acknowledge that. We support many of these projects, but we do not support the appalling way they have been mismanaged. There is a difference. Of course those opposite want to make partisan points, clearly political points, saying that we would not support these sorts of infrastructure projects. No, no, we do – but we do not support the mismanagement that has led to such appalling waste. And all Victorians should care about the level of our debt now, more debt than New South Wales, Queensland and Tasmania combined.

Mrs Kirner, when she became Premier, recognised that the state's finances were in such a parlous position that a different approach would need to be taken. Now, I do not agree with everything that she did economically at that time, but she recognised that and took a different approach. I would say to the new Premier – whom I wish every possible success; all Victorians should – that now is the appropriate time to reflect and take a different pathway. It does not look like that is what is happening, from the first few days, and I fear that Mr Mulholland's analysis that this government is carrying on as it did before and thus is tired and old will be borne out to be correct. But it does not have to be the case.

Ms Allan is the Premier. She went through what clearly was a bruising process within the caucus last week, but nonetheless she emerged as the Premier and I wish her every possible success. However, for her to succeed and for the state to succeed she needs to do what Mrs Kirner did, which was to recognise the parlous position of the state's finances. It is very hard for Ms Allan, because she is the responsible party. She has overseen \$30 billion of project blowouts. Now, that is a figure that has been fact-checked. When I was shadow minister to Ms Allan in the lead-up to the election I provided a detailed analysis to the press pack – I know members opposite had it as well – to be fact-checked. It is correct; indeed it is conservative. That is a huge figure. It is a bill for every Victorian household of about \$20,000, just because of blowouts on major projects. That is before the Suburban Rail Loop is thrown in, which has already blown out according to independent, apolitical analysis by the Parliamentary Budget Office – which Labor set up, to its credit – which shows it will be over \$200 billion. So I would urge all members, actually, to take this motion seriously and to seek to work alongside the government and the new Premier to make her a success and to make Victoria a success once more.

**Michael GALEA** (South-Eastern Metropolitan) (11:28): I also rise to speak on this motion put forward today by Ms Crozier – the same old, same old from the Liberal Party, as we see. It is all the same motions repackaged – how exciting. 'Let's put a new name on it. Let's not even give her a week to see how she goes in the first week in the job. Let's just put this motion out. Let's get this out. We know what we're going to say before it's even started. Here we go again.' So it is quite the motion, but again, as other colleagues have said, what a wonderful opportunity to talk about all the amazing infrastructure projects that this government is actually delivering. It is a foreign concept to those opposite, actually getting into office and doing something with it. We had four years of complete inertia and inaction – two premiers but four years of complete inaction and inertia.

*Members interjecting.*

**Michael GALEA:** I will come back to you lot later, but I do want to start with a bit of a rebuttal to my good friend and colleague Mr McIntosh for his outrageous comparison, comparing a fantastic Premier and a fantastic new Premier to the Collingwood Football Club when he should know that Daniel Andrews and the new Premier Jacinta Allan are both proud Bombers fans.

**A member:** Proud?

**Michael GALEA:** Well, it has been a rough few seasons, but we will be coming back. Hopefully it will not take another 23 years for us to win another premiership, like it has already. But I am not

sure at this stage what is more likely to happen next, another Bombers premiership or another Liberal government, the way that this lot opposite are acting. As a pessimistic Bombers fan, my money is on the Bombers, sadly, still. But they are proud Bombers fans, both Daniel and the new Premier Jacinta Allan too, which is a fantastic thing, so I will not have any more comparisons with that other football club.

As I say, Jacinta Allan is now one week into the job, and fair to say she has absolutely hit the ground running. She is already kicking goals, and what better way to see that than last week, on Thursday, the very first full day of her premiership, when she was out in the south-eastern suburbs, out at Pakenham at the level crossing project checking out progress. My word that project has come so far in such a short space of time. We have already removed the level crossing at Cardinia Road in Officer. We have removed crossings at Clyde Road in Berwick, and the Narre Warren project is underway now, as are the two projects in Beaconsfield – and those in this chamber will know I love talking about the Beaconsfield level crossings. But there are the Pakenham level crossings too, three crossings being removed as we speak, and a brand new Pakenham station as well as a new extension of the train line through to East Pakenham. This is a project that is going to transform the way that Pakenham gets around. I know in doorknocking the area that even five years ago people were talking about the nightmare of the level crossings, all three of them, and every single one who spoke to us and raised those issues was so frustrated. And it was so wonderful to see that commitment made at the 2018 election, five years ago, and to have our now Premier Jacinta Allan come out and announce that game-changing project for the south-east, and how good it was to have her on Thursday last week back in Pakenham, back in the south-east, checking out progress on the new sky rail, which is going to absolutely transform that community as well.

Of course on the Pakenham line, we cannot talk about the Pakenham line without talking about the Metro Tunnel. What a good project. That has been delivered ahead of schedule, which those opposite often like to forget to mention – ahead of schedule – and as the previous Premier got to check it out he thanked the workers on each station along the line, as he said, in just the last week as well. We are all looking forward to that train line opening. I know I am certainly looking forward to being able to get on one train in the outer south-east and go and see my good friend and colleague Mr Luu in the western suburbs as well. How good will that be!

**Evan Mulholland:** When is that going to be?

**Michael GALEA:** We will book in a time. I am sure he has got a lot of places he could take me – take me to shows, get some good food – and then I will come back to the south-east in the afternoon. And also of course I can go out and see our fabulous Parliamentary Secretary for Level Crossing Removals Mr Josh Bull, the member for Sunbury, who was also in Pakenham with us last week. And how good it will be with the one train to be able to go and see him as well. This is one example, and these are countless more examples of the immense infrastructure projects that this government is delivering both under the previous Andrews Labor government and of course under the current Allan government too.

Jacinta Allan has been the minister for a lot of these projects, as those opposite like to say. Frankly I am not sure why they are drawing attention to it, because Victorians know that when it comes to getting rid of level crossings, when it comes to investing in the roads, in the rail network and in the transport that we need, there has been only one government in the last few generations of Victoria that has actually been delivering that, and that is this side of the house and in particular the Allan–Andrews Labor governments. Look at what we have seen, as I said, from those opposite: four years of complete inaction. They went to the election saying, ‘We will build the Rowville rail line. We will build the Doncaster rail line.’ They said, ‘We’re not going to build any new freeways.’ What did they do? They did not build the Rowville rail line, they did not build the Doncaster rail line, they went to the election promising a freeway and then they locked us into it before the election, even though they knew they were going to lose. It was just shabby, shabby tactics, and that is all we get, and that is all we see from this motion as well – just more of the same old Liberals, the same old tactics, no vision for the state.

I really enjoy that the Liberals seem – well, they are actually not, they still seem as deflated as ever, to be honest. Let us be honest. But I love that they are saying, ‘Oh, you had an argument in the party room last week. You had an argument in the party room.’ Yes, we did. It is healthy. We had an argument in the party room, but, guess what, we resolved it. We walked out as friends, united. I know this is such a foreign concept to those opposite, that you can actually have a healthy disagreement, disagree on something and then walk out as friends. I know they are obviously very jealous because every party room that they have seems to cause more issues and more issues than the last and more issues than the last term. Are they in? Are they out? Who is being kicked out today? Who is being purged? What happened to the last one? Who is suing who? I know that they are not happy about that. But frankly this is a sign of a healthy government and a healthy democracy.

We have a fantastic new Premier in Jacinta Allan, who, as I say, is already hitting the ground running, is already working extremely hard and is going to make an absolutely fantastic Premier, leading a fantastic cabinet too, a cabinet for the first time that has more than two-thirds female representation in it – 68 per cent of the new cabinet is women. Isn’t that fantastic? What an achievement that is. It is this side of the house once again that is making the progress in terms of providing that representation: members from regional Victoria, a Premier from regional Victoria and members and ministers from all different parts of the community as well. That is what you get with a Labor government, rather than the same old, same old negativity and lack of action, lack of plans, lack of direction and lack of unity from those opposite.

*Members interjecting.*

**Michael GALEA:** If you had been here a moment ago, you would have heard me discuss that, Ms Crozier. I do say it is a hallmark of a healthy party that we work together, we bind together and we support our Premier. It is fantastic to have this opportunity to – *(Time expired)*

**Georgie CROZIER** (Southern Metropolitan) (11:36): I am very pleased to sum up this motion. It is a motion that highlights to Victorians the situation we are in. It is an important motion. It demonstrates that even though we have changed premiers, it is the same old, tired Labor government with record debts that Victorians will be facing for years. The legacy that this Premier is leaving Victoria due to her actions as Deputy Premier and her responsibilities as the Minister for Transport and Infrastructure and Minister for Commonwealth Games Delivery are issues that are very prominent in Victorians’ minds.

The Commonwealth Games abandonment by this government has led to reputational damage around the world. It is extraordinary that the cost that was in the budget of \$2.6 billion suddenly blew out. We are not getting the truth from the current Premier, nor did we from the former Premier, and I think, as I said in my substantive contribution, we need the Premier to have a moral compass. We need her to tell the truth to Victorians about what has gone on. We need her to front the Commonwealth Games parliamentary inquiry and reassure Victorians, because the legacy is there for her to correct and for Victorians to see, otherwise it is going to be one of mistrust, as we have seen from the Property Council of Australia’s comments this morning. They have lost faith and trust in this government. The 53rd tax that has been put on to Victorians by a Labor government, the record debt that is greater than that of Queensland, New South Wales and Tasmania combined and is only growing and the issues that Moody’s have put out which say our debt could be in excess of \$200-odd billion just show what peril our financial situation is in.

This motion is important because it does highlight the Premier’s actions and her legacy. As Dr Bach said, to compare the former female Premier of this state Joan Kirner and the current Premier, they are miles apart. This Premier has been around the decision-making table where all these blowouts and where all this reputational damage has occurred. She has been responsible. She has been the decision-maker around a lot of this. As Deputy Premier she was in lock step with the former Premier about the decisions. She sat in the inner cabinet around COVID. She is responsible for the Commonwealth

Games debacle. She has been responsible for \$27 billion worth of infrastructure blowouts. That is a lot of hospitals, teachers, schools, police officers and a whole range of frontline workers that we need.

Our health system is on its knees. Our education system is going backwards. We have got so many issues, whether it is housing or energy costs or the cost of living. Our state is being looked at by others not just around the country but around the world, and it is because of the actions of this government. Recently I was travelling, and people in Europe knew that Melbourne was the longest locked down city in the world. That is the reputation we have. They know about the Commonwealth Games being cancelled suddenly. That reputational damage cannot be underestimated. We need to bring confidence back into the state. We do not want businesses leaving because of these increased taxes. We need to be supporting families and business, and at this point in time there are families who are struggling, cost-of-living pressures are huge and the increasing debt and the taxes that are being placed on families and businesses are not going to instil that confidence. That is why I say the legacy of this Premier is there, and I would urge her to have the moral compass to come before the Commonwealth Games inquiry, to actually point out to Victorians what went wrong and to rein in this debt. The Suburban Rail Loop is a vanity project. Money that is going into that is not money being well spent when there are so many issues that we need to fix in this state. Rising debt and rising taxes are not the answer. I would urge all members of the house to support the motion.

**Council divided on motion:**

*Ayes (14):* Matthew Bach, Jeff Bourman, Gaelle Broad, Georgie Crozier, David Davis, Moira Deeming, Renee Heath, Ann-Marie Hermans, Wendy Lovell, Trung Luu, Bev McArthur, Joe McCracken, Evan Mulholland, Rikkie-Lee Tyrrell

*Noes (19):* Ryan Batchelor, John Berger, Lizzie Blandthorn, Katherine Copsey, Enver Erdogan, Jacinta Ermacora, Michael Galea, Shaun Leane, Sarah Mansfield, Rachel Payne, Aiv Puglielli, Georgie Purcell, Samantha Ratnam, Harriet Shing, Ingrid Stitt, Jaclyn Symes, Lee Tarlamis, Gayle Tierney, Sheena Watt

**Motion negatived.**

*Business of the house*

**Notices of motion**

**Lee TARLAMIS** (South-Eastern Metropolitan) (11:47): I move:

That the consideration of notices of motion, general business, 187 and 190, be postponed until later this day.

**Motion agreed to.**

*Motions*

**Decriminalisation of public drunkenness**

**Georgie CROZIER** (Southern Metropolitan) (11:47): I move:

That this house:

- (1) expresses its concern that the Summary Offences Amendment (Decriminalisation of Public Drunkenness) Act 2021 will increase risk to members of Victoria Police, people in a vulnerable state and the community, noting that:
  - (a) the Victoria Police training video to leave an intoxicated female in a public area places the female at risk;
  - (b) there is a health crisis in Victoria and these laws will increase pressure on regional hospitals and remove staff from struggling emergency rooms;
  - (c) Victoria is the only state that has introduced laws to decriminalise public drunkenness that has not given police increased move-on laws or powers of arrest to ensure community safety is the priority;

- (2) calls on the government to postpone the commencement of the Summary Offences Amendment (Decriminalisation of Public Drunkenness) Act 2021 until:
- (a) move-on laws are introduced to ensure police have the powers to put community safety first;
  - (b) the government establishes at least three trial sites that operate for a 24-month period and a report on this trial is tabled in Parliament; and
  - (c) the Victoria Police training video is withdrawn and reissued with due consideration to the issues listed above and no police officer is trained to leave a vulnerable person in a potentially more dangerous or vulnerable position.

This motion is timely because of course this public drunkenness law and the sobering-up centres that have been trialled – and I will come back to that – will be in place in just a few weeks time. In fact it comes into action on Melbourne Cup Day, if you can believe it, one of the busiest days of the year and certainly a magnificent time of the year with our Spring Racing Carnival, and one that most Victorians – I would say nearly all Victorians – just enjoy and celebrate. What a wonderful event it is. It showcases what we have in this city on the world stage, and it is an important one to maintain that position. But what it does do is that invariably we do see racegoers revel in the celebrations, and there is always lots of fun to be had, but invariably there are many people who overindulge in alcohol on the day, and there are thousands of people that leave Flemington Racecourse – sometimes many, many thousands – in an intoxicated state and in various degrees of an intoxicated state.

These laws that are now in place are assuming that police do not have any responsibility and that it is now up to our health system to be looking after these people. With the government's rushed and, I would say, botched policy decision, we have got one sobering-up centre in Collingwood, which is going to cause issues for that local community. People have expressed to me that they are concerned about the location, and I am not sure about the consultation that was done with the local community out there. This government –

**Evan Mulholland:** They're very upset.

**Georgie CROZIER:** They are very upset, as Mr Mullan knows only too well because he has, I think, been in touch with many of those community members. They feel that they have not been consulted with due regard by the government and it has just been thrust into their area, and they are concerned about the numbers and how it will operate.

In saying that, it is completely unworkable. It is just the most ludicrous policy. Somebody who is drunk in Frankston is going to come up to Collingwood and sober up? Somebody in some other part of Melbourne is going to come into Collingwood and sober up? I mean, it is completely and utterly bonkers. Then you have got people in regional Victoria – where do they go? They will have to go to a regional emergency department. Our hospitals are already overflowing with patients with chronic health conditions because they have been through the lockdowns and through the neglect of the Labor governments – now the Allan government, but she was part of the Andrews government. It is a dire situation our health system is in. Many people have found that due to the prolonged lockdowns their chronic conditions have worsened and they are needing hospital care and emergency care. Of course we have had a crisis in the ambulance system. They cannot get an ambulance, and people are ending up in our emergency departments. Now the other ridiculous taxes being placed on our health system – and I name the GP health tax – will put more pressure on our system. How is the government actually going to manage this? It is a completely and utterly ludicrous policy decision made by this government to expect the health system to pick up the pieces.

It has been noted that the police union and other unions have raised their concerns with government. The alcohol and drug sector have raised their concerns with government. They are all very worried about the implementation of this policy and what is to be expected. The training video I mentioned in the motion. Well, if you look at that training video, there is a woman who is intoxicated. The police ask if she is all right: 'Do you need an ambulance?' She says no, and then they walk away, saying, 'Well, we can't intervene any further.' They walk away and say, 'Well, we'll just do patrols.' What

happens if they are called out to another emergency? That patrol is not going to happen, and you have got a very vulnerable person that is intoxicated and does not get the support and care from our police, who do a fabulous job in supporting people in such a state. I think this is the short-sightedness of the government: they have not recognised the need and actually what the police do to support people in these vulnerable situations.

That is just one incident with one vulnerable female, but I want to make the point that when you have got large numbers of people who are intoxicated it can become a dangerous situation, and you need the police to have those arrest powers. Well, this takes away those arrest powers. I have to say that it was the former coalition government that introduced the move-on laws, which allowed police to move on protesters or people that were causing disruption or causing concern to the community and were being a danger to not only themselves but others, and yet this government scrapped those laws. When they came to power they abolished them, and that has been another short-sighted move by the government. Public drunkenness has been decriminalised in other states around the country, but Victoria is the only jurisdiction that has introduced laws to decriminalise public drunkenness without giving police increased move-on laws or powers of arrest to ensure community safety is a priority – and that is the difference.

The police union, the ambulance union and the alcohol and drugs sector have asked how it is going to work. There have been suggestions about installing non-invasive camera systems – medical monitoring systems – in police cells, and I think that is a very good suggestion. Where is the government on that? I am not quite sure. I do not know where they are on that, but that could at least give some additional monitoring and assistance to what they need to deal with.

Let us not forget that many people who are intoxicated with alcohol also have a cocktail of drugs on board, so there is violence. What happens then? How are we going to deal with that when there are violent members of the community who are going to be placed in the hands of health professionals? We do not have enough ambulances out there to deal with patients that need them. We have seen the disasters that have occurred due to the shortage and the crisis in our ambulance system. It is still going on. There are so many problems within our ambulance system, as we know from reports over recent weeks. That is a mess. Our health system is a mess, and yet they are expected to have this additional burden where the police now do not have those powers to assist those frontline workers to deal with this issue where members of the community are intoxicated or have an issue with drugs and alcohol.

I would like to say about this Collingwood sobering-up centre, despite the fact that it has been highlighted, that the police union have said they fear police will be forced to wait on the side of the road for help to arrive under the new model. Where is that going to place them when other people are in need? The Salvation Army boss Major Brendan Nottle said Victorians should be highly alert to the fact that there may not be enough wraparound services within and outside metropolitan Melbourne. I think he is completely right on that. We have made our points known on this for some time. We are concerned about it. That is why we have brought forward this motion today to discuss it, because in just a few weeks time we are going to have to be dealing with this, and the under-preparedness and the lack of certainty provided to our frontline workers remain. What is also of concern is that, outside of metropolitan Melbourne, Mildura and Bendigo are two hotspots for drunkenness arrests, so this policy does not extend to the areas where the issue is.

**Lee TARLAMIS** (South-Eastern Metropolitan) (11:58): I move:

That debate on this motion be adjourned until later this day.

**The PRESIDENT:** Just to clarify Mr Tarlamis's motion, this means Dr Mansfield will be able to start her motion after lunch. But if we return to this motion, Ms Crozier can continue her contribution if she wants to.

**Motion agreed to and debate adjourned until later this day.**

**Business interrupted pursuant to sessional orders.**

*Questions without notice and ministers statements*

**Medically supervised injecting facilities**

**Sarah MANSFIELD** (Western Victoria) (12:00): (281) My question is to the Minister for Mental Health. It has been over four months since Ken Lay handed his report to the government about the need for a safe injecting facility in the Melbourne CBD, yet the government has still not responded to or released the report. This is creating a huge amount of uncertainty amongst communities, and at least one person is dying of an overdose in our city every month. Minister, given your new portfolio responsibilities, when will the government commit to establishing a second medically supervised injecting facility in Melbourne's CBD?

**Ingrid STITT** (Western Metropolitan – Minister for Mental Health, Minister for Ageing, Minister for Multicultural Affairs) (12:00): I thank Dr Mansfield for her question. It is certainly a very important issue. When it comes to saving lives and reducing harm we do want to listen to the experts, and I do want to be able to digest Ken Lay's important body of work.

**Georgie Crozier** interjected.

**Ingrid STITT**: I have been the minister for two days, Ms Crozier, so I think you might want to just calm down a little bit. This is an important issue and one that I have already told my new department officials that I am very keen to put a high priority on, so I will be getting some further briefings on this issue. I will be taking the time to digest Ken Lay's report. I think we owe it to the community. We owe it to the people who have lost their lives and their loved ones to actually properly consider this work. It is a complex issue, and it deserves, I think, the new minister being afforded the opportunity to give proper consideration to Ken Lay's recommendations. In due course when I have been able to do that work the government will be releasing Ken Lay's report and the government response.

**Sarah MANSFIELD** (Western Victoria) (12:02): I thank the minister for her response. However, the government's lack of urgency on this is concerning. There is ongoing uncertainty about the location and timing, and this is disruptive for communities. As I said, people are dying preventable deaths. Not to mention there is the threat of illicit fentanyl, which we know has dramatically increased overdoses overseas, and that is looming large. Last week 18 peak medical bodies and unions signed a joint letter calling for the second safe injecting facility. They included the AMA, Health and Community Services Union and Drug and Alcohol Nurses of Australasia, and they were united in their calls to urgently establish a facility in the CBD. We have heard concerns that the government are backing away from their commitment, so, Minister, will you announce the details of a medically supervised injecting facility in the CBD before the end of this year?

**Ingrid STITT** (Western Metropolitan – Minister for Mental Health, Minister for Ageing, Minister for Multicultural Affairs) (12:03): I thank Dr Mansfield for her supplementary question, but I have to say it is like she did not actually adjust her supplementary question to take account of the answer I gave, which I think was pretty genuine in saying quite clearly and in a very up-front way that I have had an initial briefing with my department, I have asked for a more thorough briefing about these issues, I have indicated to them that it is a priority for me to get on and digest the report from Ken Lay, which I have not read yet and I fully intend to, and I will be carefully considering these complex issues. It is really easy for people to make light of this, but I actually take this matter very seriously, and I will be doing the thorough work that is going to be required to consider Ken Lay's important report. I will have more to say on these matters in due course.

**Commonwealth Games**

**Georgie CROZIER** (Southern Metropolitan) (12:04): (282) My question is to the Minister for Housing. Minister, on 20 June you advised this house in relation to the building of housing for the Commonwealth Games that 'construction is on track to commence later this year'. Given that

documents prove that the government contracted legal services to help cancel the Commonwealth Games as early as 1 June, why did the minister say that the government remained on track to build Commonwealth Games housing across regional Victoria?

**The PRESIDENT:** I am concerned that it was the minister under a previous responsibility, but I will let the minister answer as she sees fit.

**Harriet SHING** (Eastern Victoria – Minister for Housing, Minister for Water, Minister for Equality) (12:05): This is an area where, again, as I have said repeatedly to this house – particularly on the question of housing, which is squarely within the remit of the question that you have asked – I am keen to provide information about the work to progress an increase in the volume of housing being made available. The pivot that I am trying to assist you here with, Ms Crozier, being mindful of the fact that the regional package is work that is being auspiced under regional development – and my colleague Ms Tierney is working on that \$2 billion fund, which includes \$1 billion of social and affordable housing – is that I am wanting to again provide assistance to you, Ms Crozier, and to the house about what that will mean, with more than 1300 social and affordable homes being delivered across regional Victoria. This is about making sure that those homes are located where they need to be, that the objective is to make sure that now we have the opportunity to put those homes immediately into their final locations and that this will also enable us to meet the needs of regional and rural communities as they have told us that those needs are present now and will be present into the future.

That has been part of a range of conversations over a long period of time now, including conversations attended by my predecessor Minister Brooks in the other place, who is now working on the private sector and precincts part of the government’s work on housing across the state, the housing statement and complementing the work of that \$5.3 billion fund. There is \$1.25 billion in regional housing as part of that fund and another \$1 billion in the regional package. This is about being able to deploy resources, housing, in a range of configurations to the areas where it is needed, alongside initiatives like the \$150 million Regional Workforce Accommodation Fund.

There is a fair bit in what you have asked that I am looking to provide you with assistance on. Again, I do not have the transcript you are quoting from, and I do not like to have anyone quote me out of context, so I am happy for you to perhaps put that on the record.

**Georgie CROZIER** (Southern Metropolitan) (12:08): I will just repeat those dates again. On 20 June – you can check *Hansard*, and I am pretty sure that we are correct in the quote – you told this house around the housing for the Commonwealth Games that ‘construction is on track to commence later this year’, yet the government contracted legal services to cancel the Commonwealth Games on 1 June, so 19 days prior to when you made that statement in this house. So my question is, Minister: will you admit that you have misled the house around what you stated on 20 June?

**Harriet SHING** (Eastern Victoria – Minister for Housing, Minister for Water, Minister for Equality) (12:08): Thank you, Ms Crozier, for that supplementary. Now we get to the nub of what you are after here. I did not mislead the house. The work that we are doing to deliver housing as part of the regional package within that \$1 billion fund is as much about preplanning, about preconstruction and about master planning as it is about delivering greater volumes of housing stock to rural and regional Victoria.

**Evan Mulholland** interjected.

**Harriet SHING:** This is also about – to pick up what you have just raised, Mr Mulholland – being able to move immediately and directly to providing that fit-for-purpose housing, including across sites that have been identified in previous public announcements about those areas, particularly in Geelong and Bendigo. That work does go on, and I am really happy to continue to provide you with updates, Ms Crozier.

**Ministers statements: foster and kinship carers**

**Lizzie BLANDTHORN** (Western Metropolitan – Minister for Children, Minister for Disability) (12:10): I rise to update the house on the annual Kinship Care Week and Foster Care Week held during September. The Victorian government values and celebrates the role of our kinship, foster and permanent carers each and every day of the year, but Kinship Care Week and Foster Care Week provide an opportunity to especially acknowledge and celebrate our carers and the vital role they carry out in our community in caring for children and for young people.

Kinship and foster carers as well as permanent carers open up their hearts and their homes to our children and young people. On any given day across our state there are about 7300 children and young people cared for by kinship carers and around 1500 children and young people cared for by foster carers. Our carers are a critical part of our community. They offer care and support. They share certainty and security with vulnerable children, and this is vital. I take this opportunity to acknowledge the incredible commitment and service of our kinship, foster and permanent carers. It is seen, it is valued and it is celebrated.

I would also like to acknowledge Leonie Patterson, who was awarded the Victorian government's 2023 Victorian Protecting Children Awards Carer Award. Over the course of 38 years as a foster carer Leonie has provided a nurturing, stable and safe home for a staggering 357 children. Her story and those of the children she has helped, assisted and provided a home for are truly remarkable. Leonie is a remarkable woman.

The Victorian government is proud to support carers, including through the care support help desk, which helps carers access important documentation and assistance. Since the care support help desk was launched in October last year there have been more than 2600 calls from carers across the state. The assistance provided has supported almost 1900 children and young people living in care. We also support the Carer Kafe program, which provides a range of online and in-person learning and development opportunities for carers. I would also like to acknowledge Kinship Carers Victoria and the Foster Care Association of Victoria for the important work that they do to support carers and advocate on their behalf.

