



# **Hansard**

## **LEGISLATIVE COUNCIL**

**60th Parliament**

**Tuesday 15 August 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

Matthew Bach

| 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, Gaëlle                | 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

---

## BILLS

|  |      |
|--|------|
| Mental Health and Wellbeing Amendment Bill 2023 .....  | 2427 |
| Drugs, Poisons and Controlled Substances Amendment (Authorising Pharmacists) Bill 2023 ..... | 2427 |
| Royal assent .....   | 2427 |

## QUESTIONS WITHOUT NOTICE AND MINISTERS STATEMENTS

|  |      |
|--|------|
| Government integrity .....   | 2427 |
| VicForests.....  | 2428 |
| Ministers statements: early childhood education.....                   | 2429 |
| Independent Broad-based Anti-corruption Commission.....                | 2429 |
| Drug harm reduction .....  | 2430 |
| Ministers statements: Aboriginal Justice Forum .....                   | 2431 |
| Electricity infrastructure.....  | 2431 |
| Emergency Services Telecommunications Authority .....                  | 2433 |
| Ministers statements: Victorian Aboriginal Child Care Agency .....     | 2433 |
| Emergency Services Telecommunications Authority .....                  | 2434 |
| Bail reform .....  | 2435 |
| Ministers statements: Justice Michelle Quigley and Sven Bluemmel ..... | 2436 |
| Written responses .....  | 2436 |

## QUESTIONS ON NOTICE

|               |      |
|---------------|------|
| Answers ..... | 2436 |
|---------------|------|

## CONSTITUENCY QUESTIONS

|   |      |
|---|------|
| Southern Metropolitan Region .....      | 2437 |
| Southern Metropolitan Region.....       | 2437 |
| Western Victoria Region .....           | 2437 |
| Eastern Victoria Region .....           | 2437 |
| Northern Victoria Region .....          | 2438 |
| Northern Metropolitan Region.....       | 2438 |
| North-Eastern Metropolitan Region ..... | 2438 |
| Northern Victoria Region .....          | 2438 |
| Eastern Victoria Region.....            | 2439 |
| Western Metropolitan Region.....        | 2439 |
| Northern Metropolitan Region.....       | 2439 |
| North-Eastern Metropolitan Region ..... | 2439 |
| Northern Victoria Region .....          | 2439 |
| Southern Metropolitan Region.....       | 2440 |
| South-Eastern Metropolitan Region ..... | 2440 |
| Eastern Victoria Region.....            | 2440 |

## COMMITTEES

|  |      |
|--|------|
| Scrutiny of Acts and Regulations Committee ..... | 2441 |
| Membership .....                                 | 2441 |

## BILLS

|   |      |
|---|------|
| Independent Broad-based Anti-corruption Commission Amendment (Public Recommendations) Bill 2023 ..... | 2441 |
| Introduction and first reading .....  | 2441 |
| Human Rights and Housing Legislation Amendment (Ending Homelessness) Bill 2023 .....                  | 2441 |
| Introduction and first reading .....  | 2441 |
| Nuclear Activities (Prohibitions) Repeal Bill 2023 .....  | 2441 |
| Introduction and first reading .....  | 2441 |

## COMMITTEES

|  |      |
|--|------|
| Scrutiny of Acts and Regulations Committee .....                               | 2442 |
| Alert Digest No. 9.....  | 2442 |
| Annual Review 2021 and 2022: Statutory Rules and Legislative Instruments ..... | 2442 |

## PAPERS

|             |      |
|-------------|------|
| Papers..... | 2442 |
|-------------|------|

## COMMITTEES

|  |      |
|--|------|
| Economy and Infrastructure Committee .....                               | 2443 |
| Inquiry into the Use of School Buses in Rural and Regional Victoria..... | 2443 |

## BUSINESS OF THE HOUSE

|  |      |
|--|------|
| Parliamentary privilege .....                  | 2443 |
| Right of reply: Greyhound Racing Victoria..... | 2443 |
| Notices .....                                  | 2444 |
| General business .....                         | 2444 |

## MEMBERS STATEMENTS

|   |      |
|---|------|
| South West Healthcare.....                                  | 2445 |
| Safer Care Victoria.....                                    | 2445 |
| Independent Broad-based Anti-corruption Commission.....     | 2445 |
| More Trees for a Cooler, Greener West.....                  | 2446 |
| Glenroy post office.....                                    | 2446 |
| E-cigarettes.....   | 2446 |
| Gippstar Awards.....  | 2447 |
| Greyhound racing.....                                       | 2447 |
| Warrandyte electorate.....                                  | 2447 |
| Cannabis law reform.....                                    | 2448 |
| Government integrity.....                                   | 2448 |
| Multicultural Women's Alliance Against Family Violence..... | 2449 |
| Homelessness.....   | 2449 |
| Electricity infrastructure.....                             | 2449 |

## BUSINESS OF THE HOUSE

|                        |      |
|------------------------|------|
| Notices of motion..... | 2450 |
|------------------------|------|

## BILLS

|   |      |
|---|------|
| Energy Legislation Amendment (Energy Safety) Bill 2023..... | 2450 |
| Second reading.....   | 2450 |
| Third reading.....  | 2477 |

## ADJOURNMENT

|   |      |
|---|------|
| Electricity infrastructure.....                       | 2477 |
| Rural and regional abortion services.....             | 2478 |
| East Malvern RSL.....                                 | 2479 |
| Gippsland Water.....                                  | 2479 |
| Women's sexual and reproductive health.....           | 2480 |
| Beaconsfield level crossing removal.....              | 2480 |
| Lifeline Loddon Mallee.....                           | 2481 |
| Oil and gas exploration.....                          | 2482 |
| Australia-Israel relations.....                       | 2482 |
| Visit Victoria.....                                   | 2483 |
| Big Housing Build.....                                | 2484 |
| Progress Street, Dandenong South, level crossing..... | 2484 |
| Cannabis law reform.....                              | 2485 |
| Energy policy.....                                    | 2485 |
| Timber industry.....                                  | 2486 |
| Collingwood sobering service.....                     | 2486 |
| Melbourne Airport rail link.....                      | 2487 |
| Inclusive education.....                              | 2488 |
| Plenty Gorge Park.....                                | 2488 |
| Responses.....  | 2489 |

**Tuesday 15 August 2023**

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

***Bills***

**Mental Health and Wellbeing Amendment Bill 2023**

**Drugs, Poisons and Controlled Substances Amendment (Authorising Pharmacists) Bill 2023**

***Royal assent***

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

The Lieutenant-Governor informs the Legislative Council that he has, on this day, given the Royal Assent to the undermentioned Act of the present Session presented to him by the Clerk of the Parliaments:

**20/2023** Mental Health and Wellbeing Amendment Act 2023

I have also received a message from the Governor, dated 15 August:

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

**21/2023** Drugs, Poisons and Controlled Substances Amendment (Authorising Pharmacists) Act 2023

**Georgie Crozier:** On a point of order, President, I am wondering if you could provide some clarity to the house. It is my understanding that earlier this morning you told journalists that the alleged serious incident involving the member for Ringwood Mr Will Fowles did not occur within the parliamentary precinct, but Mr Fowles later this morning tweeted:

I was astonished to read reports this morning that the President of the Legislative Council has had details of the supposed allegation shared with him.

Those details have still not been shared with me.

So I am just wondering if it would possibly be helpful to the house if later today you could provide a statement as to the situation.

**The PRESIDENT:** I will not be making a statement later today. I did confirm to the media that there was not an incident reported on the precinct, and I will leave it at that. I am very mindful of the privacy of the person that has made this complaint, and I think any commentary from the Presiding Officers is very unhelpful.

***Questions without notice and ministers statements***

**Government integrity**

**David DAVIS (Southern Metropolitan) (12:06):** (225) My question is to the Attorney-General. I refer, Attorney, to the Premier's media release of 15 June 2020 in which he stated:

The Attorney General has referred the allegations –  
about Mr Somyurek –

aired on Channel 9's 60 Minutes on Sunday, 14 June and the articles published by The Age on 14 June 2020 to the Independent Broad-based Anti-corruption Commission and to Victoria Police for investigation.

I therefore ask: will you refer Lily D'Ambrosio to IBAC in the same way you referred Mr Somyurek?

**The PRESIDENT:** I am just mindful – and I am happy to be corrected – that the question referred to the minister's responsibility in the last term. I am happy to hear points of order, but that is my concern as far as upholding this –

**David DAVIS:** Well, then I ask, President, on a point of order, whether the minister will take an action in this term to refer Minister D'Ambrosio to IBAC. They are similar allegations, and in the last term she referred a minister to IBAC. In this case, in this term, I am asking with similar allegations: will she refer a minister today to IBAC?

**The PRESIDENT:** Thank you for your point of order. As I said, I am just concerned about whether we are in line with the standing orders. But the minister is prepared to answer, so I will call the minister.

**Jaclyn SYMES** (Northern Victoria – Attorney-General, Minister for Emergency Services) (12:08): I am prepared to respond. Mr Davis, I was not the Attorney-General in July 2020.

**David DAVIS** (Southern Metropolitan) (12:09): Attorney and Leader, the *Australian* reports today suggest the falsification of documents likely occurring in the electorate office of Lily D'Ambrosio, a minister of the Crown, and that payment of ALP memberships of dead people occurred and was directed from the minister's electorate office, and I therefore ask: how is it tenable that a minister of the Crown remains in place with potential breaches of the Crimes Act hanging over their head?

**Jaclyn SYMES** (Northern Victoria – Attorney-General, Minister for Emergency Services) (12:09): Mr Davis, I understand that the minister has made public comments in relation to this matter. But it is an internal party matter and certainly not a responsibility –

**David Davis:** On a point of order, President, a breach of the Crimes Act with the falsification of documents is not only an internal party matter. A potential breach of the Crimes Act is something that is relevant, and the Attorney and also the minister representing the Premier –

**The PRESIDENT:** Mr Davis, you know if you are going to make an allegation against a sitting member then you have to do it by a substantive motion, not a point of order during question time. As I said, I was concerned about the framing of this question and whether it falls inside the standing orders. I appreciate when a minister says they are prepared to respond. The minister did not say she was prepared to answer but to respond. She responded. Then, in her supplementary response – which she has got 42 seconds for if she wants – she answered that it is a matter for a political party, and we have had precedent here a number of times when previous Presiding Officers, not me, have ruled out questions that are under the remit of a political party.

**David Davis:** But this is a Crimes Act matter.

**The PRESIDENT:** That is what you are alleging. As I said, if you want to make an allegation against a sitting member, you cannot do it in a point of order during question time. The minister has got 42 seconds if she wants to continue her response. She does not.

### VicForests

**Sarah MANSFIELD** (Western Victoria) (12:11): (226) My question is for the Minister for Agriculture. Last week we heard that an investigation by the Office of the Victorian Information Commissioner found that VicForests unlawfully conducted surveillance of citizens by hiring a private investigator to spy on them. OVIC commissioner Sven Bluemmel said the privacy act breaches were serious and flagrant. Given this is just one of many breaches of the law by VicForests over several years, does the government trust VicForests to have any role in forest management in Victoria after the transition out of logging in January?

**The PRESIDENT:** I think that is verging on asking the minister for her opinion. Dr Mansfield, do you want to reframe the question.

**Sarah MANSFIELD:** I can rephrase. Minister, will VicForests have any role after the end of native forest logging in January?

**Gayle TIERNEY** (Western Victoria – Minister for Training and Skills, Minister for Higher Education, Minister for Agriculture) (12:13): I thank the member for her question. This is a question



that I have been asked a couple of times since the budget announcement in respect of the logging of native timber. The entity itself, VicForests, the government is still having discussions about. We are very mindful of the staff that are connected to VicForests, and of course we are wanting their skills and their capabilities to be utilised effectively in terms of what other entity may exist and/or in terms of land management. That is very important, and that is work that is also being undertaken in the area of Minister Stitt's portfolio. We have not landed on an actual model for that at this given time, but we are very conscious of the fact that we want to maintain the utilisation of those skills, knowledge, capabilities and corporate knowledge.

**Sarah MANSFIELD** (Western Victoria) (12:14): I thank the minister for her response. It is clear that VicForests cannot be trusted to stay within the law. The transition out of logging is just four months away. When will you give the community and workers certainty about what is going to happen with VicForests?

**Gayle TIERNEY** (Western Victoria – Minister for Training and Skills, Minister for Higher Education, Minister for Agriculture) (12:14): This goes to the whole-of-government approach that we are taking in respect of the decision around the cessation of logging of native timber. We have been dealing with a whole range of different things since that announcement. We have been dealing with the workers package in respect of the decision; the sawmill package, whether it is opt-in or opt-out; we have been dealing with the transition fund, the innovation fund; and we have been dealing with the independent contractors and the logging crews and of course the timber communities as well through a whole range of different local community strategies. We will continue to work on those matters. There are a number of other issues that we are dealing with, but these are the most immediate issues, and we will have something more to say about that fairly soon.

#### **Ministers statements: early childhood education**

**Ingrid STITT** (Western Metropolitan – Minister for Early Childhood and Pre-Prep, Minister for Environment) (12:15): I rise to update the house on the work being undertaken to give more Victorian families access to affordable, high-quality and convenient child care. We are stepping in to deliver unprecedented investment in early childhood education to help our littlest Victorians and their families access quality early education and care through the delivery of our 50 government owned and operated early learning centres.

Last week I was pleased to announce the service offering for the first four of our 50 centres. Opening in 2025, the services in Sunshine, Fawkner, Eaglehawk North and Murtoa will offer child care and three- and four-year-old kinder, and more than 400 children each day will benefit from these changes. Each service will include space for maternal and child health and allied health, ensuring that families will be able to access the services they need in a convenient one-stop location. The service offering for each local facility has been decided in consultation with local government and school communities, ensuring that these services are tailored to the needs of local communities. The four centres will be brought to life by Brand Architects of East Melbourne, who have been appointed to design all four facilities.

Of course we are getting on with the work to deliver all 50 centres by 2028. Thirty locations have already been announced, and the final 20 are to be confirmed by the end of this year. I am really excited to see these facilities come to life, and I look forward to updating the house further very soon.

#### **Independent Broad-based Anti-corruption Commission**

**David DAVIS** (Southern Metropolitan) (12:17): (227) My question is again to the Attorney-General. Following the conclusion of the fixed term of former IBAC Commissioner Robert Redlich in December last year, the government appointed Stephen Farrow – quite appropriately, I might say – as acting Commissioner, a role he has performed for eight months. Under Mr Farrow, IBAC is currently investigating deals between the Andrews government and the United Firefighters Union as part of Operation Richmond. On Monday Mr Farrow confirmed that he has applied to be appointed

by your government as the permanent IBAC Commissioner. Attorney, how can you justify this conflict of interest where the government, which gets to decide who runs the anti-corruption watchdog, is also under investigation by one of the applicants for the job?

**Jaclyn SYMES** (Northern Victoria – Attorney-General, Minister for Emergency Services) (12:18): Mr Davis, I do not know whether there is a current investigation or not, because I do not make those inquiries. It would be inappropriate to. It would also be inappropriate for people to tell me, so it is curious to me that you are making allegations about knowledge of an open investigation. You might want to disclose to the house how you might know or might have come to believe that that is true. You have also made an assertion that the government gets to decide who the IBAC Commissioner is. That is not true either. I get to make recommendations to the IOC, who actually get to make a final call in relation to that appointment.

I also take offence on behalf of Mr Farrow. Mr Farrow is an exceptional public servant. He has been appointed as an acting Commissioner to ensure critical operational continuity and organisational stability. We often have an acting Commissioner who is the Deputy Commissioner filling in that role. In accordance with the 2022 caretaker conventions, we did not want to appoint prior to the election, so we put it over to this side of the election – which was something the opposition called for, I must point out, as well – and those recruitment processes are underway.

**David DAVIS** (Southern Metropolitan) (12:19): Attorney, you seem to not want to engage with the difficult point here. The acting IBAC Commissioner is required to make decisions that directly affect the government's political interests, such as what matters to investigate, what findings to make and whether particular individuals are questioned in public or in secret. Given the government's appointment as acting IBAC Commissioner is now an applicant for the position that is within the gift of the government – that of permanent IBAC Commissioner – what specifically has the government done to manage the blatant conflict of interest it has created?

**Jaclyn SYMES** (Northern Victoria – Attorney-General, Minister for Emergency Services) (12:20): Your commentary that it is a gift to give in relation to an appointment is rather curious, Mr Davis. But in relation to any perceived conflict of interest, of course we have engaged with the acting IBAC Commissioner and the CEO in relation to the clear policies that IBAC have for declaring and managing any conflicts of interest, and I do believe that Mr Farrow went through those in his evidence. This is nothing more than an attack on a public servant, and you are questioning his ability to do his job. I have full confidence in Mr Farrow as acting Commissioner, and in relation to the process of –

**David Davis:** On a point of order, President, it was a highly specific question about what the government has done.

**The PRESIDENT:** The minister is being relevant to the question asked.

**Jaclyn SYMES:** I have answered your question, Mr Davis, in relation to speaking to the IBAC in relation to their policies in relation to conflict of interest. But as you should be aware if you are not, we also have the Victorian Inspectorate, which has oversight of IBAC as an integrity body under its remit, so there are numerous ways to ensure that there are appropriate oversight mechanisms in relation to IBAC's work. But I also – *(Time expired)*

### Drug harm reduction

**David ETTERSHANK** (Western Metropolitan) (12:21): (228) My question is for the Minister for Emergency Services. Naloxone nasal spray can reverse the life-threatening effects of a known or suspected opioid overdose. It is easy to administer and it is life saving. We have just heard today in the media that Western Australian police can now carry naloxone spray, following the lead of many jurisdictions overseas. But of course police are not the only first responders, and as we know from locations like Frankston and North Richmond, quite often it is our fire services who are first on the

scene in an overdose. So I ask the minister: has she given any thought to equipping Fire Rescue Victoria personnel with naloxone for this purpose?

**Jaclyn SYMES** (Northern Victoria – Attorney-General, Minister for Emergency Services) (12:22): I thank Mr Ettershank for his question and indeed his acknowledgement of our hardworking first responders. Often, regardless of which agency it is, they turn out for Victorians that are in need. There are a few examples of where particularly our firefighters carry equipment in relation to responding to health needs. Your direct question was, ‘Have you given consideration to naloxone in relation to what firefighters might carry?’, and I have not given specific consideration to that. There are trials of other equipment that our firefighters’ trucks are equipped with, and there is obviously a lot of training that goes in relation to that. I am not saying no, but there will be a lot of conversations before we expand the current trial, which has only just started, to other provisions of health care.

### Ministers statements: Aboriginal Justice Forum

**Enver ERDOGAN** (Northern Metropolitan – Minister for Corrections, Minister for Youth Justice, Minister for Victim Support) (12:23): I rise to update the house on the 65th Aboriginal Justice Forum, held in Shepparton, country of the Yorta Yorta peoples, last month. I had the privilege of attending the Aboriginal Justice Forum with the Minister for Police Minister Carbine in the other place. The Aboriginal Justice Forum is a collaborative partnership between government and senior members of the Indigenous community where we work together to tackle the hard issues that have a disproportionate impact on First Nations peoples. We are all stronger for the Victorian government’s longstanding partnership with the Aboriginal Justice Forum. Our ability to discuss topical issues and consult freely on important policy decisions has led to better and more robust decision-making and ultimately legislation in this place. I was grateful for the opportunity to attend the forum, to hear from members and to update them on the progress and commitments our government has made.

The Aboriginal justice agreement is a 23-year partnership between the Victorian government and the Aboriginal community, the longest of its kind in the nation. It continues to grow stronger every day as both parties engage in good faith and the shared interest of empowering and improving outcomes for Indigenous Victorians. It is always sobering hearing from respected community elders and those embedded in the community on how the government can continue to improve the lives of First Nations peoples. This government is always committed to improving – improving our processes, improving our decisions and, most importantly, improving outcomes for all Victorians. I would once again like to thank the Aboriginal Justice Forum for welcoming me so warmly and for their honest and important dialogue as we continue to work towards empowerment and self-determination.

### Electricity infrastructure

**Joe McCRACKEN** (Western Victoria) (12:25): (229) My question is to the Minister for Agriculture. Minister, as you might be aware, today there are hundreds of farmers gathering outside this place to protest the proposed route of the VNI West, which is from Bulgana to the New South Wales border, and the Western Renewables Link, which is from Sydenham to Bulgana. Minister, do you support the right of these farmers to farm their land without the interference of transmission lines?

**Gayle TIERNEY** (Western Victoria – Minister for Training and Skills, Minister for Higher Education, Minister for Agriculture) (12:26): I thank the member for his question. It is a question that I think Mrs McArthur might have asked during PAEC, and I have also had a number of questions raised regarding this land. What I have said – and this is absolutely a point – is that I am very interested in issues regarding productive land utilisation and I am always interested in hearing people’s views about that very important asset that farmers have as well as other people who work in the agricultural sector.

When I talk to farmers, what they raise with me are their concerns about drought and the impact of climate, their pride in being renowned producers of some of the world’s highest quality clean, green produce and their need for a highly skilled workforce. That is what the large number of farmers that I

talk to talk to me about, including a whole range that I met last Friday, Saturday, Sunday, Monday and Tuesday, whether it be at Budj Bim, whether it be at Hamilton, whether it be in Horsham, whether it be in Talbot and of course all those that were coming together at Sheepvention in Hamilton.

**Joe McCracken:** On a point of order, President, with the greatest of respect, I did ask the minister: do you support the right of farmers to farm their land without interference from transmission lines? I appreciate that there are other issues that the minister might be interested in, but I specifically draw her to the impact of transmission lines on productive farming land.

**The PRESIDENT:** I do not want to be a broken record, but I feel like the question was asking for an opinion again, which makes it difficult. The standing orders – I do not own them, everyone owns them – are pretty clear about asking a minister an opinion in a question. But I appreciate the minister is prepared to respond, so I will ask the minister to continue her response.

**Gayle TIERNEY:** I thank the member for providing me with an opportunity to again lend my absolute support towards farmers and the great work that they do. We understand that there are questions and concerns about the Western Renewables Link, the Victoria to New South Wales Interconnector and other renewable energy projects and their impact on farmland. Of course we understand that. These include the impact on farming activities, visual amenity and equitable compensation. I am committed to supporting farmers, as I have said, and their communities through Victoria's energy transition. The government will continue to work to get this right and proactively engage with impacted communities.

**Joe McCracken** (Western Victoria) (12:29): According to the Ballarat *Courier* on 20 June 2023 in an article titled 'Western Renewables Link divides Labor MPs Martha Haylett, Lily D'Ambrosio at 2023 Victorian state conference', which I am sure that you might have been at, the member for Ripon called for the government to 'change strategy' on a 'fundamentally flawed project'. Minister, will you as part of the government, in terms of fighting for farmers, call for the project to be reconsidered?

*Members interjecting.*

**The PRESIDENT:** I also have a number of concerns about referring to political party activities, and it was a question to seriously the wrong minister. You can add on farmers, you can add on ambulance drivers, you can add on all sorts of different occupations to a question, but it does not mean the question is to the right minister. I am not going to call the minister.

**Georgie Crozier:** On a point of order, President, in relation to your ruling, Mr McCracken was talking about the farmers in his area. He was referring to –

*Members interjecting.*

**Georgie Crozier:** No, it is question time, Ms Shing, and I am raising it with the President, if you do not mind. He was also referring to a newspaper article in his region, so the supplementary was absolutely relevant to the substantive question which he asked. In relation to his question, it was around government policy and direction, and I fail to understand why it has been ruled out.

**The PRESIDENT:** Getting to the crux of the question, it was based around a newspaper article on a political state conference. The other issue is that the question was not directed to the correct minister. Ms Crozier, I am happy to review your concern. I have had concerns with a number of questions today around asking for an opinion and a number of other areas where the standing orders prescribe that it falls outside the remit of whether someone can ask a question. But I am always happy to look at my rulings, and if your point of order is correct I will get back to you. But at this point I am not going to put the question to the minister.

*Members interjecting.*

**The PRESIDENT:** I think it is unnecessary to reflect on my rulings. As I said, I do not own the standing orders; I just try my best to uphold them. We all agreed at the start of the term on the sessional orders and how the standing orders should be. I just do my best to uphold what we all agreed to at the start of the term. But my ego can take it that there will be times that I may be incorrect, so I will look into it.

#### **Emergency Services Telecommunications Authority**

**Georgie CROZIER** (Southern Metropolitan) (12:33): (230) My question is to the Minister for Emergency Services. Minister, last Tuesday at 5:10 pm a 75-year-old went into cardiac arrest. 000 was called and the case was classified as code 2, with an ambulance taking 50 minutes to arrive. I understand, sadly, that it was too late and the man died. Given the patient was in cardiac arrest, why was this not classified as a code 1 emergency?

**Jaclyn SYMES** (Northern Victoria – Attorney-General, Minister for Emergency Services) (12:34): Ms Crozier, it is horrible to learn of a person who has passed away in those circumstances. The question that you have posed is an operational question. I have not been provided with information about the specifics of that case. If you want to forward my office some details, then I can ask ESTA for a response and provide you with greater detail, subject to any privacy concerns.

