



Hansard

LEGISLATIVE COUNCIL

60th Parliament

Wednesday 31 May 2023

Members of the Legislative Council

60th Parliament

President

Shaun Leane

Deputy President

Wendy Lovell

Leader of the Government in the Legislative Council

Jaclyn Symes

Deputy Leader of the Government in the Legislative Council

Lizzie Blandthorn

Leader of the Opposition in the Legislative Council

Georgie Crozier

Deputy Leader of the Opposition in the Legislative Council

Evan Mulholland (from 31 August 2023)

Matthew Bach (to 31 August 2023)

Member	Region	Party	Member	Region	Party
Bach, Matthew	North-Eastern Metropolitan	Lib	Luu, Trung	Western Metropolitan	Lib
Batchelor, Ryan	Southern Metropolitan	ALP	Mansfield, Sarah	Western Victoria	Greens
Bath, Melina	Eastern Victoria	Nat	McArthur, Bev	Western Victoria	Lib
Berger, John	Southern Metropolitan	ALP	McCracken, Joe	Western Victoria	Lib
Blandthorn, Lizzie	Western Metropolitan	ALP	McGowan, Nick	North-Eastern Metropolitan	Lib
Bourman, Jeff	Eastern Victoria	SFFP	McIntosh, Tom	Eastern Victoria	ALP
Broad, Gaëlle	Northern Victoria	Nat	Mulholland, Evan	Northern Metropolitan	Lib
Copsey, Katherine	Southern Metropolitan	Greens	Payne, Rachel	South-Eastern Metropolitan	LCV
Crozier, Georgie	Southern Metropolitan	Lib	Puglielli, Aiv	North-Eastern Metropolitan	Greens
Davis, David	Southern Metropolitan	Lib	Purcell, Georgie	Northern Victoria	AJP
Deeming, Moira ¹	Western Metropolitan	IndLib	Ratnam, Samantha	Northern Metropolitan	Greens
Erdogan, Enver	Northern Metropolitan	ALP	Shing, Harriet	Eastern Victoria	ALP
Ermacora, Jacinta	Western Victoria	ALP	Somyurek, Adem	Northern Metropolitan	DLP
Ettershank, David	Western Metropolitan	LCV	Stitt, Ingrid	Western Metropolitan	ALP
Galea, Michael	South-Eastern Metropolitan	ALP	Symes, Jaclyn	Northern Victoria	ALP
Heath, Renee	Eastern Victoria	Lib	Tarlamis, Lee	South-Eastern Metropolitan	ALP
Hermans, Ann-Marie	South-Eastern Metropolitan	Lib	Terpstra, Sonja	North-Eastern Metropolitan	ALP
Leane, Shaun	North-Eastern Metropolitan	ALP	Tierney, Gayle	Western Victoria	ALP
Limbrick, David ²	South-Eastern Metropolitan	LP	Tyrrell, Rikkie-Lee	Northern Victoria	PHON
Lovell, Wendy	Northern Victoria	Lib	Watt, Sheena	Northern Metropolitan	ALP

¹ Lib until 27 March 2023

² LDP until 26 July 2023

Party abbreviations

AJP – Animal Justice Party; ALP – Australian Labor Party; DLP – Democratic Labour Party;

Greens – Australian Greens; IndLib – Independent Liberal; LCV – Legalise Cannabis Victoria;

LDP – Liberal Democratic Party; Lib – Liberal Party of Australia; LP – Libertarian Party;

Nat – National Party of Australia; PHON – Pauline Hanson’s One Nation; SFFP – Shooters, Fishers and Farmers Party

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Wednesday 31 May 2023

The PRESIDENT (Shaun Leane) took the chair at 9:35 am, read the prayer and made an acknowledgement of country.

*Bills***Appropriation (2023–2024) Bill 2023***Introduction and first reading*

The PRESIDENT (09:36): I have a message from the Assembly:

The Legislative Assembly presents for the agreement of the Legislative Council ‘A Bill for an Act for the appropriation of certain sums out of the Consolidated Fund for the ordinary annual services of the Government for the financial year 2023/2024 and for other purposes’.

Jaclyn SYMES (Northern Victoria – Attorney-General, Minister for Emergency Services) (09:36):
I move:

That the bill be now read a first time.

Motion agreed to.

Read first time.

Jaclyn SYMES: I move, by leave:

That the second reading be made an order of the day for later this day.

Motion agreed to.

Appropriation (Parliament 2023–2024) Bill 2023*Introduction and first reading*

The PRESIDENT (09:37): I have a further message from the Assembly:

The Legislative Assembly presents for the agreement of the Legislative Council ‘A Bill for an Act for the appropriation of certain sums out of the Consolidated Fund for the Parliament in respect of the financial year 2023/2024 and for other purposes’.

Jaclyn SYMES (Northern Victoria – Attorney-General, Minister for Emergency Services) (09:37):
I move:

That the bill be now read a first time.

Motion agreed to.

Read first time.

Jaclyn SYMES: I move, by leave:

That the second reading be made an order of the day for later this day.

Motion agreed to.

*Papers***Papers**

Tabled by Clerk:

Crown Land (Reserves) Act 1978 –

Order of 29 April 2023 giving approval to the granting of a licence at Mordialloc-Mentone Beach Park Reserve.

Order of 25 May 2023 giving approval to the granting of a lease at Albert Park.

Statutory Rules under the following Acts –

Building and Construction Industry Security of Payment Act 2002 – No. 34.

Circular Economy (Waste Reduction and Recycling) Act 2021 – No. 33.

Supreme Court Act 1986 – No. 31.

Supreme Court Act 1986 – Corporations (Ancillary Provisions) Act 2001 – No. 32.

Victorian Civil and Administrative Tribunal Act 1998 – No. 30.

Subordinate Legislation Act 1994 – Legislative Instrument and related documents under section 16B in respect of the Minister’s Conversion Rules for Place of Take Approvals, under the Water Act 1989.

Business of the house

Notices

Notices of motion given.

Nicholas McGowan having given notice:

The PRESIDENT: Mr McGowan, I can report that the public galleries will be open next sitting week. There has been a lot of work done to get to this point. But can I tell the chamber that I am going to have zero tolerance with anyone from the public galleries yelling out or hissing or booing, and I am going to leave the chair if that happens. I just want to let everyone know, for all of our sakes, that that is what I am going to be doing.

Members statements

Budget 2023–24

John BERGER (Southern Metropolitan) (09:44): Last week I had the privilege of attending four deserving organisations to let them know some good news. Firstly I visited Camberwell Primary School, where I met with principal Gale, school council president Stuart Lindsay and parents association president Christina Woods to let them know we are kickstarting planning on upgrades for their fantastic school. Then I visited Vision Australia, where I announced we will provide a \$60,000 grant to help them continue delivering key information to our community. They reach over 350,000 listeners every month, and it goes a long way towards building a community that supports each other. You can see this with their passionate team of 300 volunteers, who provide over 80 hours of programs each week. Next I met with Suzie from the Water Well Project. I was proud to announce that we are giving them \$100,000 to support the health and wellbeing of communities from migrant, refugee and asylum seeker backgrounds. Finally, I visited the amazing team at Port Phillip Community Group. Well done to Veena, Julie, Gina and Ruth and their entire team for the work that they do. I was proud to announce that our government is providing them with a \$55,000 grant to help them continue to support locals to manage their mental health and physical health needs.

National Reconciliation Week

Rachel PAYNE (South-Eastern Metropolitan) (09:45): I begin by acknowledging the Boon Wurrung and Wurundjeri people of the Kulin nation as traditional custodians on the land where we gather today and the land which encompasses the south-east. I acknowledge that this land was never ceded, and in this parliamentary term in particular, where we will see real treaties negotiated between traditional owners and the state, I pay my deepest respect to elders past, present and emerging and so look forward to that important progress.

This week is National Reconciliation Week, an opportunity to focus on how we can strengthen relationships between Indigenous and non-Indigenous people. Indigenous voices must be elevated and respected as we come together to learn about our shared histories, cultures and achievements and how each of us can contribute to truth-telling and reconciliation.

We have taken great strides in Victoria, but this year is particularly significant for reconciliation given the up-and-coming referendum on the Indigenous Voice to Parliament – the opportunity to give constitutional recognition to our First Nations peoples. Legalise Cannabis Victoria will be supporting a Voice to Parliament, and we look forward to working with our respective communities as we progress through Australia’s next steps of reconciliation, including treaty and truth-telling.

Budget 2023–24

Michael GALEA (South-Eastern Metropolitan) (09:46): I am pleased to inform the house that the state budget has delivered for my constituents in the South-Eastern Metropolitan region, particularly in the electorate of Rowville. Carrington Primary School in Knoxfield has received funding in this budget for their initial planning works. Last year I was delighted to announce during the campaign that we are giving this school \$13.9 million for the full rebuild of several important school buildings, and it was with great pleasure that I joined my colleague Mr Tarlamis last week to visit the school. We met with the principal Brett Speed and several of the grade 6 leaders. We got to meet and talk with them and also got to thank Brett for his wonderful advocacy for his school.

In Scoresby as well we are delivering on another election commitment, with \$2 million towards an upgrade of St Jude the Apostle Primary School. This upgrade means improved learning spaces for the more than 200 students at St Jude’s. Thank you to principal Tim McMullen for meeting with Mr Tarlamis and me and also for providing a tour of the facilities that this funding will help to upgrade for their new middle school.

This budget delivers the services and projects that matter to Victorians, with new schools in our growth corridors and existing areas such as Rowville, funding for early childhood education, road upgrades and comprehensive funding for women’s health clinics. This budget is a win for the south-east, and this budget is a win for the Rowville electorate.

National Reconciliation Week

Sarah MANSFIELD (Western Victoria) (09:48): On Sunday I attended Geelong’s Reconciliation in the Park. Held every year since 2010, it is hosted by local First Nations community members with the support of Geelong One Fire Reconciliation Group. It is a day for connection and truth-telling, and Geelong deeply cares about it. It is also a chance to celebrate the many First Nations businesses and service providers thriving in our region. It is an event I feel privileged to be part of, and it joins together the many experiences which have helped to guide my personal journey of reconciliation, one which continues today.

These events are also a time to reflect on the continued impacts of colonisation and systemic racism on First Nations people. This is a legacy First Nations people in Geelong know all too well, with many bearing the deep grief and trauma of the stolen generation, who were forcibly brought to orphanages across our region. This is a history we must never forget. It is also a stark reminder that conversations about reconciliation and the importance of treaty cannot be limited to just one day, one week or a year. For all of us in this house, reconciliation must be embedded in our decision-making as we actively seek to remove systemic barriers to self-determination and restoration for all First Nations people in Victoria.

Maffco Brewery and Taphouse

Tom McINTOSH (Eastern Victoria) (09:49): Maffra is a beautiful town on the banks of the Macalister River in the middle of the Macalister irrigation district. The town has a strong dairy farming identity, a great ag show, a strong footy club, a brand new basketball and gymnastics stadium, the Gippsland Vehicle Collection, a beautiful outdoor pool – you name it, Maffra has it – and now it has its very own local brewery. I opened the Maffco Brewery and Taphouse on behalf of the minister, and I was so impressed with the historic renovated milk factory. It is a place of absolute character. I visited twice late last year while it was under construction, and the space has come so far in such a short time since then. Local entrepreneurs Nicky and Lashay have worked so hard to turn this dream into a reality,

and they have brought a community along with them. They worked every minute they could to finish in time for their first booking, a friend's wedding, because that is just the sort of people they are.

This will be an iconic destination for the region for generations to come and adds to the growing list of food and wine venues along the Gippsland Plains rail trail, which now includes the Tinamba Hotel, Mewburn Park, Duart Homestead, the Vines on Avon and the Badger & Hare in Stratford, all within 18 kilometres of each other, and now the jewel in the crown, the region's first and very own brewery. I am so happy that this fantastic project and the community of Maffra, like the rail trail, have had state government support through the Regional Tourism Investment Fund. What an investment. Congratulations to all involved.

Coronation of His Majesty King Charles III

Rikkie-Lee TYRRELL (Northern Victoria) (09:51): My members statement today is to publicly thank the Governor of Victoria Her Excellency the Honourable Linda Dessau and her husband Mr Anthony Howard for inviting me to the Victorian coronation celebration of their majesties King Charles III and Queen Camilla. It was an honour to attend the evening at Government House with many important dignitaries of Victoria who spend their time and energy working hard for all Victorians alike. This was a splendid opportunity to meet and network with people whom I would not normally have the opportunity to meet. I have now been lucky enough to start working relationships with important individuals who will contribute to the potential improvement of people's situations, lives or experiences in my constituency. This celebration highlighted the importance of networking in our line of work, as we can achieve so much more for our constituents by communicating and working with people from all walks of life with unique skill sets that can contribute to our communities.

National Reconciliation Week

Jacinta ERMACORA (Western Victoria) (09:52): During this National Reconciliation Week I wish to acknowledge the devastating impact of colonisation on First Nations people of this country. I note that Sorry Day was last Friday, 26 May. I was at Warrnambool's first Sorry Day at the Temperance Hall a couple of decades ago with my husband and young children. I had the honour of meeting respected elder Banjo Clark at that event. I do not think I will ever truly appreciate the impact of colonisation on our local Aboriginal families and communities. Why should they tell me about genocide, humiliation and modern-day incarceration? I say sorry in this chamber today by acknowledging their strength and power and the role they play in our community.

I attended a gathering of Gunditjmarra people at the Ploughed Field in Portland on 26 January. Amongst others I met Chris Saunders, who was taking a lead during the gathering. I was heartened to see the community's strength within Gunditjmarra people. Since then I have visited Dhauwurd-Wurrung Elderly & Community Health Services, where I met Kevin Clarke, Hilary Saunders and Tamika Amos. They are providing aged care services and children's services to their community and the broader community of Portland. I also visited Winda-Mara in Heywood, where Jason Walker and John Bell very generously explained to me the challenges and strengths that their community face in delivering welfare services. I thank them for their contribution to our community.

Henry the sheep

Georgie PURCELL (Northern Victoria) (09:53): On 20 June 2017 a tiny woolly bundle sat in my lap as I drove him down the Calder to start his new life. Henry the lamb was just two days old, discovered by a kind member of the public, without his mother and facing certain death by winter exposure. He was one of the lucky ones, with an estimated 15 million lambs dying this way each and every year in Australia. I gave him bottles every 2 hours. He slept in a cot next to my bed, and he loved to lounge by the warm fire, competing with four cats for the best spot. And with each and every day that he grew into a big, healthy sheep that, much to his disgust, had to move outside, so too did my love for him.

On 20 May 2023 Henry unexpectedly left this world and with it left an enormous hole in my heart. Loving a farmed animal hurts because in their happiness and joy you see the personality behind someone who is usually considered a commodity. Losing one hurts even more because it reminds you that the vast majority do not get to live the life of comfort and of safety that they did, because I know that as much as Henry was special to me, he was not special. Every farmed animal is an individual with a personality, with a story and with a desire to just live. So today I reiterate my dedication to improving the lives of all animals, for Henry, who I will miss every day for the rest of my life.

Climate change

Ryan BATCHELOR (Southern Metropolitan) (09:55): Victoria is leading the nation on climate action. We have set world-leading emissions reduction targets. We are going to halve emissions by 2030, cut them by 75 to 80 per cent by 2035 and, most importantly, reach net zero by 2045. We have cut emissions more than any other state since 2014, and we have the earliest net zero emissions target of any major jurisdiction in Australia. These targets align us with the Paris agreement goals of limiting global warming to 1.5 degrees. Our ambitious emissions reduction targets represent Victoria doing its fair share to avoid the worst impacts of climate change, and we are on the fastest decarbonisation path in the country.

I am proud to be part of a government that is delivering real action on climate. We are not slowing down. We will continue to take bold action across our economy to reduce emissions and create jobs, backed by \$3 billion in climate-positive investment. By 2035 we will be generating 95 per cent of our electricity from renewables, and we are bringing back the SEC to deliver government-owned renewable energy. We are investing to reduce transport emissions to support the switch to zero-emissions transport. By 2025, public bus purchases will have zero emissions. We are supporting farmers, we are planting trees and we are delivering real climate action, and this is what delivering real climate action looks like.

Budget 2023–24

Lee TARLAMIS (South-Eastern Metropolitan) (09:57): The Andrews Labor government has not wasted a day delivering on its election promises for our community, investing in the services and projects that matter to Victorians, including in my community of the South-Eastern Metropolitan Region. The government is continuing its record investment in education across the south-east, with 10 existing schools receiving funding for upgrades and a further 10 schools receiving funding for planning. Importantly, we are also building new schools, with funding commitments for Casey Central primary school, Clyde Creek primary school, Clyde North secondary school, Thompsons West primary school and new tech schools across Dandenong and Frankston.

We have also announced massive investments in our state's healthcare system, including major upgrades to the Dandenong Hospital and the Monash Medical Centre. Women's health clinics are also being added at Frankston Hospital, Casey Hospital and Monash Medical Centre, with a total of 20 being added across the state. Three mental health and wellbeing locals are being built in Narre Warren, Cranbourne and Officer to provide extra support to those dealing with mental health issues, with 50 being opened across the state.