**Medicinal cannabis**

**Rachel PAYNE** (South-Eastern Metropolitan) (12:12): (283) My question is for the Minister for Police, represented by Minister Erdogan. I have received alarming reports of drug detection dogs being used by police randomly on members of the public at Croydon station, Oakleigh station and Frankston station over this past month. Not only does this kind of police work contribute to the over-criminalisation of medicinal cannabis patients, it also stifles their right to freedom of movement via accessible, safe and reliable public transport. Medicinal cannabis patients already fear driving, and now they will fear police scrutiny when accessing our public transport system. My question is: how are police ensuring that operations like these do not unfairly interfere with medicinal cannabis patients' right not to be criminalised?

**Enver ERDOGAN** (Northern Metropolitan – Minister for Corrections, Minister for Youth Justice, Minister for Victim Support) (12:13): I thank Ms Payne for her question and her interest in this matter. In line with the standing orders, I will take that question on notice and get a written response from the police minister in the other place.

**Rachel PAYNE** (South-Eastern Metropolitan) (12:13): I thank the minister for the referral. By way of supplementary, I ask the minister: what training do police receive on medicinal cannabis to guide them for interactions with patients during these operations?

**Enver ERDOGAN** (Northern Metropolitan – Minister for Corrections, Minister for Youth Justice, Minister for Victim Support) (12:13): I thank Ms Payne for her supplementary question and her further interest in this matter. I will forward that to the Minister for Police in the other place and get a response in accordance with the standing orders.

#### Land tax

**Evan MULHOLLAND** (Northern Metropolitan) (12:13): (284) My question is to the Minister for Housing. Yesterday the Treasurer announced a new and expanded tax on housing at an industry breakfast, reportedly blindsiding the Premier's office. The Property Council claims that the affordability partnership signed with the government was set on fire inside a fortnight. Given the housing statement was released on 20 September, supposedly after months of comprehensive and detailed consultation and work, I ask: why weren't these changes announced as part of the housing statement released only two weeks ago?

**Harriet SHING** (Eastern Victoria – Minister for Housing, Minister for Water, Minister for Equality) (12:14): Mr Mulholland, it is lovely to have you ask your first question to me as the Minister for Housing. I am a little concerned, however, that in your triage process you have perhaps missed the point about the Treasurer's role in this particular matter and the fact that the vacant residential land tax is something which, as you have quite rightly pointed out, was the remit of the Treasurer. The preamble that you have raised here this morning again has a few embellishments and a bit of poetic licence attached to it, and I just want to for avoidance of doubt confirm that there has been a process – you may not have it over there – whereby there is a collective approach to decision-making, including in the development of legislation being introduced that relates to what cabinet does.

Now, Mr Mulholland, you may have an assiduous process associated with ventilating all of your conversations internally. We certainly do not, so I do not intend to canvass that work. I do not intend to canvass that work here today, but what I am perhaps inviting you to do, Mr Mulholland, is to look not at the question that you have asked – which is, again, to quote the Premier, 'back to the future', so hop into your DeLorean and away we go – but also at the housing statement of two weeks ago I think, which is actually about making sure we bring together the pieces of some of the most significant challenges for communities as population growth continues to increase, as we continue to see pressures around social housing, as we continue to look at the work to alleviate the pressures of homelessness and of the cost of living and as we work in those investment partnerships and again partner with our colleagues in the Commonwealth government as that relates to the social housing accelerator program.

Again, Mr Mulholland, one of the things that perhaps would assist you in your role as shadow is to look at the funding that has been allocated through this government, record funding. No other government in Australia has invested more to challenge the pressures in our market – private, community and public – than this government, the Andrews and now Allan government. We are proud of this work. We are also proud to partner with a range of organisations across peak bodies – and this will devastate you, Mr Mulholland, but some of your friends are in fact wholehearted supporters of the work that we are doing and those partnerships that are being developed – and to make sure that as we deliver this housing we are freeing up land, we are streamlining planning processes, we are assisting with the development of suburban and inner-city areas and, again, we are reducing the challenges associated with finding the land and the opportunities to meet our population growth needs now and into the future.

**Evan MULHOLLAND** (Northern Metropolitan) (12:17): Cath Evans, the CEO of the Property Council, has said the partnership entered into with the government:

... clearly outlines that consultation is a shared responsibility and that we all ... work together to find solutions in a complex economic environment.

Sadly, 8 ... days later, the Treasurer, who was a signatory to the Partnership, has announced the introduction of ... expanded taxes without any consultation ...

I ask the minister: just like the Commonwealth Games, is it government policy to mislead partners that enter into agreements with the state of Victoria?

**Harriet SHING** (Eastern Victoria – Minister for Housing, Minister for Water, Minister for Equality) (12:18): Thanks, Mr Mulholland. I was trying to perhaps give you a little bit of guidance, but this is like going bowling without gutter guards with you, I suspect. What I want to do is perhaps give you a sense of comfort that the Treasurer has addressed these matters – that there have been discussions and will continue to be discussions about these matters. In the legislative process, Mr Mulholland, around what this actually means as part of freeing up land and making sure that vacant properties are not then failing to be utilised in addressing some of those shortfalls, consultation will continue, including in this place. And I hope that when and as this bill comes to committee stage, Mr Mulholland, you will be on your feet – that you will have a vast folder of information to assist you in getting across the detail of this, including perhaps getting across the detail of the fact that this matter and the fact that you have asked for an opinion of me is something that might be better directed to the Treasurer.

#### **Ministers statements: Multicultural Community Infrastructure Fund**

**Ingrid STITT** (Western Metropolitan – Minister for Mental Health, Minister for Ageing, Minister for Multicultural Affairs) (12:19): I am really proud to make my first statement to this house as Minister for Multicultural Affairs. The Allan Labor government is working with our proud multicultural communities right across Victoria to make this state stronger, safer and a fairer place, and this is why yesterday I announced that the Allan Labor government will invest more than \$16 million to continue supporting community organisations through the Multicultural Community Infrastructure Fund. Grants of up to \$400,000 are available for organisations to build or upgrade their facilities. A dedicated stream of grants is available for Victoria’s Chinese, Greek, Indian, Italian, Islamic and Lebanese communities, along with a stream for all other multicultural community groups. This fund also includes grants to support community organisations to undertake research to establish multicultural museums.

Thanks to previous grants awarded through this fund, the Korean Society of Victoria in Oakleigh, the Samadhi Buddhist Meditation Centre in Campbellfield and the Ballarat Croatian community centre, amongst so many others, now have upgraded spaces where the community can gather, build connections and celebrate traditions. In total since 2014 this government has delivered 386 new spaces for multicultural communities to enjoy through an overall investment of \$52 million, and I am incredibly proud of that contribution and that support. In Victoria our diversity is one of our great strengths. We value the immense contribution that multicultural communities make to our state, and we know how important it is for communities to have a dedicated, safe and accessible place to share culture, foster friendships and build a sense of belonging.

#### **Lake Eildon**

**David DAVIS** (Southern Metropolitan) (12:21): (285) My question is to the Minister for Water. Minister, communities downstream of Lake Eildon have been concerned and extremely anxious about the high level of the lake, currently at 97.4 per cent capacity. With only one significant rain event, the lake would be full. With the rain over the last 24 hours, together with what is forecast in the coming days, Goulburn–Murray Water are expecting 100-megalitre inflows, which will bring the lake to 100 per cent capacity. Minister, what releases are expected, and what warnings have Goulburn–Murray Water put in place for local landowners?

**Harriet SHING** (Eastern Victoria – Minister for Housing, Minister for Water, Minister for Equality) (12:21): Thank you very much for that question, Mr Davis, and I really appreciate the opportunity to provide some information about the work that is happening to assist communities, to assist customers and to assist people who are downstream of both Lake Eildon and Lake Eppalock. As you quite rightly pointed out, we have seen significant rainfall events. It is a time of extreme anxiety and distress for communities who around this time last year were in the process of preparing for very

significant rainfall. Indeed we saw extensive spill events, and we also continue that work to partner with communities and to work alongside catchment management authorities, water authorities and a range of emergency, frontline and data collection agencies.

Mr Davis, it is important to note also, as we gather the information in real time around that modelling and what future rainfall events look like, that we enable that information to be disseminated accurately. There are daily reports about the volume of our water storages, and as you would be aware, Mr Davis, Lake Eppalock is a lake with three crested spillways. Again, when and as that lake reaches capacity, it is then going to spill and that water will come down from there. Also noting the rainfall which has been forecast is in a process of movement, it is really important that we are aware that rainfall will affect different parts of the state, of the catchment system, in different ways.

When it comes to Lake Eildon and when it comes to the work that is being done to provide people with information about what is happening on the ground, Goulburn–Murray Water has actually been calling landholders to advise them of moderate flooding and will continue to engage with people, including by reference to information from the Bureau of Meteorology, the SES, frontline responders and, as necessary, incident control centre work. This is where controlled releases are being developed with options available. I am looking forward to being able to provide really accurate information, rather than speculation at this point in time, based on that data, but Goulburn–Murray Water is working really hard to minimise risk and damage and to provide customers, landholders and communities with accurate information, including by way of information before any releases take place.

**David DAVIS** (Southern Metropolitan) (12:25): That was not really, President, a satisfactory answer. It did not answer what releases are expected, and it did not really explain how the warnings would occur. Nonetheless, Minister, this morning none of the information on the Goulburn–Murray Water website was current. The hotline was not updated at 9 am. Local landowners have been communicating between themselves due to the lack of information provided by agencies under your responsibility. As you are aware, 12 months on from the devastating floods, together with the continued warnings, why have you failed to ensure that communities actually know?

**Harriet SHING** (Eastern Victoria – Minister for Housing, Minister for Water, Minister for Equality) (12:25): Mr Davis, 12 months on we are working to ensure that interoperability is at the heart of what we do in preparing communities, in providing information and in the way in which information is made available in accessible and easily digestible formats to a range of audiences and communities. Goulburn–Murray Water is working alongside the SES and Bureau of Meteorology. These are collaborative efforts, Mr Davis. Goulburn–Murray Water, as I indicated in my answer to the substantive question, has been contacting landowners today and will continue to work alongside landowners and agencies such as the Bureau of Meteorology and the SES. Mr Davis, this is a really tough time for communities. I am under no illusions about the impact of last year’s floods on where we find ourselves now, and I have made it very clear that my priority on this is making sure that communities have the information they need to make the decisions that are right for them.

#### **Australian flag**

**Moira DEEMING** (Western Metropolitan) (12:27): (286) My question is for the Leader of the Government, representing the Minister for Government Services. Could you please outline the rationale behind the decision not to display the Australian flag on any Victorian government department websites alongside the Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander flags?

**Jaclyn SYMES** (Northern Victoria – Attorney-General, Minister for Emergency Services) (12:27): I thank Mrs Deeming for her question. I will refer it, but your question is asking whether the minister has given a direction or something in relation to that, and I am not sure –

**Moira Deeming:** No, I just wanted to read about it. I just want to know about the decision.

**Jaelyn SYMES:** Okay. All right. I will pass that on to the new Minister for Government Services Gabrielle Williams, and I am sure she will make inquiries and get you the information that you need.

**Ministers statements: housing**

**Harriet SHING** (Eastern Victoria – Minister for Housing, Minister for Water, Minister for Equality) (12:28): It is an honour today to rise to give my first ministers statement as the Minister for Housing and to share how our landmark housing statement will bring the biggest shake-up to planning and housing reform in generations. This is about acknowledging the reality that Victoria is growing. We are the fastest growing state in Australia, with our population set to hit 10.3 million people by 2051. To ease the housing pressure that Victorians are facing, we need to build 2.24 million homes in that time, and that includes a target of 425,600 homes across rural and regional Victoria.

*Victoria's Housing Statement: The Decade Ahead 2024–2034* sets a really bold target to build 800,000 new homes – that is, 80,000 a year – across the state in the next 10 years. This will be delivered through an affordability partnership with the housing industry and will complement the \$5.3 billion already invested as part of the Big Housing Build and a range of other investments that we have made and will continue to make in program and service delivery.

The statement itself focuses on five key areas to tackle the root of the problem, being housing supply. We need good decisions and we need them to be made faster, so reforming our planning system and clearing the backlog of planning permits, cheaper housing closer to where people work and need to access transportation and health care, protecting renters rights, more social housing and a long-term housing plan are all components of this plan that will come together to deliver real reform to boost our housing supply.

**Water policy**

**Gaelle BROAD** (Northern Victoria) (12:30): (287) My question is to the Minister for Water. Will Victoria continue to oppose water buybacks?

**Harriet SHING** (Eastern Victoria – Minister for Housing, Minister for Water, Minister for Equality) (12:30): I might seek leave to get an extension of time to continue on with this, Mrs Broad. You have, I think, locally made comment about Victoria's position as it relates to buybacks and our steadfast opposition to buybacks. For people who are not directly in communities along the Murray, I just want to perhaps set a bit of context. Buybacks are a process whereby water can be taken away from the consumptive pool and used for other purposes. In the case of the work being developed by the Commonwealth government through a legislative process, this is about returning water to the environment.

Victoria, by way of context, signed up to the Murray–Darling Basin plan in 2012 to make sure that we could address the long-term challenges of water supply and security for our rural and regional communities whilst also making sure that we could continue to enable these communities – the food bowl of Victoria and Australia and a really significant contributor to our economic growth around the world with niche market opportunities and development – because it is world-class produce. In 2018 there was an agreement reached by all basin states to sign up to what are called the socio-economic criteria. These socio-economic criteria – Mrs Broad, I know you know all about this, but I just want to actually put this on the record – require that there must not be any negative impact in socio-economic terms in relation to the delivery of water under the plan.

Victoria's position is backed up by evidence, including from the Frontier Economics report which was published by the government last year and shows very clearly that buybacks do real harm. They lead to very significant job losses. They lead to very significant hardships across communities. Mrs Tyrrell also knows very well the impact that buybacks have. When we saw 550 gegalitres removed from the consumptive pool through the last round of buybacks, we experienced that, and too many people have very vivid memories about the extreme distress that this caused, the loss and the damage to

communities. Where there are positive or neutral outcomes for communities, the delivery of water through the plan, including for other purposes, makes sense.

Let us be clear, though: Victoria has delivered more water to the environment than any other jurisdiction within the basin plan. Victoria is on track, notwithstanding the impact of floods and the pandemic, to return more than 95 per cent of our water under the plan. Whether a two-year extension is granted, we remain opposed to buybacks.

**Gaëlle BROAD** (Northern Victoria) (12:33): Thank you very much for that answer, Minister. Can you just explain how the government will oppose buybacks and protect Victoria's ability to produce food?

**Harriet SHING** (Eastern Victoria – Minister for Housing, Minister for Water, Minister for Equality) (12:34): Thank you, Mrs Broad, for that supplementary. Again, I have made Victoria's position clear in a number of forums. I have spoken about the impact of buybacks. I have also been in conversations, as have officials, with the Commonwealth and with other basin jurisdictions to really underscore the work that we have done in Victoria and the importance of making sure that in delivering the Murray–Darling Basin plan we are not just looking at the Murray, we are also looking at the Darling. When we look to the fact that New South Wales has not proceeded with many of its water resource plans, when we look to the fish deaths that are occurring across the Darling and Menindee and when we look to the fact that in South Australia only 2 gigalitres of water has been returned to the environment, it has also been important to make sure that we are underscoring the importance of the contribution that Victoria has made and of the opportunities that we have to deliver on the plan with that two-year extension, and I have requested a ministerial council meeting to continue that work.

#### **Malmsbury Youth Justice Centre**

**David DAVIS** (Southern Metropolitan) (12:35): (288) My question is to the Minister for Youth Justice. Minister, following last night's serious riot at Malmsbury Youth Justice Centre, which was briefed by your government to the media as a minor incident, how many young people were moved to Cherry Creek?

**Enver ERDOGAN** (Northern Metropolitan – Minister for Corrections, Minister for Youth Justice, Minister for Victim Support) (12:35): I thank Mr Davis for his question and his interest in this matter. I can confirm to the house that there was an incident at the Malmsbury Youth Justice Centre yesterday, and we are treating that matter very seriously. Violent behaviour of any sort is unacceptable, especially when it affects our staff, young people and the broader community. These kinds of matters are operational matters. We have a very small number of young people in custodial settings in Victoria. That is a result of the work that this government has done – the whole of government, really. Our investments in early childhood, in our education system and in our health system are paying dividends now. We are seeing that. We have much less young people in youth justice settings.

In terms of the amount of people that were transferred across, what I can say is that an orderly transfer did take place last night and those young people were transferred from the Malmsbury facility to the Cherry Creek facility. Because of the small numbers, I am reluctant to share those numbers with Mr Davis in here. It is a very small number, and these are operational matters based on longstanding provisions where the commissioner is in charge of the operation and the transition of people between facilities and the program of facilitating that.

As I have said on the record, by the end of this year there will be no young people at our Malmsbury facility and we will have a system where we will have our Parkville precinct and our Cherry Creek facility in place. But what I can say is that the transfer of those young people was successful yesterday evening.

**David DAVIS** (Southern Metropolitan) (12:37): It was a very, very simple question and you should have answered it.

**A member:** He did.

**David DAVIS:** He did not. He did not give us a number, and none of us accept –

**Jaclyn Symes:** He told you why he shouldn't, which is an answer.

**David DAVIS:** A claim, at least.

**Enver Erdogan:** Very small numbers were successfully transferred.

**David DAVIS:** No-one believes that. You could have just provided the number. Minister, I ask: can you give a guarantee that staff and inmates at Cherry Creek will be safe given the lack of experienced staff currently at Cherry Creek and the sudden transfer of inmates overnight?

**Enver ERDOGAN** (Northern Metropolitan – Minister for Corrections, Minister for Youth Justice, Minister for Victim Support) (12:38): I thank Mr Davis for his supplementary question. What I will do is just express my gratitude to our youth justice workers, who do tremendous work – they are experienced, hardworking, dedicated staff – instead of talking them down. They are very experienced. The people that work in our youth justice system are highly trained specialists. Many have a wide range of experiences not just in our youth justice system, whether it be in social work or whether it be in broader law enforcement – in a whole range of sectors. Instead of talking them down, I would say that they do amazing work. They are experts in their field, as we saw with the incident yesterday. I understand that our safety and response team responded. From all accounts they did an amazing job in containing the incident. Our staff are well trained. I really do take offence at your inference that they are not appropriately trained and do not know their roles. They are very well dedicated, and we will be supporting them. What I do guarantee to everyone here is that we will continue to support our youth justice staff. We guarantee that we will continue to support them and provide greater funding to our youth justice system.

#### **Ministers statements: State Emergency Service Cobram unit**

**Jaclyn SYMES** (Northern Victoria – Attorney-General, Minister for Emergency Services) (12:39): I would just like to update the house on the recent opening of the new \$6 million dedicated home base for the Cobram SES unit. Last month I was incredibly honoured to open the new facility alongside dedicated volunteers from the Cobram unit and VICSES officials, and so many people from the community turned out for this event. The facility has been a long time coming, and it is going to make a vital difference to the Cobram volunteers, who for the first time have their very own home base on the right side of the border. It was shortly after I became a member for Northern Victoria that volunteers took me to their home, which at that point in time was over the river in Tocumwal. They have created –

**A member** interjected.

**Jaclyn SYMES:** It is a lovely place, but it is not super convenient for the Cobram volunteers to have to go to another state to access their facilities and their vehicles.

I am incredibly proud as both a local member and the minister that I was able to join with that community and celebrate a fantastic facility for this deserving group of volunteers. There were representatives from across the board. We had Ambulance Victoria, we had police, we had fire representatives and indeed we had local council. Last year alone this hardworking unit responded to more than 100 requests for assistance, so this modern facility now features four new motor bays, a well-equipped office space and dedicated communications and training rooms. It will allow them to retain existing volunteers, expand their membership base and grow their operational capabilities.

SES volunteers do an incredible job, and I do note that today many will be taking time off work and spending time away from their families to help Victorians through the current weather conditions, whether that be clearing fallen trees, responding to flooding or clearing building damage. For your information, more than 300 calls for assistance were received by SES just in the last 24 hours.

Whatever the emergency and whatever the task, our SES members and especially Cobram members have always demonstrated a selfless attitude, and we on this side, who have listened to this statement, actually respect the work of the SES.

**Wendy Lovell:** On a point of order, President, on the question that Mr Davis asked of the water minister, I have been advised that one of my constituents has been advised that releases from Lake Eildon will increase from 4500 megalitres per day to 10,000 megalitres per day this afternoon and that they will ramp up to 20,000 megalitres –

**The PRESIDENT:** Thank you, Ms Lovell. You know well that is not a point of order.

**Jaelyn Symes:** On the point of order, President, just to put on the record, I think Ms Lovell has a good intention in wanting to bring that information to the attention of the minister – I would encourage her to have a conversation with the minister about it – but to use a point of order in the way that Ms Lovell has when she knows it is not a point of order but is allowed to continue to use the opportunity to put on the record information that she should not is an inappropriate use of the Parliament. I would certainly encourage her to share her information with the minister but to do it more appropriately if she really wants a decent outcome.

*Members interjecting.*

**The PRESIDENT:** I have ruled that it is not a point of order. Ms Lovell, no-one disagrees it is an important issue. But we all know the standing orders, and you know them as well as anyone else, I believe. It was not a point of order, and neither was the Leader of the Government's.

#### Written responses

**The PRESIDENT (12:43):** Minister Symes is going to get an answer from the government services minister for Mrs Deeming's one question and Minister Erdogan will do so for Ms Payne for both her questions to the Minister for Police under the standing orders.

#### *Constituency questions*

##### **Eastern Victoria Region**

**Tom McINTOSH (Eastern Victoria) (12:43):** (423) My question is for the Minister for Roads and Road Safety in the other place. Minister, constituents have contacted my office raising the issue of the roads in Eastern Victoria. The region of Eastern Victoria spans all the way from the Mornington Peninsula in the west to Mallacoota in the east and from the coastal region right up to the High Country, with thousands of kilometres of road that people rely on every day. I note that the 2022–23 budget included an extra \$2.8 billion in road maintenance over 10 years to ensure motorists stay safe on our roads. This extra funding means at least \$6.6 billion will be invested in road asset management on Victoria's road network over the next decade. These works include rebuilding, resurfacing and repairing roads as well as bridge and drainage repairs to support the productivity of the road network across regional and metropolitan Victoria. My question is: out of this funding, what is being invested into Eastern Victoria's road network to ensure that our roads are keeping users safe?

##### **Northern Victoria Region**

**Wendy LOVELL (Northern Victoria) (12:44):** (424) My question is for the Minister for Roads and Road Safety, and it concerns the dreadful condition of a major road within my electorate. The C363 Katamatite-Shepparton Main Road is a major thoroughfare that carries a large volume of traffic each day. A constituent recently contacted me about two sections of the C363 that are particularly dangerous for road users. Recent repair works on the southbound lane at the intersection of Victoria Road are so poor that the road is uneven and the bitumen is breaking away because of the heavy traffic volume that uses the road. Large potholes near the intersection of Jubilee Road cover the northbound lanes of the road and are so deep that they have the potential to damage vehicles or cause an accident.

Will the minister order immediate repairs to the southbound lane of the Katamatite-Shepparton Main Road at the Victoria Road intersection and the northbound lane near Jubilee Road?

**South-Eastern Metropolitan Region**

**David LIMBRICK** (South-Eastern Metropolitan) (12:45): (425) My question is for the Minister for Roads and Road Safety. A constituent has reached out to my office with safety concerns regarding new pedestrian crossings from Chelsea train station to the shops on Nepean Highway. Changes made through level crossing removal works have left residents with no crossing directly from the main platform entry and exit. There is a barrier that runs the length of the footpath in the north and south, blocking access to the Chelsea shops. The long walk to go to the end of the barrier has no coverage from rain or sun and is difficult for the elderly and disabled people using public transport. A third crossing directly at the entry of the platforms across to the shops would increase accessibility and improve safety. My question is this: why was the crossing not put in the logical position and what is being done to improve pedestrian access and safety at Chelsea train station?

**South-Eastern Metropolitan Region**

**Michael GALEA** (South-Eastern Metropolitan) (12:46): (426) My constituency question is for the Minister for Tourism, Sport and Major Events Minister Dimopoulos. Minister, what funding is being and has been delivered as part of the small and medium events grants program towards sporting events in the Rowville district in my electorate of South-Eastern Metropolitan Region? I note that as part of this program 122 event organisers shared in an investment of almost \$3 million to support the delivery of events in the second half of this year. This funding is helping to make it easier for organisers to bring their own events to life with help to cover event costs, including venue hire, performer fees, staffing and marketing. One particular event that was supported by this program was the Moon Festival Basketball Event organised by the Australia China Basketball Association, which was held this September.

**Eastern Victoria Region**

**Renee HEATH** (Eastern Victoria) (12:47): (427) The cost-of-living crisis and Labor's increased taxes are locking Victorians out of the property market. Research shows that an average-income household would need to save 20 per cent of their income for more than 5½ years to save a deposit for a median-priced home. In September it was reported that housing affordability had hit its worst level in three decades. Rising home prices and rapidly rising interest rates are making it almost impossible for people to enter the market. Jess, a real estate agent from Gippsland, said:

Since 2020, I have primarily operated in Moe, Victoria, where I have witnessed 291 residential rental providers sell their investments due to the escalating costs imposed by the Danial Andrews Labor government.

Since then Jacinta Allan has become the Premier and has increased property taxes twice. Jess said this is 'an unprecedented housing crisis that demands immediate attention'. My question is for the Minister for Housing: what strategies will be put in place to address housing affordability?

**Northern Victoria Region**

**Rikkie-Lee TYRRELL** (Northern Victoria) (12:48): (428) My constituency question today is for the Minister for Water and comes from concerned residents who live downstream of dam walls and floodgates. Noting the ongoing flood inquiries and the mitigation strategies likely to eventuate from these, 12 months on my constituents are worried that not enough short-term preparation has been done to prepare for this spring's projected rainfall. This week we have current flood warnings across most of Northern Victoria Region at a time when dams are collectively sitting at around 97 per cent capacity. With such full dams, coupled with the soaked ground's inability to absorb additional dam releases, why weren't controlled water releases conducted in the previous few weeks leading up to spring?

