



Hansard

LEGISLATIVE COUNCIL

60th Parliament

Tuesday 1 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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Tuesday 1 August 2023

The PRESIDENT (Shaun Leane) took the chair at 12:04 pm, read the prayer and made an acknowledgement of country.

Condolences

Bill Hartigan

The PRESIDENT (12:04): I advise the house of the death on 13 July 2023 of Mr William ‘Bill’ Anthony Neville Hartigan, member of the Legislative Council for the electoral province of Geelong from 1992 to 1999. I ask members as a mark of respect to rise in their places for 1 minute’s silence.

Members stood in their places.

Hon. Thomas William Roper

Jaclyn SYMES (Northern Victoria – Attorney-General, Minister for Emergency Services) (12:06): I move:

That this house expresses its sincere sorrow at the death, on 21 June 2023, of the Honourable Thomas William Roper and places on record its acknowledgement of the valuable services rendered by him to the Parliament and the people of Victoria as a member of the Legislative Assembly from 1973 to 1994, for the electoral districts of Brunswick West from 1973 to 1976, Brunswick from 1976 to 1992 and Coburg from 1992 to 1994, and as Minister of Health from 1982 to 1985, Minister for Transport from 1985 to 1987, Minister for Planning and Environment and Minister for Consumer Affairs from 1987 to 1990, Treasurer from 1990 to 1992, Minister for Aboriginal Affairs from 1987 to 1990 and from 1991 to 1992, and Minister for Employment, Post-Secondary Education and Training and Minister for Gaming in 1992.

I will take the opportunity to extend my and the government’s sincerest condolences on the passing of such a remarkable individual. He influenced the lives of many in Victoria, and so many people mourn his loss. He was a true advocate for social justice, a compassionate community leader and a cherished friend to countless Victorians. Tom’s unwavering commitment to upholding the principles of fairness and equality made him an outstanding member of the Victorian Parliament, serving for, as we have heard, 21 years in a range of positions. Throughout his distinguished career he tirelessly championed the rights of the marginalised and vulnerable and was deeply committed to the cause of Aboriginal reconciliation. His contribution to shaping a more just and inclusive Victoria will be fondly remembered and reflected on often.

Tom’s commitment to education and social justice began early in life through his passion for addressing the inequalities faced by students. He also published a book, *The Myth of Equality*, in 1971. Tom’s career in public service started with the National Union of Australian University Students, where he was the national Aboriginal affairs officer, followed by serving as the education vice-president from 1968 to 1970. He also became a tutor at La Trobe University’s education school, further utilising his skills and solidifying his commitment to fostering an inclusive and equitable society.

He was a dedicated member of the Labor Party. He was elected to the Victorian Legislative Assembly, as we heard, in 1973, and he was only 28. He represented the constituents of Brunswick West, Brunswick and later Coburg, and throughout his tenure in Parliament he displayed an unwavering dedication to the betterment of Victoria, actively working to address social issues and promote positive change wherever he could. Tom’s leadership was evident as he assumed various ministerial roles – as I went through in the motion, many, many different roles, all of which he brought passion and commitment to. He additionally served as Leader of the House in the other place.

Even after retiring from politics in 1994 Tom continued to make significant contributions to various advisory councils and boards. He served on the Australian government advisory council, and he was a dedicated member of the Australian Hearing Services and the Climate Institute in Washington DC. His commitment to environmental conservation led him to become a board member of Greenfleet

Australia in 2003, where he served for 21 years. In recognition of his contribution he was presented with a milestone forest, 'Tom's Forest', planted in central Victoria and reflecting a life devoted to, among other things, promoting sustainability and advocating for the environment.

Beyond his professional accomplishments Tom Roper was a dedicated family man and a dear friend to many. His infectious warmth and genuine concern for others endeared him to those fortunate enough to cross paths with him. On behalf of the government I extend my condolences to his wife Anita, his three children and his broader family and friends.

Georgie CROZIER (Southern Metropolitan) (12:10): On behalf of the Liberals and Nationals, can I join with the government in acknowledging the death of the Honourable Tom Roper and also send our condolences to his family, friends and the broader Labor movement. Tom Roper was born in Sydney on 6 March 1945. He spent most of his young life there. I understand that he was educated in Sydney at North Sydney Boys High School and then went on to Sydney University, where he graduated with honours in arts and majored in history.

As the Leader of the Government has said, he became a very active member of Sydney University and became involved in politics at that time. His activism in politics started at Sydney University. He then went and worked at the National Union of Students as an Aboriginal affairs officer, later education vice-president. He then became an adviser to the federal Minister for Aboriginal Affairs at the time, Gordon Bryant, in 1973. So he did have a long interest in this area. I note that in recent years with his stroke that he was still advocating on behalf of, as the government has said, marginalised people, including those with disability.

Tom Roper then came to Victoria, and as a relatively young member at the age of 28 was elected as the member for Brunswick West 1973 to 1976, Brunswick 1976 to 1992 and Coburg 1992 to 1994. As has been well recognised, he was, in opposition, the Shadow Minister for Health under two different governments – from 1976 to 1982 and then again in 1992 to 1993. In government he held a range of portfolios: Minister for Health 1982 to 1985; Minister for Transport 1985 to 1987; Minister for Planning and Environment and Minister for Consumer Affairs 1987 to 1990; Treasurer 1990 to 1992, which were some very difficult times for the state of Victoria; Minister for Aboriginal Affairs 1987 to 1990 and 1991 to 1992; Minister for Employment, Post-Secondary Education and Training and Minister for Gaming from January to October 1992; Shadow Minister for Sport, Recreation, Racing and Gaming 1992 to 1993; and also Leader of the House for the period 1989 to 1992. So it is a broad range of experience in this house in his ministerial responsibilities with all of these portfolios that he held.

As the Leader of the Government said, he had a keen interest once leaving Parliament in taking on roles where he was recognised internationally with his environmental credentials and his interest in Aboriginal affairs and, as I said, with the sad circumstances of his stroke, in also advocating on behalf of people with a disability. Can I also lend support and condolences to his family, his wife, his three children and all those that knew the late Tom Roper.

Sheena WATT (Northern Metropolitan) (12:13): I rise to pay tribute to the late Honourable Tom Roper, a man who meant so much to my local community in Brunswick. Many in this place will know him as one of the great health ministers of this state or as the Treasurer of Victoria, but to me and many other First Nations people, we know him as a champion of Indigenous rights. Auntie Joy Murphy spoke so eloquently at his state funeral of a man who wanted to change things for the better and a man that absolutely valued the environment, the country and of course our connection to it. He was a First Peoples minister well before his time, a champion for change before it was popular, and I will be forever grateful for the reforms he achieved as Minister for Aboriginal Affairs. That can be seen in so many ways but locally in the only Aboriginal aged care home in Melbourne, the Aboriginal Community Elders Services in Brunswick East.

CONDOLENCES

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Brunswick is full of stories of Tom's love and passion for the community, and in unearthing these I discovered from Helen Politis, a much-loved local, that he was a true Labor warrior until the very end. Tom would make every effort to hand out how-to-vote cards for Labor in every election, and the last time she saw him, she told me, he had just come out of hospital and he was still recovering from surgery and yet insisted on knowing the location of the voting booth. He was planning on being there to support the ALP that he loved so much – so, so much was the depth of his love for the party that he gave so much of his life to.

But as much as he loved the party, the people of Brunswick loved him more, especially the Greek community. As sure as the sun rises, you would see Tom celebrating the richness of the Greek heritage in the north. He was seen at almost every cultural event and would stay for hours and hours and get into the spirit of things, including dancing, and in doing so would fill the room with laughter and good spirits. On behalf of the Greek community, many of whom have reached out to me in the weeks since, I thank him for his service and I mourn his loss.

Tom's impact is felt just about everywhere in Brunswick, including in his love of education and local schools. As a strong advocate for multiculturalism, he embraced the migrant community, mainly from Turkish, Greek, and Italian backgrounds. He pulled them close together and shared with them his passion for education and making sure that migrant families were very much involved in the decision-making of the school. Former Brunswick Girls High School teacher Prue Gill spoke in glowing terms of someone who was always campaigning for school upgrades and a new building and managed to find funds anywhere he could for the vital upgrades needed, including money from Whitlam's disadvantaged school fund, which kept the school so strong in Brunswick.

Of course I cannot go past Tom's love of sport. Like me, he was an absolute diehard supporter of the Carlton Blues. Somewhat unusually, though, he had some split loyalties, and just as loudly as he cheered for Carlton, he also cheered for the team of his partner Anita, the Fitzroy Football Club. Members of the Fitzroy Football Club remember a passionate supporter who was there for every home game and at every pre-game lunch. He was a popular figure who always supported vigorously from the concourse in front of the stands at Brunswick Street oval alongside Anita. He was known and loved by everyone at Fitzroy, and home games I hear have just not been the same since. To president David Leydon and all those involved in this special club, which is our most beloved Fitzroy, I am so sorry for your loss. It is no surprise that the first time I met Tom was at Brunswick Street oval. He was cheering louder than I ever thought possible, and at quarter time he peppered me with stories of Labor achievements, sage advice and some words about his long-term commitment to First Peoples. We even shared the same role as an advocate for Aboriginal peoples in our younger years, and yes, that filled up much conversation. The stories flowed between the goals and the marks of that Saturday afternoon and many other times after.

Tom, your legacy lives on in the lives changed and in the trees planted in your most fittingly named Tom's Forest. My condolences to all that loved you, and mostly to Anita and your beautiful children. Vale, Tom Roper.

David DAVIS (Southern Metropolitan) (12:19): I am only going to make a few remarks here to associate myself with this condolence motion for Tom Roper – 'Snappy Tom' in the community parlance. I did know Tom reasonably well. I did not serve with him in this Parliament, but I especially do remember that period through the 1980s when he was both health minister and later transport minister. I did also have significant dealings with him after he had left Parliament. He had his environmental interests, and he was a person who was prepared to talk to all parties and people of all different political backgrounds. He did provide useful advice in his various environmental roles and capacities, and he provided information to the opposition at various points too. I think it is important to recognise his ability to work across the chamber as well as that clearly he was a true Labor warrior, if I can describe him that way. There was much that we disagreed on, but there were things that he was able to impart that were valuable to our side of politics too.

I associate myself with this motion, noting his family. Anita of course was a Liberal, as people may know, and there are obviously those links there. But I should also say, perhaps more controversially, that he was a person who understood the standing orders and procedures of the Parliament very well indeed, and I will be slightly negative for just a moment: many believe that the slide in the Assembly – I am going to reflect on that chamber – commenced in the period before 1992 when Tom Roper innovated with more, let me say, robust sessional orders and so forth, some of which were adopted later by an incoming government. He also was a person who in opposition best knew how to create confusion and chaos in a chamber.

Members interjecting.

David DAVIS: No, I am just reflecting. I do not think these are, in one sense, controversial things. He understood both sides of the equation. But perhaps his legacy in the Assembly is not something that has served Victoria as well as it could have. I think there is plenty of scope for reform still in the Assembly these days. But on his passing, I think he was a larger-than-life figure in so many regards – during his time in transport and his time in health and, as I say, the period after he retired.

Ryan BATCHELOR (Southern Metropolitan) (12:22): Just a brief contribution today to pay tribute to the late Tom Roper, obviously a significant figure in Victorian Labor and in Labor governments and someone close to my family, who made an impression on me as a youngster in and around that period of Labor politics that he was part of. But I want to talk briefly about the contribution Tom made beyond his parliamentary career. You can read the parliamentary biography and it is significant, but there are equally significant things he did before he entered the Parliament – most significantly, it seems, was the book he wrote, *The Myth of Equality*, which was referenced earlier, as a research officer for what was then the National Union of Australian University Students. It was revolutionary for its time and made great use of statistics and analysis to demonstrate quite convincingly just how much universities in Australia were the provenance of wealth and privilege. It was the work that he did, the analysis that he did, which made such a fundamental impact on the policy settings and the policy directions of the Whitlam government and the transformation that the Whitlam government made to Australia's university system, transforming it and beginning the process of transformation from the provenance of wealth and privilege to one that is universally accessible. Many benefited from that right across our community.

Ms Watt has touched on his engagement with our First Nations communities. He was in fact brought to Melbourne by a job with the Abschol scholarship scheme, which was a not-for-profit organisation set up to support First Nations students going to university. This was a job that was given to him, and he was employed by John Ridley, who was a former state director of the Liberal Party. So we have John to thank for bringing Tom to us in Melbourne.

There is a very interesting oral history project on the National Library of Australia website which I listened to last night, on the suggestion of my old man. One of the stories that Tom tells is of a trip he took in the early 1970s to a UNESCO conference in the United States on university governance. Not content with just going to the conference to do the one thing he was there to do, he went out and spent some time with the Navajo community, and he learned about how they were delivering education in language and reflected on what we were doing in Australia. At a time when this practice was not only not encouraged but was prohibited in many parts of the country and at a time when many Aboriginal children were not allowed to speak their own language in their schools, Tom was part of the push to get that changed. He was a fervent supporter of self-determination for Aboriginal people during his time prior to public life, during public life and post.

He was obviously a big supporter of environmental movements. He never stopped being engaged in the issues of the day. His advocacy for accessibility on our tram network was just one of the things that he was so passionate about. He was gregarious, which is why he left such an impression on a young me, and behind his smile – his cherub smile, which will always remain a feature of my memory – was a person who cared about people, and you saw that in everything that he did. He will

be missed by many, notably his family, so we send our love to Anita and his children. And he will be missed by the Labor Party a lot.

The PRESIDENT (12:26): I might take the liberty of just adding briefly to this condolence motion, taking up Mr Batchelor's point that Tom Roper was someone who cared about people. He left a huge impression on me the first time I met him and every time I spoke to him after that. The first time I met him, a long, long time ago, was when I had first come out of my apprenticeship. I was an electrician and had a responsibility for the electrics on a level of a building called Transport House. It was near completion and the tenants were moving in, and at this period of time these blokes in suits were coming on site with hard hats and for a few days in a row were giving me grief about, 'Oh, I don't think the minister would actually appreciate this aerial here and there,' to the point that on the second day, when they tried me on, I said, 'Listen, if you talk to me like this again, every electrician is walking off this job and will never come back and complete it, right, so you need to stop now.' A few days later more blokes in suits turned up – more, as in a dozen – and a shorter guy came through the pack and made a beeline to me, and it was Tom Roper. Obviously, he was the minister that was going to take over this office, and he spent what seemed like at least 10 or 15 minutes just talking to me about the industry and about the next job. He complimented me and the apprentice on the work that we had done and at the end of the conversation said, 'Thanks, guys. Thanks for the work. It's been a pleasure to meet you.' And I said, 'It's been a pleasure to meet you as well, Tom. I am rapt at what a terrific fellow you are, especially after your buddies there have been so ordinary.' As I said, every time I met him as a younger MP, he made time, and he cared about people. So, Mr Batchelor, I could not agree with what you have said any more.

The question is that the house extends its condolences on the passing of the Honourable Tom William Roper. Can I ask members to signify their assent by rising in their place for 1 minute's silence.

Motion agreed to in silence, members showing unanimous agreement by standing in their places.

The PRESIDENT: The proceedings will now suspend as a further mark of respect, and I will resume the chair at 1:30.

Sitting suspended 12:30 pm until 1:33 pm.

John Karpathakis

The PRESIDENT (13:33): I just want to make an acknowledgement on behalf of all of us in the chamber of the passing of John Karpathakis. On behalf of the chamber I wish to extend our sincere condolences to family and friends of John Karpathakis. John, unfortunately, passed away on 28 June. He had worked at the Parliament for the last seven years as part of the Wilson Security team. His smiling face and friendly demeanour will be missed by all MPs and staff.

Members

Ministry

Jaclyn SYMES (Northern Victoria – Attorney-General, Minister for Emergency Services) (13:33): President, I reiterate your comments in relation to John – a friendly, regular face that we will all miss, and our thoughts are with the broader staff who would have had a lot more to do with him on a regular basis as well.

I just want to confirm to the house that the government has resigned the commissions of the ministerial portfolios of Commonwealth Games delivery and Commonwealth Games legacy. For the purposes of question time it would be my initial view that most questions in relation to programs and subsequently announced initiatives would be in the first instance more than likely appropriate for the Minister for Regional Development, given a lot of the programs will be in her remit. Otherwise we will consider how the questions go. But it is certainly our intention to provide avenues for any questions that the

house has in relation to those portfolios, and between Minister Shing and me we will endeavour to ensure that occurs.

Bills

Appropriation (2023–2024) Bill 2023

Appropriation (Parliament 2023–2024) Bill 2023

Children and Health Legislation Amendment (Statement of Recognition, Aboriginal Self-determination and Other Matters) Bill 2023

State Taxation Acts Amendment Bill 2023

Victorian Future Fund Bill 2023

Royal assent

The PRESIDENT (13:35): I have received a message from the Lieutenant-Governor, dated 27 June:

The Lieutenant-Governor, as the Governor's deputy, informs the Legislative Council that he has, on this day, given the Royal Assent to the undermentioned Act of the present Session presented to him by the Deputy Speaker:

15/2023 Appropriation (2023–2024) Act 2023

16/2023 Appropriation (Parliament 2023–2024) Act 2023

I have received a further message from the Lieutenant-Governor, dated 27 June:

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

17/2023 Children and Health Legislation Amendment (Statement of Recognition, Aboriginal Self-determination and Other Matters) Act 2023

18/2023 State Taxation Acts Amendment Act 2023

19/2023 Victorian Future Fund Act 2023

Questions without notice and ministers statements

Commonwealth Games

Georgie CROZIER (Southern Metropolitan) (13:36): (201) My question is for the Minister for Regional Development. Minister, at public accounts and estimates hearings in June of this year, 2023, you confirmed that:

... the \$2.6 billion that is in the 2022–23 budget is for the entire games.

In the same month the government told Commonwealth Games Australia the cost was \$4 billion and a few weeks ago told Victorians the cost was \$7 billion. Minister, can you explain how the Commonwealth Games blew out by \$4.4 billion in barely six weeks?

Harriet SHING (Eastern Victoria – Minister for Water, Minister for Regional Development, Minister for Equality) (13:36): Thank you, Ms Crozier, for that question. Again, just to reiterate what the Leader of the Government has said, I am really happy to provide the chamber with –

Georgie Crozier interjected.

Harriet SHING: I am trying to assist here, Ms Crozier. I am really happy to provide the chamber with information and assistance around the Commonwealth Games delivery legacy components within the work of regional development. I hope that this will assist the chamber in that regard, and I do not wish to create any precedent that might be used for any other portfolios.

Georgie Crozier interjected.

Harriet SHING: Ms Crozier, I am just getting to the point where I can assist you, okay? One of the things that we did have within the 2022–23 budget was the opportunity to secure \$2.6 billion. Two billion dollars of that funding is now going toward the regional boost package, which will see a range of initiatives delivered and brought on line from now. That includes \$1 billion in social and affordable housing, which adds to the \$1.25 billion in regional Victoria. It also includes \$150 million for the Regional Worker Accommodation Fund. It includes \$150 million for the visitor economy and tourism fund. It includes \$25 million to assist councils to defray the costs associated with work in preparation for 2026. It includes an additional \$10 million for the Tiny Towns Fund. It includes \$20 million for –

Georgie Crozier: On a point of order, President, I understand the minister wants to speak about this disastrous legacy that this government are leaving and what they are now promoting, but the question was: can the minister explain how the Commonwealth Games blew out by \$4.4 billion in barely six weeks since the time she was in PAEC and told that committee that there was a cost of \$2.6 billion? It is a very simple question, President.

The PRESIDENT: I get your point of order. The minister still has a minute and 31 seconds for her answer, so I will call the minister to the question.

Harriet SHING: Thank you, President. I will just continue to round this out a little, given the information that you are seeking in other matters this week. We have also got \$550 million to deliver permanent sporting infrastructure, \$60 million for community sport infrastructure and programs, \$40 million for an all-abilities fund and a range of other initiatives, including multicultural events and festivals.

Ms Crozier, it is always really important to read quotes in context, and what I would do is take you directly to –

Georgie Crozier: On a point of order, President, I will say the quote again to the minister:

... the \$2.6 billion that is in the 2022–23 budget is for the entire games.

That is the quote.

The PRESIDENT: I brought the minister back to the question on your last point of order, and I think she was about to get to the answer, so I will call the minister.

Harriet SHING: Ms Crozier, again you have just done yourself a little bit of a disservice, because the question that was asked at the time was from Mrs McArthur, and the question was:

As a legacy of these Commonwealth Games –

That is from Mrs McArthur:

As a legacy of these Commonwealth Games, how much is going to be spent on infrastructure projects that will leave a legacy?

That is the question, Ms Crozier, that I then responded to. And what I did say just now, if you were listening, was that we are delivering \$550 million for sporting infrastructure. And what I also said in response to Mrs McArthur's question is:

I am really happy to provide you with the information that splits up what has been done, but it is also important to note –

between infrastructure and legacy –

that the \$2.6 billion –

that you have just quoted me on –

... is for the entire games. We are in the process of developing the split around where allocation will occur and how, and that is ... why community partnerships are so important.

Context and misquoting, Ms Crozier – really important.

Georgie CROZIER (Southern Metropolitan) (13:41): I think the entire chamber realises the minister did not answer the question, so my supplementary is: according to reports, Minister, the government's original costings for the Commonwealth Games did not include security and transport and underestimated the cost of multiple athletes villages; why were such basic elements of the event completely unaccounted for, and why should Victorians trust the government to manage major projects when costs blow out by so much?

Harriet SHING (Eastern Victoria – Minister for Water, Minister for Regional Development, Minister for Equality) (13:41): Thank you, Ms Crozier, for that supplementary. Again, the answer to your supplementary, as is the answer to your substantive, is found in the transcript that you are referring to now, and Mrs McArthur in fact helpfully set that out in a couple of questions. You want to –

Members interjecting.

The PRESIDENT: Order! It is very difficult to expect that I am to determine whether the minister has answered the question or not when I cannot hear her, and she is interjected on to the point that she cannot even hear herself and continue. If the opposition want an answer, can the minister be heard in silence.

Harriet SHING: Thank you very much, President. Thank you, Ms Crozier. As I said, Mrs McArthur had a follow-up question to the one which you have just quoted me on, Ms Crozier, and did actually refer to the \$2.6 billion forecast for Commonwealth Games expenditure, including intended contributions from the Commonwealth government and local government, and then asked:

How much has the government requested from each local council and how much was the intended contribution from the federal government?

So thank you, Mrs McArthur, for setting the scene for a complete and probably a bit embarrassing misrepresentation from you, Ms Crozier. I had then gone onto the record to say –

Georgie Crozier: On a point of order, President, do I have to repeat the supplementary? It had nothing to do with what the minister is now responding to. I am happy to ask the question again, because I am not sure she understood it.

The PRESIDENT: I do not think that is necessary. The minister has got 6 seconds.

Harriet SHING: I would refer you to my answer in PAEC:

You realise that the Commonwealth Games can be funded through multiple budgets, Mrs McArthur, which is why those conversations are continuing with the Commonwealth.

That is the quote, Ms Crozier. I hope it will assist.

Extremism

Samantha RATNAM (Northern Metropolitan) (13:43): (202) My question is to the Leader of the Government, representing the Premier. Over the weekend another disturbing event was organised by neo-Nazis, this time in Sunshine West. Reports are that white supremacist groups the National Socialist Network and the European Australian Movement held a two-day event for members of the nationalist community at a gym. The slogan they used on their posters to advertise the event said 'Australia for the white man'. This movement seems to be more emboldened, there are more frequent events and it is terrifying. Brave community protesters are exposing these gatherings, and I fear that

without them these white supremacists would be going unchallenged and unchecked. How are Victoria's culturally diverse communities meant to feel safe with these escalating threats? My question is, Attorney: what is the government's response to this most recent event?

Jaclyn SYMES (Northern Victoria – Attorney-General, Minister for Emergency Services) (13:44): I thank Dr Ratnam for her question and join her in expressing concern about that conduct and about that behaviour and the message that it is sending to Victorians that do not deserve to have those messages targeted at them. There are a range of government initiatives designed to tackle the rise of this unacceptable behaviour, a lot of it in my portfolio in relation to anti-vilification, and that work is a priority and ongoing. There is a lot of work also in relation to Minister Brooks's portfolio into social cohesiveness, multicultural communities, empowerment and the like. It is fair to say this is a community issue, and hearing other people call it out other than just leaders – which we are all committed to doing – is something that I am particularly proud of in our state. There are a lot of people that condemn this behaviour and there are a lot of people that stand up to this behaviour, and as the government is committed to doing that we hope more and more people will join with us in that cause.

Samantha RATNAM (Northern Metropolitan) (13:45): Thank you very much, Attorney. I appreciate that response, and I appreciate the efforts the government is making on a number of fronts in those portfolio areas you mentioned, along with efforts to ban far-right symbols. However, the concern is that it is clearly not dampening the enthusiasm of these racists far enough. In fact the parliamentary inquiry that was conducted in this place in the last term into the rise of far-right extremism recommended a whole range of things, including community-wide social cohesion and anti-racism awareness raising, amongst other actions it outlined. My question is: when will we see these scaled-up actions that inquiries like that inquiry recommended the government get on with as a matter of urgency?

Jaclyn SYMES (Northern Victoria – Attorney-General, Minister for Emergency Services) (13:46): I thank you for your supplementary question, and I am sure we will have ongoing conversations about these issues. There are a lot of programs underway. Maybe I will allow the Premier's office to provide you with a comprehensive list. I have covered off some of them. There is work going on with Victoria Police. There is a lot of work in education. There is a collection of work. It is a beefed-up response. I am sure I can provide you with greater detail that lists it for you so that you can come and talk to us about any of the ones you are particularly interested in perhaps participating in.

Ministers statements: regional development

Harriet SHING (Eastern Victoria – Minister for Water, Minister for Regional Development, Minister for Equality) (13:47): It is a pleasure to rise today as Minister for Regional Development to talk about the regional fund, which will deliver more than \$2 billion across rural and regional Victoria to make sure that we are bringing forward investments from 2026 to leave an extraordinary legacy of social and affordable housing – more than 1300 permanent dwellings, energy-efficient, accessible, modern, fit for purpose, able to meet the challenges of population growth – as well as a Regional Worker Accommodation Fund of \$150 million to make sure that we can address one of the most important issues raised consistently with all of us as regional MPs around shortage of workforce and of housing. It is absolutely vital that we continue these careful conversations, these partnerships –

Members interjecting.

The PRESIDENT: Order!

Harriet SHING: Thank you very much. It was good, in fact, that the shadow minister for legacy referred to legacy as being the most important part of the games, because what I am here to actually do is continue to provide the house with information about what this extraordinary legacy will be. As I said, there is \$1 billion in social and affordable housing, \$150 million for regional workforce accommodation, \$60 million for community sport and programs, \$40 million for an all-abilities fund, \$25 million for local councils which were hub locations, plus Shepparton, plus \$2 million for grants

to other councils, a Tiny Towns Fund of \$10 million for towns of up to 5000 people – many of you would have a number of those in your communities – a \$20 million First Nations economic diversification fund and \$550 million for permanent sporting infrastructure, a fantastic series of projects and initiatives.

Commonwealth Games

Georgie CROZIER (Southern Metropolitan) (13:49): (203) My question is again to the Minister for Regional Development. Minister, last week Victorian negotiators left London without reaching a deal on Victoria's Commonwealth Games cancellation fee, with a report suggesting the bill could be over \$1 billion. Is this the legacy that regional Victorians will have to pay for the minister's mismanagement?

Harriet SHING (Eastern Victoria – Minister for Water, Minister for Regional Development, Minister for Equality) (13:50): Thank you, Ms Crozier, for that question. You may seek to run a commentary on negotiations; I certainly do not intend to.

Georgie CROZIER (Southern Metropolitan) (13:50): Again the minister is trying to fudge and spin and did not answer my question, so I will try again. Will you, Minister, apologise for the \$1 billion the government has forced Victorians to pay?

Harriet SHING (Eastern Victoria – Minister for Water, Minister for Regional Development, Minister for Equality) (13:50): Thank you, Ms Crozier. Your supplementary, as was your substantive, is riven with hypotheticals and suppositions.

Georgie Crozier: What is it then? How do you know?

Harriet SHING: Well, how do you know, Ms Crozier? As I have said repeatedly, neither the Premier nor the Deputy Premier nor I intend to traverse any of the details that are the subject of negotiations. Those negotiations need to be able to continue without commentary and without interference, as attractive as that may be as a proposition to you. I intend to make sure that those negotiations can continue without those amongst us who are not in fact in the room as they occur.

COVID-19 vaccination

David LIMBRICK (South-Eastern Metropolitan) (13:51): (204) My question is for the minister representing the minister for WorkSafe Victoria. The *Herald Sun* reported yesterday that injuries from COVID vaccines have resulted in \$4.37 million in WorkCover claims. This is related apparently to 125 essential services workers, with 40 cases still open. It has taken far too long to recognise that some people experience adverse reactions to vaccines, but I am glad that they are receiving some recognition and support now. It is not really a surprise to me, as many of these people called my office during 2021 and 2022. In fact of the hundreds of people that contacted me with concerns about the mandates, the most common reasons were that either they had complex medical conditions or someone close to them had had an adverse reaction. My question for the minister is simply this: why are these considered workplace injuries?

Jaclyn SYMES (Northern Victoria – Attorney-General, Minister for Emergency Services) (13:52): I thank Mr Limbrick for his question for the minister for WorkSafe. I will pass that on to Minister Pearson, and he will respond in accordance with the standing orders.

David LIMBRICK (South-Eastern Metropolitan) (13:52): I thank the Attorney-General for passing that on. The article in the *Herald Sun* describes one example of an otherwise healthy teacher who experienced severe pericarditis after having the vaccine, eventually requiring open-heart surgery. The article also notes that many do not want to speak publicly about their experience due to stigma, as though acknowledging that some people experience severe and sometimes complex reactions to vaccines is a bad thing. So I would like to ask the minister: could the minister please describe the general nature of these injuries that are requiring payments from WorkCover?

Jaclyn SYMES (Northern Victoria – Attorney-General, Minister for Emergency Services) (13:53): Mr Limbrick, whilst I am happy to pass on your supplementary question, it occurs to me that there may be some impediments to providing that level of information, given that there would be individual privacy concerns and there would be individual files that are not appropriate to be provided to the minister and the like. But having said that, your question stands and I will pass it on. I am sure the minister will be happy to assist as much as he can.

Ministers statements: the Torch

Enver ERDOGAN (Northern Metropolitan – Minister for Corrections, Minister for Youth Justice, Minister for Victim Support) (13:53): I recently had the great pleasure of attending the *Confined 14* exhibition at Glen Eira town hall. It is the latest in a series of exhibitions presented by a fantastic organisation called the Torch. Since 2011 the Torch has been providing Aboriginal people in the criminal justice system with arts, cultural and vocational support that helps them to stay connected to culture and turn their lives around. Of course this program is delivered in partnership; it is a great private and public partnership between the Torch and our government.

But this is much more than just an arts program. For Aboriginal people in custody the Torch provides Aboriginal-led support to learn about their language group and their culture and country, as well as to develop valuable skills. Once people are released, the Torch continues to support them to build their cultural knowledge, confidence and art practice. *Confined 14* presents more than 450 artworks by First Nations artists. I was impressed by the quality of the artworks, but more than that I was moved by the stories of the people that had turned their lives around with the support of the Torch.

I was joined at the exhibition by a number of special guests, including the CEO and head curator Kent Morris and members of our Yilam team, Corrections Victoria's Aboriginal staff, who work day in, day out to support Aboriginal people in custody. They are a highly skilled and respected group who work in a difficult environment. Their efforts and frontline work in the corrections system are enormous in making a difference to Aboriginal people getting out of prison and staying out of prison.