Twenty-three new V/Line VLocity trains have been ordered from Alstom in Dandenong South, supporting 500 local jobs, and we are getting on with fixing the local roads people use every day, including a \$70 million upgrade to the intersection of Thompsons Road and Berwick-Cranbourne Road in Clyde North. Two million dollars has also been allocated to improve pedestrian safety at Hall Road in Carrum Downs and \$1 million for Fletcher Road in Frankston.

There is also support for our sports clubs and our vibrant and diverse multicultural communities and so much more that I do not have time to list today. With this budget we are getting on with delivering what matters to all Victorians, including every election promise we made at the last election, and I will have more to say about the budget over the coming weeks.

*Bills***Corrections Amendment (Parole) Bill 2023***Statement of compatibility*

Matthew BACH (North-Eastern Metropolitan) (09:58): I lay on the table a statement of compatibility with the Charter of Human Rights and Responsibilities Act 2006:

In accordance with section 28 of the Charter of Human Rights and Responsibilities Act 2006 ('charter act'), I make this statement of compatibility with respect to the Corrections Amendment (Parole) Bill 2023.

In my opinion, the Corrections Amendment (Parole) Bill 2023 (the bill), as introduced to the Legislative Council, is compatible with human rights as set out in the charter act. I base my opinion on the reasons outlined in this statement.

Overview of bill

The bill will amend the Corrections Act 1986 to limit the circumstances in which the adult parole board may order the release on parole of Paul Denyer, a prisoner sentenced in 1993 to three consecutive sentences of life imprisonment for three counts of murder. On appeal in July 1994, Denyer was granted a non-parole period of 30 years (until 2023).

As Supreme Court Justice Frank Vincent rightly noted at the sentencing in December 1993, the murders of the three women were "almost beyond comprehension.". Since that day, Paul Denyer has never shown any remorse for his conduct and has shown no sign during his time in prison that he is no longer a danger to society. Under the bill, the adult parole board can only make an order for the release on parole of the prisoner, Paul Denyer, if:

- an application for parole is made to the board by or on behalf of the prisoner;
- the board is satisfied, on the basis of a report prepared by the Secretary to the Department of Justice, that:
 - (a) the prisoner is in imminent danger of dying, or is seriously incapacitated, and as a result he no longer has the physical ability to do harm to any person; and
 - (b) the prisoner has demonstrated that he does not pose a risk to the community; and
- the board is further satisfied that, because of matters (a) and (b) above, the making of the order is justified.

*Charter rights that are potentially relevant to the bill**Section 21 – Right to liberty*

Section 21(1) of the charter act provides that every person has the right to liberty. Section 21(2) provides that a person must not be subject to arbitrary detention. Section 21(3) provides that a person must not be deprived of his or her liberty except on grounds and in accordance with procedures established by law.

It is well established that the right to liberty of the person in section 21(1) is reasonably and justifiably limited where the person is deprived of their liberty under sentence of imprisonment after conviction for a criminal offence by an independent court after a fair hearing. The liberty of Paul Denyer has been limited by a court's sentence of imprisonment. The bill does not increase that limitation caused by the court's sentence.

This bill does not alter the head sentences of imprisonment imposed by the Supreme Court under which Paul Denyer is detained. It alters the conditions on which the adult parole board may order his release on parole during the currency of the sentence and after the expiration of a non-parole period. The bill does not require the cancellation of parole for Paul Denyer if it is granted.

A prisoner has no right or entitlement to release on parole, nor to the continuation of a particular legislative scheme for release on parole throughout their sentence. In *Crump v. New South Wales* (2012) 286 ALR 658 at 670, French CJ stated that: 'The power of the executive government of a state to order a prisoner's release on licence or parole or in the exercise of the prerogative may be broadened or constrained or even abolished by the legislature of the state'.

The changes to the parole scheme effected by this bill do not change the position that Paul Denyer has been deprived of his liberty and lawfully detained for the duration of the head sentences imposed by the Supreme Court after conviction of serious offences in a fair hearing. In those circumstances, in my view, the bill does not limit the rights in section 21 of the charter.

Section 12 – Freedom of movement

The right to freedom of movement is reasonably and justifiably limited where the person is deprived of their liberty under sentence of imprisonment after conviction for a criminal offence. This bill does not add to that limitation arising from the sentence.

Section 8(3) – Equality before the law

Section 8(3) provides that every person is equal before the law and is entitled to equal and effective protection against discrimination.

Discrimination under the charter act is limited to discrimination on the basis of an attribute set out in section 6 of the Equal Opportunity Act 2010, such as age, disability or sex. The bill does not give rise to any discrimination based on a relevant attribute and hence does not limit the right in section 8(3) of the charter acts to equal protection of the law without discrimination.

It is not clear whether the statement in section 8(3) that every person is equal before the law is a separate right which is not limited by the concept of discrimination based on an attribute. If it is, then I consider that the right is limited in relation to Paul Denyer because the bill makes unique provision for him alone. I consider that the limitation on any such right is reasonable and justified because of the egregious circumstances of Paul Denyer's 3 murders and because he continues to represent a danger to the community. That Mr Denyer still presents a danger to the community so long after such serious offending means he should not be released on parole while physically capable of doing harm and this justifies the imposition on him of special restrictive conditions for the granting of parole.

Section 10 – Cruel, inhuman and degrading punishment

In *Vinter and Others v. UK* (9 July 2013), the European Court of Human Rights held that a whole-of-life prison sentence with no non-parole period was incompatible with the right to be free of 'inhuman or degrading treatment or punishment' (under article 3 of the European Convention on Human Rights) unless there was both a prospect of release and a possibility of review of the continued detention. The court considered that the possibility of release if a prisoner was terminally ill or physically incapacitated and other criteria were met was not sufficient to comply with article 3. The decision has been strongly criticised by the UK government and others.

Section 10(b) of the charter provides that a person must not be treated or punished in a cruel, inhuman, or degrading way. In my opinion, section 10(b) of the charter does not apply to life sentences with no non-parole period in the way the European Court held that article 3 applied in *Vinter's* case. In *DPP v. Hunter* [2013] VSC 440, the Supreme Court imposed a life sentence with no non-parole period after considering *Vinter's* case and the charter act. That sentence was upheld by the Court of Appeal (*Hunter v. The Queen* [2013] VSCA 385). It follows that the application in *Vinter's* case of article 3 to whole-of-life sentences with no prospect of parole has not been followed in relation to the charter act section 10(b) by the Supreme Court of Victoria. Accordingly, I consider that the bill's imposition of restrictive conditions on the making of a parole order in relation to Paul Denyer does not limit the right in section 10(b). If a sentence of life imprisonment with no possibility of parole is not cruel and inhuman punishment in Victorian law, a sentence of life imprisonment with a limited possibility of parole under statutory conditions cannot be cruel and unusual punishment.

I therefore conclude that the bill is compatible with the rights set out in the charter acts. I note that it is possible that a court may take a different view than I have as to whether the bill is incompatible with charter act rights. In this exceptional case, the charter act will be overridden because of the need to ensure that the life sentences imposed by the Supreme Court for these egregious crimes are fully or almost fully served and to protect the community from the ongoing and real risk of serious harm presented by Paul Denyer. The bill will provide that the charter act does not apply to the special conditions in the bill for making a parole order for Paul Denyer.

Dr Matthew Bach MP
Member for North-Eastern Metropolitan

Second reading

Matthew BACH (North-Eastern Metropolitan) (09:59): I move:

That the bill be now read a second time.

The Corrections Amendment (Parole) Bill 2023 is a commitment from the Victorian Liberals and Nationals to ensure a key element in relation to community safety is upheld – to make certain the

protection of the community from Paul Denyer by keeping him in jail until he can pose no threat to the community.

The bill changes the preconditions for Mr Denyer's eligibility for parole in Victoria to have the effect of preventing him from being released on parole unless the parole board is satisfied that he is in imminent danger of death or seriously incapacitated and as a result that he lacks the capacity to cause harm to another person.

Mr Denyer committed some of the most heinous crimes in the history of Victoria. Victorians should rightly expect that the government of the day should do whatever is possible to ensure he is never released.

With this bill, the Liberals and Nationals are seeking to deliver that certainty to Victorians. In addition, this bill will provide certainty to the families of Mr Denyer's victims, who have already been through hell and for whom ongoing uncertainty about Mr Denyer's imprisonment is deeply and needlessly traumatic.

Paul Charles Denyer was sentenced by the Supreme Court of Victoria on 20 December 1993 to three consecutive terms of life imprisonment for three counts of murder. On appeal the next year, in July 1994, Mr Denyer was granted a non-parole period of 30 years, which expired this year.

To provide certainty and to ensure Mr Denyer is denied parole, the bill expressly sets out the conditions for granting parole to Mr Denyer in a new section 74AC. This confirms that Mr Denyer must effectively be in imminent danger of death before parole will be granted. This aspect of the bill is modelled on section 74AA of the Corrections Act, which specifies the prisoner Julian Knight as a named individual by reference to his offences and sentencing. As section 74AA was upheld by the High Court, modelling this bill on the previous legislation provides legal certainty to the provision.

This bill means Mr Denyer will never be released except in very restrictive circumstances, essentially mirroring preconditions contained in New South Wales legislation also upheld by the High Court in the decision of *Crump v. New South Wales*. The effect of these provisions, as I have said, is that Mr Denyer will die in jail or will be in such a condition upon release that he will be a threat to no-one.

These preconditions are that: the adult parole board must be satisfied on the basis of a report prepared by the Secretary of the Department of Justice and Community Safety that he is in imminent danger of dying, or is seriously incapacitated, and as a result that he has the physical ability to harm no other person; and the adult parole board must be further satisfied that, because of those circumstances, the making of the order is justified.

By essentially mirroring the preconditions contained in sections 74AA and 74AB of the act, we can ensure the constitutional validity of this bill.

The bill also includes a provision making it clear that the Charter of Human Rights and Responsibilities Act 2006 does not apply to the new section 74AC, and that this override provision does not need to be re-enacted every five years. Although the Liberals and Nationals consider that the bill is compatible with the charter act, it is possible that this bill may be challenged on those grounds and that a court may take a different view. In the exceptional case that a court took this view, this bill overrides the charter and excludes its application to these clauses to ensure that the life sentences imposed by the Supreme Court are served and the community is protected. This provision is intended to serve as the override declaration envisaged by section 31(1) of the charter act but goes further to make clear that the charter act does not apply to section 74AC in its entirety and that the override and non-application of the charter act do not expire after five years under section 31(7) of the charter act.

With this bill, the Victorian community can be certain that it is protected from the possibility that Paul Denyer will one day be free to commit another atrocity or further atrocities. With this bill, families who have suffered unimaginably, families who have received the worst phone call you could ever

receive, families who have endured and who continue to endure unspeakable grief, will at least know that the man who murdered their loved ones will remain in jail, where he belongs.

I commend this bill to the house.

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

That debate on this bill be adjourned for two weeks.

Motion agreed to and debate adjourned for two weeks.

Energy and Resources Legislation Amendment (Transition Away from Coal) Bill 2023

Statement of compatibility

Sarah MANSFIELD (Western Victoria) (10:04): I lay on the table a statement of compatibility with the Charter of Human Rights and Responsibilities Act 2006:

In accordance with section 28 of the Charter of Human Rights and Responsibilities Act 2006 (the Charter), I make this statement of compatibility with respect to Energy and Resources Legislation Amendment (Transition Away from Coal) Bill 2023.

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

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

Overview of bill

The purposes of this bill are to amend the *Environment Protection Act 2017* to prohibit the issue of licences to engage in thermal coal activity and revoke authorisations to engage in thermal coal activity under a licence; to amend the *Renewable Energy (Jobs and Investment) Act 2017* to increase the state renewable energy target to 100% by 2030; to amend the *Mineral Resources (Sustainable Development) Act 1990* (MRSDA) to prohibit the exploration for, or mining of, coal; and to amend the *Constitution Act 1975* to entrench the new amendments banning coal mining and exploration in the *Mineral Resources (Sustainable Development) Act 1990*.

Human rights issues

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

- The right to life (section 9)
- Property rights (section 20)

The right to life (section 9)

Section 9 of the Charter provides that every person has the right to life and has the right not to be arbitrarily deprived of life.

Climate change poses a real and present threat to life in Victoria. Lives are already being tragically lost in climate-fuelled extreme weather events including fires, floods and heat waves. Without urgent action to eliminate greenhouse gas pollution, Victoria faces catastrophic warming of up to 3–4 degrees celsius. These temperatures would cause extensive loss of life.

By setting a legislated end date to coal burning in Victoria, our state's single biggest source of greenhouse gas emissions and climate pollution, this Bill promotes the right to life by limiting future catastrophic warming and its consequences.

Property rights (section 20)

Section 20 of the Charter provides that a person must not be deprived of his or her property other than in accordance with law.

By ending greenhouse gas emissions from coal burning in 2030, this Bill promotes the right to property by reducing the impacts of increasing global temperatures and extreme weather events on property.

By preventing the mining and burning of coal after 2030, this Bill may impact licences of energy companies to mine and burn coal, which are a form of property. However, to the extent that the Bill may cause a deprivation of property, I consider that any deprivation is permitted because it is expressly and clearly authorised by the Bill.

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

Rights in criminal proceedings (section 25)

Section 25(1) of the Charter provides that a person charged with a criminal offence has the right to be presumed innocent until proved guilty according to law.

Ordinarily, the presumption of innocence requires that the prosecution prove all matters beyond reasonable doubt. Section 25(1) of the Charter may be relevant where a statutory provision shifts the burden of proof onto an accused in a criminal proceeding, so that the accused is required to prove matters to establish, or raise evidence to suggest, that he or she is not guilty of an offence.

The Bill entrenches in the Constitution Act strict liability offences in the MRSDA that prohibit the exploration or mining of coal. The offence in s 8AE of the MRSDA contains an exception which places the evidential burden of proof on the accused.

The Bill may engage the Charter right to be presumed innocent, by including strict liability offences with a low standard of proof, to which the only exception reverses the burden of proof.

However, the Bill is not considered to limit the right. As above, persons engaging in resource exploration and extraction for the purposes of the MRSDA would likely be corporations and therefore not have any Charter rights: s 6(1).

Alternately, if the accused party were an individual, any limitation on the right is considered reasonable and justifiable as they would be a resource industry participant for whom compliance with the provisions would not be difficult. Resource industry participants must maintain significant expertise in industry regulation, including the restrictions exploring and mining for coal. Furthermore, the penalty imposed (200 units) is lower than the penalties that would normally apply where a higher burden of proof is required.

Finally, the evidential burden imposed by the exception in s 8AE(2) of the MRSDA is not considered to limit the right to be presumed innocent. The accused has only to prove that their discovery of coal was incidental, then the evidential burden will shift back to the prosecution.

Second reading

Sarah MANSFIELD (Western Victoria) (10:04): I move:

That the bill be now read a second time.

The climate crisis is here, right now.

Just this year, we have seen record bushfires in Chile, cyclones in south-eastern Africa, and heatwaves across China, India, and other parts of Asia.

Now, the World Meteorological Organization announced the earth will exceed our make-or-break 1.5-degree limit within just five years.

Breaching this limit will be catastrophic, and every fraction of a degree beyond it will cost more lives.

And credit where it is due, Labor is taking action, announcing last year a 95 per cent renewable electricity target for 2035 – not as soon as the science demands, but a far cry better than many of our other state and federal colleagues.

But unfortunately, that promise very well may mean nothing in terms of emissions, because while the Andrews government may not want our energy coming from brown coal – the dirtiest in Australia – it is apparently happy to continue mining and burning brown coal to export to the world in the form of hydrogen, as part of the so-called Hydrogen Energy Supply Chain, or HESC, project.

Back in 2018, Labor threw \$50 million of Victorian taxpayer money to this brown-coal-to-hydrogen project as a pilot.

Along with co-funding from the then coalition federal government, Victorian Labor supported the plan to turn our dirtiest fossil fuel, brown coal, into hydrogen for export to Japan.

Now the Labor Treasurer tells us that the project – which will expand our coal industry – won't add to Victoria's emissions because we'll capture the emissions through 'carbon capture and storage' in disused offshore gas wells in the Gippsland basin.

Labor is planning to do this through the CarbonNet project, which was also given \$150 million in taxpayer funding.

There's just one problem with this plan: carbon capture and storage has failed to actually capture anywhere near the emissions it has promised, anywhere in the world.

For example, Chevron's Gorgon gas development facility in WA saw emissions increase 50 per cent last year.

That project was delayed by more than three years and has actually gotten less efficient every year since coming online in 2019 – falling from 2.7 million tonnes captured in 2019–20 to just 1.6 million tonnes last financial year.

But despite all of this – and despite the fact that the pilot HESC project produced just 1 tonne of hydrogen in its maiden shipment, instead, embarrassingly, having to purchase more than half of its minimum total requirement – the pilot was declared a success.