**Georgie CROZIER** (Southern Metropolitan) (12:34): Minister, I appreciate that response. Minister, how many misclassifications in ambulance dispatch have occurred in the last two years that have led to catastrophic sentinel events such as this?

**Jaclyn SYMES** (Northern Victoria – Attorney-General, Minister for Emergency Services) (12:34): Ms Crozier, as I indicated, I am more than happy to take advice in relation to this matter. I am not sure whether it was a misclassification; I have not examined the case. I am happy for you to provide greater detail. I think we should start there before we start categorising matters as misclassifications, when there is not enough information in the details that you provided and I do not have the information that would enable me to respond fulsomely to the question that you have asked.

#### **Ministers statements: Victorian Aboriginal Child Care Agency**

**Lizzie BLANDTHORN** (Western Metropolitan – Minister for Disability, Ageing and Carers, Minister for Child Protection and Family Services) (12:35): I am delighted to update the house on the work the Andrews Labor government is doing to reduce the over-representation of Aboriginal children and young people in care. Last week I joined the member for Preston in the other place in visiting the Victorian Aboriginal Child Care Agency at their head office on Bell Street, Preston. It was wonderful to tour their head office and meet staff from across the different services that VACCA offer Aboriginal families, children and young people, from supported playgroups, family support and their Nugel program, just to name a few. I thank the teams for the insights they shared with me on their day-to-day work. Particularly I thank Aunty Muriel Bamblett and her leadership team for the warm welcome and discussion of VACCA's extensive work to support Aboriginal families, children and young people. Each team showed such delight and pride in the difference they are making to Aboriginal children and families, and it is a tribute to VACCA's leadership for the energy and passion within their office. I also appreciated the opportunity to hear about VACCA's role in delivering the largest ever single investment to continue and expand the Aboriginal-led service system, \$140 million in the 2023–24 state budget.

I most enjoyed having the opportunity to meet VACCA's Nugel team, who are authorised to take full responsibility for Aboriginal children and young people in the child protection system through the Aboriginal children in Aboriginal care program. The Nugel program is achieving greater cultural connection for Aboriginal families and improved reunification rates, a tribute to its success. At the end of the tour I was informed of a meeting occurring just that afternoon to prepare for the Community Protecting Boorais pilot, an Aboriginal-led child protection investigations pilot commencing this year. As those in this chamber would be aware, the ability for this meeting to occur is courtesy of the

bipartisan way we were able to pass the statement-of-recognition bill earlier this year. I thank all of those in the chamber for their support of this bill and in particular Dr Bach for the way we worked together on this bill. We are able to make real change when the child protection and family services system is above politics.

### Emergency Services Telecommunications Authority

**Ann-Marie HERMANS** (South-Eastern Metropolitan) (12:37): (231) My question is for the Minister for Emergency Services. Minister, all Victorians would be familiar with the massive failures with the ESTA, Emergency Services Telecommunications Authority, CAD, computer-assisted dispatch, system in recent years, which tragically resulted in the deaths of at least 30 Victorians. At the recent PAEC – that is, the Public Accounts and Estimates Committee – hearings Emergency Management Victoria informed the committee that there was no clear time line for the implementation of the new dispatch system. Minister, have you finally worked out when there will be a new CAD system to protect all Victorians?

**Jaclyn SYMES** (Northern Victoria – Attorney-General, Minister for Emergency Services) (12:38): Mrs Hermans, if it was not for the politicisation and attack on the staff at ESTA, I would be able to give you a really straight answer to that, but I am going to provide some commentary in relation to –

**Georgie Crozier:** On a point of order, President, there is absolutely no attack on the staff in ESTA. This is about government failure, government decisions, government policymaking and the failures of the Andrews government, so I would ask the minister to stop making political points that are not true.

**The PRESIDENT:** I think there have been rulings by previous Presiding Officers that the preamble forms part of the question, so I think the minister was responding to a preamble. She is only 12 seconds into the response, so I will call the minister.

**Jaclyn SYMES:** It has become a bit of a feature of today's question time for the opposition to make statements and claim that they are true when they are not. To claim that a failure of a CAD system –

*Members interjecting.*

**Jaclyn SYMES:** Have you read the IGEM report? Your contention was that the failures of a CAD system contributed to deaths. You are not in a position to make that claim, and no-one actually has made that claim outside of this chamber. Your question trying to link a computer system to some tragic outcomes is what I am saying is inappropriate. Your question about the status of the replacement CAD system is a genuine question, but to make disparaging comments about an organisation – to make false accusations the way you have – is not the way you should ask questions in this place, because it is a false statement that you made.

**Ann-Marie Hermans:** My point of order, President, is simply that there were lives that were lost as a result of this government and as a result of what they did in terms of not actually having ambulances arrive on time. That is a fact. It is not –

**The PRESIDENT:** That is not a point of order.

**Ann-Marie HERMANS** (South-Eastern Metropolitan) (12:40): All right. Let us just move to the second question. I thank the minister. Given the budget papers did not include any amount for the cost of this new system, when will Victorians know what this new system will cost?

**Jaclyn SYMES** (Northern Victoria – Attorney-General, Minister for Emergency Services) (12:40): It is actually responsible government to try and get the best value for projects, the best value for the money that you spend, so we did not disclose the amount that has been allocated to a tender process, because that tender process is open and you kind of do not want to telegraph what the bids should be. So we are in the processes of identifying the best of the best to identify who can deliver a state-of-the-art CAD facility that is going to service Victorians –

**Ann-Marie Hermans:** On a point of order, President, the question is very simple. The question is when – not what is happening, but when will Victorians know?

**The PRESIDENT:** The minister is being relevant to the question, and she has got 34 seconds.

**Jaclyn SYMES:** The procurement process is progressing very well. I received an update from the CEO in the last fortnight about the fact that they are very pleased with the approaches that they are getting from really high-quality providers. Once those contracts have been signed I will be more than happy to provide all of those details, including the costings.

### Bail reform

**Katherine COPSEY** (Southern Metropolitan) (12:42): (232) My question is for the Minister for Corrections. Minister, you are a key stakeholder in decisions about how bail laws will be reformed in Victoria. It is the department of corrections that has literal custody of the additional thousands of unsentenced people that have ended up in prison as a result of the 2014 and 2018 bail law changes. Currently more than one in three, 37.4 per cent of people, and 40 per cent of women in Victorian prisons are not sentenced. The department of corrections undertakes modelling, including the effects of proposed legislative changes. Minister, given the government's signalled intentions around bail reform, what is the estimated reduction of unsentenced prisoner numbers in Victoria?

**Enver ERDOGAN** (Northern Metropolitan – Minister for Corrections, Minister for Youth Justice, Minister for Victim Support) (12:42): I thank Ms Copsey for her interest in this very important piece of criminal justice reform. As you would know, our Attorney-General – thank you, Ms Symes – is undertaking that important work in relation to bail and with great public interest in getting the settings in our criminal justice system correct. As a government obviously our paramount consideration is ensuring that the Victorian community remains safe but also balancing that with the need to have a system that treats people fairly, understanding that people that are on bail do have a presumption of innocence and are not yet sentenced. So we need to make sure that those settings are accurate. I thank, again, the Attorney-General for that difficult work in balancing those at times competing interests to get the proposal before – I understand it is going to be introduced this week – the lower house. So thank you again, Jaclyn Symes.

In terms of the potential effects on the corrections system, yes, the statistic is right; about 37 per cent of those people in our custodial settings are remandees. In terms of the projected, it is not easy to necessarily project the long-term impact on the system. Obviously we would see a slight decline. I am happy to see what information I can provide, because there is different modelling in relation to that. We have come off the back of the pandemic. Our correctional system has undergone a 20 per cent reduction in the amount of people, which is obviously fundamentally a good outcome, but the long-term projections in terms of what these bail reforms will mean depends. There are a number of factors for why people end up in custodial settings. Obviously one is linked to the amount of criminal activity, but some are also outside my portfolio in terms of the sentencing. Obviously we have an independent judiciary who interprets law, interprets regulations, and there is obviously law enforcement as well. So I am very reluctant to give you a prediction today. I am happy to continue the conversation outside of this room and see what my team may be able to provide, but I hope I have been able to answer your question.

**Katherine COPSEY** (Southern Metropolitan) (12:45): I thank the minister for the answer and for that undertaking. That would be much appreciated on notice. On the topic of people imprisoned in Victoria, when the coroner delivered his findings from the inquest into the death of Veronica Nelson he found that the current bail laws are discriminatory towards First Nations people and incompatible with Victoria's human rights charter. The coroner recommended that the reverse onus regime should be repealed and a presumption in favour of bail restored. Minister, with these reports today that the government will not be fully repealing the reverse onus test, how can you have confidence that the changes proposed will significantly reduce the number of First Nations prisoners in Victoria?

**Enver ERDOGAN** (Northern Metropolitan – Minister for Corrections, Minister for Youth Justice, Minister for Victim Support) (12:46): I thank Ms Copsey for her question and her interest. From the outset I want to express my deepest sympathies to Veronica’s family and to all Indigenous people that have been affected in our custodial settings and have lost their lives. It was only last week I had the opportunity and privilege to meet Aunty Donna, and I have seen the profound impact it obviously had on her and on the whole Indigenous community in our state. It was a great tragedy, and I do not want to see anyone experience what Veronica experienced in our custodial settings.

In relation to the coroner’s work, I want to thank him. Like I said, he made a number of recommendations, many of which fall under my portfolio. I think the Attorney-General has done a fantastic job in progressing them. We have said this is the first tranche of reforms. Like any reforms, I think taking a careful approach is the right way, because we can see if we do not get the settings right how devastating the impact can be. I think the bail settings that we have are appropriate. As a government we are working with our First Nations people. I was at the Aboriginal Justice Forum just a couple of weeks ago talking about improvements that we have made to the system and improvements we want to make as well, so obviously – *(Time expired)*

#### **Ministers statements: Justice Michelle Quigley and Sven Bluemmel**

**Jaclyn SYMES** (Northern Victoria – Attorney-General, Minister for Emergency Services) (12:47): Today I want to acknowledge the achievement of two leaders in the justice system: Justice Michelle Quigley, former president of the Victorian Civil and Administrative Tribunal, and Sven Bluemmel, the now former information commissioner. In my role as the Attorney-General I rely on the support of several dedicated and committed leaders, and Justice Quigley and Mr Bluemmel are clear examples of this.

Justice Quigley has made a significant contribution to VCAT in her five-year term, especially throughout the challenges of the pandemic, managing an extremely busy tribunal that Victorians can rely on. She is admired for her intellect, attitude and sense of humour. Her commitment to creating a positive workplace was highlighted by many VCAT staff and members at her farewell. Justice Quigley returns to the Supreme Court, where she will continue her contribution to the Victorian justice system.

Sven, who served as Victoria’s inaugural information commissioner, has also demonstrated a commitment to the highest standards of integrity and independence of government institutions. He has been a strong advocate of Victoria’s freedom-of-information system with great passion. He has not been afraid to tell government how to do better while maintaining his professionalism and calm demeanour. Victoria will be well served with Sven as our new Electoral Commissioner, but I know he will certainly keep a close eye on how the review of the Freedom of Information Act 1982 progresses.

I would like to thank both Justice Quigley and Mr Bluemmel for their service and ongoing contribution to our state.

#### **Written responses**

**The PRESIDENT** (12:48): Can I thank Mr Erdogan. You offered to give Ms Copsey some more information outside of the standing orders. You responded to that question, but thank you for offering that.

#### ***Questions on notice***

##### **Answers**

**The PRESIDENT** (12:48): I have got a reinstatement of questions on notice. I received a written request from Mr Davis seeking the reinstatement of questions on notice directed to the Minister for Health. Having reviewed the responses, I order that questions on notice 256 through to 259 be reinstated in full as the responses do not address the range of information sought by Mr Davis.



*Constituency questions*

**Southern Metropolitan Region**

**John BERGER** (Southern Metropolitan) (12:49): (324) My question is for the Minister for Housing in the other place Minister Brooks. Today was a massive day for my community. I had the opportunity to join Prime Minister Anthony Albanese, Premier Dan Andrews, Victorian Minister for Housing Colin Brooks and the Commonwealth housing minister Julie Collins in my electorate, in Prahran. We had a tour of the Bangs Street project, a project as co-chair I know a lot about. We are delivering 445 new homes for Prahran. This project will provide a mix of social and market rental homes, helping tackle housing affordability, and I am proud to announce that the works are almost complete – new open green spaces, pedestrian cycling pathways, a cafe and an artist studio, with opportunities to build a sense of community. My community of Prahran know that only Labor will deliver the affordable housing of the future. My question is this: what else is the Andrews Labor government doing to address housing supply issues in Southern Metropolitan?

**Southern Metropolitan Region**

**Georgie CROZIER** (Southern Metropolitan) (12:50): (325) My constituency question is for the Minister for Education, and it is in relation to cuts to the visiting teacher service. My constituents Rebecca and Simon have two children with albinism who are vision-impaired. The children receive significant education and social benefits from specialist visiting teachers who have specific skills to provide personalised programs that enable these students to access the full school curriculum. Rebecca and Simon told me they are extremely concerned about drastic cuts to the visiting teacher service and the devastating impact it would have on their children's educational opportunities and wellbeing. I ask the minister: will you reverse these cruel cuts so that the services of visiting teachers will not be reduced and that vision-impaired children such as Simon and Rebecca's can continue to have this critical support?

**Western Victoria Region**

**Sarah MANSFIELD** (Western Victoria) (12:51): (326) My constituency question is for the Minister for Planning. Recently the City of Ballarat council granted a permit for a fourth tailings storage dam for the Ballarat Gold Mine in the suburb of Mount Clear. The separation distance between this new hazardous waste dam and nearby houses, aged care centres and local schools will be just 100 metres. For most tailings dams in other areas of the country a 1-kilometre buffer zone is standard practice and considered safe. Mount Clear residents and Central Highlands Water have taken the decision to the Victorian Civil and Administrative Tribunal, VCAT, stating that they are concerned about the risk to the environment and public health from dust migration and water leakage. Will the minister intervene and order an environment effects statement for this new hazardous waste processing dam?

**Eastern Victoria Region**

**Tom McINTOSH** (Eastern Victoria) (12:52): (327) My question is for the Minister for Small Business Minister Suleyman in the other place. Minister, the Eastern Victoria Region is home to many fantastic small businesses, from farms to breweries, tradies to hairdressers, cafes to mechanics and of course the business associations that promote supporting local. From Mornington to Gippsland, these businesses turbocharge our local economies and employ local people. It is important to make sure we provide the support they need to continue to thrive. I recently met with Shayne and Beth from the Stratford Community Association, who were successful recipients of the mental wellbeing of business communities grants program. Chatting to president Shayne Hyman and long-time member Beth Ripper, I learned about the work of the association providing wellbeing support and giving back to the small businesses of Stratford and surrounds. Minister, can you please advise which other small business communities in the Eastern Victoria Region have received critical support as part of the mental wellbeing of business communities grants program?

**Northern Victoria Region**

**Gaelle BROAD** (Northern Victoria) (12:53): (328) My constituency question is to the Minister for Consumer Affairs and also relates to government services. Can the minister please advise of the actions being taken to prevent scammers and to encourage organisations and government services to refrain from using third-party domains? Many scammers send emails or text messages pretending to be from a business and include links to websites that lead people to comply and lose money. Unfortunately, many businesses and also government bodies send emails and texts that look exactly the same, making it easier for scammers. My constituent Dr Ian Gillard raised the matter when VicRoads sent a registration renewal that contained links to websites requiring a username and password. Most banks stopped doing this years ago and never send such links. He advised that all government departments and local government should use their own domains, such as vic.gov.au, and refer people directly to their website instead of using short links and third-party servers. He also warned that many government departments and businesses do not know they are using overseas servers not covered by Australian privacy laws.

**Northern Metropolitan Region**

**Adem SOMYUREK** (Northern Metropolitan) (12:54): (329) My constituency question is directed to the Attorney-General, and it relates to the processing time of birth certificates. My constituent Hussam from Mottlecrah Circuit, Craigieburn, has been busy crunching numbers and comparing the processing times of birth certificates by the relevant body in each state. Hussam claims that the processing times in each state are as follows: Vic, nine weeks; New South Wales, two weeks; Queensland, five business days; South Australia, two weeks; WA, two working days; Tas, two weeks; ACT, 15 days; and NT, three days. If these processing times are accurate, Births, Deaths and Marriages Victoria is letting down my constituents. I ask the AG to take immediate action to rectify the poor performance of births, deaths and marriages if this information is accurate.

**North-Eastern Metropolitan Region**

**Matthew BACH** (North-Eastern Metropolitan) (12:54): (330) I have a question today for the Minister for Roads and Road Safety. I was interested to read that recently Infrastructure Victoria has recommended further investigation into the construction of the outer metropolitan ring-road. Now, this is an important project, especially for constituents of mine in Mill Park, in the new part of my electorate, and I would love to know the minister's view on this important project. What is the minister's view on the outer ring-road and the recommendation from Infrastructure Victoria? I had not previously engaged much with the community in Mill Park; however, at the last election Mill Park came into our shared electorate, and it was great to spend more time there. It was abundantly clear that when it comes to infrastructure matters, when it comes to education, when it comes to health, when it comes to all manner of different state government services, people in Mill Park – at least those still living – have been let down by the current member Lily D'Ambrosio for such a long period of time. So it is good to have Mill Park in the electorate. I am not surprised that there was a huge swing of 13 per cent to the Liberal Party at the last election. That is despite all the dead people voting for Lily. I am very keen to hear the view of the minister on this important matter.

**Northern Victoria Region**

**Georgie PURCELL** (Northern Victoria) (12:56): (331) My constituency question is for the Minister for Environment. Recently I spoke in this chamber about the government's plan to drastically increase the quota in the central shooting zone under the disgraceful kangaroo harvest management plan, significantly impacting Mount Alexander shire. Mount Alexander is made up of passionate wildlife lovers, environmentalists and tourism businesses distressed at the impact that even more kangaroo shooting will have in their own backyards. Over the winter break, on 17 July, Mount Alexander Shire Council formally voted to lobby the state government to ban commercial kangaroo shooting in their area. Will the state government listen to the community and cancel their plans to slaughter kangaroos in droves by the cover of darkness in this region?

**Eastern Victoria Region**

**Melina BATH** (Eastern Victoria) (12:56): (332) My question is to the Minister for Planning. A domestic builder, my constituent, has regularly paid \$460 a year to the VBA, the Victorian Building Authority, to renew his registration. This enables him to purchase insurance with warranties for each renovation or new home construction. He has received a renewal notice for his registration. It is not due until 29 November, but it has gone up over 100 per cent to \$1052 and must be paid by 29 August or he will incur a late fee. He is a sole trader and he has escalating building costs, so my constituent wants to know: why has the building registration fee gone up by more than 100 per cent and why are penalties now being applied before the due date?

**Western Metropolitan Region**

**David ETTERSHPANK** (Western Metropolitan) (12:57): (333) My constituency question is for the Minister for Roads and Road Safety. My constituent lives in Burnside Heights and commutes to work via Taylors Road and Green Gully Road. Significant growth in the area is adding to traffic congestion and long delays, making their weekday commute a nightmare. In particular the stretch of Taylors Road between Bluestone Walk and Kings Road is becoming a dangerous bottleneck, with only one lane in each direction. A major upgrade is needed to meet community and road user expectations, so my constituent asks: will the Victorian government provide funding to duplicate this stretch of Taylors Road to alleviate congestion as well as provide additional funding to support associated pedestrian and off-road bicycle infrastructure for this increasingly significant key arterial road?

**Northern Metropolitan Region**

**Evan MULHOLLAND** (Northern Metropolitan) (12:58): (334) My question is to the Minister for Transport and Infrastructure Jacinta Allan. Patronage on the V/Line service is yet to hit pre-COVID levels, yet many of my constituents travelling to Wallan, Donnybrook and Broadmeadows are having to stand for up to 50 minutes on packed trains. Is the minister doing anything to address this headache that commuters from Melbourne's north face daily, or is this just another example of Labor taking the northern suburbs for granted? Recently, according to local media reports, things have become so bad that some service conductors have had to stop people from boarding and others have been forced to sit in baggage areas. One local resident, Tanya, said her commute has become such a nightmare that she has altered her employment contract to two days of working from home. This level of service is completely unacceptable, and it seems like a continuation of Labor's poor form in looking after growth areas. Labor's north needs to be looked after.

**North-Eastern Metropolitan Region**

**Aiv PUGLIELLI** (North-Eastern Metropolitan) (12:59): (335) My question today is to the Minister for Transport and Infrastructure, and it relates to prioritisation decisions made regarding level crossing removal projects. I have been contacted by community members around the Surrey Hills and Mont Albert area who are concerned that the decisions regarding the prioritised removal of their local level crossings were made based on political advantage rather than greatest need. In 2017 the Victorian Auditor-General's Office found that the first tranche of level crossing removals included sites that were not among the 50 most dangerous and congested, so my question is: can you please provide the data analysis or rationale to show that the current level crossing removal projects in my region were the ones that had the greatest safety and congestion issues to justify this prioritisation?

**Northern Victoria Region**

**Wendy LOVELL** (Northern Victoria) (13:00): (336) My question is for the Minister for Roads and Road Safety – another sitting week and another question to the minister regarding the disgraceful condition of many roads in my electorate. McLennan Street, Mooroopna, forms part of the A300 Midland Highway. The road surface between Joseph Street and Echuca Road is appalling and a hazard for road users. Large potholes litter this 750-metre stretch of roadway, which is subject to a very large

volume of vehicles each day. Similarly, River Road on the Mooroopna side of Murchison forms part of the C369 thoroughfare, the surface of which has been described to me by constituents as an accident waiting to happen. Of particular concern is the section of the road located at Billy's Bend 2 kilometres north-east of the Murchison-Tatura Road. Will the minister order the immediate repair of the surfaces of McLennan Street, Mooroopna; between Joseph Street and Echuca Road; and River Road, Murchison, near Billy's Bend to ensure the safety of those that use these roads?

### **Southern Metropolitan Region**

**David DAVIS** (Southern Metropolitan) (13:01): (337) I want to ask the Minister for Planning some questions about the government's proposed changes to the planning system, and I am very concerned that Southern Metro will be very much at the forefront and in the gun for the government's planning reforms. Ms Crozier and I understand the importance of heritage protection in our area, so what I am seeking from the minister is an indication, perhaps a document or a list, of heritage protections that will be retained and perhaps enhanced – but I am not sure, given the sense that I am getting – in Southern Metro, specifically through the municipalities of Southern Metro: Boroondara, Stonnington –

**Georgie Crozier:** The councils have no say.

**David DAVIS:** That is right – councils having no say. But what heritage protections will be retained, is my simple question, to ensure the character and the livability of our suburbs is protected?

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

**Ann-Marie HERMANS** (South-Eastern Metropolitan) (13:02): (338) My question is for the Minister for Transport and Infrastructure regarding the Suburban Rail Loop and the Heatherton stabling facility. We might all recall the Liberals fought very, very hard to make sure that the Heatherton stabling facility was not a stabling facility but a great park. Soils and groundwater at the Cheltenham SRL station site are contaminated with polycyclic aromatic hydrocarbons, metals and cyanide, and they are being excavated and moved to the stabling facility in Heatherton, a former quarry site which has operated for over a decade as a clean landfill, where the degree of contamination is uncertain. Minister, what permits and mitigation measures are being undertaken at the stabling facility at Heatherton to protect human and environmental health for the nearby residences and market gardens in the area?

**The PRESIDENT:** Standing orders prescribe we only have 15 constituency questions, but I am going to call Dr Heath and do something very bold and we will only have 14 tomorrow instead of 15.

### **Eastern Victoria Region**

**Renee HEATH** (Eastern Victoria) (13:04): (339) My question is for the Minister for Multicultural Affairs. On 8 June my office wrote to the minister on behalf of Sikh Volunteers Australia, who were seeking assistance to purchase land in Monbulk, but I have still not received a response. Sikh Volunteers Australia are a not-for-profit organisation that provide resources to the most vulnerable in our communities. Their impact was highlighted during the 2019 bushfires, when they provided meals and hampers to affected communities. They want to expand their operation via the purchase of land at 585 Belgrave-Hallam Road. This land is currently owned by an Islamic group who are unable to build a school on it due to council restrictions, but now they want to sell the land to the Sikh community, who need an assurance that their plans will not be blocked. Minister, in the midst of a cost-of-living crisis the Sikhs provide an incredible service. When will their request be approved so that disadvantaged individuals can get the support that they need?

*Committees***Scrutiny of Acts and Regulations Committee***Membership*

**The PRESIDENT** (13:05): I advise the house that I have received a letter from Iwan Walters, the member for Greenvale, resigning from the Scrutiny of Acts and Regulations Committee, effective from today.

*Bills***Independent Broad-based Anti-corruption Commission Amendment (Public Recommendations) Bill 2023***Introduction and first reading*

**David DAVIS** (Southern Metropolitan) (13:05): I introduce a bill for an act to amend the Independent Broad-based Anti-corruption Commission Act 2011 to allow IBAC recommendations not contained in reports to be made public, and I move:

That the bill be now read a first time.

**Motion agreed to.**

**Read first time.**

**David DAVIS:** I move:

That the second reading be made an order of the day for the next day of meeting.