I also want to thank a member for Southern Metropolitan Mr Batchelor for making the time to join me. I am sure that he found the experience just as valuable as I did. I want to congratulate the Torch on another successful annual exhibition and again thank them for their ongoing work supporting Aboriginal people in custody.

Integrity and Oversight Committee

David DAVIS (Southern Metropolitan) (13:55): (205) My question is for the Attorney-General. I refer, Attorney, to the Integrity and Oversight Committee hearing yesterday, at which former IBAC Commissioner the Honourable Robert Redlich AM KC gave evidence and at which the four Labor members launched a coordinated attack on the Commissioner. And I therefore ask: did you, Attorney-General, or any member of your staff speak to or otherwise communicate with one or more of the Labor members of the Integrity and Oversight Committee before the hearing about the hearing?

Jaclyn SYMES (Northern Victoria – Attorney-General, Minister for Emergency Services) (13:56): I thank Mr Davis for his question, and I am aware that there was a hearing yesterday. My understanding is that the Commissioner was giving evidence in relation to the performance –

Adem Somyurek: Former Commissioner.

Jaclyn SYMES: Former Commissioner. He was being questioned about the performance of IBAC. That is a role that the IOC have. They do performance audits of our integrity agencies, and I understand that Mr Redlich was invited to be a witness for that despite the fact he no longer holds that position. So it is obvious that the statements he made were informed with experience but made as a private citizen. I knew that it was occurring, because I had heard through a member of the committee that it was happening, and that is the extent of the conversation in relation to 'there are hearings coming up', but it mimicked what was reported in the media.

David DAVIS (Southern Metropolitan) (13:57): I thank the Attorney-General for her response, and I ask: Attorney, did you or anyone in your office assist, after you were informed, in the extraordinary attack on Mr Redlich or otherwise facilitate the attack on the IBAC Commissioner?

Jaclyn SYMES (Northern Victoria – Attorney-General, Minister for Emergency Services) (13:57): The commentary is an extraordinary opinion that you may hold, Mr Davis. The matter that you speak of is a matter for the committee. The questions that they ask are a matter for personal committee members, and I did not have a role in participating in the committee, nor should I.

Shooting sports

Jeff BOURMAN (Eastern Victoria) (13:58): (206) My question could go to a number of people. It could go to the Minister for Regional Development, the Minister for Community Sport or whoever represents what is left of the Commonwealth Games, so I am going to read it out and see how we go. I suspect it is the Minister for Community Sport. Whilst Victorians living in Melbourne are concerned about the sheer waste of time and money, in areas like the Latrobe Valley the ripple effect of the government's recent cancelling of the 2026 Commonwealth Games will be felt for years to come. Part of the preplanning for the games involved pledges of funding for shooting facilities in regional areas. For the most part this was previously allocated spending reannounced, but it was appreciated all the same. My question is: will the government be allocating actual new money for shooting infrastructure in regional Victoria so there is at least a real legacy for communities that have been promised so much but delivered so little?

The PRESIDENT: We will call the Minister for Regional Development.

Harriet SHING (Eastern Victoria – Minister for Water, Minister for Regional Development, Minister for Equality) (13:59): Thank you, Mr Bourman, for that question and for your ongoing interest in the work of shooting clubs across the state in the way in which they bring people together for practice, for competition and indeed for a range of other purposes. I was pleased to meet with the Morwell club last Friday to talk about the ongoing commitments that we have to upgrading the facilities there, including ranges and other facilities. They are getting me some further information so that we can make sure that that permanent development occurs in a way that brings additional events to that club. It is a really popular club, and we want to make sure that it also sits alongside other clubs across Gippsland.

The Leader of the Nationals was somewhat crestfallen that his part of the state did not perhaps get the attention that he was after with shooting, but I can confirm that the \$60 million community sports fund will provide opportunities for infrastructure developments and for upgrades within rural and regional Victoria, which may well fall very squarely within the areas that you are talking about as they relate to shooting activities, to club work, to competition and indeed to the sport at large.

Jeff Bourman: Thank you, Minister. Unfortunately for me, you answered my supplementary question, so that is all I have got.

Ministers statements: kindergarten funding

Ingrid STITT (Western Metropolitan – Minister for Early Childhood and Pre-Prep, Minister for Environment) (14:01): I rise to update the house on the work that the Andrews Labor government is doing to build the kinders of the future. Last month I was really pleased to join the member for Broadmeadows at Gowrie Broadmeadows to announce the locations of 12 new or expanded kindergartens set to open in 2025. These kinders will deliver almost 900 additional free kinder places in growing communities, ensuring that no matter what your postcode is children across Victoria get the best start in life.

New or expanded kinders on existing school sites will be located at Tootgarook Primary School, Devon Meadows Primary School, Kerang South Primary School, Mildura South Primary School, Echuca Primary School, Thornbury High School, Wallan Secondary College, Broadmeadows Valley

Primary School and Wonthaggi North Primary School. We are also delivering three kinders on new school sites in 2025 at Topirum Primary School, Riverdale North primary school and Wollert central primary school. This is all part of our commitment to end the double drop-off for more Victorian families and make the transition to school so much easier for children.

I was pleased to open the new Kurmboon Child and Family Centre in Officer last week with Emma Vulin MP – an excellent MP – where I witnessed firsthand the incredible relationship that can be built between a kinder and a school. The service is located next to the Orchard Park Primary School, and principal Nathan Jagoe regularly visits, building relationships with the children. I am proud that our government is getting on and delivering for our littlest learners.

Commonwealth Games

Wendy LOVELL (Northern Victoria) (14:03): (207) My question is for the Minister for Regional Development. Minister, last week I met with the proprietors of the Huntly Hotel in Greater Bendigo, who have plans for a 25-unit motel facility and a significant expansion and refurbishment of their existing dining and entertainment facilities. These plans had been made knowing the regional Commonwealth Games would bring a significant tourism boost to Bendigo, both in the lead-up to and during the games, as well as an ongoing tourism boost from the international exposure. Minister, when the government made the decision to host the 2026 Commonwealth Games, what was the dollar value of private sector investment the government estimated would be made in regional communities?

The PRESIDENT: I am not too sure if that would have fallen under even the previous responsibilities of the –

Wendy LOVELL: No, it is regional development.

The PRESIDENT: I will let the minister answer as she sees fit.

Harriet SHING (Eastern Victoria – Minister for Water, Minister for Regional Development, Minister for Equality) (14:04): Thank you, Ms Lovell. Bendigo is absolutely booming, and when we think about the investments that have been made, including to the art gallery, to the work that we are doing across the GovHub and to the extraordinary collection of events basically showcasing this part of the world to everyone from around Victoria and around Australia, it says a lot about the work that the local members have been doing. What I would say, Ms Lovell, is that as indicated by the Premier, by the Deputy Premier and by me we have said that we are very happy to provide information and detail about decisions taken once negotiations with the CGF, the CGA and government have concluded. Until then, I do not intend to run a commentary on those matters.

Wendy Lovell: On a point of order, President, my question was about private sector investment, which must have been factored into the decision to host the Commonwealth Games. It was not about compensation. The minister is saying that she is not happy to answer questions while there are ongoing negotiations. This is something that has nothing to do with those ongoing negotiations.

The PRESIDENT: I cannot force the minister to answer in a certain way. I think she has made a response that any details will be available after the negotiations are finished. But I call the minister; she has still got another 2 minutes.

Harriet SHING: Ms Lovell, you clearly know more about negotiation strategy and approaches than anybody else in this Parliament, including as they may be being undertaken in rooms that nobody else here is in, including me. Ms Lovell, as the Premier, the Deputy Premier and I have said on numerous occasions now, we are very happy to provide information and detail about business cases and costings and analysis once negotiations have been completed. I look forward to the conclusion of those negotiations. I also look forward to being able to assist, Ms Lovell, the particular business in Bendigo with understanding how they can get involved in the \$60 million fund for regional tourism infrastructure, which also provides businesses looking to expand upon their work in the visitor economy with a range of opportunities to secure that sort of funding, which is intended to directly lead

to greater levels of visitation and of visitor and tourism exposure for regional Victoria. This is the entire purpose of the \$2 billion, including through the permanent infrastructure that we are delivering. When we have an additional 5000 seats at Eureka Stadium plus additional accessibility, for example, Ms Lovell, we will be in a position to host even more world-class events than are already taking place. Ms Lovell, I look forward to seeing you at some of them.

In addition to that, I would urge you to go back to that business or indeed to provide me with their details. I am very happy to talk them through that \$60 million fund for regional tourism and infrastructure. Anything that I can do to assist might well serve that particular business better than the approach that you have taken here today.

Wendy LOVELL (Northern Victoria) (14:08): Clearly there is no shame. Minister, you talked about the art gallery. The government actually asked the art gallery to put their expansion off until after the Commonwealth Games. That will be a long time. When are we going to host those Commonwealth Games? Minister, in addition to the Huntly Hotel's plans, there were two 5-star hotels planned in Greater Bendigo and many other venues were considering expansions and upgrades. These investments are now at risk of cancellation or downsizing due to the cancellation of the games. What advice has the minister been given or sought from her department on the value of private sector investment that may now be lost due to the cancellation of the games?

Harriet SHING (Eastern Victoria – Minister for Water, Minister for Regional Development, Minister for Equality) (14:08): Thank you, Ms Lovell, for that supplementary question. Again, there is a lot of hypothetical in there. You finished your question by saying 'that may well be lost'. When we talk about the decision that was taken on the 18th, it is important to note that \$6 billion is not something that stacks up for a 12-day event, but a package of more than \$2 billion does assist us with providing regional businesses with a number of opportunities to expand, to host increased visitor numbers and to put regional and rural Victoria on the map. Ms Lovell, I look forward to your enthusiasm in being able to provide information to the businesses that you have referred to.

On the Bendigo Art Gallery, Ms Lovell, I am so proud of the work that we have done –

David Davis: On a point of order, President, the question was about private sector investment. I do not think a word on private sector investment has come out of the member's lips.

Harriet SHING: On the point of order, President, Mr Davis clearly was not listening to Ms Lovell's supplementary question, in which she did actually refer to I think everything that I have spoken to. I am being entirely apposite because I am trying to provide you, Ms Lovell, with information to assist you to help people in communities who deserve to get the benefit of these investments.

Members interjecting.

The PRESIDENT: Order! The minister was being relevant to the supplementary question. She has got 1 second.

Harriet SHING: Thanks, Ms Lovell.

Bail laws

Katherine COPSEY (Southern Metropolitan) (14:10): (208) My question is to the Attorney-General about the delays in reforming Victoria's punitive and broken bail laws. It has been reported that the Andrews Labor government is considering delaying bail reform by yet another year, when in the last 12 months, from May 2022 to May 2023, the number of Aboriginal people in Victoria's prisons grew by 19.9 per cent. Overall more than one in three people currently in detention in Victoria are not sentenced, a figure that is even higher for women at 40 per cent. Every day that we wait for meaningful bail reform is another day we detain unsentenced people in this state from vulnerable communities, another day we risk a tragedy like that of Veronica Nelson's passing being repeated. Attorney, can

you please explain to First Nations communities and stakeholders why this shocking fact alone – a 20 per cent increase in the last 12 months – is not enough impetus to pass bail reforms that address this immediately without further delay.

Jaclyn SYMES (Northern Victoria – Attorney-General, Minister for Emergency Services) (14:11): I thank Ms Copsey for her question and her interest in this important matter. As the house would be aware, I am on the public record committing to bail reform. There has been an extensive amount of consultation in relation to landing that reform. It is incredibly complex work. We want to get it right. My main objective is to ensure that we have a system that is not unnecessarily imprisoning vulnerable people. We want to ensure that public safety is paramount. These are very difficult things to balance and get right. We are looking at the thresholds, at the tests. I have been very open in this consultation in relation to landing this legislation. It is very close; it will be in the Parliament very soon. It is not open to me to confirm what is in it through question time, but I am more than happy to take you through that bill in due course as it is in its final drafting stages.

Katherine COPSEY (Southern Metropolitan) (14:12): Thank you, Attorney, for that answer. We do look forward to seeing the bill when it is introduced. The coroner, legal experts, First Nations advocates, human rights organisations, the law reform commission, communities and families have been crystal clear in calling for the same elements for bail reform for years. It was brought into even sharper focus in January with the coroner's report into the death of Veronica Nelson and indeed your own evidence at Yoorrook, so reports yesterday that the government is considering not meeting those recommendations are concerning. Why would you water down what your experts are telling you is the minimum to fix this problem, and why do you feel you can disregard the formal recommendations of a coronial inquest?

Jaclyn SYMES (Northern Victoria – Attorney-General, Minister for Emergency Services) (14:13): Ms Copsey, you have not seen the bill yet, so to put me in a situation where you want to know what is in it and what is not in it and who I have listened to and who I have not is not something that I can facilitate in 60 seconds. I am more than happy to bring you through the content of the bill. Yes, you have listed a lot of stakeholders. They have all been involved in the consultation, but I can assure you I have to consult with people that disagree with that as well. That is part of my job. My job is about balance, about getting it right and about getting good outcomes. I am focused on delivering for vulnerable cohorts, and I am more than happy to take you through the detail of that bill at an appropriate time, not during question time.

Ministers statements: animal welfare

Gayle TIERNEY (Western Victoria – Minister for Training and Skills, Minister for Higher Education, Minister for Agriculture) (14:14): Animal welfare is a priority of the Andrews Labor government. That is why over the last month we have delivered Victoria's first ever pet census to help shape the future of animal welfare and ensure pet owners have the support and services they need. The pet census, which closed over the weekend, asked Victorians a variety of questions to gather important information on pet ownership and the attitudes and experiences of owners and Victorians without pets too. I am very grateful to the more than 30,000 Victorians that have completed the census. This was an overwhelming response that will provide the government with a very comprehensive snapshot of our companion animals.

The census data will help us improve our services and provide better quality support to pets, pet owners and community organisations.

Members interjecting.

The PRESIDENT: Order! Minister, can you take your seat for one second. Can the clock be reset to 2 minutes, please. The minister does not need any help. I call the minister, from the top.

Gayle TIERNEY: Animal welfare is a priority of the Andrews Labor government. That is why over the last month we have delivered Victoria's first ever pet census to help shape the future of animal welfare and ensure pet owners have the support and services they need. The pet census, which closed over the weekend, asked Victorians a variety of questions to gather important information on pet ownership and the attitudes and experiences of owners and Victorians without pets too. I am grateful to the more than 30,000 Victorians that completed the census. This was an overwhelming response that will provide the government with a very comprehensive snapshot of our companion animals.

The census data will help us improve our services and provide better quality support to pets, pet owners and community organisations. Current available data is often focused on cats and dogs or other very specific animal groups or welfare issues. The census will help close this knowledge and data gap, giving us a zoomed-out view of Victoria's pets. Early results show Victorians love their dogs and cats but also have a wide –

Members interjecting.

Sonja Terpstra: On a point of order, President, I reflect on your earlier ruling when you asked to have the minister's clock reset, because the level of noise in here is out of control. I cannot even hear what the minister is saying, and I am sitting directly behind her. I think the minister needs to be heard in silence.

The PRESIDENT: I uphold Ms Terpstra's point of order. To my frustration, after calling the minister to start from the top, there has been noise coming from all directions, which kind of did not help. Let us have a crack at letting the minister get her last 45 seconds in silence. That would be great.

Gayle TIERNEY: Thank you, President. Early results show Victorians love their dogs and cats but they also have a wide array of other interesting animals, including turtles, lizards, snakes and insects.

A member: And donkeys.

Gayle TIERNEY: And donkeys. The data that has been gathered will help shape the next generation of pet and animal welfare reforms and builds on the significant investment of our government that has already been made in supporting animal welfare and community organisations.

Written responses

The PRESIDENT (14:18): As far as today's questions go, can I thank Minister Blandthorn, who is going to get two responses, within the standing orders, from the minister for workplace safety –

A member interjected.

The PRESIDENT: Minister Symes, sorry. Minister Symes will get Mr Limbrick's responses. And then Minister Symes will get an answer for Dr Ratnam's supplementary question, on which she offered to get more information.

Constituency questions

Southern Metropolitan Region

John BERGER (Southern Metropolitan) (14:19): (282) My constituency question is for the Minister for Education in the other place, Minister Hutchins. In the 2022–23 state budget Hawthorn West Primary School received \$5.731 million to modernise the school. We are upgrading classrooms in block A, giving students better learning opportunities, and I cannot wait to see the final product. In 2021 we built an inclusive playground and sensory garden that can be used as a flexible learning space thanks to \$200,000 from the Inclusive Schools Fund, and next year we will finish refurbishing the toilet block to improve the amenities' cleanliness and hygiene thanks to \$442,000 from the Minor Capital Works Fund. None of this could have been possible without the advocacy of former Labor

member John Kennedy, someone who I know the community misses. My question is: can the minister please provide an update on the capital works projects for Hawthorn West Primary School?

Western Victoria Region

Joe McCRACKEN (Western Victoria) (14:20): (283) My constituency question is raised on behalf of many small businesses and is for the Minister for WorkSafe and the TAC. Many of the small businesses in my electorate have to pay WorkCover premiums. I met Mark Pontil-Scala, who is the general manager of Regina Glass located in Ballarat. Regina Glass export to a number of different markets across the globe. Their WorkCover premiums have more than doubled from \$30,000 to over \$70,000. The information I am seeking is just a simple question: how can you justify this? How is it justified in any way, shape or form, particularly when we have got such difficult economic conditions? Electricity prices are skyrocketing. Super has gone up. Rent is increasing. Gas prices – let us not talk about gas – 78.25 per cent of increase there. Wages are going up more than inflation. Rent is going up higher than inflation. How is a small business meant to cope in these conditions? It is about time the government started attending taxpayers anonymously because they have clearly got an addiction to tax.

Northern Victoria Region

Georgie PURCELL (Northern Victoria) (14:21): (284) My constituency question is for the Minister for Environment. A mob of kangaroos living on the proposed site for the Commonwealth Games athletes village in Bendigo are still trapped despite cancellation of the event. Over the last month exclusion fencing has been erected around the Flora Hill site to force the mob away from their home and onto main roads, where several, including joeys, have been hit and killed by cars, and it has all been for nothing. Whilst the site does not provide a suitable long-term home for the mob, development has been paused to await community consultation for an alternative build. Protecting these kangas in the meantime is the very least that the government can do. My constituents want to know if the minister will support removal of the exclusion fencing and a professional relocation program before future development commences.

Eastern Victoria Region

Tom McINTOSH (Eastern Victoria) (14:22): (285) My question is for the Minister for Ambulance Services in the other place. Ambulance workers are some of our hardest working Victorians, working every day to serve others. These Victorians deserve high-quality working conditions and modern, up-to-date infrastructure and equipment. Minister, can you provide an overview of the work that the government has done upgrading or building new ambulance stations in Eastern Victoria? I dropped into Paynesville, where the new Paynesville ambulance station is another step closer, with a builder being appointed and construction to commence in coming weeks. Local paramedics Gerry, Deb and Jamie showed me around the current facilities and told me about the unique roles of the Paynesville branch, including responding with the water police to the islands in the Gippsland Lakes. I have also visited the brand new station in Mornington and the construction site for the new station in Foster. I believe there are other upgrades in the works, and it is fantastic to see the government investing so heavily in the essential services that our community rely on.

Southern Metropolitan Region

Georgie CROZIER (Southern Metropolitan) (14:23): (286) My constituency question is also for the Minister for WorkSafe and the TAC, regarding the significant increase in WorkCover premiums that has absolutely hit so many small business owners and smashed their bottom line. My constituent Nicole runs a local business in Cheltenham and contacted me about her shock at the huge increase in her WorkCover premium. Her premium in 2022–23 was \$4100 at the rate of 0.9 per cent. For 2023–24 it is now \$7500 at the rate of 1.7 per cent, a massive 83 per cent increase. Nicole describes this as simply unaffordable, and it prevents her from employing new staff. The impact of this cash grab by the government will hit many hardworking small business owners. An average 42 per cent WorkCover premium increase comes on top of the financial strain of soaring energy bills, higher taxes and other

cost-of-living pressures. My question to the minister is: what is the justification for these massive increases in WorkCover premiums on top of all the other costs that small business owners are enduring?

Western Metropolitan Region

David ETTERSHPANK (Western Metropolitan) (14:24): (287) My constituency question is for the Attorney-General. My constituent is a resident of Sunshine, and like many other Victorians she was alarmed to see reports of a so-called 'White power lifting meet' at a gym in Sunshine North over the weekend. She was disgusted to find that the event organised by the European Australian Movement and the National Socialist Network called on members to 'celebrate the movement's exponential growth'. My constituent is feeling unsafe in her community knowing that white supremacists are holding recruitment events that can only result in an escalation in bigotry, in racism, in misogyny, in antisemitism and in violence. So my constituent asks: what is the Attorney-General proposing to ensure that our western suburbs do not become a safe haven for violent right-wing extremists?

Southern Metropolitan Region

Ryan BATCHELOR (Southern Metropolitan) (14:25): (288) My question is to the Minister for Child Protection and Family Services. Can the minister outline how funding allocated in the 2023–24 budget to St Kilda Mums will provide assistance to families doing it tough in Southern Metropolitan? We know that thousands of Victorians are struggling right now with the cost of living. Twelve consecutive interest rate rises, soaring power bills and inflation are cutting into the pockets of everyday Victorians. Groups like St Kilda Mums in my electorate are on the ground providing daily relief to many families. Their warehouse in Clayton, if you have not been out there, is a sight to behold. Thousands of pieces of furniture, clothing and baby supplies are being donated and rehomed to families in need every single day. I was there recently, dropping off some still good but no longer needed baby equipment, and we hope that through St Kilda Mums they are given to those who are in need. I am keen to see what the Andrews Labor government more broadly is doing to support this important charity.

North-Eastern Metropolitan Region

Nicholas McGOWAN (North-Eastern Metropolitan) (14:26): (289) My constituency question is for the minister representing the Assistant Treasurer, and it comes from Luke Bolton. Luke is a proprietor of a Plumbers Choice outlet, and he asks:

As a Victorian employer for over 35 years, for the first time, I have experienced our broken Workcover system. Our claim was accepted on the basis of our employee's perceptions ...

without approaching the company involved.

We were kept in the dark as to why the claim was accepted. Our government appointed insurer, Gallagher Bassett, took 18 weeks to begin payments and left us without a case manager for over 10 weeks ... This caused further issues for the injured worker. When we complained to Workcover about the incompetence of our insurer, Workcover simply referred us back to Gallagher Bassett, leaving us and the injured worker unsupported.

Mr Bolton asks:

When will the government overhaul a claims system relating to mental health where the acceptance of claim is heavily weighted on the perceptions of the employee? When will the government hold the insurers to account for the service they provide? When will the government insist that the insurers use EFT instead of antiquated paper cheques?

When will the government overhaul the Workcover Complaints process so that it shows genuine interest in acting upon complaints as a basis for improving the system?

Western Victoria Region

Sarah MANSFIELD (Western Victoria) (14:27): (290) My question is for the Minister for Disability, Ageing and Carers. The cost-of-living crisis is driving more people into food insecurity. In the Geelong region in my electorate demand for food relief has skyrocketed. Services like the Geelong Food Relief Centre source most of their food from local businesses and work efficiently to distribute food to community members, both directly and via local community services. Without these food relief services, thousands of people in Geelong would go hungry. Regrettably, they are now an essential service needed for the foreseeable future, yet it is impossible for them to plan far ahead due to lack of adequate ongoing funding from government. Reliable funding is needed to support essential operational costs like transport, food storage, volunteer support and energy. Will the minister commit to long-term recurrent funding of key food relief suppliers in the Geelong region?

Western Victoria Region

Bev McARTHUR (Western Victoria) (14:28): (291) My question is for the Minister for Transport and Infrastructure and concerns the Commonwealth Games cancellation's impact on Ballarat. Use of the saleyard site athletes village for post-games housing was a major Labor boast before the humiliating axing of the games. Minister Allan told me repeatedly at PAEC the investment would bring forward housing on the site by 'years and years'. Yet despite the Premier's claim regional infrastructure investment would be maintained, use of the saleyard site is now in doubt. The members for Wendouree and Eureka refer non-specifically to housing investment, the federal member for Ballarat claimed 'investments remain in Ballarat' and mayor Des Hudson says he is quite comfortable that what we get will be a better outcome, without knowing what is planned. So, Minister, do you commit to the development of the saleyards site in Ballarat for housing as repeatedly promised in the past?

North-Eastern Metropolitan Region

Aiv PUGLIELLI (North-Eastern Metropolitan) (14:29): (292) My constituency question is to the Minister for Public Transport, and it relates to the Ivanhoe train station. This morning – we are back again – before I got on my train I decided to time how long it would take to get from one platform to the other without using the stairs. For people getting off on the south side of the station and needing to access the buses and shops on the north side, there is no easy way. The overpass is completely inaccessible for people in wheelchairs, with mobility aids, with prams or with walking sticks. They just cannot get across the train line without making the 400-metre journey by going up the road, crossing the tracks and coming back again. It took me, without any mobility issues, almost 5 minutes to walk around, and this was without having to wait for trains to cross. So I ask: when will Ivanhoe station be upgraded to provide quick and accessible travel between platforms?

Northern Victoria Region

Wendy LOVELL (Northern Victoria) (14:30): (293) My constituency question is for the Minister for Roads and Road Safety. I have recently been contacted by several constituents regarding the current condition of the C357, Ross Street, in Tatura, specifically from Hogan Street to the south end of the Tatura Racecourse. The road is littered with potholes and deterioration caused by the high volume of heavy vehicles that use the thoroughfare to transport goods to Melbourne. One resident has told me it is difficult to sleep due to the noise made by cars and trucks hitting the potholes. Constituents have also reported that the roundabout at the intersection of Hogan and Ross streets is broken up in several places due to the number of heavy vehicles negotiating the intersection. Will the minister commit funding to repair Ross Street in Tatura from Hogan Street to south of the Tatura Racecourse and upgrade the road to reflect the quantity and type of vehicles that now use it and will into the future?

Eastern Victoria Region

Melina BATH (Eastern Victoria) (14:31): (294) My question is for the Minister for Regional Development. On 3 May the minister said in this house:

... the Commonwealth Games, as part of Victoria 2026, will deliver to rural and regional Victoria, and that is why when we turn the eyes of the world to rural and regional Victoria and to the electorates of a number of people here on the opposition benches, who say they prioritise their communities, a return on investment of \$3 billion is no laughing matter. An opportunity for volunteers, for schoolchildren, for jobs and indeed for a whole range of opportunities to come to the regions is no laughing matter.

My Latrobe Valley constituents know the colossal vacuum of lost opportunities for business and international tourism is no laughing matter. Minister, how much of your hypothetical slated \$2 billion will actually go to Gippsland in terms of priority sporting projects, tourism projects and social and affordable housing?

Northern Metropolitan Region

Evan MULHOLLAND (Northern Metropolitan) (14:32): (295) My constituency question is to the Minister for Roads and Road Safety, and the question I ask is: when will the government finally commit to fixing the dangerous Mount Alexander Road intersection in Essendon? A recent survey by the RACV of almost 5000 Melbourne motorists has reinforced what Essendon locals already know, because they live through it every day. The survey found that the Mount Alexander Road and Keilor Road intersection was a top concern and the worst black spot in the state, something that I have spoken about previously in this place. Essendon traders, residents and communities are fed up with this black spot. It is a site of constant bingles, and sadly in recent years there have been several fatalities at this intersection. I understand the member for Essendon is more interested in his share portfolio than his actual community, but I do ask the minister: when will the government finally commit to fixing this dangerous intersection and road?

Southern Metropolitan Region

David DAVIS (Southern Metropolitan) (14:33): (296) My constituency question is for the Minister for Education, and it concerns the developing impact of the state government's schools tax. Ms Crozier and I have a large number of non-government schools in our electorate. What I am seeking from the minister is the release of the list of schools for the electorate and the number of students at each of the schools. I am asking her whether that list will be released, and we will be very interested to see exactly the number of students who are impacted – the list of the schools in Southern Metro that are impacted and the number of students at each of the schools.

The PRESIDENT: We have completed the 15 constituency questions. There are still two more. Given we have had a month off, maybe we have underestimated. I am happy for those two people to do it today, but tomorrow we will do 15 and the next day we will do 15.

Northern Victoria Region

Gaelle BROAD (Northern Victoria) (14:35): (297) My question is for the Minister for Environment. Again I wish to raise concerns about the colony of 38,000 grey-headed flying foxes, or bats, in Rosalind Park in the centre of Bendigo. Last Friday I was advised by a constituent that due to the bats swarming around at dawn and dusk the air ambulance is unable to land safely at the Bendigo Hospital helipad and is being diverted to the Bendigo Airport, where patients are then transported by ambulance to the hospital. I am told it is adding 45 minutes to the patient's treatment and precious time for those experiencing cardiac stress. Apparently eight air ambulances have been diverted within the last two weeks due to the bats, and hospital executives have met with the local council to discuss the issue. Given this is a state government responsibility and the bats are delaying air ambulances and putting lives at risk, can the minister please confirm if she is aware of this situation, and if so, advise what is being done to urgently relocate the bats?

South-Eastern Metropolitan Region

Ann-Marie HERMANS (South-Eastern Metropolitan) (14:36): (298) My constituency question is to the Minister for Planning. As a result of Operation Sandon, IBAC made 34 recommendations to promote transparency in planning decisions, enhance donation and lobbying regulation, improve the accountability of ministerial advisers and electorate officers and strengthen council governance. However, I have previously asked the minister for advice regarding the proposed \$2.9 million early childhood education facility at 154 Drysdale Avenue, Narre North. Advice from Casey council is that a decision will be made shortly, but now we hear that a new childcare centre has been approved at 1 Grantchester Road, Narre North, and locals say this is 300 metres from the other childcare centre. With every childcare centre in this vicinity not operating at full capacity and with confirmed vacancies for 2023 and 2024, we want to know why 1 Grantchester Road, Narre North, has been granted an approval for a childcare centre in such close proximity to two centres nearby – and three applications are all also underway.

Members**Acting presidents**

The PRESIDENT (14:37): I call the Clerk for an acting president warrant.

The Clerk:

Pursuant to the provisions of Standing Order 2.12 of the Legislative Council, I hereby nominate –

Mr Michael Galea

to be an Acting President whenever requested to do so by the President or Deputy President.

Given under my hand on 1 August 2023.

SHAUN LEANE

President of the Legislative Council

Petitions**Schools payroll tax**

Matthew BACH (North-Eastern Metropolitan) presented a petition bearing 4436 signatures:

The Petition of certain citizens of the State of Victoria draws to the attention of the Legislative Council the Government's intention to impose payroll tax on many independent schools. The new tax was announced without prior consultation and is based on an arbitrary definition of a 'high fee' school. According to the Budget these 'high fee' schools may include those charging annual fees as low as \$7,500 and may take as much as \$422 million away from independent schools. Many schools have indicated that they will be forced to cut services, programs or staff to foot the new tax with some indicating they will have to pass the cost directly onto parents. Many parents work incredibly hard and make significant sacrifices to send their children to independent schools and should not be punished by the Government's deteriorating debt position and budget mismanagement. This new tax will increase cost of living for many families.

The petitioners therefore request that the Legislative Council reject the Government's proposal to impose payroll tax on many independent schools in order to support and uphold diversity and choice in education in Victoria.

Matthew BACH: Further to that, I move:

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

Motion agreed to.

