



Hansard

LEGISLATIVE COUNCIL

60th Parliament

Wednesday 30 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 ¹	Western Metropolitan	IndLib	Ratnam, Samantha	Northern Metropolitan	Greens
Erdogan, Enver	Northern Metropolitan	ALP	Shing, Harriet	Eastern Victoria	ALP
Ermacora, Jacinta	Western Victoria	ALP	Somyurek, Adem	Northern Metropolitan	DLP
Ettershank, David	Western Metropolitan	LCV	Stitt, Ingrid	Western Metropolitan	ALP
Galea, Michael	South-Eastern Metropolitan	ALP	Symes, Jaclyn	Northern Victoria	ALP
Heath, Renee	Eastern Victoria	Lib	Tarlamis, Lee	South-Eastern Metropolitan	ALP
Hermans, Ann-Marie	South-Eastern Metropolitan	Lib	Terpstra, Sonja	North-Eastern Metropolitan	ALP
Leane, Shaun	North-Eastern Metropolitan	ALP	Tierney, Gayle	Western Victoria	ALP
Limbrick, David ²	South-Eastern Metropolitan	LP	Tyrrell, Rikkie-Lee	Northern Victoria	PHON
Lovell, Wendy	Northern Victoria	Lib	Watt, Sheena	Northern Metropolitan	ALP

¹ Lib until 27 March 2023

² LDP until 26 July 2023

Party abbreviations

AJP – Animal Justice Party; ALP – Australian Labor Party; DLP – Democratic Labour Party;
 Greens – Australian Greens; IndLib – Independent Liberal; LCV – Legalise Cannabis Victoria;
 LDP – Liberal Democratic Party; Lib – Liberal Party of Australia; LP – Libertarian Party;
 Nat – National Party of Australia; PHON – Pauline Hanson’s One Nation; SFFP – Shooters, Fishers and Farmers Party

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Wednesday 30 August 2023

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

Rulings from the Chair

Constituency questions

The PRESIDENT (09:33): During constituency questions yesterday I undertook to review *Hansard* in relation to a point of order around Mr McIntosh's constituency question to the Minister for Treaty and First Peoples. Having reviewed *Hansard*, I do not believe the question is completely within the state jurisdiction, and also it is not a specific matter within the member's constituency, so I rule the question out. But I am sure that Mr McIntosh has spoken to a number of First Nations representatives in his electorate, which has caused him to bring this issue to the Parliament. Also, there are state responsibilities around the Uluru statement. Mr McIntosh has two more cracks at it this week, but yesterday's one is ruled out.

Petitions

Inglewood ambulance administration building

Gaelle BROAD (Northern Victoria) presented a petition bearing 136 signatures:

The Petition of certain citizens of Loddon Shire of the State of Victoria draws to the attention of the Legislative Council

The Petitioners therefore request that: Help Save Our Ambulance "Admin Building".

Inglewood ambulance station

Gaelle BROAD (Northern Victoria) presented a petition bearing 287 signatures:

The Petition of certain citizens of Loddon Shire of the State of Victoria draws to the attention of the Legislative Council

The Petitioners therefore request that: Save Our Ambulance Station Inglewood.

Tower Hill Wildlife Reserve

Georgie PURCELL (Northern Victoria) presented a petition bearing 95 signatures:

The Petition of certain citizens of the State of Victoria draws to the attention of the Legislative Council that Tower Hill Wildlife Reserve (Tower Hill) is currently designated as a State Game Reserve, a status that conflicts with the cultural, natural, and social values of the land. Tower Hill was declared a State Game Reserve in 1961 due to the collaborative efforts of the Field Naturalists Club of Victoria and the Victorian Field and Game Association who feared for the future of this special place. Decades before Landcare Australia existed, thousands of local school children revegetated Tower Hill under the guidance of the Fisheries and Wildlife Service, and later Parks Victoria. The community is deservedly proud of what has been achieved with Tower Hill, now a premiere ecotourism and family destination in the region. Tower Hill is a wildlife refuge, a place to bush walk, observe, study and appreciate nature. The Indigenous community are leaders within Tower Hill and it is an important place for visitors to learn about Indigenous culture. It is also a place to shoot native ducks. Tower Hill is a significant cultural icon in Victoria and the most valuable habitat we have. It is unacceptable that the native wildlife which call Tower Hill 'home' should be considered 'game'. It is time to take the next step in recognising and protecting the values of Tower Hill by reviewing its status as a State Game Reserve and removing the word 'game' from the reserve's signage.

The petitioners therefore request that the Legislative Council call on the Government to review Tower Hill Wildlife Reserve's status as a State Game Reserve given the values and cultural story of this location and remove the word 'Game' from the Tower Hill State Game Reserve signage, as it conflicts with the cultural, natural and social values of the reserve.

*Papers***Papers****Tabled by Clerk:**

Auditor-General – Responses to Performance Engagement Recommendations: Annual Status Update 2023, August 2023 (*Ordered to be published*).

Voluntary Assisted Dying Review Board – Report, 2022–23.

*Members statements***Berwick College**

Michael GALEA (South-Eastern Metropolitan) (09:37): This week the Minister for Education Natalie Hutchins came to Berwick College along with me and Mr Tarlamis to officially open the school's health and wellbeing centre. It was fantastic to celebrate this wonderful facility for the school along with the principal Kerri Bolch, who opened this amazing centre that supports and nurtures the school's students. Berwick College and their late school council president Roger Hall have worked tirelessly in recent years in acknowledging, supporting and taking proactive measures to assist students who are experiencing mental health challenges. The health and wellbeing centre is a result of their understanding about the needs of students who may struggle within or outside the school.

I do wish to make special mention of Roger Hall, the school council president who served in that role and on the council for more than 30 years. Roger passed away while still acting as council president and did not get to have the full recognition he deserved for such a long voluntary contribution for the betterment of the school community and for the broader Berwick community.

I would also like to thank and acknowledge the Rotary Club of Berwick for their generous contribution of a lot of equipment for the centre. Proudly this Andrews Labor government has supported the school's vision for the health and wellbeing centre and funded the project with \$1.3 million, while the school also made a significant contribution. It was fantastic to visit the site along with Minister Hutchins and Mr Tarlamis to meet with Kerri Bolch and the centre manager Kyra Dawson, and I congratulate the school on their efforts.

Barbara Muller

Joe McCracken (Western Victoria) (09:39): Last week I was thrilled to see the success of Barb Muller, the 2023 Victorian Vocational Student of the Year. Barb has always said that age should be no barrier, and she is living proof of that. At 50 years old, a single mum raising three kids, she has shown you can follow your dreams no matter what your age. I have known Barb for a number of years, from when I was a teacher. I have taught her kids, and I know that she is a very hard worker and a studious person. She is always kind and generous and is known for that in the community. That is the reason why Barb was acknowledged as Victorian Vocational Student of the Year.

During her course, particularly in her final year, she mentored second- and first-year students when one of the teachers left the course for about three or four months. She stepped into the void and helped them out by mentoring them, training them and ensuring that they got through their assessment tasks. Apart from being the 2023 Vocational Student of the Year, Barb also received the People's Choice Award and Federation TAFE's EJT Tippet Outstanding Achievement Award, which was amazing as well.

I know that Barb has had a very difficult journey to get to this point, and I want to acknowledge that, despite all the challenges, she has got through that. She is wanting to start her own business – she has just finished her course in design. I cannot wait to see Barb out there drafting buildings, seeing what they look like and contributing to the community. Well done, Barb. We acknowledge you and your hard work. Congratulations and well done.

Cooinda

David ETTERSHANK (Western Metropolitan) (09:40): Last week it was my honour to attend the opening of Cooinda, the first dedicated Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander centre in the City of Brimbank. The ceremony was attended by a large crowd that included many local elders from the community; my esteemed colleague Mr Trung Luu; Dr Daniel Mulino, the federal member for Fraser; the mayor of Brimbank Mr Bruce Lancashire; and many Brimbank councillors. The Cooinda centre will provide a culturally safe space for Brimbank's First Nations community, offering a range of programs geared towards reconciliation, healing, health, education and wellbeing. I would like to pay tribute to the leaders and activists of the local First Nations community, who have worked tirelessly over many years with both state and local government to create this fantastic space. I would also like to acknowledge the councillors, management and staff of the City of Brimbank, who work so hard for their communities and consistently punch way above their weight. This is a great and practical example of partnership driven by the insights of the local First Nations people to create a valuable and lasting asset for their community. I wish them, and I am sure this house wishes them, every success in the future. This is, always was and always will be Aboriginal land.

Flood recovery

John BERGER (Southern Metropolitan) (09:42): Last week I travelled to regional Victoria for the inquiry into the 2022 flood event in Victoria. We heard some devastating stories. In Rochester I listened to a farmer that was unable to prepare adequately amid conflicting notifications on his phone about potential rainfall, but we equally heard some stories about the community pulling together in their darkest hour, making sandbags and leaving their own homes unprotected to help others. There I met with Jenny White, someone I have known for more than 25 years. It was devastating to learn that Jenny has been living in a caravan park since October of last year. That is after being flooded out in 2011 and losing her husband mid last year to a sudden health issue. Many are living in makeshift accommodation.

It is on days like this that I am proud to be a member of the Andrews Labor government, which will always have their back. We know that climate change means that irregular weather events like this will become more regular. We must confront the reality of climate change now. I tried to visit an old shop that I used to frequent, but it had shut down due to the floods. It is these people living their day-to-day lives that we will be supporting and standing with for many months to go. I say to the people affected: I hear you, and I am with you.

Bravehearts

Matthew BACH (North-Eastern Metropolitan) (09:43): Today is Bravehearts Day, so I want to recognise the amazing work that has been done by Bravehearts since 1997 in order to seek to prevent the sexual abuse of children. Bravehearts is particularly known for its program Ditto's Keep Safe Adventure Program. I wanted to see Ditto, who is a bear, myself and to experience the program, so I went to an event hosted by the Friends of Bravehearts in Geelong on the weekend. This event was strongly supported by Mrs McArthur as well. It was great to mix with the Friends of Bravehearts. It was great to see Ditto, do a bit of dancing with Ditto and hear from Ditto the bear about his three rules for children: that we all have the right to feel safe with people, that it is okay to say no if you feel unsafe or unsure and that nothing is so yucky that you cannot tell someone about it.

Many members are aware that this program, which has been running for some time, has yielded fantastic results. I want to thank Ross and all the other amazing volunteers in the Friends of Bravehearts who support the program. Any member, anybody listening, who wants to support Bravehearts as well – because they do not get a huge amount of government support, they largely rely on donations – can visit the Bravehearts website and make a donation to allow this fabulous organisation to keep doing great work to keep children safe.

Power in You Project

Sarah MANSFIELD (Western Victoria) (09:44): Last week I had the pleasure of attending the inaugural Power in You Project gala fundraising event in Geelong. The Power in You Project was founded by Kane Nuttall, drawing on his experience with substance addiction and the importance of immediate empathic assistance when someone seeks help. It empowers people experiencing addiction and mental health and justice-related challenges, using holistic supports and strategies. Its strength lies in peer support models and therapeutic programs that foster self-esteem, self-awareness, community connections and independence. Programs include life skills, river walks, art therapy, addiction support, justice peer support and women's groups. Many of the team have lived experience, creating a non-judgemental and trusted environment for participants.

Observing the organisation over the past few years it has been wonderful to see it deliver real impacts for my community and become a standard setter in the Geelong region for addiction support. Over a third of participants who experienced substance addiction have remained sober and almost all of the remaining participants dramatically reduced their substance use. Over a third are studying, working or volunteering, and many have been able to seek additional treatment or continue to participate in the program. Our system completely fails most people who encounter addiction and the criminal justice system, making the work of organisations like the Power in You Project so important.

Gumnuts Early Learning Centre

Tom McINTOSH (Eastern Victoria) (09:46): Sale's newest kinder building is at Gumnuts Early Learning Centre, and I was there to see as the finishing touches were being made. I am proud to update the house that the modular kinder is open and catering for Sale and district kinder kids as we speak. Gumnuts received \$1.5 million from the Victorian Building Blocks capacity grant for a modular kindergarten room that will provide an additional 66 three- and four-year-old kinder spots that are free as part of the Victorian government's Best Start, Best Life reforms. Centre manager Brendon, the volunteer committee and the team of close to 50 educators have done an amazing job providing quality education in Sale, and the expansion is testament to their tireless work on behalf of the community and the next generation.

Gumnuts has no plans of slowing down. They have already begun planning the next expansion and upgrade of their facilities because they recognise how important it is to keep investing in early education, and so do we. Gumnuts encourages relationships between families and the wider community so every young family can feel supported as parents, including the local Victorian Aboriginal community-controlled health service Ramahyuck. The Best Start, Best Life reform is setting our kids up for life and is a massive investment in the future of our state. This government, led by Minister Stitt, recognised the critical role early education plays in children's development, and I am proud of the work that has already been done in this area. Sale joins other towns in Eastern Victoria who have had an investment from the state government, including Yarram, Foster, Leongatha, Korumburra, Lakes Entrance, Tootgarook and Mornington.

Epping kangaroo rescue

Georgie PURCELL (Northern Victoria) (09:47): Once again I rise in this place to talk about this government failing our native animals in a way that was completely avoidable. A mob of kangaroos have been landlocked since developers began working on extensions on O'Herns Road near the golf range in Epping. Last week, without a second thought for the welfare of this mob, the completed road was opened up to motorists. Suddenly cars began travelling at 60 kilometres per hour directly through their home. It should surprise nobody that there were collisions. One by one kangaroos were hit, while volunteer rescuers worked desperately to prevent the inevitable. One of the first was a mum with a joey at foot. Both were darted for emergency treatment, but after scans revealed spinal fractures and broken feet both had to be euthanised. Vets For Compassion assisted. Their small team had responded to over 60 similar call-outs that same week. They are volunteering up to 12-hour days, unrested and completely unsupported. There is no doubt that this government are continually relying on volunteer

wildlife rescuers to clean up their own mess, and it is high time that they stopped treating native animals and their habitats as an afterthought.

Voice to Parliament

Lee TARLAMIS (South-Eastern Metropolitan) (09:49): Right across Australia people are having conversations about the Indigenous Voice to Parliament, and I have been proud to join with our diverse multicultural and multifaith communities in the south-east and across the state as they have come together to discuss the benefits of constitutional recognition through the Voice for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Australians. This discussion has focused on how this will contribute to improving the lives of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Australians and the significance of being heard in the decision-making process of our federal Parliament and government. Disappointingly, there is an enormous amount of misinformation circulating out there, so it is important to remember that this is a defining moment for our country, with the Voice providing an opportunity to make Australia stronger and more united.

Saying yes is fundamentally about two things: recognition and listening. Finally recognising Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples in Australia's constitution as the longest continuous culture anywhere in the world, over 65,000 years, this referendum is an opportunity to recognise and acknowledge this in an important and meaningful way, and it is also about establishing the Voice to Parliament to ensure we are listening to them on the issues that affect their lives. It will put First Nations people back in control of their own affairs, ensuring their voices are heard and their rights respected, and we know when this happens outcomes improve. In a country and state as diverse as ours, which prides itself on inclusivity, our multicultural and multifaith communities understand the significance of this, and I have been extremely proud of their role in advocating for a yes vote. It is testament to the power of the wonderful, vibrant and diverse communities to unite, raise their voices and push Australia towards a fairer, more inclusive future. We can get this done together. I invite everyone to be on the right side of history by voting yes.

Water policy

Rikkie-Lee TYRRELL (Northern Victoria) (09:50): I rise today to congratulate the Minister for Water on standing with our brilliant Victorian farmers and refusing to sign up to the latest version of the disastrous Murray–Darling Basin plan. Buybacks have been detrimental to our farming communities in the past. The complexities of this issue are not black and white; however, it is clear to me that the decommodification of water as an attractive investment option for speculators would largely see the problems disappear overnight. While the requirement for environmental water is paramount for the ecological sustainability of the river systems, the purpose of this water is to artificially flood the wetlands and replicate, as best as possible, the natural seasonal flow.

During my own water tour of our section of the Murray–Darling Basin earlier this year, it was identified by numerous native wetland specialists that they already have sufficient environmental water to serve their purpose. Noting that 39 per cent of all domestic produce in this country is grown in the basin and 3.5 per cent of all Australians are directly employed within the basin, we have a responsibility to ensure current and future generations have access to critical food supplies that are sustained by this irrigation water. Again I applaud the minister for following my footsteps across the state and engaging with real stakeholders before standing up to her federal counterparts and refusing to capitulate on this outrageous proposal.

Sick pay guarantee

Ryan BATCHELOR (Southern Metropolitan) (09:52): We should not have to make the impossible choice between going to work sick and putting food on the table, but that is the reality tens of thousands of Victorians who are in insecure work face every single day. That is why it is so important that the Andrews Labor government has expanded the Australian-first pilot of a sick pay guarantee for casual and contract Victorian workers. Under the recent expansion we are giving

thousands more workers in casual and contract jobs the opportunity to access 38 hours of sick and carers pay a year.

The last pandemic shone a light on the cracks in our employment system that mean that thousands of people face this difficult decision any day. Not only does it take them longer to heal, it puts others at risk and costs productivity in our economy. Expanding sick and carers leave schemes is the solution to these issues. More than 400 new jobs are now eligible for the sick pay guarantee, covering everything from child care to early childhood workers, community support workers and even fitness instructors. Workers can apply for sick and carers pay from the day they sign up. People need to have certainty that they can stay home and recover if they are sick or caring for a loved one and still pay the bills, because keeping all Victorians safe and healthy is a top priority of this government.

Bills

Human Rights and Housing Legislation Amendment (Ending Homelessness) Bill 2023

Statement of compatibility

Samantha RATNAM (Northern Metropolitan) (09:53): I lay on the table a statement of compatibility with the Charter of Human Rights and Responsibilities Act 2006.

In accordance with section 28 of the Charter of Human Rights and Responsibilities Act 2006 (the Charter), I make this statement of compatibility with respect to the Human Rights and Housing Legislation Amendment (Ending Homelessness) Bill 2023.

In my opinion, the bill, as introduced to the Legislative Council, is compatible with, promotes, and strengthens, the human rights protected by the Charter.

I base my opinion on the reasons outlined in this statement.

Overview of bill

The purposes of this bill are to amend the Charter of Human Rights and Responsibilities Act 2006 to establish a right to adequate housing within the Charter; and to amend the Housing Act 1983 to set a target of ending homelessness in Victoria by 2030 and require planning and reporting on progress to meet the target.

Human rights issues

In my opinion, the human rights protected by the Charter that are relevant to the bill are:

- The right to recognition and equality before the law (section 8)
- The right to freedom of movement (section 12)
- Privacy and reputation (section 13)
- Protection of families and children (section 17)
- Cultural rights, including Aboriginal cultural rights (section 19)
- Property rights (section 20)

The right to recognition and equality before the law (section 8)

Section 8(2) of the Charter provides that every person has the right to enjoy their human rights without discrimination. This means that you cannot be treated unfavourably because of your personal characteristics protected by the law.

Introducing a right to adequate housing that sufficiently accommodates the person's attributes, within the meaning of the Equal Opportunity Act 2010, strengthens this right by affirming that housing should be fully accessible to all free from discrimination.

The right to freedom of movement (section 12)

Section 12 of the Charter provides that every person lawfully within Victoria has the right to move freely within Victoria and to enter and leave it and has the freedom to choose where to live.

The bill creates a right to adequate housing that is located reasonably close to public services and employment opportunities for the person. In my view, this will enhance and not limit the operation of the right to freedom of movement. What is adequate for the person will differ from person to person. The bill ensures that people will not be forced to relocate to housing that is poorly located or removed from their work and communities, while still protecting the freedom of a person to choose where to live.

Privacy and reputation (section 13)

Section 13(a) of the Charter provides that a person has the right not to have their privacy, family, home or correspondence unlawfully or arbitrarily interfered with. The new Charter right to housing in the bill enhances this right by defining adequate housing as housing that provides for physical safety and sufficient space for a person without overcrowding.

Protection of families and children (section 17)

Section 17 of the Charter provides that every child has the right, without discrimination, to such protection as is in their best interests and is needed by the child by reason of being a child. For children who are homeless or who are living in insecure housing, the lack of a secure and permanent home can interrupt their schooling, and negatively impact their health and wellbeing. The bill's target to end homelessness will promote this right by reducing and, by 2030, eliminating the harm done to children who are experiencing homelessness.

Cultural rights, including Aboriginal cultural rights (section 19)

Section 19 of the Charter provides that all persons with a particular cultural, religious, racial or linguistic background must not be denied the right, in community with other persons of that background, to enjoy their culture, to declare and practise their religion and to use their language.

Introducing a right to adequate housing that sufficiently accommodates the person's attributes, within the meaning of the Equal Opportunity Act 2010, strengthens this right by affirming that housing should be fully accessible to all and free from discrimination, including taking into account a person's cultural needs.

Property rights (section 20)

Section 20 of the Charter provides that a person must not be deprived of their property other than in accordance with law. Introducing a right to adequate housing that protects against unfair eviction improves the operation of this right. It prevents a person from being unfairly evicted from their home but does not limit the right of a property owner to manage a residential tenancy agreement, as it retains the ability for eviction in accordance with the law.

For these reasons I consider that the Bill is compatible with the Charter.

Second reading

Samantha RATNAM (Northern Metropolitan) (09:53): I move:

That the bill be now read a second time.

Almost 18 months ago, the Greens called on all members to support a bill to end homelessness in Victoria by 2030.

It represented an important moment to recognise that homelessness is inherently solvable and that, as lawmakers, we have the tools and the power to end it and prevent it.

We asked members to unite in acknowledging that housing is a human right and that nobody in Victoria should be without a home.

And the bill put forward a bold, but achievable, vision to end homelessness in Victoria by the end of the decade.

Today, on behalf of my Greens colleagues, I am reintroducing this plan to end homelessness, in this Human Rights and Housing Legislation Amendment (Ending Homelessness) Bill 2023, because in the 18 months since we first introduced these reforms, the situation in Victoria has only gotten worse. We're now in one of the worst housing crises this state has ever seen.

There are a record 58,131 applications on the Victorian Housing Register – 130,000 adults and children waiting for a public home, many for years on end.

Rents have risen 13.3 per cent in Victoria in the last year alone. In Melbourne median rents are at record highs of \$520 for houses and \$500 for units.

And on census night in 2021 more than 30,000 Victorians were homeless – an increase of 23 per cent from 2016.

These figures are striking – and all the more so because they are entirely preventable.

We know we have the power to end homelessness in Victoria. We know that the simplest and most effective way to end homelessness is to provide enough secure, long-term, affordable housing for everyone who needs it.

Once upon a time, governments saw housing as a public service – something that they provided for the people, like public education or public health. It was a government responsibility to provide affordable housing for everyone.

In the postwar period in the middle of the 20th century, amid a housing crisis not unlike the one we're in today, we did not hesitate. We directly built thousands of new public homes as a solution to a shortage of affordable homes.

But today, our governments have turned their back on their responsibility to provide housing. They have forgotten that housing is a human right. They have no plan to significantly increase the number of public and affordable homes in Victoria, because today, after decades dominated by neoliberal thinking in Australian politics, housing has become a vehicle for private investment instead of an essential service. It's seen as a commodity, an asset to appreciate in financial value, not the value that its stability delivers to families and communities.

This means that instead of being the responsibility of governments, the provision of affordable housing has been left in the hands of private developers, who care more about their bottom line than about ensuring we have enough affordable homes for everyone.

And because our thinking is so warped, our priorities so wrong, we have totally failed to protect or invest in our public housing system or create the new affordable homes we need.

In 1956, 22 per cent of new housing built in Australia was public housing. In 2022, this was only 1.7 per cent.

Today we have fewer public homes in Victoria than we did 10 years ago.

And there are just 126 affordable properties for low-income families in the entire state and no affordable homes for single parents on youth allowance or Jobseeker.

Because we are not doing anywhere near enough to create more affordable housing, we have also given up on addressing homelessness. Without a massive increase in affordable and public housing, our governments are simply sitting back and letting homelessness increase year on year.

We know from its track record that, without being compelled to create new public and affordable homes and work towards ending homelessness, nothing will change under this government.

This bill aims to make that change by reinforcing that housing is a human right and by making the government – and all future governments – develop a plan to end homelessness in Victoria by the end of the decade.

To turn now to the details of the bill, the bill will introduce a new right to housing into the Victorian Charter of Human Rights and Responsibilities.

The right to housing is recognised in international law in article 11 of the International Covenant on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights, which acknowledges the right of everyone to an adequate standard of living, including adequate food, clothing and housing.

But in Victoria there is no recognition of the right to housing in our human rights legislation. This means that there is no explicit obligation on the government to provide enough housing for everyone or to protect Victorians from being evicted into homelessness, and so our governments are free to continue making decisions that only increase housing unaffordability, contribute to the shortage of affordable housing and push more people into homelessness.

Introducing a right to adequate housing into our human rights charter will mean that a person's right to housing would have to be considered in all future policy and legislative decisions.

It will make the provision of adequate housing and the eradication of homelessness a priority for current and future governments.

This is a reform that was also recommended by the Legal and Social Issues Committee's inquiry into homelessness in Victoria.

Importantly, this bill goes further than just establishing a right to housing. We know that it's not enough to simply build more houses; we need to be creating homes that people want to live in and can build a life around in the long term.

Our bill establishes a right to adequate housing and adopts a comprehensive understanding of what 'adequate' means based on guidance from the Office of the United Nations High Commissioner for Human Rights.

Adequate housing is affordable.

It is structurally sound and fit for habitation.

It is safe and protects a person from forced evictions, harassment and other threats to their safety.

It provides sufficient space for the person, without overcrowding and without a lack of privacy.

It is fully accessible to everyone, free from discrimination and takes into account people's cultural needs.

It is well located, within reasonable range of employment opportunities, healthcare services, schools, childcare centres and other social facilities for those that need such access.

And it is secure, with long-term tenure and no risk of unfair eviction.

This comprehensive definition of what 'adequate housing' means is a first in Victoria. It recognises that our right to housing is more than a right to four walls and a roof; it's a right to a livable home.

Part 3 of the bill amends the Housing Act 1983 to create a legislated target for ending homelessness in Victoria. The bill sets that target at zero by 2030 – that is, that nobody will be homeless in Victoria by the year 2030.

It's an ambitious target – but one that is entirely achievable. And it is inconceivable that we may decide not even to try and attempt it.

For the purposes of the ending homelessness target, a person is homeless if, for at least 28 days, they have not been housed in housing that is adequate for them and have been unable to access housing that is adequate for them.

The 28-day time period acknowledges that our frontline services need a reasonable period of time to secure permanent housing for a person but also recognises that an extended period of homelessness is not acceptable if we are serious about ending homelessness in our state.

The bill requires the minister to develop a plan for achieving the ending homelessness target by 2030. The plan must have a focus on providing adequate and ongoing housing for people experiencing homelessness.

This is the Housing First approach, where homelessness is addressed by immediately providing a person with adequate long-term housing, without any housing readiness requirements.

We know that this approach works. We've seen this internationally, most notably in Finland, where their use of the Housing First principles has effectively ended street homelessness, and we saw it here in Melbourne during the pandemic. This government must continue to adopt this approach to address

our housing crisis, which is why this bill makes sure it will be a key part of the ending homelessness plan.

The plan will also have to set out the details of how homelessness will be reduced over the decade, including how many new homes will be created in order to meet the target, what types of housing the new homes will be, how much funding will be given to housing support services and how many people will be permanently housed each year to 2030.

The government of the day will also have the ability to set other appropriate benchmarks such as tracking the number of people sleeping rough or living in marginal housing such as rooming houses.

To ensure proper scrutiny of the ending homelessness plan, the plan must be tabled in Parliament within 10 sitting days after it has been prepared. And each year the minister must prepare and table an annual report on progress towards the ending homelessness target, including reporting on progress made towards the target, the number of new homes created and how much additional funding has been allocated to frontline services.

I am pleased to reintroduce this bill today on behalf of the Greens and to put forward a plan to end homelessness in Victoria.

We are in a homelessness crisis because successive governments have lacked the ambition or the drive to think differently.

For decades, our governments have put homelessness in the too-hard basket. They have said that solving homelessness is too complex. It's too expensive. It's too difficult. It's best left to the 'invisible hand' of the market, even if the market is increasingly building invisible homes for Victorians in need.

They have had no vision, no long-term planning, no clear strategy for ending homelessness in our state. Instead they've given us years of piecemeal funding, sporadic program streams and a reliance on the private sector to fill the gaps. And they have tried to lower our collective ambition and hope. They have hoped, by making it sound too complex to fix, that we – the community – would be passive bystanders to their complicity in making the housing crisis worse.

But these governments have had their priorities wrong, and this bill gives us the chance here to compel all future Victorian governments to act.

We know that homelessness is inherently solvable. All it takes is the political will to do it.

The vision outlined in this bill is bold. It's ambitious. But it is possible.

And we simply must try.

I commend this bill to the house.

Lee TARLAMIS (South-Eastern Metropolitan) (10:04): I move:

That debate on this bill be adjourned for two weeks.

Motion agreed to and debate adjourned for two weeks.

Motions

Commonwealth Games

Matthew BACH (North-Eastern Metropolitan) (10:05): I move:

That this house:

(1) notes:

- (a) the government's cancellation of the 2026 Commonwealth Games;
- (b) the \$4.4 billion blowout in cost projections for the games;

- (c) the government's belief that 'broader inflationary pressures across the economy', including interest rate rises and the war in Ukraine, were responsible for the unprecedented cost increase;
 - (2) further notes the major project blowouts across the government's infrastructure pipeline, particularly:
 - (a) the North East Link;
 - (b) the Metro Tunnel;
 - (c) the West Gate Tunnel;
 - (d) the Suburban Rail Loop;
 - (3) expresses its concern that the inflationary factors identified by the government are not specific to the Commonwealth Games and could impact major projects across Victoria;
 - (4) further expresses its concern at the cost implications these factors could have for the government's key election promises in areas such as schools, hospitals, roads and housing;
- and calls on the Andrews government to urgently release a state budget update, outlining the status and current costs of these projects.

If the government's rationale for the cancellation of the Commonwealth Games is correct, then Victoria is about to experience an extraordinary financial catastrophe. It was just two weeks before the cancellation of the Commonwealth Games was announced that Minister Shing sat in this place defending the initial costings of the games, but because of – wait for it – the war in Ukraine, among other things, we saw the cost of the Commonwealth Games blow out by about 300 per cent. Now, that is the government's line. If it is true, then those same factors that led to the extraordinary blowout of the Commonwealth Games will impact upon a whole series of other government projects, projects like the North East Link in my electorate, the Metro Tunnel, the West Gate Tunnel, and yes, Mr Luu, the Suburban Rail Loop. This is the Suburban Rail Loop that the minister said before the 2018 election would cost up to \$50 billion and yet the Parliamentary Budget Office says will cost over \$200 billion – that is, over \$200 billion before the war in Ukraine and La Niña and rising interest rates and events in China led, apparently, to a quite amazing blowout in the Commonwealth Games costings in a period of just two weeks.

On this side of the house, we are immensely concerned about that. We are immensely concerned about that, and we would urge the government to act now in order to gain an understanding of the magnitude of the upcoming blowouts, because of these apparently new factors, in these other huge projects, to which the Victorian taxpayer is very much exposed. We know already that, especially, major projects have blown out under this government by more than \$30 billion. That figure is not disputed. It has been circulated in detail to the media. Those opposite have it – it is not disputed, over \$30 billion in blowouts. We could talk about the specific reasons when it comes to some of these projects. The Suburban Rail Loop was cooked up in secret by a few Labor advisers as, would you believe it, an election bribe before the 2018 election. It is not recommended by Infrastructure Australia, Infrastructure Victoria, the Grattan Institute – in fact, it is not recommended by any expert body.

It has been interesting to me that members in the other place are wasting their time this week, because of the government's non-existent agenda, debating a sledge motion noting some of my comments on social media about the Suburban Rail Loop before the last election. I think I called it 'a mangy dog', and the government is deeply offended by this because those opposite are offended by everything, so they are debating it.

Michael Galea interjected.

Matthew BACH: Mr Galea shouts out that the voters like it. Well, that may be the case. But given that this project, for example, has blown out from costing up to \$50 billion when it was announced to \$200 billion according to the independent, apolitical Parliamentary Budget Office before the last election, we are now at grave risk.

We know that Victoria already has more debt than New South Wales, Queensland, and Tasmania combined. We know that we are still at risk of further downgrades by credit agencies, meaning that

our borrowing will become even more expensive. And yet there are new factors, according to the government, that have led to huge blowouts on major projects.

If the government is telling the truth, what we must see, as we state in our motion, at point (4) for the benefit of the house, is the urgent release of:

A state budget update, outlining the status and current costs of these projects.

These projects being the ones I have already listed that are at point (2) in our motion: the North East Link, the Metro Tunnel, the West Gate Tunnel and also the Suburban Rail Loop. But further projects – what about school projects? School building, surely –

Michael Galea: We are getting on with it.

Matthew BACH: We getting on with it, says Mr Galea. Well, we heard that in relation to the Commonwealth Games, time and time again. When it comes to school building, you are getting on with it with 96 per cent of funding in the last budget in Labor electorates, which is odd. Nonetheless, according to the government's own public statements about the cancellation of the Commonwealth Games, all of these other projects – schools, hospitals, road projects, housing projects – are also at risk. Doesn't the war in Ukraine impact these projects just as much as it would impact the Commonwealth Games?

If there is an argument as to why the war in Ukraine would have a specific impact on the Commonwealth Games but on no other government project, I would love to hear it. If that is the case, I would love to hear it, so we are giving the government the opportunity in this debate to make those arguments about the specificity of the external factors that only impact upon the Commonwealth Games and that led to a 300 per cent increase in two weeks in the costings of the Commonwealth Games. If there is an argument to that effect, I would love to hear it. I have not heard it yet. Because if that is true, despite the fact that Victoria is already mired in debt, despite the fact that Victorians are already paying more taxes than anyone else across the country – more than 50 new taxes since Mr Andrews promised no new or increased taxes – then we are on the precipice of a great financial catastrophe.

Not everybody believes the government's rationale for the Commonwealth Games. I read an article in the *Age* newspaper a couple of days ago, the headline of which was 'The con games'. The proposition that was put forward in this article in the *Age* newspaper was that the government had fashioned a Commonwealth Games across the regions with infrastructure in marginal seats in order to win votes at election time but that the government never had an intention of moving forward with what the *Age* called 'The con games'. I know many people across Victoria believe that to be true. It is suspicious that two weeks before the cancellation of the Commonwealth Games was announced Ms Shing sat in this place and defended the initial costings. That is suspicious. I would never accuse the minister of misleading this house, but if there is an argument as to how the war in Ukraine affected the Commonwealth Games costings so significantly in two weeks, again, I would love to hear it. We need to hear that argument. We need to hear the argument from the government about the specificity of these challenges: rising interest rates, events in China, supply-side issues, La Niña, Ukraine.

I do not necessarily think it is reasonable to accept the government's line about how these are the factors that led to a huge blowout in the Commonwealth Games in just two weeks, but nonetheless if that is true – if that is true – then every other government project is at risk of further blowouts. Major projects have already blown out by more than \$30 billion on the watch of this government. If these external factors are in fact having such an impact on projects, we need to have an understanding of exactly what that looks like for our budget and to work together in this place to come up with a plan to mitigate those risks, like the war in Ukraine.

I understand why there is scepticism in the community about the government's rationale for the cancellation of the Commonwealth Games. It was recently reported that Mr Andrews had been offered

but did not accept any Commonwealth funding for the Commonwealth Games. That was odd, because I actually remember in the election campaign Mr Andrews repeatedly attacking Mr Morrison for a lack of federal government funding for Victoria's major projects. Don't you remember 'miserable Morrison'? Mr Andrews fronted the press and said every time he wants money for Victorian projects it is like he has to get on bended knee with his begging bowl. It is like getting foreign aid out of the federal government, he said. But now his mates are in power in Canberra –

Nicholas McGowan interjected.

Matthew BACH: and they were offering money – no, you are quite right, Mr McGowan. In actual fact this was before the federal election: 'miserable Morrison' was offering money for the Commonwealth Games, it is reported, that Mr Andrews did not take, which is odd. I am old enough to remember Paul Keating saying, 'Never get between a state premier and a bucket of money.' Mr Andrews was being offered a bucket of money, it is reported, for the Commonwealth Games, and yet he did not accept it. So in putting forward this motion, I am not accepting the government's logic, the government's rationale, but nonetheless the government has made the case that there was a huge blowout in the Commonwealth Games costings in just two weeks as a result of a range of strange factors, including the war in Ukraine. I would love to understand that argument more, but the point we are making today is a very serious point, actually, about Victoria's ongoing financial stability.

Given the parlous state of our public finances and given the fact that I have heard no argument about the specificity of these factors only to the Commonwealth Games, we are now at great risk. We would urge the government to do the work and to put forward further information in the public domain – I know that is very unusual in Victoria, but nonetheless – so that we can work together to seek to ensure that we do not fall off a financial cliff, which undoubtedly we will if the government's reasoning is correct. So I am interested to hear further explanation from the government, and I commend this motion to the house, given the very serious nature of our current financial position and given the massive future risks that we have if in fact the government is telling us the truth about the reasons for the cancellation of the Commonwealth Games. I commend the motion to the house.

Michael GALEA (South-Eastern Metropolitan) (10:16): I also rise to speak on this motion. It certainly seems to be the case that we did not get much time to actually prepare for this motion. It only came up yesterday. After midday we were notified of this, so it has been quite a rushed motion from His Majesty's opposition. It is quite a sloppy motion. To quote your hyperbolic language from yesterday, Dr Bach, one could almost say it is sneaky. So here we are debating this once again.

I had prepared some notes in relation to the Commonwealth Games specifically, but I note that Dr Bach decided to expand this into a broader discussion that apparently the world is falling down around us, which could not be further from the truth. Basically Dr Bach has put this through at the last minute, and he has mentioned the Ukraine situation as well. I would like to briefly pause to mention that, whilst this does get thrown around in this chamber a lot, I did have the distinct honour on Saturday, along with Mr Tarlamis and Mrs Hermans, of going to a celebration of Ukrainian Independence Day in Noble Park in our electorate. It was very bittersweet event. I look forward to updating the house in further detail at a later time. But I do want to reflect on and acknowledge the situation that the country of Ukraine is going through right now. As you saw fit to mention this repeatedly in your contribution, Dr Bach, I will leave that note there.