In March this year the Victorian Labor Treasurer Tim Pallas announced that he had secured a \$2.35 billion deal through the Japanese government's misleadingly named Green Innovation Fund – delivered to a consortium of energy providers led by Kawasaki Heavy Industries – to expand this coal-to-hydrogen project to a commercial-sized operation.

Even with CCS, carbon capture and storage, working at full capacity, the Australia Institute found the project will likely still increase emissions by up to 3.8 million tonnes per year.

I'll repeat that: in a climate emergency, the Labor government thinks it's a good idea to expand our brown coal industry. It's almost too ludicrous to say aloud.

What's more, they have kept crucial details of this hidden from the public.

On 22 March, the Legislative Council passed the Greens' resolution requiring that the government provide briefings, assessments, analyses, examinations, modelling and consultancy reports on the HESC.

Unsurprisingly, Labor did not meet this requirement, citing time constraints, but told us they were preparing a response in mid-April. The Greens continue to wait, with bated breath, for the government to eventually provide transparency over this hugely significant project.

But amid obvious state capture of the fossil fuel industry during a climate crisis, there is hope.

The sheer idiocy of the Hydrogen Energy Supply Chain project has at least not escaped the energy minister, who is reportedly against it.

We suspect there are others in Labor who appreciate what a bad idea this is.

This bill is their chance to prove it.

On behalf of the Greens, I'm proud to introduce a bill today to phase out coal for good in Victoria and replace it with clean, renewable energy.

The Energy and Resources Legislation Amendment (Transition Away from Coal) Bill 2023 would ban destructive new coal projects like the HESC and, in a world first, cement that ban in Victoria's constitution.

This bill sets a certain end date for coal burning in Victoria of 2030. It amends the Environment Protection Act 2017 such that all existing thermal coal activity will cease by 2030, and no new thermal coal activity can occur after this point.

It would then prohibit the exploration for, and mining of, coal after 2030, and would enshrine that ban on coal mining in the constitution.

Labor has already put a ban on gas fracking in the constitution. Given that coal is similarly devastating for our climate and our health, we hope that Labor will, similarly, support this bill.

The bill defines ‘thermal coal activity’ as establishing, expanding, operating or modifying a coalmine or coal-fired power station. Handling, stockpiling, processing or transporting coal is also captured by the definition, as is using coal for making hydrogen – no matter how ‘clean’ the industry wants to mislabel it.

The bill provides that where the Environment Protection Authority has given a licence for thermal coal activity past 2030, such a licence will be revoked. From an abundance of caution the bill also provides no compensation is payable to anyone as a result of a licence not being given or extended or revoked.

This bill would amend the Renewable Energy (Jobs and Investment) Act 2017 to increase Victoria’s renewable energy target to 100 per cent by 2030.

To ensure coal is not mined here only to be burnt somewhere else, the bill also amends the Mineral Resources (Sustainable Development) Act 1990 to prohibit the exploration for and mining of coal.

And by putting this ban in the Victorian constitution, it ensures that there is a very high bar to overturn it so that no future government, be they Labor, Liberal, National or otherwise, could continue mining this existential threat to life on earth.

This massive expansion would sit alongside a comprehensive policy plan from the Greens that outlines, in detail, how Victoria can transition away from coal to renewables by 2030 and importantly, how workers and communities can be supported through this transition and given certainty about their futures.

The Greens want to see a job-for-job guarantee for coal workers and secure funding to 2035 for an independent Latrobe Valley Authority, which has so far received piecemeal funding and needs a bigger remit.

The authority would be tasked with the closure of Victoria’s coal plants and the development of new industries for the region such as offshore wind, clean manufacturing and mine site rehabilitation.

While the bill sets an end date for coal of 2030, our plan spells out closure dates for Victoria’s remaining coal plants: Yallourn, 2024; Loy Yang A, 2027; and Loy Yang B, 2030.

This will give certainty to the industry, workers and communities while also recognising that the science demands we cannot continue using or burning coal, especially not after 2030, if we have any hope of a safe future for ourselves, our children and their children.

There is so much potential for the Latrobe Valley beyond coal. There are huge opportunities for new jobs in offshore wind, clean manufacturing and mine rehabilitation, but only if governments are honest about the transition that’s needed, give certainty, and plan ahead to support the transition – unlike what happened with Hazelwood when the Labor government assured this Parliament and communities that Hazelwood would stay open when they knew it was about to close.

When it comes to replacing coal with 100 per cent renewable energy, the great news is that it’s absolutely achievable.

With the announcement of 95 per cent renewables by 2035, the Andrews government faced the fact that we must shut down all coal plants over the next decade – and, if they are being honest with themselves, likely much sooner than those coal giants forecast.

But it would mean nothing if Victoria continues to mine and burn coal, including for hydrogen for export.

So let’s see Labor put its money where its mouth is.

Let's phase out coal for good, get to 100 per cent renewables and support workers and communities along the way.

I look forward to support from all representatives here when we debate this bill in June.

I commend this bill to the house.

Lee TARLAMIS (South-Eastern Metropolitan) (10:14): I move:

That debate on this bill be adjourned for two weeks.

Motion agreed to and debate adjourned for two weeks.

Committees

Economy and Infrastructure Committee

Reference

Bev McARTHUR (Western Victoria) (10:14): I rise to speak on motion 6 on the notice paper, standing in my name. This motion was put on the agenda in December, the day we were all sworn in to this Parliament. I move:

That this house:

- (1) recognises the poor state of Victoria's roads, especially in rural and regional areas;
- (2) notes the consequences of damaged road surfaces, including the safety of all road users and the economic and environmental damage caused by repeated repairs to vehicles such conditions make inevitable –

and furthermore –

- (3) requires the Economy and Infrastructure Committee to inquire into, consider and report by 29 February 2024 on the state of Victoria's roads, including but not limited to:
 - (a) the budgetary resources dedicated to road construction and repairs in Victoria, with comparison to national and international experience;
 - (b) the methods and standards of design, construction and maintenance of road pavement and surfacing, with comparison to national and international experience;
 - (c) the value for money achieved by the existing Victorian system of delivering road surface construction and maintenance, including:
 - (i) the tendering process;
 - (ii) contract requirements, including technical specifications of works;
 - (iii) quality control and project assessment;
 - (iv) longer term ongoing assessment of road surface quality; and
 - (v) clawback mechanisms for inadequate quality of delivered work.

These are all absolutely straightforward proposals that should be obvious and a no-brainer to everybody.

This is a terrible and poignant time to have this discussion. The weekend just past was truly horrific on Victoria's roads. Ten people died in six separate accidents – that is 10 lives lost, but many more forever altered by life-changing injuries and by ongoing mental and physical anguish. Countless families have been left bereft.

I spoke yesterday about the effect on communities. Hamilton, in my electorate, suffered a horrendous tragedy when two teenage boys, a teenage girl and an adult woman died in a horrific accident, with another girl left fighting for life. In a town of Hamilton's size, with around 10,000 people, there are very few degrees of separation. As I said here yesterday, if you do not know the families involved, you will perhaps know one of the first responders – the police, the paramedics or the SES volunteers. You will know one of the teachers or students at the schools. Road trauma rips apart families, but it

ripples throughout entire communities. It is felt deeply and widely, and sadly, we must multiply this pain. I can speak from personal experience, having lost my son to a road accident.

In advance of this contribution I have hesitated each time in updating this next section. Every time I look again the number has risen, and I hope desperately, but I know pointlessly, that it has not risen again since my last investigation. These deaths bring the state's road toll to 133, a full 37 more than this time in 2022. At this rate the death toll will be close to 300 by the end of the year – 60 more deaths than the running five-year average. That is the context for this discussion.

We cannot attribute all deaths to the condition of roads – accidents have multiple, complex causes – but it is a significant and exacerbating factor. Even where they are not the primary cause, poor road surfaces can make close calls into accidents and minor accidents into tragedies. Those who drive on Victoria's roads know that smashes can result from hitting potholes, from dangerously uneven surfaces, from crumbling road shoulders or from vehicles swerving onto or driving on the wrong side of the road to avoid these dangers. I did suggest in the Public Accounts and Estimates Committee last year to Mr Pallas that our potholes have now become craters, and he suggested that was just Liberal Party propaganda. I did invite him for a tour of our country roads. He would have seen what dangers we have in the way of potholes and bad roads.

Worst of all, as I have raised recently in this place, the minister has assured me that not keeping statistics is how we operate in this matter. In response to my adjournment debate on 8 February, which asked for a breakdown of the percentage of serious and fatal road accidents where investigating officers identified road conditions as a contributing factor, I was told the data is not available. While road conditions, they said, are assessed by Victoria Police as part of serious and fatal road accident investigations, the overall evaluation of the environment is holistic in nature and does not allow for the requested data reporting.

I ask you: how ridiculous is that? These factors are apparent to investigators, and they must be recorded. How else can we tell what is truly causing the road toll? How else can we determine where to allocate resources in dealing with it? This is a serious and pressing matter for a committee inquiry, and my key argument here is that a committee is the proper place for these matters to be investigated.

We can all play politics. We can all stand at the side of a road and get a picture with a pothole. They make for good social media, although there is never enough space for the amount of potholes that we could cover. In some of those in Western Victoria we can even stand in a pothole and get a picture.

Joe McCracken: It's true.

Bev McARTHUR: It is absolutely true, Mr McCracken. And, as Mr Mulholland's enterprising constituents well know, we can plant a tree in the ready-made hole and start a roadside botanical garden. Now, that might be the only way we get potholes fixed in Victoria – good for the botanical enterprises but not good for road users. But this does have its limits, really. If we want to effect change, we need a serious, concerted, deliberative study, including international comparisons, inviting expert witnesses and producing a plan which will not just improve our roads but save lives.

I was on the road toll inquiry in the last Parliament, and the sole recommendation, really, was just to lower the speed limit. Now, that might be okay in the City of Yarra – down to 30 – but I tell you: out there in country Victoria driving at 30 or 40 kilometres an hour totally wrecks your program to get children to school or product to market.

Joe McCracken: It still happens, though.

Bev McARTHUR: But it still happens, Mr McCracken helpfully advises me, because in many areas in our electorate – this is my fifth year in this place – the roads are still having the 'Slow down' signs on them, Mr McCracken. The roads have not been repaired. We go from 80 down to 60 down to 40 on country roads that are meant to be managed by this state government; they are not local roads.

But this does have its limits, planting botanical gardens in potholes, and we do need a proper study. To touch briefly on the terms of reference I propose, we should not just be talking about repairing our pockmarked roads. We need a proper re-examination of methods of road pavement, design, construction and maintenance in comparison to all other national and international jurisdictions.

A constituent just wrote to me about a recent trip to New Zealand. On their 3000-kilometre drive down the west coast of New Zealand they did not encounter one pothole or broken edge on any sealed road. If New Zealand can do it, surely Victoria can. They also paint, in the middle of the road, double lines in yellow. The great thing about that is you would avoid those dreadful wire rope barriers. The Safe System Road Infrastructure Program, which installs these wire rope barriers – a \$1 billion program – was condemned by the Auditor-General due to an overoptimistic benefit analysis, inadequate program planning, incompetent record keeping and serious overspending. That was the Auditor-General. That is what he had to say about the one proposal, apart from ‘Slow down’ signs, that this government has had – spending money on wire rope barriers. In many cases they are a major problem because they are right on the edge of the road and if you stop and you need to change a tyre or you have somebody that needs to get out of the car or there are accidents, you are in real trouble. But that is the solution: put a wire rope barrier up or put up a ‘Slow down’ sign.

I am also concerned by the contracts we award and the construction and maintenance, hence the reference to the committee to examine that. This is such a simple proposal really – that the Economy and Infrastructure Committee examine this and look at how we could do it better. Surely in this day and age we want to do things better. We want to make sure taxpayers money is well spent. We need, as point (2)(c) says, ‘value for money achieved by the existing Victorian system of delivering road surface construction and maintenance’. The tendering process is vitally important, and so are the contract requirements, including technical specification of works and quality control and project assessment. There does not seem to be any of that.

A ‘longer term ongoing assessment of road surface quality’ – Mr McCracken and I know that out there in our electorate the roads are not built to last. Even the Princes Highway – highway 1 around Australia – is a disgrace. It has not long been built, but it was falling apart almost as soon as we were allowed to drive on it. We need to work out why in the last decade or so our road building and maintenance have deteriorated. We used to be famous for our good roads, but the anecdotal evidence these days is: anybody who travels interstate to South Australia or New South Wales is blown away by the quality of their roads. Let us work out how they do it better or differently. Is it the type of construction that is not up to scratch? Is it the product we are using that is not good enough? Why can’t we work out what is going wrong with the building and maintenance of our roads?

I once asked one of the senior bureaucrats in this area what sort of guarantee there was for their roadworks. It appears there is none.

Joe McCracken: It is better on your toaster.

Bev McARTHUR: My toaster does have a better guarantee than roadworks in Victoria it seems. We have an obligation to the taxpayers of Victoria to make sure that our roads are built properly, built to last and maintained well. There is just no excuse for this. It serves this Parliament well I think to refer this sort of an issue to a committee that can call on expert witnesses from interstate, other jurisdictions and around the world. What would be wrong with finding out how others do it better? That would seem like the obvious thing to do, for this Parliament to do, and I know, having been on these committees, that you are in a position to call on expert witnesses to enlighten you on how you can do things better.

I urge the crossbench to understand what is happening outside the tram tracks of Melbourne. I am sure they have got some idea but perhaps not enough to ensure that we send this reference to the Economy and Infrastructure Committee and we make sure that we use every effort to examine how we can do this better.

I think the government should also want to know exactly how we could make sure our roads are safer and better managed. We have had all the expenditure on wire rope barriers, and we were told in the road toll inquiry that if we lowered the speed, everything would be okay. But as I have demonstrated, the road toll has increased, and here we are. I urge the crossbench and the government to support this motion.

John BERGER (Southern Metropolitan) (10:31): Today I rise to speak to motion 6. This motion by my colleague opposite, a member for Western Victoria, deals with the state of the roads in Victoria. I want to be the first to say this: I have had a lot to do with roads as a former state secretary of the Transport Workers Union – the Victorian–Tasmanian branch – and having spent 28 years as an official of the TWU, I know about roads. I will be opposing the opposition’s motion because I know it is unnecessary. The motion notes the implications of road surfaces for road safety. Well, I know a bit about road safety as well. Safety is always our number one priority, but we already have a committee looking at road safety and driver behaviour. My colleague opposite may recall that there was a similar motion earlier this year, which was referred to the Assembly’s Economy and Infrastructure Committee. That work is ongoing and will consider a range of issues, including how drivers are responding to their environment, such as road surfaces. Through the 2022–23 budget, the Andrews Labor government is making a \$2.8 billion investment in road maintenance over 10 years, taking our total spend to \$6.6 billion over the coming decade. This is a level of certainty over the long term, and we have not had that before. This is a level of commitment that only an Andrews Labor government will deliver.

Since the Andrews Labor government was, thankfully, elected in 2014, Victorian roads have been diligently and swiftly cared for, because we are a government that does what matters. In 2019 an audit was conducted of the quality of roads in Victoria. This budget has been incredibly generous towards road maintenance. We have increased funding for roads by \$2.8 billion over the next 10 years. This funding will be given to flood-affected areas, which really need repairs, but also to other road networks that need a bit of a facelift. This funding boost means \$6.6 billion will be invested into the management and maintenance of our roads over the next 10 years.

In my travels around regional Victoria, including the Bellarine, northern Victoria and in recent times the electorate of the member in this chamber’s Western Victoria Region, I have observed numerous places where there are bitumen sprayers, shoulder pavers, profilers and asphalt pavers – the very equipment we need to ensure that our roads are constructed to a good standard and to the modern standard that our great state deserves and needs. Grade construction upgrades, guardrails, safety upgrades and road surfacing and resurfacing or profiling – these are the things that the Labor government knows matter, and we are doing them.

Having spent half my life in regional communities, I have had an appreciation for regional roads, and as an organiser representing transport workers, who are the main users of these roads, I know how vital they are. That is why we are investing to get things done, because that is what the Andrews Labor government does. We invest in the lives and wellbeing of the Victorian people. We invest in infrastructure to ensure that everyone in this state can have the best possible quality of life we can give them.

Just earlier in May the government announced an increase to funding for road maintenance in flood-affected areas. It is true that considerable damage has been done to flood-affected regions, especially on the roads. This damage truly needs addressing. That is precisely why the government has chipped in millions of dollars to what will be a \$7.8 million project on road maintenance and repair in parts of northern and western Victoria. This project is a repairs blitz, because we believe in working fast and effectively to deliver the change that is needed. This is not the first repair and maintenance blitz the government has delivered, and it will not be the last, because it is an effective way to ensure that our roads are always in tiptop condition.

We have also been hard at work upgrading roads, especially in regional Victoria and western Melbourne. For example, last year we invested \$41 million to upgrade Derrimut Road and Hopkins Road and Boundary Road in Tarneit. This was part of a \$125 million metropolitan roads upgrade program announced in the last budget. The metropolitan roads upgrade program was not just announced but delivered.