**Motion agreed to.**

**Human Rights and Housing Legislation Amendment (Ending Homelessness) Bill 2023***Introduction and first reading*

**Samantha RATNAM** (Northern Metropolitan) (13:06): I introduce a bill for an act to amend the Charter of Human Rights and Responsibilities Act 2006 to establish a right to housing, to amend the Housing Act 1983 to set a target of ending homelessness in Victoria by 2030, to require a plan to be developed to meet the target and to require annual reporting on progress towards the target and for other purposes, and I move:

That the bill be now read a first time.

**Motion agreed to.**

**Read first time.**

**Samantha RATNAM:** I move:

That the second reading be made an order of the day for the next day of meeting.

**Motion agreed to.**

**Nuclear Activities (Prohibitions) Repeal Bill 2023***Introduction and first reading*

**David LIMBRICK** (South-Eastern Metropolitan) (13:06): I introduce a bill for an act to repeal the Nuclear Activities (Prohibitions) Act 1983, to consequentially amend the Electricity Industry

(Residual Provisions) Act 1993, the Mineral Resources (Sustainable Development) Act 1990 and the State Electricity Commission Act 1958 and for other purposes, and I move:

That the bill be now read a first time.

**Motion agreed to.**

**Read first time.**

**David LIMBRICK:** I move:

That the second reading be made an order of the day for the next day of meeting.

**Motion agreed to.**

### *Committees*

#### **Scrutiny of Acts and Regulations Committee**

##### *Alert Digest No. 9*

**Sonja TERPSTRA** (North-Eastern Metropolitan) (13:07): Pursuant to section 35 of the Parliamentary Committees Act 2003, I table *Alert Digest No. 9* of 2023, including appendices, from the Scrutiny of Acts and Regulations Committee. I move:

That the report be published.

**Motion agreed to.**

##### *Annual Review 2021 and 2022: Statutory Rules and Legislative Instruments*

**Sonja TERPSTRA** (North-Eastern Metropolitan) (13:08): Pursuant to section 35 of the Parliamentary Committees Act 2003, I table the *Annual Review 2021 and 2022: Statutory Rules and Legislative Instruments*, including appendices, from the Scrutiny of Acts and Regulations Committee. I move:

That the report be published.

**Motion agreed to.**

### *Papers*

#### **Papers**

#### **Tabled by Clerk:**

Crown Land (Reserves) Act 1978 –

Order of 12 July 2023 giving approval to the granting of a licence at Alexandra Gardens Reserve.

Order of 25 July 2023 giving approval to the granting of a licence at Alexandra Gardens Reserve.

Land Tax Act 2005 – Treasurer's Report for 1 July 2022 to 31 December 2022 of Land Tax Absentee Owner Surcharge Exemptions, under sections 3B and 3BA of the Act.

Ombudsman – Misconduct in public organisations: A casebook, August 2023 (*released on 9 August 2023 – a non-sitting day*) (*Ordered to be published*).

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

Banyule, Boroondara, Manningham, Nillumbik, Whitehorse, Whittlesea and Yarra Planning Schemes – Amendment GC220.

Buloke Planning Scheme – Amendment C45.

Darebin Planning Scheme – Amendment C182.

Kingston Planning Scheme – Amendment C218.

Port Phillip Planning Scheme – Amendment C213.

Victoria Planning Provisions – Amendments VC236 and VC238.

Wellington Planning Scheme – Amendment C112.

Statutory Rules under the following Acts –

Building Act 1993 – No. 80.

Circular Economy (Waste Reduction and Recycling) Act 2021 – No. 78.

County Court Act 1958 – No. 81.

Subordinate Legislation Act 1994 – No. 79.

Subordinate Legislation Act 1994 –

Documents under section 15 in respect of Statutory Rule Nos. 60, 71, 72, 74, 75, 76, 78, 79, 80 and 81.

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

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

Pilotage Services Providers Standards – V1, under the Port Management Act 1995.

Victorian Environmental Assessment Council – Report on Assessment of early government-accepted LCC recommendations, June 2023, under 26E(5) of the Victorian Environmental Assessment Council Act 2001.

Wrongs Act 1958 – Notice of scale of fees and costs for referrals of medical questions to medical panels under Part VBA (*Gazette No. 26, 29 June 2023*).

### *Committees*

#### **Economy and Infrastructure Committee**

##### *Inquiry into the Use of School Buses in Rural and Regional Victoria*

**The Clerk:** I have received the following paper for presentation to the house pursuant to standing orders: government response to the Economy and Infrastructure Committee's inquiry into the use of school buses in rural and regional Victoria.

### *Business of the house*

#### **Parliamentary privilege**

##### *Right of reply: Greyhound Racing Victoria*

**The PRESIDENT** (13:09): Under standing order 21.03 I present a right of reply from Terrie Benfield, general counsel and general manager, corporate services, at Greyhound Racing Victoria relating to comments made by Ms Purcell during a second-reading speech on 30 May 2023. During my consideration of the application for the right of reply, I notified Ms Purcell in writing and further consulted with her on the submission. I remind the house that the standing orders require me to not consider or judge the truth of any statements made in the Council or the submission. In accordance with standing orders, the right of reply is ordered to be published and incorporated in *Hansard*.

*Reply as follows:*

#### ***Right of reply – inaction by GRV***

Ms Georgie Purcell made statements in the Legislative Council on 30 May 2023 as follows.

Ms Purcell stated:

*To paraphrase quotes of some recent participants from this industry: 'When we gave a possum to the greyhound, the more it scratched him the more he went nuts,' 'If anyone says anything, you went out and caught it in the run ... It's not your fault,' and, 'A few months ago he was letting dogs live in his trailer because he didn't have enough kennels, and he literally forgot about them and they starved to death.' and 'In 2002 I sent Greyhound Racing Victoria an email telling them which trainer to buy live possums from and how much they were. Guess what, he is still selling possums.' and 'I went to the racing integrity commissioner earlier this year with some recorded phone calls of trainers bragging about drugging dogs and live baiting. Nothing happened.' Those are just a few of the conversations that have been sent through to my office in recent times.*

Ms Purcell's statements suggested that Ms Purcell had credible information that Greyhound Racing Victoria (GRV) had failed to act on information that identified persons registered with GRV undertaking criminal activity. GRV did not receive the email quoted by Ms Purcell. GRV does not have the information Ms Purcell

states is in her possession. Ms Purcell did not contact GRV to verify this information before making these statements.

By stating that she had received the evidence and quoting it with a statement that GRV also has the information and failed to act on it, GRV's reputation as a statutory entity has been adversely affected and public confidence in GRV registered participants will be adversely affected.

By stating that herself or her office spoke directly to participants and then referring to them as quotes results in a public perception that not only did Ms Purcell receive the information directly from a registered participant, but that she found the information provided credible enough for her to restate those claims in Parliament. The assumption on behalf of the public is that these statements are true.

If not appropriately clarified, these statements will reduce the likelihood referrals will be made to GRV. This not only negatively effects GRV's ability to safeguard the integrity of the greyhound industry but also has a direct and adverse impact on welfare outcomes and so the performance of GRV's statutory functions.

GRV has a robust regulatory framework and a zero tolerance for baiting on luring offences. A key part of achieving this is to gather any information that may point to unlawful or inappropriate activity relevant to our industry. GRV strongly encourages all members of our community and any member of the general public to report any such information to the Greyhound Racing Integrity Unit (GRIU) for investigation.

This can be done online via this link <https://www.grv.org.au/report-suspicious-activity/>, or by calling the Investigations Hotline on 1300 856 109 and can be done anonymously.

***Right of reply – statement attributed to GRV***

Ms Georgie Purcell in the Legislative Council on 30 May 2023 made statements that *“GRV have confirmed that they will not be following up on this matter, simply because Mr Borda is from South Australia and also registered there.”* GRV did not make these statements to Ms Purcell.

The person referenced by Ms Purcell, is the Owner of the greyhound and is registered in South Australia, not with Greyhound Racing Victoria. If the breach of the Rules of Racing occurred, it occurred in South Australia, not Victoria. Given this, Greyhound Racing Victoria does not have jurisdiction to act against the Owner in relation to these offences.

Greyhound Racing South Australia (GRSA) is responsible for the investigation and any prosecution deriving from that investigation. However, because both of the Owner's greyhounds were last trained and raced in Victoria, the GRV Greyhound Racing Integrity Unit (GRIU) have assisted GRSA by making inquiries with the trainers who are registered in Victoria. Should GRSA bring charges against the Owner, those charges will be heard and determined in South Australia.

If not appropriately clarified, the statement by Ms Purcell that GRV stated that GRV will not take action adversely impacts on public confidence in GRV which adversely impacts on GRV's statutory functions.

## Notices

### Notices of motion given.

#### General business

**Georgie CROZIER** (Southern Metropolitan) (13:18): I move, by leave:

That the following general business take precedence on Wednesday 16 August 2023:

- (1) order of the day made this day, second reading of the Independent Broad-based Anti-corruption Commission Amendment (Public Recommendations) Bill 2023;
- (2) order of the day 1, second reading of the Firefighters' Presumptive Rights Compensation Legislation Amendment Bill 2023;
- (3) order of the day made this day, second reading of the Nuclear Activities (Prohibitions) Repeal Bill 2023;
- (4) order of the day 16, resumption of debate on the second reading of the Independent Broad-based Anti-corruption Commission Amendment (Facilitation of Timely Reporting) Bill 2022;
- (5) notice of motion 156, standing in Dr Bach's name on teachers who support children with disabilities;
- (6) order of the day 12, resumption of debate on the second reading of the Operation Daintree Implementation (No. 1) Bill 2023; and
- (7) order of the day 3, resumption of debate on the second reading of the Independent Broad-based Anti-corruption Commission Amendment (Ending Political Corruption) Bill 2023.

### Motion agreed to.



*Members statements***South West Healthcare**

**Jacinta ERMACORA** (Western Victoria) (13:19): A week ago tomorrow I was thrilled to accompany the Minister for Health Mary-Anne Thomas as she visited South West Healthcare in Warrnambool. We showed the minister where the \$384 million stage 2 investments will be located, including a new emergency department, new operating theatres and a new medical tower. The minister also visited the site of the innovative new linen and supply department currently under construction, where she met Ashleigh McCosh and Ben Harvey, who are both thrilled to be four months into their apprenticeships. Ashleigh was all smiles, saying she was really enjoying learning the electrical trade, and Ben is doing a plumbing apprenticeship.

As we toured the hospital we visited the community health centre funded by the Bracks–Brumby Labor governments. We saw the completed first stage of the redevelopment funded by Premier Daniel Andrews when he was the health minister. The minister pointed out that not only will these projects give great health benefits to the wider community, they will also create many jobs and opportunities for young people to be able to stay in their communities if they so choose, rather than leaving.

There is no doubt that Labor has a strong track record of investing in health in the south-west. I congratulate all involved in these significant and complex projects and look forward to celebrating the next milestones.

**Safer Care Victoria**

**Georgie CROZIER** (Southern Metropolitan) (13:21): Last week the government released the *2021–22 Sentinel Events Annual Report*. It is a scant report. It does not have anything in it – just a bit of government waffle: ‘What is a sentinel event?’ – half a page and half a blank page. There are other blank pages around acknowledgement of country and lived experience. But it is not actually talking about the issue at hand: 240 sentinel events. These are very serious issues that have happened to Victorians and a tragedy for many, many patients and their families.

What we do not know is the level and depth of what has occurred in our health services. Back in 2007 Daniel Andrews, who was then the health minister, stated that:

It is vital that our services report on these events, so that we can learn from them and endeavour to reduce such tragedies in the future.

At that time there were hospital horrors: deaths from error, 38, including 11 suicides; three medication errors; procedures on wrong person, body part, 20; instrument left inside patient post surgery, eight; and other catastrophic events, 37. That is actually more information than we have got 16 years later.

It is just a joke. This government lacks transparency and lacks accountability for the failures that are occurring within the system. They have continued to occur. There are 38 children impacted here, and the government will not even tell us how many have died, let alone how many other Victorians have died because of the ongoing failures.

**Independent Broad-based Anti-corruption Commission**

**Adem SOMYUREK** (Northern Metropolitan) (13:23): I notice serial leaker, bullyboy and renowned self-publicist Robert Redlich has been doing various media gigs around town slagging off Daniel Andrews – a noble pursuit when performed by anyone else. Whilst I am amused by two bros turning into foes, please forgive my cynicism. Redlich had plenty of opportunities to let his work do the talking when he held the position of IBAC Commissioner and Andrews was entangled in four investigations; Redlich did not interview Andrews once publicly. Furthermore, this house in February 2022 passed a motion requesting IBAC to investigate the red shirts and to expand Operation Watts to include the Premier and his faction, but Redlich steadfastly refused to do so. Today’s exclusive in the *Australian* shows just how much Redlich let the people of Victoria down. Rather than running around

town venting his spleen from a position of impotence, I call on Redlich to apologise to the people of Victoria.

On another matter, I read with horror that acting IBAC Commissioner Stephen Farrow has applied for the position of IBAC Commissioner, even as he is investigating the government. Farrow has shown appalling judgement and should be sacked immediately for creating doubt in the public's mind about the partiality of an IBAC investigation. Anyone that cannot see the massive conflict of interest has no place in IBAC. IBAC has become the soft underbelly of Victoria – leaking, lying, bullying staff and presiding over attempted suicides and the death of witnesses. IBAC must be cleaned of the crooks and spivs, such as Farrow, that populate the organisation.

### **More Trees for a Cooler, Greener West**

**Ingrid STITT** (Western Metropolitan – Minister for Early Childhood and Pre-Prep, Minister for Environment) (13:24): It was a pleasure to join earlier this month the member for Point Cook and students from Victoria University at their Werribee campus for a community planting day for National Tree Day as part of the Andrews Labor government's More Trees for a Cooler, Greener West program. Students, including First Nations students and those from the Western Melbourne English Program, worked throughout the day planting around 5000 trees. Also, kinder students and teachers from the Werribee Children's Centre joined the planting in the morning, providing enthusiastic support, even though they were more interested in creating a tower out of their pots than actually planting the trees.

This is the second event at the campus, with another 5000 trees planted last year. And it was great to see that those saplings that were planted last year are really thriving and giving us a glimpse of the kind of canopy that is going to be created, transforming that campus. Including this event, 15,000 trees were planted across the western suburbs for National Tree Day, meaning more than 250,000 trees have been planted as part of our government's More Trees for a Cooler, Greener West program. So thank you to the university's vice-chancellor and deputy vice-chancellor for their enthusiastic support for the program. This initiative is not just about planting trees for the campus, it is about creating shade, pure air and habitats, reminding us that our actions reverberate far beyond our immediate surroundings.

### **Glenroy post office**

**Evan MULHOLLAND** (Northern Metropolitan) (13:26): In early July locals were shocked to learn about the closure of the local post office in Glenroy by the end of August. This means that many, including elderly residents, those with mobility issues and those with limited access to transportation, will be left without this hub providing essential services. Post offices mean more than just postal services. Bills can be paid and applications can be made for important documents like passports. When banks close – and there have been a few closed in our community – we are told you can actually do your banking at Australia Post. Now that Australia Post is closing the community have really run out of excuses and are fed up.

The people of Glenroy are not going to take this lying down. Within hours a community campaign was launched, with locals signing a petition that is edging close to 3000 signatures. If this was not enough, on Friday 4 August the Glenroyals came out in their dozens to rally about this planned closure. I had the opportunity to join this rally organised by the Broadmeadows Progress Association with the support of the Glenroy Lions Club. The rally really sent a message that Australia Post hopefully heard loud and clear: keep the Glenroy post office open.

I had an opportunity to meet directly with Australia Post representatives. I made it clear to them they should reverse their closure, and if not, find an appropriate licensed post office location where they can partner with a local newsagency or chemist, as has been done in other areas.

### **E-cigarettes**

**David LIMBRICK** (South-Eastern Metropolitan) (13:27): Yet again our city finds itself in the middle of an organised crime war. Whilst we have apparently become accustomed to assassinations

in the street, there is something new in this episode – arson attacks all over the city. There is also something else new – the products that they are fighting over. Our government's continued failure to allow a regulated market for vaping combined with the federal government's excessive tobacco taxes have created the perfect environment for organised crime to move in. Prohibition has failed, is failing and will continue to fail. The Australian Federal Police cannot even stop heroin and cocaine imports, so what hope do they have of stopping vapes? I implore the government to urgently legalise the adult market for vaping before we end up with yet another market expansion for organised crime in Victoria.

### **Gippstar Awards**

**Melina BATH** (Eastern Victoria) (13:28): It was a pleasure to attend the 63rd Gippstar annual awards the other night, hosted by Gippsland Sports Academy and sponsored by the six Gippsland councils. I would just like to congratulate a raft of wonderful people. The junior champion of the year is Lucas Furlan for clay target shooting, and the open champion of the year is Paige Barr for rowing. The Gippstar champions award went to Aoife Coughlin for judo. The team of the year is the United Football Club in Sale, the women's team. The special achiever of the year is Lesa Fraser from Mirboo North tennis club. Joint winners for team of the year are the all-abilities netball team, accepted by Lauren Baudinette, and the Sale United Football Club women's team, whose coach Madelaine Breakspear is an absolutely fantastic woman. Club of the year is the Morwell Falcons, accepted by Tony Salvatore. One of my favourites, the show jumping junior award, was accepted by Ava Harrington, and the clay target shooting awards went to Kira Waldron, Jack Bateson, Chelsea Beechey and Alicia McGrath. Others were swimming juniors Molly Cargill and Ash Nicholes; surf lifesaving, Zali Gallagher and also Jessica Jackson; athletics, Lachlan Rosato; Rhys Pollerd for archery; cross country, Maddie Buhagiar; rowing, Alex Vuillermine; and hockey, Connor Johnston. And there are many more. I congratulate them all. Well done, and go Gippslanders!

### **Greyhound racing**

**Katherine COPSEY** (Southern Metropolitan) (13:30): Like all people of compassion, I was deeply distressed at what was revealed about the greyhound racing industry with footage coming out of South Australia two weeks ago. That footage shows greyhounds being kicked, punched and dragged by trainers while the dogs cowered and tried to run away. The sheer violence of it motivated the South Australian Premier to immediately announce an independent inquiry into the state greyhound racing industry. Members should know that the same South Australian trainer has raced dogs in 12 courses across country and metropolitan Victoria. I wonder about the welfare of animals in Victoria. Is the only difference between South Australia and Victoria that someone managed to get that instance of violence on film?

I have spoken before in this place about studies across Australia and Victoria that have concluded that the majority of people want to see the cruel racing of greyhounds banned, yet in our state we still have the biggest greyhound racing industry in the world. This industry profits off the abuse, misery and death of sentient animals, and it has no place in Victoria. Greyhounds belong on our couches, not on the tracks, suffering. The Greens call on the Victorian government to amend the Racing Act 1958 to ban greyhound racing as soon as possible, to create a welfare plan for the future of greyhounds currently housed in the industry and to implement a just plan for trainers and other workers in the industry to transition to other employment.

### **Warrandyte electorate**

**Matthew BACH** (North-Eastern Metropolitan) (13:31): I have been enjoying spending more time out and about in our electorate in Warrandyte recently. Of course there is an upcoming by-election there very soon, and I have been spending a lot of time with Liberal candidate Nicole Werner. I first got to know Nicole when she was the candidate for Box Hill at the last state election. Various external forces obviously were not moving in our direction as a party at that time. I am, however, thrilled now that there is an opportunity for Nicole to join us, should that be the will of the great people of Warrandyte, now that my friend and colleague Ryan Smith has decided to call time.

In getting out and about, Nicole and I have principally been knocking on doors. Whether it is hearing from parents at local schools like Oxley college or Whitefriars, who worry that their schools will be next on Labor's hit list of schools that will pay millions of dollars of additional taxes, whether it is talking to local businesses and local business groups like the Jackson Court Traders Association, hearing about their woes when it comes to spiralling WorkCover costs and payroll taxes, or whether it is talking to mums and dads who have recently got their latest bills and are worrying desperately about how on earth they are going to pay for them, what we are hearing first and foremost is about Victoria's cost-of-living crisis. So to all those people in Warrandyte, I would assure them that in Nicole they have a future representative who cares deeply about their needs, cares deeply about providing cost-of-living relief and has a laser-like focus on the things that matter most to Warrandyte.

### **Cannabis law reform**

**David ETTERSHANK** (Western Metropolitan) (13:33): Well, the numbers are in. More than 50 per cent of Australian voters want cannabis to be regulated and taxed in the same way as alcohol and tobacco –

**Matthew Bach:** Hear, hear!

**David ETTERSHANK:** thank you, Dr Bach – and only 26 per cent of people were opposed to this change. It is a view that spans the political divide, with 53 per cent of Labor voters and close to 50 per cent of coalition voters supporting cannabis regulation and reform. The latest Essential poll featured in the *Guardian* last week shows there is ever-increasing support for change to the adult cannabis use laws. This support has been growing steadily over the last 20 years and is reflected in polling by most of the major pollsters as well as the Australian Institute of Health and Welfare.

Australians recognise that the war on drugs has been lost and that cannabis-related law enforcement is too costly and does nothing to reduce harm in our community. Australians want change, they want sensible regulation and they want taxation. The community is well ahead of our major political parties on this issue, and it is time for those parties to catch up and act.

### **Government integrity**

**David DAVIS** (Southern Metropolitan) (13:34): I think many in the community will be very concerned with what they have heard today on the front page of the *Australian* and more generally: Minister D'Ambrosio and her office embroiled in a controversy, a serious controversy, involving the falsification of records and involving serious activities within the Labor Party. Sadly, it appears the falsification of records may well have led to a whole series of different outcomes in Labor Party internal activities.

It does appear that even electoral office activities may have been involved here, and that should concern us all. A minister of the Crown is in a position where they have either knowingly or unknowingly allowed the falsification of records associated with their office. This is outrageous. We saw with Mr Somyurek a year or two ago the Premier stood him and a number of his colleagues down for misuse of resources and for massive branch stacking inside the Labor Party. But now we find under Minister D'Ambrosio branch stacking and negative records that have been in the public domain. I think people should be very concerned, and she should be stood aside by the Premier while there is a proper investigation – while the police and IBAC look at this matter. It is disgraceful. Dead people should not be voting. Dead people should never be voting. Dead people have no role or part in our electoral system.

**The PRESIDENT:** Your time has expired, Mr Davis, and you are skirting around whether you are making an accusation of a sitting member. You are very close.

### **Multicultural Women's Alliance Against Family Violence**

**Samantha RATNAM** (Northern Metropolitan) (13:36): I want to congratulate the Multicultural Women's Alliance Against Family Violence, who recently hosted an important forum here in Parliament called Conversations on Funding Solutions. The alliance was formed in 2022 in response to the growing need for funding support for culturally diverse communities responding to family violence. Since it began, the alliance has hosted several well-attended forums, grown its membership and formalised its governance arrangements. It is led by a powerful and inspiring group of women from culturally diverse communities who care deeply about protecting their communities from the scourge of family violence. The most recent forum was insightful and revealing. It was attended by representatives from both family violence prevention and support service sectors. The forum addressed the complex nature of funding applications and governance arrangements that often exclude smaller grassroots organisations from accessing funding. Attendees suggested that for a funding model to be successful it needs to have an intergenerational family approach and in-language community awareness and to encourage our young people and those with lived experience to train as advocates and counsellors and, most importantly, fund more specialist culturally responsive services and refuges.

We know this work is critical, because the family violence death toll keeps growing. Tayla Cox and her 11-month-old baby and Gypsy Satterley and two bystanders are just the latest victims across Australia. One woman a week continues to die because of family violence. In their memories, I urge everyone to be a part of ending family violence and join with the work of the alliance and other organisations demonstrating great courage and compassion to create a society free from violence.

### **Homelessness**

**Sheena WATT** (Northern Metropolitan) (13:38): The housing crisis is affecting more and more Victorians, driving those from a position of just getting by to one of experiencing homelessness. But fear not, the important work of organisations such as St Mary's House of Welcome and the Sacred Heart Mission is at the very heart of our community. The work that these services provide is a transformative experience that enriches the lives of those in need through the work of organisations, individuals and the whole community. They work with some of the most vulnerable people in our community, fostering empathy, compassion and a deeper understanding of the complexities surrounding homelessness. These organisations are instrumental in offering vital resources to those who are struggling to find stability, providing a supportive environment where those experiencing homelessness can gain a sense of dignity, community and hope. By engaging in conversations with organisations such as these, sharing stories, serving meals and meeting volunteers, they are forging meaningful connections that transcend societal barriers. Through the work of volunteer-involving organisations like St Mary's and Sacred Heart, I was able to see firsthand what a coordinated, structured and thought-out approach to combating homelessness can look like. The invaluable groundwork that these organisations provide creates a framework that can be built on to aid in the goal of reducing homelessness in our state. I would like to take a moment to thank the volunteers for welcoming us and for the work that they do. Thank you very much.