**Southern Metropolitan Region**

**Ryan BATCHELOR** (Southern Metropolitan) (12:49): (429) My question is for the Minister for Health. Can the minister please provide an update on how the Labor government is supporting the growth and expansion of Dads Group in the Southern Metropolitan Region? Recently, along with Mr Berger, I met with Alex, Tom and Andrew, who were representatives from Dads Group. It is a community-run organisation that supports new fathers and families by connecting them with programs across the community. They recently set up in Stonnington and are seeking to expand further south into Bayside. They meet up with other dads in local cafes and parks with their kids, establishing healthy social connections where they can share, they can talk, they can learn and they can support each other. It is a place where dads can ask each other questions that they may not feel like they can ask anywhere else. We know that for fathers and for parents the chance to connect with others in a supportive environment is an incredibly important part of promoting healthy parenting. It was great to hear from them about the important role that Dads Group has played in the early part of their journey as parents, and I cannot wait to see these sorts of groups continue to grow and thrive right across Southern Metropolitan.

**Western Victoria Region**

**Bev McARTHUR** (Western Victoria) (12:50): (430) My question is for the Minister for Roads and Road Safety. In 2018 the St Patrick's Day fires swept through part of my Western Victoria electorate, caused by electrical elements and out-of-control roadside vegetation. The aftermath of no clean up and burnt timber, resulting in a forest of blackwoods, bracken and blackberry vegetation, is a new bushfire waiting to happen along highway 1, the Princes Highway, at Garvoc. The same risk exists at that location trackside on the Warrnambool line. Perhaps the minister needs to do a deal with the new Minister for Transport Infrastructure and fix it all at once, or does the Treasurer's blindsiding of the Premier yesterday show that level of cooperation between colleagues is fantasy in this new Labor government? Regardless I ask: what action is the minister taking to remove this extensive fire hazard before it all goes up in smoke again?

**North-Eastern Metropolitan Region**

**Aiv PUGLIELLI** (North-Eastern Metropolitan) (12:51): (431) My question today is to the Minister for Public and Active Transport, and it relates to Glen Waverley train station. Minister, a constituent of mine has raised their concerns about passenger flow and access at this station. They have reported that they find the area leading from the platform through the ticket gates and into the street to be too narrow and that at peak times this area can become incredibly congested. They also find the platforms themselves to be too narrow and have noted that for passengers with wheelchairs or other mobility aids it would be even more difficult to navigate the station entrance. My constituent and I acknowledge that there will potentially be upgrades to Glen Waverley station once it is connected to the Suburban Rail Loop; however, this is over a decade away and the station needs attention now. Minister, will you upgrade Glen Waverley station by widening the station entrance and platforms to make it more accessible and to improve passenger flow?

**Southern Metropolitan Region**

**John BERGER** (Southern Metropolitan) (12:52): (432) My question is for the Minister for Disability, Minister Blandthorn. The Changing Places program is all about creating communities that are welcoming and inclusive. It is a key part of the government's state disability plan. It aims to ensure that public spaces are accessible for all Victorians. Changing Places facilities are larger than your typical toilet. They have extra features that meet the needs of those with a disability. Each facility has a height-adjustable adult-size changing bench, a tracking hoist system and space for two either side of the peninsular toilet. I am pleased to say that of the 13 Changing Places facilities being supported this year, one is in my community of Southern Metro, at the Sir Zelman Cowen Park all-abilities playground in the City of Stonnington. I cannot wait to see the difference it makes. Can the minister

provide an update on the progress of the facility, and how it will benefit my community of Southern Metro?

#### **Western Victoria Region**

**Joe McCracken** (Western Victoria) (12:53): (433) My constituency matter is for the Minister for Small Business, and it relates to the cancellation and drying up of funding for mental health clinicians that are used to support small businesses through chambers of commerce. I particularly note the impact that this has had on my local chamber of commerce in Ballarat, known as Commerce Ballarat. My question is this: can the minister give a commitment to chambers of commerce, particularly my chambers in Western Victoria, that funding will be reinstated to support the mental health of small business owners? There are recommendations from the Royal Commission into Victoria's Mental Health System that note that businesses should establish mentally healthy workplaces. That is exactly the work that these clinicians were doing. That cannot happen anymore because the funding has dried up. I know many clinicians have since resigned because the fee-for-service model has not worked. I encourage the minister to consider reinstating this funding, because it is doing very good work.

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

**Ann-Marie Hermans** (South-Eastern Metropolitan) (12:54): (434) My question is to the Minister for Housing and is regarding the steps that are being taken in the South-Eastern Metropolitan Region to support social or public housing for residents. I have had a complaint from a constituent of mine whose daughter and young grandchildren have been living with her for the last four years because they cannot get public housing in the Cranbourne, Clyde or Frankston areas. She has been told that there is a 15-year waiting list and that she is not a priority. The government has recently announced a \$5.3 billion Big Housing Build to deliver 2400 affordable rental homes, but those on the public housing list who are on very low to low incomes, are often experiencing homelessness and family violence and have other special needs, are still being horribly neglected. Minister, can you please provide the steps in writing to afford my constituent some hope on the time line and due process to access social and public housing in the South-Eastern Metropolitan Region?

#### **Northern Victoria Region**

**Gaelle Broad** (Northern Victoria) (12:55): (435) My question is to the Minister for Local Government on behalf of rural councils in Northern Victoria. Last year the state government appointed electoral representation advisory panels to review the electoral structure of Victorian councils and to provide advice to the minister ahead of the local elections in 2024. Can the minister explain why many regional councils in Northern Victoria have received invoices that total in some cases more than \$60,000 for the electoral structure review and when the councils will receive the report? Many councils are finding it difficult to pay these invoices. These are big bills for small regional and rural councils on tight budgets. They are already facing significant costs following last year's devastating floods, with roads in need of repair, on top of regular operations. By receiving the bill but not the report they are also unable to comply with procurement policies. Given this review was directed by the minister, I ask that she make it a priority to resolve this matter and to reduce this burden on local councils.

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

**Matthew Bach** (North-Eastern Metropolitan) (12:56): (436) My question is for the Deputy Premier in his new capacity as the Minister for Education. I am very pleased that the Deputy Premier wished to take on this important portfolio. The question I ask is: will he instruct the Victorian School Building Authority to expedite the promised upgrade and modernisation project at Burwood East Primary School in my electorate? This is an excellent primary school. It is very close to my office. I drive past the school every day. It was promised a new STEM learning space and also new staff areas. Part of the upgrade is supposed to be new toilets and landscaped grounds, which all sound excellent. Initially the promise from the government was that this project would be completed by June this year,

but it seems to me that there is still a lot of work to be done. So I would like the Deputy Premier, notwithstanding the fact that he is only new to the role, to please look at this as undoubtedly one of many measures that he will need to look at. It was an \$8 million commitment. It will be of huge benefit to the school, and it would be great if it could be completed as soon as possible.

**Sitting suspended 12:57 pm until 2:02 pm.**

### *Committees*

#### **Environment and Planning Committee**

#### *Reference*

**Sarah MANSFIELD** (Western Victoria) (14:02): I move, by leave, in an amended form:

That this house:

- (1) notes that:
  - (a) the impacts of climate change are intensifying;
  - (b) the impacts on Victoria include an increase in frequency and severity of extreme weather and climate-related disaster events which will present significant challenges for Victoria's built environment, including private buildings as well as public infrastructure;
- (2) requires the Environment and Planning Committee to inquire into, consider and report, by 30 June 2025, on:
  - (a) the main risks facing Victoria's built environment and infrastructure from climate change and the impact these will have on the people of Victoria;
  - (b) how the Victorian government is preparing for and mitigating the impacts of climate change on our built environment and infrastructure;
  - (c) the barriers facing Victoria in upgrading infrastructure to become more resilient to the impacts of climate change, including barriers in rebuilding or retrofitting infrastructure, including but not limited to issues relating to insurance and barriers faced by local government;
  - (d) the adequacy of the current Victorian planning system as it relates to its adaptation to, preparation for and mitigation of climate change impacts;
  - (e) what more could be done to better prepare Victoria's built environment and infrastructure, and therefore the community, for future climate disaster events; and
  - (f) whether further inquiries or investigation may be needed into other aspects of climate change adaptation and climate disaster preparedness in Victoria, noting that climate change will have far-reaching impacts on all aspects of Victorian life, including but not limited to biodiversity, human health, primary production, industry, emergency services and more, and that while these areas may overlap with the matters covered in this inquiry, they may also warrant further investigation in their own inquiries.

2023 has been the hottest year in recorded history. We have seen headlines around the world of extreme weather events wreaking havoc on human life, people's homes and farms, critical infrastructure, communities and livelihoods. The climate crisis is here now. It is our reality. Droughts, fires, floods and storms are becoming increasingly more severe and frequent, and communities are being left to clean up the damage and rebuild if they can, most of them uncertain if their homes, farms, businesses and mental health will survive another damaging climate event.

If you need evidence that being prepared for the future means building resilience for what we know is coming and not making our future problems worse, then you have it in abundance. Here is a recap of what we have seen in 2023 alone. In February New Zealand, Vanuatu and parts of Australia were hit by Cyclone Gabrielle. The cyclone was the worst storm to hit New Zealand in a century, and following weeks of flooding it displaced an estimated 10,000 people and affected one-third of the country's 5 million. The New Zealand government estimates it has cost \$14.5 billion, the country's costliest disaster since the Canterbury earthquakes. Also in February and March Tropical Cyclone Freddy, one of the longest lasting cyclones in human history, travelled the entire Indian Ocean, devastating southern Africa. At the end of March a deadly storm tore through America and the mid-Atlantic,

bringing with it tornadoes that left at least 32 people dead. July also marked a new milestone. It was the hottest month that has ever been recorded on earth, so it should come as no surprise that in August wildfires ripped through Lahaina in Hawaii, killing at least 115 people, and that also in August wildfires burning in Greece destroyed an area larger than New York City, laying waste to the natural environment and people's homes and lives. In the first 11 days of last month four continents experienced catastrophic floods, devastating Libya, Greece, Türkiye, Spain, China, the USA, Brazil and Hong Kong, and the year is not over yet.

My heart goes out to the communities in eastern Victoria and New South Wales who in the last couple of days have experienced fires and now flooding. The memories of the Black Summer bushfires and catastrophic floods from last year are still too fresh. It is scary, and I thank our emergency services for the incredible work they are doing to protect those communities. We know it is not a case of if, but when, we will be adding more unprecedented weather events to this list. The experts are saying that Australia is primed to burn this summer. For the past three years we have experienced wetter-than-average conditions, with record-breaking rainfall and floods across almost all of our states. This has been followed by the driest September on record, and it is this wetter-than-average build-up to a hot, dry summer that makes experts nervous. The increase in vegetation means that there is simply more fuel to burn, and it is drying out fast.

We have been warned about what is coming for us this summer, just as the world had more than enough warning that the events we have seen this year were coming. We are no stranger to climate destruction here in Victoria, having lived through some of the most extreme weather events in history in the past decade. In Victoria there are communities still traumatised and recovering from what they witnessed and experienced during the floods last year. We heard it during the flood inquiry hearings in the retelling of heartbreak and trauma from those who have lost everything. One of those communities struggling to get back on their feet is Rochester, a small town between Bendigo and Echuca. A large portion of their community are still living in caravans and poor conditions. Residents have spoken publicly about feeling abandoned and the lack of support in the immediate aftermath of the floods. Their town is now scarred and scared for the future.

Make no mistake, there will be more towns and more communities like Rochester if we do not make the changes necessary to prepare our built environment and infrastructure for climate change. And as we have seen, as well as costing the government billions of dollars, it is those people and families who are already up against it that are hit the hardest by the destruction of extreme weather events – those who do not have savings, who cannot afford insurance, who cannot afford to relocate, who are already struggling to pay rent and mortgages, who are working day and night to keep a small business or a farm from going under. They deserve better. They deserve a government that learns from their devastation so it is not in vain, recognises that it is just a taste of what is coming and acts.

To its credit the Victorian Labor government has started addressing the enormous existential climate change crisis. Last year we saw the official start of seven adaptation action plans, or AAPs, for climate resilience. AAPs focus on the built environment, education and training, health and human services, natural environment, primary production, transport and the water cycle. These plans have been designed to run across five-yearly schedules, so 2022 to 2026 to begin with, and identify existing and key priority plans. AAPs are also complemented by regional climate change adaptation strategies for Victoria's six regions, which crucially have been developed with communities in those six regions.

Despite what are genuinely solid plans and strategies, in the hottest year on record there are legitimate questions about which climate resilience policies have actually been acted upon by both this government and previous governments and how effectively. Namely, while the built environment adaptation action plan prioritises updating building standards to better account for climate emergencies, Victoria has never had a climate trigger in its planning laws. Historically, Victoria's lack of any requirement to consider climate impacts when making planning decisions means we have seen too many developments that are either not fit for purpose in a hotter world, built in areas that are prone to impacts of weather events or actually making the climate crisis worse. This is how we ended up

with a racecourse on a flood plain protected by a flood wall which protected the racecourse but directed floodwaters straight into people's homes and businesses. People needed to be rescued in rubber dinghies while the racetrack stayed pristine and green. As reported in the *Age* in October last year:

... the head of Racing Victoria, Andrew Jones, said the Victorian Racing Club had been "entitled" to build a flood wall around Flemington Racecourse ... to protect the Spring Carnival and the Melbourne Cup Carnival ...

Now, let that sink in. Imagine hearing that if you were one of the hundreds of people whose lives were turned upside down as their homes and possessions were destroyed in October last year. Imagine living through the devastation of a climate change weather event and learning that there is currently no intersection between planning and climate at all in Victoria and discovering that while we have select environmental protections in this state, we have no requirement for major road building or infrastructure projects to consider their impacts or adaptability to climate change events.

We have also heard from countless rural councils about their frustration that they only receive funding to replace like with like after a natural disaster – for example, when roads need rebuilding after floods. While there has been some recent limited recognition of the need to fund betterment, this needs to become the norm, otherwise we will get stuck in an expensive cycle of continually replacing infrastructure that might be in the wrong place or that will need significant improvement to withstand future disasters. We can and must do better. That is why we are pushing for this inquiry today – to know how fast and how far this government is acting on adapting our built environment and how much further it still has to go. Without factoring climate change into our existing planning laws, everything else this government is doing, whether it be gradually implementing those adaptation action plans or the day-to-day building of roads, could be folly.

It is not just the fires and floods we need to prepare for; it is prolonged periods of heat, which can be mitigated through measures to prevent urban heat islands by creating tree canopies and making sure our transport infrastructure is heat-resilient. The adaptation action plans acknowledge solutions like these, but to what extent are they being acted upon? Is the government quietly implementing the whole-of-society adaptation this climate requires, or is it just planting a few dozen trees in the CBD? We know this government is making progress, but we can and must do more to ensure Victorians are protected from the devastating impacts of climate change.

There are questions we hope that this inquiry will help us answer. Would a climate trigger in our planning laws ensure multimillion-dollar developers consider the climate consequences of projects? Can we and should we legislate to ensure projects do not contribute unnecessarily to climate change through excess pollution, reduction in open spaces or reduction in green spaces? Can we and should we ensure that projects are climate-sensitive, that they can be assessed against disaster risk and cannot exacerbate the impacts of events on surrounding areas? How do coastal planning regulations allow for expected impacts of climate change, such as rising sea levels, storm surges and extreme weather events? What is the insurance sector's response to climate change driven catastrophe, and what role does the state government need to play?

Whatever this inquiry determines, it is clear that climate change must be at the heart of our decisions and planning if we want our state not just to survive in a changing climate but to continue to thrive. That is why we are calling for this inquiry and why we urge you all to support it. As we have seen, business as usual will no longer cut it. It is time to get prepared.

**Tom McIntosh** (Eastern Victoria) (14:15): I rise to support the motion put forward by Dr Mansfield. I appreciate both the words in this motion and the words Dr Mansfield spoke, which I will turn to as I go through my speech. I want to pick up the first two points that are in this motion:

That this house:

(1) notes that:

(a) the impacts of climate change are intensifying ...

That is undeniable, and that is obvious to any of us that are watching what is going on around the world. Year on year the trends that we are seeing in weather patterns – whether that be heat, whether that be extreme cold or whether that be floods – occurring in the world are intensifying and giving us more extreme outcomes which impact on us in so many, many ways.

I think it is very, very important that we are clear on, if you like, the purpose of action on climate change. It is absolutely critical no matter what way you look at it that we not only here in Victoria but nationally in Australia and globally act on climate change, whether it be for the purpose of our species that inhabit this planet – animals and plants; whether you look at the extreme weather impacts on our most vulnerable people, whether that be in cities or regions; or whether you are looking at food security, what this means for farmers and in turn what it means for people who consume the goods those farmers put out. When we look historically at issues that have impacted politics, nations, geopolitics and war, a lot of the drivers are famine, drought causing famine and all these sorts of things. We need to be very, very clear at the very top why it is so crucially important that all of us are on the same page about acting on this issue.

I have spoken before about how this should be an issue that is above politics. Sadly, it has not been. I have spoken to that at length in this place, so I will not go into that today. But it is critical, for in our lifetimes, as Dr Mansfield said, we are already seeing the effects. For those of us that have children or have extended family, in their lifetimes the impacts are going to go further and further, and they are very serious. As important as the environment is, for those that do not appreciate the environmental impact as much as others, if you feel that you are not connected to plants or animals, that is okay, but you have to acknowledge this has a very, very direct human impact, economic and health. I often talk about sustainability, whether it is economic, health or environment, and under the circumstance of climate change they are all intrinsically linked. As I said, Dr Mansfield stated:

- (a) the impacts of climate change are intensifying;
- (b) the impacts on Victoria include increases in frequency and severity of extreme weather and climate-related disaster events which present significant challenges for Victoria's built environment, including private buildings and public infrastructure ...

I do not think we need a better example than the last 24 hours, where in my region of Eastern Victoria we had fires raging across South Gippsland and into East Gippsland and then – I was talking about this in my members statement yesterday – within hours of that we were in a flooding situation. It is true, as some people point out, that we have always had natural disasters. That is absolutely true, but the significance of those impacts is growing year on year. I think when you try and have a bit of a good look at El Niño and La Niña, these changes, you start to get your head around the idea that global air temperature or water temperature changes change what is happening a continent away, on the other side of a massive, massive ocean, half a world away. When you start to think about that – that every three, four or five years an entire weather system can be affected by something that is happening off the west coast of South America, that our farmers can be put into peril, that our citizens in our cities can be put under severe heat stress, that natural disasters can occur – then you start to think, 'All right, if that's possible, what happens when we start turning the dial a bit, when we add 1 degree, 2 degrees, when we look at El Niño being so connected to humidity and how those slight changes in temperature can absolutely change that?' We need to think about changes of 1 to 2 degrees. When we put in ice caps, when we put in permafrost release, when we start weighing all these things in, we have to be very, very careful, as a people on this planet, about what these changes will do.

We have got scientists who have given us the best information possible, and there has been a concerted effort by a small number of people for probably four to five decades now to discredit and smear that information, but the majority have acknowledged that information. The majority of scientists have acknowledged that information, and every decade we have seen those scientific predictions play out, and what we have to be very, very clear on is that we need to act to get our emissions down as quickly as possible. And I am very, very proud this government here in Victoria – in a very, very difficult political space around climate action here in Australia in the last decade – has led and that we have

reduced our emissions faster than any other state in Australia, that our actions have helped shape the political narrative in Australia for this action and that we have done it in a way where we have brought the majority of the community. It disappoints me that some try to find any measure possible to slow or deter or muddy the waters on climate action, because again, it should be beyond the political ideology of 'I sit on this side of politics, so therefore I'm going to try and slow down or disagree with or dislike climate action because of some political win in it' – because as I said earlier, the consequences are far too great.

I spoke to the ambitious targets that we have and those targets we are beating. It is one thing to identify the purpose or the reason or what you will why we must be absolutely focused on an issue. The next step is to set our goals: 2045, zero emissions; 2035, 85 per cent renewable energy targets. These are goals that meet our purpose. The next critical, important thing, which is what I think this government has done well, is to set the actions that take us to those goals to achieve the outcomes that we want. I think it is the fact that we have beaten our goals – our renewable energy generation was 36 per cent in the last financial year. Our emission reductions have surpassed the goals that we set for the years 2020 to 2022 – significantly surpassed them. And as I said before, this state is reducing emissions quicker than any other state.

I think it is a fact that we are bringing the majority of the community along with us and that we are ensuring there is an economic benefit as we transition our energy industry. As we look to deal with industries – whether it be agriculture, whether it be transport, whether it be manufacturing – we identify the opportunities that are going to open up, and even more news came out today about tariffs and taxes that will be imposed by the EU around carbon. We are identifying those opportunities and being at the front to be world leaders, which we should be; we are an advanced economy. But also by doing the right thing, by setting ourselves up for success and investing in this infrastructure that reduces our emissions, by investing in the science that reduces our emissions and by investing in the people skills that help us reduce our emissions we are at the forward end of that curve to have an economy that is a zero-emission economy.

We are setting ourselves up, as others around the world, in the Middle East and other places, are doing, to ensure the economic prosperity that we have had for the last 100 years – which we have got to acknowledge and value, because that prosperity out of past forms of energy generation and export and everything have been important – is economic prosperity going forward, whilst ensuring we have a sustainable climate, a sustainable economy and a sustainable method for us all to go forward.

**David DAVIS** (Southern Metropolitan) (14:25): I am pleased to rise and make a contribution to motion 187, as amended, moved by Dr Mansfield. It does raise a series of very important issues. As Dr Mansfield did lay out correctly, though, much of the adaptation work is already being undertaken. The adaptation action plans are proceeding in a number of key sectors; the regional plans are also proceeding in a number of sectors. This inquiry would deliver some value; there is no question about that. The question is whether this is the most important inquiry at the moment. There is no question that it does cover some important areas. I do agree that matters around tree canopies and energy efficiency and some of the points of intersection with the Planning and Environment Act 1987 are worthy of consideration.

The cost of adaptation is also an important issue. Where the coalition is concerned is that this inquiry could see further burdens foisted upon the building sector in particular. The building sector has done it very, very tough in the recent period. People will be aware of the number of building groups that have gone out of business. They will be aware of the shortage of housing, and they will be aware of the very significant issues around the cost of building and the cost of supply. We are very conscious that we do not want to do anything that will add unreasonably to the cost of building or anything that will make housing less affordable and less available to the many, particularly young, people who would seek to have access to housing. Many in our party are concerned that additional costs will be loaded into housing, and that will be on top of the very tough period that the building and construction sector has experienced recently.

It is also true that this government in particular has loaded a series of taxes, charges and regulations onto the building and construction sector – more than 50 new taxes over the period of this government. Even in the last two days we have heard of new taxes coming almost daily from the government. All of these taxes will make it more costly and more difficult to build and to construct what is necessary in our community in terms of new housing, given the enormous undersupply.

It is all very well for the government to lay out grandiose targets – 80,000 new dwellings – but in no year in the state’s history have we even got to 40,000, and there is no –

**A member** interjected.

**David DAVIS:** I am talking about the potential costs that are loaded onto the construction sector and the concerns that a number of people in the building and construction sector have about those additional costs. In the abstract you may well think that some additional controls are a good idea, but there are consequences, and we do need to deal with a number of those consequences.

As I say, I think there is significant merit in the motion, but in the circumstances we are concerned about the additional costs, charges and impacts on building and construction in particular. We think that much of this can be done in any event. Some of the adaptation action plans are occurring now. We are concerned, particularly in the city, about the loss of tree canopy, but we think that that can be dealt with in a more efficient way through the planning system. Yes, there are concerns about the loss of tree canopy, which is happening at a very fast rate, and whatever modest plantings the government does in the city are being overwhelmed by the massive removals that are going on at a huge pace. Controlling the loss of trees is important, but we think it can be done in other ways. So there is certainly merit in the motion, as I say, but in this circumstance we think that the risks that the inquiry will recommend a raft of new costs and charges and taxes onto building and construction, at a time when housing affordability is such a concern, are too great.

**Michael GALEA** (South-Eastern Metropolitan) (14:31): I also rise to speak on the motion put forward by Dr Mansfield today – a motion that is on, of course, climate change. I am not sure that the previous contribution was entirely relevant to what we are discussing today. Mr Davis is correct that housing and building is a very important issue, but so too is climate change. It is something that I was reflecting on as my colleague Mr McIntosh was referring to it in his speech. I realise that he was saying everything that I was about to say as well, but it does bear repeating – it was a good speech. To think of the fact that we are here in what are the first few days of October, and from the last weekend in September to have had bushfires raging across Gippsland in two locations to us now having – it was pouring rain on the way over here. I had to come the longer way out from the annexe to avoid the rain because it was pouring down. It is quite fine for us to be a little bit wet in Spring Street – that is no big deal – but when that rain is pouring down in Gippsland, thankfully helping the fire efforts but causing another issue of flooding, that is just remarkable.

As Mr McIntosh said, these events have always happened. We are a continent of droughts, flooding rains and bushfires, but the absolute severity and the frequency with which these events are happening – 12 months ago large parts of the east coast of Australia were completely flooded. Of course we have a committee – I think it is the Environment and Planning Committee – doing an extensive inquiry at the moment into the northern Victoria floods of last year, and I am very much looking forward to our regional sitting of the house in Echuca next year, when we will be able to spend some more quality time with those flood-affected communities. At the same time, there was extensive and very, very damaging flooding across parts of New South Wales and Queensland as well. This is of course a couple of years after some of the most ecologically devastating bushfires in our history in the Black Summer fires. We are of course now entering a confirmed El Niño season, having had unseasonably wet conditions over the last few years, and as we do so we have such a foreboding sense of what is to come with the bushfire threat.

As I said, I was concerned about the season this year but perhaps not as concerned as to think that we would be dealing with it in the first week of October. I distinctly remember, having grown up in a bushfire-affected community – fortunately, in my area, well before I was born – with those Black Saturday fires just how much everything changed back in 2009 as well. We were out for the day. At the very last minute, with the conditions changing, my stepfather decided to stay home. We were going in to see what we thought were the Shaolin monks in the city. It turned out to be a ballet performance inspired by the Shaolin monks – I was a bit disappointed by that, I have got to say. But coming into the air-conditioned comfort of the Arts Centre in Melbourne, it was quite a relief from the weather. Then coming outside afterwards and seeing this city blanketed in red sky, red smog and smoke, and driving back home down the Monash Freeway and having at least a dozen fire trucks from the CFA and the MFB overtaking at great speed towards Gippsland in front of us and passing us and seeing that absolutely apocalyptic red sky – that is a day that I know I and many, many Victorians will never forget.

Thankfully, though we were safe on that day and our property was unaffected, it changed how we thought about fire, and for a lot of people too, the mantra prior to Black Saturday was: ‘You stay and fight; you stay and defend.’ People lost their lives who had done everything right. They had done all the preparation. They had got themselves absolutely ready, and it still was not enough. That day changed a lot, and I know that Black Summer changed a lot for a lot of people as well.

It is a sad fact that we are seeing these events happen more and more and more often. And again we have already spoken about – and it feels almost trite to say, standing here in Spring Street – the people who are going through unimaginable difficulties with loss of property at the moment this week. Fortunately, I do not believe there has been any loss of life, but it feels like it could be a little bit trite for us to be standing here and saying that. But I think it really is important to note that for so many of us from all different parties, from all different parts of the chamber, this is a real, sincere concern that we have both for of course the events of this week but also for the factors that are driving this to be more frequent and more severe what feels like each and every single year.