As the good Dr Bach knows, though, there is a select committee that has been formed into the Commonwealth Games cancellation and into the regional infrastructure build, because of course we were here two sitting weeks ago when that motion was debated and was put through. Along with other colleagues in this place, I am serving on that committee, with Mr Limbrick as chair. That committee is well underway. That is of course on top of the Victorian Auditor-General's Office (VAGO) process looking into it. Here we are again with yet another motion from the opposition. I say it is sloppy, and it is sloppy. It is quite indicative of the nature in which His Majesty's opposition has taken to this issue.

Members interjecting.

Michael GALEA: Do you know what? If you are not even going to say what you fought so hard yesterday to keep, I will say it. I seem to be the only one in this chamber who will call you ‘His Majesty’s opposition’. I will say it until the Governor puts through the law that was passed yesterday. You are not even going to reference the thing that you fought so valiantly to keep because it was such an attack on Victoria’s constitution, which I think you were saying at one point yesterday. It was such an attack, and you are not even saying it. So I will call you by your proper title, at least for the time being, of His Majesty’s opposition.

But this does go to the sloppiness of the opposition in their approach to this. We saw a few weeks ago the Leader of the Opposition, our good friend Mr Pesutto, go on to the radio and crow and say how wonderful it was that the crossbench voted, united for the first time, to defeat a government motion to refer this to VAGO, and that is complete nonsense. As members here know, it was a 20–20 vote. I am not sure where Mr Pesutto is getting his facts from, but he seems to be quite mistaken. Again, it just goes to the very sloppy nature in which the opposition – sorry, His Majesty’s opposition – have approached this debate. It is throwing bombs at the last minute – ‘Oh, what are we going to do?’

I do not know why it took so long to get the motion out yesterday. Maybe they could not even agree on their own side. We know that it would not be the first time within their party room that that has been the case. But anyway, we have got it here now. Who knows? We will have another member of the party room now – another gallant victory for the perfidious Mr Pesutto, claiming victory in a one-horse race. If the Commonwealth Games only had one competitor for each race, they might not be quite so interesting in the first place. But we know with the Liberal Party, if they are the only horse in the race, they will win, and that is their secret recipe for success. We wish them all the best with that strategy when running in the 2026 election – hoping no-one else remembers to nominate.

But here we are talking about the Commonwealth Games. There is a select committee that has been set up for the specific purpose of looking at this. We are doing that work, and again I note my colleague Mr Limbrick, who is chairing the committee. We are already well underway, and we are getting on with that process. There is a VAGO report. The motion today seems to be a bit of ‘Let’s throw whatever we can at the wall.’ I think the Metro Tunnel is in there and the North East Link, whatever they could find. It is great for you to remind us of all the wonderful things that are being done in this state and all the hard work that this government is doing to deliver the infrastructure for Victoria that our growing state so desperately needs.

Along with my colleagues on this side – I believe Mr Berger may have been there as well – I had the opportunity of visiting the Metro Tunnel just a couple of months ago at Town Hall station. It was wonderful to see that station underway. Members would have seen the trains running. The opposition got very excited when the test train on the very first day ran into some apparent difficulties; I do not even know if they were difficulties. But imagine a test train not running perfectly on day one. That is what test trains are for, I would have thought. The Metro Tunnel will be opening a year ahead of schedule. I note Dr Bach left that out of his rather sloppily put together motion. A year ahead of schedule the Metro Tunnel will be opening, directly benefiting my constituents in the South-Eastern Metropolitan Region and the Western Metropolitan Region, with knock-on effects that will benefit the rest of the metropolitan network.

We have in your electorate, Dr Bach, the North East Link, which is underway. Mr Puglielli is in the chamber as well, I see. Although I am a proper southie, I did have the chance to drive past the construction site last week. I note in our enjoyable debate last week Mr Puglielli raised the construction site. It is quite a big construction site. A lot of work is going on there, much more than I had anticipated, and I am sure the Minister for Environment will continue to work with you on the rehabilitation of that site. But the North East Link Program is well underway, which is great to see, as indeed are many other projects.

The Suburban Rail Loop – I cannot believe that the Liberals still think that this is a good thing for them to campaign on. They are losing seat after seat in the outer south-east and the outer east – Glen Waverley at the last election. For two elections now they have gone to the Victorian people to say, ‘This is a terrible project,’ and two elections in a row the Victorian people have said, ‘This is actually a good project. This is what we want.’ For decades and decades and decades in this state people have talked about the need for an orbital railway line around Melbourne. People have complained that to get from Dandenong to Frankston it is often quicker to go through Caulfield than it is to go the direct route. This is a government that is investing in the future. We are a growing state. These projects are just some of the many, many parts of that, and it is good to see the opposition – sorry, His Majesty’s opposition – reference them in their motion today.

On the Commonwealth Games – again, I thought I would be speaking little bit more about the Commonwealth Games during a debate on a motion that is ostensibly about the Commonwealth Games, but as we heard from Dr Bach, he is seeking to connect it with just about anything but. As members will know, Victoria agreed to take on the 2026 games following Durban in South Africa’s withdrawal from the games, and we did so with the full and enthusiastic support of the opposition. I do not think it was the perfidious Mr Pesutto back then; it was the good Mr Guy, and they fully supported it the whole way through. They said, ‘Let’s expand it. Let’s do more regional cities.’ Now of course they are saying, ‘No, no, no, you shouldn’t have done that. You shouldn’t have done that.’ We were prepared to support it and we were prepared to step in and help when it was needed because there was a justifiable business case for it that showed a benefit to Victoria. When that changed, though, we were not prepared to then go and say, ‘We’re prepared to risk this much taxpayers money on an event,’ once those costs had increased.

Members interjecting.

Michael GALEA: It is frankly adapting to the situation and adapting to do what is right in the situation. Again you will throw out all sorts of barbs and insults and whatever else you like to do, Dr Bach, but ultimately we did make the decision.

Ann-Marie Hermans: You actually cancelled the Commonwealth Games.

Michael GALEA: As you say, Mrs Hermans, we did make the decision to cancel the games, and that was on the basis of the best information at the time. As the Premier said, that was not one of the hardest decisions he has had to make in his job, because putting Victorians first is what this government has always been about. Instead we are investing \$2 billion in a regional infrastructure build that will benefit Geelong, Ballarat, Bendigo, Shepparton and the Latrobe Valley, but it will also benefit beyond those areas and beyond those five centres.

It will actually go beyond, into further parts of the regions – regions that would not have directly benefited as a result of the Commonwealth Games. This regional infrastructure build is going to deliver the housing, the community sport infrastructure and the other vital services and infrastructure that these communities need, and this is going to be a much better investment of the state’s money given the situation that has arisen. So whilst I very much appreciate the good Dr Bach’s raising of this motion for us to speak on today, I will finish where I started, which is to say: it is a sloppy motion. It is all over the place. I do not really know what you want. We have already got a select committee into this process as well as a VAGO audit underway, but by all means let us continue debating if this is what you want to do with your time today. Thank you. I do not commend the motion to the house.

David LIMBRICK (South-Eastern Metropolitan) (10:26): I also rise to speak on this motion. Effectively what this motion is talking about is government waste, and I am very concerned about government waste as well. They talk about the cancellation of the Commonwealth Games, the budget blowouts and all these projects that are blowing out, and I am very sympathetic to those ideas that the government are wasting too much money – although I will note that the government have embraced a little bit of financial prudence recently. They spoke about making some cutbacks to the public service,

which I am very happy about, and I would urge them to go further. At one point there was even a media report that the government was implementing a Libertarian Party policy of a 10 per cent cut. I am not sure whether that will actually happen or not, but it would be good.

I have got a big concern with this motion because it is talking about waste, waste, waste, and then it calls on the government to urgently release a state budget update. I think that that is just wasting more money. Many people talk about members of Parliament not having much experience in the real world; well, I do have experience working in a finance department, and budget processes are huge processes. It takes months and months in advance to go through and collect the data from all over the place – it is a massive job – and if this motion were to pass and if the Treasurer were to instruct the Department of Treasury and Finance to come up with a state budget update, here is what I think would happen: they would not have the resources at their disposal to be able to do it. They would get in a whole bunch of consultants, and this would cost millions of dollars. It would have to be a crash project, and I do not think that in any case they would get it out before the midyear budget update, which is meant to be released I think in November. I think it would be very unlikely that they would get it out before then anyway. I will not be supporting this motion on those grounds. I think that, despite my concern about waste, this is calling for more waste, so I do not support it.

Gaelle BROAD (Northern Victoria) (10:28): I certainly stand in support of this motion, and I want to thank Georgie Crozier for putting it forward. The Commonwealth Games was intended to be a games like no other –

A member interjected.

Gaelle BROAD: Yes, certainly no other – not happening. It was intended to be focused on regional Victoria and on delivering legacy projects with long-term benefits. It was intended – and we were fully supportive of this – to be something that could create great sporting venues that do serve the community every single day. We wanted projects built that would leave a lasting legacy, certainly in terms of accommodation as well as those sporting venues, and infrastructure that would also benefit the state far beyond just the couple of weeks of the games.

Regional Victoria has done it hard. There has been drought, there have been bushfires and we have had COVID, significant lockdowns and floods. We certainly needed something to look forward to. The Commonwealth Games was providing that. And 15 months ago the state government were chasing the games. They were going after the games, wanting to be the only state bidding for the games. But in November last year – well, before the state election last year – they actually expanded the number of regional cities to host the games and included the marginal seats of Morwell and Shepparton in that.

But how quickly things turn. In April this year I had Senator Bridget McKenzie visiting Bendigo, and concerns were raised then about the time frame and funding for the Commonwealth Games. We wanted to make sure that this state government did not push all the costs of the games onto the local councils. The *Bendigo Times* on 28 April this year said:

Deputy Premier and Minister for Commonwealth Games Delivery, Jacinta Allan, said there was no truth of budget concerns or timeframe issues.

‘We are making great progress with regional communities on the delivery of the 2026 Commonwealth Games,’ she said.

‘The Andrews Labor Government has grabbed with both hands the opportunity to have regional Victoria be the home of the Games ...

And then we got to the state budget – no details, radio silence. Less than 1000 days until the games, local councils and sporting groups had no information about what was happening.

And then in July it was like a house of cards that came crashing down. The Premier; Jacinta Allan, Minister for Commonwealth Games Delivery; and Harriett Shing, Minister for Commonwealth Games Legacy, announced that the Commonwealth Games had been cancelled because of cost

blowouts – \$2.6 billion up to \$6 billion or \$7 billion – but there was no explanation, no details. And what do we have to show for it now? We have got \$380 million wasted just to cancel the contract. Now, that is our money – that is your money – being absolutely wasted. Just think of how that could have been spent and what it would have done for regional Victoria with investment in things like ambulances, schools and roads. It could be a lot better than just throwing money away. Certainly the government does not seem to worry about continuing to waste money. It is interesting that even in Ballarat the Committee for Ballarat CEO Michael Poulton told the Commonwealth Games inquiry the games office is still operating in Ballarat. It seems people are still being paid not to deliver the games. So the \$380 million is just the tip of the iceberg. We know that there were a lot of people employed and office renovations that were very fancy, and all of that has just been wasted – wasted money.

We in Victoria have the highest state debt of any other state in Australia and soon we are going to be paying \$22 million a day in interest. That is despite the fact that we actually pay higher taxes than any other state, and under this government we have had 50 new or increased taxes since they came into government in 2014.

Victoria's reputation as a sporting and events capital has also been damaged on an international scale with this announcement. But now the state government are trying to keep these negotiations secret. In the hearing that was held in Bendigo, the City of Ballarat deputy mayor Amy Johnson said she was very critical of the decision to make their CEO sign an agreement:

'To expect our CEO to sign a nondisclosure agreement that prohibits him from sharing all relevant information with a councillors group is a disgrace,' she said.

'I do not think it usual. If it is, I think it is wrong.'

She also criticised the state government for failing to consult with council about funding priorities or if it was even feasible to construct accommodation and sporting infrastructure in little more than two years and ensure that transport plans were in place.

But that secret style of government, keeping negotiations secret, is something that we are seeing across the board with this government. We have seen it with the timber industry – people signing the support plans need to do that non-disclosure and they are not permitted to speak about those negotiations. We have also had under this government FOI requests skyrocket. But what this government seem to forget is that it is our money and they are here to serve people and manage our money. Why do they need to hide all this information?

In the hearings in Bendigo, there were considerable concerns raised. To quote from the *Age*, it says:

Regional groups have told a Senate inquiry they were ignored by the Victorian government when they sounded the alarm on decisions about facilities and housing for the Commonwealth Games.

They also heard at the hearing from the Table Tennis Association. They said they had been:

... blindsided when games competitions for the sport were announced for their city without consultation.

Rodney Carter, who is with the Dja Dja Wurrung Clans Aboriginal Corporation, said they were fully supportive of the games and they were wanting to see them going ahead. They were very dogged in their support of holding the games in Australia in 2026, even after the government announced that they were no longer happening.

But as reported in the *Age* yesterday, Premier Daniel Andrews has declined an invitation to speak before the Senate committee which is probing the cancellation of the games, and he told the inquiry that no government ministers or employees would attend. So where is the transparency in this government? It is very good that we do have an upper house inquiry that was supported by the whole crossbench, which is now open for submissions, and I would like to invite people to come forward and share their stories, because there are still many questions that need to be answered.

The Commonwealth Games is more than just a sport. As we saw with the success of the Matildas in the recent World Cup, it just brings an absolute sense of excitement and anticipation that brings people together, and you cannot put a price on that. And we need that in Victoria. The CEO of Vicsport said athletes were shattered when Daniel Andrews said cancelling the Commonwealth Games was ‘not a difficult decision’. But the ripple effect of the damage of this decision is felt right across the board. It is not just athletes that are impacted; there are accommodation providers. I visited the Huntly Hotel recently with David Southwick and Wendy Lovell, and they were planning expansions because of the Commonwealth Games. I have spoken to local businesses that were setting up in Bendigo and that are now moving their manufacturing overseas because of this decision. I am aware of transport operators – bus operators – that have been purchasing vehicles from other states just to be able to cope with the transport that they were anticipating with the games. And there is the damage to tourism because an international spotlight was going to be shining on regional Victoria, and again, it is very hard to put a price on that.

Jacinta Allan, who is the member for Bendigo East and the former Minister for Commonwealth Games Delivery, certainly did not deliver. The Nationals will continue to advocate for transparency to ensure that regions benefit. There is still very much a lack of detail, and there seems to be a lot of rebranding of information and money to try and get a media headline by this government. But we do need projects that suit the local region and deliver long-term benefits.

They have been called the ‘Con Games’, which I think is very appropriate, because you have to question whether or not there was fraud by this government in continuing to push the line that the Commonwealth Games were going ahead and then so quickly switching and absolutely pulling the plug. By cancelling the Commonwealth Games the Labor government has certainly dropped the baton with regional Victoria.

Jacinta ERMACORA (Western Victoria) (10:38): Yesterday’s conspiracy theory was about a hidden element in a bill that meant Victoria was going to turn the nation into a republic. Today’s conspiracy theory is that we never intended to run the games. The idea of hosting the Commonwealth Games was a well-meant initiative. It was embarked on with the most positive of intentions, particularly as no other host in the Commonwealth was forthcoming at the time. However, it has been recognised that a 12-day event, with the multitude of logistical challenges it posed and costing \$6 billion, was not going to be the best use of resources for this state. It takes leadership to change course even when that is obviously the right decision to make. I support Daniel Andrews’s decision, as does Nikki Gemmell from the *Australian*, who argues that the Commonwealth Games are an outdated concept from a colonial area, and judging by the positive response from regional leaders, so does regional Victoria. As Nikki Gemmell stated in her article in the *Australian* on 29 July:

Dan Andrews’ decision to walk away from the multi-city sports carnival feels refreshing, a sign of the times.

She added:

It’s telling that none of our states or territories want to pick up the poisoned baton. The games always felt slightly embarrassing anyway, with the mighty roar of Australia, Canada and the UK dominating so grotesquely those valiant smaller countries of the dominion. The whole thing was starting to feel anachronistic, creaky.

The games, being limited to old empire membership, have for many years now started to feel like a practice event for certain nations rather than a meeting of worldwide sporting prowess. Nikki Gemmell comes to the conclusion that:

Dan Andrews’ decision feels like a masterstroke of modernity, a declaration that will one day be cited by the history books in terms of Australia’s shift towards a republic. Out with the old ways, those dusty vestiges of colonialism, and let’s put our money where it’s really needed.

That is what Daniel Andrews is going to do. This decision is an opportunity to put our money where it is really needed. As emphasised by Harriet Shing, the Minister for Commonwealth Games Legacy:

We'll deliver all the housing, sports infrastructure and tourism legacy benefits for our regions, but without the massive extra cost of hosting the Games.

What is not to like about that? The games may not be proceeding, but every single one of our permanent new and upgraded sporting infrastructure projects will still be delivered as planned by 2026. This means big and small projects right across Victoria that will deliver modern facilities that communities want for both elite and grassroots sports for many years to come. It also means that we can go straight to delivering the final legacy through the infrastructure so that regional communities can benefit from the new and upgraded facilities earlier.

I am particularly pleased that this means that 60 kilometres of world-class mountain bike trails will be built in and around Creswick. I must admit that I personally do not need world-class mountain bike trails, but you can be sure I will be trying them out, even if my jump, berm and drop-off skills are not world class. The outcomes we will now have remain very positive and future oriented for the whole of regional Victoria.

As referenced in the Premier's press release on 18 July, the Victorian government is getting on with delivering:

... a comprehensive \$2 billion package to ensure regional Victoria still receives all the benefits that would have been facilitated by the –

Commonwealth –

Games – and more.

In addition to existing funds, there is now more funding allocated to the regions. This is giving the Andrews government the opportunity to provide urgently needed worker accommodation, with an investment of \$150 million in regional worker accommodation to provide new housing opportunities for regional communities where key workers are struggling to find affordable places to live. It is apparent that there is no more important issue anywhere in our state currently than housing. This government is committed to making regional jobs more secure and also making it easier for businesses to find and keep staff. The south-west is full of ideas on how to quickly and affordably fix the regional worker housing accommodation crisis, and I hope that we see some of these initiatives come to fruition in the future.

The government has also taken this opportunity to announce, ahead of the housing statement to be released later this year, that it will provide a new \$1 billion housing fund to deliver more than 1300 new homes in regional Victoria. And there are more benefits for regional Victoria. It is true the games were expected to bring many tourists from the Commonwealth to our shores, yet even without a 12-day influx of tourists, it is a sure thing that tourism will continue to flourish in our state's regional economies and for the long term. In fact the new \$150 million Regional Tourism and Events Fund will ensure our regions have the best of everything to offer, with new events, new attractions and more accommodation.

I am very pleased that sporting clubs in the south-west are motivated to advocate for their share of the \$2 billion in extra funding. Paul Dillon, president of the south-west hockey association, has pointed out that there can be real opportunities due to this realignment of funding opportunities. Money not being spent on the organising and logistics of an enormous event to be held across Victoria can now go to permanent infrastructure opportunities and can potentially be accessed with larger regional scope. As Paul said in a *Standard* article on 18 July:

I went from a first impression of shock to then realising the silver linings which immediately became apparent to me ... Our expectations were that Warrnambool and other communities outside the five hubs were going to get almost nothing as a legacy.

The government had promised to spend \$2 billion in regional Victoria with more details on how and where yet to be announced.

All of a sudden, I just think there is so much more room in that \$2 billion for communities like Warrnambool and others to actually get more than they would have got if the games went ahead ...

He went on to say:

I just think one door has closed and two doors have opened.

There's a huge silver lining for Warrnambool and the south-west, not just for hockey but sports in general.

Mr Dillon is right. The \$60 million Regional Community Sport Development Fund for initiatives that encourage regional Victorian families and children to be more physically active exemplifies Mr Dillon's view. A difficult decision, even a shocking one, was made, but the benefits to regional Victoria are not only an extra \$2 billion but also a more equitable spread, and that is what I want to support today in arguing against this motion, the premise of which is absolutely flawed.

There was no conspiracy about the games. We were certainly going to go ahead with those games, but the circumstances changed, and I am very, very proud that our leadership is in a position to take the gutsy decisions when they need to be taken. The benefit to the whole of Victoria is that our children and grandchildren will not be left with a Commonwealth Games debt legacy but instead a marvellous legacy of sporting, tourism and housing infrastructure for generations to come. I am so proud to stand with our Premier Daniel Andrews, who recognises when a decision is required and is prepared to make the right call.

Nicholas McGOWAN (North-Eastern Metropolitan) (10:47): I would like to begin my contribution by congratulating the newest member of the Parliament of Victoria, Nicole Werner. This is yet to be recognised by the Victorian Electoral Commission, but that should not surprise us given how inefficient we know the VEC are. They are my good friends, and I am sure they will get around to it in good time. Nonetheless, to Nicole: congratulations. I cannot wait to have her in this place in the other chamber. I was there in Warrandyte, which is also part of the electorate that I serve, on the night of Nicole's win. It was a joyous event, a great win. I did not see the –

Members interjecting.

Nicholas McGOWAN: The other side interject to say 'one-horse race'. They are absolutely right in the sense that there was not a candidate from the Labor Party, so I am happy to take that interjection up. In fact I have been wanting to talk about this for quite some time, so I thank you for the interjection. I implore the good rank-and-file members of the Victorian Labor Party: perhaps next time they might want to actually have a candidate. I know that they have some voters – not many – in Warrandyte, and even I feel for them. I am very sympathetic to their desire to at least have their democratic choice. The very fact we had such a large proportion of people not vote at all demonstrates to me that perhaps the Labor voters had absolutely nowhere to go, the poor things. What were they going to do when their own party had abandoned them?

A member interjected.

Nicholas McGOWAN: We cannot rely on the VEC for anything. They did not even inform the Victorian people there was a –

A member interjected.

Nicholas McGOWAN: I am coming to the Commonwealth Games. I am just warming up. I am coming to the Commonwealth Games, but you have taken me off track, what with the VEC and the absence of a Labor candidate in Warrandyte, which again I find ghastly. I just find it the antithesis of democracy. The fact is that you have just had at your national conference the opportunity to represent your own people, to select your own candidates, and you have run away from that opportunity. It is extraordinary. All of those opposite sat there while their own party decided not to field a candidate.

Anyway, I will go back to the motion we are debating, notwithstanding the fact that I do have great sympathy for the rank-and-file members of the Labor Party on this occasion, because they did not even have a candidate because their party did not have the guts or the gumption to put one forward.

I was there, as I was saying, in Warrandyte to congratulate Nicole, and that evening there were very many questions put to me by members of the local community – very many questions, that is, in regard to the Commonwealth Games. In particular today is a great opportunity to put some of those questions to the Premier himself through this contribution. One of those questions was: does Premier Andrews truly care about hospitals and schools? To be fair, it is a somewhat rhetorical question, because we know the short answer is no. Why do we know that? Well, we know that because he has just literally blown \$380 million at least – at a minimum. This is somebody who, walking as they talk, has no regard for the fact that \$380 million can be literally thrown down the drain. It is unbelievable.

Victorian Premier Daniel Andrews presented withdrawing from the Commonwealth Games contract – this was, let us not forget, a bid that they put in voluntarily – as a prudent decision. In his words:

No one wanted this thing to cost \$5bn, \$6bn, \$7bn ...

He said he was:

... not going to apologise for not taking money out of hospitals and schools.

Really? Not taking money out of hospitals and schools? \$380 million – there are a lot of schools I know in our electorate, Dr Bach, who would absolutely appreciate that money. They are trying to scrounge together, as we are speaking, money to try and facilitate school camps. That is a lot of school camps for \$380 million. My goodness – you could send them all overseas at that expense.

As this chamber knows and any Victorian worth half their salt knows, prudence lies in doing your due diligence before you bid for a job and not after. I mean, it is not a complicated concept, let us face it. Unfortunately, Victorians are left to pick up the tab. It is literally like you have had a runner; you have gone to the restaurant, you have had a beautiful meal but no-one wants to pay for it and everyone else gets up and runs – that is everyone from the Labor Party – and my poor colleague here Mrs McArthur is left there with a cheque in her hand for \$380 million and nothing to show for it. So she turns to her people in Ballarat, Geelong, Warrnambool, Terang and Portland, and she has nothing to show for that; she has just got a bill in her hand. It is quite unfortunate.

When asked about these woefully inadequate estimates, the Premier, as is his habit, pointed elsewhere – he blamed everyone else. That is great. It is a goodie but an oldie. I think it is probably wearing thin for this government at this point. He blamed of course the officials and the consultants. We actually do not know if any of this is a fact. There are no facts in this debate. I do not even know if the \$380 million figure is a fact either, because there is a gag order, and this is one of the great ironies. It seems to me that when the Premier said he would provide all these details later once the negotiations had concluded, he knew that he would make sure there was a gag order to make sure that they would never actually have to do that.

It was not so much mastery as just trickery I think, because to say it was mastery would be craven – to deny the Victorian people the right to scrutinise, to deny the Victorian people the right to know what was negotiated and the true extent of the actual bill. We are told – and I do not believe it – that it is only \$380 million. It is probably well in excess of that, because we also have to recall that when the Premier was discussing these matters early on, he was really referring to the major contracts. He made this differential in his language, which he often does – and I have to get better at catching him out on this when we have him next time at the Public Accounts and Estimates Committee, because I think maybe I did not do quite a good enough job – because the reality is that there are small and medium contracts as well. To what extent are we exposed to those contracts? To what extent do we have liabilities there as well? There is no doubt in my mind that the bill for this will continue to grow over time, and in all honesty until there is a change of government I do not think any Victorian will ever know the true cost of this decision to axe the Commonwealth Games.

I want to pick up on an interjection that was made earlier on, because it took me back in time. It was an irony, to say the least. I recall very well when those opposite, in government, were claiming that Matthew Guy, the then Leader of the Opposition, would cut or axe the Commonwealth Games. There was the tile that they used in social media with great enthusiasm and fanfare: ‘This is what Matt Guy’s going to do, he’s going to kill the Commonwealth Games.’ So then lo and behold, some months later, for Labor to do that to their own games themselves was not only ironic; not even those twisted scriptwriters from *Yes Minister*, *Yes, Prime Minister*, *Veep* or *In the Thick of It* – not even those guys and girls – could come up with something so comical, so twisted, so perverted that in actual fact the very thing that you have accused those opposite of you do yourself. In fact it was almost like there was this sense of projecting. That really was the last campaign in its entirety: ‘Let’s project.’ They labelled Matt Guy ‘the cuts guy’, but in their very first budget when back in government, what did they do? They cut everything. At the next campaign Victorians should be well aware that whatever Labor is saying, it is probably a good projection of what they plan to do themselves.

Ann-Marie Hermans: That’s right, exactly.

Nicholas McGOWAN: Yes, I know. It is almost like Mr Smithers, isn’t it? It conjures those –

Michael Galea interjected.

Nicholas McGOWAN: Mr Smithers – we will introduce him to this debate. We have got a few other people –

Michael Galea interjected.

Nicholas McGOWAN: We will come to the nuclear debate. I have got plenty of time for that on Thursday. I am looking forward to that.

But back to these consultants that the Premier has blamed, who hired these consultants and the officials? Well, his government of course, the Labor government. Who reviewed the estimates and came up with them? Oh, yes, that is right, it is his government. Yes, it is the same people: ‘Oops, sorry. Sorry about that.’ Who decided at that point in time the estimates were reliable? Oh, yes, that is right, it is this government as well. Oh, this is getting good, isn’t it? There is a theme being created here. I almost cannot keep track of how often they pose their own question and then answer it – or pose a question and answer it, and then say that actually that was not the question in the first place but this is another question. They lose me, they lose Victorians, in a myriad of words and wordplay, such that we are all left wondering. We are all left like my poor colleague here, Mrs McArthur, holding the check for \$380 million at the restaurant table when everyone else has run away. It is a very nasty feeling. I mean, the meal tasted fantastic –

Bev McArthur: All my friends outside of the tram tracks are bereft.

Nicholas McGOWAN: Everyone is bereft. But I realise here that I have taken up way too much time in the debate, because I have only got to the one question that the good folk of Warrandyte were asking me when I was at the victory party for Nicole Werner –

Bev McArthur interjected.

Nicholas McGOWAN: She stood in the seat of Warrandyte, Mrs McArthur. You were not there for the introduction of my speech, but –

Bev McArthur: Where was the Labor Party? They did not want to represent their –

Nicholas McGOWAN: Well, we have covered this, but just for the sake of comprehensiveness, they failed to field a candidate at all.

Bev McArthur: They did not turn up. They were a no-show.

Nicholas McGOWAN: They failed to turn up. I do have some references to the monarchy, and I will come back to the motion itself, because I do think this is an important –

Bev McArthur interjected.

Nicholas McGOWAN: As much as I would like to indulge those opposite in their whimsical take on this motion – and Mr Galea, I know that you had some commentary about barbs before and those coming your way, but I know that you sledged a few this way as well in respect to the actual motion itself. I think it is a fine motion, I have got to say. I think it is quite well put. Some thorough thought went into this. And one of my greatest disappointments – I have to get to this in the 30 seconds I have left. I have said this across the chamber: I do want to know what the mascots were. I want to know their names. I want to know how much we paid for them. They were never revealed. I think you owe it to the Victorian people to come clean on that and let us know what they are. And while I say that in jest, the reality is there is no doubt, whatever those mascots are, they cost us millions – millions. I do not know whether there is a truckload or a boatload full of them right now in some overseas country. There probably is, and they are probably crying to get out. We are all crying; it is unfortunately what happens here in Victoria today.

David ETTERSHANK (Western Metropolitan) (10:58): I am a bit uncomfortable in speaking to this motion, and I come to it I suppose as one of the ‘newbies’ here. But I am trying to look at it from the outside, because I do not think many people actually watch what is happening here in real time. And can I say to both of those people: thank you for your time in sharing with us. I think, more broadly, most people are really sceptical about what we do here sometimes and how we operate sometimes. It is not that there are not really important things that happen here, it is just that we need to be seen to be doing things properly sometimes.

Bev McArthur: Sometimes.

David ETTERSHANK: Now, let us do it at least sometimes, yes? Let us do it sometimes; maybe other times we will just be grossly opportunistic. But I guess coming back to the question of the Commonwealth Games and this motion before us, can I firstly record that Legalise Cannabis Victoria voted with the majority of this house – that is, the opposition and every other member of the crossbench – to support the establishment of an inquiry. We voted that way because we thought, and we still think, that there are important questions that need to be answered about how we ended up in this situation, and Mr McGowan has eloquently expressed some of those, I think.

But I would like to just sort of step back for one minute when we think about this resolution that is before us, because I know, even though I am new here, that when we refer something off to an inquiry, we are not sending it off to a court. It is not a court. And the members who will participate in that inquiry, they are not impartial jurors. We all take our values. Goodness knows when working in this place you get so much information it is hard not to have an opinion on so many things. But I think, notwithstanding that, it is really important that when we go into an inquiry we are seen by the public to go into that inquiry with an open mind. Irrespective of our political tags, irrespective of where we have put ourselves on the record, we are going in there for a thoughtful process where taxpayer funds will be spent on an inquiry to try and get to the truth. And then I look at this motion, and it sort of reminds me of – I am going to show my age here; I do not know how many people remember the Mel Brooks classic *Blazing Saddles*.

Members interjecting.

David ETTERSHANK: There are a few people who might remember it. And you might recall there is a scene in *Blazing Saddles* where the heroes are in front of a lynch mob.

Nicholas McGowan: Who was the hero?

David ETTERSHANK: Don’t go there. And the lynch mob are saying, ‘Hang ’em, hang ’em, hang ’em up high.’ And the judge steps up and tells them all to shut up: ‘Shut up. We’re going to try

'em first, and then we're going to hang 'em.' And I am afraid when I look at this motion and I think about this motion and this inquiry coming up, it is awfully Mel Brooks, because you are saying to everyone in Victoria, 'We're going to hang 'em.' It does not matter what comes out in the inquiry; we have already made up our minds, because this motion says just that – that we have already made up our minds. So it is in that context and in that context specifically, not because of any lack of questions to be asked through the inquiry but for the very question of the probity and the dignity of this place and this process, that Legalise Cannabis will be opposing this motion.

John BERGER (Southern Metropolitan) (11:02): Today I rise to speak on the opposition's motion on the Commonwealth Games, but I note, just as many voices from the government have before me, that the games would have cost Victoria far more than we can justify. As far as we are concerned, we are interested in delivering viable results for Victoria, and the Andrews Labor government knows that this money would be much better spent invested in everyday Victorians from the regions. It did not stack up. To quote the Premier:

What's become clear is that the cost of hosting these Games in 2026 is not the \$2.6bn ... which was budgeted and allocated.

So the Andrews Labor government decided to go another way. Of course as the sporting capital of Australia it would have been wonderful to have the games in our regional centres. However, this was not a tough decision, not when the money could have been spent elsewhere. How could we justify spending billions on the games when money would be so much better and more well placed improving the lives of regional Victorians, not just for the duration of the games but for their lifetimes? Sports are an important way to foster community and improve lives, but our focus is first and foremost those bread-and-butter issues. I am talking about health, employment, education and so on.

What are we doing with our money instead? We are investing in the wellbeing and quality of life of Victorians in the regions. Unlike when those opposite get into power, we invest in the regions. We invest in regional health, roads, education and industry. Our record investment for the regions has funded countless important aspects of Victorian regional life, from health to education and everything in between. Let me take one example of our investment: for Ballarat that means a new athletics track and an extra 5000 seats for Eureka Stadium, giving spectators a bigger and better experience and making sure Ballarat continues to attract AFL games, major events and live music. And the 2023 budget expanded the V/Line fleet and of course introduced the daily capping of V/Line prices earlier this year. We are installing thousands of kilometres of fibre-optic cable and introducing some 150 new upgraded digital infrastructure centres. Additionally, the initial 1000 kilometres of fibre that we promised to build has now been extended. With another 2000 kilometres added to the expansion, even more Victorians will be able to access the NBN. This is part of an effort to improve the speed of internet connections for homes and businesses in the regions. Nearly 130,000 homes and businesses across 40 regional towns and cities, including several tourism hotspots, will now be able to enjoy faster speeds thanks to the Andrews Labor government.

Of course how could we discuss how the Andrews Labor government is delivering for regional Victoria and how could we discuss this work without mentioning the investments that we have made in the bread-and-butter issues – core issues that are making lasting differences in people's lives – like improving healthcare services and supporting our schools and students. The Andrews Labor government has invested billions in regional health since first being elected in 2014. Our government believes in supporting and even growing our healthcare systems, regardless of where you live.

Take for example the Regional Health Infrastructure Fund, a yearly funding round that funds projects ranging from theatre and consulting room refurbishments to expansion projects. Since its inception in 2016, 630 projects across rural, regional and remote Victoria have been funded by the Regional Health Infrastructure Fund. Last year the Regional Health Infrastructure Fund awarded \$1.5 million to Grampians Health. This money was spent on replacing and upgrading the outdated sterilisation equipment at the Ballarat Base Hospital. Colac Area Health used a payment of \$580,000 to purchase

much-needed CT scanning equipment to ensure that vital scanning services continue in Colac. Gippsland Lakes community hospital was able to install 220 solar panels to act as a much-needed backup in the instance of a power outage. This would not have been possible without the Regional Health Infrastructure Fund. I should note that submissions for the 2023 round are open until 11 September.

The Andrews Labor government has assisted Victoria in making much-needed progress in mental health reform. The Royal Commission into Victoria's Mental Health System highlighted the gap between regional Victorians and Melburnians in access to much-needed mental health support, which is exactly why the Andrews Labor government has established projects like the regional mental health workforce incentive program. The program offers 200 grants for workers in area mental health services and up to 80 grants for community-managed mental health services. These grants will assist highly qualified mental health professionals in relocating to regional Victoria to ensure that all Victorians have access to the health care they need. This is a key part of the Andrews Labor government's *Victoria's Mental Health and Wellbeing Workforce Strategy 2021–2024*.

Additionally, there is more mental health support coming to regional Victorian schools. This will fulfil one of the key recommendations of the royal commission – supporting the emotional wellbeing of children in schools. The \$200 million program delivers a range of mental health support tailored to each student that needs it. The program will be fully rolled out by 2024, starting in the regions as this is something they are truly in need of. This program has three tiers that respond to the mental health needs of students across regional Victoria. The first offers broad services and promotional material to students, with things like anti-bullying campaigns. This is to foster a positive environment in schools to prevent conditions that may lead to environmental causes of mental health issues. The second tier is an early intervention program for children recognised to be at risk. This offers specialised initiatives such as cross-cultural responsiveness training and trauma-informed care. The final tier is specialised individual care for those students suffering more severely from mental health and trauma-related issues. By operating through regional schools, this program also addresses some of the biggest barriers regional Victorians face when seeking mental health care: accessibility and proximity.

On the discussion of regional schools, I would like to speak about all the work the Andrews Labor government has done for education and will continue to do with the \$2 billion diverted from the Commonwealth Games. Since it was first elected, the Andrews Labor government has maintained a strong commitment to making Victoria the Education State, a mission that has held with much success. Integral to becoming the Education State was ensuring that regional schools would be able to share the benefits and ensuring regional schools and Melbourne schools received the same access from the increased funding and reform.

It has been a key mission in this focus on education across the state to open new schools across the state. Most of these projects are ahead of schedule, which is great news for all Victorian students and their families. These schools include new schools in Shepparton, Morwell, Ballarat, Gisborne, Torquay, San Remo, Clyde, Bannockburn, Benalla and Geelong. This is along with sweeping upgrades across the regions to ensure that every school, not just schools in Melbourne, has access to modern and up-to-date facilities. Additionally, as populations grow in the regions, we are ensuring that schools are not overcrowded, with the expansion of existing schools across the state.