As for our regional roads, this Andrews Labor government has time and time again broken records for funding into Victoria's regional roads. In 2018 Gippsland received the biggest maintenance blitz the state has ever seen. In 2020 we invested millions – \$20 million to be precise – to improve roads across regional Victoria under the Safe Travel in Local Streets program, which is exactly why the Andrews Labor government and the Minister for Roads and Road Safety have introduced not only one but two rounds of grants available to community groups for programs to boost road safety this year and a large sum of funding for local government councils to improve the safety of local roads. The first round of grants was released between February and March, and the second is currently open.

\$210 million of funding has also been delivered for council-controlled roads as part of the new Safe Local Roads and Streets program. Local roads can be the most dangerous to us, as we assume that we know the roads well enough and become distracted. This is why we need to support our councils in making sure that local council roads have every proverbial bell and whistle at their disposal. With over \$200 million set aside for the improvement of the safety of local roads, we will hopefully be able to move towards a safer Victoria for motorists and pedestrians.

Thirty-three per cent of road deaths in Victoria occur on our local roads. That number is far too high, which is exactly why we are targeting local roads in our funding. These are the roads that our children cross when they are walking to school, the roads they learn to drive on and the roads they take when they first get their P-plates. They are the roads that take us home to see our families after a long day at work. These roads, like all roads, need every single safety measure we can give them. The Safe Local Roads and Streets program will ensure that councils are able to deliver important safety features like raised crossings, intersection upgrades, speed cushions, kerbing upgrades, pedestrian islands, safer speeds and roundabouts. It includes supporting councils in identifying where these features are required through the my road survey program, which is included under the \$210 million of funding.

The \$1.5 million community road safety grants program 2023–24 application period ran from 15 February to 15 March. The community road safety grants program allowed for non-profit community organisations to go out into their community and identify local road safety issues. These organisations were then able to fund projects to improve the safety on their roads. The organisations able to apply for the grant included local community centres, community groups, government organisations, local government councils and schools. I am very pleased to see the City of Boroondara in my electorate of Southern Metro listed among the applicants. It is great to see the roads in Camberwell, Balwyn, Hawthorn and Kew fall under the council's road safety application. I commend Boroondara council's Mayor Sinfield for recognising the value and the importance of this grant program and jumping on the opportunity to take advantage of the fantastic programs the Andrews Labor government is offering for the betterment of the lives of people living in the Hawthorn, Ashwood and Kew areas.

The second grant program, which is available until 16 June, is the TAC road safety grant program 2023, formerly known as the TAC community road safety grants program. The grant program financially assists and supports community organisations in implementing road safety programs that can improve upon community safety. This particular round has been funded with \$600,000 and will make great improvements to wellbeing and safety in our communities. I encourage everyone in this place to make sure that constituents and community groups in their electorates are aware of this fantastic grant program.

I commend the relevant ministers for their work in their respective fields, particularly Minister Horne, the Minister for Roads and Road Safety. It is undeniable that we have seen improvements under

several road safety ministers, and it is undeniable that Victorian roads are in good hands. The Andrews Labor government is also looking very closely at the *Victorian Road Safety Strategy 2021–2030*. The road safety strategy outlines many ways to improve the safety of our roads that extend beyond road maintenance.

It is blatant that there is absolutely nothing that warrants the need for a committee inquiry into the so-called poor state of Victorian roads. As a member of the Economy and Infrastructure Committee, I will save us all the time and tell you what the Economy and Infrastructure Committee inquiry will find: it will find that the Andrews Labor government is doing what matters and delivering for Victorians. We are delivering for road safety, we are delivering for regional roads and we are delivering for the people, partly with our world-class level crossing removal. This road maintenance and road safety funding will likely make Victoria a leading body in safe roads, but to get there we have to put our heads down and get the work done, not sit around twiddling our thumbs and complaining.

Before I end, I want to give a shout-out to the stop-go traffic controllers, hardworking men and women who stand in the elements, which at times are less favourable than others, to ensure our safety whilst important construction, upgrades and more continue. To say this matter should be referred to a committee for further investigation would be, to my way of thinking, not the best use of the committee's resources.

Joe McCracken (Western Victoria) (10:41): I am very happy to support the motion moved by Mrs McArthur in calling for an inquiry into roads in Victoria. Basically, it goes into two parts. The first part is to place on the record the poor state of roads in our state and to put on record that roads that are in poor condition do actually have consequences. The second part is to actually establish an inquiry into roads in Victoria.

To talk about the first two points of this motion is to recognise that Victoria does in fact have bad roads. I do not think any person, especially regional Victorians, could argue with this undeniable fact. If you go to the Department of Transport and Planning website there is an interactive map which indicates roads under DTP management. There are basically four classes: tollways, freeways, arterial roads which are named highways, and arterial roads. Of the Western Highway some parts are considered a freeway and some parts are considered arterial named highway. I have to say that over the years, particularly west of Ballarat, the highway has in some parts been in the poorest condition for a long, long time. Other roads, many locals know, are in mixed to poor states of condition. These designated highways, just in my particular area, include the Midland Highway, Sunraysia Highway, the Glenelg Highway and the Pyrenees Highway.

But there are major arterial roads that are impacted as well: Ballarat-Maryborough Road, Colac-Ballarad Road, Lismore-Scarsdale Road, Ballarat-Carngham Road, Beaufort-Lexton Road, Lexton-Talbot Road, Maryborough-St Arnaud Road, Ararat-Halls Gap Road, the Beaufort-Skipton road, Clunes-Creswick Road, Creswick-Newstead Road, Ballarat-Daylesford Road, Bacchus Marsh-Geelong Road and Geelong-Ballan Road, and that is just a small sample. I could keep going.

Tom McIntosh interjected.

Joe McCracken: Well, if you had driven on them, you would probably say something different. But there are many noted consequences of having poor roads. Nothing – and I mean absolutely nothing – should be of a higher priority than safety. According to the TAC, 131 people have lost their lives on Victorian roads this year as at 28 May. That represents a 36.5 percentage increase on the figure for the full year last year.

Recently there was a shocking single-vehicle crash near Hamilton in my electorate, and I want to publicly put on the record my support for the first responders, victims' families and the broader Hamilton community, who are grappling with this absolutely horrible situation. I stand with the Hamilton community, and I hope something like this never, ever happens again on our roads. Hopefully we can do everything we can to prevent further tragedy like this in the future.

The second part of this motion relates to the establishment of an inquiry. Of particular interest should be point (3)(b), which seeks to understand methods of construction, design, maintenance and surfacing and compare this to other jurisdictions. I can tell you anecdotally that patch-up jobs are not a long-term fix. I can tell you that slowing people down does not fix anything on roads. Closing down and creating detours is not a solution, and I have seen many instances of this on our country roads, particularly in my electorate.

One of the aspects which would be interesting if this inquiry is actually established, is to consider what happens in other countries. For example, in the United States, which has quite a diverse climate – sometimes snow, sometimes desert – in some states they use a concrete mix as the base of the road, which initially might be more expensive but it does tend to last longer and maintenance costs are lower. Canada has a cold climate where they have to contend with snow, yet they can produce decent roads that do not fall apart. I have often asked VicRoads, Regional Roads Victoria employees and now DTP why our roads fall apart or why maintenance cannot be done, and many times I have been told, ‘Well, you know, it’s a cold time of year. The weather’s not very good. It is weather dependent.’ If other countries such as the United States and Canada can do this work, and they have cold climates all year round, surely we could learn from them so that we can make our roads the best possible roads that they can be. We might be able to pick up practices and procedures that we could quite rightly put into practice here. Wouldn’t that be a good thing? It is not a bad thing; it is a good thing. We could learn. Hopefully that will help in delivering value for money for the taxpayer, which is part of point (3)(c) in this motion.

Quite often management of a road – back when I was responsible for at least managing a local roads network at a local government level – is in what is known as setting the intervention levels. Basically that means what triggers are in place in order for action to be taken, and intervention levels quite often will determine what treatment is required for a particular area of road. I think part of the work of the inquiry would be to look at what intervention levels are acceptable and how these are managed in other jurisdictions in order to get the best outcome for our road users.

In summary, I thank my colleague Mrs McArthur, who is from my electorate as well, from Western Victoria, for bringing this to the chamber, and I hope that we can use this as an opportunity to help improve roads in this state. The focus is on helping improve our roads. That is the focus. This inquiry is just that: it is an investigation. It is a fact-finding mission. It is an inquiry. We should never, ever be afraid of inquiring. We should not be afraid of looking into this, because ultimately we hope to improve road quality and driver experience and ultimately it will save lives, and that is something that is worth supporting. As many locals say, particularly in Western Victoria, ‘Don’t drive on the left-hand side of the road; drive on what’s left.’ Surely we can support the community so that they can safely get home, because that is the ultimate goal of this inquiry: to protect people’s lives.

Moira DEEMING (Western Metropolitan) (10:48): It gives me great pleasure to rise in support of this wonderful motion, and I congratulate all my colleagues on speaking in favour of it. Back in 2017 it was noted in an audit that an increasing proportion of the state road network was in very poor condition and it represented a growing risk to public safety and increased road user costs. That audit also stated that the approach to road pavement maintenance is reactive, and I would say that that is a good description of the way that we deal with our roads in general: reactive. And that is why I commend this motion to the house. It is proactive. It is about long-term solutions.

In this year’s budget, page 310 in budget paper 3, the roads maintenance budget is cut by a further 25 per cent to just \$441 million, and the Andrews government has been silent when it comes to a \$1.3 billion cut to VicRoads in this year’s federal budget. I would like to also note that although it is great that the government has provided funding through grants to local governments for local roads, having been a local government councillor I can tell you that having to apply for money to fix things that it is your responsibility to fix when there are objective measures to tell you that you need that money is a waste of time and a bureaucratic nightmare. Also, as any councillor will tell you, the state government and VicRoads just refuse to collect the data that shows which roads will be a state

responsibility and which will be local. Confusion reigns supreme in our system, and again the victims are our ordinary residents who just want their taxes to be used properly.

I commend this motion to the house. Congratulations. Well done on all your points, and I hope sincerely that it gets through.

Katherine COPSEY (Southern Metropolitan) (10:50): I would like to thank the member for Western Victoria for the opportunity to talk about roads maintenance, transport infrastructure and comparative investments today. I look forward to working across this chamber to tackle transport issues and how our investment is spent to secure a safe and sustainable transport network throughout this term, comprehensively and holistically.

Rural and regional road conditions and whether they are safe and deliver value for money are vitally important issues. I note that one issue that is affecting the ability of regional and rural councils in particular to maintain road infrastructure is the rate capping imposed by the state government. I note this type of constraint on local government is an issue that may be explored in an upcoming inquiry already before the Economy and Infrastructure Committee. We also know the impact heavy truck movements have on the maintenance of Victoria's roads, and given the increasing frequency and severity of extreme weather events, including flooding due to the impacts of climate crisis, there is a need for further investment and upgrades to regional transport infrastructure in particular to ensure it is resilient to the impacts of the climate crisis.

The condition of regional and rural roads is absolutely an important issue. When communities miss out in this regard it does undermine the safety of communities and contributes to and compounds inequality. It would be remiss of a committee inquiring into transport and particularly assessing return on investment for public funds not to consider all essential elements relating to the sector, including exploration of transport-related carbon emissions and the benefits of freight movement alternatives, including rail. It has been a longstanding plank of Greens policy that all major industrial and infrastructure developments require a comprehensive and independent public health impact assessment. As one example only, we have regular reports of poorer health outcomes particularly for children who live in communities that experience air quality impacts from transport – the pollution and health impacts that flow from those.

We also know from transport usage data, and indeed from data about accidents and deaths, that infrastructure gaps need to be addressed to provide vulnerable road users, including pedestrians, cyclists and those with accessibility requirements, with safe and convenient travel across Victoria's road network. Investment in transport is one of the key responsibilities of government, and the Greens believe an inquiry on this topic should investigate a more comprehensive terms of reference. For this reason, we will not be supporting today's motion.

Tom McINTOSH (Eastern Victoria) (10:52): I am happy to stand here and talk to this motion today, although I do not support it for reasons that were outlined earlier, and I will come back to that.

Road safety does affect us all. Mr Berger in his contribution talked about his time and decades of work at the Transport Workers Union. Whether it is families using the roads, whether it is workers using the roads, whether it is our cities, whether it is our regional towns, whether it is our rural residents, it affects all of us, and there are different road conditions that users must face in that. We have a growing problem with pedestrians in our city areas not focusing on their surrounds and putting themselves in danger. We have bike users, whether that is in the city or on regional or rural roads –

Bev McArthur: Get rid of the bike paths.

Tom McINTOSH: Everyone is welcome to use the road, and everyone should be free to do so safely; it does not matter who the user is. I think what this government is doing is putting the investment in across all areas to ensure that all road users in Victoria can use the roads safely. Again whether that is people using them for business purposes or using them for personal purposes, they can

get their loved ones, themselves or their freight to and from work and do so in a timely manner and a safe manner.

I will come soon to the investment that has been made out of this budget and the long-term approach that is being taken to the funding and the work that is being done on the roads to make sure that we are constantly improving them and constantly striving to have a great road network with that investment, with that research, with those smarts, with the workers that are working on building that network and maintaining that network, to ensure, as I have said, that all Victorians have access to it and can use it.

I will note, as I have spoken to before in here, the issues that country road users face. When we have people in cars going at high speeds, particularly young people, things can go terribly wrong. I have had mates myself who have gotten into a car and not come back, and that is the end – Max, 18 years old. The behaviour, the culture within the community, particularly amongst younger Victorians and particularly, as I was growing up, young men – we were not approaching vehicles in the way we should have been: people not wearing seatbelts, excessive speeding, alcohol use. Also I think in times of stress or poor mental health people were getting in cars and driving in ways they would not usually do. And I will mention Pete. Pete did the same thing, and we buried Pete afterwards. So I think there is a mixture of things that lead into people's behaviours – cultures at the time – and I hope and I believe we are making big improvements in all those. I will come back to the roads specifically, but we are improving the vehicles which we are in. I think – and I have talked about this before as well – of the changes we have made to vehicles at times when we might have had certain members of industry or certain members of the public wanting to stop the improvements over time. I mean, there was a time when people were against seatbelts, which I just cannot imagine. We look now, and we would not even consider it. So the safety improvements that we have made all the way along for vehicles are a big part of road safety.

Mrs McArthur, I acknowledge that you are bringing this motion forward, but I do not support it. We already have a similar motion that has been referred to the Assembly's Economy and Infrastructure Committee, and I believe they are well equipped to look at the issue.

I want to come back to the budget I mentioned before. We are investing \$2.8 billion in road maintenance, which is going to be over 10 years, and that is going to be additional to the \$6.6 billion that is going to come over the next decade. In the next financial year alone we are going to invest \$770 million in building, repairing and re-paving Victoria's road assets. We acknowledge that we can always do better, and that we will strive to do. But with the new, long-term funding model we will deliver road maintenance in a manner improved by long-term planning and certainty. We are deeply invested in growing and maintaining Victoria's road network and, as I have discussed before, making sure that we get Victorians home safer and making sure that we get them home sooner.

On Victoria's road network the investment we have made of \$30 billion is in almost 450 new road projects across the state – so, yes, we all agree maintenance is important, but in a growing state new infrastructure is vitally important as well. We have added 400 kilometres of new lanes to the state's road network since the beginning of 2016. Since coming to government we have invested over \$5.7 billion to maintain and strengthen our roadworks and, coming to the points raised over there, 17,500 kilometres of Victorian roads have been rebuilt or resurfaced to ensure their quality and safety. We acknowledge that the regional road network is a massive, massive portion of roads, and 15,300 out of that 17,500 have been regional roads and 2500 metropolitan. So you can see the work being done is very, very aware of and very focused on the huge tracts of regional roads that we have.

As I was saying, maintaining our network is a lot more than filling potholes. We are resurfacing roads. We are looking after that. But it is also about ensuring bridges, about ensuring our signalling network and major investments in the Eastern Victoria region – the South Gippsland Highway, the Princes Highway and major repairs that have occurred post flooding.

I am going to come to some of the work that has been done post flooding; in fact I will come to it now. \$165 million of flood recovery works has seen potholes fixed and asphalted and repairing to landslips and damaged road surfaces. And I think this long-term plan is critically important, because as we have been saying on this side for decades now – and for some on the other side it has fallen on deaf ears – climate change is going to keep throwing severe impacts at us. When you put more heat into the atmosphere, you get bigger weather events. And with bigger weather events there are a whole lot of negatives that come out of that, and one of those is what happens to our roads. Although those opposite might have liked sitting and burying their heads for the last two, three, four decades – they not just slowed things down but tried to take us backwards with any possible chance they got – we have been getting on with dealing with those challenges that are coming and not only dealing with them by trying to futureproof against those changes occurring and trying to limit those changes and the severity of weather events but by dealing with the changes that are coming, and this long-term investment in our roads and road network is seeing that occur.

A member interjected.