We have had disturbing reports from here and around the world of record temperatures just this year alone and record heatwaves once again in Europe and North America. As we brace for what is expected to be a very hot season this year, we have to be prepared and we have to be conscious, and I think this referral is a sensible way of making sure that we as a state are as prepared as we can be for the changing climate and what is to come. There are a litany of efforts that have been made, particularly by this government, by the Andrews–Allan government, as well as other governments around Australia, although I do note, as other speakers no doubt will from this side, that this government has been at the forefront of those efforts and, as some interjections recently mentioned in a previous contribution, not just setting ambitious targets but exceeding them. That is a wonderful thing for us to celebrate, but the climate is changing.

We had a discussion yesterday. I forget whether it was during question time or another time, but it was around controlled burns. There was an interjection from a member opposite who said, ‘Well, why haven’t you done enough controlled burns this year?’ saying that that was the problem. Controlled burns are a very important thing to manage the landscape, to manage the fire risk that we face, but we cannot actually –

**David Davis:** You actually stepped back from the royal commission’s targets.

**Michael GALEA:** And if you listen to what I am saying, Mr Davis, we actually cannot do them if the conditions do not allow. It would be reckless to do so, and the conditions are becoming harder and harder and harder each year, which makes it harder to do those controlled burns that are so essential to saving life. You sit in here talking about these targets and saying, ‘Well, you’ve got these targets.’ We also have to live in the real world, and the reason that you do that is because we have to adapt to the situation that we are in. We cannot just say, ‘Oh, let’s go this week, in October, and do some

controlled burns,' because there are bushfires raging in early October. You have to take a commonsense approach to it, and this is exactly the sort of thing that I think an inquiry along this side –

*Members interjecting.*

**Michael GALEA:** And they are still not listening. They are still saying we should have the same targets, but they are not listening. The climate is changing, and if you want to talk about targets, we will absolutely talk about emissions targets, all that we are doing with the SEC and how we are absolutely setting higher targets and smashing them. But if you are talking about controlled burns, this is exactly part of the reason why this is so critical. It is getting harder and harder to do that work each and every year, harder and harder, which makes it more difficult for us to protect ourselves and our communities. That is exactly the sort of thing that we need to be doing. This is exactly the sort of inquiry that we need to be holding. This is just one example of course by the way; there are many, many others as well that I am sure other colleagues will touch on. It is a very important thing that, as our climate is changing, we adapt and we learn the lessons that need to be learned, just as this very committee in fact, the Environment and Planning Committee, is currently undertaking an inquiry into the floods of last year and how we can do better. This is a very important subject for bushfires, and for urban areas too, quite frankly.

**David Davis:** Did you watch the *Today* show this morning?

**Michael GALEA:** I did not watch the *Today* show this morning, Mr Davis. I am not sure what relevance that has. We have gone from talking about building regulations and building targets to morning television.

*Members interjecting.*

**The DEPUTY PRESIDENT:** Order! Mr McIntosh and Mr Berger, I remind you that you cannot interject when you are not in your seats.

**Tom McIntosh** interjected.

**The DEPUTY PRESIDENT:** I am sorry, Mr McIntosh. You might laugh, but it is in the standing orders that if you want to speak you need to be in your seat. Mr Galea to continue, without assistance.

**Michael GALEA:** Thank you, Deputy Premier – sorry, Deputy President. I think that is the second time that has been said to the Chair this week. Thank you, Deputy President.

With the limited time I have remaining, I just reiterate the reasons I have already gone over: we do live in a changing world – the climate is changing. We have a government that is doing huge amounts to change that and to do our very best to reduce our emissions. We are meeting and exceeding those targets, but inescapably we have to acknowledge what is happening. That is why I think this referral is a sensible proposal, and I do commend it to the house.

**Samantha RATNAM** (Northern Metropolitan) (14:41): I rise to speak in absolute support of the motion put before the chamber today by Dr Mansfield. It goes without saying that the impacts of climate change not only are happening but are happening at a much faster rate than any of us had anticipated even with our deepest fears in hand. We are seeing more flood, fire and catastrophic weather events not just in Victoria but right across the world, and it is incumbent on decision-makers at every level of government and in any government across the world to heed the warnings that we have been given for a number of years now and protect our community as much as possible from the worst impacts of climate change. We have been trying for years to prevent the worst impacts of climate change by reducing emissions so that the world's population does not have to contend with the most disastrous impacts. We still have time to act to mitigate the worst impacts of climate change, but climate change is happening and it is all around us.

You just have to look at what is happening in Victoria this week, in the first week of October. To be hit with fires in Gippsland is something that not many people in this place would have anticipated, but

that is the future that is bearing down upon us right now. It is in that context that the Greens are moving this motion before us today. It is an opportunity for us to work across the aisle to think about how we best prepare for the impacts of climate change and how we continue to try and prevent the worst impacts of climate change as much as possible but also help us prepare, ultimately, to protect our community from the worst and most disastrous impacts. That is what this motion sets out to do. It is a forward-looking piece to inquire into what can be done in our built environment specifically and our planning provisions in this state to better protect us and our infrastructure from the impacts of climate change.

I note as well that this debate is occurring in the context of the debate that has happened in this chamber over the last couple of years. Those who were here in the last term of Parliament would remember that there was a similar debate when colleagues in this chamber on the crossbench, led by Mr Hayes and supported by the Greens and others, tried to move changes to the Planning and Environment Act 1987 to better account for the impacts of climate change.

While we have the Climate Change Act 2017 in Victoria, there is a potential conflict between the Climate Change Act and the Planning and Environment Act. The Planning and Environment Act, for example, has not been updated significantly for decades despite our modern world changing around it and our environment and climate demanding that the major piece of legislation that governs our built environment better respond to the changing needs of our environment and our climate. Through that legislation a set of objectives were set to be introduced that would have better aligned the Environment and Planning Act with the Climate Change Act so that in all our planning decisions we can think about the potential impacts of climate change – both how we mitigate them but also adapt to the changing nature of our climate. That was a very lively debate not supported by the major parties in this chamber at that time, but let us hope that today we are able to get on with this next bit of progress, which is a parliamentary inquiry that looks at our built environment across the board and specifically also looks at our Planning and Environment Act and how that can be updated to better address the impacts of climate change.

This inquiry reference also happens in the context of another inquiry that is currently occurring that was spearheaded by a number of people in this chamber on the back of and as a result of the major flooding event that occurred in Victoria in 2022. There was agreement in this chamber that that flooding event really highlighted some of the gaps in our responses both from our service system and our emergency services to the infrastructure and the systems that we have to better support communities and our built environment in the face of such disasters.

While that inquiry is still underway, I think it is worth the chamber noting that we are hearing extraordinary evidence about how communities felt ill equipped, not just in infrastructure and systems but also mentally, for the impact of these climate change disasters. We have been travelling through northern Victoria, and I can tell you one consistent theme that is emerging is that people understand that climate change is here. They get it, and they are very, very scared. They are looking to the decision-makers to support them and protect them, and this is what this inquiry is intended to do: to think about how we better protect our communities from those kinds of events happening in future more frequently. This inquiry reference does not cut across that flooding inquiry that is currently occurring, but what we hope it will do is complement the findings that will come out of that inquiry to think specifically about the built environment, because we are certainly hearing a lot of evidence about significant gaps in that space.

On that note I want to respond to some of the criticism of this referral by those opposite who outlined their opposition. Firstly, I have to say it is hard to understand how the opposition would oppose an inquiry of this nature – forward looking, intent on protecting our communities from the worst impacts of climate change going into the future. How could you not support something that is about protecting our future communities from the disasters that are coming our way? In fact it feels like it is a de facto referendum on whether you believe climate change is happening or not. I mean, the only reason you would block this inquiry is you do not actually accept that climate change is happening. We have heard

from those opposite for months if not years on end that they want to deny climate change is happening – not all of them, but a lot of them, enough to block this inquiry today. They do not want to accept that climate change is happening, so when you talk about the most significant bushfires this state has ever seen occurring in the last couple of years, they will say, ‘Oh, it was all about the back-burning. We just need to burn more forests down, and that will stop these major bushfires from happening in the future.’

What do you say to the flood events that keep happening right across the world? You cannot say that these unprecedented floods that are happening in New York are because we did not back-burn enough. That is climate change. You have to accept that we are seeing more frequent catastrophic events right across the globe because of climate change. Scientists have been warning us about this for over a decade. They told us that the weather system’s equilibrium will hit tipping points to the point that we will not be able to rein them back and that we are going to see more and more disasters at greater frequency and with greater devastation than we have ever seen before. That future is now our present, and we have to face up to it because those in power failed to act.

In terms of whether this is going to add costs and impost onto the building and construction industry, as outlined by the opposition, I fail to understand how an inquiry that looks at our built infrastructure and our environment and whether our government decision-making in terms of our legislation and other systems is as equipped as possible to deal with prospective climate change events will add costs to the building and construction industry. In fact the greatest cost comes from not acting. We are already seeing – and we are seeing this through the current inquiry – homes that have to be rebuilt every few years because the adequacy of the build cannot withstand the increasing strength of the climate events. You build a house only to be flooded in two years time. You are just saying, ‘Well, the user should pay. That’s on the individual. Let those communities suffer. Let’s not do anything to protect them and prevent them. Let’s just let them pay, because we don’t want our industry mates to pay.’ I cannot see how your industry mates are going to pay more.

In fact it is going to be insurers who have to keep paying out people for more and more claims. They are only able to pay out for like-for-like builds, and what we are hearing is if you have a like-for-like build despite being in a flood plain, despite knowing that you are at a bushfire risk, you are going to be building more frequently. How is that going to cost anyone more than it costs the insurers who are going to be paying out more?

Your arguments do not stack up, and ultimately it looks like denial of the impacts of climate change and what communities are going through right now. I do not think Victorians are going to like to hear their politicians and some of their representatives denying the reality they are facing right now. Tell that to the people in Gippsland right now. Tell that to the people in northern Victoria, who have just been through a catastrophic flooding event and are on the edge of their seats when any rain falls upon them. They are worried that their dams are going to overflow, their rivers are going to overflow and they are going to be flooded once again. Tell it to them, and ask them whether they believe your rationale – or lack of rationale – for blocking this inquiry.

I want to thank everyone in this chamber who has spoken already today in favour of this inquiry. It is forward facing with an underpinning motivation to support our community and better protect our community from what we know is coming, and it is the sad truth: it is coming. It is here because our leaders have failed to act for years to bring down emissions. Climate change is happening. We must protect our community from the worst impacts, and this is what this inquiry intends to do.

**Ryan BATCHELOR** (Southern Metropolitan) (14:50): I am very pleased to rise and speak on the motion referring an important inquiry on climate resilience to the Environment and Planning Committee. As a member of the Environment and Planning Committee I very much look forward, should the motion be successful in the house today, to participating in that inquiry over the course of 2024 and 2025.

It is undeniable that our climate is changing. The effects that sustained carbon emissions have had on our environment are clear on a daily basis to people right across the globe. It is not something that we can suggest is momentary or temporary. All of the science that exists tells us that there is sustained change that has occurred to our climate, and the speed of that change is increasing. It is something that governments have sought to take action on, and I think no government in Victoria's history has sought to take action more than this Labor government. We understand the need for climate action, and Victoria is clearly Australia's climate leader. We have exceedingly ambitious emissions reduction targets because those are the targets and that is the course required to ensure that our community and our economy are able to continue as they are whilst we decarbonise particularly the most significant sources of emissions in our economy.

Not only do we have the nation's most ambitious climate action targets, but our first target of 15 to 20 per cent emissions reduction by 2020 we absolutely smashed with a nearly 30 per cent emissions reduction. In the latest data available – for 2021 – we have cut emissions against previous levels by about 32 per cent, so we can clearly demonstrate that this Labor government is one that takes action to reduce emissions in our economy. It is taking action to make sure that the effects of climate change are not accelerated and that we do our bit as a government to ensure that the emissions-intensive sectors of our economy here in Victoria that we are able to control are definitely making their contribution to our emissions reduction targets, because we know that the effects of climate change are felt right across our communities.

One of the things that we have been doing in another inquiry is – we had a public hearing of the Legal and Social Issues Committee last week I think where we had a discussion with some architects about the impacts of housing and why we need to think about and treat housing through the lens and through the focus of important places where people have to live rather than just through an economic framework. In the course of that discussion the public evidence we heard from the architects did quite clearly paint in pretty stark terms the importance of making sure that our built environment and the houses that we live in are capable of withstanding the changes that are being made to our climate by the extensive carbon emissions right across our economy. I think their evidence should give us a taste of what it is that we are going to be able to further uncover and further learn over the course of this inquiry, should the committee referral motion before the chamber today be successful, because we do need to be thinking about the effects of climate change on our everyday lives. We do need to be taking policy action that both encompasses the mitigation aspects of dealing with climate change, like our emissions reduction activities, but also helps communities adapt to the realities of climate change and helps them adapt to the unfortunate realities that confront us now that we are seeing our planet warming and our local and global environment changing.

One of the things that this committee referral motion seeks to get into is to look at some of the barriers that Victoria currently faces in upgrading our infrastructure to become more resilient to the impacts of climate change. And it strikes me that one of the things that we as members of Parliament who aspire to create better communities need to think about is how those on the lowest incomes are able to adapt to the changing climate; how their circumstances can be affected by a changing climate, by extreme heat and extreme cold; and what we as policymakers and as members of Parliament can do to try and help them.

One of the issues that we face is that much of the housing stock that the lowest income members of our community, the most disadvantaged members of our community, are living in is decades old and no longer fit for purpose in many respects but especially in the context of being appropriate, energy efficient, well insulated and in places that we can expect those on the lowest of incomes to live in a rapidly changing climate. That is why the government's program of renewing our social housing is such an important part of addressing the inequalities that climate change brings to our community through our program of demolishing and rebuilding social housing, currently with walk-up social housing, in many of the communities across Melbourne but particularly in the Southern Metropolitan Region and soon, as the recent housing statement says, expanding that program to include some of the

larger public housing towers that we have in our community, buildings that are in no way fit to deal with the changes in our environment and changes in our climate.

Many of the old homes that the most vulnerable in our community currently live in are not energy efficient in the least. They are hot in summer. They are cold in winter. They are largely free of insulation. They do not have the sorts of heating and cooling that most would expect to have, let alone what we think we need in our homes to be of a sufficient quality to meet energy efficiency and environmental standards and ensure that they are places where people can comfortably live as our climate changes. I have spoken with residents who have moved back into some of the new social housing that we have been building across southern metropolitan Melbourne, where we have gone from having homes that would have had an energy rating of about 2½ stars and they are moving now into homes which are 7-star energy efficiency rated, and what that means is that they have got proper insulation. They have got double-glazed windows. They have got heating and cooling that is both efficient and more affordable so that at an environmental level they are not suffering from the extremes that they were of being too hot in summer and too cold in winter and that the mechanisms that we have got in place to help them heat and cool their homes are now much more energy efficient and much more affordable for them to use.

When this chamber is thinking about ‘Should this referral get up?’ and this committee is thinking about the barriers that Victoria is facing to upgrading its infrastructure to make sure it is more climate ready and capable of withstanding the effects of climate change, we have got to have a focus on the impacts on our most vulnerable in the community, on our social housing and on our public housing.

I absolutely hope that over the course of this inquiry the committee is able to get into these details, because people on the lowest of incomes deserve to have their representatives supporting them to move into and live in energy-efficient accommodation instead of campaigning against energy-efficient, climate-adapted accommodation for those on the lowest incomes. This is an exceptionally important issue. It is one that is affecting all of us in our community, but those on the lowest incomes the most. I look forward to being part of this inquiry should this motion pass today.

**Ingrid STITT** (Western Metropolitan – Minister for Mental Health, Minister for Ageing, Minister for Multicultural Affairs) (15:01): I do want to rise and make a contribution on this important motion brought forward by Dr Mansfield. The government will be supporting this motion and its referral of yet another inquiry to the relevant policy committee. I think that it is timely because, as a number of speakers have highlighted, we are seeing the impacts of climate change and the impacts of a more extreme weather pattern in our state right now, and this is something that the science has been pointing to for quite some time.

Having recently had the very great honour of being the state’s environment minister and working very closely with our Forest Fire Management Victoria (FFMVic) teams in our state forests and across the public land estate – those that are responsible for keeping communities safe right across the state in those areas that often butt up right against communities in regional and rural Victoria – I know that their job is getting harder because the window available to them to do the fire preparedness work is becoming narrower and narrower, more disrupted and less predictable. For example, that has limited the number of planned burns that have been able to be undertaken. They have done a significant amount of planned burns, but they have not been able to deliver all they had planned for because of that narrowing of those opportunities and the unpredictable weather patterns.

I also know that a very wet couple of years have meant that our crews have just not been able to get their heavy equipment into those harder to access parts of our state forests because the ground has been so waterlogged. There have been record rainfalls as well as record temperatures across the last couple of years. We have to adapt to these circumstances, and our government is continuing to very strongly support our emergency services right across the state, whether that is FFMVic or whether that is the CFA or other emergency response agencies.

But responding to emergencies is one thing; preparing for and avoiding those emergencies is also very important work. The government understands this, and that is why we are taking such strong action as a government on climate change, both to cut emissions and to increase our climate resilience. Our targets to reduce emissions by up to 80 per cent by 2035 and to net zero by 2045 align Victoria with the Paris goals of limiting global warming to 1.5 degrees Celsius. We know that there is absolutely no time to waste in that regard, so we have been continuing to drive those targets in a whole-of-government way – not just looking at the important portfolio of climate change but looking at where we can drive those emissions reductions right across all of the government's work. We have seen our emissions reduce rapidly. Not only have we been ambitious but we have been achieving those targets.

We also know that driving the work in the climate change space is going to mean that we can create the jobs of the future. I just look at some of the changes that have taken place in the jobs market just in the last few years – the change is incredible. We are creating more jobs in not only renewable energy but also areas like waste and recycling, because in everything we do now we have to have that frame of tackling climate change, building our resilience as a community and looking at ways that we can really change behaviour right across the board.

In terms of the climate, as I have said, we are experiencing extreme weather patterns. We are seeing an increased level of emergencies, such as bushfires and floods. They will become unfortunately more frequent and severe. Since 1910 in our state we have seen temperatures increase by around 1.2 degrees Celsius, and the risk of fire in spring has certainly increased.

In terms of some of the significant investments that our government is making in these areas, we have invested \$10 million over three years for protecting waterways, including rehabilitation and revegetation of our wildlife so that our wildlife in our waterways can thrive. Something I am fairly familiar with from the environment portfolio is our \$13.7 million investment in our VicCoasts initiative, building a safer, healthier and more resilient marine and coastal environment. We know that coastal erosion, storm surges and sea level rises are all issues that we have to grapple with. We have a very long coastline in Victoria, and we have to not only act on that to protect our precious environment, our marine and coastal assets and the precious animals that live in that environment but also plan better. We have to make sure that our planning scheme takes account of the best science and the best modelling when it comes to planning for sea level rise.

We have also invested over \$670 million to meet the emergency response and recovery needs of flood-affected communities. That effort is ongoing. It takes an enormous amount of work for flood-affected communities to recover. It is not quick work; it is difficult work, but our government is committed to working with those communities to make sure that they can not only build back better but build resilience as well for the future. We have committed over \$40 million to bolster our forest firefighting workforce with an additional 50 forest firefighters brought on from the seasonal pool into the permanent workforce, which is very important. I know that Minister Symes in her capacity as Minister for Emergency Services has been very busy working with the CFA to upgrade emergency service facilities, including stations and VICSES facilities as well. These are all important investments. We are going to continue to have to invest in these services as we deal with the continued threat of emergencies as a result of climate change and extreme weather.

I do thank the Greens for bringing this motion forward, although I do understand that the committee secretariat are a bit under pressure, but this is important work, and I think it will complement a lot of the work that the government is already looking at doing. The housing statement that has been put out most recently has climate adaptation at the heart of a lot of that work, including making sure that when we are rebuilding social housing and public housing and developing new housing stock across the state we are thinking very carefully about making sure that those assets – the most important form of infrastructure we can deliver, a roof over people's heads – are climate resilient, energy efficient and of course built in the right places.

This is all really important work, and I think it will be terrific to see what recommendations this inquiry comes up with. But notwithstanding that it is very important work, the government will absolutely continue to make sure that not only are we responding to emergencies that are the result of climate change but we are actually driving down those emissions and tackling climate change at the outset, at the forefront, to make sure that generations to come in Victoria can be safe and healthy and happy.

**Sheena WATT** (Northern Metropolitan) (15:11): It is with great enthusiasm that I join my colleagues today to speak on the motion before us on climate action. And as the freshly minted Parliamentary Secretary for Climate Action I will start this role as I intend to continue, highlighting the incredible record that we hold here as an Andrews, now Allan, Labor government on climate action, because Victoria is without any doubt the undisputed leader on climate action, with an ambitious reductions target of net zero by 2045. We have smashed our targets to date and we are well on our way to our net zero target, with the latest statistics showing that we have cut emissions by 32.3 per cent in 2021. Now, that is the latest. I wonder how much further we have progressed since then. You see, this is a government that does not just talk about climate action, we are delivering on it, and that is why we are voting today to support the amended motion of the committee referral before us.

Our targets of a 75 to 80 per cent reduction by 2035 and net zero by 2045 align Victoria with the Paris goal of limiting global warming to 1.5 degrees Celsius, and I must say we are delivering on the most ambitious decarbonisation agenda in the nation. Victorians know that we will deliver our agenda, because our record speaks for itself, with the biggest cutting of emissions of any state since 2014. What an incredible target we have held now for all these years. We have become the first state or territory in the nation to set a 2035 target, and our new net zero target of 2045 is one of the earliest anywhere in the world. We will soon enshrine these targets in legislation, and I will be back here reminding this chamber that it is the members on this side that stand for climate action, with ambitious targets and smashed records. We stand on the side of the planet, with our history of delivering real action.

The speakers before me have mentioned at length the reduction of emissions and the renewables revolution happening right here, but I want to remind the good folks here in this chamber of the rooftop solar and to think about the community batteries and the offshore wind in the eastern region. But let us not forget that for every one of these incredible projects there are jobs – real jobs in the new economy, jobs that come on a scale that we are yet to I think fully grasp. These are regional jobs, these are city jobs, these are apprenticeships – and gosh, I do like talking about apprenticeships – but they are also jobs for reskilled workers. And that is before I come to the enormous employment opportunities presented by the SEC. Now, I might come back to the SEC, because it is so critical to Victoria's path for climate action.

But I want to take this opportunity to speak about planning, because for a bright climate future we need to have reformed the planning processes that continually improve how we plan for and adapt to climate-related hazards. That is captured in the Victorian planning policy framework, which contains policy to plan for environmental risks by considering climate change impacts – bushfires, flood plains, soil degradation and more. You see, Victoria's existing metropolitan strategy, *Plan Melbourne 2017–2050*, recognises the importance of improving the resilience of the built environment to create more sustainable and livable cities.

The Minister for Planning, Sonya Kilkenny in the other place, recently announced an update to *Plan Melbourne*. In this new plan we will be planning for all Victorians and we will set into action what our state might look like in the coming decades. It will focus on delivering more homes near transport, job opportunities and the essential services that are so needed for a vibrant, livable and sustainable neighbourhood. This will include a renewed focus on climate change and resilience. We cannot do this alone, so industry engagement will begin on that work in 2024. Alongside this work, the non-stop Minister for Planning will also continue to implement an ambitious planning reform agenda. Action

across the building and planning systems is underway to support adaptation to climate change and reduce Victoria's greenhouse gas emissions.

In February last year the *Built Environment Climate Change Adaptation Action Plan 2022–2026* was released. That plan provides a template for current and future actions to improve the resilience of our cities and our towns. It includes strategic land use actions to support settlement scale responses to natural hazards, and planning and building system measures have already commenced to support implementation.

It is important no doubt to speak to a number of recent planning initiatives which have demonstrated that the Victorian government's track record on climate action cannot be in doubt. In July 2023 the Victorian government announced that from 1 January 2024 new homes requiring a planning permit will be required to be all electric. This change follows the removal of mandatory requirements for new gas connections to allow for all-electric developments in 2022, and I will say that in my community of Brunswick they are taking off.

In 2022 the government also introduced new planning exemptions to enable timely installation of neighbourhood batteries to support the integration of renewable energy into the electricity grid and help Victorians generate and consume more renewable energy locally. If you want to see what these things look like, head to Fitzroy North. They are great. This complements other planning scheme amendments which seek to encourage renewable energy, including revised permit requirements for solar panels in heritage areas to support solar rooftop uptake.

In the building space significant reform has been delivered, including adoption of the 7-star residential energy efficiency standards in the National Construction Code. Let us stay with that for a moment. That is 7-star residential energy efficiency standards in the National Construction Code. What an incredible difference that will make. These changes will come into effect not too long from now, on 1 May 2024, and will introduce a whole-of-home appliance performance metric to improve energy performance and apply electric vehicle readiness standards for apartment developments. How exciting is that? Improvements to the energy performance standard for commercial buildings are also being prepared for the scheduled 2025 update of the National Construction Code, which will examine how to support electric vehicle charging and battery storage for these building types. I know, having visited a large number of apartments with the Minister for Planning, that she is indeed very enthusiastic about electric vehicle uptake in our apartment complexes in the inner north.

The Minister for Planning is now actively working on these reforms – there is no doubt about it; we spoke about it on Tuesday morning in fact – in conjunction with the Commonwealth government. This work is supporting implementation of other government legislation and policies, including the Circular Economy (Waste Reduction and Recycling) Act 2021; *Recycling Victoria: A New Economy*; one that I particularly enjoyed being a part of the launch of, the *Gas Substitution Roadmap*; the Victorian climate change strategy; *Renewable Energy Action Plan*; and the air quality strategy. But to my mind all this action requires a workforce of the future, and it is to the SEC that those workforces will come, because we are bringing back the SEC. We are bringing it back and we are not wasting a single day. It is publicly owned renewable energy, putting power back in the hands of the Victorian people. Through the publicly owned SEC we will be delivering 4.5 gigawatts of renewable energy, which is the equivalent of replacing the capacity of Loy Yang A.

What I would like to talk about now is the new SEC centre of training excellence and the 6000 positions for apprentices and trainees. I have got to say it is an exciting time. As a member of the Environment and Planning Committee, if ultimately this motion is successful, I look forward to receiving and hearing evidence from stakeholders about how far we have come and all the steps the Allan Labor government have taken to date, as contained in various forward-facing reforms, knowing of course that innovation and adaptation are developing around us every single day.