Only Labor governments deliver for regional Victoria. We have proven this time and time again. I could talk for hours about everything the Labor government is doing to improve regional Victorians' lives, but what would any of that be worth if it did not bring results? I can assure you that the Andrews Labor government is delivering results for Victorians. For one, jobs are on the up. Earlier this year, the ABS released figures stating that unemployment in regional Victoria had dropped to 2.8 per cent, which is the lowest in the state's history. That is right, regional unemployment is the lowest it has ever been thanks to the hundreds of thousands of jobs made by the Andrews Labor government. Since 2014 just shy of 200,000 jobs have been generated throughout regional Victoria. The raw number of Victorians in work in the regions is also at an all-time high of 856,000.

I saw firsthand last week how the Andrews Labor government is delivering for Victorians in the regions when I visited the Murray–Darling Basin. Northern Victoria has been hit hard by the floods in recent years, which has made life more difficult up there. The Andrews Labor government know this, which is why we always stand by the regions. Certain voices in this place like to make out like we have turned our backs on the regions. That could not be further from the truth. Only Labor delivers for the regions on health, only Labor delivers for the regions on education and only Labor delivers for the regions on jobs – simple as that. For nearly a decade the Andrews Labor government has been committed to delivering for regional Victoria, and what I have mentioned today is nowhere near the full picture.

With the cancellation of the Commonwealth Games, the Andrews Labor government continues to deliver for the regions. The games may not be proceeding, but every single one of our permanent new and upgraded sporting infrastructure projects will still be delivered, as planned, by the end of 2026 – that means big and small projects right across Victoria that deliver the modern facilities communities want for both elite and grassroots sports for many years to come. It also means that we can go straight to delivering the final legacy form of the infrastructure so that regional communities can benefit from the new and upgraded facilities earlier.

Ann-Marie HERMANS (South-Eastern Metropolitan) (11:12): I rise to speak on the motion about the government's disgraceful cancellation of the Commonwealth Games. I have had to listen to quite a few speeches on this this morning and have been quite surprised actually at some of the things people are complaining about on the other side of the house. I would just like to read again the very beginning of this motion:

That this house:

(1) notes:

- (a) the government's cancellation of the 2026 Commonwealth Games;
- (b) the \$4.4 billion blowout in cost projections for the games;
- (c) the government's belief that 'broader inflationary pressures across the economy', including interest rate rises and the war in Ukraine, were responsible for the unprecedented cost increase ...

Just in that alone we have enough information to warrant an inquiry, and I find it really baffling that people are actually complaining that this should take place and boasting about how terrific this government has been in handling the finances and managing everything. I have had to listen to members of the other side, particularly Ms Shing, boasting about the legacy of the Commonwealth Games – a legacy, they said it would be, like no other. What a wonderful legacy this is for Victoria.

I was also extremely concerned when I heard Ms Ermacora talk about the 'masterstroke of modernity' and discuss how not delivering is a masterstroke of modernity. Well, tell that to the Commonwealth Games athletes. In fact I found it extremely hurtful to think that there would be people now totally devastated at being told that the Commonwealth Games is nothing but a practice run for other opportunities in sport. What a disgrace to call the Commonwealth Games, which has been so enjoyed by so many Australians for so long and by many people around the world, as a practice run. What are we saying about all of our athletes that have received medals after working so hard to compete in these games? Were those gold medals worth nothing, those silver medals worth nothing, those bronze medals worth nothing?

All of these athletes that picked themselves up off the ground and ran in pain to demonstrate that incredible tenacity, the persistence, the sort of courage that inspires Australians and people around the world – was that nothing, a practice run, to get up with an injury and finish the race? I suppose that is because this government does not really know about finishing the race when it comes to the Commonwealth Games, because that is one race it did not finish. They promised it before the election: what a tremendous legacy it would be for regional Victoria. And now regional Victoria's businesses are not going to have that opportunity. Regional businesses and regional athletes are also going to

suffer. In terms of expecting things to be delivered on time, well, since we cannot even have a Commonwealth Games, how can we trust this government to deliver these things on time?

The question remains to be answered as to why the government got their figures so wrong in the first place. How can we believe this Premier's projected figures? How can we? We have 50 new or increased taxes. Under this Victorian Labor government we have more taxes than any other state in Australia, so much so that businesses – like those who were anticipating the Commonwealth Games – are having to consider closing shop and moving interstate or overseas. That is not just because of the Commonwealth Games. We can look at a number of failures here. Let us look at the increase in premiums to WorkCover. I mean, that is costing businesses. They are having to close up and go interstate or overseas. This is a failed promise by a government that is failing – failing to deliver to Victorians, failing to deliver its promises. Can we trust the Premier to front up and actually answer the questions when asked? I seem to remember very, very clearly in an inquiry him not being able to recall anything. Will this be another one of those situations where the response is 'I don't recall'?

This cancellation can be nothing but government mismanagement, as this state spirals into a forecast debt said to be \$170 billion by 2026, not to mention the estimated \$22 million in interest a day, which will be upon us very soon. This is a financially failing government. We need to hold our Premier to account. He is responsible for the decisions that he makes and for the things that he promises to the Victorian people. It is one thing to promise the Victorian people before an election that you are going to deliver a legacy – a Commonwealth Games that we are never going to forget. We are certainly never going to forget the fact that we had no Commonwealth Games. The Commonwealth Games that will be like no other – indeed it will be like no other. Again, I want to stress that I find it really concerning that the lack of delivery is considered to be a masterstroke of modernity.

It is very interesting to see how the Premier continually blames others when he has to make a backtrack on something. There is never the sense of, 'I've actually got to take responsibility. I promised this; I'm not delivering it.' No, we do not hear that, we hear, 'Oh, it's COVID. It's Ukraine. It's Putin. It's everyone else' – everyone else that can be found. It is just too convenient. A partner from Ernst & Young has said that they used the same framework they apply to other major events, such as the Melbourne grand prix, when they were looking at the initial \$2 billion cost estimate outlined in last year's state budget. It is not possible to continually be pointing the finger.

How did we get from \$2 billion in December 2021 to a projected \$7 billion in 2023, which the Commonwealth Games Federation itself disputes and is furious about, saying that it is a gross exaggeration? The \$380 million settlement with the Commonwealth Games Federation keeps compounding and compounds the argument. It is outrageous to think that this government can get out of paying for the decision that it made and its poor estimates. It should be ashamed that it can make promises, that it can get its budgeting wrong even.

How can you get something so wrong? We are talking about billions of dollars. You did not figure that out when you were doing your budget before you came into the new financial year? The Premier should have learned when he cancelled the east–west link in 2014. That cost Victorians \$1.1 billion. Can you think what could have been done with that money? And now this is costing our state \$642 million for a termination settlement, according to the AAP. Let us just think about all of the other horrifying things that are taking place as a result of the cancellation of the Commonwealth Games. In fact I am running out of time so I will not continue with that, but I just want to say there are millions of fans, millions of sporting heroes and millions of Australians that are devastated with this decision. I have to remind the house that there are a number of things that this government is continuing to fail on: housing, utilities, education, health care and transport, and these are just a few. And let me talk about WorkCover and what that is doing to businesses. I support this motion.

Bev McARTHUR (Western Victoria) (11:22): One of the very important aspects of this motion is that this house:

- (4) further expresses its concern at the cost implications these factors could have for the government's key election promises in areas such as schools, hospitals, roads and housing;
- and calls on the Andrews government to urgently release a state budget update, outlining the status and current costs of these projects.

That is surely not too much to ask. It is just an update. You should be able to produce an update. It should not be too hard.

These games were fraught from the beginning. Clearly a games program over multiple sites was going to cost an awful lot of money and probably be delivered badly – well, we know that you cannot deliver anything on time or on budget, and usually they are delivered badly. In question after question in Public Accounts and Estimates Committee hearings I asked ministers about, for instance, the site in Ballarat where you were going to put housing, which was totally contaminated. After 150 years as saleyards it was clearly contaminated, but that is where you were going to have the games. As the Committee for Ballarat CEO said, they wanted an inner-city site. That would have been very logical and would have added to the housing stock needed in Ballarat, but no, we were going to relieve the council of their obligation to sort out their contaminated site. That did not happen.

What I find interesting is the fact that in PAEC I questioned Minister Shing and Minister Allan about the fact that the councils, in my understanding, were not onside with this whole thing, but now we learn that the councillors did not even know what was going on, because the CEOs had had to sign a confidentiality agreement. We know this government is about secrecy and no transparency, but that was really rich, to say that those city councils were going 'all the way with LBJ' on this proposal when they did not know anything about it, because it was all top secret. No surprise – that is how this government does operate, in a veil of secrecy continually. What is also appalling is the fact that if you can say how important it is to cancel the games, then why can't the Premier and Minister Allan front the inquiries and explain exactly why they think it was such a wonderful thing to cancel them? If there is nothing to hide, they will be heroes. Just front up to the inquiry and tell everybody exactly why you have gone about this process.

I was interested in Ms Ermacora's contribution, which went to the outdated concept of the Commonwealth Games. As I said yesterday, I am a monarchist. I was surprised that you lot did –

Matthew Bach: Hear, hear. So is Mr Galea.

Bev McARTHUR: I know, though some of them like to hide it under a bit of a bushel, Dr Bach, as in, 'We don't want to talk about it too much, so we'll keep it quiet', but there are monarchists here. I mean, there are monarchists in the Greens too. They are in my young monarchists group, I might tell you. But anyway, she said it was such an outdated concept. Well, if it was an outdated concept, why in hell did you embrace it in the first place? For goodness sake, if it was an outdated concept – probably a colonial concept, actually – you should have given it a miss. No, you launched forth, and you thought you would win a whole lot of votes coming into an election in regional areas. You probably did. The Victorian population are an honest group of people. They believe what politicians with buckets of money coming along might promise. Well, they were promised an absolute fig, weren't they – nothing – because in the end they have got nothing.

We have been told we had to save this money. We have only heard about what the games were going to cost us. We are having to spend \$380 million to cancel them. It is going to the games commission. But what about all the salaries? We know that Commander Weimar was on a \$2 million salary. I think there was an Aboriginal affairs director, and I think he was on a quarter of a million dollars – I am not sure. And then we have heard that the Dja Dja Wurrung people were not properly consulted anyway, so what in the hell was the Aboriginal director doing if he did not consult properly with his friends in another mob? Seriously. How much has it cost us in all the salaries? There were lavish offices. We

hear they are still operating. There were curtains and desks and all sorts of things that we have spent money on – completely wasted; all down the gurgler. That is some legacy you have left behind – waste, mismanagement and abuse of taxpayers money writ large.

Now these mayors have actually come good and told us exactly what did happen in the veil of secrecy that is fundamental in this government, and we have heard comments like that this is a complete ‘kick in the guts’ for those who have done a lot of work planning for upgrades. My wonderful colleague Mr McCracken and I stood outside Mars Stadium, which was going to be a fabulous legacy of this whole operation in Ballarat, and across the road there was a railway line. We were going to bring thousands of tourists and athletes and families and friends, but there was nowhere for them to get off to get to Mars Stadium. In fact the minister – she must have known they were going to cancel the games ages before – ruled out having a platform on the little railway line that exists right opposite Mars Stadium. It could have been a wonderful thing. Now, that would have been a legacy. The road there absolutely needs upgrading outside Mars Stadium. No, that was not going to happen. We were in the potholed, crater-ridden land outside the tram tracks, where your EV gets completely wrecked every time you move outside Fitzroy, in country Victoria.

I had a colleague that went interstate the other day, Dr Bach, and he reported that in driving from here to Brisbane, Queensland, outside of Victoria he only found one pothole. It is remarkable. I did try to get up an inquiry into how we build roads in this state, but I was thwarted in that episode. We could not do it. How can the rest of the country only have one pothole and we have them every few metres out there outside the tram tracks?

Michael Galea interjected.

Bev McARTHUR: Actually, you have got a few here inside the tram tracks as well, Mr Galea. I am sure you have got a few in your electorate.

Michael Galea: I don’t have tram tracks in my electorate.

Bev McARTHUR: No. But have you got any potholes, or have you got pristine roads? I bet you have. I bet the roads are fabulous out there in your electorate.

But anyway, there will be no legacy from these games except waste and mismanagement. Nobody is prepared to front up to an inquiry to actually give the real story – those that are in the know. It would be like the Coate inquiry, even if they fronted up – ‘I don’t recall. I don’t read emails. Not my responsibility – it’s somebody else’s.’ I read today they are blaming Ukraine for cost blowouts here – Ukraine, I ask you. Goodness me. Can’t they send a memo to Mr Putin to stop fighting so we can get our system back in place here? Because it is a real problem for the budget of Victoria if there is a war in Ukraine.

But the kind of story that you were trying to impart to people in Victoria was so disingenuous. You were going to provide these sporting facilities and this wonderful operation, and it was a complete fraud. Everybody has been completely deluded. People worked millions of man-hours to try and work with the government to make sure that things would be good. I thought it was farcical from the beginning, I have to say. But anyway, people in good faith worked hard to get out a system that would be good. I support the motion. Just please give us the budget update. That cannot hurt you too much.

Matthew BACH (North-Eastern Metropolitan) (11:32): I would like to thank all members who contributed to the debate on this motion. I will just make a couple of brief comments in closing. It has been referred to at numerous points in the debate that there is an inquiry, and why would we need to bring forward this motion when there is an inquiry? Well, the need is around the urgency regarding these so-called ‘broader inflationary pressures across the economy’, including the war in Ukraine. That is a direct quote from the government. The Commonwealth Games blew out and had to be cancelled because of ‘broader inflationary pressures across the economy’. And these broader inflationary pressures across the economy had such an impact on the Commonwealth Games costings that in just

two weeks those costings blew out from just over \$2 billion – that is what Ms Shing said here in the house two weeks before the Commonwealth Games were cancelled – to a much higher figure, higher by threefold.

I take some of the points that Mr Ettershank made in his contribution. He said that in this motion it looks like we may have already made up our minds. Now, I suspect that the Commonwealth Games always was a con, because I cannot see how it is that the Ukraine war and other broader inflationary pressures across the economy could have caused the Commonwealth Games to blow out by a magnitude of three in two weeks. Notably, not one member opposite sought to go anywhere near that question in their contribution or to explain to us how it is that these broader inflationary pressures across the economy had such an impact on the Commonwealth Games in such a short period of time.

Be that as it may, we are arguing in our motion that unless the government can talk to us about how it is that these broader inflationary pressures across the whole economy impact just the Commonwealth Games, they must by definition impact all manner of other government projects. So the reason for wanting to bring this forward now is that we cannot wait more than a year for an inquiry to be handed down when the government says that these broader inflationary pressures caused a blowout by a magnitude of three in two weeks. We must urgently look again at the budgets for a whole series of other major projects.

But again, I would note that not one member opposite sought to explain to us how it is that these broader inflationary pressures across the economy, like the Ukraine war, acted upon the Commonwealth Games but only the Commonwealth Games and will not have an impact on other important projects, many of which have already blown out very significantly. I take Mr Ettershank's point. I think the Commonwealth Games was always a con, but if the government wants to maintain that it blew out and then had to be cancelled because of the Ukraine war, La Niña and other broader inflationary pressures across the economy, it is incumbent upon the government to explain how it is that that was the case and how it is that these broader pressures will not impact other projects. In the course of this debate they have not done so, thus I would urge all members of the house to support the motion.

Council divided on motion:

Ayes (17): Matthew Bach, Melina Bath, Jeff Bourman, Gaelle Broad, Georgie Crozier, David Davis, Moira Deeming, Renee Heath, Ann-Marie Hermans, Wendy Lovell, Trung Luu, Bev McArthur, Joe McCracken, Nicholas McGowan, Evan Mulholland, Adem Somyurek, Rikkie-Lee Tyrrell

Noes (23): Ryan Batchelor, John Berger, Lizzie Blandthorn, Katherine Copsey, Enver Erdogan, Jacinta Ermacora, David Ettershank, Michael Galea, Shaun Leane, David Limbrick, Sarah Mansfield, Tom McIntosh, Rachel Payne, Aiv Puglielli, Georgie Purcell, Samantha Ratnam, Harriet Shing, Ingrid Stitt, Jaclyn Symes, Lee Tarlamis, Sonja Terpstra, Gayle Tierney, Sheena Watt

Motion negatived.

Business of the house

Orders of the day

Matthew BACH (North-Eastern Metropolitan) (11:42): I move:

That the consideration of order of the day, general business, 2, be postponed until later this day.

Motion agreed to.

*Committees***Legal and Social Issues Committee***Reference*

David ETTERSHANK (Western Metropolitan) (11:42): I move:

That this house:

- (1) notes the validity of medicinal cannabis as a legitimate and lawful prescription medicine for people suffering from a range of serious illnesses and conditions;
- (2) further notes that:
 - (a) while workplace drug testing fulfils an important role especially where there is risk to occupational health and safety, existing workplace drug-testing practices and procedures may unfairly discriminate against medicinal cannabis patients, as compared to patients taking other prescription medicines, by treating medicinal cannabis as an illicit drug, when it is not;
 - (b) medicinal cannabis, a lawful medication, prescribed by a doctor and taken in accordance with that prescription, should be treated in the same way as any other prescription medication;
 - (c) where a medicinal cannabis patient is not impaired by their medication at work, the medication they are prescribed should not be a barrier to gainful employment;
- (3) in acknowledging that no-one should be impaired by their medication in the workplace, requires the Legal and Social Issues Committee to inquire into, consider and report, by 30 June 2024, on:
 - (a) the legislative and regulatory framework for workplace drug testing;
 - (b) the treatment of prescription medicinal cannabis as compared to other prescription medications, under that workplace drug-testing framework;
 - (c) whether the framework for occupational health and safety and workplace drug testing may be improved to benefit medicinal cannabis patients, ensuring due process and natural justice in workplace settings, balanced against risks to occupational health and safety;
 - (d) whether current workplace drug-testing laws and procedures are discriminatory in nature and could be addressed by the addition of a further protected attribute, such as 'medication or medical treatment', in Victoria's anti-discrimination laws;
 - (e) any other relevant matters; and
- (4) directs the committee, in undertaking this inquiry, to limit its consideration to workplace drug testing and not consider the broader subject of roadside drug testing and reform of the Road Safety Act 1986.

Medicinal cannabis patients experience stigma and discrimination, unlike other patients. They do not choose to be sick, they do not choose to have a serious illness or a medical condition and they did not choose which medication would be most effective at addressing their symptoms. But because that medication has 'cannabis' in its name, they are all too often judged and prejudiced as illicit drug users. We have shone a light on this stigma as it applies to medicinal cannabis in the context of our driving laws, but that is but one part of the issue that we are confronting. Today I highlight another way that Victorian laws and practices prejudice medicinal cannabis patients, and I ask for this house's support in finding a solution.

Medicinal cannabis is a legitimate and lawful prescription medication for people suffering from a range of serious illnesses and conditions, whether that is severe muscle spasms or severe pain resulting from multiple sclerosis, severe seizures resulting from epileptic conditions, endometriosis or many other debilitating health conditions. Medicinal cannabis prescribed by a doctor and taken in accordance with that prescription should be treated in the same way as any other prescription medication. Unfortunately, this has not been the case with driving, and it is not the case in the workplace, which is why we want to do something about it.

Some industries, like mining and transport, have legislative requirements to test for illicit drugs. Other sectors require illicit drug testing as part of occupational health and safety programs or as part of enterprise bargaining agreements. It is not a part of every workplace, but it does cross multiple sectors, and it affects many, many working Victorians. In that regard I would like to just note that the motion

that is before the house has been discussed and endorsed by the Victorian Trades Hall Council, the building industry group in particular.

For medicinal cannabis patients this situation can have profoundly deleterious consequences. Patients, simply for taking their prescribed medication, are being caught up by workplace illicit drug testing regimes and then treated in the workplace as if they had tested positive for illicit drugs when they have not. It is unfair, it is discriminatory and it is costing people their jobs and their livelihoods. Where a medicinal cannabis patient is not impaired by their medication at work, the medication they are prescribed should not be a bar to gainful employment. But in the workplace, patients are being treated as criminals because their medicine is triggering a workplace illicit drug test. Worse still, we have heard from many Victorian medicinal cannabis consumers that they have faced discrimination or dismissal when they have simply advised their employer that they have been prescribed medicinal cannabis. This is outrageous. For a medicinal cannabis patient, a positive test result is neither evidence of illicit use nor evidence of impairment, and as a matter of fairness it should not cost someone their livelihood.

Medicinal cannabis patients prescribed a CBD-based medication, which is not psychoactive, will never be impaired by that medication, but trace amounts of THC in that medication can trigger a positive test result. For these patients there should be no ramifications of a positive workplace test – ever – but that is not the case. Most patients prescribed a THC- or psychoactive-based medication will not be impaired 4 hours after consumption, and most often a script of this type will specify evening dosing. For example, 12 hours after consumption, when a THC-prescribed patient arrives at work, they will be well and truly safe at work, with a significant buffer built in. Unfortunately the reality, though, is that for medicinal cannabis patients the way this medication is metabolised in the body is such that it is detectable for days and weeks after impairment has ceased. A positive test in this context is not evidence of impairment, it is not evidence of occupational health and safety risk and it should not be treated as such.

I know from the many, many thoughtful contributions that came from both sides of this place during the debate on medicinal cannabis driving that this conundrum of the presence of a drug versus impairment is well known to the members of this house. Can I say on behalf on Legalise Cannabis Victoria that we are profoundly grateful for the very thoughtful contributions that were made by parties from all parts of this house in that debate.

We today ask that the Legal and Social Issues Committee be tasked to inquire into this issue and to suggest some solutions. No-one should be impaired at work – okay? I do not think we have got an argument there. And equally, those who are appropriately medicated and safe to attend work should not be punished for taking the very medication that in many cases makes it possible for them to be at work and to feel like functioning and contributing members of their community and their workplace. We ask the committee, in exploring this issue, to find this balance and to look for genuine solutions that allow for medicinal cannabis patients to live lives to their fullest potential without compromising the safety and health of those they work with.

Georgie CROZIER (Southern Metropolitan) (11:49): I rise to speak to the notice of motion, as has been highlighted by Mr Ettershank, regarding medicinal cannabis. This issue, as he stated, relates to a legitimate and lawful prescription medicine for people suffering from a range of serious illnesses and conditions. The motion looks at the role of workplace drug testing and how people who are on medicinal cannabis can work lawfully.

That is the gist of the motion: that medicinal cannabis is obviously being used in a range of areas and is a lawful medication prescribed by a number of doctors at present and, in relation to the issue around health and safety issues in the workplace, that this issue be referred to the Legal and Social Issues Committee so that it can be looked into thoroughly.

The motion goes through in detail how that would operate: the legislative and regulatory framework for workplace drug testing, the treatment of prescription medicinal cannabis as compared to other prescription medications and how that would operate under the workplace drug-testing framework, whether the framework for occupational health and safety and workplace drug testing may be improved for those people that are using medicinal cannabis and whether current workplace drug-testing laws and procedures are discriminatory based on those that are prescribed medicinal cannabis through a GP as a lawful medication and whether they are therefore being denied the ability to work in a lawful manner. That it is the gist of the motion. The committee would be able to look at those issues in detail, and it is appropriate that it does so. It is a good issue for the committee to look through. The Parliament does lots of excellent work through the committee process, and this issue is one that is affecting many Victorians.

I note that in WA there have been parliamentary committees looking at this issue around drug-driving reforms. Of course they have a big mining industry, and it is a big impact for their industry over there, with many of their workers that are unable to work lawfully because they do have drug testing on a very regular basis. It has a massive impact for those people that are being prescribed medicinal cannabis and how they can operate in their own workplace. A range of other jurisdictions are looking at this issue, and I do note the concerns from the business community around their issues around worker safety and how it has to be managed very carefully. If I could say, that is the concern that I have, and I would hope that the committee would look very thoroughly at the implications for employers and those worksites that have got strict and stringent applications in place. The motion itself talks about that regulatory framework and goes to that very, very important point, but what would it mean for employers – would they have to pay for testing? What would be the impost for business?

I mean, business is being smashed in this state already. I have just come from a GP summit. They are small businesses. They are getting smashed by the health tax that is being imposed by this government. It will mean that clinics will shut down. It will mean that bulk-billing will go in this state. It is an Americanisation of health that is coming into this state based on what the government is doing. We have got to be supporting small business, and we have got to give them the proper framework and not impose more taxes or more cost on them. This issue around how it would apply in the broader workplace is something that I think this committee would have to look at very, very vigorously and ensure that those costs in no way cause a further increase in what businesses have to already pay, such as WorkCover premiums. Again I say the state is broke.

The WorkCover premiums that have increased in this state are smashing small business across the board. They cannot take on board any more costs. They need to be supported by government. And that is the main point, the main concern, I have: what this would mean for those legitimate businesses that are employing hundreds of thousands of Victorians – millions of Victorians, millions of Australians. It is the backbone of our economy, small business, and we need to be supporting it. We do not want to put any more imposts on them to be able to run and conduct their business in a way that they are not already being smashed.

The opposition does not oppose this. In fact we look forward to the Legal and Social Issues Committee undertaking this important inquiry and looking at these issues. I know that there are many Victorians who do take medicinal cannabis for a range of health reasons, whether it be anxiety or pain. It is a lawful prescription, and how it is supplied needs to be carefully monitored. We need to have a look at that. I do understand from previous inquiries that I have been involved in that there are legitimate concerns for police about how it is monitored in terms of capacity and impairment. I think there is a lot of work being undertaken in that space, which is a good thing as well. That needs to occur.

But I would again caution against any further impost to businesses around a further regulatory framework or testing requirements that they would then have to pay for or have applied to their businesses in an environment where businesses need support. They do not need more costs and imposts put on them. We need more support in this area. As I said, this government is no friend to small business. They have absolutely ripped the guts out of small business in this state, and it is being

felt right across the board in every single sector. I look forward to the committee conducting its work and to its outcomes – the findings and recommendations that it will come to and conclude with.

Tom McINTOSH (Eastern Victoria) (11:56): I rise to support this motion and thank Mr Ettershank for bringing it forward today. Sadly I am not surprised to hear Ms Crozier talking negatively about something that is so important to workers and something that is such a great opportunity. Talking about small businesses and business workplaces, having safe workplaces where we are supporting workers and where we are supporting our community, where we are keeping workers safe, keeping our community safe and getting the best outcome for workers when they go to their workplace is actually something that is fantastic for this state and fantastic for the productivity of this state. As I said, I am proud to support this motion. The Labor Party, on this side, was founded on advocating for and supporting workers – working people, their families and their communities. I think what is in this motion – again, I thank Mr Ettershank for bringing it forward – at its core is thinking about people within our communities, thinking about the outcomes for them.

I am going to go through and talk about a variety of different workers and the benefits that it will have for different groups or different sectors and industries of workers. I think from the start, from the get-go, it is very important that we are mindful of the fairness that this brings – that there is an opportunity for people who are suffering with ill health to have the fairness of the option to get the best treatment for themselves but also that we are ensuring that it is just, in a work context, that those workers, their co-workers and that community are safe and that individuals that go to work are not impaired and are able to contribute and contribute safely – contribute to not only their lives but to the productivity of the state, as I mentioned before. We know that workers support this. Unions are very supportive of ensuring that as many workers as possible can get to work safely and get home safely, as this motion brings forward.

I want to raise particularly workers with physical pain. It is perhaps easy for the other side to forget that people still turn up and do a very decent day's work of manual operation. That can be across a number of sectors, whether it is agriculture, whether it is construction, whether it is manufacturing or whether it is all those workers in our health services – aged care, disability – that have a manual component of their job, which over years can lead to injury and can lead to physical trauma that sees people needing support through medication prescribed by their doctors. I will come to the fact that this government has enabled this whole conversation to occur by legalising this treatment through our medical system for workers. But the fact that workers are expected to show up, decade after decade –

The PRESIDENT: I apologise, Mr McIntosh. I need to interrupt your contribution.

Business interrupted pursuant to sessional orders.

Questions without notice and ministers statements

Commonwealth Games

Evan MULHOLLAND (Northern Metropolitan) (12:00): (257) My question is to the Minister for Regional Development. On 21 June 2023 here in this Parliament, as part of your responsibilities as Minister for Regional Development you boasted:

... around about a \$3 billion return on investment, and we also know that the commitments that we have made will deliver around 7500 jobs ...

When did you become aware of the cost blowouts and ultimately the government's decision to cancel the 2026 Commonwealth Games that will now impact the \$3 billion return on investment?

Harriet SHING (Eastern Victoria – Minister for Water, Minister for Regional Development, Minister for Equality) (12:00): Thank you, Mr Mulholland, for your unique, albeit somewhat metropolitan, lens on the regional delivery of the Commonwealth Games.

Georgie Crozier: Oh, where do you live?

Harriet SHING: I will take that up, Ms Crozier. Since before I was preselected, since when I grew up, since when I have represented the area, I have lived in regional Victoria, Ms Crozier, so I look forward to that particular line of conjecture ending from here.

Mr Mulholland, as you would be aware, the detail of the announcement to move to a multi host city model is something which was part of discussions between the government and my predecessor in the role and the Minister for Commonwealth Games Delivery. The key reason for the bid going up and being successful was to be able to deliver an enormous range of benefits to regional Victoria, and part of that, as you have indicated, was the delivery of thousands of jobs. This was also, as I have indicated to this place on numerous occasions, about making sure that we could get a return on our investment, that we could see that investment, the fund which was allocated in the 2022–23 budget of \$2.6 billion, be realised through a return of around \$3 billion and that this would leave a lasting legacy of infrastructure and benefits to rural and regional communities.

What has happened since 18 July and that decision as announced by the Premier, the Deputy Premier and me not to proceed with the Commonwealth Games is that we are moving towards the delivery sooner of that regional legacy, which is a \$2 billion package. That is about making sure that we can provide \$1 billion in additional funding for rural and regional social and affordable housing, which adds to the \$1.25 billion already part of the regional housing build. It is also –

Evan Mulholland: On a point of order, President, I would ask you to bring the minister to the question. I asked: when did the minister become aware of the cost blowouts and ultimately the government's decision to cancel the Commonwealth Games?

The PRESIDENT: I thought there were two questions that you posed in your question, and I believe the minister was addressing one of those questions. I am happy to review it after question time, but my understanding is there were two questions and the minister has chosen one, which is her right.

Georgie Crozier: On the point of order, if I can possibly assist, President, the question was: when did you become aware of the cost blowouts and ultimately the government's decision to cancel the 2026 Commonwealth Games that will now impact the \$3 billion return on investment? It is very simple – one question.

The PRESIDENT: I call the minister to continue her response. I will consider the point of order.

Georgie Crozier interjected.

Harriet SHING: You can't help yourself, can you, Ms Crozier? I just want to answer the question.

What we are doing, Mr Mulholland, is providing that fund of \$2 billion. Not only does that deliver a huge range of benefits to rural and regional communities, and those communities will, as I see every day when I am out visiting with them and talking to them, have a significant range of social and economic benefits. There will be jobs created as part of that too. When you are putting an additional 1300 social and affordable homes into the market, those homes are built by people. Those homes are created by people, including apprentices and trainees. That permanent sporting infrastructure of \$550 million is actually created by sparkies, by plumbers, by chippies. This is the sort of work that delivers lasting benefit and contributes to the record low unemployment rate in regional Victoria.

Evan MULHOLLAND (Northern Metropolitan) (12:05): On a supplementary to the minister, the Premier recently said of the decision to cancel the Commonwealth Games:

The decision was weeks in the making after I was made aware of the cost blowouts.

When boasting of a return on investment in your regional development spend on 21 June in this chamber, were you misleading the Parliament, incompetent or simply out of the loop?

The PRESIDENT: There were three questions in that.

Harriet SHING (Eastern Victoria – Minister for Water, Minister for Regional Development, Minister for Equality) (12:06): See, Mr Mulholland, you cannot help yourself, can you? Whoever is drafting your questions needs to learn the art of perhaps asking one rather than three questions in a substantive or in a supplementary question. As the Premier, the Deputy Premier and I indicated really clearly on 18 July when the decision not to proceed with the Commonwealth Games was announced, it was really clear from those answers – and I have spoken about it at length in the chamber and in communities – that the cost of putting on a 12-day event of more than \$6 billion did not stack up for regional communities. That was a decision that was taken after every option available to us was examined, and that was part of ongoing work in order to exhaust every single opportunity to deliver these games to rural and regional Victorian communities, because the objectives were always to make sure that we returned a huge level of enthusiasm, of visitation and of growth, prosperity and opportunity to regional Victoria. That is exactly what we are doing with the \$2 billion regional package, Mr Mulholland.

Members interjecting.

Harriet SHING: On a point of order, President, can I ask Mr Davis to withdraw that, please. And do not say it on the record, Mr Davis.

The PRESIDENT: Mr Davis, do you want to respond?

David Davis: I withdraw.

The PRESIDENT: Thank you.

Poultry industry

Georgie PURCELL (Northern Victoria) (12:07): (258) My question is for the Minister for Agriculture. Recently Australian states and territories signed up to the new poultry standards. It stated that egg producers would have to phase out the use of conventional layer hen cages by 2036 at the latest. The final time frame will be set by individual states and territories, and Western Australia has since pledged to act sooner than this. We have been talking about banning caged eggs for decades in Australia, and it has been eight years since the regulatory process began. Australia's biggest food retailers, Woolworths and Coles, have already pledged to be 100 per cent cage free by 2025. Will the minister commit to bringing the phase-out of battery cages forward across the whole of Victoria?

Gayle TIERNEY (Western Victoria – Minister for Training and Skills, Minister for Higher Education, Minister for Agriculture) (12:08): I thank the member for her question. She is quite correct in noting that agriculture ministers met in July and we dealt with the new poultry welfare standards and guidelines. She is also correct in indicating that the benchmark is 2036 and that the implementation is to be determined by individual states. Victoria will consider issues raised by industry and other stakeholders. We will be developing an implementation plan, and we will also be working to implement the standards into our new animal welfare regulations that the member is well acquainted with. The department had been very active with the industry leading up to that July meeting, and as a consequence that consultation has built up somewhat since as well in terms of talking with the industry about what the implementation plan might look like. I am absolutely aware, as industry players are very much aware, of what the market is doing and what the big supermarkets are doing and what they have publicly stated. So it is going to be interesting as to exactly what the timing will be here in Victoria, but also obviously having an eye to what the other jurisdictions are doing.

Georgie PURCELL (Northern Victoria) (12:10): Thank you, Minister. On top of battery cages, there are other animal welfare concerns across the whole egg industry, yet the code of practice is only voluntary. As you stated in your response, the government is introducing a long-awaited new animal care and protection bill, including new regulations for the egg industry. Will these regulations in the new animal care and protection act be mandatory instead of voluntary?

Gayle TIERNEY (Western Victoria – Minister for Training and Skills, Minister for Higher Education, Minister for Agriculture) (12:10): I thank the member for her ongoing interest in all things animals. Obviously part of our discussions leading into the exposure draft is about making sure that we try and come up with a workable arrangement whereby animal welfare rights are absolutely acknowledged and indeed animal production arrangements are also balanced. This has always been a point of tension – you know that, you live it – and of course that is going to be shining through in terms of the consultations that we go through in terms of the exposure draft. In terms of voluntary versus mandatory, again that is very much part of the discussions that we will be having with the community.

Ministers statements: Country Fire Authority

Jaclyn SYMES (Northern Victoria – Attorney-General, Minister for Emergency Services) (12:11): I would like to update the house today on the government's delivery of new fire trucks for CFA brigades, which is always great but particularly important ahead of this upcoming fire season.

Georgie Crozier: How many?

Jaclyn SYMES: I am getting to that, Ms Crozier. Last Wednesday I had the pleasure of visiting Buninyong fire station with our three Ballarat-based regional MPs from the other place to hand over eight new heavy tankers to brigades across CFA district 15. This would be a record for me, to hand over so many vehicles at the same time, and it was quite an impressive sight because they were all lined up at the station when I arrived – impressive, gleaming trucks ready to be utilised if required by our CFA crews across the Ballarat region. The trucks were proudly adorned with the names of the brigades: Ballan, Buninyong, Mount Helen, Creswick, Daylesford, Miners Rest, Napoleons and Wendouree. The heavy tankers feature a 4000-litre water tank with front-controlled water cannon – they can be operated from inside the cabin – and improved turnover protection to ensure our firefighters are kept safe while they are out protecting the community.

I also got to view the new ultraheavy tanker that will be based at Ballarat City fire brigade. It is one of a fleet of 29 of these new vehicles that are being deployed to brigades across the state. They are extraordinary vehicles. They can carry 10,000 litres of water. They significantly boost firefighting capacity and are particularly useful for grassland areas because they enable you to put a lot of wet stuff on a lot of the areas that grassland fires do often involve.

Handing over new state-of-the-art equipment is an honour, but more importantly it gives me another opportunity to visit, thank and acknowledge our brilliant volunteers, and I particularly thank all of the brigade members that turned up, particularly Buninyong for hosting the event.

Eastern Victoria Region schools

Jeff BOURMAN (Eastern Victoria) (12:13): (259) My question is for the minister representing the Minister for Education. Minister, local primary schools in Drouin and Warragul are bursting at the seams, with more and more portable buildings taking up more and more of the playgrounds to accommodate the massive growth in the area. The Catholic sector has stepped up and built new schools, but the state government has not. Can the minister advise what new primary schools are funded for Drouin and Warragul?

Ingrid STITT (Western Metropolitan – Minister for Early Childhood and Pre-Prep, Minister for Environment) (12:14): I thank Mr Bourman for his question. I will be very happy to refer that to the Minister for Education, who will provide you with an answer in accordance with the standing orders.

Harriet Shing interjected.

Jeff BOURMAN (Eastern Victoria) (12:14): Thank you, Minister, and thank you, Ms Shing. Minister, the \$380 million that your government just spent not hosting the Commonwealth Games in regional Victoria could easily have built 20 new primary schools in regional Victoria. Can the minister

advise why the decision was made to spend the money on not hosting a sporting event rather than investing in Victorians of the future?

The PRESIDENT: Do you mind doing that again, Mr Bourman?

Jeff BOURMAN: I could, but it will come out the same. Just rule it out; I have got nothing.

The PRESIDENT: You make my life so easy. Mr Bourman is happy to stand on his substantive.