Tom McINTOSH: Part of that funding, as has just been pointed out across the pulpit, and part of the approach we are taking to our road network is more smarts, like our Intelligent Pavement Assessment Vehicles capturing never-seen-before data on the condition of all 23,000 kilometres of the road network. We are investing in technology, including \$340 million for Smarter Roads programs delivering intelligent traffic systems. I know intelligence might be lost on some opposite, but it is really, really important. It does not matter whether it is through our suburban road network or our regional network, we are there ensuring we are getting the best out of our networks. We have reformed our road maintenance contracts to deliver contemporary performance regimes with an increased focus on road users and safety outcomes.

This is definitely an issue in that we all strive for better roads. The government is making that investment. It has made the commitment, and that investment will be rolled out over 10 years, ensuring we are all clear where we are headed working on it.

Melina BATH (Eastern Victoria) (11:02): I am really pleased to rise this morning to add my support with my colleague Gaelle Broad to motion 6 standing in the name of Mrs McArthur, and I thank her for the comprehensive sections of this motion but also for her depth and her clarity on the need for this inquiry.

Just as my colleague Mr McCracken said, this is an investigation to look towards finding the best outcomes for our roads, for our road safety and, above all, for Victorians. What is there to see, not to let this go through? This is not anything other than it seems. It is important to look at the raft of particulars in the terms of reference.

I have just heard some members of the Labor Party talking about the importance of roads and saying that there is adequate road funding. I have heard some say we could do better, and we could do a lot better here in Victoria. In the past two years there has been a 45 per cent budget cut in road maintenance – 45 per cent; \$702.2 million down to \$441.6 million. It is with incredible sadness that we read into *Hansard* the number of deaths that have occurred on all Victorian roads to date. Sadly, we saw the tragedy in the western part of our state on the weekend, and then following that, in Eastern Victoria Region around Darnum, another tragic, tragic death. This brings families to live life with a hole in their heart and live life with a limb of their family tree missing, and I know what that means, because my cousin died on a regional road. It is vital that we protect the safety of Victorians. You only have to drive around my Eastern Victoria Region to understand the depths of that. Indeed, finishing off on those tragedies: 58 per cent of the deaths that have occurred on Victorian roads this year have occurred on country roads – 58 per cent. That is 58 country families that are at a loss, as are their communities. It is not about just lowering the speed limit. That is not the solution. We see it time and time again. I understand lowering the speed limit when there are traffic works being undertaken, but

you see the pothole filled and the 'Reduced to 80 kilometres an hour' sign is never removed. I can point to a number of different roads like this in my electorate.

What I would like to talk to is the importance of the road base and road maintenance. We know that part of this motion talks about the tender process. I have fantastic road construction companies in Eastern Victoria Region, who do an outstanding job, but they have to complete a road to tender. They are often frustrated by the fact that the quality of the substance that they put down on that road is not what they would like to use. We need to investigate the structure of road construction and how tender processes occur and the importance of getting it right so it is done well once and lasts for a long, long time.

For some of the roads that exist in my Eastern Victoria Region, a little while ago we did an investigation. We asked people to explain to us – the Nationals – about some of these roads. The Traralgon-Maffra Road was voted the fourth-worst road across the state. People came into my office and wrote to me saying that this is a deplorable road. It is often a huge thoroughfare for agricultural equipment and B-doubles transporting our great ag, but there are also many towns along the Traralgon-Maffra Road. Other roads included Sale-Toongabbie Road, Glengarry North Road, Brown Coal Mine Road in Yallourn North, Tyers-Walhalla Road and the Trafalgar-Thorpdale road. There is a slip between Trafalgar and Thorpdale that is constantly failing and is constantly putting those communities at risk. There are multiple unsafe sections along the Strzelecki Highway and the Fish Creek to Wilsons Prom road. If you go to the prom to look at kangaroos and our beautiful wildlife, you have to hop on that road to make your way there. There is also Cape Paterson Road, Wonthaggi Road, Rhyll-New Haven Road and Cardinia Road. Last but not least, there is the Great Alpine Road. I was up there recently. There has been some work done on Name Stone Point, and thank goodness, because it was quite a safety hazard. There were rocks falling. The engineering had not been done well. There is high rainfall. It needs to be done properly and well. That is the only road in and out of Omeo from Bairnsdale. I went, and again, there were potholes the size of small countries. These are unacceptable.

Regional Roads Victoria do the best they can with what they have got, and I thank Beth Liley, who is a fantastic girl from Yanakie. She grew up in the Yanakie area. She is doing an outstanding job with what she has got – the budget.

Let us talk about bridges. I heard the previous member's contribution. He spoke about what they are doing with bridges. Well, the Andrews government removed the country roads and bridges program in 2015. The Andrews government then came out with the building stronger bridges program. The Premier came to Tyers to announce a new bridge to connect Traralgon to Tyers. The old bridge floods very regularly when we have floods in central Gippsland. The bridge was announced in 2015, and works started last year – seven years later. It is going to be finished – at a push – in 2023. If you think one bridge in Gippsland is something to hang your hat on, then you have got another think coming.

There are a couple of reports that we have seen. A report in March 2022 by Infrastructure Australia, *Regional Strengths and Infrastructure Gaps*, reported an urgent need to invest more in Victoria's neglected and crumbling regional roads. I could go on and explain that in detail.

We do transport a considerable amount of agriculture – \$2 billion from our Gippsland region goes into Melbourne and out into a variety of domestic and international places. We need our roads to be safe for that transport and safe for people to get their children to school, to sport and to work. We need that safety factor.

Another investigation that this inquiry could do so very well is to look at a very good board called the Australian Road Research Board. It is funded by multiple Australian states. It is funded by a range of road bodies as well. It does wonderful research, and it is looking at alternative solutions to road surfaces to make them last longer. We need that durability. They are looking at putting recycled plastics, glass, reclaimed asphalt, concrete and crumb rubber into the road infrastructure. They are looking at geopolymers, mining waste and bottom ash. I know Opal has an energy-from-waste

program, and the bottom ash from that – the very stuff that cannot be used in the production of energy and heat – can be inertly inserted into the road base to make it more durable. These sorts of things are really important to investigate and support.

We have also seen the Committee for Gippsland. We met with them recently, Martin Cameron and I, and they have got a road infrastructure plan. None of this was in the government's budget. There was no work for the Drouin arterial road network, no preplanning or business case for the Traralgon bypass and no work funded for the Leongatha heavy vehicle bypass stage 2. We call that, down there, kamikaze corner.

There is a huge opportunity to investigate the important work that bodies are doing to insert more durable road base, the way roads are constructed and the importance of increased safety so that our families can get home safely and our product can get to market and we will not see this tragic number of 134 people to date increase any more. We can get people where they need to go more safely.

David ETTERS HANK (Western Metropolitan) (11:12): I thank Mrs McArthur for bringing this matter before the house. Are roads a big issue for regional and rural Victorians? Absolutely. Of course they are, as they are for a lot of my constituents living in and around the Melbourne growth corridors where thousands and thousands of vehicles are travelling on, at best, domestic-grade roads to get in and out of town. Unfortunately we were only approached yesterday about this referral and had no opportunity to seek to discuss or amend the terms. I do not want to appear to be ungrateful, Mrs McArthur, but I think this is a missed opportunity. Had there been the opportunity for discussion, our position might be different, but as presented this referral appears not so much to be a genuine inquiry as a four-by-two to belt the government. Look, that might be fun, but it is perhaps not the best use of taxpayer money.

Looking at the terms of reference, it strikes me as a lost opportunity. In fact I suspect much of the terms of reference could easily be answered by ChatGPT. Patterns of investment in roads, the standards required for road construction and tendering, and contract requirements are all largely within the public domain. These questions have also been extensively canvassed in multiple parliamentary inquiries in other states and the federal parliament, as well as in this Parliament.

Could the roads be better if we spend more money on them? Of course they could be. But where will that money come from, and what would be cut to pay for it? These are not issues that are considered within the terms of reference. Are there other parties that can and should contribute more, like the road heavy transport industry? This is not considered. Are there ways to reduce road usage, such as by improving rail freight services or public transport? This is not considered. What do more frequent extreme weather and climate change mean for the roads and future road construction and maintenance? That is not considered. Because of these deficiencies, we will not be supporting the referral, but we would welcome the opportunity to discuss this issue in the future with Mrs McArthur should she wish.

Ryan BATCHELOR (Southern Metropolitan) (11:15): I am very pleased to rise to speak on Mrs McArthur's motion seeking a referral to the Economy and Infrastructure Committee on road safety here in Victoria. There have obviously been some very impassioned contributions across the chamber, notably from Mrs McArthur but also from Ms Bath, reflecting on certainly some of the tragedies that we have seen over the weekend and recently on Victoria's roads. They are indeed deeply disturbing, and I think any of us who have been listening to the interviews with the families, particularly the families of the young men who died in Hamilton on the weekend, can only empathise with the absolute horror and trauma they are going through. But I think it would be a mistake now to seek to link these tragedies expressly, and we should take care in drawing the links between these particular tragedies and any sort of causality with road maintenance or road safety. I think we need to be very, very careful in expressing our sympathies but then extending that and drawing conclusions in advance of appropriate investigations. That really is for others to determine, not us here in this place.

It is an important issue. Road safety in Victoria is an important issue, and it is something that the government takes very seriously. This is of course evidenced by the referral that the other place has made to its Economy and Infrastructure Committee to look at road safety behaviours and their impacts on vulnerable road users. That inquiry in the other place is underway and hopefully will give the Parliament as a whole – and the government should it choose to consider it – some evidence of how to improve aspects of road safety here in Victoria and also some policy recommendations about the courses of action that the government can take to improve safety on Victorian roads. I think it is entirely appropriate that we allow that inquiry and encourage members of our community to support that inquiry with their evidence about what is happening in their communities and ways that we can look to support safety on our roads, particularly looking at road safety behaviours. So that is an important inquiry that is already underway that other members of this Parliament are undertaking, and I think that demonstrates the commitment of the Parliament as a whole to this important issue.

Obviously in examining how we consider issues around the maintenance of our roads rather than the safety of our roads, the government and government members absolutely understand that there are a range of challenges in ensuring that roads are constructed and kept in the best possible condition, because we know that there are multiple challenges across our road network. We need to make sure that we do the tasks of construction and repair and maintenance in an appropriate way that takes into account the enormous diversity of Victoria in its geography, in its climate and in its geology but also in the usage and the impact that that usage in various parts of the state has on roads and road conditions.

It is undeniable that Victoria is experiencing more extreme climatic events. We have experienced more flooding in the past two to three years than we have seen in the past two decades, and as a member of the Environment and Planning Committee for its inquiry into the October 2022 flooding event, I have been made very well aware from meteorology of just the impact and the uniqueness of that flooding event last year. It put enormous strain on the road network. The volume of water that we have seen across Victoria in the last couple of years but particularly last year has undoubtedly had a significant effect on all aspects of our community infrastructure, and our road infrastructure is no exception to that. We know that these sorts of climatic events are going to occur more frequently, so we do need to make sure that we strengthen our road network and make it more resilient.

We do need to start doing things differently, and the government has acknowledged that reality. That is why we have taken action to change the way we look at road funding and road maintenance, to bring in a more secure and long-term model for road maintenance but also, in the practice of doing road maintenance, undertake it in a way that recognises the different climatic conditions in different parts of Victoria, the different soil composition types, the different geology and the different road-use arrangements that impact on what is required to make our roads safer. So we need a new and better approach in terms of how we think about road maintenance, and the government is taking steps to do that by examining and taking a considerable interest in the different requirements that different elements of Victoria's road network require but also by introducing and securing longer term maintenance funding arrangements. That is why the government is introducing a multi-year funding approach for road maintenance and strengthening works, because we know that it is not something that just has to be done once. That is what we need to make sure of – that the sorts of programs of investment that are undertaken can be done with security.

In addition to always trying to improve the way we go about the business of keeping our roads maintained, the government has made a significant investment. It has put money behind this approach. The 2022–23 budget showed that we were investing \$2.8 billion in road maintenance over 10 years, taking our total spend to \$6.6 billion over that decade. That, I think, demonstrates the extent of investment, in terms of quantum, and the length of funding certainty that we make in the roads here in Victoria. In the next financial year alone we will be investing \$770 million in rebuilding, repairing and repaving Victoria's road assets, which is of course significantly more than it was when we came to government. We think that the government's investment absolutely speaks for itself.

We are investing almost \$30 billion in about 450 new road projects across the state. We have added more than 400 kilometres of new lanes to the state's road network since the beginning of 2016, and since coming to government we have invested \$5.7 billion to strengthen our road network. This has meant that thousands of kilometres of Victorian roads have been rebuilt and resurfaced to ensure their quality and safety both in the regions and in the metropolitan area. We put in significant amounts of money and resources following the floods last year to ensure that the roads, particularly those affected by the floods, are looked after.

I think it was Mrs McArthur who issued a get outside the tram tracks challenge, which is very important. What goes on inside the tram tracks is also very important, Mrs McArthur, particularly on our roads. I drove to Kerang and back on Friday and Saturday and encountered on that trip up the Loddon Valley Highway quite a few road projects in fact. What we saw on the road at the times that I was driving, in the late evening, was the road crews not entirely as active as they otherwise would have been, but they were there. They were on the job doing what they could do as part of our road maintenance program. I will be out travelling to Sale in a couple of weeks and hope to see more activity in terms of road maintenance across Victoria, actually demonstrating not only this government's commitment to road maintenance but our delivery of road maintenance projects across this state.

Rikkie-Lee TYRRELL (Northern Victoria) (11:25): I am rising to support Mrs McArthur's motion to send a referral to the Economy and Infrastructure Committee for an inquiry into the poor state of our Victorian roads. In Northern Victoria alone the current road toll is more than double that of last year, and we are not even halfway through the year. In Greater Shepparton we are at eight fatalities already; six were recorded for the whole of last year. The Moira shire has had nine fatalities this year so far; last year overall there were only six. These are just two of the shires in my Northern Victoria region.

On Sunday night I was driving through an earthquake and I did not even notice; I simply assumed my rough ride was due to the state of our roads. To have become so accustomed to the bumpy, jarring and swaying surfaces of our roads that I could not even feel the most powerful earthquake in Melbourne for 120 years is concerning.

The condition of our roads in regional Victoria is costing locals thousands of dollars in repairs to their vehicles and businesses. It is costing them hours of downtime waiting for said repairs and temporary transport. These individuals and businesses are out of pocket up to \$1400 each time their vehicles are damaged before they can be compensated. This is disgraceful since we all pay our registration and rates to ensure that our roads are safe and reliable to use.

Joe McCracken: They all go to the city.

Rikkie-Lee TYRRELL: Exactly. Why do our cars have to be roadworthy when our roads are not carworthy?

I am going to put my sassy pants on here and go off topic. The government here has just stated that climate change is to blame. On climate change – weather, I call it – if our roads cannot be weatherproof, then I think a severe investigation is needed to ensure that we can at least build our roads to be weatherproof.

I am keeping it really nice and short because I would like my colleague Ms Lovell to get up and support this motion also.

Gaëlle BROAD (Northern Victoria) (11:27): I am very pleased to stand and speak in support of this motion for a parliamentary inquiry to consider and report on the state of Victoria's roads, and I thank Ms Tyrrell and colleagues in this chamber for their contributions. I also particularly want to thank Bev McArthur, a member for Western Victoria Region, for her work on the terms of reference for this inquiry, as the issues raised apply to the Northern Victoria Region, and I am sure that Wendy Lovell will agree with that.

This motion asks the Economy and Infrastructure Committee to examine the budget allocation for road construction and repairs in Victoria; the methods and standards of design, construction and maintenance of road pavement and surfacing; and how to achieve value for money in the delivery of road surface construction and maintenance through the tender process, contract requirements and quality control. This motion recognises the poor state of Victoria's roads, especially in rural and regional areas.

The electorate of Northern Victoria covers 100,000 square kilometres, and having driven across large parts of the state, I can tell you that our road network is falling apart. Victoria's road network is vital because it connects our state. Maintaining a safe and smooth road network is a key responsibility of state government, but what we have seen under this government, which has been in for far too long, is the continuing neglect of a core responsibility. Many regional and rural roads are falling apart, particularly in flood-affected areas. The government's own transport department has found significantly accelerated deterioration across the network after a study of 8400 kilometres of roads. The Victorian Transport Association estimates that \$1 billion is needed for post-flood reconstruction. The Municipal Association of Victoria has estimated that the councils can maintain just 65 per cent of their roads.

Before the state election the coalition committed to investing \$10 billion over 10 years in road maintenance funding to provide long-term contracts, promote innovation and provide contractors with certainty to invest in better equipment. But under the Labor government, at a time when we should be prioritising road maintenance funding, the state budget saw a further cut in funding, down 45 per cent on what it was in 2020. We are seeing large potholes that come up without warning, so you can either hit them or dodge them – both are risky options. We rely on fresh produce coming from the regions to our supermarket and shop shelves, but our roads are not built to withstand the weight of large transport vehicles. Victorians deserve more than gravel roads full of potholes and with edges that are crumbling. I know firsthand the cost of maintaining a car that has to travel on these roads and the impact that that has. We need a smooth, reliable and safe road network that is properly maintained.