Remembrance Parks Central Victoria

Wendy LOVELL (Northern Victoria) presented a petition bearing 393 signatures:

The Petition of certain citizens of the State of Victoria draws to the attention of the Legislative Council the repeated pattern of governance failures by the Board of Remembrance Parks Central Victoria (RPCV) and

their failure to manage cemeteries with the compassion and competence needed to deal with grieving families. RPCV has desecrated graves by removing and destroying items placed by families with no prior warning or ability for families to retrieve cherished items. These items have included war medals, and toys that deceased children have played with. The Board has shown a complete lack of empathy and compassion to the families affected by the actions of RPCV and attempts to blame the desecration of the graves on the CEO for implementing an adornment policy that was endorsed by the Board. The Chair of the Board has admitted that the adornment policy has not been reviewed for several years. Other examples of the incompetence of the Board of the RPCV include their failed attempt to increase the cost of funerals and internments by up to 300 per cent.

The petitioners therefore request that the Legislative Council call on the Government and the Minister for Health to remove the Board of Remembrance Parks Central Victoria replace it with a new Board and Board Chair that will manage cemeteries with competence and compassion.

Wendy LOVELL: I move:

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

Motion agreed to.

Tatura–Kyabram school bus service

Wendy LOVELL (Northern Victoria) presented a petition bearing 1326 signatures:

The Petition of certain citizens of the State of Victoria draws to the attention of the Legislative Council the need for a dedicated school bus service to transport students travelling to and from Tatura to schools in Kyabram to keep our children safe. Violence and abuse have recently escalated at the V/Line bus stop and on the V/Line public buses the students must currently use, children have been made to travel on the floor of the bus due to there not being enough seats available or have been left behind to fend for themselves as V/Line prioritises ticketholders before students. Currently there are 45 known students from St Augustine’s College that catch the bus daily from Tatura to get to school in Kyabram. This number is set to increase next year.

The petitioners therefore request that the Legislative Council call on the Government to establish a dedicated school bus service to and from Tatura to schools in Kyabram to ensure the safety of children commuting to and from school.

Wendy LOVELL: I move:

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

Motion agreed to.

Metropolitan and regional parks regulations

Bev McARTHUR (Western Victoria) presented a petition bearing 292 signatures:

The Petition of certain citizens of the State of Victoria draws to the attention of the Legislative Council concerns the petitioners have about the proposed Metropolitan and Regional Parks Regulations. As drafted, these regulations prohibit bushwalking (regulation 407) and climbing (regulation 906) in parks by default. These activities will only be permitted in designated trails and areas specified by land managers. The regulations also include severe penalties for walking or climbing in non-designated areas. This creates problems for other activities such as swimming, orienteering, kayaking, geocaching, and foraging, which often require going off-trail. Trails may be poorly marked and maintained, and the regulations may discourage hikers from calling for help if lost, for fear of penalties, which puts their safety at risk. The proposed regulations would apply to more than 40 parks, including previously unregulated areas like Macedon Regional Park and Plenty Gorge Park. These parks are particularly valuable to the outdoor community in Victoria due to their proximity to the city. Each year hundreds of new climbers and hikers are introduced to the Australian outdoors through them. Under the proposed regulations, access to these activities would only exist at the discretion of land managers with broad powers.

The petitioners therefore request that the Legislative Council call on the Government to review the proposed Metropolitan and Regional Parks Regulations and reopen the consultation process to allow for substantial community feedback.

Bev McARTHUR: I move:

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

Motion agreed to.

Bills

Independent Broad-based Anti-corruption Commission Amendment (Ending Political Corruption) Bill 2023

Introduction and first reading

Samantha RATNAM (Northern Metropolitan) (14:40): I introduce a bill for an act to amend the Independent Broad-based Anti-corruption Commission Act 2011 in relation to the meaning of 'corrupt conduct' and for other purposes, and I move:

That the bill be now read a first time.

Motion agreed to.

Read first time.

Samantha RATNAM: I move:

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

Motion agreed to.

Summary Offences and Sex Work Acts Amendment (Child Safety and Protection) Bill 2023

Introduction and first reading

Moira DEEMING (Western Metropolitan) (14:41): I introduce a bill for an act to amend the Summary Offences Act 1966 and the Sex Work Act 1994 in relation to child safety and protection and for other purposes, and I move:

That the bill be now read a first time.

Motion agreed to.

Read first time.

Moira DEEMING: I move:

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

Motion agreed to.

Committees

Scrutiny of Acts and Regulations Committee

Alert Digest No. 8

Sonja TERPSTRA (North-Eastern Metropolitan) (14:42): Pursuant to section 35 of the Parliamentary Committees Act 2003, I present *Alert Digest* No. 8 of 2023, including appendices, from the Scrutiny of Acts and Regulations Committee. I move:

That the report be published.

Motion agreed to.

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

Auditor-General –

Annual Plan, 2023–24 (*released on 27 June 2023 – a non-sitting day*) (*Ordered to be published*).

Effectiveness of Rail Freight Support Programs, June 2023 (*released on 27 June 2023 – a non-sitting day*) (*Ordered to be published*).

Results of 2022 Audits: Technical and Further Education Institutes, June 2023 (*released on 30 June 2023 – a non-sitting day*) (*Ordered to be published*).

Results of 2022 Audits: Universities, June 2023 (*released on 30 June 2023 – a non-sitting day*) (*Ordered to be published*).

Community Visitors – Report, 2021–22 (*Ordered to be published*).

Crown Land (Reserves) Act 1978 –

Order of 20 March 2023 giving approval to the granting of a licence at Lynch's Bridge Historical Precinct Reserve.

Order of 23 June 2023 giving approval to the granting of a licence at Alexandra Gardens Reserve.

Order of 24 June 2023 giving approval to the granting of a lease at Brighton Beach Oval Reserve.

Order of 11 July 2023 giving approval to the granting of a lease at Albert Park Reserve.

Independent Broad-based Anti-corruption Commission –

Annual Plan, 2023–24 (*released on 29 June 2023 – a non-sitting day*) (*Ordered to be published*).

Special report on Operation Sandon (*released on 27 July 2023 – a non-sitting day*) (*Ordered to be published*).

Interpretation of Legislation Act 1984 – Notices pursuant to section 32 in relation to –

Code of Practice for Worksite Safety – Traffic Management (*Gazette G29, 20 July 2023*).

Statutory Rule No. 36 (*Gazette S327, 26 June 2023*).

Statutory Rule No. 40 (*Gazette G26, 29 June 2023*).

Melbourne Cricket Ground Trust – Report, year ended 31 March 2023.

Ombudsman – Annual Plan, 2023–24 (*released on 30 June 2023 – a non-sitting day*) (*Ordered to be published*).

Parliamentary Committees Act 2003 –

Government response to the Integrity and Oversight Committee's Report on Performance of the Victorian integrity agencies 2020/21: focus on witness welfare.

Government responses to the Pandemic Declaration Accountability and Oversight Committee's Reports on –

Review of the Pandemic (Quarantine, Isolation and Testing) Orders.

Review of the Pandemic (Visitors to Hospitals and Care Facilities) Orders.

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

Ballarat Planning Scheme – Amendment C236.

Boroondara Planning Scheme – Amendment C367.

Brimbank Planning Scheme – Amendment C237.

Casey Planning Scheme – Amendment C293.

Corangamite Planning Scheme – Amendments C61 and C62.

Frankston Planning Scheme – Amendment C162.

Glenelg Planning Scheme – Amendment C104.

Greater Dandenong Planning Scheme – Amendment C245.

Greater Geelong Planning Scheme – Amendments C434, C435, C456 and C458.

Hepburn Planning Scheme – Amendment C73.
Hume Planning Scheme – Amendment C271.
Latrobe Planning Scheme – Amendments C126 and C138.
Melbourne Planning Scheme – Amendment C452.
Melton Planning Scheme – Amendments C219 and C237.
Merri-bek Planning Scheme – Amendment C219.
Monash Planning Scheme – Amendment C169.
Mornington Peninsula Planning Scheme – Amendment C299.
Moyne Planning Scheme – Amendment C74.
Port Phillip Planning Scheme – Amendment C195.
Pyrenees Planning Scheme – Amendment C53.
Stonnington Planning Scheme – Amendment C334.
Towong Planning Scheme – Amendment C39.
Victoria Planning Provisions – Amendment VC234.
Wellington Planning Scheme – Amendments C114 and C116.
Yarra Ranges Planning Scheme – Amendment C208.

Statutory Rules under the following Acts –

Building Act 1993 – No. 65.
Children, Youth and Families Act 2005 – No. 70.
Community Based Sentences (Transfer) Act 2012 – No. 56.
Confiscation Act 1997 – No. 74.
Conservation, Forests and Land Act 1987 – No. 64.
County Court Act 1958 – Nos. 73 and 77.
Crimes Act 1958 – No. 75.
Dangerous Goods Act 1985 – No. 69.
Disability Service Safeguards Act 2018 – No. 71.
Drugs, Poisons and Controlled Substances Act 1981 – No. 61.
Family Violence Protection Act 2008 – No. 72.
Fisheries Act 1995 – No. 63.
Health Services Act 1988 – No. 57.
Liquor Control Reform Act 1998 – No. 76.
Magistrates' Court Act 1989 – No. 68.
Marine Safety Act 2010 – No. 66.
Partnership Act 1958 – No. 55.
Residential Tenancies Act 1997 – No. 58.
Road Safety Act 1986 – No. 67.
Sex Offenders Registration Act 2004 – No. 59.
Tobacco Act 1987 – No. 62.
Victorian Energy Efficiency Target Act 2007 – No. 60.

Subordinate Legislation Act 1994 –

Documents under section 15 in respect of Statutory Rule Nos. 53, 54, 55, 56, 57, 59, 61, 62, 63, 64, 65, 66, 67, 68, 69, 70, 73 and 77.

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

Dairy Food Safety Victoria determination of licence classes and fees for dairy businesses for 1 July 2023 – 30 June 2024, under the Dairy Act 2000.

Declaration of exempt schools, under the Payroll Tax Act 2007.

Declaration of the Home Buyer Scheme (HomesVic), under the First Home Owner Grant and Home Buyer Schemes Act 2000.

Ministerial Order No. 1414 – Structured Workplace Learning Arrangements (Non-School Providers), under the Education and Training Reform Act 2006.

Ministerial Order No. 1415 – Work Experience Arrangements (Non-School Providers), under the Education and Training Reform Act 2006.

Order to amend the declaration of a class of specified entities to exclude HealthShare Victoria, under the Financial Management Act 1994.

Planning and Environment Act 1987 – Orders under section 46AO approving the extension of the period of declaration of the following as Distinctive Areas and Landscapes –

Bellarine Peninsula and Bass Coast.

Surf Coast.

A proclamation of the Lieutenant-Governor fixing an operative date in respect of the following act:

Victorian Energy Efficiency Target Amendment Act 2022 – Parts 1, 2, 4, 5, 6, 7 and 9 and Division 2 of Part 8 – 1 July 2023 (*Gazette S333, 27 June 2023*).

Committees

Environment and Planning Committee

Inquiry into Renewable Energy in Victoria

The Clerk: I have received the following paper for presentation to the house pursuant to standing orders: government response to the Environment and Planning Committee's inquiry into renewable energy in Victoria.

Petitions

Corrections Amendment (Parole) Bill 2023

Response

The Clerk: I have received the following response to a petition for presentation to the house pursuant to standing orders: minister's response to the petition titled 'Support the Corrections Amendment (Parole) Bill 2023', presented by Mr Limbrick.

Timber industry

Response

The Clerk: I have received the following responses to petitions for presentation to the house pursuant to standing orders: minister's responses to petitions titled 'Immediately cease logging' and 'Immediately stop logging native and public forests', presented by Dr Ratnam.

Business of the house

Notices

Notices of motion given.

General business

Georgie CROZIER (Southern Metropolitan) (14:57): I move, by leave:

That the following general business take precedence on Wednesday 2 August 2023:

- (1) order of the day made this day, second reading of the Independent Broad-based Anti-corruption Commission Amendment (Ending Political Corruption) Bill 2023;
- (2) notice of motion given this day by me establishing a select committee to inquire into the 2026 Commonwealth Games and the progress of the regional infrastructure build;

- (3) notice of motion given this day by Dr Bach on increasing taxes and cost-of-living pressures;
- (4) notice of motion 31, in an amended form, standing in Ms Crozier's name on production of documents relating to a second injecting room in Melbourne; and
- (5) notice of motion 74, standing in Mr Davis's name on the location of the SBS headquarters.

Motion agreed to.**Standing and sessional orders**

David DAVIS (Southern Metropolitan) (14:58): I desire to move, by leave:

That this house:

- (1) notes that at the Integrity and Oversight Committee's hearing on Monday 31 July 2023 the former Commissioner of the Independent Broad-based Anti-corruption Commission the Honourable Robert Redlich AM KC gave evidence confirming his authorship of the letter sent to the former Presiding Officers, dated 15 December 2022, relating to the Integrity and Oversight Committee; and
- (2) permits notice of motion 52, which will support the tabling of the Redlich letter, to be moved immediately and debated forthwith.

Leave refused.***Members statements*****Peter Mertens**

Sonja TERPSTRA (North-Eastern Metropolitan) (14:59): I rise to advise the house of the sad passing of Peter Mertens. Peter, despite being small in stature, was a giant in the racing industry. At the age of 14 Peter left school and his family home in Morwell to become an apprentice jockey for George O'Malley in Sale. In 1979, his first year of racing, he achieved his first win on Meadow Law at Bairnsdale. This was not to be his only win, as his success continued with 2100 wins under his belt and an outstanding career that lasted 35 years, and for that he was widely regarded as the king of Gippsland. Following a challenging race fall in 2013, Peter could no longer follow his passion and turned to training horses in St Leonards in 2016. It was during that time that he met and later married Gulcin. Gulcin and Peter eventually settled in Montmorency, and despite Peter being given a cancer diagnosis, Gulcin and Peter married in 2020 and enjoyed three beautiful years together filled with love, laughter and all that life had to offer. Peter was a proud father to six children – Troy, Zac, Tory, Jake, Beau and Lily-Anne – and proud stepdad to Sibel, Sarah and Serena, and of course proud grandfather to Sophie, Marshall, Jax and Jax's sibling due in October of this year. A life well lived and sadly gone far too soon. Vale, Peter Mertens.

Alistair Urquhart

Bev McARTHUR (Western Victoria) (15:00): Today I say thank you to a man who never entered this chamber but took a lifelong interest in it. Alistair Urquhart OAM died two weeks ago at the age of 76. His attraction to politics led him in 1985 to stand against reigning Premier of Victoria John Cain for the seat of Bundoora. Imagine if he had won. He also stood federally. Supported in the 1993 election in the seat of Jagajaga by the likes of John Howard and Sir Henry Bolte, he took on the unwinnable. But facing a challenge was his forte. How else could one stride into major events with unashamed gusto and bagpipes blaring or indeed be a pivotal force in the establishment of Wise, an organisation which helps to find work for the physically and mentally disabled? He remained the chair for 30 years, forging it into a global entity. For this he gained his Order of Australia Medal. He wrote popular monthly newsletters *Letter from Melbourne* and *Letter from Canberra*. He would love to write about this place today in what I am sure he would call his 'Letter from on high.' Alistair could often be found across the road at Cafe Excello, where he would talk to anyone about politics and current affairs. My thoughts are with his beloved wife Mary. Vale, Alistair Urquhart.

Climate change

Samantha RATNAM (Northern Metropolitan) (15:02): While we have had a break for the winter our friends on the other side of the planet have been enduring worsening climate disasters. So far this year we have had cyclones in south-eastern Africa, including Malawi, Mozambique, Madagascar and Zimbabwe; wildfires in Chile and Canada – and as of 17 July in Canada there were 907 active fires, with 500 still out of control; Typhoon Talim hitting the south of China, Guam, the Philippines, Taiwan and Japan; ice storms in southern United States; and flash floods in six northern Indian states. South Sudan has had its fourth year of historic flooding. There has been record-breaking rainfall in Vermont, there have been ice avalanches and there have been heatwaves across Asia and Europe, including in Greece and Italy. UN Secretary-General António Guterres declared that the era of global boiling has arrived. It has been confirmed that the planet has experienced the hottest three weeks on record since records began, and July is tracking to be the hottest month ever recorded.

The ecosystem that sustains life on Earth exists in a fragile equilibrium that has been permanently and wilfully destabilised by inaction by the global community. While parliaments like this fiddle, our world burns, boils and collapses, and people are dying. People are being displaced from their homes, and societies will soon not be able to function. While we have passed the point of no return on global warming, there is still more that we can do to stop runaway climate change, which means stopping carbon pollution and stopping burning of fossil fuels. To quote secretary Guterres, who said it most powerfully:

The air is unbreathable, the heat is unbearable, and the level of fossil fuel profits and climate inaction is unacceptable. Leaders must lead. No more hesitancy, no more excuses, no more waiting for others to move first. There is simply no more time for that.

Glen Huntly level crossing removals

Ryan BATCHELOR (Southern Metropolitan) (15:04): Glen Huntly is now officially level crossing free, after we removed the 71st and 72nd level crossings at Glen Huntly Road and Neerim Road. More than 20,000 vehicles travelled through these level crossings every day, and the boom gates were down for up to an hour during the morning peak. Right in the middle of it all was one of the last dangerous tram squares that slowed everything down. But that is now all in the past, with the reopening of Glen Huntly station yesterday and the return of express trains on the Frankston line this week. The 58-day construction blitz saw 24-hour work to demolish and rebuild the station, 64 Olympic swimming pools worth of soil removed, a 1.2-kilometre trench built under the existing road and brand new platforms at Glen Huntly station.

I want to thank the locals for their patience, the traders for their endurance and the commuters right up and down the Frankston line for doing their bit so that we could get these works done. The new Glen Huntly station precinct will revitalise the local shopping village and create better amenity for the community. And best of all, we fixed one of Melbourne's oldest spelling mistakes, adding the space back into the name of 'Glen Huntly station', where it has been misspelled since 1937.

Islamic Society of Ballarat

Joe McCRACKEN (Western Victoria) (15:05): I recently had the pleasure of attending the Islamic Society of Ballarat at their mosque in Canadian. I met a number of members of the Pakistani community as well. I want to acknowledge the generous hospitality of Anam Shahab and Darren James as my hosts, who were so kind and welcoming. They had many great initiatives that we discussed, including supporting international students, helping families feel connected and matching people to job opportunities. Thank you for your kindness, your generosity of spirit and your hospitality.

Victorian State Merino Field Day

Joe McCRACKEN (Western Victoria) (15:06): I also recently attended the State Merino Field Day in Marnoo, which I was very pleased to open. I wish to acknowledge the hard work of president Trent Carter and secretary Kyle Hendy along with the organising committee on what was a really

wonderful day. Hundreds of people attended along with business owners and stallholders and 39 merino sheep studs. Congratulations on a magnificent day. It is a credit to the hardworking people of country Victoria that they made the great day an even bigger success than what it was last year.

Gambling regulation

Katherine COPSEY (Southern Metropolitan) (15:06): I am speaking today on the long overdue and very welcome poker machine reforms announced in July, including venue closures from 4 am to 10 am, cards with set loss limits of no more than \$100 loaded at a time and reducing spin rates on new poker machines.

After those reforms were announced experts gave clear evidence at the Public Accounts and Estimates Committee inquiry on gambling, which is on at the moment, that it is crucial to set loss and time limits daily, weekly and annually. The maximum default limit should be \$100 per day, \$500 per week and \$5000 per year to limit gambling harm. This is the system which Tasmania has introduced with bipartisan support, and it will limit the amount of gambling harm in that state. Victoria's announcement specified only a load-up limit set to \$100. If someone gambles \$100 per day every day, the annual harm would exceed \$36,000 per year, which is why losses need to be set at a maximum of \$5000 per year in order to limit gambling harm. But of course the harmful gambling industry wants consumers to continue to lose more.

The Premier in his media release said that the reforms will be introduced only subject to thorough consultation with industry through an implementation working group. I would encourage the Premier and the Minister for Casino, Gaming and Liquor Regulation to break the cycle of undue harmful gambling industry influence by ensuring that the working group includes sector experts, gambling harm and public health research experts and advocates with lived experience of gambling harm, because their voice at the table is just as important as if not more than that of the industry that has profited from their extended misery.

One Tree Per Child

Lee TARLAMIS (South-Eastern Metropolitan) (15:08): Friday the 28th marked Schools Tree Day and Sunday the 30th marked National Tree Day. Established in 1996, National Tree Day is a call to action for all Australians to get their hands dirty and plant a tree, creating more green spaces in our communities and showing our appreciation for the importance of nature. Trees are more than just a beautiful sight; they help us with the air we breathe and act as a habitat for millions of species.

I was pleased to attend the City of Greater Dandenong's One Tree Per Child event last Friday at Spring Valley Reserve in Springvale South as part of Schools Tree Day. One Tree Per Child was started by the late Olivia Newton-John and environmentalist Jon Dee back in 2013, and it was fantastic to have Jon Dee present at this event. Since then more than 26 million trees have been planted by 5 million volunteers donating around 10 million hours. This includes school tree-planting days, where across 10 countries thousands of schools participate each year in getting a student to plant at least one tree. The City of Greater Dandenong event involved the planting of over 2500 trees, shrubs and native grasses by over 800 local grade 3 students from 14 primary schools.

Through initiatives like One Tree Per Child we can make small steps to tackle climate change and create better green spaces for our local communities, and the best part of it is as these students grow up, they will see their tree grow alongside them and see the positive impact it makes to the environment and the local habitat. The collective action of planting trees is not just limited to any single country, community or planting day; it is a global effort that transcends any one country and reminds us of our shared responsibility to protect the environment and our earth. By planting trees we join hands with people around the world who share our vision for a better, greener earth.

Commonwealth Games

Georgie CROZIER (Southern Metropolitan) (15:10): Two weeks on from the Andrews government's humiliating decision to cancel the Commonwealth Games, Victorians are still no closer to understanding why this has happened, the extent of it, the costs that there will be for Victorians and a whole range of other issues that the Andrews government have refused to provide answers for for so many Victorians, especially those in our regions. What has been particularly concerning are the comments made by those that were negotiating prior to the cancellation of the games, in terms of those people that have been involved.

Commonwealth Games Australia chief executive Craig Phillips was absolutely dismayed at and despairing about the government's cancellation. He has really blown the whistle on the budgetary implications. He said in a statement:

They did not step in as hosts at the last minute, as indicated by the Premier earlier today.

The detailed budgetary implications announced today have not been sighted or discussed with the CGF or CGA ahead of being notified of the ... decision.

When the decision was made by the government, none of these bodies were informed – how insulting, how arrogant and how extraordinary. We had comments from John Wylie, the former Australian Sports Commission boss, who said the decision to cancel the contract had done irreparable damage to Victoria's reputation. The cancellation of the games has so many implications that will have ramifications for this state for years to come.

Libertarian Party

David LIMBRICK (South-Eastern Metropolitan) (15:11): Today is a great day because my party will no longer be known as the Liberal Democrats but from now on will be known as the Libertarian Party. We are part of a growing global movement that recognises the dangers of big government. Let it be known there is only one political party that stands for small government, and that is the Libertarian Party. There is only one political party that opposes tax increases every time, and that is the Libertarians. There is only one party that consistently stands for individual rights, and that is the Libertarians. We do not pretend to know what is better for other people; we respect the choices that individuals make. We know coercion is immoral, and we know that free societies allow people to succeed and contain the happiest, healthiest and wealthiest people on earth. We are proud libertarians, and we are now the Libertarian Party.

Deputy Premier

Wendy LOVELL (Northern Victoria) (15:12): I rise to acknowledge the utter incompetence of the Deputy Premier in her role as the Minister for Transport and Infrastructure and Minister for the Suburban Rail Loop and, most notoriously, as the former Minister for Commonwealth Games Delivery. The Minister for Commonwealth Games Delivery – more like the minister for Commonwealth Games failure. Every single project the Deputy Premier has had her fingerprints on has experienced a massive cost blowout, the total of which is many billions of dollars. The decision of Jacinta Allan and her mentor Daniel Andrews to cancel the 2026 Commonwealth Games wins the gold medals for betrayal, deceit and incompetent governance.

We now know that Ms Allan was aware as far back as April that the cost of running the 2026 games was at least double the \$2.6 billion indicated in the May budget, proving that she misled every Victorian in the budget papers. What we do not know is the detail of Ms Allan's claim that the 2026 Commonwealth Games will cost up to \$7 billion or the cost to Victorian taxpayers of her decision to rip up the contract between the government and the Commonwealth Games Federation.

Of course the Deputy Premier has a history of incompetence regarding major projects, with the West Gate Tunnel Project more than \$4 billion over budget and at least six years behind schedule, not to mention the disastrous Suburban Rail Loop project, which has blown out to cost Victorians up to

\$300 billion. Ms Allan needs to apologise to all Victorians for her incompetence, and she needs to resign.

Health workforce

David ETTERSHANK (Western Metropolitan) (15:14): During the winter recess I took the opportunity to avail myself of a little spinal surgery. The procedure took place at St Vincent's Hospital in Fitzroy and was followed by 10 days of rehab at St V's in East Melbourne. The procedure was successful, and my level of referred pain is greatly reduced, aided in part by the therapeutic use of medicinal cannabis. Like many of you in this place, I have experienced the odd stab in the back. I must say, it is a terrific alternative to have that knife wielded by a surgeon instead – but I digress.

I have worked in and around health and aged care for more than 30 years, but it was not until I accessed the health system as a patient that I was reminded of how extraordinary our health workforce is. Here in Victoria we are blessed to have a world-class hospital system, and this is largely attributable to that health workforce. As they support us on a daily basis, it is incumbent upon us to likewise support these workers in their work and to ensure that they are appropriately remunerated and their careers are developed to their full potential. I would like to take this opportunity to express my thanks most sincerely to all of the staff at St Vincent's for their extraordinary care, compassion, good humour and resilience.

FIFA Women's World Cup

Trung LUU (Western Metropolitan) (15:15): For many Australians there is soccer fever in the air at the moment, and with the Women's World Cup I would like to congratulate the Matildas on their 4–0 win over Canada yesterday and taking another step closer to the cup. In the west we had the opportunity to host the Moroccan women's soccer team. Wyndham City Council had the honour of accommodating a FIFA Women's World Cup public training session at the Galvin Park Reserve soccer field. Besides the media, officials, supporters and fans, there were several groups of local women's and girls soccer teams, along with the Melbourne Victory women's team, admiring and inspiring the international players.

You could not help but think how much this Women's World Cup will mean to Australia, the Matildas and the next generation of female players, the legacy it brings – the legacy of this event's investment in infrastructure, implemented by FIFA, which has tapped into the grassroots, particularly the league development program – and how top class our Matildas squad in eight to 10 years time will be. It is a sad situation that other sports, other codes, will not have the same opportunity to play out their dreams, particularly in a couple of years time, with the cancellation of the Commonwealth Games. It is a shame that so many will miss out. In closing, my best wishes to the Matildas in their quest to conquer the World Cup in the coming days.

Commonwealth Games

Gaelle BROAD (Northern Victoria) (15:17): Like most of regional Victoria, I was shocked to hear the Premier announce the Commonwealth Games had been cancelled. Just 15 months ago the government wanted to be the only one bidding and talked it up as a games like no other that would leave a lasting legacy for regional Victoria. But after winning the state election and a third term in government, very little was done to progress the games. There was no detail in the state budget papers, and less than a thousand days out councils were still in the dark about project funding. The projected cost of \$2.6 billion blew out to nearly \$7 billion because Labor cannot manage projects or money.

Our region has suffered through bushfires, COVID and last year's floods. The games brought a sense of excitement. Families were talking about it, businesses were expanding, emergency services were in planning and our athletes were in training. But instead of an economic boost, cancelling the games has left a big bill, costing millions in wages, office fit-outs, lost tenders and a broken contract with the Commonwealth Games Federation. I ask this government to stop playing their own games and allocate

the full \$2.6 billion that was intended to benefit regional Victoria and get started on delivering projects that regional communities need within the same time frame as the games, by 2026.

Schools payroll tax

Matthew BACH (North-Eastern Metropolitan) (15:18): I do agree with Mrs Broad and Ms Lovell and some other contributors regarding the fact that the cancellation of the Commonwealth Games has demonstrated a very special kind of incompetence. Ultimately, it will cost Victorian taxpayers well over a billion dollars and has made us a laughing-stock on the world stage.

But in these things Ms Allan actually has some competition. I opened up the *Age* newspaper this morning to read an article by the new education editor Robyn Grace demonstrating yet another backflip from the Labor Party on its so-called schools tax. This is just the last of a long list of backflips. Initially the hit list of schools to now pay payroll tax was going to be approximately 110, then it was 60. Initially the threshold was going to be indexed, then it was not. The threshold was first \$7500, then it was \$15,000. Well, I read another backflip this morning on the front page of the *Age* newspaper that the schools on the hit list would be set until 2029, but then actually in question time, during Ms Tierney's interesting ministers statement about the animal census, I was opening up the *Age* application and I read that the minister had come out today to unsurprisingly once again back down – a backflip on a backflip. This is so shambolic now that even those opposite must admit that this tax simply has to go. It will only cost schools – and parents, in the middle of a cost-of-living crisis – thousands and thousands of additional dollars. If those opposite will not do it, when we get into government, we will scrap it.

Commonwealth Games

Melina BATH (Eastern Victoria) (15:20): Labor's cancelled Commonwealth Games is a complete debacle. Victorians now understand that it was a political stunt. Rural and regional Victorians have been conned and betrayed. Removing a portfolio does not hide the false spin of the former Minister for Commonwealth Games Legacy in this place.

Let the house reflect on some of Ms Shing's failed promises:

We have a unique opportunity to partner with local businesses and contractors in bringing 2026's Commonwealth Games to life and to support hundreds of jobs in the process ... That will create around 7500 jobs during and after the games ...

and as I said before in my constituency question:

... when we turn the eyes of the world to rural and regional Victoria and to the electorates of a number of people here on the opposition benches, who say they prioritise their communities, a return on investment of \$3 billion is no laughing matter.

Minister, you promised that these games would be 'the best games of our lives'. Well, you have trashed Victoria's reputation on the world stage. You have trashed all that potential for international tourism, for jobs and for return on investment. Instead you have smashed hopes and dreams of young athletes, and I call on you to apologise wholeheartedly to the people of Eastern Victoria Region.

Commonwealth Games

David DAVIS (Southern Metropolitan) (15:22): I think all of us were shocked when we heard this decision by the government on the Commonwealth Games. It is one of the most extraordinary decisions I have heard in public life over many years, a decision so deceitful, a decision so surprising and a decision so damaging. There was a promise of \$2.6 billion, but now the government claims the true cost was to be \$6 billion to \$7 billion. They have not produced those figures. Those figures are nowhere to be seen, and the community is owed honesty, owed transparency and owed accountability on this. The Premier and his hapless ministers, who have been stripped of their now defunct portfolios, actually need to come clean and explain how this set of figures was arrived at. No-one believes that this is a truthful set of figures. Everybody believes they have been cooked up just simply to put the

state in a position where it could cancel the Commonwealth Games. But I say honest people keep their word. Honest brokers as states – governments – keep their word, and in this case they have trashed the state's reputation. It is resonating heavily overseas and around the world. Inbound investors are looking at this state and saying, 'This is a shocking outcome.' There have been billions of dollars squandered – still we do not know how much they are going to have to pay to get out of the contract – and waste, incompetence and damage to the state. It is extraordinary, and these ministers should resign.

Business of the house

Notices of motion

Lee TARLAMIS (South-Eastern Metropolitan) (15:23): I move:

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

Motion agreed to.

Bills

Mental Health and Wellbeing Amendment Bill 2023

Second reading

Debate resumed on motion of Ingrid Stitt:

That the bill be now read a second time.