Cherry Creek Youth Justice Centre

Matthew BACH (North-Eastern Metropolitan) (12:15): (260) My question today is for the Minister for Youth Justice. Minister, on Monday evening, as you know, there was a serious assault of a staff member at the new Cherry Creek facility. You were warned that relocating the highest risk detainees to the new facility was dangerous due to a lack of staff experience at Cherry Creek. Considering that of the first 10 inmates I am advised a significant proportion are on remand for allegedly committing murder and given there has already been a serious assault, can you guarantee the safety of staff who are employed at Cherry Creek?

Enver ERDOGAN (Northern Metropolitan – Minister for Corrections, Minister for Youth Justice, Minister for Victim Support) (12:15): I thank Dr Bach for his interest in my youth justice portfolio and his question in relation to an important matter regarding our new flagship Cherry Creek facility. Let me say from the outset that the safety of everyone in our youth justice system is paramount, and I reject the premise of his question about the safety and training of the staff. Our new youth justice system approach is about a higher level, actually, of training and preparation. Many of the people that work at Cherry Creek – I have been out to Cherry Creek – actually have a range of experience, not only across our youth justice system but, for many of the experts we have hired, working with young people in different environments, so I reject that premise. I notice that premise was also put to the newspaper by the shadow minister, and I would not take everything that the shadow minister says on face value after his performance this weekend.

Matthew BACH (North-Eastern Metropolitan) (12:16): I do thank the minister. Minister, given the lengthy delay in opening Cherry Creek, isn't it a fact that the facility simply was not ready for high-risk detainees?

Enver ERDOGAN (Northern Metropolitan – Minister for Corrections, Minister for Youth Justice, Minister for Victim Support) (12:17): I thank Dr Bach for his supplementary. Again, I reject the premise of that question, so the answer is no. What I have said from the outset is that this is a sensible and managed transition over several months. The staff work proactively to manage different situations, and where there is conduct that is alleged criminal behaviour it is my expectation that it is referred to Victoria Police, as I understand this matter has been.

Ministers statements: Wear It Purple Day

Harriet SHING (Eastern Victoria – Minister for Water, Minister for Regional Development, Minister for Equality) (12:17): Last Friday I, along with so many other people in this chamber, across the Parliament and indeed around Australia and the world, celebrated Wear It Purple Day. This is an initiative which is intended to provide a measure of visible support, encouragement, care, love and respect to LGBTIQ+ young people, who are, as we all know, as is irrefutably the case, at greater vulnerability to self-harm, to challenges to mental health and wellbeing and to suicide.

I celebrated Wear It Purple Day in Trafalgar on Friday with the incredible team at the Gippsland Pride Initiative and helped to open Gippsland's very first Pride hub, which is an amazing community space being developed and now served by UnitingCare, the West Gippsland health service and Thorne Harbour Health, along with support from the state government. This is a welcoming, inclusive and really warm space. Providing that care is so important. Within 30 minutes of opening they in fact had a community member come in, asking for resources and for support.

Every Wear It Purple Day is an opportunity for us to recommit to being supportive, to being visible and to making sure that we are calling out any challenge to the safety, the dignity or the wellbeing of LGBTIQ+ young people. And in rural and regional Victoria we know that this carries a special significance.

As Minister for Water it was also a joy to celebrate the exceptionally progressive sector which does encourage and welcome LGBTIQ+ people within our customer base, within the workforce and within the community. I was delighted to catch up with Jo Lim, the CEO of VicWater; with the Department of Energy, Environment and Climate Action Pride network members; and with Melbourne Water's Refract committee. In Shepparton I got to spend time with Goulburn–Murray Water, Goulburn Valley Water and Goulburn Broken Catchment Management Authority to hear all about the work that they are doing within their diverse and exceptionally welcoming members of the workforce who identify as LGBTIQ+.

Cherry Creek Youth Justice Centre

Matthew BACH (North-Eastern Metropolitan) (12:20): (261) I have got another question for the Minister for Youth Justice. Minister, as you say, your department is currently relocating detainees from Malmsbury to the new Cherry Creek detention centre. The first 10 are extremely high-risk young people. Why have they been moved to lower level security settings at Cherry Creek, resulting in a staff member being injured at work?

Enver ERDOGAN (Northern Metropolitan – Minister for Corrections, Minister for Youth Justice, Minister for Victim Support) (12:20): I thank Dr Bach for his question in relation to our new flagship Cherry Creek facility. Again, some of your assertions, Dr Bach, I hope you did not receive from the shadow minister, because some of his assertions I would not accept on face value. I will repeat that. The model at Cherry Creek, you have asserted, is less secure. I think that was the assertion that you have made or something along those lines. I have been very clear in this chamber many times that the initial cohort at Cherry Creek is the 15- to 18-year-old boys, which is a more complex cohort. But the Cherry Creek model is a different model; it is about giving young people the best chance to turn their lives around. Let me be clear: it is about giving them the best chance to turn their lives around. If they do not take that opportunity, that is up to them. But it is still a high-security facility. It has the latest technology in place, and the staff training model is higher than it has been before.

Matthew BACH (North-Eastern Metropolitan) (12:21): I do thank the minister. Minister, there was an agreement for 30 per cent of staff to be experienced and 70 per cent newly trained at Cherry Creek. At this point in time I am advised the experienced level is as low as 5 per cent, clearly putting staff at risk, so I ask: how many more convicted murderers, or those on remand for allegedly committing murder, will be relocated to Cherry Creek while there are insufficient experienced staff?

Enver ERDOGAN (Northern Metropolitan – Minister for Corrections, Minister for Youth Justice, Minister for Victim Support) (12:21): I thank Dr Bach for his supplementary question. In relation to the level of offending, I have already addressed that in my substantive. I have said it is a high-risk cohort with children with complex behavioural issues, and that is why they are at this new facility, where we are giving them a chance to turn their lives around. It would be very inappropriate to comment considering the small numbers of young people – many of them are alleged, let us be clear on that as well – or to go into the specifics of who is there, because these are very detailed operational matters that I will leave to the experts instead of the conspiracy theorists.

Legislative reform

David LIMBRICK (South-Eastern Metropolitan) (12:22): (262) My question is for the Attorney-General. Yesterday during committee stage the Attorney said something that piqued my interest. Apparently there are some mysterious people – I do not know who they are – who look at bills to repeal. I am very interested in that, because I have not seen many bills to repeal things lately. So I

would be interested if the Attorney could provide an update to the house on what work is being done on repealing old, outdated or, as we saw yesterday, even sometimes potentially dangerous acts.

Jaclyn SYMES (Northern Victoria – Attorney-General, Minister for Emergency Services) (12:23): Not necessarily in my capacity as Attorney-General but as chair of the legislation committee, it would probably be more appropriate for me to answer in that capacity. All departments identify acts that have room for minor changes that are fed into a process and collated for a statute amendment bill. We have probably one a term, which is the opportunity to identify any minor errors such as missing semicolons. Effectively we call them the ‘crossing the t, dotting the i bills’ regularly. It is also the opportunity to identify whether there could be small repealing bills as well. I will soon bring to this Parliament a repeal bill in relation to legislation that I have identified will no longer be required, so I look forward to briefing you in relation to that. When it comes to acts such as you have identified – that really are not causing any errors and are no longer applicable – a tidy-up is necessary, but it is not an urgent priority of the government to identify defunct legislation that is not causing any issues.

David LIMBRICK (South-Eastern Metropolitan) (12:24): I thank the Attorney for that, and I look forward to seeing this repeal bill. In the last term of Parliament, a number of crossbenchers spoke with the then leader of the upper house Mr Jennings, and the idea was discussed – this was before everything was hijacked by the pandemic – of a repeal day, identifying a large number of these outdated acts. There seemed to be much support amongst the crossbench, and even the government I might say, to have such an omnibus bill and call it a repeal day. Would the Attorney be interested in putting forward something like this in this term of Parliament?

Jaclyn SYMES (Northern Victoria – Attorney-General, Minister for Emergency Services) (12:25): Yes, I should have seen that one coming. What I will commit to is that I will bring that topic to LegCo. Minister Jennings was the former chair of that committee, and such a proposal would come to that committee. I will put it on the agenda for a discussion with the members of that committee and report back to you.

Ministers statements: child protection

Lizzie BLANDTHORN (Western Metropolitan – Minister for Disability, Ageing and Carers, Minister for Child Protection and Family Services) (12:26): I rise to update the house on the vital work child protection practitioners do every day to keep children and young people safe and families strong. Recently I was pleased to visit a child protection intake office in the northern suburbs to chat to child protection practitioners who receive reports at the intake phase of child protection. These workers receive thousands of reports every year, ranging from concerned friends and neighbours through to mandatory reports from schools, from police and from health settings regarding the safety of children and young people. Reports are received in multiple ways, with the most common being through our intake phone lines.

The role that these workers play in the child protection system cannot be overstated. They use their professional judgement to make difficult decisions on the action that should be taken in response to these reports each and every day. Their ability to investigate the reports and gather facts to inform their decision-making is critical. I want to thank each of these practitioners and the staff that I visited with for the insights that they shared in relation to their roles. The difference they are making every day in response to the reports received is astounding. They make incredibly tough decisions, but they are making an important difference in each family each and every day. I appreciated the opportunity to thank them directly for their work. It is this side of the house that will always back this vital workforce and support the job that they do, and that is why we promote a career in child protection through our Go Where You’re Needed and Jobs That Matter campaigns. We provide them with the resources they need; 1180 additional child protection practitioners have been funded since we came to government.

With National Child Protection Week starting this Sunday, I take the opportunity to thank all child protection practitioners and the workforce in our community sector organisation partners for the invaluable service that they all make to keeping Victorian children and young people safe and families

strong. They all embody the theme for this year's National Child Protection Week: 'Every child, in every community, needs a fair go'.

Biosecurity

Bev McARTHUR (Western Victoria) (12:28): (263) My question is for the Minister for Agriculture and concerns the recent behaviour of power company AusNet, which this month entered, without permission, multiple farm properties on the transmission line between Ballarat and Bendigo. Minister, as you know, AusNet has the right to work in existing easements, but to do so it must enter and cross private property in agricultural use. In this case no notification was given and no permission was granted. This is not just unlawful and it is not just about the potential for physical damage to soil and crops; there is a real danger pests or disease could have been introduced to animals and crops. As the minister responsible for Victoria's biosecurity, what have you done to protect farmers' livelihoods from this outrageous and potentially disastrous trespass?

The PRESIDENT: The reason I am struggling is that the minister is not responsible for AusNet. I would think that would be the minister for energy.

Bev McARTHUR: On a point of order, to clarify, President, the minister is responsible for biosecurity and she is responsible for the protection of farmers in her agriculture portfolio.

The PRESIDENT: I am happy for the minister to respond.

Gayle TIERNEY (Western Victoria – Minister for Training and Skills, Minister for Higher Education, Minister for Agriculture) (12:29): I thank Mrs McArthur for her question. In terms of the technicalities, they are the responsibility of Minister D'Ambrosio, but in terms of the point you raise in terms of biosecurity, can I suggest that you provide me with the exact details that you have. I will take that on board in terms of further investigation in respect of biosecurity issues if they have occurred.

Bev McARTHUR (Western Victoria) (12:30): Thank you, Minister. We will be able to provide you with detailed photographic evidence of the trespass absolutely and the impending consequences. But these regrettable incidents occurred when many farmers – they are your responsibility, Minister – were here in Spring Street protesting alongside their whole community against the damage the Western Renewables Link and the VNI West will do to agriculture in this state. Many believe it was cynically timed to exploit their absence. This behaviour happened on easements which have existed for decades and where the power companies should have longstanding relationships with the landholders – again, your responsibility, Minister. Even the most immediate stage of AEMO's grid development plan in Victoria includes another 650 kilometres of transmission lines, so we really need to know what you are going to do to protect farmers from this blight so that you can continue to have productive agricultural land in this state.

The PRESIDENT: There was a lot in that question.

Bev McARTHUR: Oh, she's very capable. She'll be able to answer it.

The PRESIDENT: I have no doubt that she is a very capable minister, but with her responsibility under the executive orders I am not even going to put that question. The answer to the substantive question was 'That is not my responsibility, but I am happy to go out of my way and give some extra information outside the standing orders'. That is the way I interpreted it. Then we have a question about new transmission networks, which is clearly not this minister's responsibility under the executive orders.

Georgie Crozier: On a point of order, President – and I just listened to your ruling then – clearly, as Mrs McArthur has pointed out, this is about agricultural land use and biosecurity aspects. When farmers who own that land were down here in Spring Street, these events occurred, so there is a direct linkage from the supplementary to the substantive. I would ask you to ask the minister to come back

to that very important question Mrs McArthur has put, because those farmers deserve to understand what the government's response is.

The PRESIDENT: The supplementary may have been relevant to the substantive question, but the substantive question was not a question under the responsibility of this minister.

Varroa mite

Melina BATH (Eastern Victoria) (12:33): (264) My question is to the Minister for Agriculture. The destructive bee parasite varroa mite was detected six days ago at Euston, with 30,000 hives being held in the emergency eradication zone awaiting destruction and over 100,000 hives which cannot be moved in the surveillance emergency zone. As pollination of the almond orchards has concluded, these bees are now starving and bee health is deteriorating. Minister, with almost a week passing since varroa mite was detected on our border, when will beekeepers in the northern Victorian area be provided with urgently needed food and hive miticide strips to avoid a widespread outbreak in Victoria?

Gayle TIERNEY (Western Victoria – Minister for Training and Skills, Minister for Higher Education, Minister for Agriculture) (12:34): I thank the member for raising this issue today. This is an issue that has been taking a lot of time and resources in relation to Agriculture Victoria. It is a complex area, and it is very heavily reliant on expert, guarded advice. We have got, fortunately, some very highly skilled scientific staff at Agriculture Victoria that provide exceptional advice.

I can give the member the latest update in relation to the varroa mite disease. On 29 August the national expert technical committee, which guides the varroa response plan, met and agreed that moving hives out of the current surveillance zone, which is the outer area of the emergency zone within the almond-growing regions near the Murray, was a safe measure consistent with the national response plan. This means that hives will be moving away from concentrations currently in the Sunraysia region on both sides of the border. The expert advice is that this will reduce the consequences of the current varroa outbreak in New South Wales and reduce the risk of it spreading to Victoria. Agriculture Victoria is putting robust measures in place to ensure that this is done as safely as possible. A permit system to facilitate movement from the surveillance zone with increased biosecurity requirements has been established. This stipulates the strict testing and reporting requirements and follow-up surveillance and testing after hives have been moved. To coordinate this response Agriculture Victoria has deployed staff into the state biosecurity coordination centre and a forward command post, which is supporting on-ground work by the state quarantine response team, which consists of Agriculture Victoria staff and industry and recreational beekeepers.

This is essentially the situation as we know it at the moment. It is moving quite fast, and of course all of the states are in communication 24/7, but it was the meeting that was held on the 29th that placed these new arrangements so that we can deal with the current situation.

Melina BATH (Eastern Victoria) (12:37): I thank the minister for her response. The varroa mite certainly came to Australia over 14 months ago, we know, into New South Wales ports, and it has been detected, as you rightly say and I have discussed, on our Victorian border. You have spoken about the national plan, but farmers in that region are very concerned that there is no specific Victorian varroa mite action plan, and I therefore ask you: why haven't you in that 14-month period actually established a Victorian action plan to protect the livelihoods of the beekeepers and the crops they pollinate?

Gayle TIERNEY (Western Victoria – Minister for Training and Skills, Minister for Higher Education, Minister for Agriculture) (12:37): I have taken you through exactly what is happening. I could go into further detail, but clearly from your question I would suggest – and I will put out the offer – that you get a departmental briefing.

Ministers statements: Hanging Rock precinct development

Ingrid STITT (Western Metropolitan – Minister for Early Childhood and Pre-Prep, Minister for Environment) (12:38): I would like to update the house on how the Andrews Labor government is securing the future of Hanging Rock with the purchase of Hanging Rock's east paddock and the release of a new master plan for this culturally significant and widely cherished landscape. I was very proud to join the member for Macedon in the other place, representatives from Macedon Ranges Shire Council, members of the local community and representatives from three traditional owner groups – the Dja Dja Wurrung Clans Aboriginal Corporation, the Taungurung Land and Waters Council and the Wurundjeri Woi Wurrung Cultural Heritage Aboriginal Corporation – on country at Hanging Rock to announce that the newly acquired east paddock will be officially integrated into the Hanging Rock reserve.

Hanging Rock is an incredibly popular tourist destination, with more than 120,000 visitors a year, a number that is expected to double over the next decade. The new master plan outlines carefully considered actions that will benefit the site and ensure that increasing visitor numbers do not negatively impact this special place. The master plan acknowledges and celebrates traditional owners' enduring relationship with the land and nature and provides for traditional owner expertise in managing tourism and cultural education experiences. With environmental sustainability and ecological integrity at its heart, the plan also recommends regenerating areas within the precinct, and the purchase of the east paddock brings it into the precinct's boundary. It will continue to cater for a range of temporary uses, such as special music events, that contribute to the economy and the culture of the Macedon Ranges.

I would like to thank everybody who has been involved in the development of the master plan over the past two years. It is an enormous amount of work to develop an agreed road map for the future management of this iconic site.

Written responses

The PRESIDENT (12:40): Minister Stitt, I believe, is going to get an answer for Mr Bourman on his substantive question to the Minister for Education.

Constituency questions

South-Eastern Metropolitan Region

Michael GALEA (South-Eastern Metropolitan) (12:40): (380) My question is for the Minister for Veterans in the other place, Minister Suleyman. Could the minister please advise how the Premier's Spirit of Anzac Prize is helping to sustain the legacy of our defence members and how young people in my electorate of South-Eastern Metropolitan Region can enter this unique competition? The Anzac legend is an important part of our history. The Anzac legend spans beyond Anzac Cove itself to places such as Lemnos, Singapore and other European theatres. However, some young people still do not know enough about the veterans behind this legend, and the Premier's Spirit of Anzac Prize is our chance to teach them. The Andrews Labor government is committed to honouring our veterans by ensuring our younger generations are aware of their service and sacrifice throughout Australia's history and involvement in various conflicts. I do want to ensure that young Victorians in my region of South-Eastern Metropolitan are able to take this special opportunity to learn more about our unique history through this wonderful program.

Northern Victoria Region

Wendy LOVELL (Northern Victoria) (12:41): (381) My question is for the Minister for Roads and Road Safety. Better Futures Romsey is a community group that actively advocates on issues concerning the future development of the Romsey region. For quite some time members of the group have attempted to ascertain what plans the government has to improve road infrastructure throughout the Romsey region. Located 64 kilometres from the Melbourne CBD, residents of Romsey currently have no easy access to a major freeway to Melbourne, despite research detailed in a draft *Romsey*

Structure Plan indicating that in 2021, 28 per cent of the population commuted to the metropolitan area for work each day. The residents of Romsey are entitled to know what plans the state government has to improve road infrastructure in the region, but local member Mary-Anne Thomas has failed to outline the government's plans. Will the minister detail any plans the government has to improve road infrastructure for the Romsey community into the future?

Northern Metropolitan Region

Adem SOMYUREK (Northern Metropolitan) (12:42): (382) My constituency question is directed to the hardworking and competent Minister for Education, who has been badly let down by a Premier who does not care about the education of working-class children. I have received a number of calls from constituents following media reports that Craigieburn Secondary College staff have asked the Department of Education for a four-day school week due to staff shortages at the school. One of those calls was from a young mum who is worried that a four-day school week will create further stress on her family finances, which these days are at breaking point as it is. A four-day school week, she says, will mean that she will need to either somehow absorb the cost of a carer for her six-year-old daughter or reduce her employment to four days, which is not financially viable. I request the minister assure my constituents with children at Craigieburn Secondary College that the government will rectify the teacher shortage at the school so that the school will not have to adopt a four-day school week.

Southern Metropolitan Region

John BERGER (Southern Metropolitan) (12:43): (383) My question is for the Minister for Multicultural Affairs in the other place, Minister Brooks. I am proud to be a member of a government that is funding a \$3 million campaign to fight antisemitism. Two weeks ago I watched a 7.30 report on the ABC: one in five Jewish students avoid university due to antisemitism, and more than two-thirds of Jewish students surveyed have experienced antisemitism. On Thursday afternoon in this building I will be speaking to the Australasian Union of Jewish Students about political engagement, and my message to them will be simply this: never stop fighting. Well done to Alissa Foster, Zac Morris, Paris Enten, Noah Loven and the team at AUJS for their tireless advocacy. With the Andrews Labor government adopting the International Holocaust Remembrance Alliance definition of 'antisemitism', I call on the universities to do the same. My question is: can the minister provide my community an update on the campaign to combat antisemitism?

Western Victoria Region

Bev McARTHUR (Western Victoria) (12:44): (384) My constituency question is for the Minister for Local Government and concerns the Andrews Labor government's embarrassing Commonwealth Games fiasco. Minister, it has come out in recent days that council CEOs were required to sign non-disclosure agreements – aka gagging orders – which prevented them from disclosing relevant information to their councillors. Given that ministers, including the former Minister for Commonwealth Games Legacy, answering my questions at the Public Accounts and Estimates Committee made great play of the support for the games from local councils and mayors, this news was surprising. Councils were obviously kept in the dark, like the rest of us. We understand from the Senate inquiry that the city of Ballarat and Bendigo CEOs had to sign these agreements. My question, Minister, is: how many other council CEOs and staff were subject to non-disclosure agreements relating to the Commonwealth Games?

South-Eastern Metropolitan Region

David LIMBRICK (South-Eastern Metropolitan) (12:46): (385) My question is for the Minister for Public Transport. The gridlocks caused by the level crossing removal and major road projects happening all over the south-east region have forced more people onto public transport, and the stations are not equipped for the increase in commuters. One constituent told me train station parking at Merinda Park is overflowing onto the street, and the following day another mentioned Cranbourne station parking was completely full so they were trying to park at Merinda Park instead; I could

probably predict how that turned out for them. The government announced its plans to include Cranbourne station in its car parks for commuters project in July 2021, promising a Cams Road level crossing removal and 400 additional parking spaces. The area is still surrounded by roadworks, and commuters are parking in paddocks adjacent to the station, waiting for their promised parking spaces that are still flagged in the planning stage. Will the minister provide a realistic time line of when the residents of Cranbourne and surrounding areas can expect a car park that meets their needs?

Northern Victoria Region

Gaelle BROAD (Northern Victoria) (12:46): (386) My question is to the Minister for Regional Development and former Minister for Commonwealth Games Legacy, on behalf of Bendigo residents. Can the minister explain if and when funding will be delivered to the so-called legacy projects promised to Bendigo as part of the games? The community was incredibly disappointed with the abrupt axing of the games. This week's Senate inquiry hearing in Bendigo was told there was no consultation with local sporting executives. A massive opportunity has been missed for sports such as table tennis and cycling to strengthen their sports and encourage young talent. Many millions of dollars have been lost to our local economy. The least the government can do is keep its promise to fund legacy projects, including upgrades of the Bendigo showgrounds and housing in Flora Hill. I note the minister said in question time today that these legacy projects will now be delivered sooner than the previously scheduled games in 2026.

South-Eastern Metropolitan Region

Ann-Marie HERMANS (South-Eastern Metropolitan) (12:47): (387) My question is to the Minister for Health Infrastructure. Will the minister advise me and my constituents when the redevelopment of Frankston Hospital will be completed? Costs have now blown out from \$562 million, which was quoted in 2018, to \$1.1 billion, as it is now projected. In a media release in July the Premier announced that the first major concrete pours for the new 12-storey clinical services tower at Frankston Hospital had been completed at the one-year mark. Surely we should be further along the path to completion. I look forward to receiving a time line, if possible, from the Minister for Health Infrastructure on the redevelopment and a date for the completion of the project.

Western Victoria Region

Joe McCracken (Western Victoria) (12:48): (388) My question is to the Minister for Environment and relates to the biolink created by a number of locals and the Pentland Hills Landcare Group near Myrniong in my electorate. I ask the minister to provide to the Myrniong community and me information relating to the advocacy she has undertaken to ensure that the biolink is retained and not ruined due to transmission lines that are planned to go right through the link. As the member for Ripon says, there is no social licence for these lines. The biolink is a very significant local project that has a number of environmental benefits. It goes for 33 kilometres along the Myrniong Creek, and it has been an ongoing project for a number of years. Many locals have contributed to it. Locals have even given up land for this project to come to fruition. That is under threat because a big powerline is going to go right through the middle. The link is no longer going to be a link, and there are going to be a number of detrimental environmental outcomes because of this. I really hope the minister can update me and others about what progress she has made to advocate on this.

Eastern Victoria Region

Renee HEATH (Eastern Victoria) (12:50): (389) My constituency question is for the Minister for Emergency Services, and the question that I ask is: what does the minister plan to do to deal with the fire response following the closure of the native timber industry? Following the state Labor government's decision to shut down the native timber industry a number of my constituents have raised concerns about the future of our bushfire response. The ban on native timber logging does not just destroy jobs, it destroys our capacity to fight back against bushfires. Native timber workers are the backbone of the response. They provide the heavy machinery and the local knowledge to fight these

fires. My constituents are extremely concerned that the state Labor government's decision to shut down the sustainable timber industry in the name of their green environmental agenda has taken away the ability for locals to deal with it.

North-Eastern Metropolitan Region

Aiv PUGLIELLI (North-Eastern Metropolitan) (12:51): (390) My question is to the Minister for Housing, and it relates to the proposed housing development at the Boronia Heights school site. Minister, the plan to develop this site was launched years ago, and the community is still waiting for these homes to be built. All the while the public housing waiting list is growing bigger and bigger. The community urgently needs a massive build of public housing that significantly increases the net number of public homes available. This inclusionary zoning pilot was touted as a way to increase public and affordable homes, and the site remains empty. This is public land, and the community wants answers. Can you please advise how many public homes will be built at the Boronia Heights site and when they will be ready for people to move in.

Southern Metropolitan Region

Georgie CROZIER (Southern Metropolitan) (12:51): (391) I have a constituency question to the Minister for Education, and it is in relation to Le Page Primary School in Cheltenham, which I visited a few weeks ago. It was tremendous to speak to the principal and understand just the growth of those students there and what he and his staff have been doing to really support so many within the community, so many families and children that are attending that school. Like many schools around Victoria it does not have facilities that are fit for purpose, and there are some issues regarding the building. There is a master plan that they believe is in place for redevelopment of the school or to assist in its redevelopment, and so the question is: could the minister please provide an update of when that master plan will be provided to the school community?

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

Committees

Legal and Social Issues Committee

Reference

Debate resumed.

Tom McINTOSH (Eastern Victoria) (14:02): As I said earlier, I am glad to be speaking to this motion, number 155, moved by David Ettershank. It has been a couple of hours since I was stopped halfway, before question time, but I am glad to resume it and I am glad to restate the government's support for this motion. It is looking to get the best outcome for working people dealing with pain, and I think it is a good thing that these issues are examined by the Legal and Social Issues Committee and that we are inquiring into medicinal cannabis in the workplace. I touched on earlier the importance particularly for people in workplaces, whether that be manual labour, who are dealing with injuries or who are dealing with physical trauma over time, or people who are in a workplace where they are responsible for the safety of others. Of course those two quite often overlay each other. The reason why I was talking so supportively earlier of the motion is the fact that I think it captures that fairness so that people can access the best quality and most appropriate pain relief. It is a justice issue. I think also it is an issue – one that I come to on this side quite a bit and that I believe our side keeps keenly in focus – of science. We want to make sure the science is informing the best outcomes for people so they can live their best quality of life.

Something else I want to talk a little bit about, which is rolled up in that, is the push-pull factor of giving people that support. We know this side is committed to supporting people in our community to get the best physical health outcomes, the best mental health outcomes – putting that support around people to ensure that they are able to achieve their most. I refer frequently to the Royal Commission into Family Violence and the Royal Commission into Victoria's Mental Health System and everything

that is being implemented and the investments that are being made to support people and to prevent trauma and remove trauma from our communities so that we do not see people not living their best lives and often ending up using a variety of substances to deal with where they are in their lives.

But I think the other side of this is we do not want to be pushing people unnecessarily into substance use that is not in their best interests and is not in our community's best interests. I actually had the inverse of this, perhaps. I used to work up in the mines years ago, and we had to blow .00. We walked in at 6 am on the gates, so I took to drinking mid-strength XXXX, which is a trait that I still have today that I cop a bit of flack about from many of my Victorian comrades and colleagues and whatnot. It is a full-flavoured lager at 3.5 per cent, and at \$1.23 a can, I do not think you can really complain.

But moving on, I think there is that push-pull factor, particularly around something like medicinal cannabis, where people are using it under medical diagnosis and medical support. You do not want to see people using another substance which perhaps will not be picked up, which is giving them worse health outcomes, which is giving worse outcomes in the workplace and which is setting a path that people can be pushed into that is not going to be the best outcome for them. I remember my first job – and I spoke about this in my first speech in this place – working on a construction site, with guys during the smoko break cooking up speed on a teaspoon and injecting it. Now, that is not where we want to be. It is not what we want to see. It is not in their best interests. It is not in their employer's best interests. It is absolutely what we are striving to stop and not see happen for a variety of reasons.

I think we need to have mature conversations about how we, as I said before, prevent physical or mental trauma. Preventing physical trauma in the workplace is really important. I have still got a long-term injury in my lower right arm that I took on from being on the tools which still gives me problems, but fortunately it is nothing I need to medicate for. Or it is that mental trauma taken on through circumstances that we can and are always working to prevent, whether that is in our families or in society or in the workplace, by being science based and open minded. We talked a little bit yesterday about our politics being for this century, not for last century. So when we bring that fairness, that openness of heart and that consideration for those in our community to try and get the best outcomes for everyone and when we are science led, we can come to conversations like those that will occur in this committee and find the right outcomes for Victorians – in this circumstance working Victorians – that, as I said earlier before the break, are going to give us that really good productivity and are going to give us that really good quality of life for those workers within their families, the families that build those communities and build our society, our state. I very much believe in society, even though some politicians last century did not. I will wrap up. I definitely, on behalf of the government, say that we support this motion. And although I am not on the committee, I hope that all those on it come to it with a fair and open mind and with a science-focused approach and get some really good outcomes for Victorians.

Ann-Marie HERMANS (South-Eastern Metropolitan) (14:08): I am also rising to speak on motion 155, standing in Mr Ettershank's name, regarding referring matters on workplace drug testing and medicinal cannabis to the Legal and Social Issues Committee for further consultation, noting that the motion instantly notes the validity of medicinal cannabis as a legitimate and lawful prescription medicine for people suffering from a range of serious illnesses and conditions and then goes on to discuss issues in the workplace that will have ramifications on WorkCover. I am keen to take a cautious approach and to be free of vested-interest tampering. I am optimistic about the gathering of data. Obviously we do welcome the gathering of data before we make decisions but will reserve judgement as to how we will respond once this data has been received and thoroughly analysed.

As a person who has worked in forms of social work, in both youth work and case management, I have witnessed firsthand the profound effects that drugs can have on young people – on anybody in fact – and how that impacts the wider community. You have to remember that my area of expertise is more in ages 12 to 25 years, but you do need to consider with any form of drug use how that can impair a person, so I do welcome the opportunity for this to be further investigated. There are many prescription drugs that can prevent a person from entering the workplace because it is unsafe to operate

machinery under certain prescribed drugs. We do need to have more information on the impacts and on the testing and the methodologies that are implicated in the workplace.

Obviously we have tremendous concerns about the pressures that are being played out at the moment in Victoria on small businesses, in fact on all businesses, in terms of WorkCover premiums, which have skyrocketed. Some people are paying 100 per cent more in such a huge increase that they have been expected to cough up by August – they just were not expecting such hikes. There are many small businesses that are folding or are having to rearrange the way they operate; they are moving interstate, they are moving overseas. We do not want to be putting people at risk, we do want to be looking after people, and I think all businesses recognise the importance of having something like WorkCover and having occupational health and safety standards. Legalising cannabis and having these health needs met is something that we need more evidence for to provide support for legalisation for drug purposes in the workplace. Occupational health and safety issues do need to be considered as to how they will impact the number of businesses that are out there and also the person that may or may not be impaired.

I do welcome the research; I think that is important: the investigation is important and the framework for workplace drug testing is important. We need to have a holistic approach, and we do, as I said, have genuine concerns for businesses given that the costs have inflated. We have 50 new or increased taxes under this government already and increased WorkCover premiums. We do not want to see discrimination in the workplace, I do agree with that, but we do need to make sure that no-one is impaired at work and that this is not going to impair judgement when they are using machinery. We do not want to see WorkCover premiums continue to increase. They have exploded under the mismanagement of this government already, and businesses, as I said, are already paying premiums that they cannot afford.

With that, I do say that we look forward to the scrutinisation of further investigation. In response to Mr Ettershank's motion, I look forward to further information being reviewed and provided for discussion. Obviously we have at heart the best interests of not only the cannabis users who want to be able to work but also the businesses that have to cover the WorkCover premiums for them and provide a safe workplace for them. On that matter, that is about all I really have to say. I do appreciate that you have brought this forward into the house for further investigation, that it might be referred on. We look forward to reading the findings and considering those and analysing those in due course.

David LIMBRICK (South-Eastern Metropolitan) (14:14): I will be supporting this motion to have an inquiry into workplace drug testing for medical cannabis patients. I see the injustice with what is happening with workplaces as basically the same injustice as what has been happening with roadside drug testing. Mr McIntosh earlier spoke about science. Well, I will say this: there is no science linking impairment, which is meant to be the whole point of testing people both in the workplace and on the roads – there is no science linking a positive test for THC in your body with impairment. At the moment the government seems to pretend that this roadside drug testing is testing for people that are impaired – it is a total con, what is going on. They are pretending it is like the blood alcohol concentration testing, which does show good correlation between blood alcohol levels and impairment, but that is not the case for cannabis.

I will say this as well: the government must know that they are really just taking advantage of the stigma associated with drug use, because they do not test for other drugs that are legally prescribed. They do not test for opiates in roadside drug testing. They do not test for benzos. They only test for cannabis because they know that there is this stigma around it and if people were taking medication for pain relief or mental illnesses and stuff and it ended up on the news it would be a bad story, even though they do impair people when they are driving.

Ultimately I see this as a technology issue, in that both in workplaces and on the roadside when they do drug testing they must test for impairment, because what is happening now is we have an injustice where people are losing their licences and losing their jobs and they are innocent. They have hurt no-one. They were not impaired. They were not going to harm anyone on the road. There were not going

to harm anyone in their workplace. It is a total injustice what is happening right now, and the government needs to fix it more urgently. I know that there have been these statements about roadside drug testing and things like this, but we need to move on this now because people are being criminalised and penalised and losing their freedoms. And I will say this: losing your licence in a regional area is an absolute catastrophe. Losing your job is a catastrophe. If people are impaired, by all means then they should be held to account for that, but our current drug-testing regime both in the workplaces and on the roads does not test for impairment. It is unjust, and we need to either end it or improve the technology so that it does test for impairment.

Michael GALEA (South-Eastern Metropolitan) (14:17): I also rise to speak on the motion put forward by Mr Ettershank today, and I rise to speak in favour of it as well. I have to say I have particularly enjoyed listening over the past half an hour or perhaps an hour of debate time to members from across the chamber on this issue. I think it has been a well-reasoned and collegial debate, perhaps a bit unlike the one that we had this morning, which was a bit more rambunctious. It has been a really interesting topic, and I do thank Mr Ettershank for raising it in the chamber today.

I do rise today to speak in support of referring this to the Legal and Social Issues Committee as a member of that committee myself, and I see a few of the members in here. In fact I believe we may even have a quorum of that committee here today, which is good to see. It is good to see that we are all engaged. I do very much support this coming into our committee, because this is the sort of issue that, as others have very well argued, is the sort of matter that the Legal and Social Issues Committee is best equipped to deal with and to examine the reasons for and also all the various other considerations that will need to be taken into account in looking at this motion. Whilst I do very much support this move in principle, going through this committee process is the appropriate way to do it to ensure that if any unforeseen foreseeable do come to light then we can address them and make various findings and recommendations in order to make this the best policy possible.

As members in this place will know, medical cannabis has been available to Victorians since 2016 when the Andrews Labor government brought in that reform. At the time it was quite notable. Like many here I was not in the Parliament at that time, but I do recall the significance of it. It was even in fact controversial, and it is hard to believe now, seven years later, that that would be controversial, because we have seen the enormous benefits of that initial trial in our program for medical cannabis use in Victoria for Victorians who need it and how much of a difference that has made to their lives. There are all sorts of conditions that cannabis is the best treatment for, and in some cases it is the only available treatment that people can find, so it has been really good to see. Some of the treatments I thought it might be instructive to outline briefly. Some of the most common conditions that medical cannabis can be used to treat in this state include paediatric and adult epilepsy; multiple sclerosis; nausea and vomiting, often as a result of chemotherapy and also HIV/AIDS therapy; various other types of pain; and palliative care, and I know from experiences not personally but from talking to others in relation to cannabis's role as a treatment for epilepsy really just how profound a treatment that can be and how wonderful it is to see it helping them live their normal life.

Obviously, though, Mr Ettershank has brought a very worthy consideration into the chamber today – that is, you cannot quite live a fully normal life if you cannot work or if you cannot drive. As someone from an industrial relations background, I know the importance of work to people and of supporting people through whatever sort of injury, illness or unfortunate event that has happened to them – seeing their desperate desire to get back to work and seeing how being off work for a long period of time can really have a psychological impact. It gets to a point where it is not just the injury, it is also the feeling that you are not doing what you want to do; the feeling that you are not in some sense, for want of a better word, contributing, even though they obviously are; the feeling of loss of identity and loss of self, which these current restrictions basically do place on people; and having that fear, that threat over their head, because they will test positive for a drug that is under most circumstances illicit. That is a real burden for them to carry. And there is, as I believe Mr Limbrick said, the stigma attached to

cannabis still because it is seen as an illicit drug even where it is prescribed for a perfectly appropriate medical purpose.

It is very good to see this motion come through. In supporting this I am very much hoping that the chamber will agree to support this motion today. I look forward, along with my colleagues on the Legal and Social Issues Committee, to that being the case. I do look forward to us commencing this inquiry. We know that the stigma that is applied to medical cannabis is not applied in the same ways to painkillers, to ADHD medicine, to PTSD medicines, to all sorts of other things. I will not go into that in too much detail, because I know Mr Limbrick spoke very, very well on that just before, but it is basically the simple principle of reducing harm. If we can show that the appropriate medical use of cannabis does not cause harm and does not cause impairment to a degree which would impact someone at work, then it is appropriate that this be looked at and remediated as soon as we reasonably can.