I remember a main road not far from Bendigo that had to be widened. It was a very long, drawn-out process seeking the approvals required. The road was reduced to a single lane as the works were undertaken, and it took months. The works were done in patches and they were very uneven; it ended up looking like a patchwork quilt. But only after a very short time the road surface started crumbling; you could see the dirt. The road was closed again and it was redone several times. In recent months my colleague Danny O'Brien came to look at some of the roads in our region. There were patches near Dingee where the road had been repaired. As I walked on the repairs, you could see my shoe print in the tar, and it was not a very hot day at all.

But at the risk of sounding like a whinger, I do want to acknowledge the work that our road maintenance teams do. A constituent, Larry Norman from Warburton, wrote to me as the finishing touches were being done to the Woods Point Road in Warburton. He asked me to thank VicRoads in Parliament for completing the work on time on behalf of the people in the area. The road is a key access point for the town, and in many regional towns the roads are the only way to get in and out. In areas prone to bushfires, maintaining a reliable and safe road network is critical.

I also think of the landslide that cut off access to Falls Creek along the Bogong High Plains Road. The landslide was about 70 metres high and 100 metres wide. If you have seen the images, it is incredible. I know that my colleague Tim McCurdy, the member for Ovens Valley, advocated strongly on behalf of the community to ensure that the road was cleared as soon as possible and sought further support for the businesses impacted. Towns like Falls Creek and the surrounding towns like Mount Beauty rely on tourism, and maintaining road access is crucial.

It was great to see one lane reopened in April, and I want to acknowledge the work of Major Road Projects Victoria and those who worked hard to reopen the road again, including those that cleared the debris, the engineers, the construction team and traffic management – thank you. I know that this

project presented significant challenges, including rain, fog, tremors, further slips and a very windy road to get there to do the work each day. But for the community and for the businesses that have experienced lost summer trade over the past three years, I say thank you. It is important that we continue to visit these areas and areas impacted by the floods to help them recover. Victoria's road networks are vital for business and to connect family and friends.

Very sadly, more than 130 people have died on our roads since the start of this year, compared to 96 at the same time last year. Since last Friday, 10 people have died in crashes on Victoria's roads, and our hearts go out to their families and friends. I know as a parent of children, an L-plater and a P-plater, how conscious I am of road safety. We should all have that in mind as we travel. We need to ensure that our road networks are maintained to a high standard. This parliamentary inquiry into the state of Victoria's roads is long overdue, and I encourage all members of this house to support it.

Michael GALEA (South-Eastern Metropolitan) (11:34): I rise with something of a sense of *deja vu* to speak on this motion by Mrs McArthur. I am reminded of my contribution early in March this year when we discussed a similar matter. I do not think I will have my contribution today interrupted by a quorum motion by Mr McGowan. I am very sorry to see that he is not in the room, but I hope he will be here shortly. There are several differences between the motion previously put forward and this one. I suggested during my contribution to that motion that it would be better suited for the Economy and Infrastructure Committee of our Council rather than a joint committee. I am also heartened to see that, unlike perhaps some in this chamber, Mrs McArthur clearly understands the standing orders, specifically standing order 7.06, which says that the same question cannot be put twice. This is a different question. I respect you for that, Mrs McArthur, unlike those who have sought to defend a curious referral to one of our committees.

But I would like to take a moment to draw to the house's attention a difference from the previous motion – unfortunately not a happy contrast – and its terms of reference is the specific reference to road trauma and safety on the roads and related matters. That was one of the primary concerns listed in the previous proposed inquiry, and I am disappointed to see that this is not in today's motion. It set the focus of that motion that the inquiry was to be about addressing the road toll, and it would have been good to have seen that today. I did admire the aim of that inquiry, which was squarely focused on reducing road trauma, but I am dismayed to see that that is no longer the focus. Value for money, economic impact and contracts now have equal standing with safety and terms of reference. These are all important points, but I think we should all agree that safety is the most important thing to discuss.

Bev McArthur: We did that inquiry. We've done it. You weren't here.

Michael GALEA: I will take you up on that interjection, Mrs McArthur. I know that my colleague Mr Erdogan did a power of work on that inquiry. I do ask the question: if we have already done the inquiry, why are we doing it again?

Something has been lost here. Whilst we can debate the various technicalities, what we can all agree on is that this is a very serious and significant issue. Far too many people are dying on our roads. One death is too many. At the end of each and every one of those deaths is a colleague, a friend, a family member whose life is irreparably changed by our road toll. We may never get our road toll down to zero, but we must absolutely try. There are numerous strategies and other projects in place to address this problem. I will not go into detail on every one of them, as I did in my speech in March, but every year about 6000 people in this state end up in hospital with serious, traumatic, road-related injuries, which has a devastating impact on their lives and those of their families.

When I spoke on a similar motion earlier this year I mentioned that 67 people had died on the roads in the state at that time. Very sadly, I was corrected immediately after my speech and informed that it was by that point 68. Today it is 134, an increase of 39.6 per cent – almost 40 per cent – on this time last year. Last year, as a total, 241 people died, which was eight more than in 2021. Forty-four of those were pedestrians – again, vulnerable road users. Pedestrians are particularly at risk. They do not have

airbags or seatbelts and they are fully exposed to traffic. It might not always be the case that they should be off the roads. In many cases, people walking on pavements or footpaths or safely crossing the road might still be at risk through no fault of their own. As with all road trauma-related injuries and deaths, none of these are acceptable.

Road trauma was the focus of the previous motion. I understand that this motion does go into greater detail on roads funding. I do note, and I will briefly refer to the contributions of my colleagues, the investment that has already taken place. I will take up the commentary from Mrs Tyrrell. We are not saying that climate change is the only reason why the roads are bad or why there is a road toll, far from it. But it is undeniable that the floods that we have seen in the past few years have, by Victorian standards, been nothing like what we have seen before, and that has had a massive effect on our road network. As a result we have invested \$2.8 billion in road maintenance and renewal, which is taking our total spend over the coming decade to \$6.6 billion, to address these specific issues, especially flood-related works – flood recovery works – which also includes road safety as well as other projects to increase the productivity and safety of our road network. A further \$674 million is being provided to upgrade critical roads and intersections as part of a road blitz plan to improve network efficiency. There is also funding directed to vital regional roads, including the Western Highway, the Hume Freeway, the Murray Valley Highway, the Hamilton Highway and the South Gippsland Highway. The roads targeted under the maintenance blitz were selected based on expert inspections and community feedback, ensuring that the works delivered are where local drivers need them the most.

There is much more I could say on this topic, but with an eye on the time as well I will also briefly touch on our road safety measures. Obviously whilst funding for maintenance is very important, improvements to those rural, regional and metropolitan roads should also be focused on reducing damage caused to vehicles, reducing fatalities, reducing injuries and improving overall road user safety, and in practical terms that also means upgraded infrastructure for pedestrians and cyclists, encouraging the use of vehicle safety technology, enforcement targeting high-risk behaviours, education campaigns and investing in road user behaviour research.

So whilst I will not be supporting this motion today, I reiterate my support for a continued and bipartisan focus on addressing road trauma, reducing the road toll and improving the overall safety on our roads. The Andrews Labor government has committed considerable funding towards improving road safety already and addressing road maintenance and improvement requirements across metropolitan, regional and rural Victoria, inside and outside of the tram tracks. The government has not neglected its responsibility to set vital road policies and pass critical legislative reforms to improve our road network and our road laws, and I note the changes to the road laws this year as well, bringing our road safety laws into the modern era. We must work constructively to deliver the increased safety our roads need and to ensure that our road infrastructure meets the needs of communities across the state and for road users of all kinds: pedestrians, cyclists, motorists, commercial and passenger vehicles and others as well.

The PRESIDENT: The time for debate has expired, so I call Mrs McArthur for her summing-up.

Bev McARTHUR (Western Victoria) (11:42): I thank everybody for their contributions. It is incredibly disappointing that the government, the cannabis party and the Greens are not supporting this motion. I cannot understand how you would not want to ensure that we look into the ways we do road building better. The cannabis party were concerned they did not have any notice about the motion. It has been on the agenda since December, when they were sworn in. They just need to read the paraphernalia we get every day, and they would be right.

Ms Tyrrell referred to the earthquake that occurred, but it is an earthquake driving on a country road every day. She is absolutely right. You hit a pothole; it is as if the earth has opened up. Ms Broad referred to the roads that are falling apart. They are absolutely falling apart.

Mr Galea, you have referred to the bipartisan approach that we could have – now, this was a golden opportunity for you to embark on a bipartisan gesture of goodwill so that we look at how we could do roads better for the safety of all Victorians, for the road users, for the producers – we drive your food to the city, you know. We need to have better roads. You people here eating tofu and everything else – you need to have a good truck that can drive on a road and not get wrecked every day.

Mr Batchelor referred to all the reasons why an inquiry is actually critical. He gave us all the reasons that we need to look at how we could do roads better, but for the life of me I cannot understand why – are you afraid over there? Are you afraid of what we might find out? We might find some solutions that you have not actually cottoned on to for how we could do roads better. What would be wrong with that?

Mr McCracken referred to road after road in Western Victoria that is just shameful. Ms Ermacora over there knows these roads very well, and I know she has not had a chance to speak, but if she did, she would also be able to detail the appalling state of roads in her area, which is our area as well. But she did not have that opportunity, and I am sure – but you could have briefed them about how bad it is, Ms Ermacora, and got them on board.

Thank you to Ms Bath, who actually detailed what is wrong in Eastern Victoria. I mean, seriously, down there you have ended the timber industry, you have shut that down, and now you cannot even fix the roads in Eastern Victoria. This is just shameful.

Ms Purcell told me – I am sure I can release this confidence – that the biggest issue raised with her in her electorate of Northern Victoria is roads. Hallelujah, it is roads! But where is she? I understand she is going to vote against the motion because she thinks the Economy and Infrastructure Committee is a bit overburdened with her self-referenced motion on gassing pigs. What is more important? Quite frankly, it would be more important to look at how we could revolutionise the way we build roads in Victoria. That would be a breakthrough of monumental proportions. Gassing pigs might be important, but I do think a motion from the chamber should have gone to the Economy and Infrastructure Committee. Saying she has a self-referenced motion she is worried needs to take priority is just not good enough.

I thank Ms Deeming also. As a former councillor she is well aware of how hopeless the situation is. Mr McCracken and I have had the glorious benefit of being councillors in past lives, and I know just how hopeless it is trying to get a grant out of the government to fix up a road if you are in local government. I mean, you have got to go through –

Joe McCracken: A forest of trees – paperwork.

Bev McARTHUR: a forest of paperwork. Quite right, Mr McCracken. We are pulling down the trees to actually produce the ability to get a grant to fix a road in local government.

I am very disappointed that the government has not seen fit to support this motion. It is something that is vitally important to those of us outside the tram tracks. I hope that we can do something better in the future in a bipartisan way, Mr Galea.

Council divided on motion:

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

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

Motion negatived.

*Bills***Public Administration and Planning Legislation Amendment (Control of Lobbyists) Bill 2023***Second reading***Debate resumed on motion of David Davis:**

That the bill be now read a second time.

Tom McINTOSH (Eastern Victoria) (11:54): I rise to contribute to the debate today on the Public Administration and Planning Legislation Amendment (Control of Lobbyists) Bill 2023. To be clear from the outset, this bill is an attempt by the opposition to score political points off the recommendations of IBAC's *Operation Clara* report. These are findings which the government has publicly said it is deeply concerned about.

The report makes important recommendations to strengthen provisions relating to conflicts of interest that arise for people who are registered lobbyists under the appointment and remuneration guidelines, the lobbyists' code of conduct as well as the code of conduct for directors. These findings were brought about by a failure to declare a conflict of interest and failure to comply with a requirement to register a lobbying client. These findings are deeply concerning. It has been said by my colleagues, and I will reiterate this in my contribution, that the government has already announced that it supports in principle the recommendations of IBAC's *Operation Clara* report.

Public trust and confidence in our institutions is vitally important for our state and for our democracy. Public trust rests on transparency. The Public Administration Act 2004, which this bill seeks to amend, has the following purposes relating to public trust and accountability:

- provide a framework for good governance in the Victorian public sector and in public administration generally in Victoria;
- establish the Victorian Public Sector Commission.

The act does include reference to conflicts of interest, and I note that this is a legislated public sector value. We need to ensure in public life, which includes Parliament, and on our essential boards of public bodies that this is occurring. To summarise these duties, the act provides:

A director of a public entity must at all times in the exercise of the functions of his or her office act –

- (a) honestly ...
- (b) in good faith in the best interests of the public entity ...
- (c) with integrity; and
- (d) in a financially responsible manner; and
- (e) with a reasonable degree of care, diligence and skill ...

All members of government boards are required to do this.

In Victoria there are more than 32,000 board members serving on over 3400 public entity boards. Many of these are volunteers, and a lot of them are in regional and rural Victoria – 77 per cent live in rural and regional areas of Victoria. I will take a moment here to give special thanks to those board members in Eastern Victoria who take the time out of their personal and professional lives to contribute to the administration of our state for the betterment of the community. These members of public sector boards tackle the state's challenges, like coastal erosion and like mental health and wellbeing, and I for one thank these volunteers for the time they give to Victoria and our community.

Overwhelmingly, both paid and volunteer board members do the right thing, and this is something to be celebrated in our communities. It should be noted that keeping things public has been a huge focus on this side of the chamber. When we talk about integrity in these institutions, where is the integrity of selling off state assets to be run by corporations for profit? How has that played out in terms of public trust and confidence? The public comprehensively voted for the public administration of

essential services in Victoria like electricity. Again I will make the point in this chamber that, as an electrician from regional Victoria, I am very excited to see the return of the SEC and the positive benefits it will bring to our great state, particularly in Eastern Victoria. People want essential services to be run by the public sector – 59,000 jobs – to guarantee the upkeep of infrastructure, low prices that do not gouge for profit and that local values are maintained, including employment benefits rather than benefits going overseas.

Other public entities cover not only essential services like hospitals, schools, public land and planning, as was the focus of *Operation Clara*, but also all kinds of public functions, tackling real issues in the community, like Homes Victoria and their effort to make the biggest investment in social and affordable housing in the state's history with the \$5.3 billion big build. These priority areas of public administration in our state are overseen by prominent people, local people, diverse people and people recruited through proper channels.

In reference to the terrific role that local people take on to support their community, I will take a moment to mention the exceptional work of the board of Bairnsdale regional hospital and its chair Chris Barry, who I have been in contact with several times since coming into the Council. Chris advocates for his local community and the hospital, and even met me after hours on a weeknight to show me around and discuss their plans for redevelopment.

Business interrupted pursuant to sessional orders.

Questions without notice and ministers statements

Housing affordability

Aiv PUGLIELLI (North-Eastern Metropolitan) (12:00): (161) My question is to the minister representing the Premier, and it relates to the rental crisis that our state is facing. Renters are in turmoil. Prices are surging. Rentals are at the most unaffordable rates they have been in the last nine years. Vacancy rates are ridiculously low, and people are accepting substandard properties that are in a horrible condition as it is all they can find or afford. Premier, you have done it before. During the pandemic Victoria froze rents. The majority of Victorians support a freeze on rent increases in the current circumstances. Will you implement one?

Jaelyn SYMES (Northern Victoria – Attorney-General, Minister for Emergency Services) (12:01): I thank Mr Puglielli for his question for the Premier. I do not know about everyone else in this chamber, but I try and tune into the Assembly question time when I can. I believe that Mr Read asked a very similar question of the Premier yesterday, and I think he gave the answer, so I think I can probably print out yesterday's *Hansard* and provide it to Mr Puglielli.

Aiv PUGLIELLI (North-Eastern Metropolitan) (12:01): I thank the member for that response. I would like to stress that we need to take action now. People are struggling, as I am sure many in this chamber would see. They are one rent rise away from crisis, from homelessness. They are going without so they can afford rent. They are living in sometimes squalid conditions. We must do something now. To the Premier, by way of supplementary, I would like to ask: in addition to a freeze on rents, will you also cap the rate of rent increases moving forward so that people are not pushed out of their homes by unreasonable rent increases?

Jaelyn SYMES (Northern Victoria – Attorney-General, Minister for Emergency Services) (12:02): Mr Puglielli, I understand your concern for people with cost-of-living issues, and that is fine. But I think the theatre that you present with your question is a little bit disingenuous, because the question was asked yesterday of the Premier. If you were fully wanting a different answer then you would probably ask the relevant minister, which would be the Minister for Consumer Affairs when it comes to rent, who would be able to provide you with a detailed chronology of the interventions, the investments and the support that this government has provided to renters in this state. We continue to

support people through cost-of-living issues, and we will continue to do that. I am very happy to work with you and your suggestions but perhaps in a more constructive way.

Child protection

Matthew BACH (North-Eastern Metropolitan) (12:03): (162) My question is for the Minister for Child Protection and Family Services. Minister, in recent hearings at the Yoorrook Justice Commission the commissioner for Aboriginal children and young people said the state is a bad parent, the recommendations they make go nowhere and there is a deliberate lack of accountability. Why is this the case, Minister, at a time when the Labor government removes one in nine Indigenous babies – the worst in the country?