I think too of the Living Future Institute – I proudly served on their board before coming to this place – an organisation that looks to reform the use of building materials in line with the incredible innovations around us like recycling of and replacements for PVC piping in our modern builds. There are examples like that all around, and I know that the members of the committee can look forward to hearing more about how industry and innovation are at the forefront, with government, in securing our climate future. You see, this government does not just talk about climate action, we are getting on with it with the most ambitious decarbonisation agenda in the country.

**Sonja TERPSTRA** (North-Eastern Metropolitan) (15:21): I rise to make a contribution on motion 187 moved by Dr Mansfield. It is seeking to make a referral to the Environment and Planning Committee to inquire into, consider and report by 30 June 2025 on the impacts of climate change but also specifically in regard to any risks facing Victoria's built environment and infrastructure from climate change. Effectively: what are the risks that climate change might pose to our built environment and how is the government preparing for that?

I have to say I had the benefit of listening to Ms Watt's contribution. She very eloquently laid out all of the things that this government is doing in ensuring that we are preparing for climate change and are able to adapt to the risks that are posed by climate change. We have done a lot of work on this. I am the chair of the Environment and Planning Committee, and what I find often is that these committee referrals really are about policy development for the opposition or crossbenchers. We are already doing a lot of work in this space, but really it is about them trying to get policy development for their particular areas of interest where we have already done a lot of the work.

I can say this was exactly the case when we did the renewables inquiry. We had already done all of the work, and it is just about perhaps opposition or crossbenchers relitigating things that they think we should do differently, but there has been a lot of work done in this space. I was just listening to Ms Watt's contribution and Mr Galea's and of course those of others in the chamber, but I can say this: it is no secret, and it is not lost on anyone in this chamber, that the Victorian Allan Labor government is getting on and doing a power of work in regard to reducing our carbon footprint. There is so much work we have done, whether it is solar on rooftops, bringing back the SEC, so many things that I know Ms Watt and others touched on earlier, but I want to specifically go to the issue around resilience and the built environment.

We are doing an inquiry into the October 2022 flood event at the moment, for example. What we know and what we all understand is that when we have temperature increases due to climate change, these bring on extreme weather events. There are opportunities to make sure that in our built environment we manage those risks that might be posed by those events. We are already doing a whole load of that, so let me just go through some things here.

In the 2023–24 state budget we made significant investments in climate resilience and emergency management, including \$10 million over three years for protecting waterways, including the rehabilitation and revegetation of those waterways so wildlife can thrive. We know that making sure that our waterways can be revegetated has knock-on effects for climate change and resilience, so we have invested \$10 million over three years for that. There is almost \$13.8 million for VicCoasts to build a safe, healthier and more resilient marine and coastal environment for the community by addressing critical erosion and flood risks, protecting marine and coastal assets and supporting the adaptation and resilience of coastal communities. It is not necessarily a built environment, but our marine and coastal environments are very important parts of our environment, and we are making sure that they are protected from risks.

There is \$677 million to meet the emergency response and recovery needs of flood-affected communities, and \$40 million over four years to bolster the forest firefighting workforce and maintain strategic fuel breaks so that we can better prepare for and respond to fire emergencies. Again, doing work on those strategic fuel breaks means that we can hopefully protect homes, which are part of the built environment. There is \$34 million for upgrades to emergency services facilities, including CFA

stations and VICSES facilities, making sure that our emergency responders and first responders have the modern, fit-for-purpose facilities that they need to enable them to do the work that they need to do in responding to natural disasters brought about as a consequence of climate change.

We are embedding our adaptation policies across government through our adaptation action plans for seven statewide systems. This was released on 9 February 2022, so again, we are already well down the path of making sure that we are adapting and protecting our built and natural environments – not just our built environment but our natural environment as well. In short, these plans cover Victoria’s built and natural environments, the education and training system, health and human services, primary production, transport and water cycle systems. They contain 127 actions that will improve public assets and services such as schools, health and transport so they are able to withstand and bounce back from extreme weather events. I know, for example, schools in my local area have put plans in place. If they are in areas that are going to be affected by fire and the like, they have action plans in place to enable them to respond appropriately.

The actions also include adjusting government policies, operations and decisions to reflect the latest climate science and prepare for climate impacts and opportunities; fostering genuine partnerships with traditional owners and Aboriginal communities to embed cultural knowledge in adaptation and support self-determination; and helping partners, industries and communities to access high-quality, evidence-based climate information and guidance to inform their decisions, because what we know is that often in these events things can change pretty quickly and pretty radically.

The clock is going to beat me on this. There is so much more that I could say on this particular matter, but I hope that I have got through some of the main points of what we are doing in terms of adaptation around these matters. Again, I have a personal view about further referrals along this line to the committee, but I understand the government is supporting this – there has been a negotiated outcome in regard to this. Obviously as chair of the committee I look forward to being part of this inquiry and chairing the inquiry, because I know there is lots I will be looking forward to hearing from the government about the many, many things we are doing in order to manage risks from climate change in our built environment.

**David ETTERS HANK** (Western Metropolitan) incorporated the following:

I rise to make a brief contribution to this important motion on behalf of Legalise Cannabis Victoria. This is a much-needed inquiry.

The impacts of climate change are indeed intensifying. Victoria is experiencing hotter days, more intense storms and flooding. Sea levels are rising. We currently average 11 days of above 35-degree heat. By 2050 that will be an average of 16 days. We have longer, more intense bushfire seasons. In 2020 smoke haze from bushfires hundreds of kilometres away choked the streets of our inner city, making Melbourne’s air quality the worst in the world. Once-in-a-century weather events are becoming more and more frequent.

The impacts of climate change will affect every aspect of society in Victoria. We have already seen the health and social impacts wrought by floods, bushfires, extreme heat and storms.

These impacts especially affect the most vulnerable members of our community: the elderly, the very young, people with existing health conditions, those who can’t access air conditioning, Victoria’s homeless.

We need to examine the risks Victoria will continue to face because of climate change and do all we can to mitigate against them – for ourselves and for future generations of Victorians.

A focus of the terms of reference is our built environment and the barriers facing Victoria in upgrading infrastructure to become more resilient to the impacts of climate change.

Going forward we will need to apply some revolutionary thinking to the construction and operation of our buildings. It will require innovation in building design, smart technology and more appropriate building materials.

The construction industry itself is a major producer of carbon emissions and responsible for some 40 per cent of the state’s energy use. Concrete is a highly carbon intensive building material and is the most widely used material in the construction industry.

An ideal alternative to concrete is hemp concrete. Hempcrete is a biocomposite material that can be utilised as an alternative to concrete and standard insulation in building.

Anyone paying attention to my contribution to our industrial hemp inquiry motion will know that as a phytoremediation material, the hemp plant sequesters carbon at twice the rate of trees. So it's already a climate-positive material.

What you may not know is that hempcrete is one of the few materials that can continue to absorb carbon after being used in construction as it pulls more carbon from the atmosphere over the building's lifetime than was emitted during construction. This makes hempcrete a carbon-negative or better-than-zero-carbon building material. Hempcrete also has extraordinary thermal properties; an amazing capacity to regulate heat, moisture, and relative humidity; and fantastic fire-resistant qualities.

The process for producing hempcrete uses about half the energy to produce than concrete. It is extremely durable and is also recyclable at the end of the building's lifespan.

I could go on, but will leave hemp there for the moment.

I am hopeful that the committee will, as part of the inquiry process, obtain some figures from the Parliamentary Budget Office so we can start to quantify the financial realities of climate adaptation and building resilience.

There's no way around it – an increase of 1.5 to 2 degrees in temperature is inevitable, whether we like it or not. Climate change is now locked in, and we must prepare for a reality where Melbourne's climate is like Mildura and Mildura's climate is like Broken Hill – but with far more volatile patterns of drought and flood.

We will be culpable if we are not working towards and regularly reviewing our response to climate change.

So we commend this motion to the house.

**Sarah MANSFIELD** (Western Victoria) (15:28): I would just like to thank all of my colleagues in the chamber who have contributed to this debate. I particularly want to thank the government for their support of this important inquiry. I think it shows that these sorts of things, when it comes to preparing for the impacts of climate change, need to be above politics, and it is really disappointing that the opposition have not been able to get behind this inquiry. I think a lot of the challenges we are facing when it comes to climate change have largely been a result of a lack of unified support and a lack of ability to put climate change as a challenge above politics and get agreement from all different political parties. However, once again I am grateful to the government for recognising the value of this and how important it is to do everything we can and to do it as well as we can when it comes to preparing our built environment for the impacts of climate change. I look forward to hopefully getting support for this inquiry to take place and seeing the outcomes of the inquiry.

**Council divided on motion:**

*Ayes (19):* Ryan Batchelor, John Berger, Lizzie Blandthorn, Katherine Copsey, Jacinta Ermacora, Michael Galea, Shaun Leane, David Limbrick, Sarah Mansfield, Tom McIntosh, Rachel Payne, Aiv Puglielli, Georgie Purcell, Samantha Ratnam, Harriet Shing, Ingrid Stitt, Jaclyn Symes, Lee Tarlamis, Gayle Tierney

*Noes (14):* Matthew Bach, Jeff Bourman, Gaele Broad, Georgie Crozier, David Davis, Moira Deeming, Renee Heath, Ann-Marie Hermans, Wendy Lovell, Trung Luu, Bev McArthur, Joe McCracken, Evan Mulholland, Rikkie-Lee Tyrrell

**Motion agreed to.**

*Motions***Decriminalisation of public drunkenness****Debate resumed on motion of Georgie Crozier:**

That this house:

- (1) expresses its concern that the Summary Offences Amendment (Decriminalisation of Public Drunkenness) Act 2021 will increase risk to members of Victoria Police, people in a vulnerable state and the community, noting that:
  - (a) the Victoria Police training video to leave an intoxicated female in a public area places the female at risk;
  - (b) there is a health crisis in Victoria and these laws will increase pressure on regional hospitals and remove staff from struggling emergency rooms;
  - (c) Victoria is the only state that has introduced laws to decriminalise public drunkenness that has not given police increased move-on laws or powers of arrest to ensure community safety is the priority;
- (2) calls on the government to postpone the commencement of the Summary Offences Amendment (Decriminalisation of Public Drunkenness) Act 2021 until:
  - (a) move-on laws are introduced to ensure police have the powers to put community safety first;
  - (b) the government establishes at least three trial sites that operate for a 24-month period and a report on this trial is tabled in Parliament; and
  - (c) the Victoria Police training video is withdrawn and reissued with due consideration to the issues listed above and no police officer is trained to leave a vulnerable person in a potentially more dangerous or vulnerable position.

**Katherine COPSEY** (Southern Metropolitan) (15:37): The Greens will not be supporting this motion. We have known for decades that the offence of public drunkenness is an outdated and an obsolete offence, that it is predominantly targeted at vulnerable people in our society, notably First Nations people, and that it has been used as a racist tool to lock up Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islanders for behaviour that would be ignored or dismissed, or on Cup Day even celebrated, in other communities.

It serves us well to remember that there were decades of expert advice and community advocacy that finally resulted in Victoria proudly and belatedly catching up and removing this offence from our statute books. In 1989 the Victorian Law Reform Commission recommended the repeal of public drunkenness. In 1991 the Commonwealth Royal Commission into Aboriginal Deaths in Custody also recommended that the offence of public drunkenness should be abolished in the states that still kept it as an offence, Victoria included. Decriminalising public drunkenness was again recommended in 2001 by the parliamentary Drugs and Crime Prevention Committee, in 2006 by the Ombudsman and in 2016 by IBAC. The offence was finally repealed in this place in 2021, and that repeal will come into operation this year.

Despite all the evidence and all the recommendations, it took 30 years to bring these reforms to Parliament. In that time hundreds of First Nations people have died preventable deaths in custody – at least 512 across this country, including many here in Victoria. It is a deep shame that it took 30 years and more deaths in order to act on the repeal of public drunkenness. The fact that this offence was finally abolished was achieved in large part due to the work of many Aboriginal organisations and campaigners, including Belinda Stevens, Apryl Watson, Warren Stevens, Kimberly Watson and of course the family of Tanya Day.

We the Greens welcome the long overdue decriminalisation of public drunkenness. It is an issue we have championed in this place for many years, and at the same time we do ask the government to continue to keep reforming our criminal justice system. We need more community mental health workers and drug and alcohol counsellors instead of police, and more sobering-up facilities instead of prison cells, so that addiction is treated as a health issue, not as a crime. And we certainly need more

public housing so that everyone has a safe place to exit institutional facilities into and we stop reinforcing the cycle of incarceration. We will not be supporting the motion today.

**Evan MULHOLLAND** (Northern Metropolitan) (15:40): I am very pleased to speak to this motion. It is an important motion about public drunkenness laws, but it is an important motion knowing deep community concern about the implementation of these laws. So I will support this motion to call on the government to postpone the date of the changes in the Summary Offences Amendment (Decriminalisation of Public Drunkenness) Bill 2020. Victoria is woefully unprepared to abolish the crime of public drunkenness. These are not my words; they are the words of the police, doctors and community groups. We cannot just abolish this crime without due consideration and without making sure the appropriate laws and facilities are in place and that they are actually effective.

The intention behind this bill is to treat public drunkenness as a medical matter rather than a criminal one. The idea is to divert those that are drunk in public to outreach services such as sobering-up centres. However, this goes to the heart of the problem. The government is only ramping up one sobering-up centre. Not only that, but as I have spoken about previously, it is located on a residential street in my electorate, only metres from the bedrooms of children and adjacent to an English second-language school, much to the dismay of local residents, who feel like they are not being listened to. I was very pleased to join a great turnout at a rally of local residents. I was very pleased to see some local councillors there, like Cr Jolly and Cr Riley and others, who joined with the community around Collingwood that are quite concerned about the sobering-up centre there. We do not really know much about the trial of the sobering-up centre, but as I understand it the trial backed onto St Vincent's on Gertrude Street and was in a health precinct. A health precinct would make much more sense than a residential street in this matter. But we are seeing sort of a creeping drop ever since the government lost the seat of Richmond into blasting through centres like this and the injecting room, making them permanent on residential streets. And it is not just the fact they put it there. There was absolutely no consultation on this location from the government. There seemed to be no tender – again, zero transparency on this – and it was instantly awarded to the folks at Cohealth.

**Georgie Crozier:** Surprise, surprise.

**Evan MULHOLLAND:** Surprise, surprise. They will be the likely winning bidders for the CBD injecting room, which many of their staff are publicly advocating for without declaring a conflict of interest – like on 3AW last week, when one of their doctors called in and was forced to prompt that they actually work for Cohealth and have a direct interest in the CBD injecting room going ahead. But we see this over and again. They instantly got the contract and said they would undertake consultations, which just basically included a letter from Cohealth to residents surrounding the sobering-up centre. That is no way to treat the people of Collingwood. It is no way to treat locals, many of whom have lived there for a very long time, who rightly have concerns.

We need to partner with local communities on centres like this. If you do want them to succeed, they do require a level of community buy-in, and that has not been sufficient by any measure. You cannot say you are going to undertake consultations with the community after you have announced it without tender and announced the location, and your consultation needs to actually be a little bit more than a letter in the mailbox. Again, that is no way to treat residents of my electorate, and I was very pleased to join a rally of local residents to make known my opposition to this centre being placed in a residential street.

There is a sobering-up centre in the inner city, or there will be. How this represents a diversion pathway for the people of Shepparton, Echuca, Ballarat, Geelong, Bendigo, Mornington Peninsula and Frankston I do not know. The Rural Doctors Association of Victoria president Dr Dan Wilson has said:

[We] compel the Victorian government to strongly reconsider its decision to advantage metropolitan communities over regional and rural Victorians.

We know with the Commonwealth Games, for example, that that was seen too – they made the promise that the games would benefit regional communities, but we know that because of blowouts on infrastructure projects in the inner city the costs got a bit too much. We know that because of the incompetence of the people on the other side regional Victoria was betrayed. Regional Victoria was betrayed with the Geelong fast rail promise. Growth areas were betrayed with the cancellation of the *Western Rail Plan*, all because this government cannot manage money. They cannot even consult with local communities and experts. Police Association Victoria secretary Wayne Gatt has echoed these concerns, saying:

This is not a Melbourne reform, it's a Victorian one ... Where will regional cities take their people?

It seems like this question has fallen on deaf ears. Heather Chigwada, an alcohol and drug clinician at Project Sunrise, said that she was worried because she was not aware of any services being put in place to help the Sudanese, South Sudanese or First Nations communities, which is a fair enough point that none of the members on the other side will answer. Even the Salvation Army boss Major Brendan Nottle said Victorians should be highly alert to the fact that there may not be enough wraparound services within and outside metropolitan Melbourne. He said:

If the government thinks just by putting certain measures in place we'll resolve the issue, I think they'd be mistaken ... Once you dig, the more needs start to emerge.

Another issue raised by Wayne Gatt and Paul Healey, the branch secretary of the Health and Community Services Union, is that the government is ignoring these individuals that will refuse to be taken to a sobering-up centre. They said:

... the government doesn't have an answer for the third group of people who just refuse the help: they're going to either punch an ambo, smash a window, or get picked up by police for doing other ...

crimes. The government needs to take a serious look at these laws. They come into effect on Melbourne Cup Day of all days, when there are going to be incidents. You have so many of the representatives on the other side – basically all of them – bragging about their union movement links, but when you have got the police union raising serious concerns and police officers raising serious concerns I think the duty of the government would be to listen to those concerns very seriously, because they are the people on our front line. I think it is incumbent upon the government to explain to this chamber and the Victorian people why they are rushing through these laws without consideration and why they are not taking a sober approach to public policy and consulting some more.

I am not saying get rid of these laws; all I am saying is there needs to be due consideration of a delay of these laws. I think that is what mature members of this chamber should do. We should go out and listen to the community. I certainly have, and I hope the government does.

**John BERGER** (Southern Metropolitan) (15:50): I rise to commend the reforms delivered by the Andrews, now Allan, government on the public drunkenness laws and penalties and the strides the Allan Labor government is making, and in doing so I speak to the motion moved by my colleague opposite Ms Crozier.

This motion asks the house to express its concern that the Summary Offences Amendment (Decriminalisation of Public Drunkenness) Act 2021 will increase the risk to members of Victoria Police, people in a vulnerable state and the community. What an absurd comment. While those opposite had Victoria Police campaigning against them under Jeff Kennett in 1999, we have continually backed our police. We have delivered record funding to Victoria Police. Our police force know that we support them each day to do their jobs. Victoria Police has been closely consulted throughout the development of these important reforms because we know that listening to the community is the way to achieve the best reforms. We know the success of the reforms relies on the engagement of all stakeholders, and VicPol are a critical part of this. The Victorian community can be assured that our police force will remain able to respond to public intoxication in a decriminalised environment.

I commend the work of the Minister for Police in the other place, my friend Minister Carbines, and the Chief Commissioner of Police Shane Patton for their partnership and commitment to getting this done. I also commend the Minister for Health in the other place, Minister Thomas, for her work in this evidence-based, health-led reform, because people who are intoxicated in public need our support not our punishment. The 2023–24 budget is providing \$84.30 million for a health-based response to public intoxication, and this includes \$78.7 million to deliver a dedicated, public intoxication service response, an important reform. It will ensure that the right supports are in place when the legislation comes into effect in November.

This government has delivered many criminal reforms, many of which have been delivered with the understanding that it is often more appropriate for emergency service workers to act in a health-based direction. This government has listened to experts and acted on advice that will result in a more nuanced and effective role for our law enforcement, ensuring safety for our greater community. In 2021 the Andrews Labor government successfully passed the Summary Offences Amendment (Decriminalisation of Public Drunkenness) Act 2021, which sought to decriminalise public drunkenness in the state of Victoria. This was in recognition of the ongoing harm the laws were causing to vulnerable communities, including our First Nations communities.

Public drunkenness reforms were one of the key recommendations that came out of the coronial inquest into the tragic death of Yorta Yorta, Wemba Wemba and Barapa Barapa woman Aunty Tanya Day. Day's death was another tragic reminder of the recommendations of the 1991 Royal Commission into Aboriginal Deaths in Custody. Both the coronial inquest and the royal commission called for the decriminalisation of public drunkenness. Acting on these recommendations and other expert advice, the then Andrews Labor government sought to construct a more health-orientated response to public drunkenness.

I also want to thank Ambulance Victoria for being an important partner in this through the development of a new model as we continue to work closely with them towards a health-led response. In the existing trials we are seeing positive evidence of a diversion into sobering and outreach services which would otherwise have used ambulance services. In recognition that this would lead to safer results for both the public and the intoxicated individual, we must continue.

These reforms do not simply decriminalise public drunkenness but also seek to introduce several service models to support the creation of a safer Victoria. The new health-led model is designed to see results that promote the safety of intoxicated individuals and those around them. Whilst our police here in Victoria are here to protect us and promote safety and are required to undergo training to respond to health issues, including intoxication, the creation of these specialised teams can offer services specific to those suffering from intoxication in public. To assist in the implementation of these reforms \$88.3 million has been pledged to be spent over a three-year period. This allocation of funds is to ensure that the service is supported in its early stages to build an effective and long-lasting addition to the face of Victoria's public service.

The rollout of the model will prioritise service delivery for the Aboriginal community in recognition of how public intoxication laws have historically disproportionately affected First Victorians and continue to in some cases. This government will be and has always been committed to acknowledging that Aboriginal Victorians face unique challenges and injustices, and it is further committed to doing everything in its powers to right those wrongs. Whilst public intoxication is not limited to one group of people, Aboriginal Victorians are undeniably affected by the current ramifications of public intoxication. At this stage intoxication laws are not leading to the results that we want – a safer Victoria for everyone.

Included services are as follows: an outreach program that will respond to intoxicated individuals needing assistance. Primarily these outreach programs will assist in areas that might not otherwise have access to those services provided. Outreach programs will exist as an on-demand response to referrals. Depending on the needs of the intoxicated person, the outreach programs will be authorised

to offer immediate assistance and organise private transportation for individuals or, if the situation calls for it, transport individuals to a place in which they can safely recover from the effects of alcohol.

Additionally, at peak times in metropolitan Melbourne outreach programs will be authorised to identify and respond to cases of dangerous intoxication. They will have the same powers as during non-peak hours, including providing immediate assistance and transport. These outreach teams will ensure that we have a dedicated team ready and equipped to address cases of intoxicated people that potentially present harm to themselves and others. It also moves the handling of intoxicated individuals to a dedicated health-orientated team. This is not because we believe the police are ill equipped; it is simply an acknowledgement of the nature of intoxicated individuals and their general need for more dedicated assistance. These policies exist to encourage the safest and best outcomes for all Victorians.

The service model will also introduce sobering centres in metro Melbourne. These will act as important safe areas for intoxicated individuals where they can be monitored by healthcare professionals until they are fit to leave. These facilities will hold up to 20 beds for the general population, and a further six will be reserved for Aboriginal people. This is again recognition that our Aboriginal communities are disproportionately affected by these changes. We are ensuring that at every step of the way we as a government can assist in harm minimisation for Aboriginal Victorians. This is a just and correct course of action.

Similar programs have been introduced in other states and territories, all with high rates of success in preventing potentially harmful situations from occurring. This aspect of reform will forever change Melbourne for the better, ensuring that Melburnians can have a good time and go and support their local night-life without having concerns about their safety and wellbeing.

This service will also provide those suffering from alcohol and substance abuse issues with referrals to programs and services if requested. Additionally, the service includes an opt-in follow-up if it is wanted or needed. This is included in all services, as the Allan Labor government acknowledges that alcohol and substance abuse episodes rarely occur in a vacuum and that anyone suffering from these issues deserves to seek out treatment if they wish to. Unfortunately, seeking help is not always a straightforward process. Stigma and inaccessibility can prevent individuals accessing the essential supportive services they need to overcome a substance or alcohol abuse problem that they wish to address. Because of this, government programs that can reach these people should do all that they can to direct them to those services that they need.

Additionally, this rollout will include the creation of a centralised service for consultation for both those needing support for being intoxicated in public and staff providing service. This centralised service will be able to manage intake, referral and dispatch services, determining the person's needs and then dispatching the appropriate service provider. It will also be a centralised service for advice and information on outreach and sobering services. It will also act as a consultation service for staff on information about alcohol and other drugs to ensure staff are able to respond accordingly.

The first sobering station has been confirmed already in Collingwood, situated close to the city in an area that sees a high rate of public drunkenness and arrests. The centre is also close to public transport and St Vincent's Hospital. All of this will ensure that the Allan Labor government will create a safer Victoria with a service that can offer appropriate assistance to somebody intoxicated in public.

I want to wrap up by quoting the coroner's findings from the death of Ms Day:

Ms Day's death was clearly preventable had she not been arrested and taken into custody.

And further:

... there was no justification for the offence of public drunkenness to remain ... some 30 years after the RCIADIC had recommended its abolition.

It is time we changed the law. We have, and we are proud of it.

**David LIMBRICK** (South-Eastern Metropolitan) (16:00): I too rise to speak on this motion brought forward by Ms Crozier. I do share some of the concerns in this motion about the implementation of the decriminalisation of public drunkenness. At the time I had concerns about how this might be implemented, and I am sad to see that some of my concerns are coming true. However, I did support the decriminalisation of public drunkenness. Being drunk is like a pre-crime – it is not an actual crime; you are not harming anyone except for yourself – so we did not object to that. However, I cannot support this motion, because it calls on the government to give police move-on laws. I think that these are extremely dangerous, may have many, many unintended consequences and could be easily misused by police. They are a gross infringement on the right to freedom of movement, and therefore I cannot support this motion.

**Trung LUU** (Western Metropolitan) (16:01): I rise today to speak on motion 191 raised by Ms Crozier that this house express its concern about the Summary Offences Amendment (Decriminalisation of Public Drunkenness) Act 2021. I thank you, Ms Crozier, for actually raising this motion, because it is very important, for this motion is about public safety and saving lives over a group of individuals complaining about punishment and sobering up at a police station. Let us look at this in perspective. What is this punitive punishment all about? It is 4 hours when you are drunk. They take you for 4 hours to a police station until you sober up, then you are charged and bailed to go to court, which you do not need to turn up to, and that is it. It is 4 hours at a police station so you can sober up and go home. That is what the punishment is all about. It is for your welfare, your safety and the public safety around it.

This motion raised by Ms Crozier is very important in relation to the decriminalisation of public drunkenness. The decriminalisation of public drunkenness is of great concern in relation to the people who actually put this act together having very little knowledge in relation to understanding what intoxication is about. This level of intoxication is not just when you have a few drinks and you are unable to speak or unable to walk. It is when it comes to the stage for those very few who have consumed so much alcohol that they are unable to look after themselves, they are unable to respond and they could be in a situation where they need assistance, they need monitoring, in case they vomit, suffocate and die. That is what the police do when they take these people who are intoxicated to the police station so they can sober up, at the same time monitoring and making sure that these people are under full observation so that they do not harm themselves and they are able to sober up in a safe place.