Georgie CROZIER (Southern Metropolitan) (15:24): I rise to speak to the Mental Health and Wellbeing Amendment Bill 2023, and I do so because it is an important bill that we are debating this afternoon that has come to the house. Obviously, members in this place know the government's intention in relation to the mental health crisis that is gripping Victoria. This bill has a number of purposes. It makes minor amendments to the Mental Health and Wellbeing Act 2022 and makes consequential amendments to the Judicial Proceedings Reports Act 1958, and it is looking at partly fixing up some areas with the implementation of the recommendations from the royal commission.

The final report of that very important royal commission was handed down in early 2021. It was an important report for the state, because it did highlight a range of issues around the mental health system here in Victoria. Of course there was an interim report, which was handed down in 2019, where five of the nine recommendations highlighted the desperate need to build the mental health workforce so that we have capacity in the system that can support those with mental health problems and so that those practitioners supporting people can also have the resources available.

What we know, though, is that that just has not transpired, and there are some real concerns around the implementation of the royal commission's recommendations and just where the government is at on it. They might talk about putting money into the system, but really where it is being delivered and how it is being delivered I think is of concern, because we know that mental health bed waiting times are blowing out yet again. I am waiting on the last quarter's Victorian Agency for Health Information data on health. Last time I looked, earlier today, it had not been released. We are still waiting on that. That is now overdue yet again. In the latest data that we know about, it was showing that, again, targets have been missed and that 60 per cent of patients were forced to wait longer than 8 hours for a mental health bed in Victoria's emergency departments. That data from VAHI shows that the government continues to fail to meet the 80 per cent target of admissions within the clinically recommended 8-hour time frame.

The reason I raise these issues around workforce is because the government has spoken about it; it is a major cornerstone of the royal commission's findings and recommendations. They said that the workforce was critical to have the ability, as I said, to deliver the services to Victorians. In doing so, again the government made some pretty big announcements around a workforce reform task force – that it would have responsibility for directing workforce reform activities and considering how models

of care and the introduction of new roles in workforces and systems planning would improve opportunities for Victoria's mental health and wellbeing workforce to work across the full breadth and depth of their trained scopes of practice to improve consumer outcomes.

The mental health and wellbeing workforce strategy 2021–24 was released in December 2021 by the then minister, Minister Merlino. In his foreword, he speaks about this issue:

... providing better care requires people. People who are skilled and trained to do the jobs that will deliver that care, and who approach their work with compassion, empathy and dedication.

I think there are so many people that actually do that. They do do that when they are working in this space. They provide amazing empathy and care and support in sometimes very challenging circumstances, and it is just heartbreaking to know that so many people are falling through the gaps, and so many children are falling through the gaps. We saw what happened in the extended lockdowns, with kids not being able to go to school and have that social interaction, and what was happening behind closed doors – the number of GPs that spoke to me about children with self-harm and tragically those that took their own lives. That will have a massive impact for years and years to come – the shadow pandemic, as it was described by so many who were seeing their children suffer in such a very detrimental way through that very dark period here in Victoria.

I was at lunch on Sunday – Mr Davis and a number of us were there – and a woman came up to me with tears in her eyes. She was a middle-aged woman, and she said, 'Georgie, you have got to do something about the mental health system; four of my friends have suicided in recent months' – four of her friends. That is the extent of I think the heartbreak that is going on in the community. It is sometimes forgotten because it is not immediate and it is such a private grief. We all know, I am sure, people who have suffered or seen those that are close to them that have suffered from a mental illness. So it is an important reform, and we understand that. We understand the royal commission and what the government is trying to do. This workforce strategy that I refer to has got lots of statements in it – motherhood statements – about what the government is doing, with the government patting themselves on the back. But they are actually failing to deliver – that is the point – because of how many people who are not being able to get the services that they so desperately need. For many people that are working within this system – within the acute health system but also within the mental health system – their frustrations are increasing because they also know that the personnel and the resources are just not being applied.

It is interesting to note, and I want to refer to, this report. As my colleague Ms Kealy in the other place so eloquently pointed out in her contribution, we fully understand that through the implementation there are going to be some errors, and what this bill does is fix up some of those errors. But it also actually is pushing back on some areas where we believe the government is not taking responsibility in an appropriate manner. What I am talking about is clauses 13 and 14, around removing paramedics from being part of that response. What these clauses do – and I will be moving in committee to omit these two clauses – is take paramedics away from that. To leave police and PSOs to be the first responders that have to deal with these patients and not have paramedics as part of that team is actually counterproductive to the whole health-led response that the government continues to tell Victorians this is all about, because it is actually not when you are taking away that part of the workforce. Again I refer to this strategy of December 2021, where it is noted there is a new workforce cohort. I will quote from page 26 of the report:

Action area 1c: Building emergent and new workforces

...

New workforce cohorts are also needed to deliver consumer-centred care and new service models ...

They talk about that it should:

... include new professions, potentially including mental health-trained paramedics, counsellors and wellbeing roles delivered across tertiary and community settings ...

The report goes on to talk extensively about that health-led response and the new and emerging workforces, as I said. I quote from page 49:

New and emerging workforces – including paramedics, consumer wellbeing support officers and counsellors, who have the skills that will support new models of care – need to be built to help stabilise the workforce.

That is the main point of why we will be moving a reasoned amendment. I am wondering if I can have that circulated. I move:

That all the words after ‘That’ be omitted and replaced with the words ‘this bill be withdrawn and redrafted to enable the delivery of a health-led response to mental health related emergencies.’.

The reason I am moving this amendment is because that is what the government has said, and that is what this task force talks about. It talks about a health-led response. It talks about having new and emerging workforces, including paramedics. So why then is the government taking away that option through this bill – through the changes in the clauses? We do believe that the bill does not capture what the government has told Victorians or what the government has told the sector. Ms Kealy has done extensive consultation with the sector. They are not happy that the health-led response has been ditched for having no paramedics as part of the transfer that clauses 13 and 14 go to.

I just referenced clause 12. Clause 12 supports the health-led response principle and allows 000 call takers to provide a health-led response wherever possible. But clause 13 removes the express reference to paramedics employed under the Ambulance Services Act 1986 in relation to ‘Taking a person into care and control in a mental health crisis’. Clause 14 provides for an authorised person to transfer care and control to a police officer, a PSO or a member of a class of authorised health professionals to be prescribed by regulation at a later date.

So that is why we are moving this reasoned amendment – to say to government, ‘Well, your clause 12 points out that’s what you want to do, but in actual fact clauses 13 and 14 negate that.’ So in committee I will be moving to omit clauses 13 and 14 in the bill so that it can be a true health-led response.

I wanted to just state that there are the stakeholders that, as I said, Ms Kealy has spoken to, and they are very much concerned about the government’s approach.

Melina Bath interjected.

Georgie CROZIER: It does recall, as Ms Bath just said, the Police Association Victoria. The police association have spoken out, and we understand that they have got concerns around their resources and the number of police that will be required to undertake the work that the government is now doing. The Victorian Mental Illness Awareness Council (VMIAC), those with lived experience, provided enormous information to the royal commission and gave such extraordinary evidence through those hearings and through the submission process, and the royal commission looked at those lived experiences. They are not supportive of the actions of government. The RANZCP, or the Royal Australian and New Zealand College of Psychiatrists, are also very concerned about this approach by government. The Victorian Alcohol and Drug Association – the alcohol and drug sector – have been very outspoken in terms of what is required and, again, provided significant information to the royal commission and provide enormous support to so many who suffer with drug and alcohol addiction and of course then may have mental health issues as a result.

So these very important stakeholders who have been providing information to the royal commission, who have been at the forefront of talking about why we need reform in this state, do not support the intentions of the government. As I said, Ms Kealy has spoken with them at length, and they have spoken about concerns that paramedics are now taken out of that response.

I think, as we have said, the recommendations from the royal commission’s report really highlight the importance of treating mental health like any other health emergency and in that situation that health professionals be there to assist in those emergencies – that certainly paramedics should be among those first responders and part of that health response. A key recommendation focused on the 000 responses

to ensure that paramedics rather than police, in instances where appropriate and where able, were the first responders. That really is, I think, very important – that paramedics are not cut out of this response.

I will be asking in committee: what is the government's reasoning for this? It makes no sense – it makes absolutely no sense. What have the union provided to government in relation to what they want about not assisting with these patients who are needing emergency care? Removing the ability of 000 call takers to refer a matter to Ambulance Victoria leaves police or PSOs to be the legislated first responders, and we do not believe that is right. We do not believe that that is the right course of action. We think this is a step backwards from the important reforms from the Royal Commission into Victoria's Mental Health System and the recommendations and findings from that important work that was undertaken. It is very much inconsistent with the findings and recommendations those commissioners provided to government. Whilst I note that it is aiming to provide flexibility, taking out a huge number of first responders in a health emergency crisis makes no sense.

I hope that those in the chamber understand the reasons for us to be proposing and moving this reasoned amendment. We do believe that it should be withdrawn and that we have that health-led response at the front and centre to ensure that those with a mental illness who are requiring emergency care get the care from a range of first responders, including paramedics.

John BERGER (Southern Metropolitan) (15:42): Today I rise to contribute to discussion on the bill before the Parliament today, the Mental Health and Wellbeing Amendment Bill 2023. This bill was born out of an urgency for Victoria to correct issues in our system and support those who need to be supported. The Royal Commission into Victoria's Mental Health System, from which the bill takes many cues, delivered many enlightening insights that all culminated in one key understanding: something needed to change. In delving into the bill and exploring just what it will do to improve the lives of Victorians navigating the mental health system, I would like to take a moment to touch on the Royal Commission into Victoria's Mental Health System, which delivered the final report on the royal commission's findings in February 2019. This report outlined extensively what needed to change in Victoria's mental health system to improve the delivery of meaningful and life-saving care for the Victorians that need it the most. The Andrews Labor government has taken this on and committed to following every single one of the royal commission's recommendations.

There were many findings of the royal commission, the root cause of many of which are to be swiftly and effectively and decisively addressed in this legislation, the Mental Health and Wellbeing Amendment Bill 2023, just as they were in the Mental Health and Wellbeing Act 2022. The commission also noted the urgency in these reforms, as a long-deteriorating mental health system will continue to cause damage to individuals requiring care. To this effect, many reforms in this bill are inspired by or directly adapted from the royal commission. The royal commission came to these findings and recommendations through a variety of methodologies that focused on exploring as many stories and experiences as possible to gain an understanding of the diverse group of Victorians within our state's mental health system. This side of the chamber does not stand for a system that leaves vulnerable Victorians high and dry. Mental health is a serious issue, and it needs to be taken seriously. Victorians need and deserve a system that is fit for purpose. They have a right to seek help when help is needed, and they have a right to be aided and respected when they seek help. This is why the Andrews Labor government and the Minister for Health have proposed a bill that will introduce several measures to ensure that Victorians of all ages requiring mental health and wellbeing support can access networks to support them. It is as simple as that.

Mental health is just as important as any other forms of health care ensuring that individuals are healthy and happy. Unfortunately, the system has not always been functioning to its full potential, as outlined by the royal commission. Part of this was rectified last year with the Mental Health and Wellbeing Act 2022, but the work is not done yet. We are not the kind of government that just does half a job. In fields that really matter, like the mental health and wellbeing of every single Victorian, we make sure we get it right. This is a rapidly changing sector in Victoria, and we are trying to build a mental health

system that truly supports those in it, a system that does not leave people worse off or worse for wear but, rather, improves their lives.

As these rapid changes take place, we must be ready to jump on expert advice and amend sections of the act that need to be amended, which brings us to the Mental Health and Wellbeing Amendment Bill 2023. It goes to a couple of the measures to improve our state's health system and ensures that the delivery of reforms within the Mental Health and Wellbeing Act 2022 causes the best possible outcomes, which I will now read over. Many of these amendments only exist to clarify or correct technical passages, but it is essential that this act be effective when it comes into effect later this year.

An additional key reform within the Mental Health and Wellbeing Act 2022 that this amendment bill highlights and strengthens shifts the current law enforcement focus that our legislation currently has towards those experiencing mental health issues that may present harm to themselves, the community and others to a focus on how these individuals may be assisted through avenues of health care. The science has shown time and time again that when an individual presents a threat to themselves and others due to their mental state, they need help. This is not to discredit the importance of our law enforcement officers or their ability to protect the community but rather to explore ways to see the harm decrease in the long term. This would ultimately be achieved by allowing paramedics the ability to exercise their work more flexibly in situations that could constitute a crisis if those circumstances ever arise. However, it is important to clarify that systemic reforms must be made to ensure that an appropriate statutory framework exists for such flexibility. When these reforms take place and a person obviously needs to be detained, it will be done.

Ambulance Victoria responds to over 60,000 calls a year in which the patient is in some way affected by mental health issues. It is important that these cases all be treated as effectively as possible, and in some cases that means reducing police engagement. These amendments will in no way alter the way in which paramedics and other healthcare professionals are able to treat these patients. This ensures that before powers are to be awarded to paramedics, the necessary systemic supports are in place and that other healthcare workers are equipped to support paramedics in such situations. This will ultimately lead to a much more effectively functioning system for our emergency services. It also means that we will have a health-focused approach to situations of potential harm that it is as fit for purpose as possible.

These mental health reforms will change the nature of mental health care in Victoria as we know it. The royal commission showed the changes were essential. Whilst it is shifting to a health-focused approach to dealing with a public mental health crisis, if a mental health crisis team is unable to respond as quickly as needed, police will remain with the powers to address the crisis. This is only in extreme circumstances.

To summarise that specific amendment, it will provide clarity to the reforms that we are hoping to introduce to create a health-led mental health crisis response standard. The protection of every Victorian is at the heart of this amendment. We believe in supporting Ambulance Victoria, hence not rushing these reforms. We are very passionate about Ambulance Victoria over here. In fact funding for Ambulance Victoria has more than doubled since the Andrews Labor government was elected: that is right, 140 per cent on ambulance spending, which adds up to somewhere around \$2 billion. This is because we know that it is important that money be spent on our essential services. We have even got more paramedics on the road, an increase of 50 per cent, which adds up to around 2200 more paramedics. This is nothing but a net positive for the Victorian people. Everybody knows that if you want a decent ambulance service, the Andrews Labor government will be the ones to deliver it.

This of course is not the only amendment being made to support the reforms being made in mental health. Clarity is made to several definitions within the act to ensure that there is absolutely no confusion when delivering these important reforms. One of those definitions being clarified is the definition of 'parent'. This obviously relates to the issue of youth mental health, which was a large component of the royal commission. Due to this there are many reforms within the act that interact

directly with how youth mental health is approached and what treatment for youth mental health would look like. Naturally, as with any other health-related consultation or interaction, if the patient is under 16, then there is a possibility that a parent must be consulted or notified.

The amendment bill clarifies that the Mental Health and Wellbeing Act will use the definition of 'parent' outlined in the Mental Health Act 2014. That is for all purposes of supporting all the big reforms we are making in mental health, like the introduction of carer-designed and led clinics across Melbourne and greater Victoria. There are a couple of those in Southern Metro, and I am excited to see the results and how they deliver for families and carers of individuals. It is important that every single Victorian is healthy and supported, even those who do the supporting.

The Mental Health and Wellbeing Act has also seen the introduction of the board of the Victorian Collaborative Centre for Mental Health and Wellbeing commencing its operations last September. It has proven already to be successful and competent in its purpose – that being the creation of a centralised voice and a reference point for the design of our new, overhauled mental health system by bringing together individuals who hold lived experiences and interactions with the mental health system, as the Mental Health and Wellbeing Amendment Bill 2023 seeks to pull back overly restrictive requirements to assist in creating an easier route to recruiting key leadership roles. This is an acknowledgement of the importance of the design recommendations and contributions being made by the collaborative centre. With these amendments the board will become even more an integral asset to the development of a positive and effective mental health system.

On the topic of the many entities established by the Mental Health and Wellbeing Act 2022, the bill also addresses the commencement of a regional board, with the interim regional bodies established and filled in February of this year. They have hit the ground running, building relationships and connections with the community and stakeholders. This is all with the intent of transitioning these interim regional bodies into the statutory regional board, a body that will inform the development and delivery of the services within regional Victoria. This amendment bill seeks to delay the establishment of the statutory regional board to make the most of the capabilities of the interim bodies in establishing the connections needed for the board to have with regional communities.

The bill also seeks to amend for clarification the specifics of which organisations may be eligible to receive state funding and therefore the exact nature of the statutory obligations these organisations are beholden to. This pertains to the opening of the 60 mental health and wellbeing locals across Victoria, an essential reform recommended by the commission. Mental health and wellbeing locals deliver important services and support close to the individuals requiring them. This is in recognition that one of the most common barriers to seeking support and treatment is simply distance. In 2023 this is not okay. To that effect these locals will ensure that mental health and wellbeing support is not systemically inaccessible. Six of these locals have been delivered, with an additional seven in the advanced stages of development. Due to the size of this program much of the cooperation with subcontractors and partners has been integrated with its delivery. The amendments made with this bill will clarify the organisations assisting in the opening of these locals and with funding from the Andrews Labor government will take the Mental Health and Wellbeing Act's definition of 'mental health and wellbeing services provided' and therefore sit under the same statutory oversight mechanisms and obligations that all mental health and wellbeing services answer to.

Ultimately most of the bill is to ensure clarification. It in no way alters or deviates from the recommendations made by the royal commission. To do so naturally would lead to a less satisfactory result for Victorians struggling with mental health issues, and what this bill does is clarify exactly how the legislation should be interpreted to achieve the best and safest results for Victorians navigating mental health systems.

The Mental Health and Wellbeing Act 2022 offered extensive change, an overhaul if you will, to the way that our state institutionally approaches mental health. As outlined in the royal commission, this is essential to the wellbeing of every single Victorian. It is a mammoth task, but it must be done. That

is what the Andrews Labor government is about: taking big steps because we know it is the right thing to do, doing what matters.

It is clear that the original Mental Health and Wellbeing Act has so much potential to right the wrongs of the past and ensure that Victoria's system and institutions will no longer hold flaws that run the risk of serious failings for some of the most vulnerable members of our community. It has been a long time coming, and the work is not yet done.

Before I go I would like to thank, and acknowledge the work done by, our health professionals. They are truly the backbone of our community, regardless of what role they take in the health world. Mental health workers are no exception to this, and they ought to be recognised for all the good work they do for us. This bill seeks to remedy difficulties for those who professionally interact with the health system and its mental health sector. After all, it is in everyone's interest that we work to make their role easier. This amendment bill is sensible, it is straightforward and it is the right thing to do. I commend the bill to the house and look forward to following how the Mental Health and Wellbeing Bill will improve the wellbeing of my constituents in Southern Metro and all Victorians at large.

David LIMBRICK (South-Eastern Metropolitan) (15:55): I rise to speak on the Mental Health and Wellbeing Amendment Bill 2023. As with the Mental Health and Wellbeing Bill 2022, I will not be opposing the legislation before us today. But before I address some of the specifics of this legislation I think it is worth reflecting a little bit on the past three years and the impact that government decisions are continuing to have on the mental wellbeing of Victorians.

Many of my colleagues who are here in the chamber today were not present for the dark days of the pandemic, but for those who were, you will no doubt remember me frequently raising the issue of mental health harms when considering how the government responded to the COVID-19 pandemic. One of the first issues related to the mental health harm of the government response that was brought to my attention was the mask mandates and in particular the effect that they had on victims of family violence and sexual assault. But I could not even get the health minister, the Premier or the chief health officer to adjust their language to try and prevent people who could not wear a mask getting bullied or, even worse, verbally attacked on the street.

While I could recount many specific stories from the tidal wave of misery that was produced, I want to highlight one of the key harms that I maintain was a reckless and irresponsible trade-off. I am referring here to the closing of schools. During the Public Accounts and Estimates Committee COVID inquiry the government confirmed that they had not done any modelling to better understand the harms caused by the government response to the pandemic. We heard from experts in the health, mental health and social services sectors. Professor Patrick McGorry stated:

We already know that there is a 33 per cent rise in deliberate self-harm presenting to emergency departments, and it is actually really even more dramatic than that – the Royal Children's and some suicide clusters – but probably there has been no significant rise yet in completed suicide.

The Commission for Children and Young People also did some great work over that period, producing regular snapshots surveying young people on how they were coping during the pandemic and particularly with school closures. While not all young people struggled, the stories from the ones who did are quite harrowing. I will not read out quotes from the various reports, but suffice to say they are heartbreaking expressions of loneliness, sadness and despair. It was with this suffering in mind that I introduced a motion in this chamber in 2020 calling on the government to reopen the schools. Whilst this motion was not successful, everything that occurred after that has only convinced me that it was the right thing to do and would likely have prevented some measure of harm to young people in this state.

It was common to hear people state, even in this place, that ‘The economy doesn’t matter’ when you are trying to save lives. This was always a naive claim. Indeed Professor McGorry in his testimony, just prior to the previous quote I read out, stated that:

As I said earlier, we could predict a rise in suicide, particularly because of the economic impacts. That is really one of the most potent drivers of suicide in these conditions.

Of course the economy matters. When people are struggling to pay their bills and feed their kids, this has an impact on mental health. We are only seeing the beginning of this now. We cannot spend our way into prosperity, and the ever-increasing taxes, fines and fees imposed on Victorians will continue to create harm.

In these circumstances people may more frequently have to deal with the frustration of government services and heartless bureaucracies. I do not mean to imply that people working in the public service are heartless – I am sure that many of them are well meaning and some of them even likely to be very hard working – but the system itself is heartless. The Victorian Ombudsman Deborah Glass did some excellent work during the pandemic, and while the inquiry into the public housing towers lockdown has received more media attention, the inquiry into the border closures provides a very clear demonstration of how heartlessly bureaucracy can manifest itself. Let us reflect on what this inquiry was all about. The government announced with almost no notice that they would be instigating a hard border closure with New South Wales. We essentially created a situation where many Victorians may have met the international definition of ‘internally displaced people’ – that is, we made internal refugees of our own citizens.

To better understand the full impact that a heartless bureaucracy can have on mental health, I want to read a couple of brief quotes from people that provided comment for the Ombudsman’s report. From page 7 of the Ombudsman’s report – this is from a contributor:

I had to constantly book online appointments with our doctors to get more and more paperwork vouching for the severity of our mental health. It was so dehumanising and humiliating ... I had to call and threaten self-harm to feel like I was being taken seriously.

From page 8 of the Ombudsman’s report:

We just want an exemption to be with our dying daughter ... She is terminal, palliative and end of life. We are being treated inhumanly ... [by a person] making a decision taking weeks we don’t have ...

As I stated at the beginning of my comments, I will not oppose this legislation, as I did not oppose the reforms in 2022. A large component of what the reforms seek to accomplish is more patient autonomy, improved consent processes and a framework for mental health that better meets the needs of consumers – and these are good things. But I simply cannot comment on legislation related to mental health without reflecting on the harm done by the government itself during the pandemic period. While improving the functioning of the mental health sector is certainly not the worst goal of a government, they could achieve some initial improvements by cancelling COVID fines immediately.

I will close by quoting the Victorian Ombudsman from the close of the foreword of the *Investigation into Decision-making under the Victorian Border Crossing Permit Directions*. She said:

I also encourage the government to publicly acknowledge the distress caused to so many people when discretion was exercised narrowly, or not at all.

If there is a next time – we cannot let this happen again.

And I agree. If we are to prevent these things from happening again, we need a royal commission into the COVID response in Victoria.

Melina BATH (Eastern Victoria) (16:01): I am pleased to rise this afternoon to speak on the Mental Health and Wellbeing Amendment Bill 2023, in doing so for the Nationals in concert with the Liberals. This bill is in some respects a tidy-up of the former bill from 2022, and it fixes some, I will say, inconsistencies that were in that bill, a very large bill, and some typos. That is the first point, and we

certainly agree with that tidy-up. This bill also makes some minor amendments to the Mental Health and Wellbeing Act 2022 and consequential amendments to the Judicial Proceedings Reports Act 1958.

The bill really does stem, as we have heard this afternoon, from the Royal Commission into Victoria's Mental Health System. The first report from that, the interim report, was handed down in 2019, and certainly five out of those nine recommendations in that interim report were on the need for a mental health workforce and to ensure that there are people working across the breadth of Victoria.

I had the opportunity and took the opportunity as part of that royal commission to join roundtable discussions with the commissioners, and there were a number of commissioners in regional Victoria. I remember attending one in Warragul one day, primarily to support some of my constituents who had come into my office. They were consistently frustrated. They were the carers or the parents of adult children, or adults, who had been suffering from prolonged mental ill health. Of course the pathways down to a mental health disorder, condition or illness can be many and varied. It can have its origins in the physical – in DNA – in substance abuse and in the pressures of life. There are multiple and concerning ways.

My particular constituents went there, and they needed to tell their stories, because despite my best efforts in raising their issues in here they were so frustrated that they felt they could not get their voices out. I do not know – it may have been temporarily cathartic. I still wonder whether or not they actually achieved what they needed to achieve. However, listening to their stories was so very challenging for us sitting there and listening to their heartfelt daily issues that they had to face on behalf of their adult children and their frustrations with the system. Also there were mental health practitioners at that roundtable for the royal commission. I remember that from a professional standpoint in regional Victoria and in Gippsland they were frustrated by the lack of other professionals and the fact that their waitlists were so, so long. They were concerned that they were not actually able to meet the needs of their potential patients, and there was frustration that surrounded that. Indeed one of the findings of the royal commission certainly was that families, carers and supporters felt that they were left out of the system. Sixty thousand Victorians care for someone with a mental illness. That was the report's finding. Indeed they felt excluded from the system. They also felt a lack of access to information about treatment, care and support – and I can reflect that in my experience with people coming into my office in my Eastern Victoria electorate.

One of those key factors, in speaking with that mental health practitioner, is the backlog and waitlist. Certainly that particular hearing and the round tables by the commission were pre COVID, and then we had COVID. We have just heard from Mr Limbrick about the effect and the impact of our statewide lockdown system – which no other state in the world had – particularly in regional Victoria, where COVID had a light footprint by comparison. We had schools in Orbost locked down for weeks and months. That certainly had an impact on those young children and the way they interacted – their lack of social and educational interaction. But there was also deprivation of contact with the elderly and the concerns they had. That really put them back on their haunches in relation to the isolation effects. Also, for those members of the community who had substance abuse issues, certainly those consistent lockdowns through COVID pushed them off into a state of increased addiction, and then they could not have an appropriate response because the waitlist was so long.

These are just some of the things that I have experienced and seen. The Andrews government have known – they have been in government for eight years – for such a long time about the thousands of job vacancies across Victoria in the mental health area and the need to put skilled and qualified people in front of those vulnerable people and their families to support them in finding a pathway to better mental health.

I just want to acknowledge our shadow minister, my colleague Emma Kealy, who has done a power of work in this space. She has really led our discussions, other than those who have written to me and certainly those who I have come across in my Eastern Victoria electorate. She has really led this in terms of the stakeholder groups. Their concerns are about this bill sliding backwards and slipping away

from the royal commission's recommendations for a health-led response to a police-led response, and that is of course a disappointment. Quoting the royal commission:

Given that most people experiencing a mental health crisis have done nothing illegal, the involvement of police can be humiliating and traumatic.

They have done nothing illegal. They simply, and most complexly, have a mental health condition. The recommendation also states that police should be involved only where necessary to protect people's safety. So we see that the royal commission really had a focus on the health professionals leading the medical support, with police and PSOs being brought in, shall we say, only as a last resort or where there was a safety issue at heart.

One of the key things that some of the constituents in my electorate have said is around the frustrations they have felt at the lack of opportunity they have had to make inroads into the initial triage and then into the support systems. These are recent case studies. A constituent's son who was under the influence of drugs and behaving erratically stated that he was going to kill himself – so a very, very serious situation. The mother's only and last port of call, in sheer desperation, was to call 000, and the police attended her property. She was really seeking an intervention in the form of a mental health professional, a lynchpin that would have provided her son with a pathway. But the police said that they felt very hamstrung and that the only pathway they could use to get him into the system was in effect to charge the young man in the hope that a magistrate would provide that pathway to mental health. The police said to this mother that they felt totally hamstrung in their attendance – and they had to do that of course, because he was potentially going to be a danger – and that they want that system better triaged.

Another constituent has a 50-year-old son who suffers from bipolar and has frequent manic episodes. To date he has been arrested several times by the police for his erratic behaviour. The concerned father stresses that mental health professionals are better placed to assist his son in bringing about suitable treatment options as an alternative to the police. Again, he is concerned that there is just this cycle of going in and coming out without that proper triage.

It is very, very clear that our police association have raised their concerns as well about a walk back from, or walk to or walk away from, a health-led to a police-led response. We saw the Andrews government spruik at election time that we were going to have 500 new police officers in our system to bolster those police lines and police support. Well, we also know that there are approximately 800 vacancies in Victoria where they cannot find police positions, and that is a concern – that is an absolute concern. I was at a function only recently where I spoke with a Victorian police officer, a dedicated officer, and he said, 'We're just under the pump.' He was not going anywhere, but the pressure on their shoulders is more and more and more.

We also see that information has come to light only recently in the media. They state that alarming data released to this Parliament on Monday shows police were called to 10,310 mental health incidents last year that led to someone having to be taken to the emergency department. That is where a lot of police actually spend their time – they are unfortunately cooling their heels in emergency departments for extended hours on end.

I would like to put on record my thanks to all of our first responders, to Victoria Police officers and to Ambulance Victoria officers. Again I had the pleasure at another function to sit and talk with a very distinguished AV officer, just talking in generalities about their work and their dedication. They are the front line – they come to explosive and volatile situations – and it is their calm, professional compassion and stability that provide often the most intensive support from Ambulance Victoria. One of the key recommendations of the royal commission focuses on the 000 responses and ensures that paramedics, as I have just said, are the first respondents to these call-outs. Again this is really vital, the way that they are responded to, for the support and the recovery and the triaging of mental health patients.

My colleague Ms Crozier has spoken about clauses 13 and 14 and our concerns around clauses 13 and 14. We certainly support clause 12 because that provides that flexibility in dispatch, in ringing 000. Call takers can certainly then nuance and triage that and provide the appropriate police or paramedics as required. So clause 12 we certainly endorse, but clauses 13 and 14 remove a focus around that medical, health-led response and walk backwards to that police response. We have got both a reasoned amendment to take this bill away and to do some work, to speak to those stakeholders and to triage this bill, and also some house amendments from the Nationals and the Liberals around removing clauses 13 and 14 altogether.

Finally, we need to listen to those professionals. They are at the coalface of mental health support. The Police Association Victoria certainly have frustrations around this, and I know my colleague Emma Kealy has spoken with VAADA, the Victorian Alcohol and Drug Association, in depth, and they do a power of work. They have also been certainly supportive of the importance of first responders, but then also getting into the system and having that ongoing professional service and a clear pathway for those people to lead better lives. Our local hospitals and our medical centres and our emergency departments are really confronted quite often with challenging situations, and I would like to put on record here today my thanks for all of our Gippsland hospitals, our Eastern Victoria hospitals, for the work that they do. I call on the crossbench to support both our reasoned amendment and our house amendment. Otherwise, this bill has merit and needs to pass through this house.

Michael GALEA (South-Eastern Metropolitan) (16:16): I also rise today to speak on a bill which is of utmost importance, the Mental Health and Wellbeing Amendment Bill 2023. This bill does represent a significant leap forward in our collective journey towards better mental health outcomes for all Victorians. To provide some context, this state has been striving to reform our mental health system under the Andrews Labor government, and we have been following the path set out by the 74 recommendations made by the Royal Commission into Victoria's Mental Health System. Our government has embraced these recommendations wholeheartedly and has already committed over \$6 billion towards the implementation of these recommendations, a commitment which is unparalleled in this country's history.