### **Electricity infrastructure**

**Ann-Marie HERMANS** (South-Eastern Metropolitan) (13:39): Outside on the steps, as we sit here, there are tractors going by with hundreds of farmers who have come out from all over Victoria to protest towers that do not belong and should not be built on their land. I have here the words from a farmer, Bill Baldwin, a sixth-generation farmer from central Victoria, who mentions some of the fire concerns about these powerlines. One of the concerns he says is that these powerlines will put CFA volunteers and local farmers and their families at risk when fighting fires around the towers. When a fire starts near or under these lines, it has been stated that it is not safe to fight either by aircraft or on the ground. The reason behind not being able to fight the fires near these lines is that there is a carbon build-up in the smoke that can create an arc of electricity and potentially kill people. By the time people wait for the fire to burn underneath and out the other side of the easement, the fire can be five to

10 times as big as it originally was and is then uncontrollable, putting more lives and homes at risk. They do not want another Black Saturday and neither do I, and I can say that when they finish this particular protest, they are leaving their CFA uniforms on the steps of Parliament in protest and disgust that this government is wanting to put their lives at risk if these towers go ahead. I also – (*Time expired*)

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

#### **Notices of motion**

**Lee TARLAMIS** (South-Eastern Metropolitan) (13:41): I move:

That the consideration of notices of motion, government business, 36 to 93, be postponed until later this day.

**Motion agreed to.**

### ***Bills***

#### **Energy Legislation Amendment (Energy Safety) Bill 2023**

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

**Debate resumed on motion of Jaclyn Symes:**

That the bill be now read a second time.

**David DAVIS** (Southern Metropolitan) (13:42): I am pleased to rise and make a contribution to the Energy Legislation Amendment (Energy Safety) Bill 2023. It is a bill we will not oppose, but this bill amends various energy acts to strengthen energy safety compliance. The bill amends the Electricity Safety Act 1998 in relation to requirements for certain owners and operators of electrical installations. It amends the Electricity Safety Act in relation to modifications of supply networks and changes to safety management systems and revised electricity safety management schemes and bushfire mitigation plans. It amends the Electricity Safety Act 1998 in relation to voluntary electricity safety management schemes for operators of complex electrical installations, the period within which things seized by enforcement officers must be returned, the preservation of serious electrical incident sites, the acceptance and enforcement of written undertakings, penalties for offences and the period within which a proceeding may be commenced. It amends the Gas Safety Act 1997 in relation to the preservation of gas incident sites, modification of facilities and changes to safety management. It also amends the Pipelines Act 2005 in relation to acceptance and enforcement of written undertakings and penalties for offences.

Part 2 of the bill, the amendment of the Electricity Safety Act 1998, the Governor in Council published in the *Government Gazette*. It can under this provision declare an owner or operator of an electrical installation as a declared owner, to which certain duties and obligations apply. Transmission companies must pay to Energy Safe Victoria an annual amount to be determined by the minister. It aligns the general duties of an owner or operator of a complex electrical installation with those of a major electrical company, including designing, constructing and decommissioning an installation and a supply network. It also deals with some of the duties of an operator to minimise bushfire danger and a general duty of major electricity compliance companies. It ensures that a major electricity company has prepared a revised electricity safety management scheme every five years – every half decade.

A major electricity company must prepare and submit an initial plan, and then there is an iterative process from there. A voluntary electricity safety management scheme operator must prepare a revised electricity safety management scheme every five years, and Energy Safe Victoria may require independent audits to ensure compliance with that electricity safety management scheme.

Part 3 deals with the Gas Safety Act and amendments to the Pipelines Act. It increases various maximum penalties in relation to the general duties under the Gas Safety Act 1997: a gas company or an operator of a complex gas installation or a manufacturer of a particular appliance must submit a revised safety case to Energy Safe Victoria. Energy Safe Victoria may accept written undertakings.

Application can be made to the Magistrates' Court for an audit for enforcement of undertakings. Proceedings for offences against regulations under the Gas Safety Act 1997 must be made within three years.

There are also amendments to the Pipelines Act, as I said, in relation to construction of pipelines and railways and other related matters. It increases the various penalties. The minister may accept certain written undertakings, and application may be made to the Magistrates' Court for enforcement of those various undertakings. I note that the Scrutiny of Acts and Regulations Committee has made no comment in particular on this.

There are a couple of points I want to make here. This is not going to be quibbled with in the chamber, I do not think, by most. But the government has got responsibilities that go far beyond this, and we saw with the Dandenongs – and no doubt Ms Bath will have a bit to say about the Dandenongs and what happened with some of the natural disasters there and the failure to have adequate preparation in place – that the government has not led by example here. It is all very well to push this back onto the firms, but the government has not led by example. The government has not worked with the firms in the way that it could have to get the best result.

Electricity safety matters go back to the bushfires. People will remember in 2009, with the terrible bushfires that occurred and the impact that occurred on Black Saturday, the failure of energy providers to have in place proper regimes. Many of these, let us be clear, are historical. They are networks and historical systems. Certainly there were significant recommendations by the royal commission that have not been fully implemented, and I think that the community can ask questions about the failure to adequately implement those recommendations.

I think the issue is about to become more intense too. As we move to a system that has more renewable energy, there are going to be more and more large, long networks carrying significant power, and this issue of safety will become a very real one. I know out on the steps of Parliament today people are worried about long trunk lines that are carrying electricity, effectively from country sites, where it is generated, to Melbourne. That is effectively what is going on over long distances, and it is critical with these sorts of wire networks that they are safely in place. There are a whole set of environment issues that impact on local farmers and local communities, and the government appears to be proceeding on these matters without proper consultation, without proper engagement with the community and without a proper regime in place to get the outcomes that I think most people would want to see: fairer arrangements, arrangements that help us meet our greenhouse targets but at the same time that are not unjust to individual landowners, that do not destroy the worth of farms and that do not destroy outcomes for those in particular communities.

The truth of the matter is under this government energy policy is a big mess. We know that the cost of energy is increasing massively, and one only needs to look at the *Victorian Default Offer 2023–24: Final Decision Paper* from the Essential Services Commission on 25 May 2023. They announced their default offer arrangements, and it says the final 2023–24 default offer prices represent an annual increase of 25 per cent. That is \$352 for residential customers, assuming annual usage of 4000 kilowatts, and \$752 for small business customers, assuming an average annual average usage of 10,000 kilowatt hours. Typical bills for residential customers will increase from \$1403 to \$1755 next financial year. For small business this means an increase from \$3039 to \$3791 on average. Of course the new prices, which are in line with most default market offers announced around the country today, will apply to all Victorian default offer customers. Around 15 per cent of households are currently on the Victorian default offer. But that gives you a window into the enormous price surges that consumers are facing, the smashing of family budgets and the cost impact on families trying to do their best – struggling families that are really feeling it.

This is a government that has jacked up taxes right through the whole system. No doubt we will hear from the government members that that is not the case, but let me just be quite clear: land tax has been increased on powerlines. Powerlines traversing government areas have had increases in land tax on

them. Make no mistake, the decisions of this government directly and precisely impact the cost. The government is scooping money back from land tax increases on the electricity wires and in doing so actually is scooping back more money into its coffers. But those costs, according to the current arrangements, flow directly through – it is a straight transfer – to the energy prices that are charged by the energy distributors. This is what we see under this government: 50 new taxes and charges, massive hits on family budgets, a shortage of supply – and inadequate and intermittent supply in some cases – and costs surging. This default offer shows you exactly where it is all heading under Daniel Andrews and his government. This government, in one form or another, has been in power for 20 of the last 24 years.

**Tom McIntosh:** Hear, hear.

**David DAVIS:** Well, I will tell you what, people are not happy with the charges they are paying. That is a result of your government's activities, your government's approaches and your government's failure to put in place outcomes that actually assist.

I have just outlined one very specific tax that this government levies directly on every energy consumer. Wires traversing government land cop the land tax, and the land tax is pulled back and is passed straight through as an additional charge. There is not even any question about this. The tax is passed straight through as an additional charge to every electricity user, and that is businesses and families. The tax hit from this government is fed straight through into higher energy charges for every single Victorian, make no mistake about this. Families can feel it. Families know the prices are going up, and families know that their budgets are being smashed. They have obviously got many other things going on too – obviously interest rates have gone up and that is impacting – but a big whack of the charges on families are coming straight through the activities of this state government, whether it be charges on road users or whether it be these sorts of electricity charges feeding through.

Even when it comes to rent, the higher land taxes are feeding straight through into higher rents – feeding harshly through – and people can feel it. Families can feel it.

**Tom McIntosh:** On a point of order, President, I am just failing to understand how roads and a variety of other things that Mr Davis is talking to have anything to do with what is in this bill.

**The PRESIDENT:** Mr Davis has some more scope, being the first opposition speaker, but I am sure he will come back to the bill.

**David DAVIS:** Yes, President, I will take your guidance. But I should make the point that I was trying to point to the costs that people are feeling with electricity charges – very relevant and directly relevant to the bill – and trying to set that in a context of what people are feeling more broadly.

People are feeling the pain of increased energy costs, and that is a big part of the matrix that they are feeling in terms of increased cost of living. I for one am very concerned about what is happening with families and these electricity charges smashing into family budgets, smashing into small business. You know, poor old small businesses are sitting there and these hits are coming from every side – massive electricity charges, as we have heard on the default offer, a massive increase in energy –

**Tom McIntosh** interjected.

**David DAVIS:** I tell you what, let me read about this again:

The new prices, which are in line with most default market offers ... around the country ... will apply to all Victorian Default Offer customers ... Around 15 per cent of households.

But when it comes to business:

Typical bills for residential customers will increase from \$1,403 to \$1,755 next financial year –

that is Daniel Andrews's record –

and for small business customers, this means an increase from \$3,039 to \$3,791.



A massive increase. And look, small businesses are feeling it on every angle. The WorkSafe Victoria charges are smashing in too. All of these are clobbering families and clobbering businesses. I do think there is a series of issues to be made here for our speakers to draw attention to the ramshackle regime of regulation that is in place in this state, the failure of the government to help consumers and the failure of the government to constrain the prices and costs that are a part of their regulation. Some of this is directly applicable, and the example I have given so that people understand this is more land tax on those electricity providers, which is allowed to be fed straight through into increased charges for businesses and straight through into increased charges for families. No wonder families are struggling. No wonder families are feeling it. Daniel Andrews and his government have a lot to answer for.

**John BERGER** (Southern Metropolitan) (13:57): Today I rise to speak on the Energy Legislation Amendment Bill 2023, and there has been a lot of legislation put forward this year from the government to update our energy legislation. This is because many of the statutes on the books are outdated and no longer fit for purpose, which brings us to this bill. The Energy Legislation Amendment Bill 2023 primarily makes amendments to the National Electricity (Victoria) Act 2005 and the National Gas (Victoria) Act 2008 for the purpose of strengthening regulatory frameworks that oversee and regulate the sale of electricity and gas in Victoria.

This bill seeks to ensure that Victoria's electricity market serves Victorians first. The bill will modernise our energy safety legislation framework to improve community and worker safety and will create a more effective and targeted regulation of new and emerging safety risks. As we know, the emerging technologies that we adopt as the state undertakes a rapid energy transition to renewable energy do not mean that we should drop the ball on safety. With heightened protections surrounding the sale of electricity and gas, Victoria will ultimately become a safer and easier state to live in. Our laws are outdated and unable to deliver the protections needed to ensure safe electricity and gas markets. This is in terms of both literal safety but also, more so, economic safety. Both are achieved through one avenue – introducing clean energy to Victoria. It is cheaper, it is safer than gas, it must be done.

Energy prices have gone through the roof since the Russian invasion of Ukraine, and the obvious solution to avoiding this is having an independent generator of electricity so that we do not have to solely rely on traded fuels for electricity, which is coincidentally a perk of renewable energy transitioning away from gas. That is right – Victorian grown electricity is better for Victorians. To quote from the Australian Energy Market Operator's climate and energy director Tennant Reed, as he stated in August of last year to the ABC:

The faster we can make the transition to clean energy happen, the less of that Ukraine invasion premium we will be paying.

Everyone knows that it is time to get on with the job. This bill is a key part in the management of the transition and in ensuring that all Victorians benefit from the transition to a cleaner energy system. Under the Andrews Labor government things do not have to get worse before they get better. The retail reliability obligation trigger will ensure that as we adjust to renewables and develop both the technology and scale of the energy, if there is any instance of a dip in the energy supply, the Australian Energy Market Operator, or AEMO, will identify and anticipate its arrival. Energy distributors will then enter sufficient qualifying contracts to ensure that their proportion of supply is protected.

For what has felt like a long time but is only really a recent development, power bills have been a big stress on families' budgets, influenced by both the cost-of-living crisis and inflation. The Andrews Labor government has been doing an enormous amount of work in the world of energy legislation programs and policies to help mitigate that pressure, along with other measures outside of gas and electricity to help everyday Victorians with the pressures of costs of living, the most well known being the power saving bonus, which was a tremendous success in my community of Southern Metro. Hundreds of thousands of applications were made across the electorate, with countless locals in Southern Metro able to compare their energy plans to get a cheaper deal. The amendments made in

this bill recognise this, seeking to push our laws into the future and ensure that energy regulation is set out to protect.

The amendments to civil penalties for breach of these regulations or obligations will also send a clear message to any energy providers in Victoria seeking to dodge the rules, and they will not be getting away with a slap on the wrist. The amendments will increase the maximum penalties for non-compliance with the regulations and the relevant regulatory body, allowing the courts the flexibility to prosecute non-compliance with the weight and reprimand that it deserves. They provide a legislative framework to compel owners and operators of critical and complex installations, such as batteries, to reduce safety risks prior to energisation. They ensure newer technologies like batteries, wind farms and solar farms are held to the same standards as existing power generators and network technologies. This is because in Victoria no-one gets away with breaking the laws, regardless of what kind. Without observing these measures to protect energy market customers, organisations and companies will be seriously harming their customers. That kind of wilful neglect is not on.

This bill was written after widescale consultation with various interest groups, stakeholders and community bodies. This includes Victoria Police and the relevant departments, including the Department of Premier and Cabinet, the Department of Justice and Community Safety, the Department of Treasury and Finance, the Department of Education, the Department of Families, Fairness and Housing, the Department of Health and the Department of Transport and Planning. This was to ensure that the subsequent amendments have been influenced by much consultation.

This is following amendments made federally to the national electricity laws, ensuring that Victorian legislation is up to date with obligations made to it by the federal government. We will also have caught up with our neighbours in South Australia, whose minister has had the power to trigger a retailer reliability obligation (RRO) after consultation with the Australian Energy Market Operator since 2019.

The first act amended by the Energy Legislation Amendment Bill 2023 is the National Electricity (Victoria) Act 2005. The bill seeks to improve and add to the methodologies and requirements for the triggering of an RRO. This is a responsibility set out in the national electricity laws and the national body of rules that regulate electricity sale and other retail affairs. Until recently it was the responsibility of the energy regulator alone to trigger the RRO. However, federal laws were recently amended to make this also the responsibility of the jurisdictional minister. This means that the relevant jurisdictional minister of any state bound by the national electricity laws, which only exclude Western Australia, may now be able to seek to trigger the RROs, just like South Australia has been for the last several years. To this effect the bill is amending the National Electricity (Victoria) Act 2005 to be in line with the federal electricity laws stipulating the responsibility of triggering the RROs.

Additionally, it introduces relevant protections and safeguards to ensure that the legislation is fit for Victorian use. This means several different aspects that make Victoria's situation unique, most notably our transition away from gas. Unlike other states under the jurisdiction of the national electricity and gas laws, Victoria has made a clean and decisive step towards addressing the need for clean energy, which is a key part of delivering real climate action so that future Victorians can enjoy a healthier planet and environment. This step of course is the banning of any new gas stoves being installed in new homes.

Banning new gas stoves means a small but sensible step in the right direction that, despite the misinformation being spread around, will not negatively affect those already living with a gas stove. It simply sets and ensures that we will not be adding to the issue. The no new gas stoves policy will also translate to cheaper energy bills in the long run and a safer home kitchen. Gas is expensive and dangerous, and if gas appliances are not serviced regularly owners run the risk of having a home with a gas leak. Electric kitchen appliances do not have the same issue.

RROs are an important aspect of Australian energy law. Essentially the RRO can be triggered when the Australian Energy Market Operator predicts there will be an anticipated shortfall in our electricity

supply. After the RRO is triggered, electricity retailers will be required to enter into contracts with generators, assisting to support the rollout of new generation capacity under the new circumstances. Under the newly introduced ministerial trigger, ministers will not need a prediction of an electricity supply shortfall. Of course there is a series of procedures, requirements and methodologies that the energy and resources minister of the day must follow diligently when triggering an RRO for the state of Victoria. This is to ensure that at no point in the future this power is abused. Introducing the power to the minister has the great potential to protect Victorians in the future in occurrences where we see, as we did early last year, a threat to the supply of energy in Victoria, which would ultimately result in heightened prices and heavier household bills. The procedure that the Minister for Energy and Resources would have to undertake includes direct consultation with the Australian Energy Market Operator, direct consultation with the Premier and the Treasurer and consideration of further specified information and criteria for a situation in which it would be appropriate to exercise a ministerial trigger of the obligation. This is to avoid the situation in which the newly issued power is abused, but it will also ensure that whenever the retailer reliability obligation, or RRO, is triggered before a potential reliability gap the minister has the full picture and full story and is reliably informed to take the next step.

This is not the only amendment made within the bill. The bill will also introduce higher civil penalties for non-compliance of industry groups and companies under energy regulations in the state of Victoria. This is to reflect the true severity of non-compliance with energy regulation law and to act as a deterrent to any industry bodies that might consider breaking the law. If you flagrantly disregard energy regulation, the regulatory body will fine you and they will prosecute you, plain and simple. It is high time that we recognise the true severity of violating electricity and gas regulations and obligations. As an energy provider that fails to comply with this obligation will unfairly disadvantage their customers on the supply of an essential product, it is important that we ensure civil penalties act as a strong deterrent in what I hope are the few instances where any energy distributor pleads that they can get away with shirking the law.

It should be noted that there was a measure regarding cybersecurity initially recommended in this bill. This matter has now been placed under the responsibility of the Department of Energy, Environment and Climate Action, or DEECA, as opposed to being delayed in the process of the bill. DEECA is supporting the delivery of mechanisms for achieving increased awareness of cyber risk management and cyber incident reporting in the energy sector in the place of initially proposed energy legislation amendments. This will ensure that any reported cybersecurity risk is swiftly and effectively addressed. Some people may wave the finger at the heightened regulation, but it is undeniable that regulation is the best way to ensure that a market delivers for consumers as well as protecting companies. With something as important as your electricity bill, you would want the market to have as much scrutiny applied to it as possible.

This is why the Andrews Labor government is reintroducing the SEC. The SEC means Victorian power in Victorian hands. The Andrews Labor government is committed to ensuring that Victorians have the best possible delivery of essential products and services, like their electricity and gas. We have more than tripled the share of renewables in power generation in just eight years. We have helped nearly a quarter of a million Victorian households install solar on their roofs. This has reduced bills, putting power back in your pocket and giving you control of your energy. We have held the Victorian renewable energy target auction, the country's largest reverse auction for renewables. We installed the Victorian Big Battery, the largest in the Southern Hemisphere, and we made Victoria the home of big batteries – that is Victoria, not South Australia.

Through our work we have reduced greenhouse gas emissions by more than any other state in Australia since 2014, and we have only just begun. Having blown past 2020 renewable energy targets of 20 per cent, we have increased our 2030 renewable energy target from 50 to 65 per cent and we have set an ambitious goal of 95 per cent by 2035. This target is backed by separate targets for offshore wind and energy storage. We will have 2 gigawatts of offshore wind by 2032 at least, four by 2035

and nine by 2040, and to support this we will have at least 2.6 gigawatts of storage by 2030 and at least 6.3 by 2035. This is exciting stuff, and it means more jobs, cheaper energy and cleaner air.

So we must ensure our legislation is up to date. We saw the serious fires in 2021 at the Victorian Big Battery and at the Cohuna solar farm. We saw how this highlighted the limitations Energy Safe Victoria, ESV, must operate in and its regulatory limit. ESV was unable, until it was too late, to intervene to regulate these sites until the fires had occurred. That is not acceptable, and it must be changed. These amendments will ensure that our system is protected against many risks that could potentially lead to harm of our energy consumers in this great state. It will protect the ongoing market, it will protect the transition to renewables and it is vital to safeguard consumer protection and confidence by ensuring the safe delivery and regulation of these new technologies.

We are building the renewable economy for the future, and for the economy of the future we need good legislation for the future. To this effect I commend this bill to the floor and encourage my colleagues to do the same. It is a sensible and intelligent bill that will protect Victorians from future reliability risks on the energy market and assist the smooth transition into a more future-ready Victoria.

**Melina BATH** (Eastern Victoria) (14:12): I am pleased to rise to make my contribution on the Energy Legislation Amendment (Energy Safety) Bill 2023 this afternoon, following on from my colleague Mr Davis, and in doing so I would like to put from the outset that it is important to have a focus on safety, particularly where the electricity system is concerned, whether it be at the point of manufacturing of various types or indeed the concern that the farmers had this morning on the steps of Parliament in relation to large infrastructure transmission lines coming through from the north and the west of the state. I appreciate their concerns and endorse their concerns and really hope that the Andrews government actually goes and pays them the homage and the attention that they deserve.

This particular bill is about modernising a safety framework around the delivery of energy, and there is no more I think live and real topic – well, there are multiple live and real issues in the state of Victoria at the moment. But certainly Victoria is facing an energy crisis, and it is felt very much in the heart and homes of families, small business and industry trying to afford those bills and the concerns around the supply of dispatchable, affordable electricity.

This particular bill amends the Electricity Safety Act 1998, the Gas Safety Act 1997 and the Pipelines Act 2005 to look at and strengthen the compliance framework. It looks to expand on the expanding nature of energy production in Victoria and particularly encompass new energies, renewable energy generators in terms of solar and wind – I refuse to call them farms; I will call them plants, because they are not technically farms – but also for those new energy technologies to encompass, be responsible and have the same level of accountability as traditional energy companies, those of generation from gas and coal. The bill looks to improve that community safety through effective targeted regulation and to reduce those risks, as I have said.

We see the changing nature of the energy landscape in this state. One of the interesting things is that when I was part of an Environment and Planning Committee inquiry into the renewable energy sector, the committee did not like my suggestion. They did not agree with an amendment that I put up to look at wind and solar plants in terms of the bond structure and noting that when these large infrastructure projects get up and impact on our landscape, whether that be offshore or on land, the companies that build and run them need to have an obligation that, when those sites are at the end of their productive life, they actually remediate them, whether that means a rolling over or an actual turning back and returning to some form of viable land for agriculture or the like. This needs to be addressed, so I put it on record. A couple of years ago I certainly had that bond scheme in the Liberals and Nationals minority report, and I think it is something that needs to be looked at. It is okay to build, but what about that remediation, and who is going to foot the bill? It should not overly be the taxpayer of Victoria well into the future.

Some of the very important local projects look to be happening off the coast of Gippsland, a fantastic region. Anyone who lives in Gippsland or has spent any time there knows it is a windy place and indeed there are those offshore waters to the east at Wilsons Promontory, noting that it is very important that this certainly needs to be kept to that zone. We have had people write and respond in relation to any other locations with their concerns, and I am very sympathetic to their concerns. I remember when the Star of the South came and was speaking to the public. Indeed there was a forum in Leongatha – and I attended that – back in 2017. I have been speaking on the opportunities not only for wind generation being offshore – that potential – but also for jobs in Gippsland and the importance of jobs in the Eastern Victoria Region. Interestingly, the first time that the government really mentioned that was back in 2021, and by 2022 they were taking credit – that they are actually driving the process. Well, it was very wisely some forerunners in Victoria in terms of the Star of the South. Indeed there are many more players now and proponents looking to come into wind development offshore, and they will, I hope, have their day as well.

One of the things that I think is really concerning about that particular project and its development is that the government seems to have already done a captain's pick on the establishment of the major port that would feed those offshore wind turbines and wind plants, and it seems to be a captain's call of Hastings. Hastings is indeed in my Eastern Victoria electorate and a very worthy place, but the government and Minister D'Ambrosio have focused their eyes there, and I am concerned that she is ignoring the other potential opportunities at Barry Beach and Port Anthony. It is a privately owned site, and I know I have had a number of conversations with proponents – Qube and the like – to discuss the opportunities, the requirements and all that goes with it. But I certainly think this government absolutely needs to have a focus on what opportunities there are for Gippsland as a whole as well. As we know, there is component assembly and installation, the servicing of the turbines and the service operation vessels – where could they actually come from? I think there needs to be an astute discussion with a focus on looking at Gippsland jobs.

In relation to that, I do get concerned that there is certainly a lot of pain happening in the Latrobe Valley, and it is a place very dear to my heart. There are job losses and industry closures, and this house has heard me speak about the native timber closure. I will not go into that in great detail on this particular bill, but there is a changing nature of energy, a contraction – we know that Yallourn power station will be closing by 2028 – and the need to pivot. I am going to make some comments in another forum on the Latrobe Valley Authority – I will leave that piece of information for another time, but I do certainly have some very strong comments about its most recent report.