What this motion also expresses and addresses is the increasing pressure on hospitals and emergency staff. Even when the police had the power to arrest and take intoxicated people to the station – even in that situation – hospitals were overrun with people who were too intoxicated. What is also very important in relation to this motion is (1)(c):

Victoria is the only state that has introduced laws to decriminalise public drunkenness that has not given police increased move-on laws or powers of arrest to ensure community safety is the priority ...

In relation to taking away the power for police to move people on, to ensure that a person has the ability to control themselves and know what they are doing, it is very important – when the police come across, in relation to people who are intoxicated, a situation where they are unable to physically go about their own daily duties or daily activities – that there is this power that police have to accompany those people back to the station, where they can monitor these people in such a state.

Now, those on the opposite side have mentioned that the police were willing to work with the government in relation to decriminalisation. Yes, but the police at the time did not realise. As Shane Patton, the chief commissioner, said:

We made representations to government about some additional powers. We didn't get any and so we're putting our training in place to do that.

Basically you have taken away the police power. They did not realise at the time that in relation to when you say 'decriminalisation' it takes every power away from the police to do what they are sworn

to do, which is to serve and protect the community. What the police have taken an oath to do is to serve and protect every Victorian, even those that are intoxicated. Wayne Gatt from the Police Association Victoria said the force needed supplementary powers to ensure intoxicated people who were a threat to themselves or others could be moved on or taken care of. So both the police association and the Chief Commissioner of Police have recognised now that the Summary Offences Amendment Act is not going to assist in relation to the decriminalisation of public drunkenness.

What we also say on this act in relation to drunkenness is people do not realise it applies not only to those who have consumed alcohol but also to those who have taken other substances and who may appear to be intoxicated. So when they are in that state and they refuse police assistance, police under this new act have no power whatsoever to assist those who are in need. Whether they are intoxicated by alcohol or affected by other sorts of substances, police now have no power to assist those in need.

What people do not realise in this chamber is overdoses do not happen in an instant. It takes time for the drug to actually get into your system and slowly slow down your metabolism, slow down your heart rate. That is when overdose occurs. So when a person has taken drugs – whatever the substance could be – and the police observe unusual behaviour, they usually approach these people and ask to assist them in such a way, but when that person has the ability to say, ‘No, I refuse your assistance’, what this act says is police have no power to actually assist those people in those circumstances, and this will leave those in those situations in a very bad state which will eventually possibly lead to a circumstance where lives can be lost.

So it is very important people understand this act does not affect those affected by alcohol alone; they might be affected by other substances as well. So those who actually support safe injection et cetera must look at this very carefully, because this act itself will take away police powers to do all sorts of things, like assisting the public, whether they are affected by alcohol or affected by drugs and so on. When we say ‘decriminalisation of public drunkenness’ it does not always apply to those affected by alcohol, so I suggest that we look very closely regarding this amendment. It is important to look at this act very closely in relation to how we need to address this.

The opposite side have mentioned that we are now going to assist with taking these people to a sobering-up centre. That is fantastic, but you have got to understand one sobering-up centre will not assist all those people in an unstable state. I will just give you some examples. Over 2016 to 2019 Victoria alone – from crime stats – recorded that 8000 cases of drunkenness are found each year; 8000 each year are recorded. One centre surely cannot assist all those people affected by drugs or by alcohol in one night, so what happens to all those people? Where do they get transported to – to overrun hospitals? Where else would it be? What happens to them when they get transported or are going to get transported? I can tell you now, before this hits, even on one weekend some stations where police can accompany and look after those who are drunk are full and have to turn them away to hospitals. That is when the hospitals are full. When all the police are unable to accompany and monitor all these people, where are they going to go? Certainly not one sobering-up centre. How big is this sobering-up centre? Are they able to accompany and look after hundreds or thousands of people per fortnight or per weekend? I dare say they will be unable to assist at such call-outs. Now, just be mindful, call-outs for Ambulance Victoria were more than 20,000 alone for the alcohol-affected during the 2021–22 financial year, so that is an average of 385 people per week. We average that, but mainly people get drunk over the weekend. I do support this motion, and I hope people take it more seriously.

**Jacinta ERMACORA** (Western Victoria) (16:11): I find it a bit rich really that the Liberals are using this motion to suggest that people in a vulnerable state will be at increased risk if the Summary Offences Amendment (Decriminalisation of Public Drunkenness) Act 2021 comes into effect. In fact this government recognises the disproportionate and distressing influence of Victoria’s current laws on public drunkenness, especially on the Aboriginal community. Notably, Victoria remains one of only two states still criminalising public drunkenness, and the opposition today seeks to delay this implementation even further. The Aboriginal community have been advocating for decriminalisation and a transition to a fairer system since the 1991 Royal Commission into Aboriginal Deaths in

Custody. The findings of the commission were tragically reinforced by the inquest into the death of Tanya Day, which occurred in 2017, and not only is this time line of Tanya Day's death a tragic story in itself, it is also a very sad example of generational trauma and the same archaic system existing for far too long. Ms Day's uncle the late Mr Harrison Day had his death examined by the royal commission. Mr Day died in custody in 1982 from an epileptic fit in an Echuca police cell after he was arrested for an unpaid \$10 fine for public drunkenness.

Fortunately the Allan government is resolutely moving towards decriminalising public drunkenness, opting instead for a health-centred approach. This is to ensure care and support for publicly intoxicated individuals and our communities, which is contrary to the long history of our judiciary system, where some of our most privileged members of society locked up many of our most underprivileged members of society. In many cases this is tantamount to criminalising despair. We know for some people alcohol is used to deal with trauma and stress as self-medication and that those in poverty and disadvantage, who do not lead lives of privilege, are more likely to be drunk in public and locked up for that.

As a sexual assault counsellor I encountered many clients who used alcohol, gambling and drugs as forms of self-medication. When I refer to self-medication, many of my clients described their use of alcohol, drugs and sometimes gambling as a tool to block out memories, numb the pain and escape from the horror in their heads. This is not the case for every person found drunk in public. But it is the case for a proportion of this population, and when other vulnerabilities are present they are more likely to end up incarcerated as a result. Many survivors of sexual assault experience intrusive thoughts about their abuser, the incident and how it has impacted them and their families. Intrusive thoughts are where memories of something unpleasant resurface and sometimes invade their consciousness constantly. We often colloquially refer to this as ruminating. Intrusive thoughts and ruminating are often a barrier to sleep, which triggers a cycle of insomnia and its subsequent health-related impacts.

It is in this context that many people who have experienced trauma of any type use self-medication as a way to cope. Alcohol is the most readily available and legal drug that achieves this end. Our society has been criminalising this coping phenomenon for hundreds of years. Now that we have a better understanding of the health impacts of alcohol abuse and the role of self-medication, it is the right thing to do. There is no logic to the arguments put forward from those opposite that these laws, by decriminalising public drunkenness, decriminalise offensive behaviours or intimidating behaviours or aggressive behaviours or stalking. In fact it is a good thing that these behaviours are uncoupled from public drunkenness so that they could be focused on for the appalling behaviours they are and drunkenness not used as an excuse.

The Allan government is envisioning a safe environment for those publicly intoxicated with culturally sensitive care, minimal judicial interference and protection for the community and emergency personnel. This approach aims to reduce rates of incarceration and prevent custodial deaths. The data tells us that the criminalisation of public drunkenness discriminates against certain cohorts of people and in particular Aboriginal people, culturally and linguistically diverse communities, people experiencing homelessness, people with substance abuse issues and people experiencing mental illness or distress. The new model will work to improve outcomes for these people. Repealing these offences is just the first step. The Royal Commission into Aboriginal Deaths in Custody and other reviews since have stressed the importance of alternative non-custodial systems, laws and services for people who are intoxicated in public. That is why the 2023–24 budget provided \$84.306 million for health-based responses to public intoxication. This funding included \$78.796 million to deliver the dedicated public intoxication service response to ensure that the right supports are in place when this legislation comes into effect in November.

I note here that whilst it will no longer be an offence to be drunk in public it will remain an offence to, as I said before, harass, stalk, intimidate or otherwise engage in offensive and aggressive behaviour. The dedicated public intoxication service response is for individuals who are under the influence but are not a threat to themselves or others and not involved in any illegal activities, and this is because

the existing response driven by the criminal justice system just does not align with present societal values. It is inappropriate for the police force to be asked to provide a health service in their lock-up on a Saturday evening. Again I emphasise that this framework gives prominence to assistance for the Aboriginal population, recognising the undue burden that public intoxication regulations and police encounters have placed upon them. Its intent is to actively decrease the number of Aboriginal deaths while in detention, reflecting persistent advocacy from the Aboriginal community who know these laws have had harmful and profound consequences on their lives. I must say it is an outrageous shame to our society and to our judicial system that a disproportionate number of Aboriginal people are locked up in our system, whether on remand or in prison. This is one important step towards redressing that inequality. Aboriginal people are 3 per cent or thereabouts of this community's population, but they are well and truly over-represented in the judicial system.

The government has comprehensively engaged with first responders and health professionals, and their insights have been instrumental in shaping the framework that we have put forward today. From now until November 2023 our government remains committed to collaborating with all pertinent parties to guarantee that the health model is both safe and aligns with community requirements. This major reform has been decades in the making, and it is progressing with consultation, feedback and as a result of passionate advocacy from some of the most vulnerable people in our community. I do not believe it should be delayed; it should certainly come into effect on 7 November. I find the arguments raised against this implementation in this motion facile and a distraction.

**Matthew BACH** (North-Eastern Metropolitan) (16:21): I am pleased to rise in support of this important motion that calls on the government to postpone the commencement of the Summary Offences Amendment (Decriminalisation of Public Drunkenness) Act 2021 until move-on laws are introduced to ensure police have the powers to put community safety first; the government establishes at least three trial sites that operate for a 24-month period; and the Victoria Police training video that we have discussed in this debate is withdrawn and reissued with due consideration of the issues listed in the motion and no police officer is trained to leave a vulnerable person in a potentially more dangerous or vulnerable position.

I do agree with a couple of the points that were made by the member opposite just now. Certainly it is an outrageous shame – to use the language of the previous speaker – that we see such appalling outcomes for Indigenous people in our justice system. That outrage and shame exists because of the concerted policies of this Labor government. Over the period of today we have listened to numerous speeches from those opposite in which much merriment has been made about the fact that on this side of the house we have been in government for, what is it now, four of the last 24 years. And yet those opposite wish to give us lectures about the appalling mistreatment of Indigenous people in our justice system that they have had carriage of for, what is it, 20 of the last 24 years.

There is a reason for several of the shocking outcomes that Ms Ermacora discussed. First and foremost, those opposite remove one in 10 Indigenous babies. It is the worst rate in the country. It is a disgrace. It is something I have spoken about before. With respect, the previous speaker has more front than Myer to attack us on this side of the house for a lack of care regarding Indigenous peoples. Has she never read a report of the Aboriginal children's commissioner that Minister Wooldridge established when she was the Minister for Community Services? If she ever had, she would have realised that the policies that this Labor government has pursued for a long period of time have led, quite inevitably, to huge numbers of Indigenous children being removed from their families – a rate more than 60 per cent higher than under the previous Liberal government. No-one opposite will contradict me: it is a fact. Yet on the side of the house we are subjected to lectures about our care for vulnerable Indigenous people from speakers like Ms Ermacora.

The reason I support this motion is not because I oppose the decriminalisation of public drunkenness but simply because the government has bugged it up. When I was the Shadow Attorney-General, I met with the head of the Police Association Victoria, and he bemoaned what he called policy by press release. This is another example of policy by press release. If the government wanted to do it properly,

it would work with the police association and have the requisite backstop measures in place, and for mine that would be fine – I would support it. I am all for justice reform. If the government is serious about getting better outcomes for Indigenous people and vulnerable people more broadly, if they want to shut down the youth justice system tomorrow, I will support them. If they want to shut down residential care in the child protection system, I will support them. They have got my vote. I will not take lectures about a lack of care for Indigenous people when this government, as we have heard from members opposite again and again today, with much glee, has been in power for almost the entirety of this century. If there are problems, as there are grave problems when it comes to the treatment of Indigenous people in our justice system, it is on those opposite. It is time they started to own that.

As I said, I personally do not oppose the decriminalisation of public drunkenness, yet there need to be proper measures in place. The points that have been raised by my colleagues on this side of the house are worthy points. We cannot simply rip away the system that existed previously without any of the requisite backstop measures. The point that Ms Crozier has made regarding the impact on vulnerable people with reference to the Victoria Police training video is an entirely legitimate point. I have been listening to the debate carefully, and I am not aware that anybody opposite has answered that point. I personally would like far more thoroughgoing criminal justice reform measures to be emanating from the government, but as we go down this pathway, if indeed the government is interested in that in the least, we need to do things properly and to plan properly. The head of the police association was right: this was a case of policy by press release. This is an important policy. It has an impact on vulnerable children and vulnerable people – I agree with that entirely – and thus it is all the more necessary to plan carefully and to get it right as you roll it out. That is why I support the motion.

**Sheena WATT** (Northern Metropolitan) (16:27): I have a bit to say on this, and 10 minutes does not seem enough. I am going to begin by recalling with great affection speaking on this matter as the bill came before Parliament in the last term, but that great affection was wrapped up with enormous sadness for the loss that had to occur before we took the steps required to face this injustice that affected Aboriginal people and continues to to this day. I know first and foremost that this is a reform long, long in the making, which came about from enormous efforts of the Aboriginal community-controlled sector led first and foremost by the Victorian Aboriginal Health Service, the Victorian Aboriginal Legal Service and the Victorian Aboriginal Community Controlled Health Organisation, and I pay tribute to them. Above all, the tributes must flow to the family of the late Aunty Tanya Day and with special acknowledgements to my former colleagues Aunty Jill Gallagher of VACCHO and Belinda Stevens.

I am very close to this cause – closer than anyone in this place – and I speak about it with a depth of knowledge that I believe others lack. You see, I was standing with Aunty Tanya's daughter the day she ran out of the workplace because her mum was on that train – the last train ride she ever did have. It is an enormous, enormous cultural load that her family have taken to address this injustice in our state. As one of the last ones to do just about anything for it, I pay tribute to Belinda Stevens, her family and of course Aunty Jill. There is a heavy load. I think about their families and all that they have done, and I think about the urgency in which they want this matter addressed. I stand here proud not just to have a connection to this story but to now have a connection very much to the solution, because people who are simply intoxicated in public need support, not punishment. They need assistance, and implementing a public health model is the way to go about it. It ensures that people who are intoxicated in public can access the health care and the support that they need, and it is not something that came about recently.

The abolition of public intoxication was one of the key recommendations of the coronial inquest following the death of the late Aunty Tanya Day. I actually sat in that coronial inquest on a number of occasions in fact before entering this place. I joined with the family in the marches for justice and I also joined in their tears. You see, Aunty Tanya Day was a proud Yorta Yorta, Wemba Wemba and Barapa Barapa woman with connections to land that I too share, so I have, with everything that I am, very strong connections to this story, and I spoke about the abolition of these offences in my first year

in Parliament. It was with great shame that I acknowledged that Victoria was one of the only two states that had yet to act on this key recommendation.

You see, Aboriginal Victorians are still disproportionately affected by this offence. You only need to know Aboriginal people that have social lives and that try to live like their fellow students and their fellow teammates in their footy clubs to know that it is not the same being out in our community as an Aboriginal person having a night on the town or celebrating a footy win. The outcomes are not the same. Let us not forget that the effect on First Nations people is simply not acceptable. It is not acceptable that the talks that happen to young Aboriginal boys about nights out on the town are about what to do when the police lock you up, and it hurts to even talk about it, because it is one of those little quiet community shames that we do not admit to, but the truth is that public intoxication in our community should be treated like a health issue and not like a crime. I read with great interest the final findings of the coroner when that report came through, and it said that Ms Day's death was clearly preventable had she not been arrested and taken into custody. With great pain I watched that video as it was released in the media. The bravery that that family showed in releasing it into the public domain to help really drive the community conversations about public intoxication – I thank them for doing that.

It simply is 30 years since the Royal Commission into Aboriginal Deaths in Custody, and that royal commission had a recommendation for the abolition of the offence of public drunkenness. You see, I have spent a bit of time – and we all have – reflecting on royal commissions, but this one has a little bit too much left outstanding. You see, decriminalising public intoxication is an important milestone along a journey which acknowledges the failures of the past and the government's commitment to a safer, better future. Whilst I transitioned from that life of community advocate to now being a member of Parliament, I will not quite forget the loss, the pain and the hurt of our community on the death of Aunty Tanya Day. So whilst there are calls for the delay and questions about not enough sites and how many people will go, the truth is we need this and we need it as soon as possible. So thank you to the community health providers and the community sector that have worked so closely to get this to where it is today.

I have seen the models that have been proposed around outreach workers working with our existing first responders to assess the health and safety risks of the supported person to make sure they are transported to a place of safety, and in many instances this will be a private residence. However, for those that require a lower acuity response and do not have a safe place to go – do you know what – a sobering service will be made available. Just as it happens in other states, it will happen here in our state, but the difference is we will have dedicated public intoxication responses for Aboriginal Victorians delivered across metropolitan Melbourne and regional locations. It will be a culturally appropriate response, led in its design, so much so, by the Victorian Aboriginal Community Controlled Health Organisation. And the one for the rest of the community will be led by the outstanding community health service Cohealth. I thank them for the work that they have done in stepping up to be there for our most vulnerable community members.

To those that are waiting, it is almost here. To the family of Tanya Day, it is almost here. We know that it has taken a little while longer than we all wanted, but it is almost here, and a delay is just not what the community needs right now. So thank you to community health. Thank you in advance to the workers that will be there for our community in times of need and crisis. I know that with it being based in Collingwood, proudly in the Northern Metropolitan Region, it will be a place that I keep a dear and passionate eye on, as well as the other Aboriginal centres right around the state. Thank you for the opportunity to speak to this motion today.

**Bev McARTHUR** (Western Victoria) (16:37): I rise to support Ms Crozier's motion about public drunkenness, and one can only say this is definitely policy on the run, really and truly. This is drunk and disorderly in a public place taking on a whole new parameter. It is only any good if you are inside the tram tracks and you need to be relocated to a drunken facility where you might be looked after.

What happens to my friends in Portland if they are drunk? How do they get transported to Collingwood?

**Evan Mulholland** interjected.

**Bev McARTHUR:** I think that is the location, isn't it, Mr Mulholland? Collingwood. Portland to Collingwood would be probably about a 4- or 5-hour trip. They could have sobered up by the time they get to Collingwood, you would hope. But anyway, this is ridiculous. This is about as sensible as closing down coal-fired power stations and saying we have got to have renewables and zero emissions by anytime soon with nothing in place to give us power, and we are all paying the price for that. Well, we will all be paying the price for this stupid kneejerk reaction to a situation that is serious.

Clearly the police are not in favour of this, and why should they be? I cannot imagine the ambulance officers are in favour of this, because they might be picking up the pieces as well. Please do not even suggest to our public hospital system that they have got to pick up the pieces. In my regional hospitals and even in the small hospitals that have emergency care, there is no way they can cope with drunken people being landed on their doorstep because there is nowhere else for them to go. Do we leave them just lying in the streets or actually going out and causing more damage in the community? There is nothing in place to solve this problem, but look out, we are going to remove drunkenness as an offence. What a stupid idea.

This motion:

calls on the government to postpone the commencement of the Summary Offences Amendment (Decriminalisation of Public Drunkenness) Act 2021 until:

(a) move-on laws are introduced to ensure police have the powers to put community safety first ...

Isn't that what we should be looking at, community safety first?

(b) the government establishes at least three trial sites that operate for a 24-month period and a report on this trial is tabled in Parliament ...

Well, of course that is what we should be doing. We should be testing the system first before we jump down the path of removing the offence. We have got the minister for – what are you the minister for, Enver, police or corrections? – something over there. It is obvious you do not want any more people in your system. Haven't you got vacant places? Dr Bach, aren't there –

**Matthew Bach:** Stacks at Cherry Creek.

**Bev McARTHUR:** Stacks at Cherry Creek. Can we relocate people to Cherry Creek? What are we doing over there, Minister? There is space over there; we could relocate people. We are in a terrible situation here. We are going to remove an offence without putting anything in place to solve the problem. We all feel terribly sorry for those that are caught up in the minister's judicial incarceration system, but we have got to have a better system in place before we go down this thought bubble path.

I just cannot imagine what is going to happen out in rural areas. You want to get rid of all the single-officer police stations – you are going to scrap them in my electorate – so there are going to be no police and there are going to be drunks around everywhere, yet they are going to have to be brought to Collingwood if necessary. Have you got enough police vehicles to do this, Minister? I am sure you have not. Have you got enough officers? There are 800 vacancies, aren't there, Mr Mulholland, in the police – or 800 gone off the list?

**Evan Mulholland:** There's a lot.

**Bev McARTHUR:** There are an awful lot. We have not got police. I guess they are going to have less to do now. They just leave the drunks lying around. Is that what is happening? This is a really ridiculous situation. You need to rethink it.

**Evan Mulholland:** They're scarred from having to pull kids off playgrounds.

**Bev McARTHUR:** Oh, my goodness me. Yes, that is what you did. You were pulling children off playgrounds and picking up elderly women sitting on park benches during COVID. You are good at that, but now we are going to do this.

Why wouldn't you think about it first and make sure you get the system right? It does seem like you have just jumped down the throat of a very bad idea, and you are clearly going to make it worse. How are you going to protect the community and protect the vulnerable people that are intoxicated? I guess there are some of us that might have been intoxicated from time to time – we can appreciate this – but we do need to make sure that everybody is cared for properly and not just leave them to languish in a drunken state somewhere and perhaps going on to cause further damage. I do not want to imagine what other crimes might ensue if we just leave drunken people around and do not look after them properly. You cannot look after them unless they are very close to Collingwood. This government is all about being inside the tram tracks; they never get outside the tram tracks. Here we have got drunken behaviour being only accommodated not only inside the tram tracks but in this very inner little urban area to appease the Greens. Really, that is what it is all about, isn't it? They are the ones that you need to appease because you keep losing seats to them and you need to make sure you are greener and more left than them to pick all this up.

We certainly think you should have another look at this. We try and help you; we are here to help. We are always here to help make sure you get these things right. We want to make sure that everybody in Victoria is looked after properly, the community is safe and the police have a proper job to do. Their job is to protect the community first. You have not even got the police on board with this. What sort of nonsense is this when you embark on a policy and you do not even get the law enforcement officers ready to go? This seems ridiculous. I just think we need to really be very careful about this. And as for this police training video – we are told it would leave an intoxicated female in a public area, placing females at risk – do you not support women, you people over there? I cannot understand this. You must be against women, because this is not fair on the female population. It really is not. I do not mean the male population, I mean the female population; we need to look after them.

As Ms Crozier says in the motion, there is a health crisis in Victoria and these laws will increase pressure on regional hospitals and move staff from struggling emergency rooms. Have you ever tried to get into an emergency room in a public hospital? I doubt you lot ever have. It is almost impossible. You wait for hours and hours and hours. Even trying to get into an emergency department in a private hospital in Melbourne, you wait for hours. So if you are going to end up with a whole lot of intoxicated individuals dumped in the emergency departments of public hospitals, we are going to have even more strife. We are going to have to have PSOs in hospitals to make sure that the patients needing urgent care are well looked after while we deal with the intoxicated individuals that have nowhere else to go except a public hospital. Really, the government needs to stop doing stuff by press release. Just think the thing through carefully. When you want to make a policy, just do not jump to conclusions and the best headline you think you can get. What was that, Mr Mulholland?

**Evan Mulholland:** No tender.

**Bev McARTHUR:** No tender. There is no accountability in this either, Mr Mulholland. Is that right? There is no accountability, no transparency, no proper thought process and no testing of the policy whatsoever. It is a disgrace, and I really think you should have another little think and support the motion.

**Lee TARLAMIS:** I move, by leave:

That debate on this motion be extended by up to 25 minutes.

**Motion agreed to.**

**Ryan BATCHELOR** (Southern Metropolitan) (16:47): I am pleased to speak in this debate on Ms Crozier's motion on public intoxication reform, and I want to begin just by reflecting and

contrasting the two prior contributions that we have had in the chamber. The first was from Ms Watt, who gave us a very thoughtful, experienced and heartfelt contribution not only about the exceptionally tragic circumstances that surrounded the death of Tanya Day in police custody, which was the subject of coronial recommendations, that specific case and Ms Watt's involvement with both Ms Day's family and also with the broader Aboriginal community and service system, but on the impact and implications of these policy reforms on the Aboriginal community as a whole and the disproportionate effect that the offence of public drunkenness has had on Aboriginal Victorians and why it is such an important piece of law reform that this government has taken to remove it from the statute book.

I contrast that with the quite extraordinary contribution we just witnessed from Mrs McArthur, who seemed to think that finally implementing the recommendations of a royal commission that were handed down in April 1991 is somehow policy on the run and that an issue which has been the subject of recommendations from a royal commission sitting before not just this government and the government before that but the government before that waiting to be implemented and, quite frankly, shamefully ignored on too many occasions by governments of all political persuasions – to address some of the issues that were raised by Dr Bach – is policy on the run. It is an issue which a royal commission for years in the making, a royal commission that started in 1987, made a recommendation on in 1991, and on 1 November 2023 Victoria will finally be implementing its recommendation. That is the last thing that can be described as policy on the run. It is absolutely a vital, long-overdue piece of law reform, because what this law reform tells us at its fundamental core is that people who are simply intoxicated in public need support and not punishment. What they need and what we are doing by the decriminalisation of public intoxication and changing our response from a criminal model, a punishment model, to a public health model is to make sure that those who need support can get it and that those who are vulnerable and do not need to be locked up are not. That is the fundamental reason why this is such an important piece of legislation.

It is true and it is undeniable – and we have been told since April 1991 again and again and again, most recently by the Victorian coroner in the coronial inquest into the death of Tanya Day – that this offence needs to go from our statute books because it disproportionately affects First Nations people, that the Aboriginal community is disproportionately affected by the offence of public drunkenness being on our statute books. This is what the coroner said, and this is a direct quote:

Ms Day's death was clearly preventable had she not been arrested and taken into custody.

And:

... there was no justification for the offence of public drunkenness to remain ... some 30 years after the RCIADIC had recommended its abolition.

What we can see there is the latest in a long line of inquiries that have told us that the right response to public drunkenness, the right response to public intoxication, is not one where incarceration is the first response but one where a health response is the way we need to go, and that is exactly what we are doing. It is not on the run; 'long overdue' is how we would describe this reform.

What we cannot have is more people put in the circumstances that Tanya Day and others before her have been in. I do not think any of us can have on our conscience, knowing what we know, that we have supported a law to remain on the statute books that allows this to continue. We know the law needs to change, and we are changing it. We know the service response needs to change, and we are investing in the changes that need to be made to enable that to occur. That is why the last budget provided over \$84 million for a health-based response to public intoxication, including funding for service responses to ensure that mechanisms are put in place in an outreach setting – that it is not just the first centre that has opened in Collingwood, as those opposite would like to suggest, but that the best response is a community-based public outreach model that is able to respond as required in the community so that when people are intoxicated and clearly need support, it connects them to that very support.