The relevance and importance of this bill that we are debating today cannot be overstated. We are addressing an urgent need, one that touches each and every Victorian: our friends, our family, our children, our colleagues and ourselves. Mental health is not an isolated issue; it threads through every aspect of our lives and shapes our society. So as we progress, let us remember why we are here today. We are here because every Victorian deserves easy and accessible high-quality mental health care. We are here because mental health matters and because it is time that our legislation reflects that reality. Mental health is about not just the individual but also the community. We all have a role to play in creating a supportive and inclusive environment. As elected officials, we have been entrusted by the community to prioritise and improve mental health services for our constituents.

Turning to the pivotal work of the royal commission, which many of the previous speakers have referenced, a significant turning point in our state's history, this royal commission conducted an extensive and intensive study into the state of our existing mental health services and delivered a comprehensive report with those recommendations I mentioned. These recommendations encompass an array of interventions and reforms all designed to make these mental health services that we have more accessible, more inclusive, more responsive and more effective. A plan such as this is not simply a guide. It is a clear call to action, a demand for change that we as lawmakers and as public servants have a moral responsibility to heed. This government has pledged wholehearted support to the full implementation of these recommendations, and this bill stands as a testament to this commitment, as it forms a key component of our journey towards comprehensive mental health reform.

Commitment alone, though, of course is not enough. Action is the lifeblood of change. In the two years since the royal commission's final report was released, we have been relentless in our pursuit of change. To date the Andrews Labor government has already successfully implemented 60 per cent of

the recommendations, and work has begun on over 90 per cent of them. We are not just talking about change, we are driving it, we are living it and we are delivering it.

It is also important for us to examine the financial commitments that underline this tangible dedication to mental health reform. The government has shown an unprecedented level of commitment to mental health in Victoria. This is not just echoed in words or policy but, more importantly, shown through the investments made. To date we have allocated over \$6 billion to fortify and revamp this state's mental health system. The level of investment is unrivalled in the history of Victoria and indeed Australia. No other state government has so significantly invested in and put support into mental health. This assertion is not an exercise in self-congratulation or anything; rather it is an important signal of what has been a stark change in our collective approach to mental health.

The commitment also continues into this year's state budget, with an allocation of \$776.3 million earmarked to progress the implementation further of those recommendations. This fund is designed to bolster existing services, initiate new ones and ensure that we meet the urgent needs of those requiring mental health, alcohol and other drug treatment and rehabilitation and harm reduction services. It is also a clear and unequivocal message to all Victorians that their mental health is a priority to this government. We are dedicated to fostering a future where mental health services are readily available, are easily accessible and are catering to the needs of every Victorian.

An integral part of this bill and the broader mental health reform effort is the deliberate, strategic and effective implementation of those recommendations. One such initiative in this reform process has been the establishment of mental health and wellbeing locals. It is all very well and good for us to reinvest in world-class mental health services, but if they are all located in Parkville or Prahran, that is not doing much good to people in Cranbourne or Pakenham or Gippsland. These mental health and wellbeing locals are a really significant and important part of this reform agenda because they bring these services into people's neighbourhoods. I am so excited that in this year's state budget we saw a commitment towards the building of an additional three mental health locals, including one in the south-east – in Narre Warren – as well as planning commitments for future mental health and wellbeing locals right across the state, including in Cranbourne and in Officer as well in the outer south-east. These local services are a really important initiative. There has already been \$263.8 million invested in these mental health and wellbeing locals, with the expectation of having 50 such locals operating across the state by 2026. It also ensures that people have less barriers to treatment not just in terms of actually getting there but in terms of social acceptance as well – being able to fit it into your schedule and not have to take the time out and then explain what you are doing to find solutions that work for you. Having those services close to home really is transformative.

Beyond those locals as well, we are undertaking the expansion and upgrade of other facilities across the state, from opening the Parkville youth prevention and recovery centre and an additional five new youth facilities to upgrading existing ones in various locations. We are ensuring that this high-quality mental health service is available in every part of the state. The expansion also includes the creation of a women's prevention and recovery care centre, the first in Victoria to offer accommodation for accompanying dependants, further testifying to this comprehensive approach.

It is not just confined to physical infrastructure. It is equally focused on addressing different mental health conditions and the diverse needs of our communities – initiatives such as the hospital outreach post-suicidal engagement program, or HOPE; the \$20 million investment to tackle eating disorders; and a \$60 million investment to support the various and diverse mental health issues of our diverse communities. Our CALD and LGBTIQ+ communities are examples of this. Our approach is about recognising the unique experiences of different communities, of different Victorians, and tailoring interventions to meet those specific needs.

Moreover, we are also preparing for future mental health needs, investing in infant, child and family wellbeing hubs and in mental health and wellbeing services across the state as well. These investments will also ensure age-appropriate mental health support is available for all Victorians. The \$801 million

mental health beds expansion program is another step towards this by reducing waiting times, easing the burden on our emergency departments and providing immediate treatment for those who need it. This is all about bringing those royal commission recommendations to life and bringing them to action for all Victorians. It is about creating a future where mental health is treated with the urgency, the care and the respect that it deserves, meaning no-one is left behind.

There are also a number of reforms in terms of our workforce development. I would also like to join previous colleagues from both sides of the house who have acknowledged the work of those people who work tirelessly in our mental health sector, and I wish to add my voice to theirs in my admiration of the work that they do. Quite frankly, the work that they do is remarkable and an inspiration to many of us, and especially many of us in this chamber, and there is a need for further allocations of staffing. There is a need for more staffing, and that is why we have set ambitious targets. We set them last year to double the mental health workforce by 2031 from 8700 to 17,400 full-time equivalent workers. We are proud that this government has been at the forefront of workforce expansion in the mental health space, also investing over \$600 million since 2020–21 in workforce initiatives. These efforts have already resulted in the creation of 2100 more jobs in this sector. This includes more than 400 mental health nurses, over 300 psychologists, more than 100 psychiatrists and over 900 additional allied health clinicians. These numbers are not just statistics; they are our frontline workers, our frontline soldiers in the battle against the mental health crisis.

Additionally, we also believe in the power and influence of lived experience in mental health care. In line with this we have invested \$50 million to grow and develop the lived-experience workforce. This is the largest ever investment of its kind, showcasing our commitment to enhancing career pathways for this crucial part of the workforce, and as we look towards the future, our plans for workforce expansion continue unabated.

We have offered relocation incentives for returning international health and mental health workers, launched the Aboriginal mental health traineeship program, and we are also expanding the forensic community mental health workforce as part of the \$81 million commitment to improve Victoria's forensic mental health services. These efforts not only create more jobs but ensure that our workforce is skilled, equipped, diverse and culturally competent to meet the varied mental health needs of our community.

As I conclude I would like to, in commending this bill to the house, note that mental health is a real issue that has real-world effects on each and every Victorian in many different ways. This amendment bill is a very important step closer to achieving true mental health equity, and we must continue striving for that goal. Mental health is not a destination but a journey, and it is about taking significant steps, small or large, every day to improve our wellbeing. I do commend this bill to the house.

Sarah MANSFIELD (Western Victoria) (16:28): I rise today to speak on the Mental Health and Wellbeing Amendment Bill 2023. This bill amends the Mental Health and Wellbeing Act 2022, which comes into effect later this year. Just for the record, my partner is employed as a psychiatrist at a public health service and sits on the board of the Victorian Collaborative Centre for Mental Health and Wellbeing, and although this legislation impacts both roles, there is no personal gain for him and it does not present, I believe, any conflict of interest.

The Greens have long stood by the principle that people experiencing mental illness should live free from stigma and discrimination. They should have maximum opportunities for inclusion in society and contribution to their community. We stand firm that mental health services, our agencies and frontline responses should adopt trauma-informed approaches that uphold the dignity, culture, gender, lived experience and strengths of an individual, their family and carers. That is why, although we will be supporting this amendment bill, the Greens will continue to push the government to work towards implementation of more humane and health-led responses for people facing mental health challenges, and we do in fact agree with many of the concerns we have heard from across the chamber this afternoon.

Recommendation 10 of the Royal Commission into Victoria's Mental Health System called for first responders to people experiencing mental health crises to be led by health professionals like paramedics rather than the police. While many police do a tremendous job in what are often very challenging circumstances, a justice-led response is not the right one for what is fundamentally an acute health issue. For various reasons many people and their families fear and mistrust the police, and a person's past experiences of trauma can influence their response to an intervention. The reality is, as we heard throughout the royal commission and we all too frequently hear from our communities, far too many people have been subject to further harm and trauma from punitive responses when compassion and mental health expertise were what was needed.

We understand that from a practical perspective it is not possible for paramedics to take on this additional workload by the original proposed date of 1 September. They currently lack appropriate resources, support and capacity to take on this role to keep consumers and staff – keep themselves – safe, and safety for all must be paramount. We recognise that this is challenging work, and we are aware that our paramedics are already overloaded due to extraordinary demand. Chronic underinvestment in health prevention and primary care means more people are getting sick and requiring hospital-level care, and our paramedics are at the front line of all of this extra healthcare demand. But highly skilled health professionals like paramedics are well placed to lead health-related emergency responses, and the government needs to be doing everything it can to support them and other mental health workers and create capacity for them to undertake this important work. They may need more time, but the Greens want assurances from the government that removing references to a full health-led response in the legislation does not mean that these reforms will be swept quietly under the carpet.

Our mental health workers, as we have heard from many speakers already this afternoon, do such important work and deliver life-changing and very often life-saving care, but it is no secret that there has been a history of mistreatment and abuse of power in our mental health systems and associated institutions, and this has led to a legacy of neglect and broken trust which will take transformational change to heal and rebuild. The government has done well with the implementation of many of the recommendations from the mental health royal commission, and we want to see that good work continue because the number of people in our community experiencing mental illness only continues to increase. Nearly one-quarter of Victorian adults report being diagnosed with depression or anxiety by a doctor, and 45 per cent Victorians will experience a mental health condition in their lifetime – that is nearly half of us. In a 2012–13 survey 30 per cent of First Nations people surveyed reported high or very high psychological distress levels, which was nearly three times the rate of non-Aboriginal people. The impacts on young First Nations people are devastating, with rates of intentional self-harm among young Aboriginal people aged 15 to 24 years at 5.2 times the rate of non-Aboriginal young people. Other marginalised groups include our LGBTQIA+ community, who suffer mental health problems at four to six times higher rates than those of the general population, and it is particularly high among trans and gender-diverse young people.

As hard as these figures are to hear, we know the numbers are not likely to come down in the near future. The pressures and strains from the rising cost of food and essentials, skyrocketing house prices and increasing homelessness are taking their toll on the wellbeing and mental health of people right across our state. For people already living with a severe mental illness or caring for someone with a severe mental illness, who are already more likely to be living in poverty and experiencing homelessness in the first place, these additional pressures that they are facing currently can be devastating.

Initial responses to the Greens cost-of-living survey that is currently out have highlighted just how much current pressures are impacting people's mental wellbeing and their ability to pay for

medications and access health care. These are just some of the stories that have come in from Western Victoria when we asked people how they had been impacted by the rising costs of living:

Stress, fear of homelessness if our landlord should decide to put the rent up again, feeling like I cannot go to the doctor when I need to because it costs around 100 dollars now.

This is another person:

I have developed anxiety and depression as a result of worrying about paying bills.

And another:

... my entire payment is taken by rent & food & meds & bills. I feel so isolated especially since I am a high risk person for covid & unable to partake in many community activities or see family & friends much.

And another:

Have had to choose who gets dental or mental health care between myself and my partner.

Things are really tough for people, and they deserve better. What we need right now is the political courage to address the pervasive and mounting pressures of poverty and housing. If we are really serious about improving mental health outcomes for people in Victoria, these are the sorts of things we need to be prioritising. These issues are not disconnected. I know from my time working as a GP that it is virtually impossible to address the physical and mental health issues that people experience without secure and stable housing and enough food on the table.

So my challenge to this Labor government is to be bold and to do more to really give Victorians the best chance of living healthy lives, prevent mental illness in the first place and better support those who are already living with a mental illness. Our public mental health services must be fully funded so that they can provide timely, high-quality intervention for people experiencing mental illness – people of all ages and regardless of where they live. When people are given the right conditions and support to recover, they can and do thrive. The World Health Organization put it succinctly in 2004: when individuals are mentally healthy, they are able to realise their own abilities, cope with the normal stresses of life, work productively and make positive contributions to their community. These are things we should all have the right to do.

Ann-Marie HERMANS (South-Eastern Metropolitan) (16:36): I rise today to speak on the Mental Health and Wellbeing Amendment Bill 2023, which aims to make minor amendments to the Mental Health and Wellbeing Act 2022 and consequential amendments to the Judicial Proceedings Reports Act 1958. Importantly, I emphasise that the Liberals and Nationals are supportive of the recommendations of the Royal Commission into Victoria's Mental Health System. Personally, with my background in education and social work – or more accurately youth work – I am fully cognisant of the importance of mental health and of the escalation of the mental health crisis we face in Victoria at this time.

I do at this point want to also acknowledge that there are a number of families who are dealing with family members who have either committed suicide or are contemplating suicide and people who are a risk themselves and to others, and I do offer my sincere condolences to anyone who has lost a loved one in this way. I know also from my portfolio that a number of our hardworking emergency services first responders, particularly in the fire services, have to deal with the effects of suicide on a regular basis. They are the ones that are called out to cut people down and to collect that which is left, and that is an incredibly difficult thing to have to do. So we do need to also make sure that we are providing for our emergency services workers and first responders the support that they need to protect their mental health.

I am very passionate in supporting services that will address the very real difficulties and challenges that we face in this state of Victoria at this time. I also want to acknowledge the comments made by my colleague Ms Georgie Crozier, as she mentioned the aspect of suicide. It is one that is really

affected by the Mental Health and Wellbeing Amendment Bill, and we need to consider the issues that are predominant and that relate to this particular bill being passed.

I also at this point in time want to acknowledge that in my electorate I am hugely supportive of the work done in the mental health space. I want to acknowledge many of the health services that do exist in the South-Eastern Region: the mental health services of Community Support Frankston; the South Eastern Private Hospital's mental health service in Noble Park; Early in Life Mental Health Service; Cornerstone centre in Dandenong, which is a contact centre and has a lot of people that are suffering with mental health that go there for food and support; Monash Health, which deals with a lot of mental health; the mental health services in Cranbourne; and there are many others that I may have left out.

I also had the opportunity on the weekend to attend a fundraiser for mental health, and I want to commend and support the work done in the mental health space. The Mental Health Foundation's gala dinner was hosted in Rowville on the weekend, and I was there with a table, supporting this fundraising event and the initiatives that it works towards with the expansion of services for people in need. I want to commend the great work that this foundation does and others in their delivery of support – many of them offer it for free, from fundraising – and the counselling services that they provide also to the multicultural communities.

These services help people to have access to vital resources and group-supervised activities and contribute towards the establishment of a wellness hub for people to access whenever and as needs arise. I want to also say it was a great night, and I am really pleased to note that there are others that are coming up and I would like to commend them to the house. So there is the mental health forum, 'Healthy minds', which has been organised by the local Rotary clubs for the south-east. It is actually for the Australian Rotary Health mental health research. I want to thank local constituent Leanne Byron for raising my awareness of this mental health forum that is going to be taking place in Casey for surrounding areas and will be raising money for Australian Rotary Health, which is now one of the largest non-government funders of mental health research in Australia. They are also working towards improving mental health issues in Australia and have been since the year 2000.

It is a sad reflection to note that a number of Australians are currently diagnosed with a mental illness and that this is overwhelming, particularly among young people. Research is showing that half of mental illness begins by the age of 14, and we need to provide the support services that we can for these people. I also want to note that it is concerning in terms of my portfolio that over half of WorkCover claims are said to be mental health claims and related to mental health issues. So this is an important bill that is before the house, and I am really, really pleased to be able to rise to speak to it.

I want to note though that we have concerns, the Liberals and Nationals, about clauses 13 and 14, and we have proposed some amendments in this area. Clause 13 amends section 232 of the Mental Health and Wellbeing Act 2022, which currently permits certain classes of people, including registered paramedics employed by an ambulance service as defined in section 3(1) of the Ambulance Services Act 1986, to take a person into care and control during a mental health crisis. I could not help but take notes when some of my colleagues in this chamber were speaking. For instance, Mr Berger mentioned that he is passionate about Ambulance Victoria and that even more paramedics are now on the road. Of course we are all looking for best possible outcomes, but there are concerns with the clauses in terms of how we are looking at this particular bill in relation to whether we are going to have a health-led response or whether we are going to have a police-led response. I do want to explain how much we feel it is important to consider the issues and the impacts that this bill and these particular clauses are going to have.

At this point I do want to remind people, as a person who has worked in education in schools, that right now I know a number of my colleagues who are still working in education are having to deal with incredible rises in the number of mental health issues in classrooms. In fact I hear of children who are pacing in classrooms. It used to be that you would maybe have to take a few little fidget items into

a classroom in years gone by, prior to COVID and prior to lockdowns, for the odd ADHD situation or the odd young person that might struggle to be able to focus. But now I can say that my daughter as a preservice teacher is going in with a bag full of these things, that young people are suffering from anxiety, that they are unable to focus, that this is a real concern and that we have an escalation in mental health issues. And so I do think that for a person in the police force to actually turn up to a situation of crisis in mental health as a first responder can often be incredibly intimidating. When we have children that are now starting to suffer from mental health issues at more escalated numbers than we have ever had before in this state as a result of what they experienced during the time of the lockdowns in Victoria, then I do think we need to really consider the impact that this particular clause is going to have on the lives of Victorians.

As my worthy colleague Melina Bath from the Nationals mentioned, there was a particular situation where the police felt hamstrung and had to come into the situation and then charge a son. The mother called the police, and they charged the son in order to protect him, because he was wanting to commit suicide. They were hamstrung – those were her words – in what they were able to do. So is this the best approach? Well, we would say it is not the best approach, and that is why we are looking at these amendments for clauses 13 and 14. We would really commend them to the crossbench to consider as we come to a time of actually considering the situation with this particular mental health and wellbeing bill that is before the house.

As we know, police, ambulance and fire services are struggling with a lack of resources. They are struggling with manpower, they are struggling with their budgetary constraints and they are struggling in terms of the number of increases that we have for WorkCover. In fact first responders have the highest rate of people who are on mental health cover through WorkCover. It has just increased, so we know that they are struggling in this area. I would say too that it is a real shame, and I will just throw this in there, that we still have a number of vaccine-injured first responders who would like to return to work to be able to support these forces and are yet not permitted to do so because they are struggling with draconian mandates that are still imposed on them. The government just continues to throw some of our more vital services under the bus. I think that to actually expect police, who are not fully equipped, to deal with the unreasonable additional pressure on their resources and personnel is not fair at this time. It is not as if they do not have enough to do with the increases that we see in family violence and the escalation that is taking place in our society. Police themselves are voicing their concerns with the Police Association Victoria and arguing that this is a backward step, using police personnel, and that it will only further hamper timely and necessary police responses to the public both for general situations and also in the mental health area.

As Melina Bath mentioned, it is humiliating for people who are requiring some form of mental health mediation to find themselves facing police. This is not the best approach. I myself know that I have friends that are dealing with mental ill health and the mental health space, and I am really pleased that we are looking at ways that we can improve in this area, but I do again commend to the house the amendments which we have put forward as a coalition.

I think it is really disappointing that with an issue as big as this one this government again did not consult effectively with everyone that is a stakeholder when they were preparing their bill. Victoria needs a unified mental health system, and the advice from people that are on the ground is that it is incredibly imperative to make sure that we have a system that works effectively. So I just want to say that we need to make sure that our mental health bills that we put forward and that we pass in this house are genuinely going to impact in a positive way the safety and wellbeing of Victorian lives.

Sheena WATT (Northern Metropolitan) (16:49): I rise today to speak on the Mental Health and Wellbeing Amendment Bill 2023, and in doing so I would like to acknowledge that not only is the Andrews Labor government committed to building a mental health system that works for all, we are actually getting it done. When I was growing up, I quickly came to understand that our mental health system was failing those experiencing mental ill health. I came to understand rather quickly, particularly from my mob and my Indigenous brothers and sisters, that our history of past and ongoing

racism and discrimination has had a profound and enduring impact on our social and emotional wellbeing outcomes. I came to understand that, though we remain a strong and resilient people, the intergenerational trauma and the continued impacts of marginalisation which we experience each and every day have meant that for us we face higher rates of poor mental health than my non-Aboriginal friends and family. I watched as far too many members of my community tried to navigate a broken, underfunded, overburdened mental health system. I watched as mob sought mental health support through services that lacked any diversity or cultural understanding of what good health and wellbeing meant to Aboriginal peoples. I even watched as those in my community in need of mental health support avoided these services altogether, knowing that they would not get the help that they needed. The truth, in my eyes, was plain and simple: Victoria's mental health and wellbeing system was inadequate not just for Aboriginal Victorians but for all of us.

Later, when I entered the community healthcare workforce at the National Aboriginal Community Controlled Health Organisation and later the Victorian Aboriginal Community Controlled Health Organisation, the respected state and national peak bodies for Aboriginal health, I came to understand that the impacts of mental ill health created lasting problems for our First Peoples, and I would like to share with you some facts that affected me so deeply that I have carried them with me since my days at NACCHO more than a decade ago. Did you know that poor mental health and substance-use disorders are estimated to account for as much as 14 per cent of the health gap between Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal peoples? Or that twice as many young Aboriginal people as young non-Aboriginal people experience mental ill health? Or that the national suicide rate for Aboriginal people is estimated to be twice that of the general population?

The last time we came here, in the sitting week before we broke for winter break, I had the deep joy actually of meeting with Thirili CEO Annette Vickery. Annette is the CEO of an organisation that works around Aboriginal suicide prevention and postvention – a term that some may not be familiar with, but it is a growing and incredibly important piece of work for our mental health workforce and of course for our communities that need it. I was joined at that meeting by the Parliamentary Secretary for Mental Health and Suicide Prevention Tim Richardson, and in that meeting we really had an opportunity to hear from Annette, an expert in her field and a really profound and esteemed leader, about just what crisis we have in mental ill health here in our state and the numbers – the sheer and frighteningly large numbers – of Aboriginal people that have made attempts on their own lives. It was something that definitely spurred me to action, although it was not new to know.

It does not end there, with a single organisation doing all of the heavy lifting. There are so many others in our community that work on that, and I would like to take a moment to acknowledge the work of VACCHO, the Victorian Aboriginal Community Controlled Health Organisation, which I had the distinct pleasure of working in for a few years. One of the pieces of work that VACCHO did with such esteem and pride was really affect the way the Royal Commission into Victoria's Mental Health System in the first place was thought to be. I recall with great affection actually representing VACCHO in the negotiations around the terms of reference for the mental health royal commission, which led to a really substantial look at the impacts of mental ill health on Aboriginal Victorians and the really disproportionate numbers that we can see, as I said earlier.

There are so many folks that will be needed to really effect the sort of large-scale change that this royal commission envisaged, and so to those that have chosen to make a life and a career in the mental health workforce, can I take a moment to acknowledge you and all that you do. It is a tough gig – there is no other word for it – but I hope in the work you do that you find it enormously rewarding, particularly when working with those most marginalised and most vulnerable. So thank you to particularly our Aboriginal health and mental health workforce.

There are long-term effects of a failing mental health support system for First Peoples. It means an ongoing cycle wherein the intergenerational challenges facing Aboriginal people combine with ongoing discrimination and a mental health support system that does not work to generate very, very

poor outcomes for Aboriginal Victorians, not just in terms of our mental health but also our physical health.

My background is in Aboriginal community controlled health organisations, and I have risen in this chamber to talk of it a number of times. It does tell me that although as Aboriginal people we are more than capable of working within our communities and organisations to support better social and emotional wellbeing outcomes, our leadership can only take us so far when it is not matched and supported by government. In fact creating a fit-for-purpose mental health system also requires that governments have the courage to step up and make it happen, and that is what the Andrews Labor government has done. It was us who said enough is enough, it was us who decided that given the inadequate state of the mental health support system in this state we needed a royal commission to help shine a light on every nook and cranny of the system and it was us who listened to the wealth of evidence presented to the Royal Commission into Victoria's Mental Health System by clinicians, experts and even those facing mental ill health themselves and accepted each and every one of the 74 recommendations that outlined that we needed to build a functional mental health and wellbeing system in this state.

Since the royal commission's final report was handed down – and so many of us here in this place were there at the Royal Exhibition Building for it – we have not wasted a day in getting on with the job. We have delivered critical investments to fund the replacement of existing mental health services with a new 24/7 fit-for-purpose service, to place mental health practitioners in every Victorian secondary and specialist government school and to establish the Victorian Collaborative Centre for Mental Health and Wellbeing, and that is just the tip of the iceberg. I still remember getting the opportunity to open the 20-bed youth prevention and recovery care centre in Parkville with then Minister for Mental Health James Merlino. YPARC, as it is affectionately known, offers young people in my electorate who are at risk of suicide and self-harm the specialist mental health care and support they need through the provision of treatment and acute in-patient mental health services. At the time of opening, this was the fourth of eight hubs funded by a key investment from the Andrews Labor government in response to recommendation 21 of the royal commission. It is with investments like this and services like this that we rebuild our mental health system into the fit-for-purpose, responsive system it needs to be to work for all Victorians. I am proud to be part of a government that has begun the work to reform our mental health and wellbeing sector, and with this bill we are also continuing to gradually build up the institutional capacity, legal structures and people power we need for a strong and sustainable mental health system that will be able to support the social and emotional wellbeing of Victorians for generations to come.

As many of my colleagues have highlighted, this bill amends the Mental Health and Wellbeing Act 2022 to ensure that the act is operating as intended and ready to go when it commences on 1 September this year. Alongside our investments in services, additional mental health beds and other resourcing and capacity-building endeavours, we are making sure we have a strong legal framework in mental health and wellbeing because we are serious about creating robust and long-lasting change which each and every Victorian will benefit from for years to come. That is why we are proposing these amendments to the 2022 act to make sure that we take the time to get this absolutely right.

This bill will amend the act to ensure that there are clear powers to detain and transport security or forensic patients who are absent without leave from a designated mental health service, clarify the definition of 'mental health and wellbeing service provider' and, most significantly, make changes to the provisions establishing a health-led response to mental health crises in the community, which will enable paramedics and other authorised health professionals to be prescribed by regulation to exercise crisis response powers once they are appropriately supported by progressing system reform. These amendments will enable us to continue working towards the full implementation of all recommendations of the royal commission whilst also working together with Ambulance Victoria and other key stakeholders in the sector to ensure that reform, development of models of care, service

investment and adoption by paramedics of care and control powers is done in a way that is safe and practical.

I want to focus for a minute on our move to a health-led response to mental health crises in the community – something that our government is committed to implementing. I think we can all agree that the best way to manage and handle a mental health crisis in the community is for responses to be led by healthcare professionals rather than law enforcement. Such an approach allows those experiencing a time-sensitive mental health crisis to receive the compassion, health care and referral to services that only health professionals can provide. This is instead of approaching situations where people need mental health and wellbeing support in a way that assumes criminality. This is a big and necessary change. With this bill we are ensuring that we can take the time to get this right and make sure that our mental health system is responsive to the needs of patients while also ensuring workers right across the sector are safe and supported when on the job.

I know that ensuring this legislation is as strong as possible will put us on the path to a fulsome, quality mental health and wellbeing system that will support, change and save lives across the state, and I know that only a Labor government is able and willing to get on with the job and get this done. I commend this bill to the house.

Rachel PAYNE (South-Eastern Metropolitan) (17:02): I rise to speak to the Mental Health and Wellbeing Amendment Bill 2023 on behalf of Legalise Cannabis Victoria. This bill amends the Mental Health and Wellbeing Act 2022, which comes into effect in September this year. It provides several clarifying amendments, including the scope of service providers regulated under the act, the health-led response to mental health crises and powers for transportation of patients.

Legalise Cannabis Victoria will lend its support to this bill, but we would like to preface this support by acknowledging that we do have some reservations about aspects of this bill. In doing this, we would first like to highlight the circumstances that gave rise to the existing act. The Mental Health and Wellbeing Act drew on the recommendations of the Royal Commission into Victoria's Mental Health System – most notably to ensure that, wherever possible, emergency services responses to people experiencing time-critical mental health crises are led by health professionals rather than police. This new health-led approach to mental health and wellbeing is progressive policy that recognises the need to transition away from a law enforcement approach to mental health crises, and it was widely welcomed by the community and stakeholders.

Although this bill does include technical amendments necessary for the proper functioning of the act, we fear other amendments may result in a backsliding on our important work on mental health and wellbeing. Specifically, we had concerns about clauses 13 and 14 in this bill. Clause 13 removes paramedics as an authorised class of persons that may take a person into care and control in a mental health crisis – but for a reason. Clause 14 prescribes police officers and PSOs as authorised persons for the transfer of a person to the care of another authorised person in this same context. As the explanatory memorandum notes, this delay is required principally to allow Ambulance Victoria time to train paramedics and ancillary staff in care and control powers – all 4000-plus of them – and we thank the minister's office for their time and extensive explanations on this front.

Ambulance Victoria does incredible work every single day, and their involvement will be central to our transition to a health-led response to mental health and wellbeing. We are not ignorant of the demands on our state's ambulance service. They are under the pump and unfortunately often under strain to meet response times. Legislating their role in addressing mental ill health requires a fine balance to ensure that we do not undermine their role in emergency response. If the need to delay their assumption of care and control powers has been identified and justified, we will not protest. Rather, what we will do is highlight the need for government transparency and accountability. Vague commitments do little to reassure the public that these amendments will not erode the recommendations of the royal commission. So to ensure this does not occur, we have pressed the government to provide a fulsome explanation and to commit to a time line to confirm the extent and

nature of upskilling required and to clarify the number of personnel to be upskilled. We thank the government for the explanation that they have undertaken to provide in this chamber today, because in the meantime police continue to be one of the primary responders to mental health crisis situations and that it is not what they or the royal commission want. Although this is and will continue to be important where there is a community safety risk to paramedics, we know it is not the way to lead our response to mental ill health.

As was highlighted in the royal commission and as I expect we are all well aware, having police as first responders to mental health crises is highly problematic. Despite their best efforts, police lack the expertise and extensive training to deal with mental health patients. Often their presence can be incredibly traumatic and escalate the risk of violence for someone going through a mental health crisis. These people have done nothing illegal and deserve to be treated as such; we know this. Many stakeholders are dismayed at the growing involvement of police in situations where people are experiencing a mental health crisis, including Victoria Police. This is why a health-led response is so important. We need to get health professionals at the forefront and allow people with mental health issues to be responded to in accordance with mental health principles in the very least restrictive way possible. We understand that this is a major transition requiring the implementation of many difficult changes. We understand that Ambulance Victoria will simply not be ready to assume this role on 1 September, and we believe it is imperative to reassure those affected by these amendments of our continued commitment to mental health and wellbeing.

Gaelle BROAD (Northern Victoria) (17:08): I rise to speak on the Mental Health and Wellbeing Amendment Bill 2023, as I believe any spotlight we can shine on the importance of mental health care in this state is worthwhile. It is particularly important in regional areas at the moment as our communities are grappling with issues, including floods, COVID-19 and extreme cost-of-living pressures. This bill makes minor amendments to the Mental Health and Wellbeing Act 2022 and also makes consequential amendments to the Judicial Proceedings Reports Act 1958. I do want to thank my Nationals colleague Emma Kealy for her leadership on this bill and the extensive consultation that has been done.

The Mental Health and Wellbeing Act 2022 was brought in after the recommendations of the Royal Commission into Victoria's Mental Health System. The commission's interim report was handed down in 2019. Five of the nine recommendations focused on the overwhelming need to create a strong mental health workforce. The final report was released in early 2021, and it is important to note that the Nationals support all recommendations of the royal commission.