Victoria has not rested on its laurels when it comes to improving access to treatment options. Early access to medical cannabis for Victorian children with intractable epilepsy, the Victorian compassionate access to medical cannabis scheme, was initiated in 2017 or 2016. I do applaud that this government was at the forefront of that important reform and that it is such a non-controversial thing today that people can have medical cannabis treatment. There are all sorts of other conversations that I am sure we will be having in this chamber and in this Parliament about further measures, and I look forward to Mr Ettershank and Ms Payne bringing them forward to the Parliament. But for the time being, whilst cannabis does for recreational use at least remain an illicit substance, it is really important to step forward with this and show that it can bring a lot of benefit to people. It really is life changing. I know when the trial first came in 30 children were treated for some severe, severe illnesses, and what a difference it made.

In terms of further context for what it means to have epilepsy, about 30 per cent of children who are diagnosed with the condition will have what is known as intractable epilepsy. Any type of epilepsy can become intractable at some point, so there is no guarantee that even if someone does not have it, they will not then go on to develop it. But it is treatable. Some children may be seizure free even, with expert care. If a child still suffers from seizures after taking two carefully chosen seizure medications, the chances of success with a third medication are very low – only about 5 to 10 per cent. It can be a lifelong condition, and children, and later adults, face many potential effects from living with it – daily living skills; obviously, driving in and of itself; delays in speech and motor skills, such as walking; depression or anxiety due to worrying about when a seizure may occur; difficulty thinking and paying attention; not being able to drive a car or do other manual labour jobs, such as using a forklift or other machinery; reproductive issues; trouble doing schoolwork or other sorts of work; and trouble sleeping.

People of all ages, but especially children and their parents, must be careful due to the risk of accidents when having a seizure. I will not go into details of who, but a person very close to me was driving a car a few years ago, and the person in the car with them in the passenger seat had a very severe epileptic fit to the point where they had to pull over and physically hold and restrain this person on the side of the Monash Freeway. It was a very dangerous place to have an epileptic attack. They had to restrain this person while they were frantically calling for help and calling 000. These things, when they do happen, especially when they happen unexpectedly, can be very absolutely severe and potentially even life-threatening.

Gravely, there is also the risk of course of what is known as SUDEP, sudden unexpected death in epilepsy. Each year more than one in 1000 people who have the condition die from sudden unexpected death in epilepsy. This is the leading cause of death in people with uncontrolled seizures. One of the best ways we can help this situation and one of the best ways we can avoid these incidents is by reducing the frequency of seizures, and medicinal cannabis can really improve the quality of life of children and adults with epilepsy. It can quite literally save their life.

So I think it is important just to reflect on the context of why we have this scheme here in Victoria. For me, anything that we can do to reduce the barriers to access and the barrier of stigma to access and to living your normal life can only be a good thing. It is appropriate of course that we do it in a measured and considered way, and that is why I support this referral to the committee. I commend this motion to the house.

Rachel PAYNE (South-Eastern Metropolitan) (14:26): I rise to support this Legalise Cannabis motion. We have really only just begun to scratch the surface of what cannabis can offer in terms of therapeutic benefits. I note that many of my colleagues have referred to some of the effectiveness that medicinal cannabis can have as pain relief and in managing seizures, epilepsy and MS and as related treatment for depression, anxiety and sleeping disorders. We are now starting to see that detailed scientific evidence is out there. This medicine is effective, and it works for people. It has provided life-changing relief to patients where other medications have failed. It is no wonder that since Victoria legalised the use of medicinal cannabis in 2016 there have been over 370,000 prescriptions filled across the state. Medicinal cannabis is a great leap forward in pharmacology, and it is here to stay.

It really is time we addressed those Victorian laws and practices that continue to unfairly prejudice medicinal cannabis patients. In February we moved a bill to remove the discrimination against medicinal cannabis patients in the Road Safety Act 1986. At the time, the Premier said:

What we want to try and do is make sure anyone and everyone who would be better off because of medicinal cannabis has no disincentive, in fact is supported to access the medicines that will alleviate their pain ...

That statement of principle applies equally to medicinal cannabis in the workplace. We need to end the disincentives that medicinal cannabis patients receive in the workplace. As my colleague Mr Ettershank so succinctly put it, patients do not choose to have a medical condition, and they do not choose which medicine is best for treating their symptoms. Lawfully prescribed medicinal cannabis patients are not behaving irresponsibly or trying to get away with anything, but they are testing positive in workplace drug tests, and then they are not treated with the understanding that the result is derived from medication. Instead they are being punished as if they were using an illicit drug, and this is simply wrong.

A positive test is not evidence of illicit drug use or impairment. We know the trace amounts of THC can stay in a person's system for days and weeks after consumption and trigger a positive test result. We know that in a blood test result it can show up for a month. If a person is not impaired by their medication, they should not face dismissal because of an outdated testing regime that is not in step with modern medicine. I appreciate Mr Limbrick's comments in reference to the fact that the scientific evidence is there and the evidence is clear, and it is time we got on with the technology and advancing that position. Many Victorians are prescribed medicinal cannabis after years of taking far more dangerous medications, such as opioids or benzodiazepines, which come with a host of debilitating side effects and are highly addictive, but these Victorians are being forced to choose between continuing the treatment that has given them back their lives and continuing to work.

We also must remember that this has real-life impacts, and I would like to reflect on a few of the patients that we have been in consultation with during this process. I would like to tell you about Elena. We are not using Elena's real name; however, Elena is a successful software engineer. Elena has been prescribed benzodiazepine and she has spent many years on these harmful drugs, forming a dependency and enduring debilitating side effects. Elena was eventually prescribed a full-spectrum CBD-THC medication for her conditions. She credits medicinal cannabis with turning her life around. She takes the medication at night, leaving a 12-hour gap before attending work so that she will never be impaired.

Elena did the right thing; she disclosed her medicinal cannabis prescription to her employer. She even produced a letter from her doctor, but to no avail. Her employer treated her prescription medicine as an illicit drug, and she was immediately put on a work-from-home order and then suspended from her job. We also have to remember this is a software engineer, so she is not operating any machinery; she

is working behind a desk. Feeling she had no option, Elena left her work. She was not impaired at work, but she was forced to make a choice between leaving her job and giving up the medication which enabled her to lead a fully functioning life again.

Sam is another medicinal cannabis patient who enjoyed a successful career until he produced a positive urine sample at work. Prior to being prescribed medicinal cannabis, Sam thought his company's drug policy was pretty clear: for an employee who produces a positive drug sample, if they have a prescription they can go back to work – they are exempt. If they do not have a prescription, then they face disciplinary action. But Sam provided his prescription for medicinal cannabis, his sample was classed as illicit and he was suspended from work. Sam is now at a crossroads, and he must make that choice between taking his lawfully prescribed medication and keeping his job.

We have heard of so many examples of this type of discrimination. We have also heard of employees disclosing that they use medicinal cannabis and also being removed or suspended from their work pending an investigation or they have just simply been laid off because they do use medicinal cannabis, without any drug testing, just because of the stigma. We have also heard from people who have been prescribed medicinal cannabis by their GP and feel it would strongly benefit them but will not take it for fear of losing their jobs, and this is what we hear from the prescribing doctors and patients as well.

Medicinal cannabis should be treated like any other prescription medication, and it is a fairly simple proposition. I note that Mr McIntosh talked about fairness and workers, particularly around pain and injury. I think what is really important for everyone to remember is that when it comes to being prescribed medicinal cannabis you have to show to the prescribing doctor that you have tried every other option of medication to alleviate your pain – that you have tried opioid-based medications and that you have tried other forms of medication. What we are finding is that medicinal cannabis patients finally have their agency back. This is medicine that is working for them, and yet they are being discriminated against for accessing a legal medicine. It has to be the last port of call. We all agree around impairment – no-one should be impaired while they are at work – but people correctly taking their prescribed medication in a safe and appropriate way should not be punished for doing so.

I also note my colleague Mr Galea referred to children with epilepsy and how this medicine has been life changing for them. Well, what are we going to do when they get a job and get a drivers licence? Are we going to say to them, 'You can't drive and you can't work because you can't take your medicine at the same time', or are we going to say, 'You have to access your life-changing medicine and you can have those liberties of living a normal, full life'? We at Legalise Cannabis believe the Legal and Social Issues Committee will be able to tease out the complexities of this issue and make sensible recommendations for law reform, so I ask the house for their support of this motion.

Sarah MANSFIELD (Western Victoria) (14:35): It is with pleasure that I rise to speak in support of Legalise Cannabis's motion today. In 2016 medicinal cannabis was recognised in Australia as a legal medical treatment. Qualified health practitioners were given the green light to prescribe medicinal cannabis products for patients experiencing a range of conditions. We have heard about many of them already today, but just to reiterate, these include anxiety, epilepsy, chronic pain and cancer-related symptoms. However, our workplace laws have not caught up. Unlike other legal prescription medications, in many settings medicinal cannabis is effectively treated as an illicit substance. In workplaces where drug testing is performed, employees risk instant dismissal if they return a positive test for cannabis regardless of whether it is medicinal cannabis or whether it produces any level of actual impairment.

To understand why workplace drug testing is problematic for people using medicinal cannabis, it is helpful to have an understanding of how it is handled by our bodies. I am very excited about this because it is where pharmacology meets policy. Cannabis contains two main compounds, or cannabinoids, of relevance: tetrahydrocannabinol, or THC, which we have heard about; and cannabidiol, or CBD. THC is the substance associated with the psychoactive effects, including sedation and euphoria, or a high. Clinically, it can have benefits in chemotherapy-related nausea and

vomiting, spasms associated with multiple sclerosis and chronic pain. CBD is not associated with intoxication, although it can have side effects that are relevant in the workplace. Evidence supports its use in some forms of epilepsy, anxiety, chronic pain and some other neurological disorders.

There are a variety of medicinal cannabis products used for different conditions, and they contain different combinations of THC and CBD. Some have only THC, some have mostly THC and others have mostly CBD. Currently none are 100 per cent pure CBD. Workplace drug tests only check for THC, not CBD, and are generally performed on saliva or urine. Drug tests are a blunt instrument that only show the presence or absence of a substance. They do not tell you when or how the substances were taken. They do not tell you the current effect on an individual's capacity to perform a task. Inferences about the timing of administration of the drug or its effects can only be drawn if there have been established and predictable correlations between the presence and level of a drug and its effect.

All drugs behave differently, both in terms of how they are dealt with by the body and what effect they have on different parts of the body, including the brain, at different concentrations. Some drugs are relatively predictable, and you can make some reasonable assumptions about what detection of drugs at different levels means. Alcohol is a pretty good example, as I will explain later. Others, like THC, are much more difficult to draw such inferences about.

Peak levels of THC depend on the route of administration. If you inhale cannabis, it causes relatively high levels of THC in the bloodstream and a fast rise and fall in the blood and saliva THC concentrations. Taking it orally leads to a slower and lower peak level and a relatively slow fall. Of key importance is that THC is highly lipophilic, which literally means it likes fat. It is readily absorbed into fatty tissues, which make up a reasonable proportion of our bodies. It varies between individuals obviously, but THC stays stored in the fat for a long period of time – days to many weeks – and it is gradually rereleased into the bloodstream before being broken down by the liver and excreted from the body. The half life – that is, the time that it takes for the blood concentration to fall to half the level of the peak – can be long and varied, from one to two days to weeks. This is the same whether it is THC from medicinal cannabis or illicit cannabis. This is why THC can be detected on drug tests, particularly urine tests, for days or weeks after it has been taken. A positive test is therefore not an indication of recent intake of THC. It is also not an indicator of the level of impairment, and that is what is really important here.

Multiple studies have not been able to convincingly demonstrate a reliable relationship between THC blood concentrations and tests of impairment, whether they are subjective assessments of impairment or more objective measures. Evidence supporting a relationship between concentration and impairment is particularly weak for regular users, which would include pretty much all medicinal cannabis users. THC is quite different to many other drugs in this regard. Compare it to alcohol. Alcohol is handled by the body in a relatively predictable way, which is why we can give advice about the number of standard drinks that is likely to produce a problematic blood alcohol level. It is also not stored in the body and recirculated like THC, and therefore the presence of alcohol in the blood or on a breath test indicates recent consumption. Importantly, there is a pretty reasonable correlation between blood alcohol concentration and the level of impairment, with reasonable studies to back this up.

Impairment is what is actually important in a workplace setting to ensure safety. It is the justification given for workplace drug laws and testing. Impairment is a risk with THC, but it is with many other medicines, and there are systems and processes to handle this risk. Many medications that are not screened for as part of workplace drug tests can have side effects that pose a safety risk. Take, for example, some types of antihistamines, epilepsy and nerve medications and antidepressants. These can all cause drowsiness and alter judgement, but we have ways of dealing with this risk. Doctors regularly have discussions with their patients about the potential side effects of medications, including the impact they might have on their abilities in different situations, such as driving and working, and where precautions need to be taken.

Employees taking prescription medication that may have impairing side effects are generally encouraged to discuss their ability to complete their work with an employer, and in some cases medical professionals specialising in occupational health may be consulted to develop a safe work plan. Unfortunately, because medicinal cannabis is not treated like other prescription medications in the workplace, particularly by those workplaces that engage in drug testing, it is difficult for doctors to give appropriate advice. As I have outlined, there is a poor relationship between the timing of doses and the duration of risk of a positive test, and there is also a poor correlation between the presence of THC on a drug test and impairment.

The lack of protections for medicinal cannabis users also makes it very hard for them to disclose their use to their employers due to stigma and the risk of loss of employment on disclosure. Ironically, this may actually be promoting a less safe workplace. Some people will take medicinal cannabis and not disclose it, potentially creating risks that could have been avoided if we had treated it like any other prescription medication. Other people will choose not to use medicinal cannabis to avoid risking a positive drug test and losing their job and instead just deal with debilitating symptoms or have to take alternative medications that may have worse side effects. It should be acknowledged that for many people medicinal cannabis actually makes life much more manageable. It enables them to manage symptoms that would otherwise prevent them from working. The benefits of medicinal cannabis mean they can safely and productively participate in the workforce, when they might otherwise have been impaired by the symptoms of their medical conditions.

That is why I am standing in the chamber today on behalf of my Greens colleagues in support of the inquiry being put forward by Mr Ettershank and Legalise Cannabis. We hope that this inquiry will lead to practical and much overdue reforms of workplace laws and regulations; provide certainty for employers, employees and prescribers; reduce discrimination experienced by medicinal cannabis users; and provide safer workplaces for everyone.

Jacinta ERMACORA (Western Victoria) (14:43): I want to thank my parliamentary colleagues Mr Ettershank and also Ms Payne for bringing this motion forward. I have learned a lot, even just researching for this speech, and I have certainly learned a lot listening to you, Sarah Mansfield. I really appreciated your excitement about the intersection of pharmacology and policy and the solutions that you came up with. In particular I note and support part (3) of this motion, for the Legal and Social Issues Committee to consider how the needs of medicinal cannabis patients can be more fairly and appropriately managed by employers, which is almost like a good conclusion statement to Dr Mansfield's speech.

It is important to recognise that patients using medicinal cannabis often face challenges in balancing their medical need with other aspects of daily life, such as maintaining regular employment – again, a familiar theme. The Andrews Labor government took the pioneering step of legalising medicinal cannabis in 2016. This set a benchmark for further advancements in this field across Australia. Today medicinal cannabis is not only legal but also accessible by prescription, transforming the lives of so many Victorians who now rely on it for therapeutic reasons. This government is committed to aligning Victoria's occupational health and safety regulations with current medicinal guidelines and therapies whilst also balancing workplace safety.

It is critical to emphasise that no employee should be impaired while on the job, whether due to legal or illegal substances. Workplace drug testing is an essential tool for mitigating risks and hazards in certain work environments. However, such measures should not disproportionately affect those using medicinal cannabis provided they are not impaired while working. The aim of any workplace drug-testing protocol should be to minimise or eliminate hazards associated with drugs and alcohol, ensuring a fair and consistent approach.

Our record on medicinal cannabis shows continued progress, advancement and reforms since 2016. In 2017 we launched the Victorian compassionate access to medicinal cannabis scheme. This scheme initially granted 30 of Victoria's most critically ill children with intractable epilepsy access to imported

cannabis. This commitment helped families secure medicinal cannabis treatment for children suffering from an extreme drug-resistant epilepsy, particularly when all other treatments had been exhausted. I am proud of the compassion shown by this government, and these groundbreaking treatments have had tangible impacts. Medicinal cannabis has led to a significant decrease in seizure episodes for many involved, and by 2020 the program had expanded to include 90 children.

Victoria's efforts in advancing medicinal cannabis have also been instrumental in driving national reform. Patients can now obtain both imported and locally manufactured medicinal cannabis products. Since 2017 the Victorian government has channelled over \$5 million into research related to medicinal cannabis, focusing on areas like driving impairment, palliative care, cancer, endometriosis and autism. Today Victoria stands as a frontrunner in Australia's medicinal cannabis sector. This is largely due to our government's collaboration with local growers and manufacturers, especially in the development of CBD, or cannabidiol, products.

Agriculture Victoria has the distinction of being the first entity authorised by the Commonwealth government to cultivate and manufacture medicinal cannabis outside of a strict clinical or research environment. Agriculture Victoria is also collaborating with companies like the Cann Group and Canopy Growth Corporation to delve deeper into the medicinal properties of cannabis. We have achieved a significant milestone by successfully developing, manufacturing and safety testing a pharmaceutical-grade, purified CBD product, the first of its kind in Australia. This CBD product is now supplied to local research organisations for clinical trials, contributing to research capabilities and expanding the evidence supporting CBD's therapeutic benefits.

Victoria's lead has encouraged other states and jurisdictions across our nation to conduct their own research, and philanthropic bodies have become increasingly supportive. I was intrigued by a recent study funded by a philanthropic grant from Wesley Research Institute and the Lambert Initiative for Cannabinoid Therapeutics at the University of Sydney. As cited by the University of Sydney on 9 June 2023:

Australian researchers have published the first robust clinical study proving that medicinal cannabis effectively treats the debilitating effects of Tourette syndrome.

The research was published in the *New England Journal of Medicine*, and the findings show a statistically and clinically significant reduction in motor and vocal tics in just six weeks. Study co-author Professor Ian McGregor said:

We were delighted ... to deliver this important clinical trial showing the efficacy of oral THC and CBD in treating Tourette syndrome.

He said:

This is such a difficult syndrome to treat. It severely impacts the quality of life of 1 in 100 young Australians.

One of the participants in the trial said in the paper that his tics were really painful, not to mention embarrassing, making him self-conscious. He said:

The oil has reduced my tics by about 50 per cent and I have been able to read a book for the first time in 10 years.

He went on to say:

Some days I get home from work and realise I haven't focused on my Tourette syndrome for the entire day. It's changed my life.

Stories such as these are so encouraging and reinforce this government's commitment to the CBD program. With the successful completion of our government-backed CBD development program, we are now shifting our focus to encouraging local manufacturing of medicinal cannabis products.

As we debate this motion it is critical to note that on our side of the house workplace safety is an uncompromising priority. In Victoria we uphold stringent OH&S laws to mandate employers to

establish and maintain a secure and healthy work environment for their staff. This includes identifying and managing risks in the workplace associated with alcohol and drug use. We know that the consumption of alcohol and drugs can have repercussions on workplace safety. This can also have a negative impact on productivity and interpersonal relationships, both in work settings and beyond. In the workplace the use of substances where they are prescription medicines, illicit drugs or alcohol can evolve into an OH&S concern. All of the above can compromise a worker's judgement, motor skills, focus and alertness. This becomes especially crucial in high-risk settings where failure to manage such risks can have dire, even fatal, outcomes. Take, for instance, long-haul truck drivers, drill rig and mine operators and those who work in heavy machinery. I do know a woman who works regularly offshore in a highly complex environment. The drug-testing procedure prior to boarding the helicopter is similar to an international immigration process, and so it should be. The tolerance for anything in the bloodstream is very low. We know the potential for grievous harm or fatalities is considerably elevated when individuals are impaired at work, even if that is illness or lack of sleep. It is an employer's obligation to adequately manage these workplace risks and hazards to ensure employee safety and avert work-related injuries. It is also equally vital that our OH&S regulations are modernised and sensitive to the requirements of those using prescription medicines.

In conclusion, I support this motion because on this side of the house we believe in a just and fair treatment for all Victorian workers. No individual in Victoria prescribed medicinal cannabis should be forced to make the difficult choice between taking their prescription medicine and going to work, provided they are unimpaired. This government acknowledges the importance of drug testing in the workplace, especially in industries where risks are high, as a measure for employers to fulfil their OH&S responsibilities. We also stand in favour of investigating ways to accommodate the specific needs of medicinal cannabis patients within these work environments. I support the motion, and I look forward to hearing the results of the inquiry.

Aiv PUGLIELLI (North-Eastern Metropolitan) (14:53): I rise today to support this Legalise Cannabis Victoria Party motion and to echo the comments of my colleague Dr Mansfield. It is great; we should all do this again sometime. Victoria needs to get smarter on drugs. When it comes to cannabis we need to move away from a presence approach to workplace drug testing and instead to a focus on impairment. It is frankly nonsensical that people are being unfairly penalised in the workplace for using a medically prescribed substance.

As we know and have heard today, cannabis has been found to assist with the management of a number of health conditions. Its prescribed use is having a positive impact on the lives of many Victorians. We know the benefits. That is why it is now available as a legal medication, and as such it should be treated the same when it comes to workplace drug testing – and of course driving laws, but that is a discussion for another day, given the wording of this motion. With the use of medically prescribed cannabis we are not talking about being impaired at work. That absolutely is a health and safety risk and should be managed appropriately, but there are already safeguards in medical advice that is provided to all people when they are prescribed medication, whether it be cannabis or pain medication or sleeping pills or any other legally prescribed medication. However, today we are talking about the presence of prescribed cannabis showing up in a workplace drug test and people being treated differently and discriminated against on the basis of their use of their prescribed medication.

We heard in a federal inquiry earlier this year that there is evidence that suggests that people are choosing to substitute cannabis for other drugs for fear of testing positive in workplace drug tests. People are aware that cannabis may stay in your system for longer and are instead choosing to use other drugs, particularly novel psychoactives, to avoid detection in workplace testing. This can make the situation much more dangerous. The system in Victoria needs to be changed and updated to reflect our current laws. This current situation that treats users of medically prescribed cannabis the same as illicit drug users when it comes to workplace drug testing is discriminatory. I support this motion and changes that support the use of medically prescribed cannabis here in Victoria. To be honest, let us legalise it more broadly – but again, that is a conversation for another day.

Sheena WATT (Northern Metropolitan) (14:55): I rise to speak on this motion from my colleagues here in the Legalise Cannabis Party and in doing so would like to take a moment to thank and to recognise the strong advocacy of Ms Payne and Mr Ettershank on this important issue. I really am very much proud to be part of the Andrews Labor government, who have a proud history of positive reform in access to medicinal cannabis for those that need it most. We heard some of the stories in the chamber while this motion was being debated earlier today, and thank you to those folks who have shared their stories. I too, as we go on, will have some to share as well.

Indeed our government led the way in 2016 as the first state in Australia to legalise the use of medicinal cannabis, and in doing so we have improved the lives of so many Victorians who need it for their treatment. The data shows that it works; our reforms have led to a reduction in seizures for many, many participants. Our work in medicinal cannabis cultivation and access has been groundbreaking and has supported national reform, with patients now able to access imported and locally produced medicinal cannabis products. Since 2017 the Victorian government has invested over \$5 million into medicinal cannabis research in subject areas such as driving impairment, palliative care, cancer, endometriosis and autism.

Victoria is one of the leading jurisdictions in Australia for the medicinal cannabis industry, and this has been strongly supported by our partnership with local cultivators and manufacturers throughout CBD product development. Agriculture Victoria was the first entity authorised by the Commonwealth government to undertake cultivation and manufacture of medicinal cannabis outside of narrow clinical or research settings, and Agriculture Victoria continues to undertake research into the medicinal cannabis plant in partnership with companies including Cann Group and Canopy Growth Corporation.

We are continuing to lead the way in medicinal cannabis treatment and now have successfully completed the development, manufacture and safety testing of a pharmaceutical-grade purified CBD product, the first product of its type to be produced here in Australia. This CBD product is being provided to local research organisations for use in clinical trials, and I have had the good fortune of visiting some of these research centres. These trials will build local research expertise, provide more patients with access to CBD and expand the evidence base for its therapeutic use, and with the successful completion of the government-supported program to develop a CBD product, the Victorian government has transitioned and now encourages the local manufacturing of medicinal product.

The government has been working with road safety experts about how to best support medicinal cannabis patients so they do not have to choose between taking their medication and driving on the road. Current roadside drug testing only identifies if THC is present in someone's system and does not differentiate between medicinal or recreational cannabis, and there is no test at the point of detection that tells us the level of THC and how it relates to impairment. I actually recall this. Last year I was on the Legal and Social Issues Committee inquiry into legalising cannabis in Victoria, led at that time by the chair of that committee Fiona Patten. I do recall a range of experts presenting evidence to the committee on that, and I would say that that particular inquiry was one that really opened my eyes to what the opportunities are, what the models look like overseas and how we in Australia can really embrace the opportunities presented.

There is of course more to say on that, but I will come back to the motion at hand. This is why the Victorian government has established a closed-track trial to investigate road safety risks associated with the use of medicinal cannabis. The trial will not occur on public roads – that is really important for folks to know – and will be conducted on a closed track to ensure there is no risk to trial participants or indeed to the public. The trial will not change the fact that in our state it is illegal to drive under the influence of THC on our roads. Initial scoping work for the trial has now commenced, and the government will introduce a bill to Parliament later this year to enable the trial to happen. We await the outcomes of the trial, which will deliver us the best available evidence when determining government policy for the future.

As other speakers have said, safety on our roads is just so very important. This closed-track trial will help expand the evidence base on the impairment medicinal cannabis may cause drivers, while ensuring the safety of all road users. But the truth is that no Victorian should have to choose between taking their medication and going about their daily life. Those on this side of the house understand that for medicinal cannabis patients, balancing their treatment requirements with other life factors, like simply going to work each day, can be really difficult. I am now recalling the example provided by Ms Payne. It really does reinforce the fact that no Victorian should have to choose between taking their medication and going about their daily life. Thank you, Ms Payne, for sharing that.

Of course this government is overwhelmingly committed to ensuring that our OH&S laws remain consistent with contemporary medical advice and that treatments are appropriately balanced with workplace safety risks and considerations. It is important to note that no-one should be impaired at work, whether by a legal drug or otherwise. Workplace drug testing can be a critical tool to manage risks and hazards in particular workplaces, and I am thinking about some of those very high-risk workplaces and recalling that some of my friends are working in some particularly high-risk workplaces. I know how important it is that they not only are safe but have the assurance that everybody else around them is safe as well. Of course the focus of any drug-testing policy should be to eliminate or reduce the risks associated with alcohol and drugs in the workplace in a way that is consistent and fair.

We are supporting this motion today for the Legal and Social Issues Committee to consider how the needs of medicinal cannabis patients can be more fairly and appropriately managed by employers. With that, can I recommend that members of the Legal and Social Issues Committee take the time to read the report of the previous Parliament's Legal and Social Issues Committee, which considered cannabis use in Victoria. That was a very substantial piece of work, and I am recalling a series of meetings and some of the expert evidence that was presented at those meetings. I would just recommend that to members of this new committee to consider.

Of course there is more to say on this, but I know that we have only a few minutes to go and I understand that the mover of the motion perhaps has some final remarks that he would like to add. With that, thank you for the opportunity to speak today to this motion. Again, I reinforce my support.

Sonja TERPSTRA (North-Eastern Metropolitan) (15:04): I rise to make a contribution on motion 155, brought by David Ettershank. Effectively, this is a referral motion asking the house to require the Legal and Social Issues Committee to inquire into, consider and report by 30 June on a range of things that have largely to do with the regulatory framework for workplace drug testing: the treatment of prescription medicinal cannabis as compared to other prescription medications under the workplace testing framework; whether the framework for occupational health and safety workplace drug testing may be improved to benefit medicinal cannabis patients, ensuring due process and natural justice in workplace settings; and other matters. It is a long motion. I will not read it all in, because it is obviously on the notice paper.

It is an interesting area for inquiry. It is quite a vexed area for inquiry. Having been a trade union official for many, many decades and having worked in blue-collar workplaces and occupations where heavy machinery is in fact used, I understand some of the consequences that may flow from some of this. However, it is an interesting question that I think the debate today really centres around. I know I have only got 4 minutes or so on the clock, so I am going to bring it home strong. But I think it is an interesting area for inquiry.

There will hopefully be a lot of evidence presented about impairment, because that is what we are really talking about. What does impairment look like? I know we have actually had debates in this chamber about when we sit late in this chamber and whether we are impaired because we are tired. Oftentimes alcohol and drugs are not the only things that cause impairment. You can be tired, and it can take days to recover from being tired. I note I have had cause to read some information previously about the fact that if you are impaired due to lack of sleep it can be the equivalent of having a .05 blood

alcohol concentration. The question really is: what is impairment and to what level will it impair someone?

As I said, as a former trade union official I have represented workers in occupations and workplaces where the operation of heavy plant equipment and machinery is part of that workplace, and I know that those workers in those industries and occupations take occupational health and safety in the workplace very seriously – for very good reason, because we want workers to get home safe from work. We do not want workers to be injured at work, and we do not want workers who might be impaired to injure other workers. These regimes have been hard fought for. I know employers wanted them, but also the unions have been at the forefront of negotiating those arrangements to make sure that they are fair and that workers who may be picked up in any testing regime also have their right to natural justice and also to see what the full facts and circumstances around what may be impacting those employees look like so that those things can be taken into consideration. If I think back to when workplace alcohol and drug testing began, it was actually quite a different landscape in the beginning to what it is now. It is a much more compassionate space, I believe. It is still not without its lumps and bumps, but nevertheless it is something that has evolved, and that has been through the hard work of not only employers but also unions to make sure that workers are heard in that space.

Nevertheless I do think the Legal and Social Issues Committee will have its work cut out on this one. I think it definitely will be an interesting inquiry. As I said, the motion is asking for it to report by 30 June 2024. As is always the case, our committees in the Legislative Council have a full board of work. There is lots of work going on. As usual, it is brought by crossbenchers asking this chamber to refer these matters for inquiry to the different committees.

Of course the government is supporting this motion today. I should have said that at the beginning. I was remiss in not doing that, but yes, the government is supporting this inquiry. I mean, if you look at our government's record on medicinal cannabis, we have done a number of things. Just recently we have announced a medicinal cannabis driving trial. We have got a good solid record, as I said, on occupational health and safety in the workplace. We know that alcohol and drug use can impact relationships, safety and productivity in the workplace, and we have had many policy initiatives, particularly in the case of high-risk workplaces where risks posed to employees can be fatal. With things like long-haul truck drivers, drill rig operators, mine operators and employees who operate heavy machinery and equipment and from the things I have just talked about, we know that these things can impact workers in the workplace. I know that in Victoria employers understand their obligations only too well.

I have 26 seconds left on the clock, so I am not going to get to talk about all of the things that our government has done, but nevertheless I think that our record speaks for itself. As I said, we do support this motion, and I look forward to the committee undertaking its important work and reporting by the due date.

David ETTERSHANK (Western Metropolitan) (15:09): First of all, could I just open by expressing my profound appreciation to all the members who have participated in the debate for their thoughtful and heartfelt contributions. When I was reading my copy of the dummies guide to parliamentary procedure, this moment, it said, would be an ideal opportunity for me to both capture the discussion and rebut the points of difference, and there seems to be a definite lack of rebuttals to be made.

I would like to just note a couple of comments: could I compliment Mr McIntosh, Mr Galea, Ms Ermacora, Ms Watt and Ms Terpstra on their recognition of the changing role of medicinal cannabis and the fact that it is expanding rapidly – I think currently we are running at about 5000 new prescriptions by the TGA every month in Victoria alone. Quite clearly the law and a lot of workplace practice has not kept up with that.

I also note the comments from Ms Crozier and Mrs Hermans, which struck at the question of the mindfulness of employers and the need to control questions of WorkCover cost and employer liability. Can I just note and I hope provide some reassurance there that to my mind, given the literally dozens of reinstatement applications that are currently before industrial tribunals as well as the Federal Court over these very questions, consideration as to what represents good practice and what represents fair practice with regard to medicinal cannabis will be to the benefit of workers and employers, and that will be reflected in long-term practical application.

I also just note the comments both from Ms Terpstra and from Mr Limbrick about the conundrum here and the conundrum of on the one hand weighing up the rights of the primacy of the relationship between the doctor and their patient and on the other hand attempting to try and come to grips with this issue of the level of impairment and what that means practically on a day-to-day basis, and that will obviously be central to the committee.

I note Dr Mansfield's valuable explanation. It is certainly the first time I have heard that linkage of pharmacology and politics, and maybe that gives a new meaning to the concept of polypharmacy.

Sarah Mansfield interjected.

David ETTERS HANK: Do you like that one? Yes, anyway, on that note, I thank everyone concerned for the process, and I commend the motion to the house.

Motion agreed to.

Motions

Energy policy

Melina BATH (Eastern Victoria) (15:13): I move:

That this house:

- (1) notes that:
 - (a) Yallourn power station is slated to close by 2028;
 - (b) Victoria's largest power station, Loy Yang A, is set to close by 2035;
- (2) recognises that the Andrews Labor government:
 - (a) does not have a plan to deliver reliable and affordable energy to Victorians;
 - (b) has not identified any projects or funding partners to deliver the State Electricity Commission;
- (3) acknowledges the importance of a commonsense plan to:
 - (a) build new energy generation;
 - (b) upgrade Victoria's transmission network so that households and businesses across the state can access clean, affordable and reliable power; and
- (4) further notes that Victorians will continue to face higher energy bills at a time when they can least afford it.

I am very pleased today to rise to ask this house to consider and vote in favour of my motion 182 on the notice paper in relation to energy and the cost of living. If we look around the state of Victoria, there are many key and important issues that Victorians face, that families face, that businesses face and that industries face, but the cost of living and the regular, dispatchable, affordable supply of energy are two of the very primary focuses of many, many Victorians. So I want to bring to the house's attention the very live issues that are occurring not only in my electorate but across Victoria, whether it be in energy production or indeed in many cases the collapse of traditional energy production and also the transmission of new energies.

Let me put on record that I am speaking on behalf of the Liberals and Nationals and that we are cognisant of a transition to new energies and the need for new energies as old energies come offline over time, but it has to be done in a proper transitional way that does not cripple families and does not cripple businesses and so that the infrastructure from the source of the point of the energy production

to the end point – to the household or to the business or industry – is there, available and affordable and does not cripple Victorians any more than we are with an estimated future bill and debt of an eye-watering \$200 billion, which we hear that Moody's have been speaking about in the papers.

I will go through the motion in sections because this is a very big topic. The first section states:

That this house:

(1) notes that:

- (a) Yallourn power station is slated to close by 2028;
- (b) Victoria's largest power station, Loy Yang A, is set to close by 2035 ...

We know that Hazelwood closed following a tripling of the coal royalty tax. The Hazelwood power station was going to close – there is no doubt about it – but it was going to be a staged closure. It was pushed over the edge of the gangplank approximately seven years ago. With that, there was a whole tumble effect of workers losing their jobs and having to find capacity where they could in other power stations or in other employment.

That is on the cards for the Yallourn power station. I have been out there a number of times in recent years and spoken with the proprietors, EnergyAustralia. I want to compliment them on the very proactive work that they have been doing for their workers. They are very focused on their workers and the transition that they need to make. They have put \$10 million into retraining, reskilling, financial advice, jobs and skills research and regular communication from the company about what life looks like after that. They have provided a snapshot to their workers of what that really looks like. People overwhelmingly want to stay in the valley, which is good, but they also want to find other jobs. Some of them are more than willing to retrain, and others are not sure about what their life will look like in the future. I commend EnergyAustralia and the unions for working really closely together to have good outcomes for their workers. That is going to be in 2028. That is going to take offline 1200 megawatts of electricity. This state, at the moment through this government, has to be ready and alive to that.

We also know that Loy Yang A a year ago had a restructure and said that they are going to shut down by 2035. They are the largest power station in our state. They pump out electricity that is no doubt keeping the lights in this place illuminated today. But there is a great concern. In fact the government was so concerned only recently that it popped out a media release saying, in effect, that even though it has got this policy of 95 per cent renewables by 2035 – that is a big ask – it is a bit nervous because it needs Loy Yang A to stay open. Why? Because it is supplying the electricity that is keeping our schools, hospitals and industry going. They need it. They are really, I think, quite panicked and they are prepared to underwrite that coal-fired electricity power station in order to keep those lights on. You can see that they are pushing the policy, but there is a nervousness that Loy Yang could go early, and that is something that Victorians could not cope with or afford.

Also, there is a very important discussion around where to for those people, where to for our community. I know – I am Nostradamus; I can tell – privatisation is going to get a run from the opposite side, from the government benches. They are going to say, 'Hang on a minute, Jeff Kennett used privatisation' and talk about the impacts. We are going to hear that because that is all they have got these days. There were efficiencies made post that. With the Andrews government, we see the rhetoric and we see some spin, but they do not have a plan. This state does not have a plan, an investment strategy.

I am so disappointed. We look at the history and what has happened. The Latrobe Valley Authority was set up in 2016. It has had \$300 million, or a bit more now, to develop a strategic plan where it can identify to the community, to Victorians, what this is going to do to attract investment to – and I am being parochial – the Latrobe Valley, to the heartland where these closures are going to happen, what it is going to do, how it is going to measure those time lines for investment, what those time lines and what that investment will look like and what are the targeted programs for investment. And what we

have seen unfortunately, and it brings me no joy to say this, is that over the past decade the Latrobe LGA, specifically the Latrobe LGA, workforce has declined by over 4000 jobs, while in other areas – and I am pleased for other areas in regional Victoria – we see Ballarat, Bendigo, Geelong, Mildura, Shepparton and Wodonga, six LGAs, have over that period of time indeed increased their jobs to around the tune of 10,000. So the Latrobe Valley LGA is contracting. What this government does, and I am sure we will hear it today, is it says Latrobe Gippsland is growing jobs. Well, Latrobe Gippsland is six LGAs altogether, and indeed there is a great diversity of jobs in that area, including agriculture and many, many others, but you want to refocus the debate away from the very epicentre of change, and these are people that deserve not only lip-service but a definite quantifiable commitment.