Far from the caricature of the circumstances that we hear repeatedly from those opposite, the actual substance of what is being done here by people who care and are working on the ground in the communities across our state, not just in one part of it, enables the sort of response that these individuals need. That is not to be taken to a jail cell; that is to be taken to a support service or provided with the appropriate sorts of supports in another safe place. It could be a private residence; it could be some other facility. What we have got under the response that this model is providing is clearly that people who may have complex needs will get provided with a sophisticated service response that is not just the one that we have seen feature in the past that has led to such tragic consequences.

We obviously do have the first sobering-up centre, which is the 20-bed facility in Collingwood, a dedicated space to help people who are intoxicated recover. It follows on from trials of similar types of services in similar locations, which saw no reports of localised complaints or reports of disruption. We think that an appropriate health-led model will be the most appropriate response to get people from where they are in public to a safe space and also to connect them with the sorts of workers that they might need. But it is not just the immediate response that matters here, it is actually the follow-up services, whether they be services from alcohol and other drug workers or services connecting our First Nations people with their Aboriginal community controlled health services provider and with culturally appropriate services, that might assist people in their recovery instead of further punishing them in our system. There will be trained staff and outreach services providing a holistic response that gets to what is required, not the sort of blunt response that has been provided and shown to fail on so many occasions.

We cannot forget why we are here. That is because people die. Tanya Day was the latest in this long line of people, largely Aboriginal people, who have died in custody as a result of being put behind bars for public drunkenness. We cannot let it continue. We cannot delay any more.

**Michael GALEA** (South-Eastern Metropolitan) (16:57): I also rise to speak on this reckless, irresponsible, typical motion today. I would like to acknowledge the other speakers we have had from this side, including Mr Berger, Ms Ermacora and of course Ms Watt, and that very powerful speech by Mr Batchelor. I note that in 1991 I actually was not born yet, so for us to be acting on this now I would say is timely, but perhaps the words – as you said, Mr Batchelor – are ‘well overdue’. This is not a rushed thing. This is very, very overdue.

There is probably not much that I can say that goes to the issue as well as others already have, but we are here debating this motion today. There are many other things that we could be debating. I understand that the Maroondah Hospital motion has been delayed for another day. I am sure we will all look forward to that. We wish Mr McGowan full health and a quick recovery. But this is a very serious matter. This is life and death, and it has been death for far too many Victorians. Far too often that has been Indigenous, Aboriginal Victorians, who have suffered disproportionately as a result of the existing laws that we have.

The existing laws in Victoria have made being drunk in a public place a criminal offence. I would challenge any of my colleagues in this chamber to reflect back perhaps on their 20s, or perhaps not so long ago, to a time when they themselves may have been worse for wear in public. I wonder if any of them when that happened ever really thought ‘I’m actually in danger of being sent into a cell’ because they were out on Flinders Street or at St Kilda Beach and having a few drinks or out at the country races – wherever it might be. I do not think any of us have had the experience of thinking ‘I’m a bit worse for wear here. I’m in genuine danger.’

**Bev McArthur** interjected.

**Michael GALEA**: I do not think any of us have felt that. I do not think you have, Mrs McArthur. I certainly have not felt that, but many Indigenous Victorians do feel that, and it is a discriminatory and disproportionate law. Whether that was the intention of the original drafting or not, it is the fact of

it, and we have to face the reality of the situation. That is what those laws did, and that is why we are changing them.

People who are intoxicated and at risk and in a vulnerable place out in public need our support, not punishment. This government, the Andrews–Allan government, in 2019 acknowledged that this reform was, as I say, long, long overdue and committed to decriminalising public intoxication and replacing the current criminal justice response with a health-led approach.

Until this government introduced legislation to abolish these offences in 2020, in the term of the previous Parliament, Victoria was one of only two states that had yet to act on this crucial recommendation, with Aboriginal Victorians still disproportionately affected. In December last year a health-led model was confirmed to be the Victorian government's approach to tackling this issue. This year's state budget, the 2023–24 budget, allocates \$88.3 million over three years for the statewide rollout of the health-based response to public intoxication, including dedicated services for Aboriginal Victorians.

Much has been made of Collingwood. It is disappointing to hear that word, just from the trauma of the weekend for those of us who do not barrack for that particular football team. But Collingwood is one part of the solution; it is not the entire solution that we are proposing. There is a statewide approach. Those opposite may choose to ignore that. I normally love the debate about the tram tracks; I really do, especially as my electorate does not have any of them. Collingwood is a really important initiative, but it is not the only one. There are many, many others that are a part of this as well.

**Bev McArthur:** Where are they? Name them.

**Michael GALEA:** Read the budget papers, Mrs McArthur; \$88.3 million –

**Georgie Crozier** interjected.

**Michael GALEA:** Here we go. This is your own motion, and now you are going off on all sorts of other tangents.

*Members interjecting.*

**Michael GALEA:** The Commonwealth Games now, is it? We had a building discussion in the climate change motion earlier today, and now we have Commonwealth Games in public drunkenness. Goodness me. What are you going to bring up next? Perhaps not Maroondah Hospital today as we were hoping and expecting.

**Georgie Crozier:** I was dying to bring it up.

**Michael GALEA:** I was dying to speak on it. I was the first speaker on our side, so you and I are both upset. I am sure Nick is very happy, though, Ms Crozier. But we are talking about a very serious matter here.

The Justice Legislation Amendment Bill 2023 that we passed yesterday in this chamber also picked up some of the recommendations following the Tanya Day inquest. It was very good to receive support from across the chamber for those measures. Abolishing the offence of public drunkenness was another key recommendation of that inquest. That law that played an undeniable role in the death in custody of a Yorta Yorta, Wemba Wemba and Barapa Barapa woman, Aunty Tanya Day. The Allan Labor government is committed to decriminalising public intoxication and implementing a public health model to ensure that those intoxicated in public can access the health care and the support that they need.

The coroner's findings state:

Ms Day's death was ... preventable had she not been arrested and taken into custody.

And:

... there was no justification for the offence of public drunkenness to remain in the *Summary Offences Act 1966* some 30 years after the RCIADIC had recommended its abolition.

As Mr Batchelor said, that is now 32 years ago. Her death was a tragedy and a systematic failure that needs to be addressed. We must abolish this offence, as has been legislated, prioritising a health-focused response.

Ms Watt talked in very moving detail about that last day that Ms Tanya Day had, that last train trip that she did not know would be her last train trip. I will not talk through that again, because I do not think I can give it the same justice Ms Watt did, but it is a fact that we saw the discrimination in this law have a most awful, awful consequence on that day back in 2017. Ms Day's uncle, as others have also said in this chamber, Mr Harrison Day, had also died in custody in 1982 from an epileptic fit in an Echuca police cell after being arrested for a \$10 unpaid fine for public drunkenness. Separated by 35 years, these two deaths in the same family, in such similar circumstances, are absolute tragedies that should have been avoided. We cannot have another person die in custody over something that should not even be considered criminal. This is what we have heard loudly and clearly from the Aboriginal community in this state. It is right, and it is right that we fix it. This evidence implores us to act and decriminalise public intoxication. In doing so we acknowledge the past failures of all governments in this state and acknowledge the progress towards future better health outcomes for all Victorians, including – not excluding – our First Nations communities.

As I said, there was significant funding in this year's state budget for a robust, health-led response to public intoxication, including –

**Bev McArthur:** Well, put it in place first.

**Michael GALEA:** It's in this year's budget, Mrs McArthur – more than \$78 million to deliver the dedicated public intoxication service response to ensure that the right supports are in place when this legislation comes into effect in November and many other things that I would love to talk through. However, my time is limited, so I will reiterate that this is a very significant, overdue and thoroughly practical, thoroughly appropriate change in our legislation come 1 November. It is disappointing to see this motion being put and framed in the way it has been today, and for the reasons I have described, I do not support this motion and do not commend it to the house.

**Jeff BOURMAN** (Eastern Victoria) (17:07): I will make my contribution quick. Public drunkenness is one of those things that, when I first joined the police force all those years ago, was explained to me as being created as an offence because they had no other way of getting people to safety. Now, that was a long time ago, and for sure the time has come to fix that. But my problem with the whole thing, and I think I am re-covering what I was saying at the time, is there is no safety net there. There is one place in Collingwood at the moment – there will be more, I know that – but when it is 3 am and you are driving down the road and you have got the drunken guy walking home from the pub and he is wandering all over the place, there is nowhere to take them at the moment unless you are close to Collingwood. They will just have to be left. I think that is the problem with where this is going. It is not a problem that we are getting rid of drunkenness as an offence. For many reasons that have been outlined, it is definitely time for it to go, but I think just doing it before we have something else is going to create more problems than anticipated. I will leave it at that.

**Georgie CROZIER** (Southern Metropolitan) (17:08): Mr Bourman, who has experience in this area as a former policeman, understands exactly what police officers have to deal with all the time. I have just got off the phone from a GP in country Victoria who was telling me about the services that have been cut in the area where he works. He was saying that ambulances now have to be called to take patients an hour away to a hospital in Horsham, Wangaratta or Bendigo because this doctor, under this government, is unable to operate, and the urgent care centre has been shut down. When you have got doctors who need ambulances to transport patients and when you have got such strain on our health

services and the government is saying that public drunkenness now becomes a health issue and police do not have any powers to assist, we are just going to exacerbate the issue in health.

That is why it is an idiotic proposal, what this government has done – putting a sobering-up centre in Collingwood, for God’s sake, when this issue is right across the state. I think that is why this motion is important – so that people understand exactly those concerns. Of the very people who are going to be directly affected, Police Association Victoria, the alcohol and drug sector and the ambulance union have spoken out about it. They are speaking out about this policy direction by the government, and there are various members that have talked about various issues. It is not taking away from those issues, but this policy is not going to address the problem, it is just going to create more of a problem. I urge your members to support my motion.

**Council divided on motion:**

*Ayes (14):* Matthew Bach, Jeff Bourman, Gaelle Broad, Georgie Crozier, David Davis, Moira Deeming, Renee Heath, Ann-Marie Hermans, Wendy Lovell, Trung Luu, Bev McArthur, Joe McCracken, Evan Mulholland, Rikkie-Lee Tyrrell

*Noes (20):* Ryan Batchelor, John Berger, Lizzie Blandthorn, Katherine Copsey, Enver Erdogan, Michael Galea, Shaun Leane, David Limbrick, Sarah Mansfield, Tom McIntosh, Rachel Payne, Aiv Puglielli, Georgie Purcell, Samantha Ratnam, Harriet Shing, Ingrid Stitt, Jaclyn Symes, Lee Tarlamis, Gayle Tierney, Sheena Watt

**Motion negatived.**

*Statements on tabled papers and petitions*

**Department of Treasury and Finance**

*Budget papers 2023–24*

**Ryan BATCHELOR** (Southern Metropolitan) (17:16): I am very pleased to rise to speak on – have I got the table numbering right? I had just better check: is it 7330? This is the third of the budget papers – service delivery – tabled on 30 May 2023.

**A member:** Hear, hear.

**Ryan BATCHELOR:** I think it will be right. Hopefully it will be right. I do not want to get it wrong, President. I do not want to get it wrong.

**Harriet Shing:** There is a first time for everything, though.

**Ryan BATCHELOR:** Maybe. We will have to wait and see. It is very important. What these tabled papers demonstrate is that the health and wellbeing of Victorians is an absolute focus of this Labor government here in Victoria. Every Victorian has the right to access free and quality health care, and that is exactly what funding allocated in these documents demonstrates. What the documents also demonstrate is that we are taking steps to make sure that our healthcare system is open to all and, most importantly, that everyone can get the help that they need quickly and when they need it.

One of the things that these papers demonstrate is that what this government is doing is bringing into focus the important issue of women’s health and is investing quite considerably in women’s health. It is also doing a range of other things, which I will come to across the contribution that I have to give today. The Victorian Labor government knows that for years women’s health has not been given the attention it needs and deserves in our community and in our health system. Conditions like period pain, fibroids and menopausal symptoms will affect around 80 per cent of women in their lifetimes. An estimated 200,000 women in Victoria alone suffer from endometriosis, with an average time of seven years to diagnosis. Women are more likely to be diagnosed with rheumatoid arthritis, osteoporosis and Alzheimer’s disease than men, and these are the sorts of statistics which must prompt

action in our health system, and what this government demonstrates is that we are taking it. We are investing \$153 million to completely change how women's health issues are treated here in Victoria.

I am particularly excited by this because at the Alfred hospital in Southern Metropolitan Region we are building a new women's health clinic, which will serve as a one-stop shop for women needing treatment and advice on issues from contraception to pelvic pain. We are also giving pharmacists the ability to prescribe the contraceptive pill, commonly used as a contraceptive but also applicable to treating a range of other health issues. Giving pharmacists the ability to issue those prescriptions will make that more accessible, more convenient and improve the operation of our health system for women, but we are obviously not stopping there.

We know that, for too many, being able to access the sort of urgent but not emergency care that they require is considerably important – things like infections, fractures and burns that need immediate treatment. So we are investing more than \$70 million to deliver free primary care clinics across the state, and there is one in Southern Metropolitan in Prahran right across the road from the Alfred hospital. These centres are providing local health services for patients who might not be able to wait and see their regular general practitioner. Taking both walk-ins and bookings, these clinics have doctors and nurses onsite to treat mild injuries and illnesses, having access to diagnostic services like pathology and medical imaging. And we know from patients who have been using these facilities since they have been open that they really appreciate being able to walk in and see a doctor with a short wait time for minor bumps and scrapes, and very importantly, this is freeing up space in our emergency departments for people who require serious emergency care, because this Labor government believes that if you are sick, you have got to be able to get care fast.

That is the principle we are also seeking to extend to those suffering from mental injury or psychological distress, and the budget does considerable work in allocating funding to plans for mental health and wellbeing clinics across the state, including one planned as part of Alfred Health in the Southern Metropolitan Region, because no-one should have to suffer in silence while they wait to see a GP or put off the getting of care when they need it because of the cost of that treatment. These mental health and wellbeing locals will act as a front door to the mental health system targeted at people over the age of 26, creating inclusive and welcoming spaces, and importantly, people will not need a referral to visit. These are a range of ways in which this government is supporting the health care of the Victorian community to make sure that everyone and all Victorians have access to quality, affordable health care when and where they need it.

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

#### *Budget papers 2023–24*

**Wendy LOVELL** (Northern Victoria) (17:22): I rise to speak on the state budget, which raises the budget for Goulburn–Murray Water, the authority responsible for managing water storages in the north of the state. I particularly want to talk about Lake Eildon and particularly want to talk about a question that was asked in question time today of the minister about the inflows and the releases from Lake Eildon and the warnings, or lack of warnings, that are being given to locals. Mr Davis asked this question out of genuine interest in the matter and certainly in the genuine interest of my constituents in the north of the state who are at the mercy of Goulburn–Murray Water and their releases from Lake Eildon. If you are right near the dam wall, you get very little notice that you are about to be flooded. We have been hearing this constantly from people close to storages during the flood inquiry.

What we have seen this week is apparently 108 millimetres of rainfall in one day at Lake Eildon, which is the highest rainfall since – I think it is the highest rainfall on record, actually. I am just trying to look for the information I had on that rainfall, but it is certainly very high. The previous record was around about 68 millimetres, I think, in previous years. During question time the minister was very unhelpful in providing any sort of answer on this issue to Mr Davis.

At 11:45 this morning an employee from Goulburn–Murray Water told some of our local residents that releases from the lake will increase from 4500 megalitres per day immediately, ramping up to about 10,000 megalitres per day from this afternoon – and that is on top of the tributary flows – and that releases into the Goulburn tomorrow would increase to 20,000 megalitres per day, but they were unable to tell a definite time that these increases will start. Now, this is very important if you are close to the dam wall, because the water is going to be in your paddocks very, very soon. The employee also said that there may be further increases above the 20,000 megalitres per day in following days, depending on inflows. This is not good enough. Goulburn–Murray Water then started telling a few people this story and said, ‘Oh, spread the word amongst your neighbours.’ There needs to be far better warning for people about the releases from the water storages. There needs to be adequate warning given to people, because it places people’s families and their stock at risk if they are not given adequate warning.

It is not good enough for the minister to just wipe her hands and very smugly sort of wipe the issue away during question time. This is a very serious business. The minister needs to realise that what she is managing is a very, very serious situation for people who are close to the source of the water and indeed for people who are downstream of the water. I know that people in my area watch the Goulburn–Murray Water website daily to see what the levels of the storages are. I know that people in Rochester watch the Goulburn–Murray Water website daily to monitor the storage levels at Lake Eppalock. People are afraid. It is only less than 12 months since we were all flooded out last year, and there are many people who are still afraid. There needs to be far better and far more adequate warning systems provided by this government to people who are at risk of being flooded.

I have just found those rainfalls: apparently yesterday 108 millimetres of rain fell on the Eildon township. The previous highest single day of Eildon rain in an October was just 65.8 millimetres on 21 October 1953. So this is the highest day on record since records began, and people are very nervous. The minister needs to take this far more seriously and make sure those warnings are given, and she should be thoroughly briefed. She should have known those inflows and the releases from Eildon when the question was asked in question time today.

### **Yoorrook Justice Commission**

#### *Yoorrook for Justice: Report into Victoria’s Child Protection and Criminal Justice Systems*

**Samantha RATNAM** (Northern Metropolitan) (17:27): I rise to speak on behalf of the Victorian Greens on what I believe to be one of the most important reports tabled not only during this Parliament but in the entire history of the state of Victoria, and that is the *Yoorrook for Justice: Report into Victoria’s Child Protection and Criminal Justice Systems*, tabled last month. The Yoorrook Justice Commission is the first formal truth-telling process on both past and ongoing injustices experienced by First Peoples in Victoria in all areas of life since colonisation.

This is Yoorrook’s second interim report, looking this time specifically at the child protection and criminal justice systems, which have long been associated with the most egregious systemic injustice against First Peoples. The final report is a credit to all those who were part of this process – the hard work of the Yoorrook commissioners, staff and counsel and all those who gave evidence through submissions, round tables and the hearings. I recognise that this included members of this government – the Attorney-General; the Minister for Police; the Minister for Corrections, Minister for Youth Justice and Minister for Victim Support; and the then Minister for Child Protection and Family Services – along with senior departmental employees and the Chief Commissioner of Victoria Police. I want to further recognise the respect, honesty and sincerity of the evidence presented by those from the government, even when it was damning to the government. Is there any better illustration of why this commission was so important – providing a forum where those in positions of leadership felt they were finally obliged to publicly acknowledge such important but uncomfortable truths.

But most importantly I wish to acknowledge the contributions of First Peoples who shared their lived experiences in the child protection and criminal justice systems. These were deeply personal stories of

those who experienced racism and at times brutality in child protection or prisons – and, too frequently, both of these systems. Indeed, among the most harrowing of stories were those involving children whose life paths tragically moved inexorably from the child protection system into the juvenile and then adult justice systems, effectively from the moment of their birth, due to racism, discriminatory laws and policy failures that have evolved from colonial times to this day. I recognise their courage in sharing these stories. Moreover, I hope that they now feel a sense of ownership and pride that it was through their stories that not only was this report able to publish the truth but this truth will I hope serve as the catalyst for change for those in government and indeed this Parliament to finally work to end the discrimination and injustices that were experienced.

The report makes 46 recommendations, the general theme of which is self-determination for First Peoples in Victoria – that is, granting First Peoples genuine decision-making power, authority, control and resources in the child protection and criminal justice systems. The report also made specific, urgent recommendations for legislative reform – the work of us in this Parliament – which we can start actioning as soon as tomorrow, because one recommendation calls for changes to bail laws that go beyond the current government bill.

Here I note the words of the chair of the commission and proud Wergaia/Wamba Wamba elder Professor Eleanor Bourke AM, who spoke to Victoria’s politicians when she said that ‘words were important but the real test is the actions they take now’. The Victorian Greens accept the call to action. We pledge to immediately work to support implementing the recommendations of Yoorrook in this Parliament and in all future parliaments and pushing governments to do so, whether it be further amendments to the Bail Act 1977, the creation of a new, independent police oversight body, raising the minimum age of criminal responsibility to 14 years without exceptions or strengthening cultural considerations in child protection laws.

And we strongly condemn those reactionaries rejecting progress and a more positive future for First Peoples for their own political ends. Sadly, just today we have seen this from some in this chamber seeking to exploit fear to stifle even the most overdue of changes in repealing public drunkenness laws. I say to you now, it is no longer the time for persevering with the failures of the past to deny the truth so clearly stated before us. It is finally time for change, finally time for action – not more delays – finally time for positive and progressive politics based on truth, not fear, and most of all it is finally time for implementing policies and laws that actually work for Victorian First Peoples. Let us all recognise the truth in this report and now work towards achieving it.

### **Deakin University**

#### *Report 2021*

**John BERGER** (Southern Metropolitan) (17:32): Tonight I rise to speak about the 2021 annual report of Deakin University. Situated in Burwood in Melbourne’s east, Deakin University is an example of what makes Victoria the Education State. Since opening in 1974 Deakin has been making an impact on university students across its Melbourne and Geelong campuses. It represents opportunity and upward mobility. In fact 34.7 per cent of Deakin students in the 2021–22 period were the first in their family to attend university. Beyond enrolment, Deakin is also outstanding in the research department. Deakin offers its students a world-class education right in the heart of Melbourne’s east and out in Geelong. For many in the community of Southern Metro it is their first choice of uni to attend, and for a good reason, but Deakin Uni also has a massive and diverse population. Their student body has students hailing from 134 different countries across the world, and they have also increased their intake of international students, with over 11,000 students from overseas. We know that education is one of Victoria’s great export industries, and it is institutions like Deakin that make it so.

I am also proud of the work Deakin does for its students in regional and remote communities. Where you are from or how much money your parents make should not be a barrier to higher education – Labor gets that. We know that it can also be vital in getting that dream job, which is why it is fantastic

that nine out of 10 Deakin alumni find full-time employment within three years of graduating. Deakin offers courses and experiences for students who are motivated to get out into the workforce, and it is paying off. For the past 12 years Deakin has had the recognition of having the most satisfied undergrads and the most satisfied postgrads in the past two years.

Aside from offering strong education opportunities and a positive student life, Deakin University is a strong research uni. It has increased its research income consistently since 2015, with an increase in research contracts, tenders and grants further boosting the calibre of research across its campuses. This includes a 5 per cent boost in research income in 2021. That means more opportunities for research and scholarships, like an extra 400 scholarships for prospective PhD students. Their researchers are in hot demand, working on government, industry and community research projects like Deakin's safe future mobility research lab, which is partnering with New South Wales on roadworks safety and transport, or Deakin's blue carbon lab, which is pioneering work on saving our Great Barrier Reef. Its industry partnerships are going from strength to strength. Thanks to the Allan Labor government, we have invested \$10 million into an advanced manufacturing hub in Geelong. Deakin is also doing its part to battle carbon emissions. Their carbon neutral 2025 strategy plan includes real action like an integrated water management plan and reimagined green spaces on campus.

In the year of the Voice they are making a concerted effort to improve equality, opportunities and the treatment of Indigenous Australians. This is managed by the *Deakin Indigenous Strategy 2023–2028*, presided over by the new position of pro-vice-chancellor in Indigenous strategy and innovation. I congratulate Professor Rose on his appointment to this space.

Although it is a young uni, it is already punching above its weight, offering the number-one-ranked sport science course in the world, and it is ranked in the top 50 young universities in the world.

As a husband, father, brother and son of a nurse, I know how important nurses are for our community now and into the future as our population ages. In fact my wife Vanessa was a nurse-educator at the Geelong university campus for some years. Her commitment is a testament to the university. It has been the highlight of her 27 years as a nurse to teach nursing students. It is people like my wife Vanessa who have benefited from the government's \$2 million investment in 2021 to the nursing and midwifery simulation centre at the Burwood campus. With the 20th-ranked nursing course in the world, Deakin is an asset to our state as we invest in the workforce of the future.

There were over 450,000 enrolments in higher education institutes in Victoria in 2021, and our government's support for universities was vital during the COVID-19 pandemic. The Andrews government established the Victoria Higher Education State Investment Fund of \$350 million to support Victorian unis, and it was vital in keeping the lights on. It helped fund over 50 capital works projects, applied research and research infrastructure projects and Victoria's uni research via \$265 million in payroll tax support through deferrals. These investments are crucial in ensuring unis like Deakin remain global leaders and remain viable to educating our next generation. I am excited to visit with the local member the member for Ashwood in the other place Matt Fregon, which will be a fantastic opportunity to thank staff and to hear from students about what support they need. I commend this report to the floor.

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

#### *Budget papers 2023–24*

**David DAVIS** (Southern Metropolitan) (17:37): Today in the reports section I want – as you would expect of someone with a new portfolio – to reflect on the budget papers, what they show and what they do not show with respect to the energy portfolio. It is interesting to look at the objectives in the energy portfolio – reliable, sustainable, affordable energy services and so forth, and a long list of items. But when we look the actual output measures, this is not actually what they report. They are all mainly input measures, and some of them are worthy points. I do not diminish the fact that they should be there, and they can actually make a contribution. But there is nothing about the actual price paid by

consumers, nothing about the price paid by businesses and nothing about the quality and reliability of supply and the lack of interruption: 100 per cent reliable supply would be a reasonable target, I would have thought – or a very high number – and a reduction in energy costs would be a reasonable target. That is actually not what is occurring.

There are some programs that the government has got which are perfectly reasonable programs which provide some assistance, you would presume, but the government has not laid out for itself to be measured on the actual outcomes, the actual energy costs paid by households and the actual reliability of supply. I note also in the public accounts and estimates document that we got this week, the 2023–24 budget estimates, a similar set of points is made in a more obtuse way. I do not in any way criticise the Public Accounts and Estimates Committee, and this is a bipartisan report. It does make some recommendations, for instance, about the establishment of the SEC, the so-called re-establishment of the State Electricity Commission: \$44.5 million in the 2023–24 budget to the establishment of the SEC includes staffing, accommodation and other points, and these are obviously inputs. But it does go to key issues at 9.6:

The State Electricity Commission (SEC) portfolio is a newly created portfolio in 2023–24.

It has no reported responsibilities in the budget papers. Now, let us give some reasonable latitude here, but we would expect some actual reported outcome measures in the next budget. The recommendation says:

The Department ... clearly outline the responsibilities, related initiatives, outputs, objectives, objective indicators and performance measures of the State Electricity Commission portfolio in the 2024–25 Budget.