This bill aims to fix several errors in the act and also changes the time frames on a number of recommendations made by the royal commission. I am concerned, however, that it also suggests major changes to the police response to people suffering a mental health crisis. This would potentially take the focus away from a health-led response in the first instance. There is a quote on page 515, chapter 9.2, from the royal commission's report, which says:

Given that most people experiencing a mental health crisis have done nothing illegal, the involvement of police can be humiliating and traumatic.

Clearly, it is far better to have health professionals trained in mental health first aid as first responders. It is also clear that we have grave shortages of workers right across our emergency services team in this state. The Police Association Victoria are concerned that this legislation will add extra pressure on their limited resources. I think most of us would like to see people with a mental health issue being treated as they would be for any other health issue where immediate emergency support is required.

I thank my colleagues Ms Crozier and Ms Bath, who have also spoken on the need to omit clauses 13 and 14 through our amendments. As I mentioned, the issue of mental health is particularly important in regional areas, and as I travel throughout Northern Victoria I regularly meet people who are facing a wide range of mental health issues. Recently I had the privilege of spending time with some residents of Rochester who had lost their homes during last year's disastrous floods. They were very generous

with their time and in sharing their stories of heartbreak and devastation as well as the strong community response in the town. I thank them for that. We will soon be marking a year since the floods devastated many communities across Northern Victoria Region. This anniversary will be a tough time for many people who are still struggling with basic issues such as accommodation, finding builders and tradesmen and working through the minefield of insurance claims. In Benjeroop recently I met with local residents who are very stressed because our water storages are now at capacity and many levee banks have not yet been repaired after last year. They fear just a few days of heavy rain could easily spark another flood.

Yet another major mental health impact has come from the rising cost of living under this government. Everything is costing more. The government's raft of new and increased taxes has added to this considerably. Steep increases in the cost of basic items such as groceries, gas and electricity are hurting our communities, and all of this takes a massive toll on people's mental health. It is clear that the mental health of Victorians has suffered greatly because of the decisions made by this government.

I think back to the lockdowns during the COVID pandemic. I spoke with residents in regional towns without a single case that were struggling as they were told not to leave their homes. I recall the decision made by Jacinta Allan to close Victoria's borders in 2021 on New Year's Day and force families to drive over 10 hours and wait for hours in the car with young children and elderly members of the family to get back before the borders closed. I know people that have moved interstate because of decisions made by this government. I know paramedics, kinder teachers, engineers and gardeners that were unable to work because they did not get the COVID vaccine, and despite workforce shortages some of these restrictions still apply today. I know of a friend's father who would visit his local men's shed on a regular basis who during the lockdowns committed suicide. I received some correspondence just recently from Loddon Mallee Lifeline. It is incredible the work they do. They took over 15,000 calls in 2022, and they state that in the Loddon Mallee region, which covers Mildura, Bendigo and Swan Hill, last year there were 84 deaths by suicide. That is almost two per fortnight. They say there has also been a significant increase in hospitalisations for intentional self-harm in the region in the past year, increasing to a worrying 184 admissions. The demand for their support services and their crisis support locally has increased by 36 per cent since the start of the pandemic.

I think of the families that had to mourn alone as funerals were watched by family and friends online. A friend of mine attended his mother's funeral in Sydney and then had to spend two weeks in quarantine in a Melbourne hotel room, with no access to fresh air, before he could return home to be with his family.

I think of the mental pressure that decisions of this government are having on people in local businesses. I spoke with a business owner just last week who employs a few people and now has to pay \$11,000 for his WorkCover insurance premium but has never made a claim.

I think of the government's lack of detail in the announcement of the payroll tax on independent schools and the pressure this put principals and families under as they struggled to find out more detail and wondered how they would pay for it when families were already struggling.

I think of people I have met in Charlton and Wedderburn who are concerned about the planned transmission line project, known as VNI West, and the minister's constant changes to the route and the lack of a proper consultation process. I think of the towers that are going to dominate the skyline and cross over productive agricultural land. Just today I heard of a young farmer whose property has been devalued by \$1.5 million by the bank due to the powerlines crossing that property.

I think of the families I met visiting Powelltown last week and meeting the owner of a timber mill who wonders about the future of their 40 workers, many of whom would struggle to find employment elsewhere, and the mental stress this government has caused by closing down Victoria's sustainable native timber industry – going from seven years to seven months and offering free TAFE courses for

people to retrain and telling them to seek mental health support from their local community health services, which are already under pressure.

I think of the Commonwealth Games and how much our local communities were looking forward to it, the athletes in training, the kids inspired to play sport, the business owners that had already made significant investments to expand their business and our emergency services, which were already meeting together to make plans. Local business groups had been hosting sessions for hundreds of local businesses and providing regular updates, and local councils in Bendigo and Shepparton had already invested lots of time and energy with local sporting groups preparing for the games. Then, just like that, this state government cancelled it, and the Premier said it was an easy decision. Well, it is clear that the decisions made by this government and their lack of care, lack of planning and constant desire to raise taxes to cover up their financial mistakes are contributing to the increased demand for mental health support services in this state.

Jacinta ERMACORA (Western Victoria) (17:16): I am pleased to speak on the Mental Health and Wellbeing Amendment Bill 2023. Most in this chamber would know that in a former life I worked as a counsellor for the South Western Centre Against Sexual Assault. In this role I had direct contact with clients who were impacted by traumatic events that led to adverse effects on their mental health. At the time the majority of South Western CASA clients not only had experienced sexual assault but were also living with diagnostic and statistical manual diagnosed major mental illness. Acknowledging the impact of major mental illness on survivors of sexual assault was central to the care and support that we provided our clients.

The Royal Commission into Victoria's Mental Health System was a pivotal investigation into a system that was not fit for purpose. Victorians suffering from waning mental health often found themselves struggling to find access to treatment long after the first signs presented themselves. Unable to access community supports, family members regularly felt the added strain of being the only support system, despite no formal training. Compounding this was a judicial and policing response to mental illness rather than a health-led response. The experience and preferences of people with mental illness were not reflected in the way the culture or structure of the mental health system worked, and in outer regional and rural Victorian communities the service system was even smaller. I remember being devastated to deliver a teenage survivor of sexual assault with a high suicide ideation score to the local hospital emergency department because there was no service able to monitor her overnight. I welcome the findings of the royal commission and, in the final report, the 65 recommendations to overhaul the mental health treatment space. The government's commitment for each and every recommendation to be fulfilled swiftly, deftly and within the recommended time frame makes me proud to stand here today as a member of the Andrews Labor government.

The bill before us today is an extension of the government's commitment to rectifying the mental health system, particularly for those who identify as LGBTQ+, refugees, asylum seekers, people living with disabilities and people from culturally diverse backgrounds. This bill amends the act passed by the last Parliament in August 2022 to make sure it operates as intended. Before the act comes into effect on 1 September 2023 these minor but technical amendments are necessary to prevent any unintended consequences or misinterpretation.

Some key features of the Mental Health and Wellbeing Act 2022 are the establishment of the Mental Health and Wellbeing Commission and Youth Mental Health and Wellbeing Victoria. The Mental Health and Wellbeing Commission, among other things, will hold government to account for the performance, quality and safety of Victoria's mental health and wellbeing system. The act also establishes Youth Mental Health and Wellbeing Victoria, which will address the emerging evidence of the youth mental health crisis. This initiative goes beyond the recommendations of the royal commission and reflects recognition of the need to do more to address the unique experiences of mental health and wellbeing issues for young people in Victoria. The Mental Health and Wellbeing Act 2022 also introduced new service delivery frameworks underpinned by a set of rights and

principles. I will address some of these principles, which are close to my experience as a social worker in the past.

Dignity and autonomy – not everyone responds to the same treatments in the same way. Practitioners can use different models of therapy for different people with the same condition. Some respond to the psychotherapy model, whilst others response to a cognitive behaviour therapy model. So the principle of dignity and individuality is important in the act.

Family and carers also are important. Inclusion of the needs of families and carers and supporters, including children, is very important. It is not uncommon to have a parent with a mental illness being cared for by a teenager or even a young child. These wonderful young people are often studying and living their own childhood whilst fully responsible for the care of a mentally unwell parent. The lived experience of persons with mental illness and their families should be respected. This is about believing the lived experience of people with mental illness, not what the books say but how the individuals describe their experience.

As with the rest of the community, people living with mental illness often live with other medical and health conditions. This is about the unique interaction of comorbidities and how they impact on mental illness. Many people have more than one condition to contend with. The mental health system should provide a holistic approach to care rather than a condition-by-condition approach.

The dignity of risk is another principle which is really important. We all have a right to take reasonable risks, and so should people living with mental illness. For some people, living in the community is a risk in itself, but it may for some be far more satisfying than institutional living. This is an expression of the right to participate in the good, the bad and the ugly of our ordinary society, whether that is playing sport, going out for dinner or even simply going for a walk. Acknowledging the unique characteristics of people experiencing mental illness is important. We all know how it feels to be demeaned because of a particular characteristic we have or who we are. Suffering from a mental illness does not justify derogatory treatment because of any diversity characteristic.

Gender safety is also addressed in the act. Services must be responsive to any current experience of family violence and trauma or history of violence and trauma. This is very important, because when you have comorbidities your vulnerability is multiplied. At CASA our figures showed that once you had been assaulted for the first time you were more likely than those in the average population to be subsequently assaulted. If you layer this with other comorbidities, like disability, for example, the figures go up exponentially. So it is important that the act explicitly expresses expectations around the safety of people with mental illness.

Today's bill came about during preparations for implementation of the 2022 legislation. In doing so the government recognised some omissions that would impact on the intent of the last Parliament to overhaul the mental health system. This is a proactive approach by the Andrews government, ensuring the implementation is effective and free from misunderstanding. The government is prioritising these amendments to ensure that the intention and spirit of the 2022 act are preserved. The bill aims to amend minor but key implementation hurdles. It is important to note that none of the amendments in this bill deviate from the royal commission's time line recommendations.

In conclusion, respect is an important core value of mental health service delivery. After all, we are all on the same spectrum; we are all variations of 'normal'. Some of us are mentally healthy most of the time and occasionally experience a touch of mental illness. Others have major mental illness and occasionally feel well. In the end we are all different and unique human beings who deserve a strong and caring mental health support system.

Council divided on amendment:

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 (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

Amendment negatived.**Motion agreed to.****Read second time.****Committed.***Committee***Clause 1 (17:34)**

Georgie CROZIER: Attorney-General, I am just wondering if you could provide to the committee how many recommendations from the royal commission have been fully implemented and just the progress of the implementation of those recommendations.

Jaclyn SYMES: As you would appreciate, Ms Crozier, that is not specifically connected to the bill. But I reckon that if I ask the people in the box, they will have a good response for you in relation to that.

Georgie CROZIER: It is clause 1.

Jaclyn SYMES: Yes, but it is a big one. I am advised that there are 74 recommendations, as you would be aware, and 90 per cent are underway.

Georgie CROZIER: Ninety per cent are underway – that was in a media release on 2 March 2023. Is the 90 per cent still underway? I want to understand how many have been fully implemented.

Jaclyn SYMES: We have implemented 60 per cent, which leaves the remaining underway with a commitment to implement all recommendations of the royal commission.

Georgie CROZIER: Thank you, Attorney, for that clarification. Is that public? Are those 60 per cent recommendations publicly reported anywhere?

Jaclyn SYMES: I am advised that the Department of Health website has regular updates in relation to this, as I have indicated. I am more than happy to try and provide you with information, but this is of a very general nature in relation to the questioning that you are undertaking. I am here to facilitate the passage of the bill. Perhaps if there is any further information of that specific nature that is not forthcoming, I can endeavour to ask the office to get back to you in relation to some of those unrelated matters to the bill – acknowledging that it is all in some way connected – but I understand that the department's website should be useful as well.

Georgie CROZIER: Thank you, Attorney. The reason I ask this is because, as you say, it was a large body of work, and the government has put in place a bill around the royal commission and specifically some of the recommendations, the work that you are undertaking. This bill is to correct some of those errors that have occurred through the implementation, as we all know, and there are concerns that have been raised. I think it is entirely reasonable for the house to understand exactly how many recommendations have been implemented in full and what the latest information on the department website is, because that changes. And I think all I am asking is that we have an update

with that accurate reporting of the 60 per cent of the 74 recommendations that have been implemented and have a list of which ones have been implemented.

Jaclyn SYMES: Yes, thanks, Ms Crozier. I certainly understand your interest in this matter. We can say that it is a significant reform program, an agenda that will take several years to implement. I think 10 years is the forecast of the implementation plan. There are regular updates on the website of the recommendations that have been implemented, and that is where you will get the information about the 60 per cent. If that is not adequate, then perhaps we can find another mechanism to get you that information.

Georgie CROZIER: Thank you very much, Attorney, for that clarification. Could the Attorney provide to me an update – and you may have done it; you possibly have – of *Victoria's Mental Health and Wellbeing Workforce Strategy 2021–2024*, which was handed down in December of 2021? I referred to it in my second-reading speech. In it the then minister spoke about:

... we will review and update the strategy every two years, so it reflects the needs of the mental health and wellbeing workforce as we build the new system from the ground up.

I am wondering if there has been a review as yet. Obviously this is not quite the two years – it was December 2021 that this was handed down, so we are not in December 2023, I understand – but in terms of that, is that underway? Is that review on track to be delivered by December 2023? That is really the question I am asking.

Jaclyn SYMES: Planning is underway for the next strategy, yes.

Melina BATH: This actually relates to clause 19, but it is probably just as easy to ask this particular one now, because by the time we get to the other clauses it will be keeping on going. In relation to the Governor in Council orders for regional mental health boards, I am interested to know why the government has extended – moved out – the date by which an order must be made until the end of December next year. What has been the philosophy behind that?

Jaclyn SYMES: I understand that through consultation there has been overwhelming support for an agreement to delay it by one year to allow sufficient time for further community engagement, and this is a proposal that has been supported by those chairs.

Melina BATH: Thank you, Attorney. In terms of the community engagement, could the Attorney provide a bit of context about how that has occurred – the type of feedback? Also, how will that be presented? Is that going to be presented in a public way for those boards?

Jaclyn SYMES: Ms Bath, you have hit the nail on the head. They want further community engagement, which is one of the rationales for the delay or the pushing it back for another year. In relation to how that will be communicated, I will see if I can get an answer to that.

Ms Bath, I am advised that, as I am sure you would appreciate – and it sounds appropriate to me – interim chairs will be very much in control of what is appropriate for their local community and will form the basis of how the community engagement will be best placed in those communities as well as how they would communicate that.

Georgie CROZIER: Minister, it is my understanding that the mental health sector did not see a full exposure draft of the original bill until – well, the first time they saw it was when it was first tabled in this place. Was there a reason why they did not receive a full exposure draft of the original bill?

Jaclyn SYMES: The original original bill or this bill?

Georgie CROZIER: No, the original bill, because this is correcting the errors of the original bill.

Jaclyn SYMES: The amendment bill. Well, I am only here today to talk about this bill, not the original bill, but consultation with agencies since the original bill has led to many of the amendments in relation to this bill.

Georgie CROZIER: I understand you are talking about this bill, but the reason I am asking is because the original bill had errors in it, and this bill is partly correcting those errors. That is why I am saying if the sector had been exposed to the original draft, then perhaps some of those errors would not have occurred. I am just wondering: was there a reason why they did not receive an exposure draft?

Jaclyn SYMES: Exposure drafts are not necessarily that common. We have not had many in the last little while. Sometimes they are a good idea. Sometimes you can get a similar outcome through appropriate consultation. My memory of that legislation, from when the former minister brought it forward, was there was an acknowledgement that we expected to come back after it was enacted and fix some of the implementation issues. It was something that we wanted to get underway. So I think we have been pretty honest with the sector that we knew that we would be returning to this bill to amend, and a lot of the agencies have fed into the amendments that are before us today. We were very keen to progress the original bill to be true to our commitment to implementation of the royal commission's recommendations, so I think we have been very up-front with the community and the sector in relation to wanting to get underway, acknowledging that we would need to come back and fix some things up, and that is hopefully what we are doing today.

Clause agreed to; clauses 2 to 11 agreed to.

Clause 12 (17:45)

Sarah MANSFIELD: The change in clause 12 is to essentially remove the requirement for the response to be led by an authorised health professional, and it has been changed so that that only has to occur insofar as it is reasonably practicable in the circumstances to be informed by an authorised person or health professional. Essentially, this is a watering down of the health-led response that was recommended by the royal commission. We are just wondering why this change has been made.

Jaclyn SYMES: Thank you, Dr Mansfield, for your question. I would not articulate it as a watering down of recommendations. Recommendations in relation to these matters are still under development and under consideration and have involved a lot of operational consideration before coming to proper fruition. This clause actually puts beyond doubt that police officers and protective services officers are not prevented from exercising care and control powers if they are unable to base the exercise of those powers on the advice of a health professional. The rationale is that the health-led principle requires that to the extent reasonably practicable in the circumstance the exercise of care and control powers be health-led or, if that is not possible, be health-informed. It is our view that unless there is amendment, there is a possible interpretation that police or protective services officers cannot act in circumstances where they are unable to be informed by health advice. 'Reasonably practicable' was already in the original act, and this amendment is all about providing clarity for that original act.

Clause agreed to.

Clause 13 (17:48)

Jeff BOURMAN: I have some questions, if I could. My apologies if this has been covered off already, but I just want to make sure I am right before I make a vote. Clauses 13 and 14 effectively, as far as I can tell, remove an ambulance or a paramedic from taking a person into care and control in a mental health crisis. Now, my understanding of it is that at the moment they can. This will remove them. Am I correct in that? Just reading it verbatim, it says:

... omit “, a registered paramedic employed by an ambulance service as defined in section 3(1) of the Ambulance Services Act ...

The way I read that – and this is obviously the crux of Ms Crozier's amendment – is that this will end up being a police- or PSO-led response; it has to be by law.

Jaclyn SYMES: Paramedics will be prescribed in regulations, but, Mr Bourman, what this clause does is remove ambulance paramedics from the provisions conferring powers to take a person into care and control from the community and allow registered paramedics and others to be prescribed by

regulation at a later date. This does not mean that they are not involved in the process. The status quo will remain. At the moment there are 90,000 calls a year that involve ambulance turnouts to mental health patients or people that are displaying mental health issues. The reason that we are ensuring that we are acting appropriately here is that it has not been possible for necessary training and service reforms to be rolled out in time for ambulance paramedics to take on these powers from the commencement – that is, on their own. That is the concern that we have.

I think some of these questions could perhaps be directed to Ms Crozier in relation to the intention of her amendments, because what we are wanting to do at the moment is to ensure that both agencies can respond to issues. But we know that removing the ability for police and PSOs to assist, in many instances, whether they jump in the ambulance with the paramedics or they follow the ambulance in relation to getting to the hospital to respond to some serious behaviours or community safety concerns – we are wanting to move to a health-led model but we are not in a position to do that at this time. The royal commission made recommendations to do that by 2024 and it remains the position that the government would like to advance. You would appreciate that these recommendations were made in 2019, before we had the unprecedented impact on our health system. So this is about making sure that we are in a position to move to a health-led model at a later time when we think it is safer to do so. But I can reiterate that the practice of dual call-outs, for example, would be expected to continue, as they do each and every day.

Jeff BOURMAN: Thank you, Minister. I guess I am just confused. I understand what you are saying. Talking about a mental health crisis, obviously police have powers under section 351 of the Mental Health Act to take someone into custody or protective custody – whatever you want to call it. I understand what you are saying, but I am still not sure why this made it in here. If the status quo is going to stay, wouldn't it have been easier just to leave the status quo and deal with it otherwise, rather than removing the ambulance from the legislation itself?

Jaclyn SYMES: This enables us to keep the commitment and to implement it in a safe, responsible way when it can practically come into effect. Our concern is that if we were not to make this amendment, if we were to move too early to a health-led response and effectively, in many instances, discourage the police or the PSOs from having that role before paramedics are appropriately trained or more are recruited in relation to the current demands that they are facing, it would be premature to move to what we would ultimately like. But the regs will do that.

Jeff BOURMAN: Yes. I get that. Thank you, Attorney-General. I guess my concern is always that in the end using a police-led response can, in the eyes of people that are not there, lead to unfortunate circumstances. It was put that police do not have the training to deal with mental health issues. I can tell you from experience they certainly get the experience really quickly, but I want to put it on record. I guess this was probably not ideal from the government's point of view either, but I just really do not like the fact that it leaves police at the front of something that they probably would rather not deal with at all, if they could.

Jaclyn SYMES: Mr Bourman, I acknowledge that, and that is why we want to move to a health-led model. These amendments do not change the current role for police or PSOs. The original amendments, if they had been enacted, would have made changes. The original bill, if enacted earlier than what we are now proposing – if it had been brought forward – would have taken away more police presence. I reiterate: there are 90,000 calls a year for paramedics to respond to mental health issues. Many, many of those involve police attendance as well. The police have specific powers, particularly in relation to assisting paramedics with patient transport arrangements and the like when there is no consent. A paramedic is not in a position to force somebody into the back of an ambulance, regardless of how much health attention that person needs. They do not have the training and they do not have the power to do that. That is what we want to move to potentially in the future as part of the recommendations in relation to that health model, but we are not quite there yet, which is why the status quo has effectively been maintained through this legislation.

I think you asked specifically in relation to why we have to make these amendments. In addition to the concerns about significant safety risks were ambulance paramedics to take on the roles ahead of the appropriate training and support, my advice is that if the powers remain in the act and are not exercised there is a legal risk to Ambulance Victoria (AV) for failing to meet obligations under the act, so it is not as though we can just leave them there and say that we will fix it up later. That is why we have to address this.

But there will be a continued focus on police's response to mental health issues. They are still always going to respond. You have articulated that in your experience they get training on the ground pretty quickly in response to this, but it is also part of their formal training. They have a two-day mandatory training in mental health focusing on communication, de-escalation, stigma and bias, and what we are wanting to do in the future is have the least restrictive means to respond to instances as possible.

Some police have been doing a great job – we acknowledge that – but moving to a health-led model is all about only using care and control powers as a last resort. It is really about making sure that our wonderful health professionals are best equipped, best trained and best supported to continue to de-escalate and continue to provide care and hopefully be in a situation where they are not needing the additional presence of police and PSOs, because it is all about the person's health condition, responding appropriately to that and leaving police to respond to community safety concerns or offending behaviour.

Sarah MANSFIELD: You indicated that government is working to progress to the full health-led model ideally by the recommended time of 2024. Can you commit to a time line for implementing the full health-led response, and will it at least be in this term of Parliament?

Jaclyn SYMES: I thank Dr Mansfield for her question seeking information in relation to the government's commitment to this matter. Just to put it on the record, the royal commission recommended that responses to people experiencing a mental health crisis should be led, wherever possible, by health professionals rather than police. We have been exploring that this afternoon. The establishment of the health-led response was recommended by the end of 2024. We have committed as a government to implementing every recommendation from the royal commission, and this includes the commitment to establish the health-led response. However, as we have explored a little bit this afternoon as well, rising demands on Ambulance Victoria and the ongoing impact of the pandemic have put great pressure on the health system, and it would be irresponsible to proceed with introducing new care and control powers for Ambulance Victoria paramedics when the act commences on 1 September without being sure that the necessary supports are in place for the safety of our healthcare workers and of course the broader community.

The amendments in the bill will allow time to ensure the necessary system reforms are in place to support paramedics to take on these roles, including the delivery of training to the more than 4000 Ambulance Victoria paramedics that we are effectively attracting and onboarding.

I think I might have heard you say in your contribution that you were concerned about a set-and-forget-type mentality. That is certainly not the case. This is a commitment that we are fully behind. There are project teams in Ambulance Victoria, ESTA and VicPol, and all are currently undertaking planning and design work to move towards the health-led response. Options to support the implementation of new care and control powers for paramedics are also being currently considered by government. So all of the agencies that are currently on the ground dealing with these issues are indeed providing direct feedback and direct suggestions to government about how we can get this right in order to deliver it before the recommended time.

We expect that Ambulance Victoria will commence the rollout of training to paramedics next year, in 2024, and this is in addition to the significant amount of work already undertaken to deliver a health-based response, including planning and design activities to implement the royal commission's other recommendations to reform existing mental health triage services, develop a range of new safe spaces

for adults and young people and develop new crisis outreach teams that will be available 24/7 for people to receive immediate support in their home environment. That is all about better treatment, de-escalation and getting to matters before they come to that pointy end where there is a first responder approach. When fully implemented, the health-led model will ensure that people are better connected with services that are responsive to their needs, and the intention is to reduce unnecessary transports to emergency departments (EDs) and reduce demand on ambulance crews and certainly the police.

Sarah MANSFIELD: Just a follow-up to that: do you plan on legislating this fully health-led response, perhaps returning paramedics into the legislation at some point in the future when you are ready to do so?

Jaclyn SYMES: My understanding is that the way we have set up this bill enables that to be done by way of regulation. So we are asking for support of the bill, which has along with it a commitment to implementing this change through regulations rather than relegislating.

Georgie CROZIER: Attorney, could you please clarify – when you were answering one of Mr Bourman’s questions I could not quite hear you – the number of transfers that you indicated? How many were there that were done?

Jaclyn SYMES: No, I was indicating that my information is that there were 90,000 call-outs from AV for mental health related incidents. Many of those involve dual dispatch in relation to both AV and police.

Georgie CROZIER: Thanks, Attorney, for that clarification. Yes, I understand that there sometimes needs to be a dual response, but now that paramedics have been taken out of the response until you commit to that health-led response, which is due next year – but as you said, the training will have to take place – it is the intention, but it is not clear, I do not think, from the response, that there is a set deadline about when that health-led response will take place and paramedics will be a part of that process. The reason I ask is because of that 90,000, which is going to put a big burden back on the police. Will paramedics be paid more to respond to these call-outs?

Jaclyn SYMES: Ms Crozier, let us explore this a bit. We might go around in circles a little bit, but your claim that paramedics will be taken out of this response is not what is happening here. On the 90,000 calls that were received in 2021 for mental health issues that paramedics were dispatched to, those figures are not anticipated to change much. The only thing that is happening here is that paramedics cannot undertake the care and control aspect, but they can still support mental health patients.

As I was articulating to Mr Bourman, when I was making inquiries about what happens in practice if a person is experiencing or is perceived to be experiencing a mental health issue that paramedics want to respond to, police are required if there is a community safety aspect, if there are weapons involved or if there is a crime being committed but also if the patient does not consent to being transported. There are many instances where the police merely support the paramedic response and the paramedics have the additional support for transport where a police officer might say, ‘Well, I’ll jump in,’ or they may just follow the ambulance in the car and be at the hospital for those handovers before the care and control can be transferred to a psychiatrist, for example. So there is not a massive difference. There is no removing of paramedics’ response to health issues that have a mental health element; it is just that care and control issue in relation to those concerning behaviours. We want to make sure that we have a workforce that is well equipped to be able to deal with those either by themselves or only in instances where there are community safety offences and other areas where police would ordinarily be the first responders. AV have never had the care and control powers, so this amendment is not taking them away. This is not changing that. It is just delaying the commencement of the health-led model, which will actually remove more of the police from these instances, to a later date so we can get the training right, the support right and further recruitment and the like.

There is not a lot of change happening here at this point in time. The change for the health-led model is due, in line with the recommendations, by the end of 2024, and the commitment, as I outlined to Dr Mansfield in relation to all of the first responder agencies giving us advice in relation to how best to do that, is occurring now.

Georgie CROZIER: Thanks, Attorney. Clause 13, as is my understanding, removes the express reference to paramedics employed under the Ambulance Services Act 1986 in relation to taking a person into care and control in a mental health crisis that you just explained.

Jaclyn SYMES: As I said, I reckon we are going to go around in circles a bit. Can I jump in?

The DEPUTY PRESIDENT: Attorney.

Jaclyn SYMES: That is what the bill was doing. It has not happened yet. That is what the bill was proposing to do on 1 September. That is what is being removed. What is happening right now stays the same. It is just not changing on 1 September.

Georgie CROZIER: Well, there is concern. Why is there so much consternation from stakeholders?

Jaclyn SYMES: I do not know. There is a misunderstanding, which I think people have been trying to articulate.

Georgie CROZIER: I do not think you have actually consulted with them. Because when you speak to the Victorian Mental Illness Awareness Council, the Victorian Alcohol and Drug Association, the Police Association Victoria – the police association say that you are backtracking on the original legislation, that you are not actually undertaking what the royal commission expressly is requesting you to do. I have been listening to your answers: you are talking about a health-led response, you are going to start the training for paramedics at some point in 2024. I would like to ask: when will that training start so that it can be a health-led response? And my question is: does that apply to every paramedic coming through as well? Will every paramedic be trained in this? What is the time frame for that to be completed? If you would not mind answering those questions and then I will come back to my concerns that have been raised around the police force and what the impacts will mean for them.

Jaclyn SYMES: I am going to start where you finished. There is no change to Victoria Police right now. VicPol will have less involvement once the paramedics come online through the regulations for being the –

Georgie CROZIER: But when?

Jaclyn SYMES: By the end of 2024 is the royal commission's recommendation, which is what we remain committed to.

Georgie CROZIER: By the end of 2024 all paramedics will be trained and they will all be ready to go?

Jaclyn SYMES: I do not want to put a definitive date on this. What I want to come back to is the recommendations of the royal commission, which is that by the end of 2024 we want a health-led model, which means we want less cops, more paramedics, in its simplest form. That is a recommendation of the royal commission we support. With the legislation that we introduced, we wanted to do it on 1 September. For a range of reasons, predominantly pandemic issues, because of the current unprecedented impact and pressures on AV, we are wanting to push that out to make sure that we are ready to make that transition in line with the royal commission's recommendations. I understand that stakeholders support the royal commission recommendation of a health-led model. We remain committed to that recommendation. Training will be for all paramedics. We have got 4000 new paramedics that need to be trained. So we are wanting to make sure that we have adequate time to train new paramedics without pulling everyone off the road that wants to have a group training session. You have to stagger these.

Georgie CROZIER: So it is not going to be met by 2024, is it? It is pie in the sky.

Jaclyn SYMES: Well, your amendments do it on 1 September. I would like you to move your amendments, because I am actually really concerned your amendments mean that paramedics will be forced to do it on 1 September and police will not. That is the effect of your amendments.

Georgie CROZIER: Attorney, the concerns from police who say that they are spending 60 per cent of their time in terms of transport and 4 to 6 hours on average staying with these patients in an emergency department – that is not a health-led response.

Jaclyn SYMES: No, that is why we are moving away from it. That is the commitment.

Georgie CROZIER: Yes, but you are taking paramedics out of that situation. You are leaving it in the hand –

Jaclyn SYMES: No, we are not.

Georgie CROZIER: Well, no, this is the understanding –

Jaclyn SYMES: Well, you are wrong. That is the problem.

Georgie CROZIER: Well, I think the government has got this way wrong, because that is what the stakeholders all believe. That is what their impressions are. You have done a shocking job of consulting on this, if that is what they are saying. There are 900 officers who are on sick leave or on long-term WorkCover leave – 900 police officers – as of today. How many more police officers are going to be able to do this work, because we just do not have enough paramedics in the system to be able to support these patients? You are saying that it removes the express reference to paramedics employed under the Ambulance Services Act 1986 taking a person into care and control. So that is going to be left with the police.

Jaclyn SYMES: It already is, right now.

Georgie CROZIER: Yes, but it is going to be more pressure on them –

Jaclyn SYMES: No, it is not.

Georgie CROZIER: Well, convince me why it is not, because that is what the bill says.