We see that the government does not have a plan. We recognise that the Andrews Labor government does not have a plan for Victorians to deliver reliable and affordable energy, and it does not identify any projects or funding partners to deliver the SEC – and let us get onto that topic shortly. We see unfortunately that – and I will finish off on the Latrobe Valley Authority – it put out the ‘Latrobe Valley and Gippsland transition plan discussion paper’, a nice document. It had a focus, it had aspirations, but it had no absolute plan, and this is such a disappointment and a loss for our region. It is a playbook and it is a disappointment, but it is a missed opportunity. When we have the township of Morwell with 11.5 per cent unemployed, the highest rate in regional Victoria, and we see a national unemployment of 3.5 per cent, all the talk does not bring those people jobs unless it actually brings people out and into new industries.

We also know that there was a Hazelwood worker transition scheme and a worker transfer scheme and transition service. These had limited success. We also know that there has been a disastrous government policy about the closure of the native timber industry. We have seen Opal white paper – we are now importing white paper from overseas. How environmentally friendly is that, that they have closed the white paper mill in transition and we are importing that from overseas? This is such –

Members interjecting.

Melina BATH: You will have your turn. We understand on this side that it is important to have a plan, and we also want to see that there is affordable and dispatchable electricity. We have seen energy prices have risen 25 per cent from 1 July. It is approximately a \$426 increase per family.

The Essential Services Commission in March released its draft Victorian default offer, which shows the average bill rise is 31 per cent. These are facts. These are not suppositions; these are facts from an independent commission. We see that 400,000 residential customers can expect to pay an increase of \$1400 to \$1800 a year come the end of this year. We see that impact on businesses and the struggle there is for everyday businesses to keep their doors open, to make a buck and pay their staff, and certainly to keep tax flowing too. And we see that this government is also putting, over its term, 50 new or increased taxes. This is a burden that we really do not want to have to cope with, but indeed Victorians are coping with it.

In relation to the SEC, it certainly was a great thought bubble during an election campaign, but what does it mean? We see that Alan Finkel – a very, very respected gentleman and a scientist – has resigned from the advisory board of the SEC. I think he could see the cards on the wall – that it is really not working for people. They have not identified any projects or funding partners, and that was borne out certainly during the Public Accounts and Estimates Committee and the teasing apart of those documents. They have got the vision but they do not have the partners. They do not want overseas investment, yet it is open to overseas investment. It is a bit like the two-step: they are going two steps forward and one step back. It is very critical.

We look at that, and we see that Marion Terrill, head of transport and city programs at the Grattan Institute, said that the proposed revival of the SEC should be avoided. It is unwise, she said, ‘because governments cannot be relied upon not to interfere with government business’. And indeed that is what we are seeing. We are seeing that the Andrews government has set up the transmission authority

called VicGrid, whether it is in parallel with or whether it is in conflict with, in our patch in Eastern Victoria Region, AusNet Services, who are looking to provide those transmission lines for renewable energy – onshore wind energy. We know that Star of the South have been really canvassing people and promoting their vision and the work that goes behind that to get a feasibility study and plan and then get the green light from the federal government. They are just one of about, I think, 30 different proponents who are looking at that offshore wind, and that is a very important component. We know that it is windy in Gippsland. It is one of the windiest places in the world.

There are great opportunities for jobs in the region, and I will come back to that. But once that energy is produced, you have got to have these poles and wires, potentially coming off around Gifford and going through the central part of Gippsland and into the switching station in the Latrobe Valley. Now, that is sensible, but what we are seeing is that VicGrid is actually going to go into competition with AusNet. And is that realistic? Is that important? Is that helpful in the long run? These are some of the questions that are being explored. What you want is a government to support investment in renewables and new energy, and I will get to that too. But what you do not want is them to end up dragging the system down and delaying this production of energy so that what you are actually getting is a cliff, where you are going to have these coal-fired power stations closing – slated closures, going to close – and in the end you are not going to have the renewables online, not because the proponents and developers are not absolutely working to the max but because government bureaucracy and red tape will be slowing them down.

Now, this is a topic of great depth and I have 4 minutes left, so I just want to cover off on a couple of other things. First of all, there are huge opportunities for jobs in our region – jobs out to sea – but they are limited. It is going to be a different format of jobs with offshore wind. We want, or I want and I am sure many people in my electorate also want, there to be that transition, that opportunity for people that were working in coal-fired power stations to transition and use some of their skills but be reskilled to work in the renewable energy sectors. We also know that there are opportunities in Gippsland in Barry Beach and Port Anthony for that, and there will be in Hastings as well. But this government needs to look at the Latrobe Valley and what is happening there, because jobs in Hastings and Barry Beach do not equate to jobs sitting in the centre of the Latrobe Valley.

What the government seems to be very quiet on, and it is just so frustrating, is the Hydrogen Energy Supply Chain. We have got a Japanese government and associated consortium who are ready, willing and able to invest \$2 billion into establishing blue hydrogen. This is hydrogen made from coal that will be producing the hydrogen, and then it will be shipped – now piped – to the Port of Hastings and then over to the Japanese economy. There will be zero emissions eventually from the combustion of hydrogen, water and oxygen, but what has to happen is carbon capture and storage.

I am going to hear from the Greens going ‘No, no, it doesn’t happen.’ Well, it does and it can happen. I have been to the Otways; I have seen the work that they are doing there and that they have been doing for 15 to 20 years safely capturing carbon dioxide and storing it inertly in geological deposits. My colleague Danny O’Brien has just come back from a very short – about a week – trip to Britain and Denmark to look at a whole raft of renewables and renewable projects. He said the first carbon capture and storage occurred in Denmark in 1991, and Britain is fast-tracking its developments. He also went to fantastic towns that had been coal towns that are now retooling in a massive way for wind turbine manufacturing and wind blade manufacturing and that also will be looking at hydrogen, I think in that case from gas, with carbon capture and storage.

There are many more things to say. There is nothing more important than safe, affordable, dispatchable electricity, and I have not even got on to gas. The shutting down of gas for new builds is just ludicrous. We know also from Danny going over there that they are looking at hydrogen pumped into or replacing traditional gas and putting hydrogen into homes. If you negate that now, you are missing an opportunity into the future. The other thing that is so very, very important is transmission lines, and I know that there was a rally here only last sitting week at Parliament on the VNI West program and how there need to be other opportunities – a very sensible proposal put through by Mr Bruce Mountain

et al. This government needs to listen to that. I encourage everyone to have a fulsome debate. We need electricity, we need gas and we need affordable energy supply in this state.

John BERGER (Southern Metropolitan) (15:33): Today I rise again to speak on another motion, and this time it is on the cost of living and the price of energy. We all know that we are in a cost-of-living crisis. This motion of my colleague opposite Ms Bath suggests that we do not have a plan to deliver reliable and affordable energy to Victorians. Well, we do.

The motion mentions Loy Yang A, which is set to close by 2035, and Yallourn is slated to close by 2028. Last week it was announced that the Victorian government and AGL have signed a structured transition agreement, giving certainty to the closure of Loy Yang A in 2035 and putting workers at the heart of this process. The agreement confirmed the closure date of Loy Yang A, ensuring a 12-year notice period for the closure of that station. It gives certainty to workers, communities and the energy market. It provides for worker support packages well above the existing obligations, and it creates a development fund that is \$50 million to repurpose the Loy Yang site and provide greater benefits to the community. It keeps the lights on until we have enough renewables and storage capacity to replace it. This government is ensuring an orderly transition, increasing renewable investment certainty and ensuring we continue to put downward pressure on power prices.

Part (4) of the motion talks about how Victorians can least afford it at the current time. We all know we are in a cost-of-living crisis, and only the Andrews Labor government is tackling it. I want to associate myself with much of what was said in this very building on Monday. I had the great opportunity to catch up with my friend of nearly 30 years, Senator Tony Sheldon of the Commonwealth Parliament. Acting President McArthur, you may know Senator Sheldon and his lifelong work for transport workers and workers in general. On Monday he rightly asked Alan Joyce, the CEO of Qantas, what he has been doing for workers. Well, I am here to say, not much. He illegally sacked thousands of workers, cut their pay and set up 38 shell companies for workers – in a cost-of-living crisis. In fact companies like Qantas are hoarding almost half a billion dollars in flight credits, and this is outrageous.

We know that families are facing growing costs. The war in Ukraine has sent energy prices skyrocketing. We are dealing with the aftermath of a once-in-a-generation – in fact a once-in-two-generation – pandemic, and families are doing it tough. But we know this should not mean that families go hungry and most importantly that our kids go hungry. That is why I was proud to see the Premier and the Minister for Education announce recently that the Victorian budget 2023–24 is investing a massive \$289 million to help families with school costs, including with food. We are supporting families with the resources they need to provide healthy breakfasts, lunches and holiday food packs. We are also providing that extra bit of support to ensure that no student is left behind because they cannot afford a school camp or sports event, and we are helping with uniforms and other essential items. We are standing with families that need it the most.

In the 2020–21 budget we unveiled a massive \$797 million household and energy affordability package, and this was the budget that first introduced to the public the widely popular \$250 power saving bonus. First, for concessions, students and pensioners, it provided relief for more than 900,000 Victorian households in 2021. Then in 2022 and this year, it was expanded to everyone. As we know, by going onto the website you can save. I want to take this opportunity to inform my community that they should apply now, today or tomorrow at the latest, because the latest power saving bonus closes this Thursday. The numbers are massive. I want to put into the record the 25 August estimated application figures for my community of Southern Metro: for Albert Park, 20,730; for Ashwood, 20,688; for Bentleigh, 22,280; for Brighton, 17,796; for Caulfield, 21,887; for Hawthorn, 20,234; for Kew, 18,853; for Malvern, 18,464; for Oakleigh, 28,250 – that is right, 28,250 people, and that is massive. I congratulate the member for Oakleigh in the other place Minister Dimopoulos and his community for such an effort. And of course Prahran, 28,489, also a massive effort – where my office is located. I congratulate my staff on the many days at the Prahran and South Yarra station reminding residents to apply. Sandringham had 18,329 applications.

We are bringing the SEC back, and this is going to lower the cost of living and your power bills. 1.8 million Victorian households have already applied for the \$250 power saving bonus. That means \$450 million worth of payments to Victorian households. That is real money in the pockets of Victorians. We had another round in March for households to access a second payment. That is \$500 since the start of this financial year. No government in Victoria's history has ever done more to drive the uptake of renewable energy. We will deliver 95 per cent renewable energy in 2035 and cut emissions by 75 to 80 per cent by 2035.

Last year we saw 36 per cent of our electricity come from renewables. We have committed to reaching net zero by 2045. We have set vital targets for storage and offshore wind – 2 gigawatts of offshore wind by 2032, 4 gigawatts by 2035 and 9 gigawatts by 2040, with \$27 million to help develop renewable energy at the Port of Hastings. We have also committed to energy storage targets of at least 2.6 gigawatts of energy storage capacity by 2030 and at least 6.3 gigawatts by 2035. And of course we will keep going, legislating our Victorian renewable energy target, or VRET, with a 95 per cent target by 2035, which will create 59,000 jobs, increase gross state product by about \$9.5 billion and put downward pressure on bills. We are extending the Solar Homes and batteries program into 2022–23 with 64,000 solar rebates and 1700 battery rebates available.

In the 2022 calendar year more than 510,000 households and 49,000 businesses received discounted energy-efficient products and services. On average, households and businesses that undertake efficiency upgrades under the program save \$110 and \$3700 respectively on their annual energy bills. Even those who do not participate will save on their bills, with households saving \$150 and businesses saving \$870 over the next 10 years due to lower network costs. And there are of course free L-plate and P-plate licences and online testing programs. This all contributes to lowering the cost of living. There are discounted driver licence renewals for safe drivers, car registration discounts for concession card holders, short-term vehicle registration and free TAFE to give Victorians more training and new careers. We are making nursing and midwifery studies free by covering students' HECS. There is a cap of one residential rent rise per 12 months and capped council rates, and we are banning Victorian energy upgrades telemarketing, protecting consumers and their hip pocket from being preyed upon.

There is discounted student travel for Aussie residents as well as international students to acknowledge their important contributions. There are free zoo visits and Melbourne Museum entry for kids under 16 and a range of discounts, concessions and entry-level travel vouchers for seniors. There are travel accommodation subsidies for rural Victorians travelling long distances to see health specialists, discounted and free treatment through Dental Health Services Victoria and the school breakfast program. This year a further \$69.5 million was delivered to keep the program running with Foodbank Victoria. The delivery has expanded by 2.4 million meals. \$32.9 million has been put towards the affordable school uniforms program, which means disadvantaged families can save on essential school items – not just uniforms but also textbooks and stationery. And there is \$15.5 million for free period products in all Victorian government schools, \$2.9 million Glasses for Kids program, \$32.9 million for the State Schools' Relief program to continue its delivery of the affordable school uniforms program, \$3.815 million for the Books in Prep Bags program and \$168.724 million over four years and \$44.85 million ongoing for the Camps, Sports and Excursions Fund.

I am a renter, and I have been a witness to rent rises. That is why am I proud to be a member of the Andrews Labor government, which has a nation-leading plan on renters rights. Renters across Victoria are embracing more than 130 reforms now in place thanks to the Andrews Labor government's reforms making renting fairer and safer for all Victorians. From caps on rent increases to ensuring pets cannot be unreasonably refused to stay at home, we are committed to ensuring that renters are not forced out into more expensive homes just to get the basic human rights they deserve. As the Premier said:

Renters across Victoria are embracing more than 130 reforms now in place thanks to Andrews Labor Government's reforms to making renting fairer and safer for all Victorians.

We on this side of the chamber take the cost of living seriously, and we are working hard to deliver this each day.

Gaelle BROAD (Northern Victoria) (15:44): I certainly rise to speak in support of this motion, and I want to thank my Nationals colleague Melina Bath for putting it forward. Cost of living is a big issue. Everywhere I go I am speaking to people, and that is something that they are talking about. I was visiting a local business owner recently, and he said the prices and the bills just keep going up. It is not an easy time for people in business. I was speaking to one local business in a Swan Hill location, and they were saying it is so quiet for them at the moment, quieter than what it was during COVID. They put that down to people needing to save money and just simply not spending, so it is a very tough time.

Energy is so important. It is important for manufacturing in this state. It is important for business, for cafes to be able to run, for families and homes and for heating. It is extremely important. We have seen the cost of electricity bills just keep going up, increasing by about 30 per cent. The Essential Services Commission has warned that prices are continuing to increase, possibly by up to 25 per cent. This motion talks about the need for a commonsense plan to build new energy generation and upgrade transmission networks so that households and businesses across the state can access clean, affordable and reliable power, but our concern is that in this state there is not that plan. There is not a plan, and transition is far from smooth. Hazelwood power station has already closed, Yallourn is due to close by 2028 and Loy Yang A, Victoria's largest power station, is set to close by 2035. As my colleague Melina Bath pointed out, this is leaving very big holes in the energy and power supply, and are we ready? The Star of the South, the offshore wind project down around Gippsland, has got a range of different investors and entities involved in it, so it is a significant project. But it is in its very early stages. It hopes to be operational by 2030, but when you think about the other stations going offline, that is a very scary fact. This government has the goal of 95 per cent renewables by 2035, so you would hope that we would be a lot further advanced than that.

The power saving bonus, yes, gives \$250 to help households to compare their energy bills, and I do encourage people. That program is due to close tomorrow, so even if you have done a previous round, you can apply. My colleague Emma Kealy has been calling for an extension of that program because people are under so much pressure at the moment with the cost of living. So we have certainly called on the government to extend the power saving bonus at this point in time, but you can go to compare.energy.vic.gov.au to find out more.

I just want to speak also about the VNI West project. This is the Victoria to New South Wales Interconnector West, known as VNI West. It is a proposed new transmission line across the north-west of the state and it is impacting areas in northern Victoria, including Charlton, Boort, Kerang and near Echuca. It has been about 40 years since this type of project has been undertaken, and I would say the administration of it and the process have been shocking to say the least. It has been very difficult for local communities. We have seen a lot of notification rather than consultation. I know people have been outside supermarkets attending what they thought was consultation, but they are just sort of handed a brochure and that is it. I have been to some of these consultation sessions, with people sent into different rooms and divided up, and I think it is important that you are there to answer questions and inform people, because it is just so important to get that engagement.

Transmission Company Victoria, TCV, was set up very quickly just this year to assist with community engagement because it had been so poor to that date, but you can see in a simple ABN search that it has very similar directors to the Australian Energy Market Operator, so some would question the legitimacy of that process. I have certainly raised this issue in the Parliament on several occasions. I have asked the Minister for Energy and Resources about the business case and the costs for this project. The minister said route 5a:

... was identified as most likely to facilitate and expedite project delivery, in particular by minimising constraints to timely delivery.

Locals are concerned that lower population numbers are why the government's preference is for this particular route. It is concerning when you think about regional Victoria. It contributes billions of dollars to our economy, it contributes food and fibre and now it is also needing to bear that burden for energy and renewables and these transmission lines.

I attended the rally on the steps of Parliament very recently, and there were a lot of people there. I think there were about 40 or even 60 tractors just going around, making people aware of the impact of these transmission lines in the region. We have fifth-generation farmers that have not been consulted, and they are very concerned about these huge transmission lines. We are talking about towers that are up to 80 metres high, going for –

A member interjected.

Gaelle BROAD: Yes, many kilometres. The CFA have also raised concerns about this. They are not able to fight fires in close proximity to these lines, so the worry is that grassfires will continue. These lines will also impact on the ability of farmers to undertake the use of drones and other modern technology in their farming. There are areas where irrigation has been installed – very expensive irrigation – and these lines will have an impact on that, as well as the social impact and the impact on tourism in the region.

When I asked the minister about the costs for this project, I was referred to the *VNI West Assessment Project Conclusions Report*. To quote page 88 of the report:

The estimated capital cost of Option 5A is approximately \$3,499 million ... which is comprised of \$1,755 million in Victoria and \$1,744 million in New South Wales.

But when you look at page 123, it talks about the costs that are taken into consideration and it does state:

The Victorian payments were not included given the timing of the announcement from the Victorian Government.

I am very concerned that people are being approached about these different paths and routes. Has the government done the proper homework on the costs of this project?

We can also say that the government has made decisions about gas: no exploration. They have shut that down. New homes will not be able to install gas. As my colleague Melina Bath pointed out, that does impact future decisions like hydrogen and how we could utilise that. At the moment in this state there has been interest from Japan, as she mentioned, to invest in hydrogen. We need to be looking at those different opportunities.

Batteries are something that we need when we transition. At this point in time what we have in Victoria is very limited. I note the Big Battery at Hazelwood is 150 megawatts, and it only powers 75,000 homes for 1 hour. We have 2 million homes in Melbourne, and we have a growing population, so that demand for energy is only going to increase. We have still got a very long way to go.

If you think about these decisions about electric buses and needing to ensure electric buses, how is that going to work in regional areas where there is not enough power to charge the fleet? There are a number of concerns that need to be addressed in this transition. That is why we need a plan, not marketing and not spin. There has not been much, as we have seen, come of the SEC. There were a lot of big promises made in the lead-up to the state election last year, and we have seen many of them fall on their heads.

Energy is essential. We need to be efficient with our energy, especially with our growing population. I commend this motion. It states that we need to acknowledge the importance of a commonsense plan to build new energy generation and upgrade Victoria's transmission network so that households and businesses across the state can access clean, affordable and reliable power.

Tom McINTOSH (Eastern Victoria) (15:54): Well, well, well, here we are again. Obviously the Nationals are leading this one, because the Liberals are nowhere to be seen on energy and nowhere to be seen on power in our energy grid or probably power within their own coalition. I might need to sit down. This motion ‘acknowledges the importance of a commonsense plan to build new energy generation’. This is the party that – was it eight, nine or how many years in federal government when you had your hands on the levers – had 22 plans.

I really like this line. I am going to say it again. I do not think their energy ministers knew where their media advisers’ or their policy advisers’ out-trays were, because every time they were off to a media scrum or to a conference, they picked up their bit of paper and that was their new policy. Just to put this very clearly on the record, for the Nationals and the Liberal Party, who are also somewhere behind there working on their energy policies, to talk about commonsense plans and there being a lack of one is absolutely incredible, because a commonsense plan is exactly what this government has. We have led the nation. In the vacuum of leadership that occurred federally, this state led the nation – indeed led many parts of the world – and now we are seeing the fruits of that labour. We are seeing the energy generation. Those opposite are saying, as per usual, ‘The sky is falling in. How are we going to do it? How are we going to reach our targets?’

I agree that energy generation is absolutely critical. It is important to our homes, it is important to our businesses and it is core to the prosperity of our state in ensuring our productivity and our economic wellbeing. But let me be very clear. We are already producing 36.5 per cent of this state’s electricity from renewable sources. We are ahead of our targets. We are absolutely ahead of our targets. Those opposite are talking about power stations closing. We acknowledge the power stations are closing, and we acknowledge, as I have many times in this place, the workers that have contributed for 100 years to our collective prosperity in this state. The biggest issue for our renewable energy transition is ensuring we have enough workers. That is why this side has invested \$50 million into clean energy training through our TAFEs. That is why there is \$5 million allocated in last year’s budget to Morwell TAFE. It is to ensure that we have the workers to deliver the work that we need to do. We know that our offshore wind programs have 13 gigawatts of capacity that is going to be put in – tens of billions of dollars.

I spoke last time about how with offshore wind the federal coalition left the regulatory framework sitting in the top drawer of the minister’s desk for years on end. It took unions, it took environmental groups and it took Labor to push to get an industry which is important to our energy generation, is important to our prosperity, is important to our workers and is absolutely key to ensuring we get to net zero by 2045. That is our plan. We on this side recognise the problem. The problem is emissions. We need to keep carbon out of the sky. We have acknowledged the problem, which those opposite refuse to do. They might pay some lip-service once or twice and say the right thing in the seat of Hawthorn. In the seat of Hawthorn, where their leader needs to hold on to his seat, he will say the right thing, but everywhere else they are out slowing things down.

Here is a party that went to the election wanting to start drilling our farms for gas reserves that are not there. ‘Let’s get out on the farms and start cutting them open and looking for coal seam gas. Don’t worry about coal seam gas. Rip the coal seams up and let’s let it go wild. Let’s hit the water. Don’t worry about the farmers.’ Coming back, there is no plan, so it is these activities that we are seeing. They are talking out the sides of their mouths. That is why we end up with motions like this. I do not know where Mr Pesutto is. I do know what he thinks about his party dragging back on emissions reduction and dragging back on the state’s energy generation. He wants to have one message for his seat of Hawthorn, but the rest of you have a very, very different message.

Let me step onto the next point: nuclear energy. Okay, ‘We’re going to have gas. We’re going to have coal seam gas. Renewables aren’t working. Even though we’re ahead of all of our targets on renewable energy generation, let’s have nuclear.’ All right, so the latest costing out of the UK says that 3 gigawatts is about \$60 billion. If you compare the cost, it is about eightfold the cost of renewable energy generation. What are we going to do? We are going to find a way to establish a new regulated

energy generation method or market or whatever you want to call it, so there is something that is cheap, affordable and working with renewables, and they are going to put that aside and build nuclear. Okay, so we are working off gigawatts, and those opposite are talking about the power stations. We are talking about Loy Yang A with 2.2 gigawatts, Loy Yang B with 1 gigawatt and Yallourn with 1.5 gigawatts. Hazelwood is gone; it has been replaced.

I must say rooftop generation in this state is already exceeding the capacity of Hazelwood, so we should never forget what is being generated at the source for households in Victoria as cheap as you can get – 2 to 3 cents a kilowatt – directly into people's switchboards into their houses.

But back to nuclear: let us say we have four nuclear stations. What have we got – eight regions in here in the upper house – so only half of us are going to get a nuclear power plant. So let us all sit down and we will collectively figure out what seats will get a nuclear power plant. Bev, would you like one over there in Western Victoria? Will we have one in the east, up in the north, a couple in the metro? But who is going to miss out? Who is going to miss out on a nuclear power plant? Well, fortunately there is a solution: the regions that miss out can get the nuclear waste so they can benefit and enjoy nuclear power as well. So here we go: we have got coal seam gas, we have got ripping up farms for gas production and we have got nuclear energy. The ideas are endless.

To come back to the motion, point (3) 'acknowledges the importance of a commonsense plan', and that is exactly what this government has – as I have already said, 13 gigawatts of offshore wind and 4 gigawatts through the SEC, a program that was absolutely backed by Victorians at the last state election. We have set up our renewable energy zones. This is not a plan that we are talking about right now, this is a plan, since 2014 in that leadership vacuum, that has been clearly and methodically laid out. We have had our Victorian renewable energy target auctions – 800 megawatts of energy on the first one, 600 megawatts on the second. Business have come to the table. Community have come to the table. We have got a clear understanding of what we are trying to do, and we are going to be powering government infrastructure and services with 100 per cent affordable renewable energy.

I said before we have already got over 1.5 gigawatts of capacity coming off our rooftops. We have got our storage targets – 6 gigawatts. I was up at Hazelwood only two weeks ago at the new battery storage facility up there. It has got capacity to double. These are the investments that we are making, whether it is in Geelong or whether it is our neighbourhood batteries around Victoria. One was announced for Heyfield the other day. They are around metro. Let us go into our population centres and ensure that the generated energy is captured and used at time of need.

There is no doubt there is a big challenge, absolutely. Dealing with climate change and dealing with energy production for our state is a big challenge, but we are up to that challenge, and that is why we have a plan. And I frankly do not think it is good enough for the Victorian people to have an opposition that do not have a plan, that just sit there and say, 'The sky is falling in' and 'It can't be done' and 'We'll all be ruined.' Even when you look at the current figures, they say that we are smashing our targets, we are delivering power for Victorians and we are ensuring that we are meeting our zero emission targets, which the federal coalition government could not do. They made us the laughing stock of the world. As manufacturing requires clean energy to ensure clean products, this government and the Labor federal government are going to ensure that we can export our products, because they will have come from an energy source that the world wants to trade in, an energy source that the world will respect – a leadership that the world will respect.

Just back to that point of workers, I absolutely am committed, as is this government, to supporting workers. We had the energy skills expo only a couple of months ago with Minister D'Ambrosio and Minister Tierney. The biggest issue we have got in these 59,000 workers we need in this energy transition is getting enough of them and training them. We are looking after those workers who are transitioning. We thank them, we respect them and we transition them. Our new workers, we capture them young from our high schools. We say, 'Here is an industry you should be in. Come and power Victoria with affordable, clean energy.'

Renee HEATH (Eastern Victoria) (16:04): While I like the passion that we are seeing from Mr McIntosh over here, I think what we have to remember is that behind every policy is people. Something I will never forget is bumping into a constituent that I met during the Gippsland bushfires in 2019–20. At that time I was working in a relief centre where I was providing free chiropractic care for people that had been displaced from their homes and for CFA volunteers.

I was speaking to this lady who had been through the most devastating situation. She had had her house burnt down, and she was literally sleeping on the floor of a relief centre. She had had her business shut down because the whole town had been cut off. I was amazed, because during that time we were talking to each other there was a buzz of positivity, as you will remember, because people were pledging that once all of this was over they would go and they would fill their eskies and they would get these towns that had just been smashed back on their feet. Well, I saw her a little while after that – actually just late last year. I was excited to see this lady, and I said, ‘Oh, how have you been going?’ She looked me in the eye and said, ‘I wish I’d died in those fires.’ Obviously I was very shocked by hearing that, and I said, ‘Well, what do you mean by that?’ And she said, ‘After that, COVID hit and our business couldn’t open up even though there were no cases for kilometres and kilometres.’ She said, ‘After that we had floods,’ and she said, ‘Now we’ve got all of these new regulations and I cannot financially get our business back on its feet.’ This is something that has absolutely struck me – that we in here have fairly cushy lives. Yes, we work hard, but the average wage in Victoria is \$65,000. The starting wage here is just shy of \$200,000, and there is no comparison in that. We are facing a cost-of-living crisis that is affecting the average Victorian and that people in here will just never understand. Life is getting harder for these people. Her life had taken a personal beating, her business took a beating, her community took a beating, and now the cost-of-living crisis is making it harder for people like this to get back on their feet.

We have more resources in this state than they do in a lot of places in the world. We have coal, and yes, it is not the best, most clean energy, but it provides baseload power that powers businesses like that of the lady in Mallacoota and that will allow people to get back on their feet and allow them to pay their bills. We have ample gas, but we are not allowed to use it. Our energy bills have risen this year already by more than 25 per cent. That is why I want to remind everyone in this chamber that behind every policy are people, and the people in Gippsland are doing it very tough.

I worked in Morwell as a chiropractor, and I worked there during the time of the Hazelwood closure. For people there, those jobs have not been replaced to the same level. In fact I had a patient who used to be an executive in the Hazelwood power station there, and when I spoke to this patient he was saying that, yes, he has got another job, so that was supposedly a good news story, but at the time it was a part-time job that just came nowhere near the level that he was earning before. The jobs have not been replaced in that area, and people are still recovering from the closure of Hazelwood. Yes, it needed to go; it absolutely needed to go. It was a dirty power station. But these people are still trying to recover from that. The decision has been financially devastating for many of these people.

And now we come to wind turbines. I was recently in Hastings at a presentation on the wind turbines, and they were talking about the massive size and the impact that it will have on the area around Hastings and the amount of money that it will take to build them. Something that I was shocked by was that every single thing you see above the water has to be replaced every 10 years. Every 10 years these massive, massive structures have to be completely replaced. So I spoke to the man afterwards, and I said, ‘If this has to be replaced every 10 years, how on earth is it going to reduce costs?’ And I was very surprised. He actually laughed, tapped me on the shoulder and said, ‘Oh, everyone knows this isn’t going to reduce costs.’ It is true; that is what he said – one of the project managers of this project. We have to be doing more to relieve the cost of living. We absolutely need to.

These are ideological decisions that are being made at a time when the state does not have money to provide financial support to people that are really doing it tough. I want to thank my colleague Ms Bath for putting this motion forward. I completely support her in it because we have to remember that behind every policy is people, and this one is not supporting the Victorian people.

Michael GALEA (South-Eastern Metropolitan) (16:10): I rise to also speak on this motion put forward by Ms Bath on cost of living and energy. It feels like it is a little bit of déjà vu. I think there have been a few cost-of-living motions put up by the Liberals and Nationals in the past few weeks.

Bev McArthur: His Majesty's loyal opposition.

Michael GALEA: Sorry, I will be corrected by Mrs McArthur: His Majesty's most loyal opposition, yes. Tomorrow will probably be the last day I can get away with saying that before the Governor signs yesterday's bill into law. I will make the most of referring to you, Mrs McArthur, as His Majesty's most loyal opposition whilst I can.

Bev McArthur: His Majesty's most loyal subject.

Michael GALEA: I will happily refer to you as His Majesty's most loyal subject too if that is what you wish.

But it is with a bit of a sense of déjà vu that we are speaking on this again. Look, cost of living is a very important issue right now, perhaps one of the most important issues facing Victorians. I will talk briefly about one of the many things that we are doing to account for that and to address that and to support Victorians.

We do have this motion here on cost of living and energy today, and I really cannot help but wonder about the good Mr Pesutto, the member for Hawthorn. I hope he is connected with cost-of-living issues. I am not sure if he is so much connected with the cost-of-living issues affecting Victorians as he is with the cost-of-living issues affecting him with his legal bills, but that is for another day. What I will say is that this is a government that is not getting bogged down in those petty squabbles like those the good Mr Pesutto finds himself in. This is a government that is getting on with delivering real benefits for Victorians.

I want to make a note of my colleague Mr McIntosh's speech just now and all the incredible things that are happening in the renewable energy space. It is really good to take a step back. Frankly, it had drifted from my memory that not so long ago we did have a disastrous federal government that brought in no less than 22 separate policies. As he says, bringing a new one, a new press conference, 'What are we going to talk about today?' I am only relieved that I do not see members opposite, members of His Majesty's most loyal opposition yet resorting to bringing lumps of coal into the chamber. I am very glad to see that. I hope that we can maintain the decorum of debate at a higher level than our federal friends, and I trust I will have your willing engagement and support for that.

But there are a number of things that we are doing, and I do wish to acknowledge, firstly, the power saving bonus. It was great to hear another contribution from Mrs Broad, who is also extolling the virtues of this wonderful policy. This is now the fourth round of this program that we are in – \$250 into the pockets of hardworking Victorians – and it closes tomorrow, so to anyone who has not yet applied for this current round, the fourth round, which opened in March this year –

Members interjecting.

Michael GALEA: Apparently the Liberal Party is not in favour even though its MPs have been spruiking it in their constituencies. Dr Bach has been spruiking it, the member for Berwick has been spruiking it, but you are saying that we should not be doing it. Once again with this, as with many, many other issues, who knows where you stand. It is a new position every day. Who knows what we are going to get next? But on this side of the chamber we are committed to providing real, meaningful support to Victorians by means of the power saving bonus. This is the fourth round. I reported recently on the huge uptake we have had in this round. I think I reported that more than 1.7 million people have taken it up. I am delighted to say that now 1.81 million Victorians have taken up the power saving bonus.

Bev McArthur: What a shame.

Michael GALEA: ‘What a shame,’ Bev says. What a shame. I hope that you have taken it up, Mrs McArthur. But what a shame, I say. I have done many, many wonderful street stalls, and my colleague Mr Tarlamis down here has done them as well. We have had good turnout from the community. Maybe Mrs McArthur herself might like to come along and get some assistance with it. It is an important service that we have been providing, that Liberal MPs have been spruiking in the communities whilst they have been attacking it in here, and we see that once again today. I will at least give credit to the Nationals that they are enthusiastically supporting this initiative, and I appreciate Mrs Broad’s comments from earlier.

But this is a wonderful policy. Just because Mrs McArthur and the Liberals do not like it – again, I am sure we will have another party meeting by the end of the day and we will know whether they support it or whether they do not. We might need to go to a spill motion – who knows what is going to happen next with that illustrious lot. But this is a policy that is making a real, significant difference to everyday Victorians. As I say, along with Mr Tarlamis I hosted a number of street stalls in Berwick and in Rowville. The turnout was really remarkable. We had one in Rowville, in Wellington Village Shopping Centre. We even had our new federal member for Aston Mary Doyle turn up to give her support and lend a hand, and we had a queue of people, just as we did when I was helping the member for Frankston Paul Edbrooke, another fantastic local member. Joining him at Karingal Hub shopping centre, we had a queue all day. In 6 hours straight we had more than 300 people through. That is \$75,000 into the pockets of local Karingal families just in one day.

This is a policy that Victorians have absolutely taken up with gusto. It has been also a privilege to support people. Many of us in this place, and hopefully all of us in this place, have the know-how and the technical wits to process it ourselves, but it is really important that for people that do not – maybe they do not have quite as much confidence – we have been going out and offering that service. I do note even some Liberal members shamelessly spruiking it as well, and then when people call for help, referring them to their Labor members. We will be more than happy to support anyone who comes through, even, as I say, Mrs McArthur herself. I do encourage you to apply for the power saving bonus. It is a great initiative – 1.81 million Victorian households agree. Get on board. Get behind it.

There are many, many other things that we are doing in this space as well. If we look, for example, at the Solar Homes program: just over 250,000 total installs of solar panels, batteries and hot-water systems. This is through \$8000 interest-free loans that we are offering to Victorians to reduce their energy costs. Those customers that have taken it up already can benefit from an average of \$700 to \$1073 annually. This is part of the meaningful change.

As we are doing this, and as we are doing the big-picture reforms, such as the ones that Mr McIntosh talked about – I had the great pleasure of catching up with the Minister for Public Transport today, and we have terrific reforms with zero-emission buses. All of the new buses being delivered for our public network in this state by the year 2025 will be zero-emission buses. It is part of *Victoria’s Bus Plan*, which is going to deliver better services for us all. We need –

Members interjecting.

The ACTING PRESIDENT (John Berger): Order! There is far too much noise in the chamber.

Michael GALEA: Thank you, Acting President Berger. And thank you, Mrs McArthur, for the lashings of help that you are supplying me with today as well. But zero-emission buses and public transport itself is a huge part of this transition to renewable energy. I know for some time now already – I am sure Mrs McArthur will be absolutely rapt for me to mention this – Victoria’s tram network has been supported by solar electricity. So we have got a solar-powered tram network, we are bringing in zero-emission buses and we are providing for all Victorians, whether you live within the tram tracks or beyond.

There are a number of other initiatives that have taken place as well – far too many for me to go into in fact in the next 90 seconds of my contribution. But I can briefly mention things such as, as I said,

the fourth round that we have now of the power saving bonus and helping more Victorian families with access in terms of other cost-of-living measures too. We have got \$42 million to install 100 neighbourhood batteries across the state at targeted locations, all as part of a measure to drive down power bills more. And of course we are bringing back the SEC. I know my colleague Mr Berger got a bit of a wild response from those opposite for mentioning Jeff Kennett before, and they say, 'Well, it was a long time ago.' It certainly was a long time ago, but it is reflective of how much damage was done to this state and our energy network in the 1990s that it is still an issue of importance today, and that is why we are bringing back the SEC. We will bring it back in a renewable fashion that is going to bring jobs – it is going to bring jobs to the Latrobe Valley, it is going to bring jobs across Victoria and it is part of one more measure of the state-shaping projects that this government is all about.

Over on that side, who knows what they stand for? Do they support the power saving bonus or do they not? Ask a different person, get a different answer. Do they support renewable energy targets? Some of them say they do. Mr Pesutto says they do, but I think their attitude today convincingly says that they do not. Once again you do not know what you want to do, you do not know what you are saying, you do not agree with each other and you are not fit to govern. On that basis I do not support this motion.

Bev McARTHUR (Western Victoria) (16:20): I take total exception to that. He said we are not fit to govern. We will be very fit, very soon. Just get ready, Mr Galea. You will be in opposition. You will be in His Majesty's loyal opposition, I hope.