I do not think they are unreasonable requests by the committee. You have got this new body being established, there is \$1 billion supposedly available here and the community will want to see that their prices come down, they will want to see that their supply is secure and they will want to see that there is a better actual outcome for the community. It is important I think to look at this principal claim that:

According to the budget papers, the new SEC will 'accelerate investment in renewable energy in partnership with industry, deliver benefits to households through lower energy bills, and assist in meeting Victoria's renewable energy targets'.

These have got to be measured. These have got to be reported, they have got to be reported annually and they have got to be seen in the budget. And we want to see that there is an outcome there for the community. If the government is going to expend this public money, this taxpayers money, we want to see energy prices falling, not increasing the way they have been. The truth of matter is – and I will not lay out the full detail today – we all know that energy costs have been going up. Yes, we might have a website we can go to and get \$250 back, and that is great when you get the cheque from the taxpayer. But the point is that it does not actually lower the cost of energy. In fact energy costs have been going up, and there is a plug that comes in for \$250.

But energy costs have gone up far more than that for most families. I would ask people in this chamber to ask families about this, because families are doing it tough. They are really feeling it. Businesses are doing it tough. All of these changes have got to be measured. You have got to have outcomes, and they have got to be cheaper power for people as a critical step and indeed more reliable power. We have seen recent reports from the Australian Energy Market Operator and so forth which have pointed to the issues of reliability we will be facing in the summer. They are things that should be measured and reported on in the budget too. Reliable, safe, cheap power; renewable power; and power that does not actually pollute – all of those are objectives, but they are not being reported on sufficiently in this budget.

**Public Accounts and Estimates Committee***Report on the 2023–24 Budget Estimates*

**Michael GALEA** (South-Eastern Metropolitan) (17:42): I rise to speak today on the 2023–24 budget estimates report from the Public Accounts and Estimates Committee (PAEC), and I am very pleased to do so following a well-timed segue, perhaps an unplanned one, from Mr Davis.

**David Davis:** And note that some people do read it.

**Michael GALEA:** I had the pleasure of reading it, as you can well imagine, as a member of the committee, along with other members from this chamber, Mrs McArthur and the deputy chair Nick McGowan. I had the great pleasure of taking part in the estimates process this year along with my two colleagues from the Council and colleagues from the Assembly. I would like to particularly acknowledge the chair of the committee Sarah Connolly, the member for Laverton, who did an outstanding job in her first year chairing the PAEC estimates process. She did an outstanding job of shepherding us all through, along with other colleagues of course, including the member for Point Cook, the member for Yan Yean, the member for Melbourne, the member for Gippsland South and the member for Box Hill. We are very grateful to him especially as he has now stepped off the committee; I would like to congratulate him on his new role as a parliamentary secretary. He will be greatly missed on the committee.

Above all I would actually like to thank the committee staff, particularly Caroline Williams, the executive officer, and all of her officials who have worked tirelessly on this report. As members here will know, we have a wonderful privilege to shape, to probe and to investigate, but the bulk of the work on these reports is always done by those committee secretariat staff, so I would like to acknowledge their very hard work through this process.

This is an important part of our democratic system, estimates each year. We will have all sorts of comments and criticisms, but I think it is really important to note that this is a really robust process that we go through. There are obviously lots of factors and there are questionnaires and other things too, but the most prominent part of the estimates process is of course the hearings: 58 hours and 40 minutes I believe it was, Mrs McArthur, this year. You might correct me, but I think it was that long that we were in the room for with different departments, different portfolios and different ministers.

We often hear some criticism, sometimes from those opposite, saying that we should have a Senate-style system like they do in the federal Parliament for estimates, but I think it is a really good thing that in our system in Victoria every single minister gets compelled to attend, to be interviewed and to answer questions on their portfolios. In the Senate system you only get the ministers who are senators. To those members who do call for that, I would remind them that a feature of what we have is that all ministers, not just those in the Council, are compelled to attend.

There were a number of contributions on the report in the Assembly this morning. I only discovered this week that while we have the great privilege of being able to speak on all manner of reports that are tabled in this place, our poor colleagues in the Assembly only get to comment on committee reports. They have been waiting for this day so they could speak on the estimates report, and I appreciate their contributions, particularly those which referred to the member for Gippsland South as the father of PAEC, this being his ninth year on the committee. Congratulations to him. There was some debate as to whether he is the father or the grandfather of PAEC, and I am happy to align myself with those saying he is the father of PAEC.

We had robust discussion in those hearings. Some of the questioning from colleagues – I will not give Mr McGowan a hard time; he is not here today, so we will save that debate for another day. But it is something to be taken seriously. I also do very much appreciate the decorum of all members and the

general goodwill and respect of all members. It was certainly good to see no-one putting their feet on the table this year for one, a marked improvement.

In closing, I basically just want to acknowledge again, as I said, the work of the secretariat that went into this report. I would also like to note to members that the report is a really good resource, particularly for those of us who are newer members. Each department has a really good summary prepared by the secretariat, endorsed by the committee, which really gives a good breakdown of how each department operates, how it functions and how that has changed in the previous year. It is a good part of our process. I am happy to be speaking on the report today, and it is good to see full support for it from the committee members.

### *Adjournment*

**Lizzie BLANDTHORN** (Western Metropolitan – Minister for Children, Minister for Disability) (17:47): I move:

That the house do now adjourn.

### **Inclusive education**

**John BERGER** (Southern Metropolitan) (17:47): (473) My adjournment is for the Minister for Education in the other place, Minister Carroll, and I want to begin by congratulating Minister Carroll on his recent appointment as Deputy Premier and Minister for Education. I look forward to working with him to deliver for schools in my community of Southern Metro. Thank you also to the outgoing Minister for Education in the other place Minister Hutchins and her hardworking office for their support and guidance this year.

Investing in our education system is what good Labor governments are about. Education is something that this side of the chamber cares about deeply, and the Allan Labor government is committed to supporting all students and teachers. There are no better examples than in the electorate of Hawthorn, which I know deeply misses its former Labor member of Parliament, who is a former principal who understands the education sector and its needs. From Auburn kindergarten to Swinburne University, every school and kinder in Hawthorn is benefiting from the Allan Labor government's commitment to education. It is the responsibility of any fair government to ensure that the right to pursue an education is protected.

Victoria is the Education State, and the Allan Labor government has always been committed to funding that ideal. This budget was no exception. On the day the budget was delivered I was lucky enough to be at Camberwell Primary School to announce that planning is underway for the \$9.7 million that the Allan Labor government will deliver, and that is on top of several statewide programs we are rolling out – think of the tutor program, ensuring no student was left behind in the pandemic.

Schools in Hawthorn like the Rossbourne School and their staff members are benefiting from our support. They are benefiting from the support given by our government to ensure that they can deliver a quality education to all students no matter how complex their needs. It is part of a wider package of almost \$1.6 billion of investment in disability inclusion to ensure schools have the resources they need. As part of that, we are encouraging teachers to apply for the postgraduate course, the master of inclusive education, which is designed to provide teachers with the chance to upskill their knowledge; to motivate, challenge and include students with a disability; and to provide them with extra resources. That is why my adjournment is this: can the minister join me on a visit to Auburn High School in the suburb of Hawthorn East to see firsthand how students are benefiting from the programs supported by the Allan Labor government?

### **Rural and regional health**

**Georgie CROZIER** (Southern Metropolitan) (17:49): (474) My adjournment matter is for the attention of the Minister for Health, and it is in relation to rural and regional health services. As we

know, the health system in this state remains under enormous pressure. There are many, many issues that are affecting our health system. It is my understanding that health services are being challenged by the department and by the minister to provide some answers around reducing back-of-house staffing costs, and they have been given a week to come up with answers as to how they will actually achieve this. We know that in December there was a report from the department, a health services partnerships evaluation steering committee report, and in that report it spoke about legislative change, including the amalgamation of local health networks. So there is no doubt, despite the government saying that amalgamations are not occurring, that the pressure on these health services is such that they are going to be forced and squeezed and made to join with other health networks to ensure that they are still operating.

What that means for rural and regional communities is that the services will be diminished, and we have seen that through the amalgamation of the Horsham and Ballarat health services and the services that have been reduced in Horsham. You ask the member for Lowan, and she will tell you specific stories about what has occurred there and what locals are telling her – what doctors are telling Ms Kealy and me around those towns that have been affected and the lack of health services in those areas. This is a serious issue where health services are being further diminished, and communities across rural and regional Victoria are the ones that are losing out. This government has no regard for those areas. The action I seek from the minister is to provide an answer to the house on exactly how many jobs will be lost as a result of this directive given that health services are being asked to reduce back-of-house staff costs within the week.

#### **Sick pay guarantee**

**Aiv PUGLIELLI** (North-Eastern Metropolitan) (17:52): (475) My adjournment tonight is to the Minister for Employment, and it relates to the sick pay guarantee. The action I seek is that casual relief teachers are included in this scheme so they too can access sick pay when they take sick leave. My office has been contacted by a number of teachers who were very disappointed to hear that casual relief teachers have not been included in the second tranche of jobs covered by the guarantee. They were under the impression that they might be included in this round, and they were quite disheartened to hear that they were not. Just like all casual and contract staff, casual teachers have to face lost income when they are unwell, and given the nature of their work they are often exposed to illness and get sick as a consequence of their work. I have heard from a casual relief teacher who was only able to work six days in all of term 3 due to ill health and an injury. They are struggling to cover the costs of maintaining their home and utility bills, and they have had significant unexpected vet costs, so they are accessing food relief and relying on their dwindling savings to cover costs.

Another teacher has told me how they have worked in 19 primary schools this year and are constantly surrounded by a large number of sick kids. They caught the flu last term and they had to take a week off work. They said realistically they needed a second week off, but they could not afford to lose a second week of income and so instead pushed through and worked while exhausted and still recovering. Even taking the one week of sick leave meant \$2000 in lost income – no income for that week, but rent was still due, bills still needed to be paid and groceries bought. The sick leave guarantee would have provided welcome relief during this time. Schools are known for spreading infection, with children still developing skills in hygiene. Sick casual relief teachers should not have to choose between staying home to recover and a day's pay. Casual relief teachers should be eligible for the sick pay guarantee. There are of course some casual relief teachers who make the difficult decision to go to work for financial reasons when they probably should not. This can spread infections further and across schools. A sick pay guarantee would ensure that casual teachers did not have to make this decision. Minister, please expand the sick pay guarantee scheme to include casual relief teachers.

#### **Small business support**

**Michael GALEA** (South-Eastern Metropolitan) (17:54): (476) My adjournment this evening is for the Minister for Small Business, Minister Suleyman. The action I seek is an update on how much

support is being provided by the Small Business Bus program. Starting and growing a small business can be quite daunting, especially if you are just getting started or if it is your first business of the type or your first business in a field that you have previously not undertaken. The complexities of financial structures, tax law, labour, safety and other factors must be managed and considered.

The Small Business Bus is a practical way for the government to help small business owners get expert information and advice, all without leaving their local area. The bus is one aspect of the ongoing efforts of this Victorian government, the Allan Victorian government, to give small businesses access to the right tools that they need and the information that they need so that they can grow and prosper. The Small Business Bus comes fully equipped with expert advisers to provide general business assistance as well as financial and wellbeing support from trained experts. For the past few years the business bus has travelled across metropolitan Melbourne and regional Victoria, helping a myriad of local businesses.

I know that there are many, many fantastic established small businesses in my electorate of South-Eastern Metropolitan Region run by hardworking locals looking to ensure their businesses are thriving and in many cases looking to grow them and add to their local economies. That is why I am so pleased to hear that the Small Business Bus will be visiting Berwick next week, on Monday 9 October. It will be in the median strip car park opposite the post office at 17 High Street from 10 am to 4 pm, giving local businesses access to advisers and expert information. Anyone can visit the bus to pick up helpful information, and I encourage people who want a free 45-minute consultation to help them start or build their small business to book in advance and reserve themselves a spot. You can book a consultation by visiting the Small Business Bus page on the Business Victoria website. I hope many local business owners will drop into the bus on Monday and benefit from the expert advice that will be on hand. To reiterate, the action that I am seeking is an update on how much support is being provided by this Small Business Bus program.

### Taxation

**Renee HEATH** (Eastern Victoria) (17:57): (477) My adjournment is for the Treasurer, and the action that I seek is that he immediately drop this ridiculous tax on Airbnbs, holidays and tourism. Victorians are being crushed by Labor's ever-increasing taxes. They cannot catch a break, and it seems that under Labor they will literally have to pay more for one now. Labor have now introduced over 50 new and increased taxes since coming into government, and by the looks of it, they will not be stopping anytime soon. Once again Labor are pioneering a new path with a nation-first tax. This time it is a tax and groundbreaking progress that nobody has asked for. New taxes are predicted to add around \$100 in costs for those looking to have a getaway. The Victorian Chamber of Commerce and Industry CEO has called this a tourism killer. Killing tourism is not what Victoria needs, and making life harder for small businesses is not what Victoria needs. The eastern region is home to the best holiday spots in the country, and they will suffer as a result of this. Small business is the backbone of our economy, and it is small businesses that this tax will impact. It will make Victoria a less attractive place to come to and stay and more expensive as a tourism destination, and I ask that this tax be repealed.

### Cohuna child care

**Rikkie-Lee TYRRELL** (Northern Victoria) (17:58): (478) My adjournment matter today is for the minister for early education. After spending time in the Gannawarra Shire Council region last month, my attention was directed to a local concern that has the potential to impede parents' ability to participate in the area's enormous projected growth. The Cohuna township within the Gannawarra Shire Council has an education, health, industry and business centre. It has a high employment rate and had a growth rate of 17 per cent for children aged between zero and 11 years of age from 2016 to 2022. The community is in dire need of new pre-prep, childcare and kindergarten facilities to accommodate these children. Earlier this year the council undertook a feasibility study which highlighted the need for improved infrastructure to support kindergarten and long day care within

Cohuna. The current data being utilised by the Department of Education to make assessments focuses on Gannawarra as a whole and on Kerang as the largest township rather than Cohuna specifically. Currently only 15 hours weekly of kindergarten can be provided for the community, as there is no centre-based child care. I request that the minister re-evaluate the current council data in order to make a funding commitment for this desperately needed infrastructure upgrade.

### Teachers

**Matthew BACH** (North-Eastern Metropolitan) (18:00): (479) My adjournment matter tonight is for the Minister for Education, and praise God that we have a new one. Just yesterday I tabled a petition in this place regarding the former minister's plans to sack 117 specialist teachers for children with oftentimes significant disabilities and on other occasions with life-threatening illnesses. In the period between the commencement of that petition and the tabling of the petition yesterday, members of this place will be aware of course that the minister did back down. She did another spectacular backflip.

**Bev McArthur:** She could go to the Olympics, that girl.

**Matthew BACH:** She pledged that her new schools tax would hit schools, all of which she called high-fee private schools, with fees of \$15,000 and under, but she did a significant backflip there. Mrs McArthur is right: she could perform at the Olympics at this rate.

When it comes to the so-called visiting teacher program, the minister also backed down, and that is an excellent thing. But I am worried about the parents whom I met with at that point in time. The minister had not bothered to meet with them before announcing this new tax. It is a Labor theme, isn't it? You go out and you announce a poorly calibrated new tax without talking to anybody. She had not spoken to any schools – not one. Mrs McArthur knows this full well because she discovered this information at the Public Accounts and Estimates Committee. She asked the minister, 'Who had you consulted?' I was watching. There was an extraordinary pause of about 30 seconds, and the minister said she spoke to some schools at a dinner. Well, I was at that dinner; it was a jolly nice dinner over the road at the Park Hyatt. Then Mrs McArthur asked, 'Well, which ones?' The minister could not name a single school, because she had not spoken to one.

The same was the case when it came to her decision to sack 117 critical specialist teachers for children with disabilities right across our state. She had not bothered to speak to a single one of these important teachers or a single parent of a child with a disability who had benefited, manifestly benefited, from this important program. But what I heard when I consulted with these parents was a real worry that despite our pleasure – our great pleasure, our glee – that the minister had backed down, these jobs had been saved and these children with disabilities would continue to get this service, there is no guarantee from the government they will not come after more frontline teachers. In the other place it was put to the former Minister for Education, recently sacked, that she should guarantee that no frontline teachers will be sacked as a result of the government's efforts to introduce some savings measures. Now, if the government would like some help from those of us on this side of the house, we will help. I do not doubt that there is very significant waste in the Department of Education that you could cut, but never frontline teachers and certainly not teachers for children with disabilities. The action that I seek from the new minister is the guarantee the previous minister could not give us that there will be no sackings of frontline teachers.

### Frankston health services

**David LIMBRICK** (South-Eastern Metropolitan) (18:03): (480) My adjournment matter today is for the attention of the Minister for Mental Health. In my time as an elected member of this Parliament I have had several opportunities to meet with stakeholders in the alcohol and drug sector. One thing that has been consistently raised with me for over four years now is the problems and the fragility of Victoria's pharmacotherapy scheme. For people with serious opioid addiction issues it is often stabilisation on methadone, suboxone or buprenorphine that allows them to recover and improve their health and quality of life. These pharmacotherapy drugs, often in combination with other support, can

represent the beginning of a journey where people overcome the challenges that led to their substance use issues and shift their lives in a positive direction. In meetings with former CEO of the Victorian Alcohol and Drug Association Sam Biondo and the CEO of Harm Reduction Victoria Sione Crawford they both highlighted that we should probably have 5000 more people on pharmacotherapy here in Victoria. They have also highlighted that the majority of people on pharmacotherapy gain access through a handful of doctors well past their retirement age who prescribe to hundreds of people.

This brings me to the current public health crisis developing in Frankston. For several months the director of the Frankston Healthcare medical centre, which manages nearly 2000 pharmacotherapy patients, has been in discussion with the Department of Health to try and ensure continuity of care for their patients while their chief prescribing doctor took planned leave. There was apparently a breakdown in the negotiations, which led to the clinic closing its doors just over a week ago. It took just one day for a robbery to occur at the co-located pharmacy. They did not steal cash or anything else, they stole pharmacotherapy medication, the drugs that they normally were prescribed.

With the serious risk of people relapsing, returning to heroin use and possibly crime to fund it, an urgent solution is needed. The government have stated that they have set up a telehealth service – as though some of the homeless patients can access telehealth – and apparently part of the solution proposed is to set up a pop-up clinic for local patients and to refer other patients to alternative services. This fundamentally misunderstands the issues both with the pharmacotherapy system and with Frankston. There are not other services available; that is why they were accessing the Frankston service in the first place. Another part of the proposed government solution is to refer people to Harm Reduction Victoria's pharmacotherapy support line. The staff there do a good job assisting people to get access to services and resolving issues, but there is absolutely no way they can adequately deal with such a large influx of people needing support. My request of the minister is to meet with Nadia Siciliano, director of the Frankston Healthcare clinic, and find a way to urgently resolve this crisis.

### **Western Victoria Region roads**

**Bev McARTHUR** (Western Victoria) (18:06): (481) My adjournment matter is for the Minister for Roads and Road Safety and concerns the ever-growing extensive list of dangerous roads in Victoria – Western Victoria in particular. Given the minister to date has failed to address the serious deterioration and unsafe conditions around roads, I thought I would give her a list of the top 10 worst roads in Western Victoria: (1) Coleraine-Edenhope Road, particularly closer to Coleraine; (2) Glenelg Highway between Coleraine and Casterton – this section is one of the most dangerous areas to drive on; (3) the Glenelg Highway east of Glenthompson – the Labor government promised it would be rebuilt in 2018, and we are still waiting five years on; (4) the Maroona-Glenthompson Road, with particular consideration of the area between Willaura and Glenthompson; (5) Mackinnons Bridge Road as you turn off the Princes Highway near Camperdown; (6) the Princes Highway between Warrnambool and Port Fairy; (7) the Princes Highway between Portland and Heywood; (8) the Henty Highway between Hamilton and Branxholme; (9) the Henty Highway between Cavendish and Hamilton; and (10) the Woolsthorpe-Heywood Road between Heywood and Hawkesdale – and that is just 10 roads in one part of Western Victoria Region that are in a terrible state. By all means the list does not cover all roads that need repairing and actually rebuilding – there are many more.

I am grateful to Jason Bendeich and his son Sam, who came to Parliament house on Monday to talk about this issue and who regularly keep my office up to date with the latest shocking roads to add to the ever-growing list. I recently mentioned the Darlington Road – let us add that as number 11 – and how the government has reduced the speed limit to 80 kilometres an hour over several kilometres to compensate for the mammoth amount of potholes that would wreck cars if they travelled at the usual speed. The government's solution to rotten roads in my electorate is simply to lower the speed limit on our country byways and highways rather than properly fixing the problem. I have no doubt we will be forced to drive at 40 kilometres an hour on our country roads soon.

Instead of the Victorian government haphazardly patching parts of roads only to be washed away as soon as there is a bit of rain – forget about global warming – they must act competently and diligently to make our roads safe and capable of carrying roadworthy vehicles. The shoulders of roads must be properly built, roadside vegetation responsibly cleared and proper drainage maintained. How else will those inside the tram tracks receive the fresh produce to keep them fed while delivery trucks drive at delayed speeds without blowing a tyre? There are hundreds of kilometres of roads in Western Victoria that are in need of repair or rebuilding, so the action I seek from the minister is to urgently commit to these top 10 – now 11 – worst roads in Western Victoria.

### **Crime prevention**

**Trung LUU** (Western Metropolitan) (18:09): (482) My adjournment is for the Minister for Police and Minister for Crime Prevention. I rise to bring attention to the recent increase in violent crime and shootings in Victoria, particularly affecting Melbourne's west. According to the Chief Commissioner of Police Shane Patton, in the past year there has been a rise in non-fatal shootings across Victoria. The action I seek is for the minister to provide details of how the Allan government plans to keep the community safe and address the rise in shootings that has occurred in Victoria in the past years.

Just in recent weeks our community has faced two fatal shootings, causing significant concern among residents. The shooting in September showed us a man with underworld connections shot dead at a local cafe in Keilor while members of the public were nearby. On the 14th there was a drive-by shooting in a quiet suburban home in Craigieburn, leaving a man and woman distressed and fearful for their lives. These shocking events came only a few days after the horrifying violence in Bourke Street, where a car was driven into pedestrians, killing one man and injuring five more. While I wish these were isolated incidents, unfortunately these shocking acts of violence have been part of a growing trend in Victoria. Residents in Melbourne's west want nothing more than to be safe from crime in their own homes and within their local communities. So, Minister, my concern is for the safety of my residents and my constituents. The safety and welfare of my citizens is the main concern for me. I ask the minister to provide details of how the government plans to keep the community safe and address the rise in shootings that has occurred in Victoria in the past year.

### **Barmah strategic action plan**

**Wendy LOVELL** (Northern Victoria) (18:11): (483) My adjournment matter is directed to the Minister for Environment, and it concerns the status of the planned review of the Barmah National Park and Barmah forest Ramsar site strategic action plan 2020–23. The action that I seek is for the minister to provide a comprehensive update to the public on the status of the review into the strategic action plan, including if the review has commenced, details of what consultations have been held with the Barmah community and local stakeholder groups and a date when the review will be completed and recommendations released to the general public.

The Barmah strategic action plan 2020–23 for the protection of flood plain marshes in Barmah National Park and Barmah forest Ramsar site was publicly released by Parks Victoria in February 2020. The four-year plan outlines the program to address priority threats to the flood plain marshes within the Barmah forest Ramsar site, which is largely located in the Barmah National Park. The Barmah National Park and forest supports nearly 300 native species of birds, fish, reptiles, frogs and other animals, and the government claims the strategic action plan was designed to better protect the Barmah forest Ramsar site ecosystem that supports these species. The plan was developed following consultation with government agencies, traditional owners, community members, environmental groups and other stakeholders. Due to contradicting information released by the Andrews Labor government, there is uncertainty in the local community regarding when the all-important review of the strategic plan will be completed, so now it is up to the Allan Labor government to actually give us this information. In the plan it clearly states on page 5, under subheading 1.3, 'Duration and review':

This plan applies over a four-year period, through to June 2023

And:

In the final year of the plan a more comprehensive review will occur.

Yet the summary of the strategic plan published on the Parks Victoria website states that the review will be conducted between June 2023 and June 2024. I have recently been contacted by numerous community groups and residents in the Barmah region who have reported to me that no community consultation has been done regarding this review, which was supposed to have commenced nearly four months ago. It is imperative that the Barmah community and key community groups are provided the opportunity to provide input into the effectiveness of the Barmah National Park strategic plan and that the Andrews Labor government – or the Allan Labor government, as it is now – are fully transparent on the review process of such an important policy document.

### **Mt Waverley Tennis Club**

**David DAVIS** (Southern Metropolitan) (18:14): (484) My matter for the adjournment tonight is about the Mount Waverley Reserve and particularly the Mt Waverley Tennis Club. There is a state government plan for the reserve that is being developed, it seems, with inadequate consultation with some of the key users. I met with the tennis club several times recently, including with my colleague Sam Groth, the Shadow Minister for Sport, and we discussed the issue here to hand. The tennis club is 99 years old this year and will be 100 years old next year. It has a very large membership. It has four courts, with access to a fifth, but the plan developed by the City of Monash requires, it seems, that you can only go forward as a tennis centre if you can provide six courts. Despite the fact that this is a very popular reserve – it is a reserve that is supported by a huge membership, including many older people; there is an older group of women who play midweek and actually enjoy the long-term camaraderie of the site – it seems council and government are working without a thought for a solution for this tennis club. It seems to me after 99 years somebody should be prepared to work to support the Mt Waverley Tennis Club. By all means change arrangements, but make sure there is a proper outcome for the Mt Waverley Tennis Club. After 99 years I say they should see their 100th year, and indeed the actual plan for the piece of land which the tennis courts are on is to turn it into a car park. Now, that seems to me to have put the cart before the horse, as it were, and not got things quite right. I do not think that this is a solution that most people would be wanting to see.

I understand that there are competing needs, and I understand the pressures that are on councils and indeed state governments in this matter, but there is money from the state government for the future of the reserve. There is council decision-making that has occurred here, but what seems to have been forgotten is the importance of that longstanding tennis club. I say the heritage of the club is important. I say the long-term members are important. I say the access of local people, including younger people, is too. When Sam Groth and I were there a week ago there was a whole group of young kids doing a tennis clinic. I thought, ‘This is magnificent. This should be protected and preserved, and a way has to be found to make sure that there is an alternative.’ If it has to be an alternate spot, well, that is an argument that we can have, but at the moment there is no realistic alternative being provided to the Mt Waverley Tennis Club. I call on the Minister for Tourism, Sport and Major Events to intervene and make sure that the club sees its 100th year, that the extraordinary members who play there are looked after and that there is an outcome that is not so harsh as to close forever an almost 100-year-old tennis club.

### **Responses**

**Gayle TIERNEY** (Western Victoria – Minister for Skills and TAFE, Minister for Regional Development) (18:17): Tonight we had 12 adjournment matters. Those matters will be referred to the appropriate ministers for responses.

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

**House adjourned 6:18 pm.**