But back to the bill for the moment: one of the amendments in this bill, and it is indeed to the Electricity Safety Act, has the purpose of revising bushfire mitigation plans as well as electrical safety management schemes. If you mention bushfires in Eastern Victoria Region, we have had more than our fair share – more than we ever want to have again. The reality is we are certainly a fire-prone region in Victoria and across the nation and across the world, and all government focus needs to be on mitigation. If this bill can go some way toward revising and improving mitigation plans, then that is a reasonable thing. What the government has not done over the past many years is take on board the 2009 Victorian Bushfires Royal Commission recommendation 56 from the 2009 fires in relation to a 5 per cent rolling target for forest fuel reduction burns, preparatory burns, and it is a concern that the Andrews government has ignored that. They have gone off on their own. They have gone off on Safer Together. It was rolled out in 2015 as being the panacea for our fire mitigation, fire protection. We see that the resulting prescribed burning, the fuel reduction burning, is less than 2 per cent in any given year and it is quite low in terms of the overall hectares burnt.

In 2019–20 we saw catastrophic fires – 1.6 million hectares, almost 400 homes, lives lost, not to mention our natural fauna and flora lost. I am always gobsmacked at how the Greens can speak about the destruction of various things but they forget about all those incinerated animals due to poor preparatory burns by the government. We will always get fires, we understand that, but it is about the mitigation of them, and this government has been a very poor neighbour in terms of public land and

the way it does and does not do fuel hazard reductions. I could go on. My point is that the government needs to turn its focus to that. We have lost expertise and machinery with the closure of the native timber industry. This is a problem that will not go away, and it will affect people in regional Victoria.

One of the amendments amends the gas act. That looks at the administration of safety management plans by the relevant entity to ensure that they remain current to technological changes in electrical installations in the supply of gas. I am sure people know where I am going here. I have just heard Mr Berger say – and I wrote it down – ‘gas is expensive and dangerous’. I think it is incredibly inflammatory of Mr Berger to say that: expensive and dangerous. I have used gas in my house, as have thousands upon thousands; indeed 80 per cent of Victorian homes are connected to gas. If it was dangerous, people would not be using it. It is actually really renegade of people to say that. In relation to the government’s thought bubble to shut down gas connections by 2024, this is –

*Members interjecting.*

**The DEPUTY PRESIDENT:** Order!

**Melina BATH:** When I light my fire at home and I light my gas system to cook my vegetables, it is actually nourishing my health. It is keeping me warm and it is cooking my food, and I will never, ever, ever use induction. I love gas.

*Members interjecting.*

**The DEPUTY PRESIDENT:** Order! Ms Bath to continue without assistance, please.

**Melina BATH:** The New South Wales government thinks it does not need another complication in the gas market. It is not going to go and ban new gas connections to homes. This will only seek to increase the cost of homes and increase the cost of supply, and it is quite frankly an absurd policy.

I could also go on about the thought bubble that is the SEC. It is a half-baked plan. There are no partners. This is a broke government who had a thought bubble at the time of the election. Let us look very briefly at the interim CEO of the SEC, Mr Miller. He spoke at the Public Accounts and Estimates Committee about how the investments would be solely Australian co-investments, and then he also said there was no preclusion for foreign investors to come into the market. We have heard the government say the SEC will allow us to deliver renewables, but these renewables are being delivered anyway, and I have cited the case of those. He has also talked about whether the SEC or the Treasurer had set a rate of return for this investment by the Andrews government on the SEC, and the answer is, ‘Well, not yet,’ even though the government is expecting to invest probably by the end of the year. So it is putting in money; it is not sure how much investment it is going to get. The SEC was sold as going back to the olden days. Well, that was generation, poles and wires as well as a retail arm. However, the minister has ruled out that we are going back into transmission and distribution. It does not know which way it is dancing, the SEC, and it will prove to be a headache for many Victorians. The Nationals want to see a safer Victoria. This bill goes part way there, and it can walk through the house from our point of view.

**Tom McINTOSH** (Eastern Victoria) (14:27): Well, it should come as no surprise to anyone here that I am very happy to stand in support of this bill here today, very happy to follow on from my colleague Mr Berger and very happy –

**Harriet Shing** interjected.

**Tom McINTOSH:** Indeed, I am very happy also that Minister Shing, my colleague from Eastern Victoria, is here, because I think up-front the whole reason why we are debating this bill is because of leadership – leadership that has seen new technologies emerge and new technologies succeed. For those opposite, it does not matter what political playbook they look at – they want to stay in the 1950s, and they do not want to take a step out of it. They refuse to. We heard in the last contribution that they will stay in the 1950s. They refuse to leave. It is this side that has taken the commitment to action on

climate change and to the various pieces of that puzzle that we must act on to get the outcomes that we need, and that has led exactly to us standing here with this bill in this Parliament today.

We have had fantastic men and women contribute to the energy system that we have had here in Victoria for the last 100 years, particularly in Latrobe Valley through thermal coal generation. That has been an incredible technology that has delivered prosperity to this state and energy to our businesses, our people and our homes. However, the time has come where we know we need to move forward in how we generate our energy. That centralised thermal generation is now giving way to decentralised generation using various renewable means – sunshine, wind, water – and these are cheap ways that we can generate energy to ensure our energy capacities, needs and desires are met. So with this new technology comes a need for new legislation and new regulation, remembering that it is not the centralised model it has been, which has been perhaps easier for regulators to focus on, with a discrete number of locations and a small number of operators, originally state and then of course that was privatised during the Kennett era. Now we have a situation where we have more and more generators.

It is great that we have renewable generation, but we have to make sure that those operators, those generators, are working under the same or equivalent safety requirements as our generators of the past. We need to make sure that the workers that work in and around those energy generators are kept safe and that their pay and conditions are equivalent to conditions that we see in other areas. We know it is important that we move to renewables as quickly as possible, but that does not mean that we just throw away the rule book and have a wild west cowboy scenario. We have to ensure we have the right conditions.

That is why this bill is focusing on compliance for those generators to ensure that in their project planning and in their project delivery they are reporting on what it is they intend to do and they are reporting on what they are doing. We are ensuring that the regulator has the tools in its hands, with those civil penalties, to pull up anybody – any company, any generator – who is not doing the right thing, because we have seen time and time again that where there is no proper regulation and where there is no proper enforcement lives are at risk. Whether it is workers dying or suffering amputations or lifelong injuries, it is incumbent upon us to stand up for them. This side has always stood up for workers to ensure their safety and their conditions. It is also about community safety. We have seen over the last century what happens in major industries, in major construction projects and in various things when these regulations are not adhered to. We see the consequences. That is why this bill is so important to our workers and to our communities – so that they are all kept safe.

I think the other thing I want to touch on early in my contribution is this new technology and what it means for the new workers, the new skills. We have seen that the Labor government has a \$50 million commitment to TAFEs for clean energy. We see a massive new sector emerging, particularly offshore wind. Ms Bath commented before about offshore wind; I am going to come back to some comments made on that before that I think need to be addressed. We see thousands and thousands of jobs. This government is always committed to jobs and committed to apprentices and trainees, because when we see privatisation we see a shortage of apprentices and trainees, which leads to a shortage of tradespeople. When you get a shortage of tradespeople, people in their homes, mums and dads, go to ring and find a tradie to come around and do the work – and, guess what, they cannot find them. That is why you have got to make the commitment to train people and train them well.

**Harriet Shing:** Free TAFE.

**Tom McINTOSH:** Free TAFE. Thank you, Minister Shing. We need that commitment, which this side has – after we saw what happened in the 1990s with privatisation and jobs going out the window. I remember as an apprentice myself there were the pre-era tradies who wore their overalls, they wore the colour, there was pride. They had jobs, they stuck with their jobs, they got gold watches. Then it just became contractors – ‘Righto, you’re in for six months, then you’re out.’ So we have seen what happens. As these new technologies emerge, which this bill deals with – the new technologies that are

emerging to deal with the problem that we have identified, the plan that we have put in place to deal with the problem – these new workers are required. We know – back to offshore wind – how many workers are going to be required going forward: tens of thousands.

Coming back to this government's commitment to apprenticeships and traineeships, whether it is the Big Build, whether it is the Metro Tunnel or whatever you look at, there is that commitment, that 10 per cent commitment of apprentices on the jobs so we have a pipeline of well-trained, well-skilled workers. I think it is great that this bill is ensuring their safety. It is ensuring the projects that they are on are compliant from a regulation perspective so these jobs are being built safely and efficiently so that – to the key part of it all – we get the energy that we need for our state.

I just want to come back a little bit to the why: why we are here and why we are doing this. I know this has been a very difficult issue for some, particularly on the other side. For the last 25 years at least we have known this is an issue of –

**Michael Galea:** Longer.

**Tom McINTOSH:** Well, much longer. Thank you, Mr Galea. But the real politics of this has probably been hot for the best part of 20 years, and we know we have to take action on climate change. We look at what is happening in Europe in their summer – record temperatures. Year on year we keep seeing records. And there are those that would be deniers. We had the deniers for the best part of a decade – delayed action. And then you have got the –

**Harriet Shing:** Some of them are on the opposite benches.

**Tom McINTOSH:** Indeed. Then you have got the naysayers: 'Oh, you know, we're not too sure.' And then you have got those that just look for other ways to delay. I for one really struggle with negativity, with no detail, no plan, no position for the public to listen to, to get behind, that actually thinks about how we are going to go forward. It comes back to that: do we want to be in the 1950s and just say, 'No, the sky's falling in, everything is bad'? Well, do you know what – there is no solution. There are no problems. It is just negativity. We seem to see that from the political spectrum, you know, either side of Labor, and I think it has a lot to do with why we have been re-elected to government – because we are putting a clear plan on the table: zero emissions by 2045. There it is. How are we going to reach that? Energy is an absolutely crucial part, so by 2035, 95 per cent of our emissions will come from clean energy sources, and we are building the plan to do that.

Ms Bath talked before about Hastings and why the Port of Hastings was chosen. It is a deep-water port, a 12-metre port that we need ships to get in and get out of to install the wind turbines. And I also have to pull you up, with respect, Ms Bath. You talked about how, effectively, the Labor Party has come late to offshore wind. The federal National-Liberal party – because it basically is the National-Liberal party now – sat with the regulatory framework for offshore wind in the minister's drawer for years. It was unions, it was environmental groups that pushed for this industry to come. And we know this industry is worth tens of billions of dollars and thousands of jobs. The biggest issue we have is finding enough workers to fill the roles and to train these workers, which is why we are committing the money and the TAFE programs to ensure we have these workers. But it is more than the TAFEs, it is the jobs that are going to come out of our universities to support this industry.

I get a bit passionate and a bit worked up when there are just these blocks, these negativities: 'The sky's going to fall in.' But yet we move forward. We move forward as a people, as a state, as a country and as global citizens, because that is what this takes. It takes commitment as global citizens to deal with this problem.

On the energy component, we have seen what we have done on the Victorian renewable energy target (VRET) with the auctions. The most recent one last year was 600 megawatts, and there are six major projects to ensure we are continuing with our solar farms, our wind farms, so they are delivering. I have talked in this place before about how we have the highest concentration of solar photovoltaic,



rooftop solar, in the world, which is absolutely fantastic. Australians have seen that it is incumbent on all of us to get involved and produce clean zero-emission energy.

Not only that, it actually makes financial sense. In the 1970s it was \$100 a watt for solar panels. Now we are talking a number of cents, because do you know what – when we invest in technologies, when we invest in people, when we invest in the skills, we get efficiency of returns on these things. And now they are so cheap – affordable energy for people to have on their own home. Batteries are coming; EVs are coming. People like to mock all this stuff. I am proud to stand here on the record, as is this government. We are backing it, whether it is our public transportation and our buses – having our buses powered by electricity by 2025 – or whether it is setting up charging stations, the infrastructure for private citizens to buy electric cars over coming years. We are already seeing an explosion of that. We have gone from 2 or 3 per cent to 8 per cent in a matter of months. That is just going to grow and grow and grow as the supply comes on.

**Harriet Shing** interjected.

**Tom McINTOSH:** Yes, and government buildings, and that comes back to the VRET and the reverse auctions, ensuring our government buildings have clean energy – all of our government sectors, clean, clean energy for all of it.

**Harriet Shing:** Public housing.

**Tom McINTOSH:** Public housing – we have been talking about public housing today, but I am going to stay right on topic here, unlike Mr Davis and unlike others who wanted to talk about things that did not even relate to energy. I do not know whether it is because they do not understand energy or they do not want to talk about it or they are embarrassed because of 20 years of inaction and no plan. You know, the federal National–Liberal coalition – was it 16 different plans on energy?

I am not sure if their energy ministers had their teams' offices mixed up and it was like, 'There's my policy adviser and there's my media adviser. Which out-tray do I grab my paper out of as I head to my media release today?'

**Harriet Shing:** I will just take a lump of coal in.

**Tom McINTOSH:** I will just take a lump of coal: 'It won't hurt you!' And this is why so many Australians are switching off them, because they have just seen there is no willingness and there is no ambition to deal with it. There is just negativity. And the negativity works – credit to them. They got a good eight or nine years. Abbott did all right. He got into government, but what did he do for the people of Australia and for the world? Nothing. They did not deliver anything.

**Melina Bath:** You are digressing. Wander back.

**Tom McINTOSH:** Yes, I should bring it back. Thank you, Ms Bath.

**Harriet Shing:** Let's talk about induction. How good is induction?

**Tom McINTOSH:** Induction cooking –

**Harriet Shing:** You would never ban yourself from induction, would you?

**Tom McINTOSH:** I would not ban myself. Look, I cook with gas at the moment, but I am very, very open and very willing to move to induction, because we do know the harmful effects of gas. We absolutely know the harmful effects of gas. I think if we brought any doctor – I mean, it all comes back to science. You listen to the science of climate. You listen to the science of health. And I often stand here and talk about sustainability. Let us do things sustainably. Let us run our climate sustainably, let us run our economy sustainably and let us run our health, our health services and our individual health, sustainably, rather than just coming back to these 1950 styles of thinking, where, 'Oh my God, I could never do that. We didn't do that in the 1950s, so how on earth could we do that?' And this is the point of this bill.

*Members interjecting.*

**The ACTING PRESIDENT (John Berger):** Order! Mr McIntosh, you have got 36 seconds.

**Tom McINTOSH:** Excellent. The whole reason for this bill is the fact that this government took action on climate change, set a plan and set targets for business, for community. We led the nation when there was no other leadership, and the results of that are right here. New technologies have emerged and new businesses and new skills are needed and therefore we are legislating, we are regulating and we are setting up industry to clearly understand what is required of them and ensuring worker safety and ensuring our community get clean, affordable power.

**Gaelle BROAD** (Northern Victoria) (14:42): I rise to speak on the Energy Legislation Amendment (Energy Safety) Bill 2023. The growth of technologies and new technologies – it is important with renewable energy storage – has now exposed gaps and weaknesses in the energy safety legislation framework. So the bill seeks to address some of these changes and makes updates to various acts – the Electricity Safety Act 1998, the Gas Safety Act 1997 and the Pipelines Act 2005.

My son is training to be an electrician, so I am very supportive of safety in this sector. I think it is extremely important. But I am also pleased to say I am very supportive of renewables; I have solar on the house roof, and the bill is exceptionally good come summer, not so good come winter, but yes, I am very supportive of renewables. But our power bills keep going up and up and up. I was speaking with a local businessperson just recently, and he was saying what a significant increase he has had in his electricity bills, along with his WorkCover bills, thanks to this government. He is really struggling in business at the moment. For locals that I speak to, they are concerned when they get their power bills as well, and it is not going to get any better very soon. The Essential Services Commission has confirmed that Victorians will suffer a further increase of 25 per cent in power prices, and that is an average increase of \$352 for households and \$752 for small business. And a recent report found that Victorian households suffering financial hardship and struggling to pay their energy bills have average utility debts of \$2500, so it is very difficult for people to be able to pay and afford their electricity bills now.

The power saving bonus – the government over recent years has spent millions and millions of dollars on this program, but it is only providing temporary relief, very temporary relief. It has really won people's votes – they are trying to win their favour – but it is costing millions of dollars and providing a short-term fix; it is not delivering more secure and reliable energy to reduce power bills.

Speaking with neighbourhood houses, there has been a lot of pressure on them to work with people in providing the power saving bonus. I do encourage people, if they have not, to apply. It does provide some temporary relief to your bills, but applications close on 31 August. The neighbourhood houses did mention that they are put in a difficult position by the government in talking to people about their bank details – 'Trust us. Don't trust anyone else.' I have been alerted to some scams just recently, and I think the government really needs to look at how they deliver these programs to make sure that people are not put in very difficult positions.

The government has made very big promises when it comes to renewable power and power generation in this state. It has certainly been in power for a long time, but it does look like we have had a lot of policy on the run. I am not sure how they are going to stack up in reality, some of the promises that have been made. Government has promised to generate 95 per cent of electricity from renewable sources and that 6.3 gigawatts of battery storage will be connected to the grid by 2035. Before the last election Labor talked up the revival of the SEC and publicly owned power and promised to build 4.5 gigawatts of publicly owned renewable energy generation, but it was revealed to the Public Accounts and Estimates Committee that there is no limit on foreign companies bidding for SEC money. So far the SEC employs 29 people located in Melbourne, when we were told before the election the SEC would create 59,000 jobs. I think it is worth pointing out too, as Danny O'Brien, a

colleague in the other house, has pointed out, the importance of private sector investment in this space. But we are seeing many challenges in this space.

It looks like we are going to have a very bumpy ride with the transition to renewable energy. Hazelwood has already closed. Yallourn is due to close in 2028 and Loy Yang A by 2035. My colleague Melina Bath has spoken about the impact of lost jobs in the Latrobe Valley and how significant that is, and I know Martin Cameron in the lower house has been a strong advocate for the communities there.

The Star of the South, Australia's most advanced offshore wind project, has not even started construction. According to their website they are currently applying for a feasibility licence to develop the project and they hope to be operational by 2030. Then the first Big Battery to be built at an Australian coal site recently opened at the former Hazelwood power station. It is just 150 megawatts and has the capacity to power 75,000 homes for 1 hour during peak periods. Melbourne has 2 million homes, and it is growing.

The Victoria to New South Wales Interconnector (VNI) West project, again, is due to be completed by 2030, but still lots of homework is to be done. The original plan was to update the existing 220 kilovolt line from Ballarat to Kerang via Bendigo, but out of the blue they have circulated various new plans. They talk about plans on the other side of the house. They were just mentioning a variety of different plans, but I will say I think we are up to plan number nine for the proposed route with this one.

**Evan Mulholland:** Quite a few plans.

**Gaelle BROAD:** There are quite a few different plans that seem to be confusing people, and that is significant when you are trying to work with local communities. People do not know where the path is. We are looking at huge – 500 kilovolt – double-circuit overhead transmission lines across valuable agricultural land. These are massive 80-metre-high towers. When you are thinking ‘How tall is 80 metres?’, I want you to think of being at the footy and looking up at the MCG lights, because that is the height of the proposed towers across regional communities in northern Victoria, with miles of high-voltage cables stretching between them.

The community consultation has been extremely poor. Communities have been just notified, told, given brochures instead of being consulted with properly. I went to a session in Wedderburn that was convened by the *Loddon Herald*, and it was the first time that the Australian Energy Market Operator actually attended a forum to take some questions from the floor. I also went to another forum that was in Charlton in the first week of July. They had quite a number of staff there, about 20 different staff, all answering questions at different tables, which was very good. Then they had another room. People went into the other room, and a group of them came in at the same time. I asked if I could please go into that room to hear the information that was being shared. They said no. Three times I asked; three times I was told no, for safety reasons I was not allowed in there. But it was clear that they were not permitting people to get together; it was more direct contact with individuals. I think that is very concerning. We certainly had a big crowd gathered out the front today.

The information that has been delivered has not been accurate. The landholder booklets and information also had wrong information in them. Some of them have already gone out to residents, and they have already been making decisions based on potentially inaccurate information. I know the federal government has also been concerned and has asked for a review of information. So there has certainly been policy on the run. Transmission Company Victoria got created – similar directors, hard to differentiate. But it has not been done well at all.

The VNI West: I have asked the minister – I have raised it in the house recently – to provide the latest costings and the business case for this project, because we are talking hundreds and hundreds and hundreds of kilometres of these 80-metre high transmission towers. I have seen costings of about \$3 billion, but there is a lot of cost in developing a project like that. The minister has used powers to

fast-track VNI West, and they are just powering ahead without proper community consultation or consideration of the actual cost. Despite this, landowners within 1 kilometre of the preferred route of the corridor have already been contacted.

I was just outside earlier. We had the rally out the front that had been convened by a number of different people.

**A member:** I was there too.

**Gaelle BROAD:** Yes, many of our colleagues were there, which was fantastic. It was great to have David Littleproud, the federal Leader of the Nationals, speaking and also Anne Webster, who has been very active and committed. Emma Kealy also addressed the crowd there, which was wonderful, and it was great to see Jade Benham, who has also been a strong advocate, along with Joe McCracken and Bev McArthur as well.

**A member** interjected.

**Gaelle BROAD:** No, I believe the member for Ripon was not there, which is very disappointing, because these lines are going right through that electorate. Residents are very concerned about the impact of these proposed lines. There is a huge impact on agricultural land, and they have raised numerous concerns. We all heard from a number of people out there today, from Glenden, from Bill and from Jason. Bill and Jason are both sixth-generation farmers and talked about the importance of food security. I think that is definitely something worth considering. Thinking about being proactive, they also shared today at the front of Parliament a different proposal, a different option to the current VNI West that they have put forward. It is a paper written by Bruce Mountain, Simon Bartlett and Darren Edwards. It is called *No Longer Lost in Transmission: Expanding Transmission Need Not Be at the Expense of Land-Holders, Renewables Investors, Communities, Consumers and the Environment*. This proposal that Emma Kealy referred to talks about utilising existing easements to maximise the electricity transmission and increase capacity. The Nationals really want the government to consider this proposal through an independent analysis, to look at the merits of this. A lot of thought, a lot of research has gone into this by professionals in this space, and we do want the minister to consider this proposal.

I think when we consider energy production in this state we also need to think: are we dependent on energy produced in other states and headed for blackouts and even higher bills? Victoria is very fortunate to have access to so many different sources of power generation, and it is important in any analysis, I guess, to balance the risk and reliance on different sources of power. Energy is a big issue in Victoria, and our families and businesses, with our current cost of living and soaring energy bills, are really suffering. Over the last decade we have seen under Labor electricity costs double, the closure of coal-fired power stations, a ban on the exploration of new gas supplies and just recently another restriction – they do not want new homes to have gas either. Well, other states have been very quick to rule that out, which just shows you Victoria is quite alone in some of the decisions it is making. We cannot just rely on other states and countries to meet our needs. Victorians deserve secure and affordable energy. The state government needs to increase Victoria's energy supplies and fix the issues in our transmission network to reduce energy prices and the cost of living. I only hope that Victorians make the switch to see a change of government in 2026.

This bill does amend various different acts, as I have mentioned, to strengthen the energy safety compliance framework in the network. We support this bill to modernise the framework, because that is what needs to happen in the energy sector.

**Michael GALEA** (South-Eastern Metropolitan) (14:56): I rise today to also speak on the Energy Legislation Amendment (Energy Safety) Bill 2023. I do want to acknowledge the contributions from all previous speakers, including you, Acting President Berger, Mrs Broad and Ms Bath, and others on this side as well – a very impassioned speech we had from Mr McIntosh, which was very exciting to listen to, as always. In fact it was wonderful to hear Mrs Broad comment on how our reforms in the

field of gas are nation leading. I think that I could perhaps misinterpret that as a compliment, because I know they have been very well received in many quarters, and they are very well received in fact because we are leading the nation in this reform.

It was very good to see commentary on those matters in what is a relatively narrow bill today that we are speaking on but a narrow bill that has a very significant impact. That is because fundamentally this bill is about two things: this is about sustainability and this is about safety. Crucially the implementation of the measures in this amendment bill will mean that as we adapt, as we continue to transform our state's energy infrastructure network and industry altogether, we actually are doing so in a way that is safe. Other speakers, including Mrs Broad, have commented on the stability of our energy sector, and that is something that is very important as well. This bill is a very important part of that. I was speaking to a colleague just before, who was telling me about an incident in their street with regard to an electrical fault, and a tradesperson ended up injured as a result of electricity. It is a very important thing that we do get this right. This is quite a straightforward bill, and it is good to see broad support for the bill itself.

Of course what the bill is about is that when technologies change, the legislation and the regulation need to change with them. Our emphasis is clear: we are dedicated to making Victoria's energy grid safer, more secure and more sustainable. The road ahead is varied and complex, and there are many exciting initiatives going on. There are many things going on at a broad level too to make that happen, and others have spoken on this. Whether it is the Port of Hastings, the Victoria to New South Wales Interconnector or other measures such as the gas reforms as well, every one of those reforms is a really key step in this.

We are actually at the forefront of the renewable energy push in this state, and we have been for quite some time with the targets we have had in place. It is important that we drive that investment, and through the SEC we will be seeing even more investment. As Mr McIntosh referenced earlier too, it means more jobs, more trades and more skilling up in these sectors, and as we do that, we are encouraging new technologies. They are getting better day by day. It is really, really vital that we actually keep the legislation in line so that we can continue to have a safe and secure energy network for all Victorians. As I say, it is just an example of responsive legislation, responding to the changing circumstances, and it is good to see these reforms come through.