Anyway, each part of this motion is important, I have got to say, and congratulations, Ms Bath, for bringing it forward. But I thought I would concentrate on discussing Victoria's transmission network – no surprise. Part (2)(a) notes that the Andrews Labor government 'does not have a plan to deliver reliable and affordable energy to Victorians'. I should remind the house that this state once had the most affordable, the most reliable and the most accessible power in the country. Now we have got the most expensive and the most inaccessible. I have got dairy farms operating on diesel generators who cannot get three-phase power. It is a disgrace. You are lucky to get any milk in this town here because my dairy farmers are so adversely affected by your appalling power situation. Part (3) acknowledges 'the importance of a commonsense plan' – that would be a novelty for this government – to:

upgrade Victoria's transmission network so that households and businesses across the state can access clean, affordable and reliable power ...

I have often pointed out in this place that for the main part, generation is inseparable from transmission. While local generation, microgrids and battery technology are developing, for the foreseeable future power will still have to be dispatched from generators to end users. For too long we have allowed politicians and activists, particularly on the Greens side – though they did not do well in Warrandyte the other day; I might say you can forget about them in the future – to divorce transmission from generation. They have perpetrated a grand deception that clean, green energy generation is possible without any environmental price to pay. Yet the inescapable reality is, as these communities will testify, that new infrastructure required to connect disparate and remote wind and solar projects to the grid is hugely environmentally damaging. I mean, it is fine here in the City of Yarra or the City of Port Phillip. They can argue for green, clean energy – they have not got a wind tower sitting on their roof. But out there in country Victoria it is an issue.

We all know how substantial the increase in Victorian electricity generation from renewable resources has been in recent years, as well as in our state's ambitious targets in decades to come, but even today it is apparent that our transmission infrastructure has not kept pace with the changes. And as each additional renewable project comes online the problem becomes more critical. Recent modelling by the Australian Energy Market Operator, AEMO, shows that this year 29 per cent of wind generation and 25 per cent of large-scale solar generation in the Western Victoria and Murray River renewable

energy zones respectively will be wasted due to inadequate transmission capacity. Twenty-five per cent will be wasted – so it is happening already.

We have a poor outcome by national and international standards, which will only worsen as our transition continues. Investment in Victorian wind and solar is already being dramatically discouraged. The required transformation of transmission infrastructure in Victoria is a critical issue given the immense capital costs involved and the substantial impact on the environment and on communities. To give you an idea of the scale, AEMO believes 10,000 kilometres of new transmission lines will be required across the country to meet the current renewable energy target. I will say that again; get it into your head: 10,000 kilometres of transmission lines crisscrossing our pristine country environment like a spider web. You would not want that in South-East Metro, I am sure. Is that where you are from, Mr Galea, South-East Metro? Is that the place?

Michael Galea: South-East.

Bev McARTHUR: Yes, South-East, that is right. In my electorate of Western Victoria I have been inundated by the desperate complaints of people facing the first of these new powerlines. The planning and regulatory system now in place is utterly inadequate, perhaps unsurprisingly given the many decades which have passed since we last built new transmission lines. Talk about going back to the future with the SEC – we are going back to the very late past, building transmission lines with completely out-of-date technology. That is how up to date you people are.

The consequences have been unsuitable proposals, inadequate safeguards and arbitrary action by government, which have deprived Victorians of the environmental and planning protections they would normally enjoy. There is no doubt about the immense conflict caused, and I am concerned that the backlash created may damage the social licence for renewable power as a whole. You absolutely are wearing people thin. It is ever more apparent that we need to fundamentally redesign the processes for transmission network planning and construction and to do so rapidly. In my view, the proper way to do this is to constitute a parliamentary committee inquiry on the subject, which could benefit from national and international experience, to deliver a timely but thorough report on the way forward. I will have more to say about this soon – just look out.

The recent release by the Victoria Energy Policy Centre of the plan B report makes this concern more pressing. There is a real risk that in the construction of multiple single-line high-voltage interconnectors we are about to take a fundamentally wrong turn which will cost vast amounts of money, do immense damage and be irreversible for the foreseeable future. In ignoring recent developments in technology and market trends, the Victorian Minister for Energy and Resources and her department unfortunately appear to exhibit levels of stubbornness, institutional capture and political sunk cost fallacy, which inspire no confidence at all.

The problem originates with AEMO, which has pushed a national super network philosophy since its creation in 2010. The Hobart-to-Townsville, 500-kilovolt AC super-grid has been a driving obsession for that organisation. While it might have looked good on paper 13 years ago, we now have a different market, different technology and the need for an on-the-ground project, not a theoretical idea. Suspiciously, everything about the idea has changed since 2010 except the plan to build. The project costings have blown out by many multiples of course, but the reasoning has changed 180 degrees too. Believe it or not, the initial reasoning for the interconnector was to replace the expensive northern black coal with cheaper Victorian brown coal – that was the original idea of AEMO. The world has changed a lot since then, but the project is identical.

Last week it was my great privilege to spend two solid days visiting affected individuals, groups and communities along the route of the Western Renewables Link and the VNI West. They detailed their opposition, speaking about the visual blight of 80-metre towers 540 metres apart across the landscape, the farming impact, powerlines, easements bisecting sometimes small properties, permit restrictions and bureaucracy, biosecurity, property values, ecological damage, firefighting issues and insurance

issues. They also spoke about their experience with government. I mean, that is incredible. There are people with major mental issues as a result of this absolutely appalling way of trying to get a transmission system that is not fit for purpose out in our community. Government ministers and Labor MPs simply ignore them. They do not even reply, let alone reason with them. The government pretended initially it was either a national issue, AEMO's issue, or a private company's issue, AusNet's, not the state's responsibility. And then that all changed. The government have taken it over. Now that they are responsible, it will still be somebody's fault.

The total inadequacy of existing legislation is no surprise given it is decades since we built new powerlines. With no adequate community consultation, no planning restrictions – you could build a powerline next to a house, but you could never build a house next to a powerline I might tell you – it is a total failure of government policy, and you all ought to be ashamed of yourselves for rabbiting on about needing a different sort of power in this country but without having the transmission to go with it.

Sheena WATT (Northern Metropolitan) (16:30): I rise to speak on yet another motion from those opposite regarding the cost of living. I thank those opposite for bringing us this motion for our attention, because it gives me a chance to share with you all the many wonderful ways that the Andrews Labor government is helping families and communities deal with the rising cost of living. One of the great initiatives of this government is the \$250 power saving bonus, which has benefited 1.81 million Victorian households as we speak, and I understand that that number is going up each and every hour as folks rush to get money in their pockets and money in the pockets of their families and their households. But it is worth noting that the applications for the power saving bonus close tomorrow, so if you have not already, jump in and apply. I understand some members of this chamber have not yet. I encourage you all to get on board, because not only is it \$250 in your back pocket, it is also a chance to understand whether or not those power companies are taking you and your hip pocket for a ride. What a great opportunity that is.

We are a government that takes energy policy seriously. We have a champion minister in Minister D'Ambrosio, who has done more than any government in Victoria's history to drive the uptake of renewable energy. In fact only this week I believe she announced that Victoria is the first subnational government to join a very prestigious international wind energy council, and I know that she will have more to say about that. But you know what? It is only one of the very many announcements and deliveries that are happening for Victoria and the Victorian community, including a commitment to 95 per cent renewable energy by 2035, which is just around the corner, and we will cut emissions by 75 to 80 per cent by 2035. That will be here before we know it. Last year we saw 36 per cent of our electricity in this state come from renewables, and we have committed to reaching net zero by 2045. I know we will all be thinking about where we will be in 2045. There will probably be some new faces in this place, but what there will not be is a change in our commitment, from those on this side of the chamber, to achieving net zero by 2045.

We have set vital targets for storage and offshore wind, with some ambitions that are worth celebrating, including investments in the renewable energy terminal at the Port of Hastings. Hastings is a great community held by a great and very enthusiastic local member. Of course there are commitments to energy storage targets of at least 2.6 gigawatts of energy storage capacity by 2030 and at least 6.3 gigawatts by 2035. Gosh, 2035 is going to be a busy year in the energy space here in Victoria. Of course we will keep going because by 2034 we will have legislated our Victorian renewable energy target of 95 per cent. And you know what? That creates jobs – thousands of jobs – 59,000 jobs in fact. It will increase the state gross product by about \$9.5 billion, and that alone will help put downward pressure on our bills.

But you know that there is more to celebrate when it comes to us and our state reducing the cost of people's electricity bills. One which I know those on this side are especially proud of is that we are bringing back the SEC. We know how much the privatisation of the SEC hurt Victorians. We know that it did not work, and that is why we were so proud at that last election to go to the Victorian people

with a promise to bring back the SEC. The Victorian people heard that very proudly and supported that call at the ballot box.

The SEC will be 100 per cent renewable and 100 per cent publicly owned. What an enormous benefit that will bring the Victorian people. The State Electricity Commission will initially invest \$1 billion towards delivering 4.5 gigawatts of new renewable energy projects by 2035 – that is the equivalent of the replacement capacity of Loy Yang A. Through these new renewable energy projects it will push wholesale prices down and lower bills. Because the government will own it, the State Electricity Commission will not be run for shareholder profits but for all Victorians.

The new SEC will become an energy market proponent under a 10-year plan to deliver cleaner and cheaper energy, with all profits invested back into the system to help drive down power bills. The SEC will help deliver our nation-leading renewable energy and emission targets and thousands and thousands of jobs. I cannot say that enough – 59,000 in fact. We are not wasting a moment. You know what, we are just getting on with it.

The expert advisory panel is guiding the SEC's work to make sure it delivers the maximum benefits for the Victorian people and the maximum benefits of public energy ownership to the people of our great state, with lower power prices, faster investments in renewable energy, storage and lower emissions. Our pioneer investment mandate has been released; I recall the minister talking about that in the other place not too long ago. That will help us find the first projects for the SEC to invest in. How very exciting is that? There is a lot of interest from industry to help us deliver on these projects. The market search will help us build a pipeline of longer term investment opportunities, generating thousands of jobs and billions in investment while helping Victoria achieve its nation-leading renewable energy and storage targets. Later this year we are going to hear more about what those successful projects look like; I know that I cannot wait for that time to come.

But that is not all. In fact as a state we are pretty committed to the youngest Victorians, those whose names are not on the power bills but who do tend to cost a little bit to the hip pocket. But no more, with the introduction of funded, free kinder for three- and four-year-olds saving families, or their grown-ups, up to \$2500 per child each year. We have slashed the price of train travel across our state, so if those littlest folks want to go and visit their grandfolks, there are regional fares capped at the metro fare rate – how exciting. And when they grow up to be a little bit bigger, they can get the benefit of the Get Active Kids vouchers of up to \$200. Sometimes families do it tough, and when they do it tough there is support available, with utility relief grants of up to \$1950 for households.

But we know that there is more to do. That is why, looking after our veterans, we have established the Australian-first Veterans Card Victoria. That is why in this state we have free sanitary products for women and girls at 700 public sites right across the state. And you know what, it is not enough for us to fund all of this by ourselves. We have come a-knocking to our friends in Canberra, and we will continue to work with them and the other states and territories to look at options for easing the cost of living for families right here.

I know that there is more, including the \$3.75 million energy assistance program, which is a free one-on-one service helping Victorians struggling with power bills. It helps them navigate the energy market, apply for eligible grants and concessions that may be about, find and switch to better offers and sometimes just fix up some bills with the errors that are in there. The fact is that too many folks that have eligibility for concession rates just do not get them. But now, with the assistance of the energy assistance program, that can be achieved. Research from the Consumer Policy Research Centre shows that just 7 per cent of eligible concession card holders were not receiving these energy concessions. In some of the other states this number is far stronger, so we have a lot more to do.

We have provided targeted bill relief to eligible concession card holders. There is, which I found really good to know, a 17.5 per cent discount on electricity bills all year round and 17.5 per cent on gas bills for six months of the year, including the wintertime when we know that gas bills can get quite tough.

These rates are among the most generous in the nation, so that should bring some comfort to Victorians. There are also grants and other things available, and can I encourage Victorians to get onto the app and find out more. Thank you very, very much for the chance to speak on this motion today.

Melina BATH (Eastern Victoria) (16:41): I appreciate the call to sum up this debate on energy generation and cost of living. In doing so I will make some comments about those who have contributed to the debate, and I thank everybody for their interest in this topic.

I note Mr Berger touched on the contents of the motion. He spoke about the Andrews government's latest media release on Loy Yang A, and he made mention of the fact that the Andrews government is in effect underwriting Loy Yang A staying open till 2035. The government I believe is quite panicked. In its push for renewables it would actually send this company out of business at an earlier stage, and that would be an absolute disaster for us, who need to keep electricity in our homes, in our hospitals, in our schools and in our industry. He did also go on a bit of a canter around Labor's policies and included in his discussion the family pet.

I really appreciate Mrs Broad's discussion on the important work that needs to be done, that many farmers on the VNI West potential route feel that communities, farms and agriculture have not had that deep discussion and that conversation – I think one of the farmers said to me, 'There's a big difference between notification and consultation,' and they feel like it is the former not the latter – and on the impost of ever-increasing electricity costs on families, manufacturers and businesses.

Mr McIntosh reverted to the line that the best line of defence is attack, and if he is talking about the federal government, he can feel like he can have a swipe at all of us. That is the status quo. But he did raise the issue about the SEC, and I want to put on record that people of Morwell, the electorate of Morwell, which covers the Latrobe Valley, did not vote for the SEC. Thirty-one per cent of that population voted for Labor, and the Nationals are in the seat of Morwell. They could see through this flawed policy, and they certainly did not vote for it.

In terms of Dr Heath, I thank her for her contribution. She certainly said that behind every policy is people. She also highlighted the fact that there has been a 25 per cent increase in electricity bills, which is hurting people, families and industry.

Mr Galea spoke passionately about the power saving bonus, but he failed to acknowledge that the Essential Services Commission only this year said that the energy increases impost on homes and families is over \$400 this year alone, let alone the last six, seven, eight years, so the power saving bonus does not actually cover that direct cost impost that families are facing.

Ms Watt spoke about various other things as well as the power saving bonus and again the SEC. It was not supported at the ballot box in the seat of Morwell.

There was no discussion around hydrogen. It is too hot a topic for this government to speak about hydrogen. Whether it be blue hydrogen that will then facilitate green hydrogen, they will not go near it. They are nervous Nellies on this topic.

I would also like to thank my colleague Mrs McArthur, who spoke very passionately and wisely about the need for this government – and all governments – to get the transmission of renewables and new energy correct. It is not happening through VNI West. She wants to set up an inquiry on transmission and our transmission future, and I think that would certainly be endorsed by the people in her Western Victoria electorate – the farmers and the ag industry sector, which feel like they will very much feel the impost of large transmission lines, which could be done in a better way. I think she may have even referenced this very useful document, *No Longer Lost in Transmission* by Bruce Mountain, as an option B that should be considered.

Council divided on motion:

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

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

Motion negatived.

Bills**Independent Broad-based Anti-corruption Commission Amendment (Public Recommendations) Bill 2023***Second reading***Debate resumed on motion of David Davis:**

That the bill be now read a second time.

Jaclyn SYMES (Northern Victoria – Attorney-General, Minister for Emergency Services) (16:53): I have an opportunity to have a brief discussion on a bill this week that may come back another week, I assume, but at the outset I have had a good look at Mr Davis's private members bill, and we do not oppose the intent of the private members bill. There are a few concerns I have with it. It has got some merit, but it is a bit messy the way it is and also, without making announcements today, there are issues that we as a government are looking closely at. Mr Davis's bill does propose –

Members interjecting.

The PRESIDENT: There are a heap of conversations going on that could be had anywhere other than here.

Jaclyn SYMES: Thank you. Mr Davis, did you catch what I have been saying?

David Davis: Only partially. There was some hubbub.

Jaclyn SYMES: Oh, right. You will be pleased to know that of all of the motions and bills that you have put to this chamber, you are getting closer, because I am nearly there on this one.

There are some merits to this. There are some issues that Mr Davis's bill does pick up that do need addressing, and I am happy to indicate that they are issues that we are aware of and are advancing ourselves. There are concerns with this bill in the way that it stands, and I will run through a few of those. As I said, the intent is quite good, but ultimately we cannot support this particular bill. We would caution that the drafting of the amendments in this way does miss a couple of key considerations that need to be further considered and subjected to further consultation and the like.

Overall Mr Davis's bill proposes to amend the Independent Broad-based Anti-corruption Commission Act 2011 to expand their ability to publish recommendations. Currently section 159 of the IBAC act enables IBAC to make recommendations but requires recommendations that are not contained in a report to not be made publicly available. That is not to suggest that those reports are not used internally. Agencies have conversations with IBAC about issues they have identified. Obviously I am not privy to a lot of those particular conversations, but they are ways of highlighting issues with agencies that they need to address, and agencies are certainly grateful and made better for those interactions.

There is also the opportunity that IBAC have to use their existing framework to publish thematic reports. This is effectively quite often the result of smaller investigations either of smaller agencies

that would be identified if you were to publish a public report or indeed of specific incidents. I think it is particularly easy to draw on the example of Victoria Police where they have thematic reports and have the opportunity to bring issues into the public domain in a de-identified way. Some of those reports have been on very serious topics, but they are a way for IBAC to ensure that, in the public interest, these are conversations that the public can have and issues that can be brought to the fore and examined more broadly.

Mr Davis's bill contains a clause that relates to section 159(2). New subsection (2A) proposes that:

Despite subsection (2), if the IBAC considers it is in the public interest to do so, the IBAC may publish on its website in whole or part a recommendation under subsection (1) which is not contained in a report, insofar as the recommendation relates to matters of an institutional nature and does not contain a comment or an opinion which is adverse to any person.

As I said, in some ways some of that is being met by the ability of IBAC to have own-motion thematic reports and the like. There is also nothing in the non-publication report that stops IBAC being able to have those conversations and draw to the attention of individuals, agencies or the public sector particular incidents or particular concerns that they have indeed with a view to changing behaviour. Mr Davis's proposed new subsection (2B) is:

If the IBAC publishes a recommendation in whole or part ... the IBAC must also publish on its website a statement of the reasons why it considers publication is in the public interest.

I am a little curious about this requirement, and Mr Davis might want to elaborate a bit in his summing up. Like, really, if IBAC were to do this, it should be underpinned by being in the public interest. So I guess having an additional step is not without merit, but I do sort of question why you would ask this of IBAC.

In summary, the proposed changes in the bill would permit IBAC – if it considers it in the public interest to do so – to publish a recommendation which is not contained in a report on its website. I am just curious as to whether Mr Davis thinks that that is only on its website. Would they be able to further disseminate such material in the form of a report that is sent to people physically et cetera, or is it just the website? I was just a bit curious about that as well. A recommendation could be published if it relates to matters of an institutional nature and does not contain a comment or an opinion that is adverse to any person. This is sensible. IBAC would also be required to publish the statement, as I said, in relation to its reasons about the recommendation being in the public interest.

The intent is clear; it is just the application and the workability of these that need a little bit more teasing out. These are reforms that, in their substance, have been requested by IBAC because they acknowledge that they will enable more information about the work that they do to be made public in a more timely fashion, rather than having to wait to publish a formal report, whether that is a thematic report, which I was touching on before, or an educational report. It is sometimes better to wait for a theme to emerge to perhaps have more impact in relation to a topic that IBAC has identified. Having the choice to make it would be an important component of the proposals.

The other thing that just bothers me a little bit – and this is not necessarily a criticism of Mr Davis per se – is having lots of little bills at the same time. It is curious to me because, if you have an idea that you want to prosecute through a private members bill, that is fine, but if you have three consecutive bills that could quite easily have been considered as one bill, that would have been a better way to go. But, as I said, the other bills I had bigger issues with compared to this one. So it is nice to be not as negative towards a proposal that Mr Davis has put up compared to in previous times. But this is not the way that government approaches legislative reform. You are in a better position to consider a broader suite of reforms and how they interact with each other rather than through piecemeal approaches, which can end up with some unintended consequences.

As I said, it is not my intention to make any formal announcements in relation to the government's work, because there are appropriate and necessary steps in relation to government legislative reform.

But it would be best perhaps for me to revert to my overall observation at the start: that I believe this bill has merit. It is just the execution and the form and probably a few other things that mean we are slightly unaligned, and it is a little undercooked for my liking. I am certainly happy to give Mr Davis a commitment to brief him at the earliest time in relation to the government's landing on its considerations of this matter. Again, it would be at a time where we would not be proposing to make such a piecemeal amendment one provision at a time. We feel we are best placed to appropriately consider the effects and tests of ramifications of changes to integrity bills in a much more fulsome manner.

As I said, it is important to think through the potential impacts of changes. Obviously for a robust integrity system this is a really important step because, by its nature, this is a system that requires a really important balancing between transparency and public accountability on one hand and fairness to those being investigated on the other. Both of these values are really important, and finding the right balance takes time, it takes nuance and indeed it requires careful consideration about how the changes might impact on the rights of individuals and on other processes, including other laws and other institutions. I think we saw last week another IBAC bill which was proposing to amend elements of the IBAC bill but had not given consideration to identical provisions in the Ombudsman Act 1973, for example. So it is complex, and again, this is not a criticism necessarily of Mr Davis's intent, because this is a process that is quite complicated, and I am proposing that it would be bureaucrats that would give me advice in relation to those considerations. But, as I said, it is important when you are looking at reforms to the integrity system that you look at how they are interconnected as a whole and not take them in sound bite pieces. We are looking to make meaningful, thought-through reforms that work for our integrity agencies and work for our stakeholders, and of course the reason we are here is to actually work for Victorians and to provide confidence for them about transparency and accountability.

Probably the other thing to mention would be the role of the Integrity and Oversight Committee, which is the accountability parliamentary committee, which has an important function in relation to the consideration of our integrity agencies. It may be known to members that in the current inquiry into the performance of IBAC, the performance audit, this is a topic that has been featured in their public hearings. So again, not only am I a little concerned about the form of Mr Davis's bill and the fact that the government would like to give closer consideration and consultation to such a change, but I would also be interested in what the IOC have to say in relation to their consideration of these matters. I am not sure about the timing of their report, but I believe that their hearings have concluded in relation to the performance audit of IBAC, so I suspect that we could expect that at some time in the near future. That would be an important piece of relevant information before landing a proposal of this nature.

I would like to just make mention of a couple of items. They are minor, but they are things that I think need to be accounted for when you are looking at a bill such as this. First of all, I have just got a few concerns that the bill as it is currently drafted does not seem to restrict IBAC from publishing recommendations where that publication might prejudice ongoing criminal investigations or active legal proceedings. The independence obviously of the judiciary is a fundamental pillar of our system. It rests on the separation of powers and acknowledges the three branches of the government, the executive and the courts, and it is essential that matters that go through the courts are allowed to run their course without interference from government or government agencies. That is why we would express some caution in relation to proceeding with this bill without giving a little bit of consideration to whether you would need some safeguards in relation to the impact that it could have on existing court proceedings. As I said, there is merit, but if you rush these types of things and give government agencies power to interfere with matters before the court, that is not a great outcome. Even the creation of uncertainty in relation to the ability to impact a court proceeding is something that we would want to ensure is protected against.

Another item that has been brought to my attention is that the bill does not in its current form appear to restrict IBAC from publishing recommendations that might identify individual persons. I certainly take Mr Davis's word that his intention is certainly not to identify persons, but in the context of IBAC making recommendations about agencies it is important that the recommendations do not contain

adverse comment or opinion about an individual. Sometimes small organisations and sometimes isolated incidents might not provide that protection. Of course personal privacy protections and other important safeguards such as natural justice processes are really important for IBAC to be giving consideration to before they are to publish a report or in fact any matter. When an IBAC report seeks to identify someone, even if they are not subject to adverse comment, IBAC must be required to consider whether doing so could unreasonably damage their reputation, safety or wellbeing. So there could be further consideration given to a safeguard in a bill such as Mr Davis's private members bill where it applies to recommendations. You could build them into these provisions; that is something that we would want to consider before we were to proceed with such a proposal.

Getting to the end of the comments in relation to the details of this bill, the public interest statement or statement of reasons why IBAC thinks that it is in the public interest, I touched on this before but – and Mr Davis, I would be happy if you could touch on this later – how would this requirement work in practice? I do not think IBAC have given public comment in relation to that and their view on that. It might be worth testing it with them certainly in the development of our own material, but I am interested in whether you have given the justification for that. I am just not sure it is required, but I am certainly interested in why you think it is.

So again, it is another prospective amendment to the IBAC act. It is a little bit of *deja vu*, but it is a good conversation to have in relation to this one. You do want information going out to the public that informs the public of IBAC's work and provides guidance, education and information to agencies and individuals about identified risks, themes and matters that could serve a public good in that information being out there. And I like the fact that the proposal is for IBAC to have that discretion, because in some instances they come across information that is really important to share with an agency but is not in the public interest to be shared more broadly, particularly in relation to the welfare of people that may be subject to those investigations. That is just one example of that.

So it is a noble objective, the bill, but we do caution that the changes are a little bit too simplistic and gloss over a couple of required safeguards. But it has been a good exercise to have a conversation about this and it has certainly sharpened my mind in relation to some of the similar issues that we are advancing through my office and our consideration of a range of improvements or a range of amendments to the IBAC framework. But again, this piecemeal approach is just not the way that I am in a position to progress this important topic. As I said, we have stood here time and time again on these matters and I think they do inform my overall work, so in that sense that is helpful, but it would be not the way I would like to legislate from a government perspective.

I guess I would end with again reiterating this government's commitment to the ongoing work of strengthening the integrity system in Victoria. We certainly are committed to the integrity of the Parliament, the executive government, the public service and our entities, and IBAC and other agencies are important features of achieving that. We have already committed to a broad range of reforms to strengthen agencies across the board, including parliamentary integrity standards. It is why we delivered the Victorian Independent Remuneration Tribunal and Improving Parliamentary Standards Act 2019. It is why we have committed to implementing 21 recommendations in the IBAC and Ombudsman's joint Watts report, and they are being advanced and will be in the Parliament in line with the recommended time lines that that report provided – that is, due next year. And it is why we have actually gone further in relation to those recommendations in Watts and committed to implementing three additional changes to further strengthen public trust and lift standards across the administration of all political parties in Victoria.

There is always more to do, and I give my personal commitment to keep listening and keep consulting, and I will always give due consideration to ideas that have been brought forward. I do thank Mr Davis for this bill. As I said, it is in alignment with a lot of my thinking. There are just a few things in here that do not quite work and are a little bit undercooked from our perspective in relation to teasing out a few of those issues that I raised. With that, this is the closest I have come to supporting one of Mr Davis's bills, but I am not quite in a position to be able to support this bill today.

Business interrupted pursuant to sessional orders.*Statements on tabled papers and petitions***Department of Treasury and Finance***Budget papers 2023–24*

David DAVIS (Southern Metropolitan) (17:14): I am pleased to make a statement on a report today, and I want to talk about Victoria's financial position. It is clear from the Moody's report recently released on 12 July that the position of the state is very serious. It is deteriorating:

... Victoria's stand-alone credit profile has weakened in recent years and will continue to do so as sustained infrastructure spending continues to drive debt higher. Despite the underlying strength of the Victorian and broader Australian economy, the state's debt burden is unlikely to stabilize before the end of the fiscal year ending in June 2028 (fiscal 2028).

That is a very serious position.

... its debt burden will have risen to 226% of revenue, and will continue to rise on ongoing debt funded infrastructure spending.

I am quoting further:

This rapid (and prolonged) growth in debt amid higher interest rates will raise borrowing costs and weaken debt affordability over time ... limiting headroom under current rating tolerances.

They talk about a couple of serious credit challenges – the ongoing rise in debt to fund capital spending, vulnerability to external shocks and carbon transition, and sustained fiscal deficits. It is interesting to look at the chart – exhibit 2, as they call it – on page 2 of the report. They look at net, direct and indirect debt and revenues – and it is important to note this – lifting from 99.8 per cent in 2020 to 198.1 per cent in 2024. Net, direct and indirect debt across gross state product is lifting from 14.8 per cent to 29.5 per cent. These are significant deteriorations by any course.

You know, some of us remember the election in 2018, when a couple of days before the election the Premier and his Treasurer Tim Pallas went out and said they were going to lift state debt from 6 per cent to 12 per cent, and now it has gone in this year's budget to 25.4 per cent and up to 29.5 per cent by 2024. These are very serious lifts in state debt, and they do limit the state's ability into the future and shift debt onto our children. They shift debt to our children, and they make it harder because taxes will be higher. The ability of the state to provide services, whether they be education, health or other services, will be limited. The report goes on to say Victoria is Australia's second-largest economy and looks at the position of the Australian economy. They move to a number of key points here:

During fiscal 2023, payroll tax receipts proved more resilient ...

so they actually scooped in more. Despite that:

The fiscal 2024 Budget introduced additional taxation measures ...

We know that the clobbering through payroll tax and land tax is absolutely smashing so many people. School taxes are extraordinary taxes that people never thought we would see in this state.

On balance however, we see vulnerabilities in the state's own source revenue profile from fiscal 2024 onwards as rising interest rates further test the resilience of consumer confidence, business investment and housing affordability.

You know, the truth of the matter is actually quite simple: you cannot trust Labor with money. Labor will always damage the economy. They will always damage the budget's financial position. Ultimately they might get that run, and they might get a few terms where they churn through the money, spending wildly and spending without proper cost containment. We know there is \$30 billion in cost overruns on projects, and it is climbing, whether it is the Metro Tunnel or whether it is the West Gate Tunnel. Some of these are good projects in themselves, but they are improperly administered and

without proper cost containment. Labor cannot be trusted with money, and there are always problems. They go on to say:

Although debt affordability is currently adequate with interest payments at an estimated 4.9% in fiscal 2023 ... interest rates will significantly constrain Victoria's operating profile over time ... interest costs will increase to almost 8.0% of operating revenue by fiscal 2027 ...

These are significant hits that are occurring.

Department of Treasury and Finance

Budget papers 2023–24

Ryan BATCHELOR (Southern Metropolitan) (17:19): I rise to speak on the 2023–24 budget papers tabled on 30 May. In particular I would like to take note of budget paper 4, which outlines the state capital program, including the funding allocated to Victoria's Big Housing Build, because the state budget continues to build on the Andrews Labor government's commitment to delivering more social and affordable housing right here in Victoria, and in every corner of this state we are getting on with the job of building more housing.

As we have said in this chamber before, if this country, if this state, is going to get serious about fixing the housing crisis, we know we are going to have to build more houses. Increasing housing supply is our fundamental response to the need of more people to live in additional homes, and what is critical to the budget is that Victoria's Big Housing Build is doing just that. The government is investing \$5.3 billion to deliver more than 12,000 social and affordable homes, including \$1.3 billion in the budget directed to regional areas. And we are getting on with the job already. Construction on the sites right across Melbourne and Victoria is currently underway building these new social and affordable homes, and since 2020 more than 2000 households have either moved or are getting ready to move into their brand new homes. In addition to increasing housing supply the Big Housing Build is creating more than 30,000 jobs, providing a vital boost to local and regional economies.

I am very glad to see that there are new social and affordable homes going into places right across the state, right across Melbourne, including into the Southern Metropolitan Region, and along with my colleague Mr Berger and my lower house colleagues we have been out and about having a look at the new homes that are being built right across the Southern Metropolitan Region. A couple of weeks ago I visited a new housing development in Brighton East where the state government and the Commonwealth government are partnering with a community housing provider to deliver 152 brand new energy-efficient modern accessible homes, providing housing for 154 people over the age of 55 and in particular those at risk of homelessness, including women, victim-survivors of family violence and those living with a disability. At this site in Centre Road, Brighton East, we were there a couple of weeks ago with the Commonwealth minister and the state minister and met some of the new residents who have already moved back into these new homes. Stage 2 of the development – the demolition works – has been completed and construction is about to commence in addition to that block that has already been completed, and those residents have moved back in.

There are 299 new homes being built at New Street, Brighton, which we also visited recently with the mayor of the City of Bayside. Those homes are looking spectacular. Earlier in the year we went over to Ashburton to the Markham estate with 178 brand new homes replacing the 56 outdated walk-up dwellings. All of these homes that we have seen are modern, energy efficient and accessible, which means that for the residents who are moving back in not only are they getting brand new facilities but they are also going to be facing lower energy bills into the future. On average these units were about 2 stars, the energy rating, prior to the demolition, and the new homes are 7-star rated, which will mean up to 75 per cent lower energy bills in these apartments, saving these residents money.

The Big Housing Build continues: we have got Bangs Street in Prahran, which Mr Berger has visited recently. We have got stuff in Hawthorn and in Port Melbourne, and the estate in Hampton East is in the process of being demolished so that new homes can be built. And as Victoria always stands ready

to do more, we know there is continual opposition from the Liberal Party and from the Greens, who do not want to get on board and back more housing to fix the housing crisis in this country, and we hope that eventually in Canberra their friends will pass the \$10 billion Housing Australia Future Fund. While we wait for action from them, this state government is getting on with building more homes for more Victorians.

Legal and Social Issues Committee

Inquiry into Extremism in Victoria

Samantha RATNAM (Northern Metropolitan) (17:24): I rise to make some brief comments on the government response to the Legal and Social Issues Committee's inquiry into extremism in Victoria, which was tabled on 21 June. The Greens welcome the government's response to this inquiry and its in-principle support of all 12 recommendations. We are pleased that this government is responding to the threat of far-right extremism and has committed to a range of reforms to counter violent extremism in Victoria, including the Nazi salute ban announced yesterday. But we would urge this government to be bolder and go further than what it is outlined in its response to the inquiry.

To date, the government has defaulted to a law-and-order response to far-right extremism in Victoria. Its response to this inquiry has a heavy emphasis on the role of Victoria Police in managing counterextremism and counterterrorism measures, and it has so far focused on justice reform to tackle far-right extremism, like banning the Nazi salute and symbols. But creating new offences or proscribing symbols is only one tool in the toolbox in responding to the rise of neo-Nazism and other hateful ideologies in this state. We cannot rely on a heavy police response as our only solution. The more effective approach is to stop these hateful movements from taking root in our community in the first place. This means supporting communities, building social cohesion, investing in anti-racism and anti-discrimination education and building trust in our political systems, our social institutions and our civic institutions.

To that point, I want to bring the house's attention to four key findings and recommendations that we need to start investing in as a state now if we are going to take the threat of far-right extremism seriously. They are:

Finding 38: Anti-racism public education campaigns and education programs that teach respect and appreciation for multiculturalism are important for improving social cohesion in Victoria.

Finding 39: Education about the Holocaust is particularly important for understanding some of the consequences of racism and vilification throughout history and should have ongoing inclusion in the Victorian school curriculum.

Recommendation 7: That the Victorian government support the ongoing provision of existing anti-racism education programs and actively seek to improve and increase the provision of such programs in the community.

Finding 40: Digital and critical literacy are essential skills for young people to navigate the internet safely, develop resistance to the influence of extremist messaging and analyse the quality of information they are exposed to.

Along with these actions, taking the threat of far-right extremism seriously also means looking at the root causes of extremist ideology and the drivers that push people into far-right movements. The committee report canvassed the risk factors for far-right extremism in Victoria, including social isolation, economic insecurity and inequality. While these may seem like complex problems with complex solutions, we cannot address the rise of far-right extremism without also addressing these. We have to commit to tackling the inequalities and the injustices in our society that push people towards hateful movements, including ending poverty, building communities and reducing inequality.

As the report notes, we are also seeing worrying links between far-right extremism and other prejudiced views like transphobia, anti-LGBTIQA+ sentiment and misogyny. We saw this in action as recently as March this year when transphobes and neo-Nazis joined forces on the steps of Parliament to vilify and attack our trans and gender-diverse community. No response to extremism will be

complete without tackling this increasing hatred and vilification of our queer community. I note the government is still yet to fully implement the recommendations of the inquiry into anti-vilification protections, including reforms to our anti-vilification laws. These reforms are a necessary part of addressing the rise of far-right extremism in our state, and I would urge the government to progress this as a matter of urgency.

While the Greens are pleased that the government has finally responded to this inquiry report, this response must be a first step to a comprehensive, whole-of-government response to the causes and consequences of far-right extremism in Victoria. We encourage the government to be bolder and go further in building and strengthening our community to truly stamp out these hateful movements.

Economy and Infrastructure Committee

Inquiry into Land Transfer Duty Fees

Evan MULHOLLAND (Northern Metropolitan) (17:29): I rise to speak on the report tabled yesterday on the inquiry into land transfer duty fees. It is an inquiry I had the great pleasure of being part of and participated in with quite an interest. The issue of stamp duty is a very important one, particularly for my generation, who are struggling to afford homes due to rising fees and housing costs. It is also important to many migrants in my electorate. Just a few facts to break down: under Labor, the median house price in Melbourne has increased from \$605,000 to over \$1 million, and the price of an apartment has increased from \$432,000 to \$605,000.

Despite this increase, Labor has not adjusted stamp duty brackets. This means that new home buyers and those upsizing, downsizing or relocating for work are having to pay more stamp duty. Another thing that Mr Davis and I pointed out in our dissenting report is the issue of the brackets of stamp duty concessions. They go from \$600,000 and taper off to \$750,000, which is a massive issue for people in my age cohort. We heard from a lot of witnesses, like the good folk at YIMBY Melbourne, how the current situation we have – we are now over \$1 million for the average house price – is forcing young people to choose basically between a small apartment in the inner city or something out in the growth areas, where this Labor government has not invested in the proper infrastructure and has botched the delivery of housing estates. So we actually called for the threshold to be increased to reflect the current housing market.

Another thing in regard to this – and I heard Mr Batchelor speaking earlier about social housing – is there are musings in the media about their planning takeover, of taking away rights from local communities on housing. Most experts that I spoke to actually considered stronger housing targets as the best way to increase the available supply of housing stock. Speaking to many experts, many developers and many non-profit developers, they will tell you that more often than not it takes longer to go through a process through the minister's desk than it does to go through the local government planning process. So we are meant to believe that that will be the answer to our housing crisis.