Lizzie BLANDTHORN (Western Metropolitan – Minister for Disability, Ageing and Carers, Minister for Child Protection and Family Services) (12:03): Thank you, Dr Bach, for your question. Given the topic that we are discussing, can I also acknowledge the traditional owners of the land on which we meet and pay my respects to elders past and present – an important undertaking and acknowledgement that we make every day in this place.

Can I also welcome the truth-telling process. I, the Attorney-General, the Minister for Corrections and the Minister for Police in recent weeks have all had the opportunity to meet with the Yoorrook Justice Commission and discuss these important issues. I welcome the truth-telling process that this government committed to, and I also commend the commissioners for the work that they are doing with the support of their very able counsel. It was our government that set up the Yoorrook Justice Commission because we believe in the truth-telling process and we believe in ensuring that First Peoples have the opportunity to have their story and their experiences heard but also to have those experiences acknowledged going forward in terms of the way in which government governs and the way in which this Parliament makes decisions, and I note that indeed there is a decision for this Parliament to make this week in relation to some of these matters.

As I said at the Yoorrook Justice Commission, without pre-empting some of the recommendations and the report of the Yoorrook Justice Commission – I have said it in this place as well – there is indeed an over-representation of First Peoples children in the child protection system, and that is something that has to be addressed and is something that we are addressing through a number of mechanisms, from the truth-telling process itself to the record investment that I spoke to yesterday in my ministers statement when I updated the house in relation to the government's investment in addressing the factors influencing over-representation of Indigenous young people in the child protection and family services system.

We support this process. Both I and the department will continue to support the Yoorrook Justice Commission in the important work that it is doing to fulfil its goals of truth, of understanding and of transformation of the system in order to better represent and address the needs of Indigenous children. I do not want to specifically comment on the content of the inquiry before it has concluded, but I do welcome the work that it is doing and I look forward to its recommendations.

Matthew BACH (North-Eastern Metropolitan) (12:06): Thank you, Minister. I note the mechanisms, as you called them, that you briefly referenced in your response now and outlined in more detail yesterday, as you said. On that matter – the over-representation of Indigenous children in child protection – if the current trend continues, evidenced by the latest data from the report on government services, it will take 122 years to close the gap in Indigenous over-representation in child protection in Victoria. Regarding these mechanisms that you speak of, Minister, what will their impact be? When does the government now project the gap will be closed?

Lizzie BLANDTHORN (Western Metropolitan – Minister for Disability, Ageing and Carers, Minister for Child Protection and Family Services) (12:06): Thank you, Dr Bach, for your question on this important matter. As you suggested, the trend is not acceptable, and the trend is something which this government is seeking to address. We are seeking to address it starting with the process of truth

telling through the Yoorrook Justice Commission through to the funding and investment that we outlined in the budget just last week.

There is absolutely an acknowledgement both from me and indeed from the Premier himself that work needs to happen to change that trend, and that is exactly what this government is doing by investing \$140 million. The Premier and I have gone through an extensive process of consulting with Aboriginal community controlled organisations in particular and a number of stakeholders, from legal representatives through to those who are delivering child and family services directly on the ground in a more statutory sense. But we have listened to those who are involved at every stage of the process with a view to ensuring that the trend actually is reversed, that the trend goes the other way, and that this record investment of this government addresses the over-representation of Aboriginal children in care.

Ministers statements: Melbourne Polytechnic

Gayle TIERNEY (Western Victoria – Minister for Training and Skills, Minister for Higher Education, Minister for Agriculture) (12:08): I am pleased to update the chamber on how the Andrews Labor government is supporting more Victorians to train for highly skilled jobs. Recently I attended the Heidelberg campus of Melbourne Polytechnic to open their new \$3.2 million Advanced Manufacturing Centre of Excellence. Employers have repeatedly told us of the high demand for engineering skills, particularly in the burgeoning advanced manufacturing sector, and it was so good to see so many local businesses and local industry leaders not only present on the day but absolutely embedded in the centre by contributing to the curriculum, curriculum design, ideas, providing equipment and of course work placements.

Manufacturing is a driving force of Victoria's economy. It employs more than 261,000 people and contributes around \$31 billion to the state's economy each year. In recent years Victorian manufacturing has moved towards more diverse mixed industries, ranging from construction to food, biotech and aviation. The Victorian skills plan identified that advanced technology driven manufacturing necessitates new education and training pathways in emerging technologies. This state-of-the-art centre is training the next generation of Victorian engineers to enter the workforce with cutting-edge skills in robotics, 3D printing, programming and computer design. It will support a range of industries, including biomedical, defence, aerospace and food technologies.

I want to give a shout-out to our passionate trainers at Melbourne Poly, who push the boundaries, driving high-level skills beyond what many would think was possible. This centre is exactly what this government agenda is all about: industry-relevant, industry-focused training that connects to jobs and careers. Congratulations to all involved, particularly the fantastic local vibrant industry training partnership. You are truly inspirational, and we can learn very much from what you are doing.

Poultry industry

Georgie PURCELL (Northern Victoria) (12:10): (163) My question is for the Minister for Agriculture. Cage, barn and even free-range egg producers are deliberately causing stress to hens to induce what is known to the industry as forced moulting. The process involves severely limiting food and water and deprivation of sunlight for up to three weeks. Forced moulting intentionally deprives hens of essential nutrients and literally tricks them into thinking it is winter, when food availability would naturally be scarce. It shocks them into losing their feathers and, in the interests of farmers, laying more eggs. This process is repeated again and again without a day of reprieve. The consumer demand for eggs all year round means factory farms continue to exploit natural processes at the expense of welfare. It is entirely legal. Will the minister ensure forced moulting is banned as part of the new animal welfare legislation in Victoria?

Gayle TIERNEY (Western Victoria – Minister for Training and Skills, Minister for Higher Education, Minister for Agriculture) (12:11): Thank you, Ms Purcell, for your question. I note that many of the questions that you raise with me are about issues in terms of animal welfare, and

essentially the answer is the same each time regardless of the type of animal that you raise. That is that essentially this government is absolutely concerned about animal welfare issues, and we have proven that in terms of budget allocations over the years and indeed a whole range of other things as well. You are well aware of that, Ms Purcell.

The fact of the matter is that obviously we are incredibly concerned and we are doing a number of things and have done a number of things in terms of animal welfare, something that other governments just have not done. Indeed the previous federal government walked away from animal welfare issues and disbanded the committee as well. It was interesting to see in the most recent federal budget a commitment from a more grown-up federal government to have much more dialogue in terms of animal welfare. But not only that, they are looking at legislation. So we are looking forward to having that dialogue with the federal government. Of course we are also wanting to have, as much as we can, commonality across all the jurisdictions, whether it be the states, the Commonwealth or indeed the territories, and we will continue to do that.

As you are well aware, we are also undertaking a range of consultations in relation to new animal welfare legislation, and there will be an exposure draft that will be circulated later on this year. We will continue to have that conversation that will lead us to more modernised animal welfare laws in this state, and we are very much wanting to have conversations with everyone. We also need to make sure that we get it right in terms of animal welfare issues that are obviously put forward by a number of community groups. But we need to balance that with food production, and we need to listen to our farmers as well. Most of them actually do treat their animals really well because they know it is important not just for the values associated with the care of animals but also in terms of the market and consumers. Consumers are becoming more educated about the importance of eating produce that has been treated well. So we look forward to the conversations and the ongoing work that we are undertaking.

Georgie PURCELL (Northern Victoria) (12:14): Thank you, Minister, for your response. Chickens bred for meat are genetically selected for increased appetite and consistently overfed until their breast meat muscle is so large they can barely stand or walk. The process is designed to happen so quickly that the industry risks birds dying from stress or organ failure before their breeding or slaughter date. To compensate, parent birds are starved once they reach their goal weight in the last weeks of their lives. An independent review into farmed bird welfare found that chickens being denied food is particularly cruel when it is the very thing that they have been genetically bred to do. Can the minister advise if broilers continue to be starved in Victoria following the Victorian government's farmed birds welfare review?

Gayle TIERNEY (Western Victoria – Minister for Training and Skills, Minister for Higher Education, Minister for Agriculture) (12:15): I thank Ms Purcell for her supplementary question and her care and concern in relation to meat chickens in this case. Can I indicate to her – and I am sure she absolutely knows this – that force-feeding is prohibited in this state, and again, if she believes it is happening, then I would ask her to actually record it so that there can be an investigation from PrimeSafe.

Foster carers

Matthew BACH (North-Eastern Metropolitan) (12:16): (164) I have got another question for the Minister for Child Protection and Family Services. Minister, as you know, Victoria loses more foster carers every year than any other state or territory – 580 at last count. The CEO of the Centre for Excellence in Child and Family Welfare Deb Tsorbaris said over the weekend that:

If we keep going like this, in five years' time we'll have almost no foster carers left.

A secret report to government recommends an increase in the foster carer allowance of over 60 per cent to retain more carers. Why has the minister failed to raise the care allowance by a single cent?

Lizzie BLANDTHORN (Western Metropolitan – Minister for Disability, Ageing and Carers, Minister for Child Protection and Family Services) (12:16): Thank you, Dr Bach, for the question. Can I also thank foster carers for the important work that they do for children and for their communities day in, day out, and can I also acknowledge the important work that Deb Tsorbaris and others in the community services organisations do in advocating for both their community service organisation members but also the foster carers that are attached to their organisations. The contribution that they make is important in this conversation, which is a conversation we have had in this chamber a number of times over the first half of this year.

I have a number of times outlined that the government does value foster carers and the contribution that they make in caring for some of our most vulnerable children. We do provide a care allowance for foster carers. The care allowance does contribute towards the day-to-day cost of caring for each child in care, and it is dependent on the ages and the needs of the child. Higher care allowances are determined on a case-by-case basis as determined by the needs of the child and the family at that particular time of the assessment and in relation to ongoing specialist or support needs that that family might have in order to care for the child in their home. We also have a series of additional allowances. We have a new placement allowance for level 1 allowance placements in their first six months, for example, and we also have education assistance payments per year until a child is 18 to assist with meeting the educational costs of children in care. So we do have a number of allowances, both the principal allowance and additional allowances, that recognise the financial contribution that foster carers do make. On 31 May we also made a supplementary payment of \$650 per eligible child placement, which was paid to carers in addition to their usual care allowance payments.

So, Dr Bach, as you know, we have had these conversations a number of times in this chamber, and we do recognise the important work. We have spoken with people like Deb Tsorbaris and other advocates for foster carers, and we do recognise certainly the needs of those carers. This was a record investment in terms of the child protection and family services system, and there has been a huge injection to the system overall, which will obviously have an impact on all children who are in the system in one way or another. And the work that we have done in recently providing this supplementary payment in addition to the other allowances and the other supports that we provide to foster carers is an important recognition of the significant and important contribution they make to caring for some of our most vulnerable children.

Matthew BACH (North-Eastern Metropolitan) (12:19): Thank you, Minister, for that response, and I note in particular your comments regarding the supplementary payment. This has been a matter of some recent commentary as well. Kinship Carers Victoria said, specifically regarding the supplementary payment, that it is not even enough to ‘lift carers out of poverty’. Are they wrong, Minister?

Lizzie BLANDTHORN (Western Metropolitan – Minister for Disability, Ageing and Carers, Minister for Child Protection and Family Services) (12:19): Thank you, Dr Bach, for the question. Can I at the outset again acknowledge the sacrifice that we know that all carers make when they take children into their care. We know that the children who are in foster care or who are in kinship care are some of the most vulnerable children in our community, and we acknowledge that foster carers make many, many sacrifices in terms of providing care for those children. The work that they do is really commendable. As I have said a number of times, in many respects they are modern-day saints for the work that they do. We do acknowledge the work that they do and we do in many ways support it, from the allowances that I outlined in my initial remarks to your first question, both in relation to the additional allowances and in relation to the supplementary allowance that was issued on 31 May. Of course there are many other ways – as I have also outlined in this chamber when you have asked this question before, Dr Bach, in relation to the other supports – that we do provide for carers. The care support help desk, of \$5.8 million – (*Time expired*)

Ministers statements: Commonwealth Games

Harriet SHING (Eastern Victoria – Minister for Water, Minister for Regional Development, Minister for Commonwealth Games Legacy, Minister for Equality) (12:21): Today I rise in my role as Minister for Commonwealth Games Legacy. As the Commonwealth Games showcases the very best opportunities that we have to celebrate the pride of place, the identities, the history, the culture and the stories of rural and regional Victoria, we will be creating thousands of local jobs. Before, during and after the games we will see about 7500 jobs created, in fact. Our vibrant rural and regional communities are a driving force behind Victoria’s economic growth and prosperity, and that is why we are maximising opportunities for Victorians – for jobs, for businesses, for enterprises and for communities – to get involved and to be part of the journey to Victoria 2026 every single step of the way.

This is also about celebrating the diversity across Victoria through a range of investments in accessible and inclusive infrastructure in events, services, procurement and employment opportunities. Through the Local Jobs First policy we are seeking to engage a variety of local skilled workers and businesses through the goods and services procurement pipeline. That is worth \$800 million, and that will feature more than 1200 opportunities for contracts to be won. These procurement processes cover everything from mascot design through to medals, uniforms, opening and closing ceremonies, the King’s baton relay and much more.

In April we in fact opened a registration-of-interest process, inviting regionally based employment suppliers and group training organisations to assist contractors in finding people to help build the games villages and venues. An expression of interest for a range of things was also released at the start of May, and we are inviting ceremonies production services to register their interest. This is also about working with First Nations communities, of special importance this week in discussing this in the context of National Reconciliation Week. I look forward to you getting on board, Mrs McArthur.

Early childhood education

Georgie CROZIER (Southern Metropolitan) (12:23): (165) My question is to the minister for early education. Minister, Malvern Memorial Kindergarten is a fabulous community kindergarten with excellent programs and opportunities for children. Yet while the government spruiks its funding for free kinder, it is proving inadequate to cover the costs of the excellent educators and programs offered at the kinder. A family with a three-year-old and a four-year-old attending the kindergarten, as in the case of a constituent of mine, will be paying an out-of-pocket charge of \$10,700 – far from being free. With cost-of-living pressures and uncertainty about job security hitting families because of Victoria’s economic climate, constituents like mine simply cannot afford the additional cost of more than \$10,000 for their two sons to attend a kindergarten program in their local community. Minister, why won’t the government support families like this and apply the government’s free kinder funding to the out-of-pocket charges they will have to pay?

Ingrid STITT (Western Metropolitan – Minister for Early Childhood and Pre-Prep, Minister for Environment) (12:24): I thank Ms Crozier for that question. Of course it gives me the opportunity to remind the house in some detail of the arrangements that our government has backed in around free kinder. This is all part of our Best Start, Best Life reforms. The budget that we handed down last week commits \$1.8 billion to the continued transformation of early childhood education in Victoria, and that includes over \$500 million for the free kinder initiative, including an additional rolling out of three-year-old kinder and the commencement of the rollout of pre-prep.

As I have explained on more than one occasion in the house, free kinder is a game changer. It is a cost-of-living initiative that our government is absolutely proud to deliver. It provides parents in sessional kinder with up to \$2500 per child and in a long day care setting an offset against those Commonwealth childcare fees of \$2000. This is a significant investment by the government to assist parents in having no financial barrier to sending their children to three- and four-year-old kinder. The average kinder fee across the state is \$1900, so where we have pitched our government-funded free kinder – at \$2500 in

sessional kinders – is well above the average fees being charged by the vast majority of services across the state. We have also provided, for those high-fee-charging kindergartens, transitional payments to enable them to transition to free kinder.

I would obviously urge that particular kinder in your electorate, Ms Crozier, to work with my department on all of the ways that we are providing support for kinder. It is very important that you understand that free kinder funding is in addition to all the other funding that the government provides to our fantastic kindergarten services across the state. I am absolutely delighted that 97 per cent of kinders – 97 per cent of kindergarten services in our state – have signed up for free kinder. In relation to your constituents, Ms Crozier, I would urge you to ask them to work with my department on all the ways that we can help them transition to free kinder so that they can offer free kinder to families in their community, like the vast majority – 97 per cent of kinders – are doing.

Georgie CROZIER (Southern Metropolitan) (12:27): Well, Minister, my constituents have written to you, and that is why I am raising this question in the house today. Parents who cannot afford these fees will drop out of community kindergartens and seek places elsewhere, placements that are just not available. The risk for this kindergarten is it will become unviable, and parents have been told it will be closed within five years. Will you guarantee that community kinders like this will not be subjected to the cruel selective application of free kinder fees and enable all Victorian parents to access what you are saying is being applied across the state – not just to 97 per cent but to 100 per cent of kindergartens – so that kindergartens like Malvern Memorial can remain open and continue to provide excellent early learning opportunities?