The reforms will also strengthen the safety compliance framework in part by increasing obligations for some electricity providers and companies on those new technologies where applicable, which includes owners and operators as well. Effectively this is matching the new technology safety provisions up to what we already have in our existing network, so it is nothing new or radical in that respect. Again, as I say, it is just adapting existing structures into our new transformed model. It will also provide Energy Safe Victoria with an enhanced enforcement toolkit to provide more effective regulation of this field in what is a very transformative and changing time. Safety is paramount. It is our duty to ensure that this sector operates under these higher standards. The stringent measures in this bill, especially regarding those higher risk installations, are a testament to this government's commitment to no stone being left unturned when it comes to safeguarding the lives and property of Victorians as we do this transition. Whether it is from the big players in energy generation or right through to smaller providers, this is a bill that will update and hold everyone fairly and equally to these elevated standards.

The companies operating at the peak of our energy sector – those involved in large-scale electricity generation and storage – all play a pivotal role in shaping our energy landscape. They are essential for our future energy needs, and as such it is really important that they do exemplify the highest standards of safety and efficiency. This bill helps to further delineate the roles, responsibilities and expectations for these industry giants, ensuring that they align with our vision for a secure and more sustainable energy future. The Energy Legislation Amendment (Energy Safety) Bill 2023 signifies our continued and unwavering commitment not only to learn from our past but to pave a safer, more sustainable path

forward. Through this bill we are taking decisive action to ensure that Victoria remains at the forefront of this energy transformation.

Furthermore, this bill, as other colleagues have noted, will amend the Electricity Safety Act 1998, the Gas Safety Act 1997 and the Pipelines Act 2005 to boost the broader energy safety compliance framework. The bill will make amendments to allow the Governor in Council upon a recommendation of the Minister for Energy and Resources to declare certain electricity installations to be of a class to which certain duties and obligations will apply. It also makes amendments to the Electricity Safety Act 1998, the Gas Safety Act 1997 and the Pipelines Act 2005 in respect of the civil penalties, increasing them up to sixfold from previous amounts. I note that the penalties in those various acts have not been updated since 2007; 16 years on seems like a very timely opportunity to take advantage of this bill to adapt those penalties as well.

Taking a step towards a safer and more sustainable energy model will be able to be done while costing less than \$1 million extra annually. Considering the increased safety and peace of mind that the Energy Legislation Amendment (Energy Safety) Bill 2023 brings, it is clear that this bill is unlikely to bring significantly undue impacts of costs. To fund the oversight, regulation and enhancement of our energy safety, Energy Safe Victoria has laid out its various levies over the next couple of years. I note that the increase for next year will be in the order of 31 cents for the year. While these figures are a nominal increase, they are relatively speaking quite low, quite proportional and quite reasonable given the outcomes that we will be getting through this legislation. Furthermore, through the passage of this bill and its implementation we will see an enhancement of the capacity to investigate and address safety concerns promptly and efficiently, as we all expect the regulator to actually do. This will ensure that potential hazards are mitigated before any harm occurs. Whilst there are small costs involved, the returns on this in the order of a safer, more secure energy network really speak for themselves.

Our commitment to a greener future is evident in our push for new electric alternatives. Recognising that one of the best ways to reduce our household greenhouse gas emissions is the transition towards all-electric homes, we have brought in reforms that will come into effect from the start of next year with regard to the implementation of gas services to new-build houses. Broadly speaking, there are three reasons that we are doing this. The first is of course environmental. Transitioning to electric homes will make a huge difference towards our goal of 95 per cent renewable energy by 2035 and achieving net zero emissions by 2045. This will be, as I said, one of the most significant steps that we can all make in our households in this transition towards cleaner, greener renewable energy. There will be financial savings as well, though, once implemented. Without having to rely on dual connections and by having that single electricity connection, residents will be able to expect a typical saving of \$1000 per year on their bills, and of course, added to other initiatives, such as rooftop solar, those savings will be able to compound to up to \$2200 per year. The residential electrification grants program, which we also have in place, will allow Victorians to save \$4600 on up-front costs for solar photovoltaic systems and hot water. And the third part of it is for health and wellbeing. As Mr McIntosh talked about, we have to listen to the science.

I note that Ms Bath in her contribution earlier, or perhaps it was an interjection, said that she will never, ever, ever use an electric cooktop. I have got to say – and it is disappointing she is not in the chamber presently, but I am sure she is watching with close attention – it is something that has definitely changed over time. I can certainly recall it about 12-odd years ago in one of my first rental houses. I know some in this chamber like to announce every time they speak on this subject that they are or have been renters. It is not normally my practice to talk about that, but as someone who did rent for several years, I have had many different houses and many different types of cooking appliances, whether gas or electric. I have got to say the first house I had back in the day had an electric stove top. It was a little portable unit, and frankly it was absolute rubbish. It did colour my view for a bit, but I have got to say I have seen a lot of friends and family members who now have installed up-to-date electric systems – electric stove tops, induction – and it is quite remarkable. It really is actually just as good as if not possibly even better than gas.

**Nicholas McGowan** interjected.

**Michael GALEA:** So we have come a long way from the dingy little electric stove top that I was using in my flat in Clayton back in 2011, Mr McGowan, and it is as part of this change that we are delivering this. I know those on the other side might say ‘Pah!’ and whatever else and not be willing to embrace it. That of course is no surprise, because we have seen that time and time again. They are not prepared to adapt to the technology, not prepared to adapt to change and not prepared to adapt to the 21st century, and this is yet another example of that. I invite my colleagues on the other side of the house to go check it out. I am sure that at least one of your friends or family members would have one. Go and try and use it for yourself. It really is not that bad. Once you get the hang of it, it is actually a pretty good way to cook. I am also looking forward to the day when I can upgrade my current stove at home to an induction cooktop as well.

**Nicholas McGowan** interjected.

**Michael GALEA:** You know what, Mr McGowan, when I do, you will be the first I invite around. We can cook together. You know what, Mr McGowan, I will put on sausages for you. We will do them on the induction, and we will have proper Victorian tomato sauce to serve with them. I know that is a real passion project for you, Mr McGowan. It will taste delicious, just as it would if it were done on a gas frypan as well.

It is a really important initiative as part of our ongoing commitments. It has been the source of some commentary in previous contributions, so I think it is worth mentioning in my contribution here today as well that despite the doom and gloom and in fact despite the calls for a gas-led recovery by those on that side, I do not think we have had anyone brandishing pieces of coal in this chamber. I think we can at least thank you for having some relative sense, as opposed to the federal member for Cook, who was waving around his piece of coal like it was a shiny toy. That might be emblematic of the Liberal Party’s attitudes, but I hope that those in this place in this Parliament would not be quite so backward.

Nevertheless, perhaps my optimism is misplaced because we have seen those on the other side apparently committing the opposition to reversing this new initiative, the new gas policy, should they win the election. Good luck explaining to Victorian voters how you are actually going to take climate change seriously, because despite the protestations from your so-called moderate members and so-called moderate Leader of the Opposition as they are going on ABC radio and in the *Age* talking about how wonderful and modern and progressive they actually are, the truth is, just as with every other policy, you are going to take us back to the 20th century – back in terms of transformation into renewable energy and back to another Liberal government of cuts, cuts, cuts. We all know what to expect. We have heard commentary over the last few weeks from members opposite about what they would do on this particular policy, and I am afraid that is what we have come to expect from them. One thing that it is very good to see some bipartisan support for, though, is of course the government’s power saving bonus program. I will join my colleague Mrs Broad –

**Nicholas McGowan:** I never said that.

**Michael GALEA:** You did not, but others have, Mr McGowan. I will join my colleague Mrs Broad in absolutely encouraging everyone who has not yet put in an application for the power saving bonus to do so. We have just over two weeks now until 31 August, when that program does come to an end for its current, fourth round. I am delighted to say that 1.7 million Victorians have already claimed through this program. It is a really, really vital investment to support households with their cost-of-living issues. As well as that, part of that 1.7 million people – half a million people – actually took advantage of the program to look at changing their providers and did change their provider to get onto a cheaper rate. It is a terrific initiative, and again I do encourage all Victorians and all my constituents – I know many of mine have already been very happy to – to take advantage of it. Of course anyone in the community can reach out to their local representative, and we will be more than happy to help them with that process.

As I wrap up, there is a lot of initiative and a lot of reform going on in this space, because of course on this side of the house we are the ones who actually deliver the reform and the transformation of our electricity future into cleaner, greener and more reliable networks, and in doing so, this bill will make sure that our safety is not compromised as we embark on that journey.

**Sonja TERPSTRA** (North-Eastern Metropolitan) (15:12): I rise to make a contribution on the Energy Legislation Amendment (Energy Safety) Bill 2023, and I am really pleased to do so, because this is an important bill. We know that it will modernise Victoria's energy safety legislation framework to improve community and worker safety, something that we know is critically important to this side of the house. It will also create more effective and targeted regulation of new and emerging safety risks that are posed by emerging technologies as the state undertakes a rapid energy transition to renewable energy. As everyone in this house will know and certainly as everyone in Victoria understands, this government is wasting no time in the transition towards renewable energy – energy that will come from cleaner sources. That is a key plank of this government's commitment to reducing carbon emissions, and I am proud to be part of a government that is working so hard on delivering that important reform.

The reforms will also strengthen the safety compliance framework by increasing obligations for electricity and gas companies, including owners and operators, and this legislation gives the ESV the legislative power to compel owners and operators of critical and complex installations such as batteries to reduce safety risks prior to energisation. The bill ensures newer technologies like batteries, wind farms and solar farms are held to the same standard as existing generation and network technology. As you can see, this bill is necessary because we need to keep pace with the changes of an evolving industry. Where we have new technologies, we also need to make sure that they are safe and comply with relevant safety standards. The reforms also provide Energy Safe Victoria with an enhanced enforcement toolkit to effectively regulate the transforming energy sector. At the election we committed to a comprehensive review of energy safety legislation for the long term, but these proposed reforms are a good first step, representing a range of quick wins. This bill will help ensure the safety of workers and communities as we continue with our journey and transition to a renewable energy future.

I had the benefit of listening to some of the contributions earlier, and I note Mrs Broad said that her son was going to be training to become an electrician, and I am also pleased to say that my daughter is looking forward to training to become an electrician as well. She will be undertaking her cert II towards the end of this year in October – of course the cert II is on the free TAFE list – which is going to be provided by Holmesglen TAFE. I am very pleased and proud that she will be doing that. I know that she will be trained in electrical safety as well as part of her ongoing education once she becomes an electrician. I know she will be looking forward to working as an electrician and being part of this transition to renewable energy, and it is something that is really exciting. I know a lot of younger people are passionate about the environment, and they are concerned about reducing our carbon footprint and reducing greenhouse gas emissions. Being able to work as a sparky, perhaps work on installing solar panels or even maybe work on a wind farm would be something that would assist young people in combining those two passions. In my family I now have a son who is an apprentice plumber and potentially a daughter that will be an electrician, so I reckon I have got my house renovations all covered there and will be saving quite some significant sums of money whenever we decide to undertake those sorts of renovations, because they are pretty expensive, bathrooms and electrical. Anyway, there we go. As I said, worker safety is pretty important, and this bill does a range of things. But of course ensuring that communities are safe as well as part of any transition and making sure that the new infrastructure is also held to the same safety standards as our old infrastructure are very important.

Victoria is leading the nation when it comes to energy transitions. We are undertaking one of the fastest transitions in the world, and we have more than tripled our share of renewable energy in power generation in just eight years. That is no mean feat, and this has been helped in large part by nearly a



quarter of a million Victorian households installing solar panels on their rooftops, reducing bills and giving them control over their energy. I know one of the great things about when you install solar panels on your roof is you get the technology, whether it is a phone app or something on your computer, and you can actually log in and see the energy generation. I know we used to look at that when we had the old meter where the disc used to spin backwards. We used to have to go to the box to look at that. But now that it is all connected up in a technologically savvy way we can either look at it on our phone or look at it on the desktop computer and see the solar power that we are generating at particular times of day, and of course at different times of the year you are going to generate more power than others. It is an amazing thing, so we love that.

As I said, nearly a quarter of a million Victorians have installed panels on their rooftops. It gives them control over their energy and a great ability to see what they are using and when. You can look at what you are using and when and look at peak and off peak and those sorts of things, so you can actually structure when you use your appliances. For example, if you look at when electricity is peak or off peak, if you are running a dishwasher at peak times, you are obviously going to pay more for it and things like that. There are people in my street who I know are retired, and they go to great lengths to look at all these sorts of things about when to put the heating on and when not to. We know that there are important cost-of-living measures that our government have introduced to assist people with managing their electricity bills, and I know the contributions of many on the government side today have talked about some of those things as well.

We held the Victorian renewable energy target auction, the country's largest ever reverse auction for renewables, and we have installed the Victorian Big Battery, the largest in the Southern Hemisphere, and made Victoria the home of the Big Battery. That is amazing. We may not have the Big Pineapple, but we have got the Big Battery. We love that, because our credentials in moving to a fast transition to clean energy are very obvious and apparent. Through those auctions we have reduced greenhouse gas emissions by more than any other state in Australia since 2014, and we are enormously proud of that.

But we have only just begun, and wait, there is more, as the saying goes. We have comfortably surpassed our 2020 renewable energy target of 20 per cent, and we have increased our 2030 renewable energy target from 50 per cent to 65 per cent. We know we have got the capacity to do more, and we are doing more. We have set our 2035 target of 95 per cent, so we are setting a cracking pace. We are not wasting a minute. We are getting on with it. The target will be backed with separate targets for offshore wind and energy storage, and I know as the chair of the Environment and Planning Committee when we did the renewable energy inquiry we were looking at things like the Star of the South wind farm, which is an exciting project. Who would have thought actually that the Bass Strait – I know it is not in the Bass Strait; I know it is off East Gippsland. Bass Strait is one of the windiest places in the world, so we have got great capacity to generate and to look at lots of different forms of wind.

What we know is that inquiry heard from a range of stakeholders. But it also heard how important the transition to renewable energy has been through the uptake of rooftop solar. That has been a really incredible contribution to our targets, and we thank Victorians who have embraced that wholeheartedly by moving to take up any opportunities to have rooftop solar and to avail themselves of any rebates that they may have been eligible for. It is great. You can see the power of community – what happens when people embrace those things that are made available to them. People certainly do want to reduce their carbon footprint and emissions and are doing that whenever they can.

We will have at least 2 gigawatts of offshore wind by 2032, 4 gigawatts by 2035 and 9 gigawatts by 2040, so as you can see, there is enormous capacity to do more, especially with wind. And to support this increase in renewable capacity we will have at least 2.6 gigawatts of storage capacity by 2030 and at least 6.3 gigawatts by 2035 – again, enormous capacity, and we keep working on building that capacity. We have brought forward our net zero emissions target from 2050 to 2045, which will require the transformation of our entire energy system, including transport and industry, but our energy safety legislation has not kept pace, and this is why we need to make reforms.

This is nothing short of the most fundamental technological transformation of our lifetimes, and it is pretty exciting to see it happen. It means more jobs, cheaper energy and cleaner air, which is going to benefit everybody, especially people who may have underlying health conditions. Breathing cleaner air is always a bonus, and so is cheaper energy, and I just touched on that earlier. People who live on fixed incomes like the pension are the ones who are most vulnerable to price increases, and we have seen massive price spikes in the cost of electricity, for example. Why? Because it is private electricity companies who can rake in the profits, jack up the prices and take those profits offshore. And this is why bringing back the SEC will be amazing, because we know that an essential service like electricity should never have been privatised. It was a failure of a previous Liberal government that that occurred, and it has taken this long to unscramble that egg. I know that so many people cannot wait to see that happen, for us to bring back the SEC, because I know people are going, 'We can't wait, because we want to buy electricity from the government, because it'll be cheaper and all the profits will stay here in Victoria rather than seeing them go offshore.' So I cannot wait for that to happen, and I will certainly be looking forward to becoming a customer of the SEC. I cannot wait to purchase my electricity from that, and I know so many other Victorians will also be doing the same.

It is important to understand that privatisation is a failure, and that certainly is no more demonstrable than in the electricity market. What an abject failure that has been, and it has cost Victorians so much money – millions and millions and millions of dollars in profits that have just gone offshore to large multinational corporations. What a shame that it is. But isn't it great – and I know Victorians are thanking us now for bringing back the SEC. I cannot wait to see it unfold, and I look forward to seeing that story continue.

Another important aspect of this bill is to ensure the safety of workers and communities – and I touched on this earlier. The amendments that are in this bill will also align the energy safety obligations of renewable energy companies with those of traditional companies and strengthen the investigative and enforcement powers of the independent safety regulator, Energy Safe Victoria. And look, recent incidents highlight the urgency of these amendments. Two serious fires in 2021 at the Victorian Big Battery and the Cohuna solar farm highlighted the limitations and that Energy Safe Victoria must regulate facilities such as solar farms and battery installations. So you can already see that there are examples that highlighted these limitations. Energy Safe Victoria was unable to intervene or regulate these sites until the fires had occurred. So it took some really unfortunate accidents to occur before ESV was able to get some kind of jurisdiction over them. We do not want to see those circumstances happen again. We want to make sure that Energy Safe Victoria has the capacity to investigate any concerns before these incidents occur.

Over the past two decades the electricity sector has been replacing carbon-intensive generation with zero-carbon technologies. The sector is moving away from having a small number of large-scale facilities that have historically been owned and operated by a handful of companies towards being a more decentralised and widely distributed electricity generation industry.

I have got 2 minutes on the clock, and I know time is going to beat me, because there is so much I could say about this piece of legislation. It is so critically important. I have touched on some of the safety aspects, and I will not be able to talk about energy and climate action, but I know some of my colleagues talked about that a little bit earlier on. We have done so much in this space, as I said. I touched on a little bit of that earlier in my contribution. This is an important bill, as I said. It does a range of things, not least improving worker safety and protections, which we know is critically important.

I might just talk about the record of those opposite, though. I have saved the best for last, even though I have only got a minute and a half to go – but nevertheless. We are unapologetic on this side of the house about the safety regime. With every project, every powerline and every solar panel, we need to make sure consumers and the community are safe. Those opposite do not care and cannot be trusted with our energy system, and that is why on this side the government are getting on with these important reforms. They let private energy companies run rampant, they privatised our energy system and failed

to reinvest and invest continuously in renewable energy or to support Victorians to take up solar. Victorians paid the price with soaring energy bills, and that is why on this side of the house we have made sure we are giving important cost-of-living relief to communities and we are making it easier for people to put solar on rooftops. Retail electricity prices, when those opposite were in government, increased by 34.1 per cent under the previous Liberal government – quarter 4 in 2010 versus quarter 3 in 2014. It is irresponsible management of our energy system which hurts people, and we know we have vulnerable people in our community who are on fixed incomes and cannot simply absorb these exorbitant electricity price increases. Since 2014 – in the 20 seconds I have – the Liberals voted against or tried to gut the following energy bills: the Climate Change Bill 2016, the Renewable Energy (Jobs and Investment) Bill 2017, the Renewable Energy (Jobs and Investment) Amendment Bill 2019 and other energy legislation. As you can see, those opposite have no commitment to renewable energy or ensuring a safe energy sector. I commend this bill to the house.

**Evan MULHOLLAND** (Northern Metropolitan) (15:27): Can I say thank goodness for the clock. I am keen to speak on the Energy Legislation Amendment (Energy Safety) Bill 2023, and I want to start by pushing back against Ms Terpstra's comments about privatisation and perhaps give her a history lesson on the subject of electricity. If this was an education bill, I would be able to run through and give her a history lesson, because I would like to just point out – and you can actually check *Hansard* to find this out, Ms Terpstra – it was actually just 30 years ago that the government of Joan Kirner began the privatisation of power assets when they sold 51 per cent of Loy Yang B in 1992. I ask Ms Terpstra – I note she has now left the chamber – and others to perhaps look up *Hansard*. Go to the Parliament of Victoria website, check *Hansard* yourself and you will find it was the government of Joan Kirner that sold our power assets – 51 per cent of Loy Yang B – and began the stages of privatising the SEC. Ms Terpstra and Labor – many of them – have spoken about 'nasty Liberals and their privatisation'. If they hated the Kennett privatisation so much, why did the Bracks and Brumby Labor governments do nothing to reverse that privatisation? I wonder: why was it? Perhaps because Victorians were reaping the economic benefits of that agenda. I think that is why. And also on their history of privatisation, as was mentioned, I remind Ms Terpstra and I remind those opposite that Labor actually has a really proud record of privatisation – a really proud record that they should be proud of. Labor of course sold the State Bank to the Commonwealth –

**Nicholas McGowan**: Paul Keating.

**Evan MULHOLLAND**: to Paul Keating, who then flogged it off to the Commonwealth Bank, so you have got a double agenda of privatisation. And who can forget the Gillard government? That Labor government actually sold the last of the Telstra shares. They privatised the last of Telstra. They finished the job, that good Labor government! I know they really, really hate privatisation, but it was actually this Andrews government that leased, for \$9.7 billion, the Port of Melbourne in 2016 to pay for level crossing removals. They almost needed to get double the price to pay for what the blowouts have been on the level crossings, but they did that. That is a great Labor privatisation legacy! There were others as well. How about the sale of the Land Titles and Registry office in 2018, which the Victorian Treasurer described as an outstanding result. The Premier and Ms Terpstra seem to have a different view. In 2018 they sold our share of the Snowy Hydro scheme.

**Nicholas McGowan** interjected.

**Evan MULHOLLAND**: Mr McGowan, they even privatised Federation Square actually, and of course there is the partial privatisation of VicRoads – a 40-year deal for \$7.9 billion.

We see a lot of that on the other side. They will scream about privatisation. I know in New South Wales, when Mike Baird sold the poles and wires, there was an enormous campaign from the Labor Party and the trade union movement about the selling off of poles and wires, but then when it came out, the mechanics of actually selling those poles and wires – who bought those poles and wires? That would be the industry super funds, with former Labor figures on the boards of those funds. So they yell across the chamber and say how much they hate privatisation and how those nasty Liberals are

privatising everything, but deep down in their Labor roots, they love privatisation. Ms Terpstra should check *Hansard* about Joan Kirner and the legacy of Joan Kirner and also should realise, as members opposite should, that privatisation runs deep and rich in the history of the labour movement and Labor governments, and they should be absolutely proud of that.

I want to touch on the gas ban that this government has announced, because it is quite concerning. It is absolutely quite concerning, and we heard members opposite talk about our position on the gas ban, that we will oppose it. Absolutely we will oppose it, and we will absolutely, when we come to government in 2026, repeal it, because it is removing choice from Victorians. I implore Labor members – perhaps the Labor member for Northern Metropolitan sitting across from me – to go out and speak to their communities. I have certainly had a lot of feedback, particularly from my Indian community in the outer north, from people worried about not having a gas connection.

**Nicholas McGowan:** What about the Chinese community?

**Evan MULHOLLAND:** The Chinese community as well. It is really concerning that Labor would seek to remove this choice from Victorians, and particularly Victorians in growth areas in the northern suburbs have been reaching out to me, really concerned about this development from Labor. The Andrews government has not shown how it would fully replace baseload gas with renewable energy, and the Andrews government is once again taking choice out of the hands of Victorians. Victorian homes are reliant on gas for heating and cooking, and to ban gas connection is a short-sighted and misguided policy. Around 80 per cent of Victorian homes are connected to gas. New home buyers should not be punished for Labor's flawed agenda.

It is funny seeing the other Labor premiers react to Daniel Andrews's thought bubbles to take his own government's stories off the front page, because almost immediately you had the New South Wales Premier saying, 'No, no. We won't be doing that – absolutely not,' because they seem to have a little more common sense than this Labor government. He actually said that New South Wales does not need another complication with its energy mix. Previous government studies show that the Gippsland and the Otway basins are a vast source of natural gas and onshore gas. Our energy mix in Victoria is far from stable and plays a critical role in keeping the lights on. And can I point to one of Australia's leading climate scientists, Dr Alan Finkel, formerly Australia's chief scientist. He has been clear that gas will and should remain one of the nation's key energy sources. Maybe this is why he quit as an adviser to the Labor government's SEC, because of the government's short-sighted agenda of ruling out gas and demonising natural gas, which is demonising, I think, the choices Victorians make for themselves – the choices Victorians make for themselves to keep themselves warm, the choices that Victorians make for themselves on using a gas stovetop.

I have lived in a lot of places in Melbourne's north across my lifetime. I have lived in apartments before with electric stovetops, and I know and Victorians know it is just not the same. It is just not the same. While it will still cook eventually, sure, it does not cook to the magnitude that people expect and people deserve, and I do not think we should be punishing Victorians in growth areas for their short-sighted agenda to pursue this flawed plan. Why are you punishing everyone in those growth areas in the northern suburbs and in the south-east by them not having gas while everyone else can? The minister certainly needs to explain this further. The minister needs to be clear about this gas ban and the impact it will have. I know she is rather busy at the moment with other matters –

**Nicholas McGowan** interjected.

**Evan MULHOLLAND:** but I certainly know, Mr McGowan, that the people of Mill Park are very interested in this policy and the people of Plenty are very interested in this policy and the people South Morang are very interested in this policy because they know and they use lots of gas stoves for their cooking.