Mr Batchelor spoke about social housing. I just want to point out two examples in my electorate, because the government talk about social housing. There might be some in Southern Metropolitan but there is definitely not in Northern Metropolitan. We saw in 2017 and in 2018, announced in Reservoir and Broadmeadows, new social housing projects. The land in Reservoir was actually meant to be a highway at one stage and has not even been rezoned to have houses on it. So the government has not even moved on it. They announced it in 2017–18 and have not done anything with it. It has been sitting there in some department, doing nothing. But we are meant to believe if we hand all the power to them, they will somehow do things quicker next time, even though they have not taken advantage of it since 2018 with these social housing projects. Hume City Council, which is a Labor council, does not even know any details about the Broadmeadows social housing project, which was announced in 2018, and they are asking the government for more transparency. So I really struggle to see how that planning takeover could get any better than what it is now.

Taxes are also an issue. On the changing from stamp duty to land tax, I do not think we would be able to trust this government. We heard from a lot of witnesses, and no witness could rule out that we would not end up with double taxation – you would get charged the stamp duty and the land tax as well. So you would get hit with taxes twice, which is actually what happened with this government's Labor mates in the ACT. They promised a phased transition, and they have ended up with both taxes. We know this government introduced 50 new or increased taxes; they love taxes and will not be able to help themselves.

Peter MacCallum Cancer Centre

Report 2021–22

John BERGER (Southern Metropolitan) (17:34): I am honoured to have the opportunity to speak to the 2021–22 annual report from the Peter MacCallum Cancer Centre. What began as a concept in a single room, run off the smell of an oily rag 74 years ago in the then Queen Victoria Hospital, has now grown into an internationally recognised cancer treatment centre with five locations across Victoria. Originally called the Cancer Institute, Peter Mac has helped countless patients and families of patients seek the best possible care they can – and best of all, right here in Melbourne. You do not need to travel outside of our great state to get the best care and attention in the world, and I reckon that is something we should be proud of.

In the annual report's goals and achievements section there is a statistic that is completely remarkable. There is a 100 per cent positive patient response, and it is 100 per cent for all of the three quarters that it was measured in. But you cannot remain the best without a plan, and Peter Mac have a plan. In 2020 they outlined their five-year strategic plan, which details how they are going to continue to deliver and even improve on their world-class cancer treatments. Peter Mac is now halfway through its strategic plan, and the outlook is good. The report speaks to the performance and outcome metrics that Peter Mac judges itself on. This ranges from quality of care to advancements in technology and research, and I am proud to say that Peter Mac is hitting all these benchmarks. In the 2021–22 year Peter Mac treated over 40,000 inpatients, ranging from haematology to melanoma. They also completed 285,000 specialist appointments.

But we know that despite being lucky to have Peter Mac in the heart of our city, it can still be hard for rural Victoria to access these services. That is why I am proud that they are doubling down on their efforts to make their services more accessible to any Victorian that might need them. This includes increasing the number of telehealth appointments by 28 per cent, so no matter where you are in Victoria, whether you are a casual worker in metro Melbourne or a farmer in rural Victoria, you can still make that appointment and receive the world-class health care you deserve.

Beyond existing treatment regimes, clinical services and community engagement, Peter Mac has also led the way in the field of research. We are training the best and the brightest right here in Melbourne, and our advances are on the cutting edge, putting us at the forefront of treatment and the ability to commercialise this. It is a fantastic asset to our state, and it makes us the envy of the nation. The drawcard of research, teaching and commercialisation is attracting talent and students from right across Australia and right around the world. It helps to cement our role as the Education State, home to the next generation of scholars, researchers, academics and medical professionals.

But we know, particularly in the year of the Voice, how important it is to fight the ingrained and structural discrimination that many face when entering the medical profession and field, and Peter Mac is doing its part in ending it. Peter Mac's reconciliation plan is helping to advance equity in health care and fighting the discrimination that many First Nations people experience in the medical profession. From extensive training to culturally sensitive healthcare practices and engagement with a consultancy firm, Peter Mac is leading the way. Through engagement with First Nations people, Peter Mac established the Peter Mac cancer centre's Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander advisory committee. We know that soliciting First Nations voices and walking with them is the best way to address their needs. Peter Mac has also embedded an Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander cultural

safety framework in their workforce. As a proud unionist, it is great to see that their enterprise bargaining agreement's leave policy acknowledges the unique cultural practices, traditions and needs of First Nations staff.

Peter Mac is on a solid path. They are continuing to deliver the best care at a time when Victorians need it the most. We all know someone who has been touched by Peter Mac in big ways or in small. That is why I am so proud to be a member of the Andrews Labor government, which is backing our healthcare infrastructure and workforce – that is backing Peter Mac in all the way. We have delivered a record \$54 billion since coming to government in 2014, with a \$4.9 billion boost in this year's budget alone and with more workers, better services and the latest equipment. I know Peter Mac and hospitals like it right across our state will continue to deliver for all of us. I commend the report to the house.

Economy and Infrastructure Committee

Inquiry into Land Transfer Duty Fees

David LIMBRICK (South-Eastern Metropolitan) (17:39): I rise to speak on the report on the inquiry into land transfer fees. In a world where people disagree on so many things, there is one thing that we can all agree on: stamp duty is garbage. In fact it is absolute garbage. I know this because that is what everyone told our inquiry. Renters, home owners, investors, young people, old people, economists, conservatives, libertarians, authoritarians, empty-nesters, first home buyers and people in the real estate industry – everybody hates stamp duty.

These days, though, you need to be rich just to pay the taxes. Stamp duty costs about \$40,000 for a median house in Victoria, which is a huge hurdle for homebuyers. Most parents feel in their bones that their job is to make the world a better place for their kids – I know that I do. Yet our kids might be the first generation since colonial settlement to think they might never really call a place their own. When average married couples cannot buy an average house, something is broken.

Nearly 50 per cent of marriages in Victoria unfortunately end in divorce, so those who do buy a house and pay the tax might feel they cannot even afford to move out. This is a divorce tax that no doubt causes many people to stay in miserable marriages. There must be tens of thousands of stories out there of not just people who cannot get a foot in the market but also those who live in unsuitable houses who are discouraged from downsizing, who put up with neighbourhood disputes or noisy neighbours or who commute many more hours than they need to all because it makes no sense to pay tens of thousands of dollars for nothing.

So if everyone hates stamp duty, why do we still have it? We all know the answer: because the government wants the money. There we have it: the problem is the government. It is not young people ordering avocado on toast, it is not evil rich people or people using Airbnbs; the problem is big fat greedy governments, and allow me to give an example. Scrapping the Suburban Rail Loop, a project not many people asked for, would save \$34 billion – and let us face it, much more than that once all the figures are actually tallied. But by my calculations the government could use this money to simply scrap the project and halve stamp duty for the next eight years or, even better, abolish it for four years. Then any person who bought a house could use the \$40,000 left in their pocket to go anywhere they want or to stay put or to pay off their mortgage more quickly. I know this report presents many different options, but there is absolutely no reason why the government cannot do this now. There is absolutely no reason why they cannot find savings to get rid of stamp duty altogether.

Stamp duty is immoral. It creates untold misery for thousands of people in thousands of different ways. The reliance of the government on a tax everyone hates demonstrates that the government does not serve the people in this space. At the very least it must be indexed to stop the increases. But let us not pussyfoot around: to end stamp duty we must start by ending government greed. The major parties claim to be searching for ways to end the problem of housing affordability, but they must realise that government is the problem. My recommendation to this inquiry on behalf of the Libertarian Party was that this odious tax be taken out gradually to allow the government to balance its books, but you can

take it out gradually or take it out immediately; either way it must go and we must replace it with absolutely nothing. Everyone agrees stamp duty is garbage, and if governments care about the people they are supposed to serve, it is time to take out the trash.

Economy and Infrastructure Committee

Inquiry into Land Transfer Duty Fees

Trung LUU (Western Metropolitan) (17:42): I rise to make a statement on the report into land transfer duty fees that was tabled yesterday by Ms Purcell, the chair of the Economy and Infrastructure Committee. Land transfer duty, commonly known as stamp duty, is a tax most economists believe is a bad tax. The committee agrees with this view. We recognise that stamp tax is a bad tax – and to us common people it is another tax from the government – because it is volatile, it hurts affordability, it limits mobility, it slows development and it distorts the allocation of homes. So why do we still have stamp duty? Well, in simple terms, it is a cash cow for the government. Income from stamp duty has doubled from \$5 billion to \$10 billion since Dan Andrews took charge in 2014. Stamp duty makes up 34 per cent of state tax revenue.

To many Victorians it is a lot of money. The government will run this line that if we abolish stamp duty it will impact services to Victorians. The Department of Treasury and Finance told the committee that getting rid of stamp duty would mean they would need to find an extra \$8 billion from elsewhere. Some may argue that we could replace it with land tax, while others suggest that it should be replaced with an increase to GST. The fact is the government cannot afford to lose \$8 billion. The government desperately need this revenue because of the debts we have incurred from all the cost blowouts from all the major projects, and now we are paying for their incompetence and mismanagement. The budget can be managed with the abolition of stamp duty with better project management, keeping costs down and giving up on false promises before elections. The 2022–23 state budget revealed that the cost of government projects has increased by \$8 billion. Let us not forget Dan Andrews was willing to throw away \$1.3 billion to cancel the east–west link, and for what return? Zero. Now, due to poor management and overpromising, we have just wasted another half a billion dollars cancelling the Commonwealth Games. This government is incompetent and continues to waste taxpayers money. That is why we need to keep high taxes.

I live in the west. It is one of the fastest growing areas in the whole country. Many young families as well as many new migrants move to the west because it is the most affordable place in Victoria. But even there the house prices are going out of the reach of average Victorians. The fact is that one of the factors that makes houses so expensive is stamp duty. Over the last 10 years in the west the median price has gone up over 50 per cent. This means a family home that used to cost around \$400,000 is now over \$600,000, and buyers cannot claim the first home buyers exemption.

Stamp duty is set for a certain house price, but then as the house prices rise, more and more houses are caught in that tax bracket. As the median price rises, more Victorians will have to pay stamp duty, making buying houses even more expensive. So the serious question to ask the Andrews government is about housing policy: how can we make houses more affordable? Increase supply of new lands, promote development in regional towns and cities and look at rezoning middle-ring suburbs. If we really want to fix the housing crisis, we must make homes more affordable. The government must reduce the taxes for young families and new buyers. The Labor government say they want to address the housing crisis, and you hear this over and over again in this chamber, but are they making things more affordable? No, they are making them more expensive. The threshold for a first home buyers exemption needs to be raised, stamp duty needs to be indexed or abolished and land needs to be affordable – and no more taxes.

As reported in appendix 1 of the minority report, the Andrews government has imposed over 50 new taxes on Victorians lately. We are in the middle of a cost-of-living crisis and a housing crisis, and we must do whatever we can to bring the costs down. If we cannot abolish or replace stamp duty, we must index it or do something to reduce stamp duty. Affordability is the key. I support the recommendation

in the minority report by my colleagues Evan Mulholland and David Davis that the stamp duty threshold needs to be raised to \$1 million to make homes more affordable for Victorians so more people can have a home and aspirational young Australians can have a place to live – and to address this housing crisis.

Adjournment

Enver ERDOGAN (Northern Metropolitan – Minister for Corrections, Minister for Youth Justice, Minister for Victim Support) (17:47): I move:

That the house do now adjourn.

North-east rail line

Wendy LOVELL (Northern Victoria) (17:47): (435) My adjournment matter is directed to the Minister for Transport and Infrastructure and concerns the liquidation of Exel Infragroup Pty Ltd, the lead contractor of the Victorian government's north-east line upgrade project. In the wake of the liquidation of Exel Infragroup, which has left many subcontractors unpaid for work on the north-east line upgrade, the action that I seek is for the minister to intervene and fund the full payment of all outstanding money owed to subcontractors for work on the state government's north-east line upgrade to ensure subcontractors have confidence to participate in future government projects.

The north-east line upgrade project is a project to upgrade the rail line to allow VLocity trains to run between Melbourne and Albury. Exel Infragroup Pty Ltd is a civil excavation business that was the lead contractor for several parts of the project, including line upgrades at places such as Lilliput and Balmattum in my electorate. On 14 July Exel Infragroup went into liquidation, with the company owing money to several subcontractors who had completed work on the project. I have spoken with two subcontractors based in my electorate who are owed substantial money from the liquidated company. Synergy Traffic Management is a small Shepparton business that is owed \$63,000 for completed work on the north-east line upgrade project. Along with the money owed, this company spent many thousands of dollars on training staff for an expected two more years of work on the project. CountryWide Asphalt in Wodonga is out of pocket more than \$378,000 for completed work on the project – a significant amount that impacts on its ability to meet its own financial obligations.

It is unacceptable for the government to wipe their hands of responsibility to subcontractors by saying that Exel Infragroup was paid in full for work on the north-east line when the government's own ministerial directions for public construction procurement, which prescribe the procedures that Victorian government departments and public bodies must follow when they procure public construction works, require proof from a contractor that all subcontractors have been paid. Ministerial direction 7.2.4, headed 'Subcontracting', reads:

Contracts must contain appropriate mechanisms to ensure that:

...

(c) the Contractor demonstrates proof of payment to subcontractors and suppliers.

So why was the final payment made to Exel Infragroup when it obviously had not paid its subcontractors, and why weren't the directions adhered to? The minister is ultimately responsible for this mess, and clearly the ministerial directions have been breached, so I call on the minister to ensure subcontractors are paid in full immediately.

Canterbury Girls' Secondary College

John BERGER (Southern Metropolitan) (17:50): (436) My adjournment is for the Minister for Education in the other place Minister Hutchins, and the action I seek is for the minister to join me in visiting Canterbury Girls' Secondary, an incredible school in my community of Southern Metro, specifically in the electorate of Hawthorn, and one of only five government girls schools in Victoria. Canterbury Girls' provides a fantastic example of what a good quality education in Southern Metro is

like, and it represents the great opportunities for education in my community. The teachers and support and admin staff are second to none, and I am proud to support them.

We back women's education on this side of the chamber. Earlier this year we held the Trades Fit expo to showcase the array of rewarding and well-paid career opportunities available to women and non-binary students in our state, and we are backing in female and non-binary high school students to choose a career in a trade or a tech-based career. For too long gender-based discrimination has stifled non-males from pursuing a career, and we are fighting to change that. The latest figures from the National Centre for Vocational Education Research shows students in VET secondary schools rose 1.1 per cent to over 52,000 last year. We are the only Australian state to increase its numbers of school students pursuing VET studies, and it is all thanks to the Andrews Labor government's reforms to senior secondary schooling.

Since 2018 we have invested a total of \$639 million into the system, transforming careers through ongoing improvements and access to VET, and the results show it. In an alumni poll, over 90 per cent of graduates of Canterbury Girls' said they graduated high school satisfied with the education they received. Just last week Victorians again topped the nation in this year's NAPLAN results, with massive improvements at both primary and secondary levels as Victorian students continue to thrive at school. It is schools like Canterbury that help Victoria retain its first place in year 7 and year 9 writing. I am proud of our work, and I look forward to having the minister visit Canterbury and see how it is thriving under an Andrews Labor government.

Cost of living

Aiv PUGLIELLI (North-Eastern Metropolitan) (17:52): (437) My adjournment matter is for the Premier, and the action I seek is for the Labor government to stop supermarkets from price gouging. It was reported last week that the two major supermarkets, Coles and Woolworths, recorded \$2.72 billion in combined profit this last year, and at the same time that they were making these record profits these supermarkets were busy jacking up the price of groceries well beyond the rate of inflation, wreaking havoc across the community. I have said this before and I will say it again: these decisions impact people's lives. There is a real human impact to this cost-of-living crisis, and yet these profiteering corporations and the governments that enable them do not seem to care.

Over the last few months the Greens have been running a survey on the cost of living. I want to tell you about some of the stories that we have actually received from this survey. These stories are confronting, they are heartbreaking and, really, they should not be a reality in Victoria or anywhere in this country. To start with, so many people are saying they simply cannot afford to eat three meals a day. People are accessing food banks at an ever-increasing scale. People are cutting out essential nutrition and dietary requirements for things like diabetes or coeliac disease because of cost. This is a crisis that will have untold impacts. One person told us:

I have reduced my meals per day to one, which at the moment consists of half a can of soup and two slices of bread.

Some parents have told us they are keeping their kids home from school because they cannot afford to pack a lunch for their children. Many people who wrote to us said they are skipping vital medication because they have to choose between medicine or food. They are skipping dentist appointments and doctors appointments for serious illnesses. People spoke of increased isolation due to financially being unable to afford to go out with friends or needing to stay home to conserve energy because they are skipping meals. One parent told us they are skipping their own meals so their kids can eat – skipping their own meals and having to lie to their children and say they will be eating later so the kids do not worry.

Failure to stop the supermarket duopoly from gouging prices and making food unaffordable is failure to address the cost-of-living crisis. When will the Labor government step in to protect the people instead of the supermarkets recording billions of dollars of profit at their expense?

Literacy education

Renee HEATH (Eastern Victoria) (17:55): (438) My adjournment is for the Minister for Education, and the action that I seek is that the minister commits to implementing an evidence-based, systematic synthetic phonics approach in Victorian primary schools. In relation to the latest NAPLAN results, Victoria's success depends on who you ask. Victoria's education minister said that Victoria has had a phenomenal result across nearly all NAPLAN categories. However, in an opinion piece today in the *Age* Jo Rogers wrote about how our phonics-phobic state is creating a generation of kids who cannot read.

To me it looks like teachers and students alike are facing an uphill battle. Recent NAPLAN results show that almost 30 per cent of Victorian schoolchildren are not meeting proficiency in literacy and numeracy. Forty per cent of Victorian year 3 and year 9 students are now being recognised as not meeting standards in grammar and punctuation. The NAPLAN results exposed a broadening gap in Aboriginal students in Victoria, with an average of 21.5 per cent of Indigenous students in the 'in need of support' category compared to 6.8 per cent of non-Indigenous students. Things are getting much worse for people in remote areas, with almost 50 per cent of students needing additional support compared to 7.9 per cent of students in major cities.

This is not an issue of funding. This is not the fault of students. This is not the fault of wonderful teachers. This is a flawed state curriculum. There is nothing more important than the next generation, and surely it is our job to ensure they are provided with the very best start possible. In her opinion piece Jo Rogers wrote:

Consistent studies prove beyond doubt that the best practice for teaching reading and writing is direct, explicit and systematic teaching, especially systematic synthetic phonics.

That is exactly what we should be doing. Our curriculum does not reflect best practice at the moment, and that is something that we need to address. Victorian children deserve better. It is time to update our state curriculum to include evidence-based practices.

Women's sport

Rachel PAYNE (South-Eastern Metropolitan) (17:58): (439) My adjournment matter is for the Minister for Tourism, Sport and Major Events, Minister Dimopoulos. In recent weeks we have witnessed the incredible scenes of Matildas fever sweeping Australia. 11.15 million Australians tuned in to watch the semifinal match against England, making it the most watched television program since records have been kept. This tidal wave of love for our national women's soccer team has been labelled as a game changer for women's sport in this country.

Unfortunately, Australian female athletes still face many more barriers to participation and progression than their male counterparts. This is an ongoing struggle for adequate resources, funding, support and equal pay, as the minister is well aware. Even at the very highest levels of their sports many athletes cannot earn enough money to make a career of it and are forced to take on additional work or leave professional sport altogether. Women's sport is crying out for support, and the old rhetoric that women's sport simply is not as popular has clearly been proven wrong. But the thing is, it did not ever need to be. There is no justification for this gross and systematic divide in resources, facilities and pay. During the women's FIFA World Cup, commitments were made by FIFA to future pay parity with the men's game, which I welcome, but it is still a hard pill to swallow that the winning team of the women's FIFA World Cup took home \$6.6 million while last year's men's winning team took home an eye-watering \$64.6 million in prize money.

It is terrific that following the event the federal government announced \$200 million to fund the improvement of sporting infrastructure, including facilities and equipment for women and girls. I acknowledge the government's guarantee of more free-to-air broadcast for women's sports. Many, including me, were frustratingly unable to watch many of the World Cup games because of its limited presence on free-to-air television. But the reality is this is a drop in the ocean compared to professional

men's sport. Somewhere in Australia right now our future Matildas are out there, turning up to practice three times a week and watching every game. Right now they need our help. We can give them the support and resources they need so that nothing stands in their way. Former Socceroo Craig Foster has called on state governments to get involved in increasing grassroots funding to foster more opportunities for women and girls in sport. So the action I seek is that the minister consider how we can get women and girls to engage and participate in sport throughout their lives and for the minister to direct greater investment into grassroots women's sport programs around Victoria.

Payroll tax

Georgie CROZIER (Southern Metropolitan) (18:01): (440) My adjournment matter this evening is for the attention of the Treasurer. Today the Liberals and the Nationals held a GP summit after concerns had been raised with us over many, many months. In fact for 18 months this issue has been bubbling along about a payroll tax being applied to GP clinics, and of course it is Victorian patients who are the big losers out of this. They are suffering.

Evan Mulholland interjected.

Georgie CROZIER: There were, Mr Mulholland, lots of doctors from your area who actually had some very terrifying statistics and spoke about the situation as it is. We all know Victoria is broke. The Moody's report yesterday to say that our debt is going up to \$220-odd billion is terrifying, and of course this government is grabbing money from wherever it can, but it is short-sighted, and I am absolutely astounded with the minister's absolutely appalling and reckless comments in the house today about this issue, saying, 'Nothing's changed.' That is what the government keeps saying, 'Nothing's changed,' and she keeps saying:

We have met with the RACGP, we have met with the AMA and we have met with other representatives, and we continue to be open to meet with them. In fact I meet with them regularly.

Well, if that is the case you would have taken notice of the many instances when they have raised this issue. In a letter to the Minister for Health, the Treasurer and the Premier on 27 January from the Australian GP Alliance, AMA and Royal Australian College of General Practitioners it is very clear:

General practices already pay payroll tax on other members of the general practice team and administrative staff. Extending that tax to include the tenant GPs who deliver Medicare-funded clinical services will further contribute to the Victorian GP crisis by adversely affecting the fiscal viability of these clinics.

I know that those opposite in the government do not have any understanding of small business because they all come out of the unions. They are all union hacks. They do not understand what it is like to operate an individual small business like many of these GP clinics, who do an enormous amount for our community. Even the ATO understood that these tenants are independent contractors. They manage themselves – their holidays, their annual leave and what they do – they are not employees and yet the Treasurer and others are having this shocking tax grab on health services. It is purely that – it is a health tax – and it is Victorian patients that are going to lose out. Hundreds of thousands of services will be lost out because of this tax grab when clinics close their doors and bulk-billing ceases.

So the action I seek is: what advice has the Treasurer given to the State Revenue Office for increased activity or increased auditing of GPs and other allied health professionals like dentists, physios and chiropractors? And we want to understand: what did the Premier tell the SRO to do to get a greater tax grab, which is going to have a massive impact on our health services?

Falun Gong

David LIMBRICK (South-Eastern Metropolitan) (18:04): (441) My request is for the Minister for Tourism, Sport and Major Events. During my time as a member for South-Eastern Metro I have come to know the practitioners of Falun Gong, also known as Falun Dafa. They promote and live their values of truth, compassion and forbearance. They are law-abiding, hardworking people with a strong value system, and we are lucky to have them in Australia. But unfortunately many of these people have been

subject to terrible human rights abuses by the Chinese Communist Party, and some of this bullying has not stopped even once they have moved to Australia. I am particularly horrified when they are treated poorly in Australia, as we saw a few years ago with some terrible reporting by the ABC's *Four Corners*. The ABC found very little of substance but tried to smear the whole movement, which greatly pleased the Chinese Communist Party. I would also say that true to the warnings provided by Falun Dafa, unfortunately the ABC's footage was used to justify continued persecution in China.

This brings me to the latest example of what appears to be institutional bullying in their new home. Each year they put on a spectacular show called Shen Yun, which showcases the best of traditional Chinese dance and music. I have been honoured to see this a number of times, most recently at the St Kilda Palais Theatre. It is great entertainment, and I can vouch there have never been any serious problems with security or anything else. So I was horrified to hear that Shen Yun was cancelled by the Melbourne Convention and Exhibition Centre despite the fact that there have been no problems with previous shows. The MCEC erroneously believes that there is a problem with Falun Dafa.

My request for action is for the Minister for Tourism, Sport and Major Events to meet with representatives of the Falun Dafa association to discuss these issues and ways for them to avoid these misunderstandings in the future. My office would be happy to put them in contact and help facilitate this in any way possible.

Melbourne Victory Football Club Afghan women's team

Michael GALEA (South-Eastern Metropolitan) (18:06): (442) Tonight I wish to raise a matter for the Minister for Tourism, Sport and Major Events in the other place, and the action that I seek is that the minister update the house on what the government is doing so that FIFA will officially recognise Afghanistan's national women's football team, which is based in Melbourne. On Friday night I was fortunate to spend time with participants of the Afghan locally engaged employee program, a terrific group in the south-east, as well as members of Melbourne Victory's Afghan women's team, including their captain Mursal Sadat.

Two years ago the team of Afghanistan's finest female players met at the Kabul airport, surrounded by Taliban men with guns, and fled their nation for safety abroad. Up until just days prior they had been on the pitch displaying the skills they had developed from a lifetime of love for the game and the self-discipline that had got them to a world-class standard. Their participation in the game was up until that time encouraged by the former Afghan administration. Players fled to many nations, and fortunately for us many of them came to Australia and to Melbourne. After a time of resettlement and recovery, the players were embraced by Melbourne Victory – a fantastic A-league club – and are now known as the Melbourne Victory Afghan women's team. Because the Taliban do not recognise the women's team as their national team, FIFA refuses to accept them as the national team, and therefore they were unable to participate in qualifiers for the World Cup. As she watched from the sidelines, captain Mursal Sadat said:

Every single moment I watched, I wished that my teammates were able to play and represent Afghanistan ...

It's just so hard to watch from the sidelines and not even be part of the qualifier games. You can see all your dreams and everything that you worked so hard for just fleeing from you. It feels like someone has cut it off our wings and we can't fly anymore.

Regretfully, by not recognising the team for who they are, FIFA is perpetuating gender inequality and breaching their own code of ethics. I encourage all members and others to lobby FIFA, as so many nations are now doing, and sign the petition #StandWithAfghanWomen, which has received well over 170,000 signatures to date and which I have proudly signed.

Delburn wind farm

Melina BATH (Eastern Victoria) (18:08): (443) My adjournment matter this evening is for the Minister for Planning in the other place, and the action I seek is for the minister to reject Delburn wind farm's new application to amend the four permit conditions. The Strzelecki Community Alliance Inc.

has over 1000 members and 483 households, which will be dispersed around and surrounding the proposed Delburn wind farm and will be directly impacted by the thirty-three 250-metre tall wind turbine development. Now, the reason it does not support the current wind farm proposal is not because the group does not agree with it and does not support renewable energy – on the contrary. This development fails to conform with the recommendations of the National Wind Farm Commissioner, who is now newly named the Australian Energy Infrastructure Commissioner. This group, a very decent set of people who I have had many an interaction with, is concerned that Delburn, the developer, have changed the permit conditions to suit their needs.

This area has almost 1600 dwellings within a 6-kilometre radius of these developments. They are concerned that the project certainly is amongst an area that has a significant bushfire history. Indeed the 2009 Delburn complex fires are etched in the minds and scarred into the souls of the people of Mirboo North, Darlimurla, Boolarra and Yinnar. They are concerned that 19 of these 250-metre-high turbines are within 200 metres of public roads – these are the new proposed amendments. They are concerned that some of those blades are actually only 20 metres off the Strzelecki Highway. They are concerned that there will be an aviation risk, and the Civil Aviation Safety Authority still does not consider the Delburn wind farm an acceptable risk to aviation safety. They have no confidence that the levels proposed will be acceptable in terms of noise. They also feel that the amendments serve to weaken the protection of community through limiting the scope of the project boundaries and the scope of the affected communities. They are rightly concerned, and I want to support their concerns. As they said, and I have agreed on other occasions, this is not against wind farms, but these amendments to the current proposal are an overreach and should not be considered by the minister.

Marine conservation

Georgie PURCELL (Northern Victoria) (18:11): (444) My adjournment matter is for the Minister for Environment, and the action I seek is for shark nets and drum lines to be prohibited in Victoria. Shark numbers in the open ocean have dropped by roughly 71 per cent in the past 50 years. A Senate inquiry into the effectiveness and regulation of shark mitigation and deterrent measures was told that culling and drum lines would not reduce the number of deaths in Australia. Despite our sensationalised fear of sharks, nobody has been killed by an attack in Victoria in over three decades. Attacks are rare everywhere, and yet Australia is one of the only countries in the world to actively kill sharks caught in nets and drum lines.

This state is home to 2500 kilometres of beautiful coastline and 170 types of sharks. From great whites and bronze whalers to 1.5-metre elephant sharks, Victoria has them all, and yet, thankfully, not once have shark nets or drum lines been considered necessary by the Victorian government. Instead we have successfully relied on community education, aerial droning and patrol boats to monitor and issue warnings. Effective surveillance coupled with a better understanding for sharks and their environment are why attack statistics are so low and not expected to rise.

Of 396 animals found in shark nets from 2018 to 2019 in New South Wales, only 23 were the intended targets. Twenty-three great whites, bull or tiger sharks and a further 372 innocent marine animals including dolphins, cownose rays and turtles were caught by these deathtraps. Biologists and conservationists have been campaigning for years to pull nets and drum lines from Australian beaches. Not only can sharks swim under, around and above the nets, but as Humane Society International pointed out, at least 40 per cent of sharks are caught on the beach side of nets trying to find their way back out into the open water. They are truly redundant. Drum lines are large baited hooks that lure sharks and other animals as they enter shallow water. Those caught can suffer for hours before they are ever discovered and either killed or released with an unknown fate. Interstate trials have consistently deemed them to be ineffective safety measures.

Despite this damning evidence, New South Wales and Queensland have recently announced that they will continue to net and bait over 130 beaches in the lead-up to this year's summer. Nets and drum lines

are stripping our oceans under the guise of protection, but sharks are vital to keeping our oceans healthy. I hope the minister will agree to never utilise either of these cruel and deadly traps in Victorian waters.

Voice to Parliament

Ryan BATCHELOR (Southern Metropolitan) (18:14): (445) My adjournment is to the Minister for Treaty and First Peoples, and the action I seek is an update on the progress made in Victoria on a treaty with our First Peoples and advice on the role that a First Peoples voice plays in that process. Victoria is the first Australian jurisdiction to commit to and action all elements of the *Uluru Statement from the Heart*: voice, treaty and truth. We are currently working through that treaty process at a state level. The First Peoples' Assembly of Victoria, now in its second term, serves as the independent voice to represent traditional owners of country and Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples in Victoria. The Assembly is laying the groundwork to negotiate treaties with the Victorian government. Victoria is showing the nation how the process of voice, treaty and truth can be done and the steps we all need to take together. One of those steps for our nation is going to be on 14 October, when Australians will have the opportunity to vote yes to the Voice to federal Parliament.

The Voice will ensure that Indigenous Australians are listened to when the federal Parliament discusses policies that impact their communities. For the past 250 years we have not properly listened to the people who have been here for more than 60,000, and it is time that we did. For decades we have spent billions on programs that have not delivered meaningful improvements for Indigenous communities, and the outcomes for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people just are not good enough – we must do better. Any step forward which gives First Nations people a bigger say in the decisions that affect their lives is a positive step and worth taking. It is a commonsense policy reform. It is common sense that policy reform works better when government listens to and works with communities to create change. As we are seeing in Victoria, the Voice will do exactly that. Importantly, by being put into the constitution, the Voice will have the security and independence that it needs to provide meaningful and honest advice.

For too many years First Nations people have been on the receiving end of misguided government programs and policies. It is time to right this wrong. I am voting yes because it is the right thing to do. There have been some who have teamed up to try and stop me from telling my constituents how I am going to vote in this referendum, but that is not going to work. I am proud to be voting yes and supporting a Voice to the federal Parliament. I am voting yes for a better future for First Nations people. With the *Uluru Statement from the Heart* Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Australians made a simple request: a voice in decisions that affect them. This year, on 14 October, we have the chance to take this next step on the path to reconciliation. Let us make it happen.

Energy policy

Bev McARTHUR (Western Victoria) (18:17): (446) My adjournment matter is for the Minister for Energy and Resources and concerns her department's *Offshore Wind Policy Directions Paper*, published in March 2022. On page 19, figure 7 states that achieving the 60 gigawatts of generation needed for the state's 95 per cent renewable energy target using only onshore wind and solar could require up to 70 per cent of Victoria's agricultural land. The figure was discussed in the Legislative Council Environment and Planning Committee's inquiry into renewable energy in Victoria public hearings. In the final report – I think it bears repetition:

... it could require the use of up to 70% of Victoria's agricultural land.

Of course I am sure the minister would say that figure would only apply were all of Victoria's electricity to be generated by onshore wind and solar. But the truth is the vast majority of it will be. The government itself says 60 gigawatts of electrical generation will be required for energy decarbonisation, yet the Department of Energy, Environment and Climate Action's own commitment to offshore wind is just 4 gigawatts by 2035 and then 9 gigawatts by 2040. That leaves an enormous gap to 60 gigawatts, one which can only be bridged by a massive increase in onshore wind and solar.

So the action I seek from the minister is to provide for Victorians a forecast on where that 60 gigawatts will come from. What percentage will come from onshore wind and solar, and consequently what percentage of Victorian agricultural land will be required? Does she agree with VicGrid CEO Alistair Parker who, when questioned at a public meeting, is reported to have said the percentage will be more like 55 per cent? In any case, this would be an absolute transformation of our state. For too long we have pretended that shiny green generation could exist without dirty great transmission lines. Without honesty on this transformation of Victorian land use, we will have the same kind of deception perpetrated on the Victorian people. We need up-front, honest information on the final destination now, not a field-by-field loss as we creep towards the targets.

Multicultural communities

Evan MULHOLLAND (Northern Metropolitan) (18:20): (447) My adjournment tonight is seeking action of the Minister for Multicultural Affairs, and the action I seek is an explanation of whether the government takes engagement with multicultural communities seriously. On Friday evening last week we saw the Victorian ALP win the gold medal for taking out the trash. They love sending media releases out late on Fridays. They, like most Victorians, really love footy finals and really love the Melbourne Cup, not for the reasons that we do but for the reasons of sending out media releases with bad news the night before so no-one will see them and they miss the 6 o'clock news programs.

Party monitor John Thwaites was unable to identify who was responsible for breaches of the rules relating to the renewal of memberships of deceased members – absolutely astonishing. Tom Donato, whose father Antonio's membership was renewed in 2018 and 2019, after his death, said it was completely inadequate. You have got to remember Antonio Donato had been diagnosed with dementia about seven years earlier. That makes the act of what has happened here even more disgusting. Are we seriously meant to believe that no-one knew who was forging the signatures of dead people? I tell you what: there are definitely a fair few on that side that know who it was, because they are busy briefing exactly who it was. Are we seriously meant to believe this? Forging signatures is a serious crime. I know Tom Donato, the son of the deceased, is heavily considering a police investigation into this, and I think that is a good course of action because forging signatures is a serious crime and we need to get to the bottom of what happened here, not some two-week review.

But this is how they treat multicultural communities. I see it for myself. This is how they treat multicultural communities in my community in the north, signing up memberships for dead people in my electorate and signing up lists, which they must have got from somewhere, of people in my electorate without their permission. It goes to show their disdain for multicultural communities. I read with interest an article in the *Age* where ALP member and mayor of Hume City Council Joseph Haweil said:

Internally within the Labor Party, multicultural communities have been used as electoral fodder for decades and for factional reasons ...

That is what they do on that side of the house. They use and abuse multicultural communities for factional reasons. I would like to send a message to this government and the ALP that I am not going to let this go.

Responses

Enver ERDOGAN (Northern Metropolitan – Minister for Corrections, Minister for Youth Justice, Minister for Victim Support) (18:23): There were 13 matters raised today: Ms Lovell to the Minister for Transport and Infrastructure; Mr Berger to the Minister for Education; Mr Puglielli to the Premier; Dr Heath to the Minister for Education; Ms Payne to the Minister for Tourism, Sport and Major Events; Ms Crozier to the Treasurer; Mr Limbrick to the Minister for Tourism, Sport and Major Events; Mr Galea to the Minister for Tourism, Sport and Major Events; Ms Bath to the Minister for Planning; Ms Purcell to the Minister for Environment; Mr Batchelor to the Minister for Treaty and

First Peoples; Mrs McArthur to the Minister for Energy and Resources; and Mr Mulholland to the Minister for Multicultural Affairs. I will make sure that all of those matters are passed on to the relevant ministers for an appropriate response.

Georgie Crozier: On a point of order, President, I am wondering if you could give some guidance. It has been a longstanding practice in this house that members are not to display political paraphernalia. There are a number of members that are displaying ‘yes’ badges, which is obviously a political campaign that is going on for the upcoming referendum. I am wondering if you could caution those members around the rulings of the Council.

The PRESIDENT: Thank you, Ms Crozier. I will take that into consideration overnight. Whether to determine if it is a political –

Georgie Crozier: Of course it is.

The PRESIDENT: That is what I will determine. Given that members have been alerted that they can use their communication allowance to make people aware of this particular referendum, whether they are saying that they will vote yes or whether they are saying that they will vote no, I will take it into consideration.

Georgie Crozier interjected.

The PRESIDENT: Do you have a further point of order? Do you want to go further?

Georgie Crozier: No, I think you’ve confirmed that you’re going to allow it.

Lee Tarlamis: On the point of order, President, there has been a determination by the Department of Parliamentary Services that we are allowed to express our position. We are not allowed to advocate, but we are allowed to express our position, so –

Georgie Crozier: On the referendum?

Lee Tarlamis: Yes.

Georgie Crozier: On the point of order, President, I think this is just starting to go down a bit of a slippery slope, because once we start this, when an election comes we can all have our Liberal paraphernalia, you can have all your Labor paraphernalia and the whole place will be a circus.

Lee Tarlamis interjected.

The PRESIDENT: I think we are just having a conversation across the chamber. Let me put it under consideration, Ms Crozier.

Georgie Crozier interjected.

The PRESIDENT: I am not being negative about your point of order; I will just take it into consideration. I think there was an interjection: ‘Maybe we’ll wear “no” badges’. Well, maybe that might be the case. We will see.

The house stands adjourned.

House adjourned 6:25 pm.