Jaclyn SYMES: I do not understand how you have formed this view. I was listening to the debate going, ‘Do they honestly believe this, or are they deliberately trying to mislead the public?’ And you have convinced me that you genuinely believe this – but you are wrong. We are not taking powers away from paramedics – they do not currently have them. We are not putting more pressure on police, because they are already currently doing this. We acknowledge that that is not the right approach. We want to change it. We wanted to do it by 1 September – the pandemic hit. We are not ready to do it by 1 September. We wanted to go back to the royal commission’s recommendations, which were to introduce a health-led model by the end of 2024. We are committed to doing that, and that is all the amendment does – it does not change anything that is currently happening now. No powers are being taken away from anyone – it remains the same. I get that you are a little bit confused about the amendment, because the amendment is amending a bill that has not come into effect yet. If the bill had come into effect and we were amending it, then we would be taking something away. We are amending this bill before the enactment, which is 1 September, which means we ain’t taking away anything, because it does not exist yet. I am trying to help.

Georgie CROZIER: No, well, I am here to put it on the record, because there –

Jaclyn SYMES: I am trying to help, but I am going to make the comment: the misinformation that the opposition are peddling has been very unhelpful, and as I said, I am going to give you the benefit of the doubt that you are genuinely just confused and not deliberately trying to tell people that we are

changing something that we are not. That is the effect of your amendments; that is the effect of your language.

Georgie CROZIER: No.

Jaclyn SYMES: It is.

Georgie CROZIER: Clause 12 enables that flexibility, so it is already there.

Jaclyn SYMES: The bill has not been enacted yet.

Georgie CROZIER: Yes, but what I am saying is your clause 12, the 000 response allows police, PSOs or ambulance, depending on the appropriate response, for available resources. So it is there. It is there in clause 12, but clause 13 takes away the paramedics.

Jaclyn SYMES: Ambulances can already respond. This is about the specific care and control power, which is different to providing health care, responding to someone who needs an emergency response. The care and control order is about physical restraint, non-consensual transport – those powers. There is nothing to stop someone, right now or any time in the future, calling 000 and going, ‘There is someone that is experiencing a very significant health issue. I’m concerned that they are going to commit suicide.’ They will still deploy ambulances now and into the future. Nothing changes there. But if that person is violent –

Georgie CROZIER: You just said there were not enough paramedics.

Jaclyn SYMES: That there is not what?

Georgie CROZIER: You said in answer to a question that there were not enough paramedics.

The DEPUTY PRESIDENT: Ms Crozier, the minister has the floor.

Jaclyn SYMES: Well, we want more paramedics. That is why we have committed to recruiting more. There are unprecedented health demands, but we want more paramedics too. What I just want to really clarify is that if you call 000, a health response will be dispatched now. The only thing that we are talking about here is what powers that paramedic has at that point in time in relation to dealing with somebody through the mental health lens. At this point in time, it is only police and PSOs that have that power in relation to some of those issues we want to move to paramedics once they are trained and once we have recruited.

Georgie CROZIER: Why then when a patient ends up in an emergency department does a police officer have to sit with them for 4 to 6 hours? Why is that an appropriate response? Why is that allowed to occur? And I would like to understand what consultation you have had with the police, as they have got these concerns about what is happening out there in the Victorian community now and what happened throughout the pandemic. There were no ambulance officers, so they were leading the whole thing. They were transporting them. The patients would leave. They would come back and back. It was a complete and utter debacle. I have raised it in this house numerous times. That is not a health-led response. That is the police undertaking the work of paramedics where they should have been in place and where healthcare workers should be taking their place in an emergency department. That is not happening. A police officer is having to stay there for hours and hours and hours on end, and we have got a shortage of police officers – 800. How on earth are they expected to pick up the slack until you get everybody trained to undertake this work?

Jaclyn SYMES: We acknowledge that we want a health-led response. We want less police doing the coercive power element of responding to people with mental illness and mental health issues. We are only talking about the coercive element here. A better way of describing that, I think, would be that it only relates to someone who needs to be taken into care and control to prevent imminent or serious harm to that person or to another person. So we are talking about really significant incidents that are of most concern in relation to what might happen to that person or somebody else. You make

reference to picking up the slack and why should they. This is what police are already doing. This is why we have committed to a health-led model, because we acknowledge that we would like to move away from that. But your narrative that we are by virtue of this bill making it harder for police tomorrow or on 1 September is an inaccurate characterisation of what we are doing. What we are doing is being true to the recommendations of the royal commission, which will move some of those care and control issues, the coercive powers, away from police to appropriately trained paramedics.

As Mr Bourman has reflected, police have been dealing with these types of behaviour for a long time, and a lot of people, when they see somebody having a mental health issue in the street, go, 'Oh, I don't know if I ring the police or if I ring an ambulance.' It is really confronting, and they do not want that person to harm themselves, so often both are dispatched. At the moment, police are trained in mental health response, in de-escalation et cetera, but they are the ones that currently have the powers to force somebody to stay at a hospital, for example, to ensure that they do not go out then and do something terrible.

We want to move away from that and make it more of just health people doing this job. There will always be a role for police in some way, shape or form when it comes to community safety, but we do want to get the balance a little better, and that is why we are doing this – because we acknowledge that VicPol are like, 'We think more health people could do a really good job here. We think our skills are better placed over here.' And they are working with us on this model because it will benefit them in the work they do whilst we make sure that AV are well placed to do this appropriately for their own safety and for the benefit of the community and patients that will benefit from it.

Georgie CROZIER: Thank you, Attorney. You just said the police are working with you on this model. Could you provide to the house who was consulted, when they were consulted on it and what input they had around this model?

Jaclyn SYMES: Well, I can assure you that AV, ESTA and VicPol have been consulted and we continue to do so. There are consultative groups right now.

Georgie CROZIER: You are saying they are continually being consulted?

Jaclyn SYMES: Conversations are happening right now.

Georgie CROZIER: With police?

Jaclyn SYMES: Probably not at 6 o'clock at night, but right now, yes.

Georgie CROZIER: So with police they are ongoing?

Jaclyn SYMES: Yes, absolutely.

Georgie CROZIER: And at what level is that, just to provide a context in terms of who is responding on behalf of the police?

Jaclyn SYMES: There is a working group with representatives from all agencies.

Melina BATH: Minister, I want to just ask a couple of questions or make a point about regional Victoria. You have said that when 000 are called sometimes both are dispatched – VicPol and ambulance. In regional Victoria there is sometimes a very thin line and there may not be the dispatch ability of police and ambulance. So if the ambulance is the first responder due to lack of resources, what is the government's read on this? How is it being informed by regional Victoria, and what is it doing? Under this bill it is putting the ambulance officers, the paramedics, in an invidious position.

Jaclyn SYMES: You two have different views on this. In one sense Ms Crozier is saying ambulance should do everything; you are acknowledging –

Members interjecting.

Jaclyn SYMES: You are acknowledging the challenges of responding to emergencies, which is why we have a lot of people that can be trained to be dispatched to different emergencies as it is – fire trucks can go to car accidents and the like. So there are already inbuilt in our emergency response many situations where first responders from different agencies can respond to particular issues. What you are referring to is that ambulances can still respond to mental health issues. If there is somebody that is at risk and they need police assistance, they can still, in the confines of their own safety, ensure that they are providing assistance. If they need police, then that can be an additional dispatch. Often you will not know until you are there as an ambulance paramedic the situation that you are in. For instance, ESTA take calls and they are blind; they can only go on the information that they are provided. I do not want there to be too many hypotheticals here, but you could be deployed to what is requested as an ambulance and you get there and you are really concerned because another person in the house has a weapon. It is not advised that ambulance paramedics, whatever they are responding to, would put themselves in a position where they would enter a home where somebody has a gun, for instance. So there are numerous arrangements for dispatch to respond to different issues, but what you are specifically asking about is –

Melina Bath interjected.

Jaclyn SYMES: Ambulances can be dispatched to mental health issues now, and whether police presence is required as well is often determined through ESTA's information call and the dispatch information or indeed informed by paramedics once they arrive at the incident.

Melina BATH: Minister, you have mentioned recruits. Then you mentioned new paramedics – 4000 new paramedics – that need to be trained by the end of 2024. Did you mean new paramedics that are currently in service – that are currently employed by Ambulance Victoria – or did you mean 4000 new paramedics that you are about to and yet to employ into the service?

Jaclyn SYMES: Yes, sorry. For clarification, 4000 paramedics will need to be trained in total.

Melina BATH: Thank you, Minister. Now, a couple of years ago, I understand, you put \$6 million into training new paramedics, so I am seeking to understand: where has that money gone, why hasn't it gone into training and why do we still need 4000 new paramedics in this particular system?

Jaclyn SYMES: I am little confused by your question. I am also confused how it relates specifically to the bill. We do not need 4000 new paramedics. There are 4000 paramedics that need to be trained to transition to a health-led model. I am not the relevant minister, as you would appreciate, but this is not the only area that paramedics need training in. Presumably there are many other training programs for paramedics, new and existing, that are underway. As it is not relevant to the bill, there might be another way for you to seek information about the level of training that goes to paramedics.

Georgie CROZIER: Well, Minister, it is relevant to the bill, for heaven's sake. On 4 March in 2021 'Emergency workers at the heart of mental health response' was your government's media release. It talks about a \$6 million investment, which includes:

... changes to responding to 000 calls, with our ambulance services to become first responders to calls for mental health support.

So Ms Bath's question was entirely appropriate for this bill. What she was asking is: since that time two years ago, how many people have been trained with that investment that was put in place by the government?

Jaclyn SYMES: Well, Ms Crozier, I do not want to be too cute here, but we are on clause 13, and I am not really sure how this relates to that clause. It was not asked in clause 1, but in any event, in order to be helpful, this is training that is work that is already underway and will continue to be delivered.

Georgie CROZIER: I am not going to go back and forth on this, Attorney, but we have been talking about training. You have just mentioned that in relation to this clause.

Jaclyn SYMES: I have not. I am trying to respond to your questions.

Georgie CROZIER: I understand that, but in terms of the responses it is all very much related because, as you are saying, it has got to be a health-led response around the paramedics that need training. So we are just trying to understand: of that investment that was put through the system by you two years ago, how many people have been trained? It sounds like none have.

Jaclyn SYMES: Ms Crozier, since 2014 this government has spent an additional \$2 billion on ambulance services.

Georgie CROZIER: And look at the number of Victorians that have died.

Jaclyn SYMES: Imagine what the system would be like under you guys. There has been 140 per cent more spent on ambulance services by our government than the former government.

Georgie CROZIER: It is not about money, it is about where it goes.

Jaclyn SYMES: The training is underway and it will continue to be so. As I think I said before, you cannot pull paramedics off the road responding to increases in health demands. You have to make sure that you get the staggered approach and that the design work is right. It has been informed by the other agencies, and we will continue to deliver it. I would appreciate it if we could get back to the bill.

Georgie CROZIER: I am not going to debate it further. I do not know if Ms Bath has got further questions. I will move the amendment. But I do have to say, Attorney, about your contribution just then in terms of the investment, you spoke about the investment and carried on about what we would have done in opposition. I am not going to go off on a tangent about that, but you have actually put \$6 million into training on this very issue, and I have not had a response from you about how many paramedics have actually been trained for this very reason. Because you have not gone and sought information from the advisers box, clearly none have been trained with that \$6 million. That is taxpayers money. When you put out a media release and make an announcement about money that is going into a system to do this – as you say, to better prepare – then we should be able to have an understanding about where that money has gone.

Jaclyn SYMES: Funding, planning and design activities for the training package are underway, and the media release relates to recommendations 8, 9 and 10, I am advised. I can assure you, Ms Crozier, that we want to make sure that this reform works. We are genuinely behind the royal commission's recommendation. We acknowledge that it is better for health professionals to respond to people in times of crisis that are underpinned by mental health. We want to make sure that they are well equipped to do that. We want to get the training right, as I have said. The funding is available to ensure that it can be delivered.

Georgie CROZIER: You still have not answered my question.

Jaclyn SYMES: I did. I started with –

Georgie CROZIER: How many?

Business interrupted pursuant to standing orders.

Lee TARLAMIS: I move:

That the meal break scheduled for 6:30 be for half an hour.

Motion agreed to.

Sitting suspended 6:31 pm until 7:03 pm.

Georgie CROZIER: Before the break I was speaking about a health-led response and the need for that to continue. I want to just go back to the legislation that you are talking about, Minister, which comes into effect in September and what this amendment that we are talking about refers to. Part 5.2

of the Mental Health and Wellbeing Act 2022, ‘Power to take a person into care and control in a mental health crisis’:

232 Taking a person into care and control in a mental health crisis

- (1) An authorised person who is a police officer, a protective services officer, a registered paramedic employed by an ambulance service as defined in section 3(1) of the **Ambulance Services Act 1986** or a member of a prescribed class of persons may take a person into care and control under this section if the authorised person is satisfied that –
 - (a) the person appears to have mental illness; and
 - (b) because of the person’s apparent mental illness, it is necessary to take the person into care and control to prevent imminent and serious harm to the person or to another person.
- (2) A person remains in an authorised person’s care and control under this section until the person’s care and control ends in accordance with section 239.

That is the bill that is coming into effect in September, as we both understand. I would like to understand this issue: this bill that we are debating today takes out the reference to a registered paramedic employed by an ambulance service as defined in section 3(1) of the Ambulance Services Act. I would like to understand whether the government’s intention is that the non-emergency patient transport, which is under review by the government, will take on this aspect when that review is completed and when the NEPT service could come under the control of AV. Is it the intention that they would be providing this backup and providing care for those patients with a mental illness that need transfer?

Jaclyn SYMES: That review is independent of this act, so I cannot comment on a review that is yet to report. Its findings are not informing this act at this time.

Georgie CROZIER: Thank you, but there is concern from a number of people about that review, as I have indicated in previous weeks. The reason I am moving the amendment to clause 13 is for this very reason that I have just spoken about – that:

An authorised person who is a police officer, a protective services officer, a registered paramedic employed by an ambulance service as defined in section 3(1) of the **Ambulance Services Act 1986** ...

remains in the legislation, the bill that we are debating today. That is the reason for my amendment, and I would request that the chamber support the reasons for doing so.

Jaclyn SYMES: Ms Crozier, with your amendment the advice I have is that it would put paramedics in a position where they have coercive powers – they have the ability to do what police have now – and they have not undertaken the training to do that yet. Are you not concerned about the impact that your amendment will have on our hardworking paramedics? Because I think you are putting them in a very precarious position.

Georgie CROZIER: Well, Attorney, as I previously said, as per the media release there has been \$6 million provided by your government – taxpayers money – on this very issue back in 2021. Here is a media release, as I have referred to, from the Premier and the acting Minister for Police and Emergency Services Danny Pearson. They were talking about the training for the paramedics to undertake this response. So you are telling me that none have been trained, even though you have told Victorians they have been and you have put investment into it – \$6 million. Is that what has happened here, because I think somebody –

Jaclyn SYMES: I asked the question.

Georgie CROZIER: Well, this is what I am referring to. It talks about exactly what this is, so I want to know. It is not me that is putting anyone in danger. I think that the government has misled Victorians in the most extraordinary way again. You have said that this money was going towards this very training, and you have not answered it properly. It has not happened. I do not want to put anyone in danger; I just want the truth here, and I want to understand exactly what is going on.

Jaclyn SYMES: At the risk of going around in circles again, Ms Crozier, the media release was referring to the training that we are still delivering. We are delivering that training. It is incomplete, and my question remains. Your amendment will have the effect of, on 1 September, putting paramedics in the very difficult position of not being ready for the health-led model, which is why we are changing it to push it out in line with the royal commission's recommendations for 2024.

Georgie CROZIER: But you are never going to meet it.

Jaclyn SYMES: My question remains: do you accept that your amendment is putting paramedics in a very precarious, dangerous and unsafe position as of 1 September?

Georgie CROZIER: Clause 12, Attorney, talks about authorised health professionals 'so far as is reasonably practicable in the circumstances' –

Jaclyn Symes: On a point of order, Deputy President, I sit here regularly, and I acknowledge that it is not often that I ask questions, but I am interested in some direction from the Chair. When an amendment is proposed by a member of this chamber, it is my understanding that we are entitled to ask questions about the impact of that amendment, and I am not receiving any answers, I am just getting further questions. We are talking about an opposition amendment at the moment, we are not actually talking about the bill.

Georgie CROZIER: I actually think –

The DEPUTY PRESIDENT: Order! Ms Crozier, sorry, the Attorney has raised a point of order. Yes, Attorney, you are entitled to ask a question. Just like in question time, I cannot control if you do not like the answer. So you are entitled to ask the question, but the member answers in the way that she sees fit.

Georgie CROZIER: Thank you, Deputy President. I think we are having this debate because there is a lack of clarity in this bill – so much lack of clarity. I have referred to the media release of 2021, where you promised it was happening. You are talking about meeting the royal commission guidelines, which you say are going to be delivered in 2024 but we may not get there. We have no certainty.

Jaclyn SYMES: You are verballing me. I did not say that.

Georgie CROZIER: Well, can you guarantee that every paramedic will be trained – I have already asked this question – by 2024 to meet the time lines that you are insisting will be met?

Jaclyn SYMES: I can confirm that we have got a better chance of –

Georgie CROZIER: No, no.

Jaclyn SYMES: I am allowed to answer in the way I see fit. We have got a much better chance of training 4000 paramedics by 2024 than by 1 September, which your amendment is forcing people to try and do.

Georgie CROZIER: Clause 12 allows for the flexibility. If there is not a paramedic in place to be able to care for a patient, it allows for the flexibility to have a trained police officer or PSO undertake that work. Your own bill states it. So if you do not have a paramedic to be able to do this, then this bill, in clause 12, allows that to occur, Attorney. What I am saying is that we say this should be a health-led response as per the recommendations of the royal commission. Right?

Jaclyn SYMES: We agree.

Georgie CROZIER: Clause 12 already has the flexibility to meet the demands if there is not a trained paramedic available. Your media release from 2021 says you are investing in that. You have not answered the question of how many people have been trained, which I am very concerned about, that clearly –

Jaclyn SYMES: So concerned that you want to put them into the field without training.

Georgie CROZIER: No.

The DEPUTY PRESIDENT: Order! Attorney, Ms Crozier has the floor.

Georgie CROZIER: I am actually concerned about the process undertaken by you as the government bringing legislation into this place, the lack of consultation that has occurred. And what you promise, what you say and what you spend – taxpayers money – you do not deliver on. That is what I am really concerned about. I do not want any patient to be put at risk, but equally I have listened to the police association and others who tell me what is happening inside emergency departments. So you have failed on every level. I stand by this amendment to be carried today so that paramedics are included in this legislation. Clause 12 is still there to support a careful transition if required if there is no-one, as clause 12 says, ‘so far as is reasonably practicable in the circumstances’. That is what it is referring to. If they are not available, then of course they will be transferred appropriately.

Jaclyn SYMES: Ms Crozier, the flaw in your argument is that clause 12 does not provide any legal protections for AV, so it does not stand up, the logic that you are trying to articulate. I understand; I actually think we are on the same page here. We all want health responses for people that deserve health responses, and people who are experiencing mental health issues should get a health-led response. I think all of us in this chamber agree with that. What we are saying is that we want it to be appropriate, we want that to be safe. What we are doing right now is maintaining what happens at the moment, with an acknowledgement that we would like to do better and have more of a health-led model and less reliance on police. We are saying that the original bill proposed to do that on 1 September. We are not ready for that.

You can criticise us on that, and you have done that – okay. But my concern is that we are discussing your amendment, which will have the impact of doing what we want to do after everyone has been trained, everything is in place and we have consulted broadly with first responders before the regulations are made. You are wanting to do that on 1 September. That is what your amendment does. Clause 12 does not help you as you have articulated, because it does not do what you think it does. I actually think we are in agreement here, and it is a misunderstanding. It is complicated, I get it. We are amending a bill that has not been enacted yet, and I am trying my best to articulate to you why your amendment is bad. I would like you to withdraw it, because it is going to have a big impact on the people that you purport to support. You purport to be an advocate for paramedics. You are literally saying, ‘I don’t want police to do the job they are currently doing; I want paramedics to sit next to a violent patient who is suffering a mental health illness because we want them to have coercive powers tomorrow,’ when I am acknowledging that we need to do more work to enable those workers to be able to do that job.

Georgie CROZIER: The minister is verballing me. That is not what I want. That is just ridiculous to say that.

Jaclyn SYMES: I know you do not, but that is the impact. I am trying to explain it to you.

The DEPUTY PRESIDENT: Attorney, Ms Crozier has the call.

Georgie CROZIER: Clause 12 gives that flexibility. It is there. It gives that flexibility for authorised persons to be able to transfer and care and have that if there is a patient that requires it. It is what is happening now. But we are saying that a registered paramedic, who has been trained using the \$6 million that was provided in 2021, should be there if available. That is why we say it should stay in the legislation. It can roll on. Goodness knows when they will all be trained – goodness knows. That is on the never-never. But it should be there. According to your media releases you are doing this: paramedics are being trained. You have put \$6 million in for them to be trained. You have been doing that for two years. If they are being trained, then they should be in the act. That is why I am moving

my amendment, so that they are recognised in the act. If they cannot, then clause 12 will step in so that PSOs or police officers will be there to safely care for those patients.

David LIMBRICK: I do not have a question; I would just like to state my position on this amendment for the record. We must be very careful when enacting any sort of coercive powers, and that is exactly what this is doing. It is handing coercive powers to paramedics. I would like to thank the government's advisers for working with my team on giving us advice around this. I accept what the government has said – that their initial intention with their previous bill was to have things ready by September. It is clear that is not going to be the case; therefore the idea that in September paramedics are suddenly going to get coercive powers without training is dangerous, in my mind. Therefore the Libertarian Party will not be supporting these amendments. If I was going to offer some constructive criticism to the government, I would say that they seem to have a pattern of being rather optimistic with their time lines for implementation of these sorts of things and that maybe they should be more conservative with how long it will take to do these things, because they clearly take a lot longer than what is anticipated in the first place.

The DEPUTY PRESIDENT: Ms Crozier, do you want to explain your amendments?

Georgie CROZIER: I have. I have explained it. I have just explained many times why I am moving my amendments.

Jeff BOURMAN: I just have a couple of quick questions. Attorney-General, what mental health training do the ambos get now?

Jaclyn SYMES: Mr Bourman, the question relates to the training that is informed by clinical practices for health workers. We do not have to hand a summary of everything that that covers. It is similar to other health worker provided training in relation to dealing with mental health and mental illness matters. I am more than happy to get you more information on what that looks like as part of a training module for paramedics, and obviously the existing package of training will inform how we want to expand the additional training for paramedics as they obtain greater control over those powers and the ability to respond to people in the absence of other authorised officers.

Jeff BOURMAN: Thank you, Attorney-General. If you could just get me the highlights – I do not need the whole package. Will the ambos in the future, before this gets enforced, be trained in physical control? Control of someone can sometimes be verbal, and sometimes it goes beyond that.

Jaclyn SYMES: Thank you for your question, Mr Bourman. In relation to the finalisation of what will be provided in training, it is still under development. There are working groups that are coming together, including representatives from our agencies, which are going through real-life situations and what may be required. I think what is important to note is that paramedics would not be expected to step into the role of community safety or responding to violent situations that police would ordinarily.

There is sometimes a fine line between an episode that someone is having with a mental health issue and how dangerous they can be to themselves or to others and where it is appropriate for police assistance. But we are wanting to counter that balance from now overwhelmingly relying on police to respond to that to try and get more of that health-led model in, and it will be an evolving practice over time. Even when paramedics become enabled under the regulations to have care and control order powers, that will not take away powers from police. They will still have the ability to play that role. We are just wanting to have more training, a health-led model and trauma-informed practices that start to ensure that that practice of police and PSOs stepping into that role can be more appropriately picked up by health professionals when the health-led model is an appropriate response to that individual circumstance.

Jeff BOURMAN: Thank you, Attorney-General. This is probably more of a statement. Obviously, the police will still have a role to play, but these things can go from really quiet to extremely violent in a moment, and I think it would be fairly unfair to any of the ambulance people if they were there on

their own whilst it went south, with no training. As I said, I guess it is more of a statement than anything.

Jaclyn SYMES: Yes, I appreciate that, and I guess you have articulated why we want to take more time to ensure that the enactment does not put that pressure and that legal uncertainty on paramedics right now. Part of the training package for paramedics will also include de-escalation of incidents and the like. But returning to my comments about the fact that police will retain the ability to step in, in the event that a care and control order power is enacted by a paramedic, they could reverse that decision and say, 'No, no, we need to hand this particular individual over to police or another health body,' for example, in relation to responding to that person. So just because they have enacted the powers, when they come into effect, that does not mean that there is no ability to step back if the risk profile changes, for example.

Jeff BOURMAN: Thank you, Attorney-General. Obviously, the police will still have the ability and will be needed in some cases. I just think, without knowing what actual training and powers they have – I guess, just to put it on record – if the paramedics are going to be trained in hands-on control, there will probably be a need to change the recruitment standards. Because there are a lot of people that have been hired by the ambulance people over the years that were not expecting to be in this sort of situation, and now they will be facing it. As I said, if the police do not go there and it goes off, it does take the police time to get there, and if they are already there in every instance, it is kind of defeating the purpose of what we are doing.

Jaclyn SYMES: You make good observations, but also these were considerations of the royal commission. We know that there are instances where a health-led model is more appropriate to deal with individual circumstances. This is not designed to take the place of the appropriate role that police play in relation to community safety; it is going to be about balancing. And you are right, there will be situations – they are happening now – where paramedics are deployed and the situation becomes dangerous for them and they have to step away. Even though they are wanting to help someone that is injured, for example, if it is too dangerous to do so, it is their policy to ensure –

Jeff BOURMAN: As they should.

Jaclyn SYMES: Yes, as they should. We want a safe work environment for our emergency services personnel, and police are more appropriately trained for those instances. That push and pull will continue to happen as the reforms play out, and there will be a role for everyone. Everyone is on board that we can do better to respond to people with mental illness through better health response and less reliance on coercive powers that are predominantly held by police.

The DEPUTY PRESIDENT: Ms Crozier's amendment proposes to omit this clause. If you are supporting Ms Crozier's amendment, you should vote no.

Council divided on clause:

Ayes (24): 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, Rikkie-Lee Tyrrell, Sheena Watt

Noes (13): Matthew Bach, Melina Bath, Gaelle Broad, Georgie Crozier, David Davis, Renee Heath, Ann-Marie Hermans, Wendy Lovell, Trung Luu, Bev McArthur, Joe McCracken, Nicholas McGowan, Evan Mulholland

Clause agreed to.

Clause 14 (19:33)

Georgie CROZIER: I think we have prosecuted the argument throughout the course of the evening. I am inviting members to vote against the clause.

The DEPUTY PRESIDENT: If you are supporting Ms Crozier's amendment to omit the clause, you should vote no.

Council divided on clause:

Ayes (24): 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, Rikkie-Lee Tyrrell, Sheena Watt

Noes (13): Matthew Bach, Melina Bath, Gaele Broad, Georgie Crozier, David Davis, Renee Heath, Ann-Marie Hermans, Wendy Lovell, Trung Luu, Bev McArthur, Joe McCracken, Nicholas McGowan, Evan Mulholland

Clause agreed to.

Clauses 15 to 53 agreed to.

Reported to house without amendment.

Jaclyn SYMES (Northern Victoria – Attorney-General, Minister for Emergency Services) (19:37): I move:

That the report be now adopted.

Motion agreed to.

Report adopted.

Third reading

Jaclyn SYMES (Northern Victoria – Attorney-General, Minister for Emergency Services) (19:38): I move:

That the bill be now read a third time.

Motion agreed to.

Read third time.

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

Adjournment

Enver ERDOGAN (Northern Metropolitan – Minister for Corrections, Minister for Youth Justice, Minister for Victim Support) (19:38): I move:

That the house do now adjourn.

Flood recovery initiatives

Wendy LOVELL (Northern Victoria) (19:38): (325) My adjournment matter is directed to the Treasurer, and the action that I seek is for the Treasurer to prioritise flood-affected regional communities when considering projects to be delivered using funding redirected from the now cancelled regional Commonwealth Games to deliver badly needed housing and sporting infrastructure in these communities and the proper repair of the road network in regional Victoria. The cancellation by the Andrews Labor government of the 2026 regional Commonwealth Games was a devastating blow to many regional Victorian communities. While the events themselves were to be held in five regional hubs, many other regional areas were anticipating reaping the economic benefits of increased visitation generated by the games being held in country Victoria. The state government had allocated \$2.6 billion towards staging of the games, and much of this funding had been allocated to build

temporary sporting infrastructure to hold events or complete large-scale redevelopment of existing facilities. With the games now cancelled and the temporary infrastructure and many other expenses no longer required, the Treasurer has an opportunity to redirect this funding and to prioritise communities that are currently doing it tough.

The October 2022 floods devastated many communities in my electorate, including Rochester, Shepparton, Mooroopna, Seymour and Echuca. The effects of the floods are still being felt in these communities, particularly in Rochester, where there are still around 300 households displaced from their homes. In Shepparton the floods reinforced the importance of a second river crossing between Shepparton and Mooroopna, and funding is required to construct stage 1 of the Shepparton bypass project that will deliver this crossing.

There are many sporting infrastructure needs in these flood-ravaged communities that, if completed, will benefit local competitions and provide facilities to be enjoyed for generations to come. Funding should be provided to help reopen the Rochester pool, which has suffered extensive damage from the floods, including to the pool shell, building and the pool pump. The upgrade of the Shepparton Sports Stadium has long been a priority project for Greater Shepparton City Council, and the Treasurer should allocate funding to make this important piece of infrastructure a reality.

Some of the housing provided from the \$1 billion the government has already allocated should go to those communities that need it most, and flood-ravaged towns like Rochester and Mooroopna are in desperate need. The available funding will allow Labor to fully invest in the safety of Victorian motorists and get on with fixing our deplorable regional road network. The 2022 floods made the substandard roads even worse, and I call on the government to invest wisely in regional communities to deliver a legacy for all Victorians.

Animal welfare

John BERGER (Southern Metropolitan) (19:41): (326) My adjournment is for the Minister for Agriculture, Minister Tierney. Tonight I rise to speak on an issue dear to my heart: pets. During the winter break we lost one of our pets. Ronnie was only two years old and was taken from us far too soon by an autoimmune condition. I would like to thank the vets and specialists that have guided us through this very difficult time. I am sure they do this quite frequently, helping families through traumatic experiences.

Everyone in this chamber knows that pets are a crucial part of our families in this state. Trust me, I know. They provide us with loyal and reliable companionship and are often as much a part of the family as any. I know in this chamber we take the protection of our four-legged friends – and in fact any of our pets – very seriously. We are a compassionate state, and Victorians care deeply about their pets. This is why their welfare should be of major concern to this chamber. It is important to my community of Southern Metro, and that is why we must understand the issue.

As it stands, most of the current knowledge about our pet populations in Australia is related to dogs and cats. It is often held by local councils and is not always comprehensive. That is why I was proud to see the Andrews Labor government announce something special – that we will be holding the first ever pet census to give us a clear picture of pet ownership in Victoria. The census closed on Friday and provided a broad collection of information on all kinds of pets, not just dogs and cats. It included questions on the number and types of pets owned as well as the reasons for getting a pet and experiences of living with them as part of your family. It also included important questions on services that are needed to maintain pets and the financial cost that they can sometimes cause families.

It is a priority for our government to protect our pets from harm. We banned the horrific practice of puppy mills through our enactment of Oscar's Law and ensured that our pet breeding legislation is amongst the strictest in the world, and we are committed to recognising for the first time in Victoria's animal welfare laws the sentience of animals, to protect them from harm and legislate a framework to minimise harm that is done to animals.