I have been to lots of multicultural events recently – up in Craigieburn, up in Kalkallo, up in Greenvale – and I tell you what: this policy has gone down like a lead balloon. I will tell you what

policy has gone down well: the Liberals and Nationals commitment that we will repeal this gas ban when we come to government in 2026. Comments I have had are that it is common sense. ‘Why are they doing this? Has it gone through yet? When are they banning it? I’m moving in a year’s time to a new home that I’m building, is that going to be not able to have a gas connection?’ Also, for those advocating new measures for renewable energy, this is not a good policy for you. The state government is investing money in hydrogen and hydrogen research, and the only way that could be delivered to households is through gas pipes, existing infrastructure. So you are going to have a situation where new home builds will not be able to have that connection and will not be able to have access in the future to the possible use of hydrogen. This is the kind of flawed approach taken by this minister and this government in regard to this ridiculous gas ban.

I note members opposite were talking about electric vehicles as well and pumping that up. I have not met a single working-class person in my electorate that can afford an electric vehicle. In prebudget debates when we were talking about the Andrews government record debt it was put to me, ‘What would you cut?’ I actually came back to the chamber with a list. I spoke about fishing rods. I spoke about a few other things – a diversity and inclusion director at the Suburban Rail Loop Authority that was getting almost \$300,000 a year. I also talked about the \$3000 subsidy for electric vehicles as a suggestion, a helpful suggestion, saying I do not think we should be subsidising \$3000 off when the average price of an electric vehicle is around \$70,000. I have not met any working-class people in my electorate that can afford that. Happily, I was very glad to see the Andrews government made the decision to cut that subsidy. They actually, I hope, took up my suggestion of cutting that subsidy. They all say they are committed to electric vehicles, but they place a tax on electric vehicles and then they remove the subsidy from electric vehicles. I think it is another example that we can see of how hollow their actual words are and how easy it is to actually pull them apart on what they say here in the chamber.

People are doing it incredibly tough at the moment. I know in my electorate people are really feeling the cost of living, and that is not helped by new taxes. I think we were up to almost 50 since 2014 since the Premier said to all Victorians that there would be no new or increased taxes under his government. Before the last election he actually said the same thing. But we have seen new tax after new tax after new tax after new tax, which is making life harder for Victorians. The Essential Services Commission has confirmed that Victorians will suffer a further increase of up to 25 per cent in power prices and an average increase of \$352 for households and \$752 for small businesses.

They all talk about their power saving bonus, and it is great that people get that money back, but that money is not making up for the continued increases we are seeing in power bills. The Andrews government does need to accept some responsibility for that. It does need to accept some responsibility for its flawed transition, its flawed approach to gas. I was very happy to be on the front steps of Parliament today speaking to people who are actually affected by Labor’s transition, because their transition seems to be all about transmission – transmission through farmland that will destroy good agricultural land that puts food on the table. These people are rightly concerned about that.

**Jacinta ERMACORA** (Western Victoria) (15:42): Acting President Galea, may I take this first opportunity to congratulate you on your appointment.

I am pleased to speak on this bill that makes changes to Victoria’s energy safety legislative framework, modernising it to improve community and worker safety. This legislation provides the regulatory mechanism to ensure that energy safety is maintained and enhanced as we transition to new technologies. New energy technologies have exposed critical gaps in risk management in the energy sector in this state. This bill will create more effective and targeted regulation of new and emerging risks that come with new technologies and in particular those posed by renewable energy technologies.

Victoria’s journey to carbon neutrality is well underway. This is happening through the transformation of our energy production from old fossil fuel means of energy production like coal and gas to carbon-neutral means of energy production like wind, solar and possibly hydrogen. The transition to wind,

solar and hydrogen is happening at pace in this state, and that is why we must equip our energy safety regulators with the ability to respond to emerging safety issues. The proposed changes for ensuring safety compliance will heighten responsibilities for electricity and gas enterprises encompassing both residential and utilities. This bill guarantees that newer technologies like batteries, wind farms and solar farms adhere to the same benchmarks as established power generation and network technologies. As we change to these new renewable technologies, we are now changing our regulatory frameworks to improve the safety of workers and communities.

Energy technologies are continuing to evolve and change rapidly as evidence of global warming is taking place across the globe. The theories we have heard for decades about climate change are becoming a harsh reality, and we are witnessing these with our own eyes. As I was writing this speech yesterday, the death toll in Hawaii in Lahaina was at 93 – but I have just checked and it is now up to 99 – from the absolutely awful fires that have rampaged through Maui and the town of Lahaina. I understand there are still hundreds of people missing and that they have lost very important indigenous historical information as well.

From wildfires to floods, climate change disasters have been running rampant in the Northern Hemisphere, especially over the last month, and here in Australia emergency organisations are already issuing warnings about our next fire season. That is why the Andrews Labor government is taking immediate steps to address climate change and setting one of the most ambitious emissions reduction targets in the world, cutting Victoria's emissions by 75 to 80 per cent by 2035. We have already more than tripled the share of renewable power generation in just eight years. We are investing in and implementing new and emerging technologies on a growing scale. The Andrews Labor government has assisted nearly a quarter of a million households in Victoria to install solar panels, resulting in reduced energy bills.

Victorians are continuing to take up the assistance and incentives to go carbon neutral. Just last month, on 27 July, Minister for Energy and Resources Lily D'Ambrosio announced a new \$8800 interest-free battery loan, which will enable households to maximise output from their solar panels and save thousands on energy bills over the lifetime of their battery. Solar homes outcomes: homes with both solar and battery save an estimated \$1500 on their energy bills each year, with an average return on investment period of between seven and 10 years.

This government is planning for the future of renewable energy. Our offshore wind and energy storage is projected to achieve at least 2 gigawatts by 2032 and, in case my colleagues perhaps did not hear some of my fellow people from this side, 4 gigawatts by 2035 and 9 gigawatts by 2040. This is a huge change – the most pivotal technological shift of our lifetimes. The Victorian Labor government's transition to carbon neutrality will mean more affordable energy, a cleaner, cooler planet and more employment opportunities as we transition.

With this comes the necessity of a new and emerging safety environment. Upholding the wellbeing and safety of workers and communities by ensuring the emerging renewable energy sector is sustainable and safe is something this government is proud to do. The Andrews Labor government is committed to ensuring that our energy safety protocols evolve alongside the evolving technology. It will also strengthen the investigative and enforcement authority of this state's independent safety regulator, Energy Safe Victoria.

There are new types of incidents and safety hazards which need new and clear guidelines in risk management. For example, procedures for responding to a house fire emergency involving solar panels are different now from a few short years ago. As a former CFA volunteer, I know that the standard operating procedures required for responding to a structure fire involving a solar panel energy installation are different and can be dangerous.

Last week I met with captain of the Warrnambool CFA brigade Tom Woodhams to discuss these issues. He described a number of scenarios where new or originally unanticipated risks emerge and

the difficulty in isolating power from a solar battery installation. Whilst you can isolate power and solar panels at the front of the house, the panels continue to produce energy on the roof. In the context of a fire this often means that the wiring between the panels and the isolating switch remains live and indeed the fire may even cause a metal roof to become live. If we add water to this scenario, we can all imagine how potentially dangerous this can be. This is an example of a safety issue that did not exist prior to the emergence of solar energy installations and a great example of why this legislation is needed. The regulatory mechanism provided by this amendment not only enables Energy Safe Victoria to require safe and preventative practices but also provides for penalties that reflect the significance of a breach.

Tom also explained the issue of battery fires, where the very nature of energy production in batteries results in the generation of heat. To extinguish a battery fire the battery pretty much needs to be immersed in water. Tom has seen examples where they have reignited once removed from the water due to their own self-combustion. He did refer to various videos on the internet, one showing a container ship full of electric cars on fire and another example of electric scooters catching alight. Again, these are examples of the need for strong and adaptive safety regulations as we transition to the new normal in energy production.

A further example of a safety issue provided by Tom was about retrofitting solar panels and hot-water systems on roofs that were not originally designed to accommodate such weight. In a fire situation rooftop hot-water systems can cause the roof to collapse inwards, spilling hot water into the fire-fighting dynamic. And in an example as recent as last week, a minor fire was extinguished by the Warrnambool fire brigade in the solar panels on top of the Capitol Cinema in Kepler Street.

It is important that we design buildings and renewable energy installations to prevent safety issues in the first place. This is why this legislation amends the Electricity Safety Act 1998, the Gas Safety Act 1997 and the Pipelines Act 2005 in order to fortify the framework for ensuring compliance with the energy safety standards. This bill introduces revisions enabling the Governor in Council, following the recommendations of the Minister for Energy and Resources, to designate specific categories of electricity installations subject to distinct duties and responsibilities. Proposed amendments to augment civil penalties are also outlined in this bill, increasing them by up to six times their prior amounts under the three acts.

One example, very local to me, of the necessity of these amendments was evidenced in the case of the 2018 Terang and Garvoc fires, often referred to commonly and locally as the St Patrick's Day fires. These fires began with the sparks from the interaction of Powercor high-voltage powerlines and ravaged 6000 hectares of land and property. Tragically, the peat fires continued to burn for months after the main fire was extinguished and at great expense to the community and organisations and the government to extinguish. Powercor subsequently had a court-imposed fine of \$130,000. This outcome was deemed unsatisfactory and not at all in proportion to the amount of damage done by the fire. It certainly did not reflect the cost of extinguishing the peat fire or restoration of farm fences and infrastructure. This example of neglect of safety obligations shows the current penalty structure failing to align with potential ramifications for life, property and the environment. The meagre penalties undermine the legislation and potentially motivate businesses to gamble with safety because it is cheaper. Many of these penalties have remained unchanged since 2007.

The bill's amendments will implement more robust penalties for violations of energy safety regulations and will give the community confidence that the government will hold asset owners and operators accountable for safety lapses. Further, the bill will equip Energy Safe Victoria with augmented oversight and authority over any modifications to a facility's safety management plan alongside the capacity to carry out comprehensive revisions of these plans at five-year intervals.

The bill plans for our energy future. It acknowledges the volatile state of our environment as we respond to climate change. It represents mature planning and, above all, responsible and strong governance by the Andrews Labor government.

**Ingrid STITT** (Western Metropolitan – Minister for Early Childhood and Pre-Prep, Minister for Environment) (15:54): I thank all members for their contributions on this bill. This bill of course will modernise Victoria's energy safety legislative framework to improve community and worker safety, and it will also create more effective and targeted regulation of the significant new and emerging safety risks that are posed by new technologies as the state undertakes a rapid energy transition to renewable energy sources.

These reforms will also strengthen the safety compliance framework by increasing obligations for electricity and gas companies, including owners and operators, and the legislation gives ESV legislative power to compel owners and operators of critical and complex installations, such as batteries, to reduce safety risks prior to energisation. The bill ensures newer technologies like batteries, wind farms and solar farms are held to the same standard as existing generation and network technologies. It will also provide Energy Safe Victoria with an enhanced enforcement toolkit to effectively regulate the transforming energy sector.

At the last election the government committed to a comprehensive review of energy safety legislation for the longer term. These particular reforms contained in this bill are the first step in that process and represent a number of important changes. The bill will help ensure safety of workers and communities as we continue with our journey of transition to renewable energy.

As others have already outlined in their contributions, Victoria is leading one of the fastest energy transitions in the world. We have helped nearly a quarter of a million Victorian households install solar panels on their roofs, reducing their bills and giving them control over their energy, and we are only just beginning. We have comfortably surpassed our 2020 renewable energy target of 20 per cent and we have increased our 2030 renewable energy target from 50 per cent to 65 per cent. This target will be backed by separate targets for offshore wind and energy storage; we will have at least 2 gigawatts of offshore wind by 2032, 4 gigawatts by 2035 and 9 gigawatts by 2040. So this is an exciting transition that we are going through in our state.

To support this increase in renewable capacity we will have at least 2.6 gigawatts of storage capacity by 2030 and at least 6.3 gigawatts by 2035. We have brought forward our net zero emission targets from 2050 to 2045, which will require the transformation of our entire energy system, including transport and industry, but our energy safety legislation has not really kept pace with this reform. It is nothing short of fundamental technological transformation that we are experiencing in our lifetime. It is exciting. It means more jobs, it means cheaper energy and it means cleaner air. Importantly, it will tackle dangerous climate change by bringing emissions down, but to ensure that the safety of workers and communities is maintained, our energy safety rules need to change to keep pace with technology. This legislation does that by making commonsense amendments to our legislative framework.

Over the past two decades the electricity sector has been replacing carbon-intensive generation with renewables, and the sector is moving away from having a small number of large-scale facilities that have historically been owned and operated by a handful of companies towards a more decentralised and widely distributed electricity generation industry. That exponential growth in these new technologies has exposed some critical gaps within the current energy safety framework. The current framework was originally developed based on, as I said, a small number of entities in the 1990s and did not factor in possible uptake and investment in renewable energy or the technological diversity that has emerged in both utility- and residential-scale installations.

It is critical to safeguard consumer protections and confidence by ensuring the safe delivery and regulation of these new technologies, so the bill does that in a number of different ways. It creates a new head of power to declare an owner or operator of an electrical installation to have duties and obligations in line with a major electricity company, and companies will need to comply with enhanced safety obligations and pay levies to ESV. All changes to accepted safety management plans will need to be agreed to by ESV and do not automatically reset the five-year period in which a safety plan needs to be reviewed.



The bill will align general duties for complex electrical installations with those for electricity supply networks and allow operators and owners to submit a voluntary electricity safety management plan. It will require the preservation of a serious electrical or gas incident site and change commencement of the period in which ESV can bring court proceedings to the time that the offence comes to ESV's notice. It will also provide the minister and ESV the power to enter enforceable undertakings with regulated entities and will increase maximum penalties for offences relating to maintaining safe networks.

The bill also makes amendments to the Electricity Safety Act 1998, the Gas Safety Act 1997 and the Pipelines Act 2005 to increase civil penalties up to sixfold from their previous amounts. As my colleague Ms Ermacora just went to in her contribution, the current penalties really do not align with the potential implications to life, property and the environment that may result from a failure to fulfil safety obligations. Such low penalty rates in the current scheme really undermine the intent of the legislation, and low penalties potentially incentivise businesses to take safety risks.

The Andrews Labor government is absolutely committed to making sure that energy safety is paramount and that our robust energy safety framework is proactively updated to ensure we continue to keep workers and the community safe. There are inherent risks with all electrical infrastructure, but these risks are mitigated through appropriate energy safety rules. As a government, we have always worked closely with ESV and prioritised safety. We introduced legislation through the Energy Safety Legislation Amendment (Victorian Energy Safety Commission and Other Matters) Act 2020, which transformed ESV from a single-member agency to a three-person commission. That commenced in January 2021, supported by a chief executive officer and a technical advisory committee. At the election, as I said, we committed to a comprehensive review of energy safety legislation for the long term, and we are getting on with that. As we continue to transition to renewable energy, we will maintain our proactive approach to safety, and that is why we need this bill. I commend the bill to the house.

**Motion agreed to.**

**Read second time.**

*Third reading*

**Ingrid STITT** (Western Metropolitan – Minister for Early Childhood and Pre-Prep, Minister for Environment) (16:03): I move, by leave:

That the bill be now read a third time.

**Motion agreed to.**

**Read third time.**

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

*Adjournment*

**Ingrid STITT** (Western Metropolitan – Minister for Early Childhood and Pre-Prep, Minister for Environment) (16:03): I move:

That the house do now adjourn.

### **Electricity infrastructure**

**Joe McCracken** (Western Victoria) (16:03): (376) I asked the Minister for Energy and Resources a constituency question in June about the proposed VNI West project, which was the subject of a protest out the front today. I asked the minister if she would come and meet with the locals on the ground and hear their concerns. The response I received was like something out of *Utopia* or

*Yes Minister.* In relation to the Victorian transmission investment framework that was released, she said that it would provide:

Place-based approaches to engagement and benefits for impacted Traditional Owners, local communities, and landowners. The focus is on collaborative, long-term approaches to build thriving communities delivered in a defined geographical location.

Is that like some sort of joke? Collaboration? Long-term approaches? Thriving communities? That does not describe the Victorian government's approach to this at all. But I guess that is the same approach that has been taken for the Western Renewables Link, and many communities that were out the front today have experienced that as well.

It was actually so bad that the Labor member for Ripon Martha Haylett was quoted on 20 June this year in the Ballarat *Courier* as saying that the Australian Energy Market Operator and AusNet:

... had failed to "bring communities along for the journey" and did not represent "what the Labor movement is all about".

The member for Ripon then went on to say:

Transmission line projects need a social licence to be delivered ...

I am here to tell you that it simply does not have one in my community.

She then added:

I have sat in the homes of so many people who have cried as they've told me about how they fear losing their family homes and livelihoods ...

So the action that I seek from the minister is this: provide a guarantee to local communities along the route of the VNI West that you will not treat them the same as you did the communities you engaged with for the Western Renewables Link. I urge the minister to have genuine conversations instead of sending her Melbourne-based bureaucrats out to have these consultations done. It is just not good enough. And my offer still stands to the minister too: I will come with you and meet with the communities. I have met with them already. I welcome you to come out to communities like St Arnaud, Marnoo and many along the line of the VNI West all the way from Bulgana, because they have been greatly impacted, and they have hated the way that they have been treated by this government. I would love for the minister to actually show genuine concern and listen.

### **Rural and regional abortion services**

**Georgie PURCELL** (Northern Victoria) (16:06): (377) My adjournment matter this afternoon is for the Minister for Health, and the action I seek is for her to urgently address the abortion accessibility crisis in regional and rural areas of Victoria. New data has revealed that there are currently 17 areas in Victoria where people have no access to abortion, and a vast majority of these are in my electorate of Northern Victoria. Access to essential health care is being described as a postcode lottery, and it is pregnant people in the country that have the losing ticket. Recently the federal government announced increased access to medical abortion, also known as the abortion pill, and while this is a great first step, there are still glaring gaps in reproductive health care across regional Victoria. This not only puts pregnant people at risk but further increases and perpetuates the stigma attached to terminations.

I have spoken publicly and openly about my own personal experience with abortion, not because it is always easy but because one of the most powerful ways to overcome the stigma attached to it is to normalise the conversation around it. I got an abortion because I did not want to have a child. I think that is important to say, because too often we defend abortion by using the most extreme and less common examples of why they are necessary, such as sexual assaults and unviable pregnancies. But when it comes to making the decision to have an abortion, no-one needs a justification or an excuse. And while I was grateful to have access to safe and legal health care when I needed it the most, to get an abortion as soon as possible my only option was for the procedure to be undertaken at a city location with an out-of-pocket cost of over \$500. For many Victorians this is a cost they simply cannot afford

to bear. For regional Victorians it is compounded by travel time and expenses, arranging time off work, added cost for childcare arrangements and in most cases a support person being required to do the same.

We know that inaccessibility of abortion increases the risks of the people requiring them turning to unsafe measures and leads to poor mental health outcomes and additional stress at a time that for many is already difficult enough. There is so much more that this government could be doing to ensure that we regional Victorians do not have to travel across the state or pay an exorbitant amount to access what is in no uncertain terms basic health care. At a time where bodily autonomy is under attack across the world, I hope the minister and this government can show that here in Victoria bodily autonomy is not negotiable by expanding abortion services into our regional areas.

### East Malvern RSL

**John BERGER** (Southern Metropolitan) (16:08): (378) My adjournment is for the Minister for Veterans in the other place Minister Suleyman, and the action I seek is that the minister join me on a visit to East Malvern RSL in my community of Malvern to meet with the committee, staff and members to discuss the new Veterans Card Victoria. The East Malvern RSL sub-branch history begins in 1933 in a barn loft at the rear of a property off Darling Road. It was established by foundation president Ted Hopkins, vice-president Cyril Elliott and secretary Eric Lowe. Over 120 ex-servicemen came together in this barn. With more than 90 years of history since its establishment, East Malvern RSL notes that many of its members were among the first Anzacs who fought at Gallipoli. Many had fought on the Western Front. Their vision was:

... to preserve the spirit of mateship, to honour the memory of the fallen and to provide welfare services to veterans and their dependants.

Today their vision is to ensure that every veteran and their families are respected and supported. East Malvern RSL manages to achieve this in many ways, whether it be a commemorative service to remember the service and sacrifice of our veterans or to fundraise for their members and their families to support them.

The RSL also provides welfare services through grants and scholarships, supports kindred organisations and is a safe and friendly space for veterans and the community to come together. With the diverse, complex and multigenerational veteran community – ranging from the trails of New Guinea to the hills of Korea, the jungles of Vietnam and the deserts of Kuwait, Iraq and Afghanistan – the needs of the veterans are different. The people are different, and the communities are different, but they all share something in common: they are bonded by their shared mateship, service and duty. They are all diggers, and they deserve our respect.

The East Malvern RSL is a real social hub in my community. It has a bistro and a space for live music, and of course it hosts the East Malvern Men's Shed, but it needs your support – our support. So I encourage my community to visit [eastmalvernsl.org](http://eastmalvernsl.org) and sign up as a member. For only \$40 your support goes a long way to keeping the place alive and running, and it goes a long way in supporting my electorate. In my community of Southern Metro, there is a very large veteran population. Overall there are about 3000 veterans in the Southern Metropolitan Region, and many call Malvern home.

I know president Geoff Tobin and the team at East Malvern RSL would appreciate a visit by the minister to hear directly about the great work that they are doing for the veterans, including the Veterans Card, and how the Andrews Labor government continues to support the state's veteran communities. I look forward to welcoming the minister soon.

### Gippsland Water

**Melina BATH** (Eastern Victoria) (16:11): (379) My adjournment matter this evening is for the Minister for Water, and the action I seek from the minister is to intervene with Gippsland Water and

reinstate 20 contracts that are CFA-based brigade contracts that Gippsland Water cancelled only recently. These contracts are for fire equipment maintenance.

Gippsland Water has terminated long-term contracts that it had engaged in with 20 of our CFA brigades in my Eastern Victoria electorate. The CFA volunteers received information via a letter to say that their long-term contracts were cancelled. This blindsided our very good volunteers, who have been in place for 17 years in some cases, and it was effective basically at the end of July. What we cannot understand is that these are volunteer organisations whose sole purpose in raising those funds is to put them back into their own brigades to buy specialised equipment, breathing equipment and extra equipment for supporting their endeavours to serve and to save life and property in our communities.

I understand that Gippsland Water is now walking backwards and saying that they are now working with the CFA and that there will be ongoing collaboration. It is quite disappointing that unfortunately it has to get to this point where an MP, me, jumps up and down and runs media on this and asks for this in the house in order for Gippsland Water to then be cajoled – I will put that politely – into having these discussions. It should not have had to happen in the first place. If there were any issues to do with any of the contracts, a contract is between two parties – they should have gone straight to the other party and decided the best way forward.

Can I commend all of our CFA for the work they do in fire equipment maintenance. In this Gippsland area with Gippsland Water in the past 15 years they have raised over \$105,000 through those contracts to really support their community and support their equipment. These are volunteers, but they are highly trained, and the contracts that they have had with Gippsland Water have been official, they have had insurance and they have been highly regulated. So as I say, it is highly disappointing that it has come to this. I will be very pleased if there is a positive outcome, and I call on the Minister for Water to intervene where necessary and see that these contracts are returned for another 17 years.

**The PRESIDENT:** Before I call the next member, can we acknowledge in the gallery former member and former minister Andre Haermeyer.

### **Women's sexual and reproductive health**

**Rikkie-Lee TYRRELL** (Northern Victoria) (16:14): (380) My adjournment matter is for the Minister for Health in the other place. Many married women of child-bearing age and health are being denied permanent contraception through having their tubes tied. Physicians are still using the excuse of having to seek both the patient's and her husband's permission to undergo this contraceptive surgery or pushing for medicated and risky hormone contraceptives that pose adverse reactions such as stroke. Many women who have chosen not to start a family altogether are also finding it difficult to gain a referral for this surgery and are being faced with alternative options if they do not wish to risk unwanted pregnancy.

What has happened to the 'My body, my choice' movement? Does it only apply to a child wanting to permanently mutilate their body and change their gender? Why should a sound-of-mind, healthy woman be denied a procedure that nearly 100 per cent guarantees effectiveness in this day and age? Women should have the liberty and support to make the right health choices for their bodies and social situations. Seeing that I cannot find legislation that restricts a doctor from referring a patient to a gynaecologist for this surgery, I ask that the minister investigate why doctors are still so hesitant to carry out this basic and beneficial procedure to women of their own accord.

### **Beaconsfield level crossing removal**

**Michael GALEA** (South-Eastern Metropolitan) (16:16): (381) My adjournment matter this evening is for the attention of the Minister for Transport and Infrastructure and relates to the Beaconsfield level crossing removal project. The action that I seek is that the minister look at options for the repurposing of removed vegetation for the use of local environment and community

organisations. It is unfortunate but necessary that the project requires a small amount of tree and shrub removal within the project area in order to deliver the new road bridge over the rail line and remove the level crossing. When the project is complete approximately 80 native and indigenous trees and 75,000 plants and shrubs will be planted in the area.

I have spoken in this house before about the bunya-bunya pine tree that will thankfully now be protected during the construction of the bridge that will replace the level crossing. The bunya-bunya is a very special tree that was planted 150 years ago and still stands tall, proud and healthy right next to the railway house, which will also now be protected following our successful campaign. I also note there was a welcome to country and smoking ceremony conducted at the site just a few weeks ago to inaugurate the commencement of these works, and it is great to see this project already underway. The ceremony cleansed the land and the people about to work on the land while attendees were informed of the importance of that land to our local Indigenous communities. It was aptly situated next to the bunya-bunya tree, which was a very important tree in local Indigenous history and culture as it was used as a food source for local Indigenous people, who ate the nuts and shoots produced by the tree. Indigenous people also used the tree to remove bark for kindling and held large community events to celebrate the harvesting of the kernels. It has been celebrated and cherished still further over recent decades by the local community in Beaconsfield of all persuasions, and it is so wonderful for that reason to see the tree being protected by this government. So again, to conclude, I ask the minister to facilitate the distribution of remaining seeds, mulch and logs to various community organisations in the outer south-east that can benefit from it by repurposing it locally.

#### **Lifeline Loddon Mallee**

**Wendy LOVELL** (Northern Victoria) (16:18): (382) My adjournment matter is for the Minister for Mental Health, and it concerns the critical funding shortages experienced by Lifeline across Victoria, in particular the Lifeline Loddon Mallee service based in my electorate. The action that I seek is for the minister to provide a funding commitment of \$119,000 in additional emergency funding for Lifeline Loddon Mallee on top of their standard annual funding to allow the organisation to maintain vital services and support those in need.

Lifeline Loddon Mallee commenced operation in 1995 and provides vital short-term crisis support to a population of nearly 300,000 across 10 local government areas. The service currently employs 13 staff and has 75 volunteers who work in two call centres, one in Bendigo and the other in Irymple. As well as providing immediate crisis support, Lifeline Loddon Mallee deliver community training programs and a grief and loss counselling service and recently launched a pilot youth counselling service. Demand for crisis support from Lifeline Loddon Mallee has increased by 36 per cent since the start of COVID-19, and the need for the service grows exponentially each year. Sadly, 84 deaths by suicide were recorded in the Loddon Mallee region in 2022, and there has been a significant increase in hospitalisations for intentional self-harm in the region over the past year.

The standard funding received by Lifeline Loddon Mallee from the Andrews Labor government covers just 25 per cent of the service's annual operating cost. The rest of the funding required is raised by the organisation, and because of the pandemic lockdowns implemented in Victoria this badly needed fundraising was impossible. Over the last couple of years the government has provided additional emergency funding to Lifeline Loddon Mallee of \$119,000 each year to ensure it can continue to assist those in need. There is a growing concern within Lifeline Loddon Mallee that this additional funding will not be forthcoming from the government, greatly impacting the operation of the service at a time when the region it serves is still struggling to come to grips with the devastation caused by last October's floods.

Without the additional funding Lifeline Loddon Mallee would have to cease their grief and loss counselling service that I mentioned earlier and three full-time equivalent jobs would be lost. Just as concerning, the funding shortfall would impact on the number of volunteers the service could recruit each year, dropping from the required 35 volunteers to just 15, thus decreasing the number of calls

that could be answered. The work of Lifeline Loddon Mallee saves lives and I urge the minister to provide the \$119,000 in additional funding to allow them to continue this vital work.

### **Oil and gas exploration**

**Sarah MANSFIELD** (Western Victoria) (16:21): (383) The action I am seeking from the Minister for Energy and Resources is to advocate to the National Offshore Petroleum Safety and Environmental Management Authority for an end to the seismic blasting that is supporting gas and oil exploration offshore from Victoria. Our oceans in Victoria are under extreme pressure from a range of threats. One threat in particular has led the coastal communities of western Victoria to draw a line in the sand: seismic blasting. Seismic blasting is undertaken by fossil fuel companies surveying for untapped gas and oil reserves under our oceans. To map the ocean floor, airguns trawled behind large vessels emit powerful sound waves at the underwater equivalent of around 180 decibels every 10 seconds, 24 hours a day, seven days a week, often for months on end. To put that in perspective with sounds that we hear on land, a jackhammer is 130 decibels – this is the point that causes humans pain – 140 decibels is the equivalent of a jet engine at around 30 metres and 180 decibels is almost 100,000 times louder than this and causes immediate deterioration of human hearing tissue.

Just as noise harms the human eardrum, research is increasingly showing that this level of marine noise has negative implications for a range of marine species. Zooplankton, the small but essential building block of our marine ecosystems, has been found to die at extreme rates in blasted areas. Southern right whales, which calve and feed throughout the Otway Basin, are under threat by the disruption that marine noise has to their migratory patterns.

New licences for companies to undertake seismic blasting in the Otway Basin are set to be granted in October. Western Victoria's coastal communities depend on healthy oceans for their lives and work, and they hold grave concerns for the impact that new seismic blasting will have on this precious marine life. Last week Warrnambool city councillors voted unanimously to oppose seismic testing in the Otway Basin, joining Moyne shire, Colac Otway shire and Surf Coast shire in their opposition. In Cr Paspaliaris's contribution she acknowledged that the council could not continue to celebrate their strong position on climate change while remaining silent on the significant risk that seismic blasting poses to their coastline.

The Andrews state government has promoted itself as leaders in the movement to tackle climate change, and yet it is silent about the blasting that is happening in federal waters and impacts on Victorian communities and coastlines. Steps to transition off gas are one thing, but what we need from this government is for them to make brave decisions and start taking the strongest possible action to protect our precious marine environment and tackle climate change. This means no more seismic blasting and an end to offshore gas.

### **Australia–Israel relations**

**David DAVIS** (Southern Metropolitan) (16:24): (384) My adjournment tonight is for the attention of the Minister for Multicultural Affairs and also for the Premier; I think it is highly relevant for the Premier. The Labor Party nationally have flagged a number of concerning changes that they are about to implement, and Senator Wong has said that we will change the way we are describing relations between Australia and Israel and in particular the words that we use to describe a number of matters surrounding the West Bank and Gaza. Using the word 'illegal' to describe Israeli settlements, Senator Wong said the change would strengthen Australia's opposition to Israeli settlements on the West Bank

and, in a shot at the Morrison government's pro-Israel tilt, emphasised certain principles. She has also said that they are going to start referring to the 'occupied Palestinian territories'.

All of this has certainly upset many in the Jewish community. The Australia/Israel & Jewish Affairs Council has blasted the shift as a 'profound disappointment'; that was the description. AIJAC executive director Colin Rubenstein said:

It is incredibly counter-productive to label these areas as occupied Palestinian territories, with the government purporting to know what the boundaries of any future two-state resolution will look like ...

That was in an article in the *Australian Financial Review*. Australia has got to be in a position where we are not one-sided, but we do need to respect the contribution of the Jewish community; it is a democracy. Mr Rubenstein also added that:

... asserting that Judaism's holiest sites, such as the Western Wall and Temple Mount, are Palestinian territory is "highly unacceptable".

These matters actually affect harmony here, too. I do not think the federal Labor Party or anyone should have opened these matters further. I do not think they should have changed the description. This seems to be some left-wing pressure inside the Australian Labor Party at a national level, but it has repercussions into areas here. My electorate has many Jewish community members in particular.

It is interesting. The *Guardian* carried an article that dealt with this as well:

The move sparked claims from the Coalition ... that 'the faceless men and women of the Labor party' were dictating foreign policy ...

Well, I think that is right, and that has repercussions and concerns here. I think Bob Hawke would be turning in his grave and I think this is the wrong decision, and I call on the Minister for Multicultural Affairs and the Premier, if possible, to advocate against this move, to actually pull Senator Wong into line and ensure that harmony is preserved in Victoria.

### Visit Victoria

**Katherine COPSEY** (Southern Metropolitan) (16:27): (385) My adjournment this evening is to the Minister for Tourism, Sport and Major Events. As one of the first acts of the newly elected Andrews Labor government in 2014, Tourism Victoria was merged with the Victorian Major Events Company to create a single private company called Visit Victoria. Visit Victoria is the only state tourism board in Australia that does not have to comply with a freedom-of-information act. As such it is able to act with significantly less public oversight than its peer organisations.

In June of this year the *Saturday Paper* reported that Visit Victoria paid the *Betoota Advocate* for friendly coverage promoting travel to Victoria. I am not suggesting that there is anything untoward in that, but it does beg the question: what else is the agency paying for? The *Saturday Paper* submitted an FOI request about payments made to *Betoota* for the favourable articles, and in response the Department of Jobs, Skills, Industry and Regions said:

Visit Victoria operates as a company limited by guarantee, with the Premier of Victoria being the sole shareholder. As a company, Visit Victoria is not subjected to the FOI Act.

Add into this analysis the fact that Visit Victoria receives public funding of more than half a billion dollars per year. This means half a billion dollars of public funding is being spent by a private agency with governance arrangements that mean it can operate with less oversight than any other tourism board in the country. Even in a good year this does not pass the pub test, and in a year when we are having very frequent and often weekly or daily discussions in the public sphere about integrity and government, it does not pass the test.

We should consider reforms where all private companies that receive public funding are subject to the Freedom of Information Act 1982, but that is a wider conversation for another day. My adjournment matter today is for a more limited and specific request, I ask the minister to exercise their power to

make Visit Victoria a prescribed authority in the Freedom of Information Act. This can be achieved by regulations rather than a legislative change; it is a smaller change within the minister's powers that can be achieved simply and quickly.

### **Big Housing Build**

**Sheena WATT** (Northern Metropolitan) (16:29): (386) I rise to acknowledge the steps our government has taken to address the pressing housing challenges across our state. My adjournment is directed to the Minister for Housing, the Honourable Colin Brooks in the other place. I ask him to come and see firsthand the incredible work being done there in North Melbourne.

Our government has demonstrated an unwavering commitment to tackling the housing challenges head-on through policy and a steadfast dedication to finding solutions, and that work has already begun. The momentum is positive, and you can feel it – even so recently as this morning, as the Premier joined the housing minister to see fantastic new projects here in the Southern Metropolitan Region, which was a beautiful event joined by member for Southern Metropolitan John Berger. By engaging with local communities – and Mr Berger knows this – stakeholders and beneficiaries of the initiatives, including beautiful folks who now have gorgeous new homes, can witness the very real impacts of our Big Housing Build.

This visit I hope will not only affirm and reaffirm our commitment to addressing the housing challenges but also amplify some stories worth hearing about people that have overcome enormous challenges to now find a safe, secure and affordable home thanks to the Andrews Labor government's Big Housing Build. There will be some stories that you will hear. Above all the North Melbourne community have been very open and very warm to the incredible works being done. Can I just say I am sure the minister is going to have an almighty good time meeting the good folks of North Melbourne and seeing the new campus of North Melbourne Primary School right next door, because we are united with a shared vision for a place in Victoria where everybody has a home, and I look forward to him joining me in the great northern suburbs.

### **Progress Street, Dandenong South, level crossing**

**Ann-Marie HERMANS** (South-Eastern Metropolitan) (16:31): (387) My adjournment is to the Minister for Transport and Infrastructure in the other place, and I asked this question previously on 1 June 2023 but was advised that the question needed to be directed to the minister for transport. I thought the Minister for Roads and Road Safety would have passed this on, but this was not the case. So the action I seek is for the minister to supply information in writing to all the local businesses on Progress Street and Fowler Road that are being subjected to what can be only called a huge inconvenience of parking, congestion, safety and productivity losses due to this government's insistence on removing the level crossing on Progress Street in Dandenong. We require therefore information on the following three measures from the minister: (1) safety solutions for trucks that will have to pass each other on the narrow hump bridge to Fowler Road; (2) safety measures and solutions implemented so that these trucks can enter the South Gippsland Highway without putting themselves or others at risk; and (3) a commitment in writing with a date for the long-term solution of a bypass extension. The Big Build has been advertised on the internet site, and so has this level crossing removal. It said the following:

We're removing the level crossing –

and proudly –

at Progress Street, Dandenong South ...

I might add this is a level crossing that none of the businesses want removed. They went on to say:

... and building a new road bridge connecting Progress Street and Fowler Road.



This road, however, is going to be too narrow for these trucks, and they are going to have to wait for each other or play chicken as they go across this bridge. This new road, it said:

... will provide businesses in this busy industrial precinct with safer access to Princes Highway via South Gippsland Highway.

This is simply not the case. There is nothing at present put in place to make it a safer option. At the moment they have traffic lights. At the moment they have a level crossing that is not near a station, so the trains go past quickly. They are quite happy to wait for 30 seconds so that they can be on their wide streets and be able to get through to the Princes Highway. This diversion to Fowler Road is going to mean that they are going to have to go around all the parked traffic through a narrow road, where there are other businesses that will also be inconvenienced, and then risk their lives and the lives of their passengers and others as they try to cross over the South Gippsland Highway – and why? Just so this government can say that they ticked a box and removed another level crossing. What a waste of taxpayers' money, creating a safety hazard that will impact important Victorian businesses and services.

I am telling you this is simply not good enough and the businesses are telling you it is simply not good enough either. This is a fundamental failure of this government to genuinely consult with people and come up with solutions. There are 50,000 vehicle movements a week in this area, and trucks cannot pass each other on the hump bridge. The government have not provided any solution, even though they are aware of the issue, so I ask the minister to provide in writing the information that we have requested.

#### Cannabis law reform

**David LIMBRICK** (South-Eastern Metropolitan) (16:35): (388) My adjournment matter this evening is for the Minister for Health. Earlier today I spoke about organised crime, and I am going to talk about organised crime again. The market earlier today that I was talking about was vaping. But I would like to talk about another market that the government has neglected to deal with, and that is the cannabis market, often referred to as the blue-chip stock of organised crime. This is a vast market in Victoria, and for reasons that totally escape me the government continues with its failed prohibition policy. Prohibition has failed, is failing and will continue to fail in the future. If we want to attack organised crime and get rid of or at least reduce the crime and corruption in this state that have been going on for decades now, we need to tackle the root cause, which is drug prohibition. So my request to the minister is this: urgently look into how we can get a legal cannabis market for adults in Victoria to instantly annihilate the organised criminal control of this market and bring it into legal hands, so that we do not have this market controlled by organised crime. I would like to say it is an absolute mystery to me, on an issue that is so popular, that would sail through Parliament, why the government continues to hold back. I think that they need to be bold. They need to be bold on drug law reform. They have done bold moves on drug law reform in the past. I urge them to move forward as quickly as possible on this issue and to legalise cannabis in Victoria.

#### Energy policy

**Renee HEATH** (Eastern Victoria) (16:36): (389) My adjournment is for the Minister for Energy and Resources, and the action that I seek is that the minister explains how Labor's decision to ban gas connections from next year will save Victorian families up to \$1000 off their energy bills. This is a big claim, and Victorians want to know how it will work. Stated in your media release, and I quote:

New Victorian households will save up to \$1,000 off their annual energy bills while reducing household emissions, as part of the ... Labor Government's landmark decision to phase out gas in new homes.

The problem is it is just not true. Prices are on the rise and so are emissions under this plan. Firstly, less gas means more brown coal. Gas has roughly half the emissions of brown coal. This move will increase emissions. Secondly, if financial savings are so great there is no need to legislate it; people will switch over by choice. Victorians are sick of bearing the brunt of Labor's bad decisions. Labor

governments around this country continue to claim that their ideological agendas will ease the cost-of-living crisis, yet bills continue to skyrocket. Last month Nine News reported that Victorian families can expect their power bills to rise by 25 per cent this financial year. So minister, can you please outline to Victorian families exactly how these savings will be achieved?

### **Timber industry**

**Gaelle BROAD** (Northern Victoria) (16:38): (390) My adjournment is to the Minister for Agriculture, to reverse the Labor government's decision to end native forestry in Victoria. When you consider the facts, this decision makes no sense at all. Victorians rely on timber. We use timber to build houses, furniture, floorboards, staircases and window frames. We use timber to create products like copy paper, cardboard and paper bags. And as people struggle to pay rising energy bills, many rely on firewood for heating. Victoria's population is growing, and we do not produce enough timber to meet demand. We use timber from other states and import hardwood from countries that do not have the same environmental standards.

The best thing about timber is that trees grow back. When a tree is harvested there is no waste; every part of the tree is used. The Nationals want Victoria to become a clean, green state, but to do so we need to expand the timber industry, not shut it down. Our native timber industry should be praised for its role in helping the environment. Trees absorb carbon, and even timber, once cut or made into furniture, stores carbon. We need more of it, not less.

The Victorian native forest industry harvests less than 0.04 per cent of Victoria's total forest area per year. By law, every tree harvested must be replanted, and old-growth forests cannot be touched. Labor's decision to close the native timber industry on 1 January 2024 is nearly seven years ahead of schedule and gives no time for businesses and towns to transition.

I was at Powelltown Sawmills recently with Cindy McLeish, the member for Eildon, to meet with those directly impacted by this decision. Their business employs up to 40 staff, including some that have always worked in the industry who will struggle to find employment elsewhere. Closing the native timber industry will not just impact VicForests and crews, timber mill workers and office staff, furniture producers, builders and transport operators; it will further increase costs and impact us all. I met a contractor who has worked with VicForests since 2007 in seed collection and regeneration. He has called every hotline seeking assistance but does not qualify under the timber industry package. He used to employ 15 staff. Now he is drawing down on his mortgage and struggling to support a young family.

For the few who qualify, Labor's support packages force people into silence, and free TAFE vouchers and referrals to mental health services with long waitlists offer little hope to people whose lives have been destroyed by this government. The minister promised to back local communities with the financial support, secure jobs and training, and one-on-one case management they need. But what they really need and our whole state needs is for this Labor government to reverse their decision and help the timber industry grow in Victoria.

### **Collingwood sobering service**

**Evan MULHOLLAND** (Northern Metropolitan) (16:41): (391) My action tonight is seeking the action of the Minister for Mental Health, and the action I seek is a commitment that the government will consult with the local community on the Collingwood sobering-up centre and explain why it is not possible to continue the existing location on Gertrude Street backing onto St Vincent's. It feels like a bit of groundhog day speaking in this place once again about the government's lack of consultation on initiatives that affect local communities. It was only last sitting week I was speaking about the CBD injecting room, about the failure to consult residents about that, and now the government wants to put a permanent sobering-up centre in a residential area in Cambridge Street, Collingwood, once again with no consultation with the community, with local residents or with the local council and once again

next to a school. It is actually next to the Collingwood English Language School. They seem to be lumping all of these things next to schools in the seat of Richmond.

Indeed as much as the community recognise the importance of addressing public drunkenness through a health-centred approach – as I do, and I have spoken on the record about the public drunkenness laws – residents feel out of the loop on this. They do not understand why it cannot be put where it is now. There is a trial going on at the moment on Gertrude Street backing onto St Vincent's in a health precinct – not in a residential area, in a health precinct, where people can be properly looked after. Residents were shocked to receive a letter from Cohealth just a week after the location was announced. It was announced on the same day that they were also the provider, and then within a very short time frame they got a letter out to the community trying to cool the community's concern about this centre.

I have been speaking with local residents who feel like they have not been heard. I note another member for Northern Metropolitan Mr Erdogan likes to send out glossy pamphlets to the people of Richmond. I encourage him to speak with the community in Collingwood about this sobering-up centre and the concerns that they have. The trial, while it might have been a success, was backed onto St Vincent's in a health precinct, where it should be. This is a far more appropriate location not only due to the hospital and easy access to public transport but because it is a non-residential area. So I call on the minister to explain why it is not possible for the sobering-up centre to continue at the trial location at St Vincent's and to commit, please, to consulting with the local community in Collingwood. The government needs to consult rather than dropping proposals on the community without any notice.

### **Melbourne Airport rail link**

**Trung LUU** (Western Metropolitan) (16:44): (392) My adjournment matter is for the Minister for Transport and Infrastructure in the other place. I call on the minister to contact local businesses located near the proposed Keilor East train station and provide them with clarity on whether the Melbourne Airport rail project will proceed. The Leader of the Opposition and I met with Christy, who founded the Essendon Keilor Gymnastics Academy. The academy is well regarded in Melbourne's west, and I was able to see firsthand not only the outstanding dedication of their staff but also their excellent facilities. Christy outlined how she faced some tough days during COVID lockdown. Thankfully, the academy has bounced back, and today over 2000 young Victorians visit the academy every week to train and exercise. Impressively, five girls have made it into the Australian Gymnastics Competitions pro league.

In February this year Christy was informed that the state government would acquire her academy and bulldoze it to make room for Keilor East train station as part of the Melbourne Airport rail plan. While this situation was not ideal, Christy and her 60 staff understood the need for improved public transport in Melbourne's west and set about finding a new home for her academy. She has been searching for months for a site which would meet the unique needs of her business. Despite finding several promising sites, she has not been able to take further action because the state government has failed to provide clarity about the future of Melbourne's airport rail project.

Reports in the media have suggested it has been paused and could even be cancelled. However, Christy and other small businesses in the area near the proposed Keilor East train station have not received any updates from the government. This is simply unacceptable. Small business owners and their staff are completely in the dark and need some certainty. Due to the uncertainty, businesses do not know whether they can invest in capital works, such as a roof replacement, which would cost over \$40,000. Existing staff do not know whether they will be forced to look for a new job. This is also impacting local families, who for many years have had to put up with disruptions to their kids' organised sports and grapple with a heightened level of uncertainty.

I certainly hope the minister can contact local businesses like the Essendon Keilor Gymnastics Academy and provide them with clarity about the status of the Melbourne Airport rail project so they

can move forward with confidence. I also hope to meet with the member for Niddrie and hope others in the other place will join me in calling upon the minister to act with certainty.

### **Inclusive education**

**Matthew BACH** (North-Eastern Metropolitan) (16:47): (393) My adjournment matter tonight is for the Minister for Education, and the action I seek is for her to reverse the callous cuts of the Andrews Labor government to specialist teachers for children with a disability across Victoria. Currently there are 117 so-called visiting teachers. These are teachers who have done significant extra training and who have considerable skills when it comes to supporting children with disabilities and also children who have very serious illnesses, oftentimes life-threatening illnesses. There are 117 for the entire state. They go into schools, principally in regional and rural areas, where there are so few other services, and they work one on one with children with oftentimes really significant and challenging needs.

Since it was announced that the government inexplicably was cutting this service and cutting 117 specialist teachers, denying support to about 5000 Victorian children with disabilities and serious illnesses, I have had so much correspondence, principally from parents who have found that this service and these teachers have been of such immeasurable use to them, to their families and first and foremost to their children. I think as members – and I am guilty of this – sometimes we come into this place and say ‘Look, I’ve been inundated with concern’ about a particular issue. I am guilty of gilding the lily from time to time, but on this occasion I have had so many presentations to me via email and on the phone from parents who really feel at their wits’ end.

Yesterday I was pleased to join Mrs Broad and a group of other coalition members to hear from members of the Deaf community about the impact upon them and their children. I then met with another group, with Ms Lovell and also Mrs Hermans, of parents who have children principally who are blind, and they told me and they told us that the government’s proposal to cut these 117 specialist teachers and to replace them with some sort of coaching model that would deliver not one teacher into the classroom was a model destined to fail. What they told us is that their children have really specific and challenging needs. Many of the parents who I met yesterday have children who are blind – not who struggle to see but who are blind.

I used to be a schoolteacher, and I did a great deal of professional development. I would have no idea what to do to support a child who is blind or what to do to support a child who is deaf. We saw with the schools tax that the minister ultimately sought to reverse a botched process. I would urge her again: please, Minister, we know that Victoria is broke and that the government has to seek to make savings; children with disabilities should not be the ones to pay for your financial incompetence.

### **Plenty Gorge Park**

**Bev McARTHUR** (Western Victoria) incorporated the following (394):

My adjournment matter is for the Minister for the Environment, and concerns the management of the Plenty Gorge Park.

Given its proximity to Plenty, Greensborough and other suburbs, there is real concern about the growing fuel load present in the Park.

While weather conditions and patterns may have mitigated against fire in the last couple of years, they can quickly change. The level of fuel-load does not.

The action I seek, Minister, is a commitment from Parks Victoria that appropriate fuel load management is carried out in the Park – including via removal or burns – and the publication of information which reassures the public that sufficient action has been taken in recent years, and that an adequate forward program for fuel reduction is established.

### Responses

**Enver ERDOGAN** (Northern Metropolitan – Minister for Corrections, Minister for Youth Justice, Minister for Victim Support) (16:50): There were 18 matters raised today: Mr McCracken to the Minister for Energy and Resources; Ms Purcell to the Minister for Health; Mr Berger to the Minister for Veterans; Ms Bath to the Minister for Water; Mrs Tyrrell to the Minister for Health; Mr Galea to the Minister for Transport and Infrastructure; Ms Lovell to the Minister for Mental Health; Dr Mansfield to the Minister for Energy and Resources; Mr Davis to the Minister for Multicultural Affairs; Ms Copey to the Minister for Tourism, Sport and Major Events; Ms Watt to the Minister for Housing; Mrs Hermans to the Minister for Roads and Road Safety; Mr Limbrick to the Minister for Health; Mrs Broad to the Minister for Agriculture; Mr Mulholland to the Minister for Mental Health; Mr Luu to the Minister for Transport and Infrastructure; and Dr Bach to the Minister for Education. I will make sure that all those matters raised are referred on to the relevant ministers and there is an appropriate response in line with the standing orders.

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

**House adjourned 4:52 pm.**