The sad reality is that many pets are discarded and abandoned, sometimes even shortly after being purchased, and that is why my adjournment request is that the minister join me in thanking Save-A-Dog in Glen Iris – a team that has since 1985 saved thousands of dogs and cats. I thank them for the work that they do creating a culture of protecting animals. It is because of organisations like Save-A-Dog and those on the front line that our work in the government is made possible.

Farriery education

Georgie PURCELL (Northern Victoria) (19:44): (327) My adjournment matter this evening is for the Minister for Training and Skills, and the action that I seek is for the certificate IV in farriery to be added to the free TAFE list. On 1 September 2020 I was contacted about a 40-year-old donkey in a desperate situation and in need of rescue. When I met Duncan, it was clear his hooves had not been trimmed in years, while the other equines I share my backyard with see my local farrier every six weeks. There is a drastic shortage of farriers across Victoria, yet equine hoof care is one of the most frequently needed services. It is also an ageing profession, meaning qualified farriers are retiring without replacement. A recent skills impact equine industry survey report found that all equine services are significantly more difficult to identify and arrange in regional, rural and remote areas, and many are of questionable quality. There are urgent skills needed in equine-related industries, especially for horse care and welfare, with farriers being one of the most used and in demand services. Hauling, for a farrier, can be stressful, knowing that they are few and far between. The certificate IV in farriery is only available at one location in Victoria.

Over the winter break my beautiful 43-year-old Duncan passed away peacefully in his sleep. He enjoyed his twilight years immensely, recovering from his past loneliness with horses and sheep and braying when he saw me carrying his warm gumnut porridge to him each night. He has left a big, awkward donkey-shaped hole in my heart and will be so very missed. I will always remember that after years of struggling to even move he enjoyed trotting around on his well-cared-for hooves once he came to me. In his memory I hope the minister will ensure that all equines across Victoria have access to safe qualified farrier services.

Elective surgery

Georgie CROZIER (Southern Metropolitan) (19:46): (328) My adjournment matter is for the attention of the Minister for Health, and it is in relation to the elective surgery waiting list. I have spoken about the Victorian Agency for Health Information data earlier today. I confess I have not had a chance to have a look at it, but when I last looked today there was no data on the latest elective surgery waitlists. We know that elective surgery waitlists remain way too high. They were high prior to COVID –

David Davis: Frightening.

Georgie CROZIER: frighteningly high – and have been putting the health of so many Victorians at risk. They are having worse health outcomes because of the waits, and there are a whole lot of flow-on effects because of those delays.

Before the election last year the minister promised to deliver 240,000 elective surgeries by 2024. That is 20,000 elective surgeries per month, and 2024 is just five months away. From the last figures, this is not going to be able to be met, and we saw in the budget papers that they were not meeting their own performance targets in these areas.

Also, at the opening of the Blackburn Public Surgical Centre on 28 October last year, the minister said:

This centre will be completely dedicated to planned surgery and together with the new Frankston Public Surgical Centre, they'll be delivering close to 15,000 surgeries a year.

We know that was not happening in the first few months of the operation. They were well under what they were promising to deliver. When asked in the Public Accounts and Estimates Committee if the

centres were operating at anywhere near capacity, the minister said those two facilities had delivered 2000 surgeries – as I said, nowhere near the requirement to get to 240,000 surgeries a year in five months time. Again, asked when they would be fully operational, the minister responded, ‘By the middle of next year’. These centres that opened in September and October last year – 2022 – are not expected to be fully operational until mid-2024.

My question to the minister is: will you be able to deliver on the commitment of delivering 240,000 elective surgeries per year by 2024, as promised to the Victorian public in the lead-up to Victoria’s election last year?

Gambling regulation

Sheena WATT (Northern Metropolitan) (19:49): (329) My adjournment matter is directed to the Minister for Casino, Gaming and Liquor Regulation in the other place the Honourable Melissa Horne MP. The devastating effect that gambling has on so many Victorians cannot be understated, with billions lost to gambling each and every year. With the Andrews Labor government implementing mandatory loss limits, load-up limits, minimum spin times and mandatory closure periods, we are taking the action needed to help all Victorians affected by gambling. These gambling reforms are the strongest in Australia and will deliver the very best outcomes for Victorians.

My constituents in the Northern Metropolitan Region have made it clear to me through many conversations that these changes are a big step in the right direction – and I thank all of them that reached out to me on that – to of course stem the tide of the unacceptable pain and hurt that gambling brings. My question to Minister Horne is to request an update on how these changes will bring an impact to the people living with problem gambling in the Northern Metropolitan Region.

Heavy vehicle parking

Moira DEEMING (Western Metropolitan) (19:50): (330) My question is for the Minister for Planning. Will the minister work with their federal and local government counterparts and stakeholders to solve the critical heavy vehicle parking shortage? Because if it is not dealt with now, it will hobble the next decade of road transport expansion and productivity, especially in the Western Metropolitan Region, which I represent. For example, I have been told that the rezoning and cheap release of the Derrimut Grasslands adjacent to Fitzgerald Road would be a good way to utilise the Commonwealth funding available for this purpose and to deliver a dedicated heavy vehicle driver fatigue management facility.

The massive increase in infrastructure and industrial capacity in my region has exacerbated the already critical shortage of long-haul heavy vehicle parking sites. The National Heavy Vehicle Regulator is rolling out 30- to 35-metre high-productivity vehicles, and yet it is common knowledge that refuelling centres in Melbourne are barely coping with the current 26-metre vehicles as it is. Currently the constant blame-shifting harms local residents just as much as heavy vehicle and local truck drivers, who are so often so desperate to rest that they end up parking illegally all over our suburbs. We need to look after our truck drivers. They kept us fed and clothed in the longest lockdowns in the world, and often it is a lonely, thankless and dangerous job. For their safety and ours we need to do what we can at a state level to make sure that truck drivers can access toilets, showers, food and rest.

WorkCover premiums

Ann-Marie HERMANS (South-Eastern Metropolitan) (19:51): (331) My adjournment is directed to the Minister for WorkSafe and the TAC in the other place. This government’s WorkSafe system has an industry classification and rate system based on the claims experience of each classified industry. WorkCover premiums are also determined by the relative risk profile for each industry. While the relative risk profile for each industry impacts an individual organisation’s claims history, WorkCover premiums are also impacted by the workplace safety record and safety initiatives of each classified industry.

The action I seek is for the minister to meet with me; interested Victorian Chamber of Commerce and Industry members; business owners; school leadership teams; not-for-profits and volunteer groups, including the CFA, who are currently having to shake tins to get extra money; and other impacted services to explain why the government has implemented and continues to use a fundamentally broken system where – by its own admission, I might say – even if an individual business or service has not made a single claim, it is adversely impacted, with significant increases to premiums if its competitors have had a lot of claims and/or if there have been a lot of claims in the classification of its industry.

Births, Deaths and Marriages Victoria

David LIMBRICK (South-Eastern Metropolitan) (19:53): (332) My adjournment matter is for the attention of the Minister for Government Services in relation to the ongoing issues with Births, Deaths and Marriages Victoria (BDM). In August last year I raised the issue of long waits, which a constituent had raised with my office. The minister assured us that the delays were minimal and continuing to reduce in time and that longer waits were caused by the applicant not providing the correct information on application. The minister stated that staffing increases would continue, but here we are 12 months later, and we have had another constituent contact us to say that she has been waiting for over a month for a copy of her marriage certificate, which she paid express post for.

In August 2022 the minister stated that they had 98 full-time staff, and I would be interested to know if this has increased, considering the backlogs people are experiencing. Presumably they are all working from home, as their office is still closed. If you look at the Google reviews for births, deaths and marriages, it is pretty grim, and they have a 1.7-star rating. My staff looked at some recent reviews, and not only are people still experiencing long waits for certificates, they are unable to contact anyone at births, deaths and marriages, with many people paying fees for certificates that they do not receive. The reviews include stories of people waiting for hours on hold, being hung up on and emails being unanswered. Many people are paying for services they are not receiving, and they have no ability to fight for a refund, as they are still unable to resolve this in person and none of the other points of contact are working. The online system is broken, and many applications expire before they can be correctly completed and they have had to pay fees. I will highlight a couple of cases: one person just this week stated that they paid for a certificate and have been waiting for four months. When trying to address this they had been on hold on the telephone for 1½ hours. Another person urgently waiting on a death certificate waited on hold for 3 hours. Customers are asking for a consumer watchdog to be involved.

We need to know why such an essential service is only open from 8 am to 2 pm and why the customer service centre is still closed. When will it re-open? Are we paying rent for a building that is permanently closed? My request for the minister is to reopen the BDM offices immediately and ensure that services are returned to an adequate level.

The PRESIDENT: Before I call the next member, the standing orders prescribe that we can have up to 20 members who can do adjournment matters, and if my maths is right, we have got 21 on the list. If one person can consider during the next few adjournments if they would like to not do theirs, that would be very helpful.

Preston development

Evan MULHOLLAND (Northern Metropolitan) (19:55): (333) My adjournment tonight is seeking the action of the Minister for Planning, and the action I seek is a commitment from the minister to provide information on a timely approval of the Assemble Communities development in Preston. Housing affordability is one of the greatest challenges for many in my electorate. It is also one of the greatest challenges of my generation. Earlier this year a survey by Resolve Political Monitor found that more than 70 per cent of young people believe they will never own a home. The situation is more dire for those doing it tough in our community who could benefit from social and affordable housing. We know from countless studies and from an understanding of the principles of economics that the only practical way to improve housing affordability is having more supply. It is why it is so

disappointing to see Darebin council dragging its feet on this development. Melbourne is in the middle of a housing crisis, and without developments like Assemble Communities' proposal housing supply will never improve.

The Premier is very quick to – I think quite rightly – attack the Greens for holding up housing construction. He always says he will not take lectures from the Greens when they are blocking housing. However, the mayor of Darebin happens to be a Labor mayor, and I do not see the Premier criticising Darebin City Council on this front.

I was very pleased to join with the member for Northcote, Kat Theophanous MP, in the *Age* newspaper in support of this development. This development in Preston will provide 480 units for rent – a build-to-rent proposal – 20 per cent of which would be dedicated to social housing, 20 per cent for affordable housing and 3 per cent for disability accommodation. If there is an issue with height, the council should have sorted it quickly without endless nitpicking. It is on St Georges Road, right next to Bell train station, on a very popular tram route. If you are not going to build developments like this there, then where? You either support alleviating the pressures of the housing crisis or you do not. I seek action from the Minister for Planning to commit to providing information on a timely approval of the Assemble Communities development and to get on with the job of fixing Melbourne's housing crisis.

The PRESIDENT: Dr Ratnam has been taken off the list – she will go tomorrow – so I can call everyone else.

Commonwealth Games

Rikkie-Lee TYRRELL (Northern Victoria) (19:58): (334) My adjournment matter is for the Minister for Regional Development. Victorians, particularly regional Victorians, are reeling from the government's decision to abandon its plans to host the 2026 Commonwealth Games. With no external consultation, no referral to a committee for discussion on possible alternatives and no itemised breakdown of where the major cost blowouts occurred, Victorians deserve answers. To have placed a tender for the games when the government did so was financially irresponsible. It was rightly met with great criticism from the community. However, with a potential taxpayer expense of up to \$1 billion to withdraw, other alternatives should have been considered – for example, condensing the games to the city, where pre-existing infrastructure could have supported most events. This decision further highlights the government's fiscal illiteracy and lack of accountability to the people it claims to represent. I ask the minister: can you provide the costings on required expenditure for the Commonwealth Games to the general public so they can see the information this decision was based upon?

Baxter rail extension

Renee HEATH (Eastern Victoria) (19:59): (335) My adjournment matter is for the Minister for Public Transport, and the action that I seek is a commitment to extend and duplicate the Frankston to Baxter rail line. It is common knowledge that there is a great need for better public transport in the Eastern Victoria Region. That is why last year the Liberal Party committed \$750 million toward the extension and duplication of the Frankston to Baxter rail line. When in government, the federal Liberals allocated \$225 million to this project. When Labor took government, they scrapped it. Once again the people of the Mornington Peninsula have been sidelined. People in these communities deserve better. They should have access to fast, reliable public transport, not only for convenience but also because it provides access to employment and other opportunities. This is extremely important in this area because some of the areas affected by this train line are Baxter and Langwarrin, and data from the RMIT University Centre for Urban Research reveals that the suburbs of Baxter and Langwarrin are unfortunately among Victoria's most vulnerable to spikes in cost of living, due to greater exposure to mortgage stress, car dependency and other inflationary pressures. These hardworking people are paying tax. Why aren't they receiving any rewards? Funding needs to be invested into areas of need, not just areas where Labor wants to buy some votes. The state Labor government continues to refuse to support this extension and has failed time and time again to act, knowing full well that it is crucial

and that these areas are growing and they need the appropriate infrastructure upgrades to cope with the demand.

Dental services

Sarah MANSFIELD (Western Victoria) (20:01): (336) My adjournment matter is for the Minister for Health. Next week is Dental Health Week, an important time to take stock of an area of health care that is seriously neglected. Unfortunately we have a legacy of separating dental health care from our broader public health system, which has devastating effects on people's health. Dental health is inextricably linked to bodily health. Not only does poor oral health immediately impact eating, speech, self-esteem, education and employment opportunities, dental disease is also associated with a host of medical conditions, including infections, stroke, heart disease, type 2 diabetes, adverse pregnancy outcomes, neurodegenerative conditions, inflammatory bowel disease and respiratory conditions. With wait times for public dental care sometimes reaching in excess of three years in some parts of the state, people are being forced into emergency services, placing an extra burden on our already stretched hospitals. In 2021 there were over 17,000 potentially preventable hospitalisations in Victoria due to dental conditions. That is 17,000 hospitalisations that would not have occurred if people had access to timely and affordable dental care. An interim report from the Greens-led federal Senate inquiry into access to dental care in Australia outlines the findings of a nationwide community survey. This survey received the largest number of responses to a committee survey in our nation's history. The interim report demonstrates that the biggest barrier to access is cost – people simply cannot afford to go to the dentist. Victoria has public dental services, but –

The PRESIDENT: Time! Have you put your question?

Sarah MANSFIELD: The action I am seeking is to acknowledge the health impacts of being unable to access timely dental care and to take action to reduce dental wait times across all of Victoria.

Youth crime

Trung LUU (Western Metropolitan) (20:03): (337) My adjournment matter is for the Minister for Police. I rise to talk about a matter of great concern: the alarming rise in youth crime, particularly among offenders aged between 10 and 17. The over-representation of young individuals in aggravated burglaries, theft of motor vehicles, robberies and carjacking is deeply troubling. So the action I seek from the minister is to provide information as to what actions and resources the government has planned to put in place to combat and alleviate the surge in offences committed by children aged between 10 and 17. Statistics show that offences committed by children between 10 and 14 have risen at an alarming rate, with a 45 per cent increase in offences across the state compared to previous years. Aggravated burglary committed by the same age group, 10 to 14, spiked by nearly 87 per cent. In addition, approximately 9 per cent of offenders involved in aggravated burglary are aged between 13 and 19. Minister, sadly any increase in crime will always eventuate in a disastrous outcome, as it has in recent months. In the west, in my constituency, in May, 16-year-old Pasawm Lyhym was fatally stabbed in Sunshine. A month later, in June, 14-year-old Ethan Hoac was also fatally stabbed in St Albans. My condolences to those families and friends. But it did not end there. In July a teenager was set upon by two other boys and received stab wounds in Watergardens shopping centre. Last week a year 10 student, Rhyen Singh, and his two friends were stabbed while playing basketball in Tarneit before celebrating his birthday.

These are serious injuries. Innocent lives will be lost as a result of the increasing incidence of crime among youth, and the Victorian Labor government has not done anywhere near enough to address the underlying causes of youth crime in this place. So can the minister please provide detailed information on the measures and the resources that the government intends to put in place to combat and alleviate the surge in offences committed by youth offenders? We must have a comprehensive understanding of the actions and interventions that have been put in place and the plans to address these pressing issues. As a policeman of 28 years, this is an alarming concern for me in relation to the youth crime that has arisen in Victoria, especially those four incidents I mentioned – not to mention all the other

offences across the state in recent times. So could the minister please provide some information as to the strategies he plans to put in place?

Premier conduct

David DAVIS (Southern Metropolitan) (20:06): (338) My matter is for the attention of the Premier. The Premier has made a number of statements in recent weeks about the *Operation Daintree* report by IBAC. This was a matter of debate of course in public testimony at the Integrity and Oversight Committee hearing on Monday and further on radio this morning – in fact earlier this morning with the Honourable Robert Redlich AM KC, former IBAC Commissioner and a very respected legal person in our land. The Premier in dismissing the *Daintree* report tried to argue that it was purely educational. This is of course pure nonsense. The report is replete with criticisms and negative commentary about the government's activities and the government's decision-making processes. Robert Redlich has since come out and said that actually it is not just simply educational, it is much more than that. He has reinforced the point that this report is a very serious report about the awarding of a \$1.2 million contract to a union that was not qualified to deliver the services that were being sought, and it was done without proper process. Was it corrupt? Was it a criminal act? Probably not, and that is what IBAC said.

A member interjected.

David DAVIS: Maybe, but let us just accept at face value that IBAC concluded that it was probably not a criminal matter. But it was improper. It made it very clear that it was entirely and utterly improper, and the negative findings, as I say, are replete through the report. Robert Redlich has spoken publicly and made it clear that the report actually did make negative reflections and criticisms of government. So the action I seek is for the Premier to correct the record, for the Premier to step back and admit that he was wrong, that the report was not a purely educational report, that the report did have negative criticisms and findings about the government. I think he should read the report closely, following what Robert Redlich has said over the last two days.

While I am discussing this, it is important to note what occurred at that inquiry on Monday. The four Labor members – let us be clear what they did – hoed into an eminent Australian, an eminent Victorian, somebody who was on the Court of Appeal for many years, actually a person of huge integrity, and this was clearly a round-up action. They were clearly briefed. They were given questions, and I note some of the commentary in the paper where the Premier's office and so forth are denying that they provided the questions, but it seems that actually this was a coordinated action, and the Premier needs to come clean. Was he involved? What was his –

The PRESIDENT: Time is up, Mr Davis, and also you know that to make accusations against sitting members should be by substantive motion. You are kind of getting close; you are on the edge.

Water policy

Gaelle BROAD (Northern Victoria) (20:10): (339) My adjournment is for the Minister for Water, as water storages across the region are close to full capacity and broken levee banks require urgent repairs. The minister has a responsibility to manage our waterways and fix levee banks to help protect valuable agricultural land, private and public assets, infrastructure and homes from further floods. I recently visited Kerang and also met with local residents in Benjeroop to discuss the impacts of the floods and works still required. Locals told me that in March this year rivers in the region were low enough to walk through, yet our water storage levels have continued to build up. Goulburn–Murray Water manages 24 water storages across Northern Victoria. Lake Eildon is at 95 per cent. Cairn Curran Reservoir is at 97 per cent. Lake Eppalock is already 100 per cent full, with more rain predicted over the next few months. Water releases were only recently increased once the catchment was over 99 per cent full, from 150 megalitres a day to 800 megalitres per day, when the valve has the capacity to release up to 1600 megalitres a day.

Goulburn–Murray Water follows operating procedures, and the primary purpose of Lake Eppalock is for harvesting water. Current legislation requires them to maintain the water storages for entitlement holders. Those operating rules need to be reviewed by the minister. The rules need to be updated to take into account catchment area, forecast rainfall, current storage levels, entitlement holders and the impact of water releases on areas downstream.

I understand the minister has directed the Department of Energy, Environment and Climate Action to undertake an assessment to review operating procedures in relation to Lake Eppalock and Lake Eildon by the end of this year, but our water catchments are either full or close to full and October is usually our wettest month. Understandably local residents are getting nervous. They are working hard to rebuild and do not want a repeat of the devastating floods of last year. The minister needs to listen to local communities and take action now. Levee banks still look like Swiss cheese following last year's floods and require urgent repair works. There are 4000 kilometres of undefined and unregulated levee banks across Victoria, and half of them are in Gannawarra and Loddon shires. Add in 1000 kilometres of roads already impacted by the 2022 floods, and the local shires are still battling to keep their heads above water.

While the flood inquiry is due to provide recommendations next year to help Victoria prepare for future floods, I ask the minister to listen to the feedback of local communities and take urgent action to review the operating rules of our water storages and repair broken levee banks across the region.

Public housing

Bev McARTHUR (Western Victoria) (20:13): (340) My adjournment matter is for the Minister for Housing, and it concerns the unauthorised subletting of public housing by tenants. Homes Victoria quite rightly will not permit tenants to sublet or assign their public housing property. It is only fair. After all, the system is there to provide for those in genuine need, not to provide an income stream for unscrupulous tenants who are ripping off the system and exploiting the goodwill of taxpayers and Homes Victoria staff.

The background to this is the growing housing crisis in our state. Recent figures show nearly 70,000 applications for public housing are still left in limbo, including more than 36,000 deemed urgent. The state budget showed some victims of domestic violence are waiting more than 20 months for accommodation, despite being entitled to express treatment. The same figures showed 58,131 families were waiting for long-term accommodation in March and that more than half of those were classified as priority cases. So it is only fair to ask: what measures are being taken against those who exploit the system, make money for themselves and leave the vulnerable without public assistance?

Looking into this matter, I could not help but be concerned. The Department of Families, Fairness and Housing website contains guidelines on undeclared occupants, subletting and squatters. It notes that staff must provide evidence of a tenant advertising a room; that an agreement has been reached with the new occupant; that the tenant has granted exclusive rights to occupy; and that the tenant is receiving regular rental payments – for example, through bank statements and/or evidence in relation to payment of utilities. This seems to be an extremely high bar for what could be verbal agreements and cash-in-hand payments. It is surely difficult for Homes Victoria staff to investigate and prove. The guidelines then note that:

... management will consult with Legal Services ... to determine the best course of action in light of the individual circumstances and human rights considerations of the tenant –

and –

the sub-letter ...

I can understand a measured approach being taken to subletters, but fair-minded Victorians will not hold highly the human rights of deliberate fraudsters. The action I seek from the minister is a

reassurance that the situation is well understood and that appropriate enforcement action will be undertaken. This would include, I suggest, the estimated number of unauthorised sublets, an assurance that Homes Victoria staff have sufficient investigative powers and a full statistical breakdown of the number of tenancies terminated annually due to subletting to undeclared occupants.

Energy policy

Joe McCRACKEN (Western Victoria) (20:16): (341) My adjournment matter is to the Minister for Energy and Resources, and it relates to the cancellation of gas in new homes in Victoria from 2024 onwards. The action that I seek is very simple: repeal this destructive and horrendous policy. Eighty per cent of Victorian homes rely on gas to cook food and heat their homes. Depriving new homes of this access to a resource not only removes an efficient and reliable commodity for households but also forces households to install electrical appliances. This is obviously designed to increase demand for electricity, which will as a result force up prices across the board. But the silliness of this policy cannot be understated. Victoria still has an incredibly heavy reliance on brown and black coal, particularly for energy generation of course. According to the *Australian Financial Review* article on 28 July titled ‘Vic gas ban is no spectacular win for the climate’:

Brown coal ... accounted for 68 per cent of electricity produced in Victoria in 2020 ...

Now, if the plan is to cut gas out of the energy sector in order to get to net zero, you need to have a reliable baseload alternative, and until the government can ensure that the wind blows 24/7, the sun shines 24/7 and that we can store energy for more than 10 minutes in a battery, there is no viable alternative to gas. It certainly is not renewables at this point of time, let alone the cost effectiveness of it all. And given that gas has actually lower emissions than coal, wouldn't it make more sense to have more gas and not less? Even if, environmentally, that was your only concern, brown coal would be of greater concern than gas. So why the transition away from gas towards coal? Because that is what is actually happening, and without an alternative, there is an increased reliance on brown and black coal instead of gas. It is just that simple. It is common sense. But I guess this government is great at cancelling things – cancel gas, cancel the Commonwealth Games, cancel the airport rail link. What is the next reckless cancellation that we are going to see?

Public consultation

Nicholas McGOWAN (North-Eastern Metropolitan) (20:18): (342) My adjournment matter is actually with respect to the minister representing the Minister for Climate Action, Minister for Energy and Resources and Minister for the State Electricity Commission the Honourable Lily D'Ambrosio, and the action I seek is that the minister commit to a thorough public consultation process before progressing the Mineral Resources (Sustainable Development) Amendment Bill 2023.

It will come as no surprise to this house or in fact to the Parliament that over the course of the last couple of weeks a number of constituents – of mine, President, of yours too and of others in this place – have written to me and expressed their concern at the lack of public consultation, and rightly they have. For the benefit of them and all of the other Victorians who might listen to this, they are Maurice from Boronia; Ally from Doncaster – that is for my colleague in the other place Mr Guy; Don from Heidelberg – that is for Mr Carbines; Robert from Ringwood North; Kirsten from Eaglemont; Anouk from Heidelberg Heights, a place I am very familiar with; Genevieve from Eaglemont; Robin from Ringwood North; Marie from Ringwood East; William from Vermont – and it goes on; the list is quite comprehensive. All of these people are concerned about consultation or a lack thereof by this government. There are Andrew from Templestowe Lower; Robert from Wantirna; Heather from Montmorency – that is Vicki Ward's territory, from memory, from the other place, yet again; Jane from Kilsyth – I think that is Mr Hodgett, if memory serves me correctly; and Melissa from Ringwood East – that is Mr Fowles. I am not sure what he is doing tonight; he is probably out on the town. Michael is from Bayswater – from memory that would be Mr Mullahy, I think; Owen from Burwood East – that is perhaps Mr Hamer's area; Simon from Croydon; Marguerite from Eltham – that is Vicki Ward again; Teresa from Warranwood; Susan from Park Orchards; Bruce from Heathmont; Brian

from Ringwood – that is Mr Fowles again; Steven from Chirnside Park; Damian and Hiromi from Mitcham; and, last but not least, Angela from Eltham.

These are constituents of mine – and not only mine, President, but also yours, Sonja Terpstra's, Aiv from the Greens and also Dr Bach's, who is here with us tonight. He understands and shares my concern that yet again all these Victorians – more than 25 of them, in fact 26 or thereabouts – have written and expressed their concern that this government time and again have absolutely steamrolled, ignored and shown absolute disregard for public consultation when it comes to their amendments, whether it be the Commonwealth Games, whether it be the forestry industry, as my learned colleague Beverley McArthur knows about all too well, whether it be the gaming industry and the changes they made overnight or whether it be the sporting sector in respect of the Commonwealth Games. I ask the minister to address these serious concerns.

Eastern Victoria Region housing affordability

Melina BATH (Eastern Victoria) (20:21): (343) My adjournment debate this evening is for the Minister for Housing in the other place, and it relates to housing, homelessness and the cost of living in my Eastern Victoria electorate. There is a sensational person called Sarah Copland. She is the pastor of Enjoy Church in Gippsland. She and her incredible team of volunteers support vulnerable locals. Located in Morwell, the front line of crisis and the heartland, unfortunately, of need in this area, she operates a number of programs that support people who are struggling with the cost of living and struggling with homelessness. She runs Re.store pantry, which provides an opportunity for people to fill their larders. She has a market day in conjunction with Foodbank Victoria once a month, and she has seen the demand grow and grow like never before. The cost of housing and the cost of rent, food and electricity are having a profound impact on people's lives. She once upon a time would see a few families; now it is a least 200 a month that come through and use the food bank in Morwell.

Recently, talking to her about housing stress specifically, she said the need is dire and is growing. There are multiple families living under one roof because they cannot afford to live separately. Social and affordable housing in Eastern Victoria Region is absolutely on the must-do list. We have seen with the Andrews government how they are all too happy now that the political situation has passed, the election has come and gone and they have worked out that it was a flawed policy to have a Commonwealth Games that they could not afford, to backtrack on the whole business.

The Council to Homeless Persons has some very grim figures. Gippsland homelessness has surged in the past four years between assessments – 10 per cent in East Gippsland, 32 per cent in South Gippsland, 38 per cent in Narracan, a shocking 85 per cent in Morwell and 113 per cent in Pakenham – and there is great scepticism as to whether the Andrews government will actually deliver any of the slated 1300 social and affordable homes after the Commonwealth Games debacle. So I ask the minister to provide a time line for my electorate of Eastern Victoria. When will the homes be built, how many will there be and when can we see the bricks and mortar come to fruition?

Child protection

Matthew BACH (North-Eastern Metropolitan) (20:24): (344) My adjournment matter tonight is for the Minister for Child Protection and Family Services, and the action I seek is an explanation from the minister: does it remain the government's position that residential care should be phased out? If not, why not? And if not, what levels of abuse would precipitate a change of policy?

At the Public Accounts and Estimates Committee the minister was very forthcoming regarding the appalling levels of abuse of our most vulnerable children in residential care. Residential care units are group homes out in the suburbs that house children in the child protection system who cannot be placed in foster care. Liberal and National members of the Public Accounts and Estimates Committee asked for some information on notice, and Minister Blandthorn was good enough to provide that information. Through the provision of that information we learned even more about the huge levels of abuse of children in care. Our independent children's commissioner has previously said that many

children in residential care are preyed upon by what she termed paedophile prostitution rings, and it is now abundantly clear that abuse of children in care, including the most egregious forms of sexual abuse, has become completely normalised.

In this place, on a number of occasions, I have congratulated Minister Blandthorn for the good budget outcome that she was able to achieve when it came to increased funding for residential care. But my worry is that the situation is now so bad that it is not possible to reform residential care to a state that is acceptable to us in this place and to the broader community. When we are seeing such huge proportions of children abused in care, we need to seriously consider the viability of the entire model.

There are alternatives. So many Victorians with the right incentives would love to be foster carers, and yet we know through information provided by the Australian Institute of Health and Welfare that far more foster carers leave the system in Victoria every year than in any other Australian jurisdiction. We need what the Liberals and Nationals advocated for at the election, and that is a very significant expansion of the foster care allowance so that basic expenses can at least be covered. Adoption should be available to Victorians who need it, especially members of the LGBT community. We learned last year that fewer than five members of the LGBT community in Victoria – a state of 7 million people – have been able to adopt children since adoption reform was put in place. This government's policy is to stop foster carers fostering kids and stop adoption and yet funnel more children into residential care. I think this entire model now, given the level of abuse, needs to be rethought.

Responses

Enver ERDOGAN (Northern Metropolitan – Minister for Corrections, Minister for Youth Justice, Minister for Victim Support) (20:28): There were 20 matters raised today: Ms Lovell to the Treasurer; Mr Berger to the Minister for Agriculture; Ms Purcell to the Minister for Training and Skills; Ms Crozier to the Minister for Health; Ms Watt to the Minister for Casino, Gaming and Liquor Regulation; Mrs Deeming to the Minister for Planning; Mrs Hermans to the Minister for WorkSafe and the TAC; Mr Limbrick to the Minister for Government Services; Mr Mulholland to the Minister for Planning; Mrs Tyrrell to the Minister for Regional Development; Dr Heath to the Minister for Public Transport; Dr Mansfield to the Minister for Health; Mr Luu for the Minister for Police; Mr Davis to the Premier; Mrs Broad to the Minister for Water; Mrs McArthur for the Minister for Housing; Mr McCracken to the Minister for Energy and Resources; Mr McGowan to the Minister for Climate Action, Minister for Energy and Resources and Minister for the State Electricity Commission; Ms Bath to the Minister for Housing; and Dr Bach to the Minister for Child Protection and Family Services. I will make sure that all those matters raised are referred to the relevant ministers and appropriate responses are sought.

The PRESIDENT: The house stands adjourned.

House adjourned 8:29 pm.