Ingrid STITT (Western Metropolitan – Minister for Early Childhood and Pre-Prep, Minister for Environment) (12:28): I have to say, Ms Crozier, it really does you no service to catastrophise about these things. Nothing could be further from the truth. There is over \$500 million in this budget alone for free kinder across the state. There are also additional supports that our government provides to kindergartens, including an experienced teacher supplement. I was out with the Premier just this morning announcing that every kinder will receive a \$5000 grant for upgraded toys and equipment. The list goes on and on, with \$1.8 billion in this year's budget alone. I am absolutely proud of the work that our government is leading in our nation. Free kinder is an absolute game changer. You are catastrophising, and I would urge you to ask that kinder to engage with the Department of Education, who will assist them fully.

Anti-vilification legislation

David LIMBRICK (South-Eastern Metropolitan) (12:29): (166) My question is for the Attorney-General. Just this week in the UK a £100,000 settlement was reached with Anna Thomas, a civil servant who worked at the Department for Work and Pensions. With the support of the Free Speech Union, she brought a complaint to the employment tribunal, arguing unfair dismissal, belief discrimination and harassment. Anna was fired for gross misconduct after making a whistleblower complaint that she believed the department were breaching their impartiality obligations under the civil service code. Her concerns were based around diversity training and resources on gender ideology, arguing that there was implicit support for the political aims of these groups, breaching the impartiality requirements of the public service. Whilst I have concerns that the situation in Victoria is probably bad already, with the proposed anti-vilification laws the government are working on, this could get even worse. What assurances can the Attorney-General provide that impartiality in the public service will not become essentially criminalised by these new laws?

Jaelyn SYMES (Northern Victoria – Attorney-General, Minister for Emergency Services) (12:30): I thank Mr Limbrick for his question. At the outset I would reiterate the Victorian government's commitment to being a model employer. We have had a lot of firsts in terms of worker protections which have often been prosecuted through our industrial relations relationships with our parties – the VPS, for example, with things like family violence leave and the like. There are numerous responses that we provide in relation to the latest in protecting workers. Your specific question relates to the anti-

vilification laws. As I am on the record in this place and outside this place as saying, this is very complex legislation. This is legislation that we want to get right. This is legislation that, if we rush, we risk unintended consequences. I do welcome everyone's feedback in relation to anti-vilification law reform. That consultation is kicking off very soon, and I would welcome your input into that, Mr Limbrick.

David LIMBRICK (South-Eastern Metropolitan) (12:31): I would be very happy to contribute to that. This government is not unique in considering how to respond to hate speech or, as I would put it, speech that those in power hate. For example, New Zealand recently withdrew their proposed hate speech laws to continue work trying to find the right balance. Ireland is right now on the verge of passing anti-free-speech legislation that includes potential penalties of up to five years in prison. Scotland passed their hate crime and public order act in 2021, but it is yet to be implemented out of concern that the police cannot easily define hate speech. This has not prevented people, however, from being investigated in the UK for Orwellian non-crime hate incidents. There are documented disclosures demonstrating that the police are keeping files on or investigating people for posting on social media their belief merely that transgender women are not women. Can the Attorney-General provide reassurances that the dictionary definition of 'woman' – that is, an adult human female – will not be considered hate speech under the proposed anti-vilification laws?

Jaelyn SYMES (Northern Victoria – Attorney-General, Minister for Emergency Services) (12:32): That is a bit of a stretch. Mr Limbrick, there is a lot in that question. But at the outset I took great offence to your reflection that hate speech is speech that those in power hate. I am fortunate to not be the recipient of a lot of hate speech, because I am white, I am not LGBTI+ and I am not Jewish. I have actually had a pretty privileged life. I get called a bogan and that sort of thing, but the speech that is directed to people causes immense harm, and I am really passionate about supporting those people that that hate is directed to. It is actually not about me. It is not about my feelings. It is about my responsibility as a leader in this state to protect those who are receiving harm from language. That is what the anti-vilification laws are designed to do. We want to get it right. It is my intention to get it right, to take the time and to not have unintended consequences. Again, I welcome your feedback. I welcome people's feedback. I am not necessarily going to agree with them, but that is the challenge of being in this role. It is about talking to people about protections and talking to people who have strong views either way. I commit to talking to all people to ensure that we get this legislation right, but I will not back down on wanting to protect those that need protection.

Ministers statements: child protection

Lizzie BLANDTHORN (Western Metropolitan – Minister for Disability, Ageing and Carers, Minister for Child Protection and Family Services) (12:33): I rise to update the house on our government's investment to improve outcomes for children and young people living in residential care. Earlier this year I had the privilege to visit residential care homes in my electorate of Western Metropolitan Region and meet with the staff and young people in these settings. These young people were beautiful, they were amazing and they were extremely articulate. What I heard on these visits was the need to increase the provision of therapeutic care and to invest to improve the outcomes for children and young people in residential care. I also heard directly from young people in the ministerial youth advisory group that we need to do more for those in residential care, particularly in providing therapeutic supports. I have also met with community service organisations who are providing services to children and young people who are living in residential care.

In the budget last week we outlined a \$548 million investment to improve outcomes for children and young people in residential care. This is the biggest investment in care services in a single budget and is part of our almost \$900 million investment in child protection and family services in this budget. Our care services investment includes funding to ensure that all children and young people in residential care will be supported to access therapeutic supports by 2025–26; continuing funding of the 19 two- and three-bed residential care homes across Victoria; providing funding for the remaining six two- and three-bed homes that are progressively being constructed across Victoria and will be

operational by mid-2024; continuing targeted care packages which support children to live in suitable care arrangements that prevent their entry into residential care settings; and funding to continue to target child sexual exploitation for those in residential care, building upon our existing initiatives to address this abhorrent conduct. The investment will deliver an expansion of the department's sexual exploitation practice leads to all 17 Department of Families, Fairness and Housing areas across the state and new dedicated sexual exploitation practice lead positions in both the metropolitan and rural after-hours services to detect issues at night and over the weekend. This is the biggest investment in care services in a single budget, and it is this side of the house that will continue to deliver for better outcomes for children and young people living in residential care.

Integrity agencies funding

David DAVIS (Southern Metropolitan) (12:35): (167) My question is for the Attorney-General. Attorney, I refer to funding of independent oversight agencies. The expected outcome for IBAC funding in 2022–23 is \$62.9 million, yet the government proposes to spend only \$62.2 million in 2023–24, effectively cutting IBAC funding despite IBAC being overwhelmed and unable to take on all the inquiries it needs to. I therefore ask: isn't it a fact that the government has kept IBAC on a tight leash with a choker collar to muzzle its ability to inquire into corruption that is rife throughout the government?

The PRESIDENT: I do not know if you want to rephrase that, Mr Davis, but it is asking for an opinion.

David DAVIS: It is a fact. I am asking for a fact.

The PRESIDENT: I am happy to let the minister answer the question as she sees fit.

Jaclyn SYMES (Northern Victoria – Attorney-General, Minister for Emergency Services) (12:37): No, Mr Davis. The support for integrity agencies from the Andrews Labor government continues to be demonstrated year on year in relation to our investment. IBAC's 2022–23 budget was \$61.9 million and 2023–24 is \$62.2 million. It is an increase of \$300,000. The actual spending for IBAC in 2022–23 is \$62.9 million, which is \$1 million higher than their budget. IBAC did not in fact submit a budget funding thing this year. But what I think we need to understand is that your continual rhetoric around the fact that this is an organisation that is starved of funding and support is completely false. Just because you continue to say it does not make it true. There are almost 300 people that work at IBAC, and they are invested with more than \$60 million a year. If you compare that to when you were in government, it was about 100 people and –

Members interjecting.

Jaclyn SYMES: You would not know, because you did not invest in them to have a look. Your suggestion is that it is an organisation that has not been supported, but it has, both financially and through legislative change with significantly more powers to investigate corrupt conduct. We have responded to the requests in relation to support for their investigations, and I thank them for their important work. But an organisation that receives \$60 million a year – more than – and has 300 people can hardly be described as somebody on a short leash.

David DAVIS (Southern Metropolitan) (12:38): The community knows that IBAC cannot investigate many of the things it needs to, and the reason for that is the government has starved it of funds. But further, Minister, the Inspectorate funding falls in this year's budget from an expected \$9 million in 2022–23 to \$8.2 million in 2023–24, and OVIC falls by \$1 million from the expected outcome. I say, Minister: isn't it a fact that these independent agencies for which you are responsible have all been clamped and that oversight of the government will be compromised as part of the cover-up of your government?

Jaclyn SYMES (Northern Victoria – Attorney-General, Minister for Emergency Services) (12:39): God, it is just all about statements from you. The Victorian Ombudsman did not submit a budget bid

for renewed funding in the 2022–23 or 2023–24 budget cycles. However, the 2023–24 budget provides the Victorian Ombudsman with \$700,000 to support the operations of their office in strengthening its data integrity and cybersecurity systems. OVIC has more than \$300,000 lapsing in 2022–23 as a result of fixed-term funding provided in last year’s budget. The funding enabled it to engage an information security consultant and to upgrade its IT infrastructure. The funding was fixed term for a need in relation to that. These are organisations that are supported by this government to do important work. You continue to have this false narrative. I do not believe your facts. It is just your opinion, Mr Davis. In relation to support of the agencies and what they have asked for, this government will continue to support their needs.

I do just make reference to the fact that you say that I am responsible as the Attorney-General. These are independent agencies, which I do not seek to have responsibility for. I meet with them regularly and have administrative functions, but it is not my responsibility, because that is implying that I want to have some control over them, which you continue to ask me to have.

Metallurgy education

Joe McCracken (Western Victoria) (12:40): (168) My question is to Minister Tierney in her capacity as minister for higher education and skills. From the budget handed down last week, and particularly given your ministers statement, which spoke about support for industry and skills in industry, what support is being given to the study of metallurgy in Victoria, particularly given resource extraction and mining are significant industries in this state?

Gayle Tierney (Western Victoria – Minister for Training and Skills, Minister for Higher Education, Minister for Agriculture) (12:41): This is in terms of my portfolio responsibility for higher education, Mr McCracken, is that right? Okay. In terms of higher education delivery and courses that are delivered, they are determined by the universities. Universities are independent, self-governing organisations.

David Davis interjected.

Gayle Tierney: But in terms of my responsibilities, Mr Davis, you well know that in terms of their delivery of courses, it is determined by the actual individual university. You will also know, Mr McCracken, that in terms of funding, the funding of universities is primarily the responsibility of the federal government.

In terms of my responsibilities – and I take it that you are a new member, so you have not necessarily been taken through this before – the fact is that what we have done is make a contribution. We set up a fund of \$350 million during COVID because the federal government at the time refused to provide JobKeeper to the university sector. We set aside \$350 million so that the universities could make applications so that we could align some of the activities that they needed to get done with the priorities of the state government, and everyone within the sector and everyone within industry said that that was a fantastic contribution and it was well thought through. In fact Dr Bach just said it was – absolutely it was.

We also have interactions with the vice-chancellors through our quarterly forums. I am often on the phone to them about a whole range of things, including student welfare issues. This is a government that takes its relationship with the university sector to be very important. We have got four universities that are dual sector, which do deliver vocational education and training courses as well. This is a sector that is highly regarded, and of course international students are incredibly important in terms of the culture of Victoria but also in terms of our relations with other countries.

In terms of the particular question you asked, this is a question that you should be putting to the universities, and indeed, as I said, there was \$350 million that was available for the universities to make applications to do courses such as that. They obviously did not. They did not consider it important enough at that particular point in time, Mr McCracken.

Joe McCracken (Western Victoria) (12:44): Thanks for that response, I think. Given that there are actually no TAFE courses teaching metallurgy in Victoria, what are you going to do to support the teaching of metallurgy in Victoria, given that our industries are so important for resource extraction?

Gayle Tierney (Western Victoria – Minister for Training and Skills, Minister for Higher Education, Minister for Agriculture) (12:44): So now it is a question to the Minister for Training and Skills, not the Minister for Higher Education, is that right? In terms of that –

Members interjecting.

The President: The minister will be heard for the last 46 seconds in silence.

Gayle Tierney: If it was so important, I would expect to have received representations in respect of this. I have not received those representations from industry. If I did, I would also get the Victorian Skills Authority to investigate in terms of the need, and then we would have further discussions if the need was determined.

Ministers statements: National Reconciliation Week

Jaelyn Symes (Northern Victoria – Attorney-General, Minister for Emergency Services) (12:45): I want to use my statement today to recognise National Reconciliation Week, which I know many members have used members statements to do today, and I thank them for that. It does carry particular significance this year for a number of reasons, and Minister Blandthorn took us through her experience, as did some other ministers who have had the honour of recently providing evidence to the Yoorrook Justice Commission, reflecting on and acknowledging the hard truths and reality of the nearly two centuries of dispossession and colonisation of Aboriginal people. I hope that this truth telling can lead to healing and that Aboriginal peoples and non-Aboriginal peoples can continue to walk together on this path of reconciliation. These are important reflections for us all as later this year Australians will be participating in the national referendum on an Indigenous Voice to Parliament. I am proud to be supporting the yes campaign, and I am proud to be part of a government that is committed to all elements of the *Uluru Statement from the Heart* – voice, treaty and truth – an amazing statement. If you have not read it, please do.

I am also proud that this year's 2023–24 budget has invested over \$7 million to expand the Victorian Aboriginal Legal Service's regional hub model. The regional hub model will provide culturally safe legal services at new locations across Victoria, benefiting regional and suburban Aboriginal communities. VALS provides tailored legal services and casework across criminal, civil and family law. I also commend VALS's advocacy on many crucial policy matters and for promoting social justice for Aboriginal peoples. The recently opened offices in Warrnambool and Bendigo are already producing excellent results, with significant increases in their client intake, which is really important because local services mean that you can reach locals and get better tailored outcomes for them.

Aboriginal community controlled organisations, like VALS and Djirra in particular, enable Aboriginal people to seek help in a way that suits them, which is critical for fair and just outcomes. The work is central to our aim to address over-representation of Indigenous people in the criminal justice system, and I thank these organisations and also the members of the Aboriginal Justice Forum and the Regional Aboriginal Justice Advisory Committee for their ongoing engagement and leadership.

Written responses

The President (12:47): Minister Symes will get a written response for the question and supplementary from Mr Puglielli to the Premier. Regarding the supplementary answer to Dr Bach's first question to Minister Blandthorn, in real time it was very difficult for me to decide, without the expertise of the person asking the question and the minister answering the question, whether that was the answer, so I would ask for licence from the chamber to consider that one and come back later.

Aiv Puglielli: On a point of order, President, I have an unanswered substantive and supplementary question without notice to the Premier that is now over three months overdue. The question relates to the renaming of the MaroonDAH Hospital and the replacement of the Woiwurrung place name with the name of a former monarch. I asked this question in February, and from the looks of some passing mentions in the state budget I suspect I may know the answer. But in this National Reconciliation Week, I would think that we all see the importance of this issue. I ask that you please request a response to my question, as this is an issue that the First Peoples' Assembly and many tens of thousands of people in our community care about and they should have a clear answer from the Premier.

The PRESIDENT: Thank you for that. The Leader of the Government has given me a commitment to look into those particular responses.

Constituency questions

South-Eastern Metropolitan Region

Michael GALEA (South-Eastern Metropolitan) (12:49): (210) My question is for the Deputy Premier in her capacity as Minister for Transport and Infrastructure. The 2023–24 budget includes funding, as part of the \$674 million roads blitz to get families home sooner and safer, to upgrade the intersection of Thompsons Road and Clyde Road in Clyde North in my electorate of South-Eastern Metropolitan Region. Many constituents have contacted me expressing the need for this intersection to be upgraded. I welcome this funding commitment to address the impact that this intersection has on my constituents' commutes, especially during peak- and school-hour traffic. My question is: how many vehicles and commuters use the intersection of Thompsons Road and Clyde Road in Clyde North currently and how will they benefit from this infrastructure upgrade?

South-Eastern Metropolitan Region

Ann-Marie HERMANS (South-Eastern Metropolitan) (12:50): (211) My question is to the Minister for Transport and Infrastructure. Minister, I have been contacted by a constituent who is being forced to relocate for at least 12 months due to the Level Crossing Removal Project and what they call the 'light rail project' being undertaken in Parkdale. The government is offering to relocate this constituent for 12 months but is only offering to pay the lease in four-month periods. Given my constituent has to pay the lease on their existing rental property, they believe that the government should be paying the full 12 months of rent on the new property in advance. My constituent is concerned with having to pay their existing rent plus the rent on the remaining eight months on the new property. Given my constituent is under extreme pressure to find a suitable home to work in, live in and move to and has been given a deadline to do so of 12 weeks, they need an urgent resolution to this matter. Minister, can you please ensure that my constituent has their rent paid 12 months in advance, prior to them having to vacate their existing rental property, and meet with residents to hear their concerns. I look forward to hearing from the minister as soon as possible.

Western Metropolitan Region

David ETTERS HANK (Western Metropolitan) (12:52): (212) My question is for the Minister for Education, Minister Hutchins. My constituent is the parent of a primary school student in the Brimbank council area. My constituent understands their child's school is under the proposed third runway new flight paths. They are concerned the noise pollution levels stemming from the increased flights will negatively impact their child and other young students, and they referred me to studies that have shown that living and learning under significant airway traffic can adversely impact a child's learning and cognitive development. My constituent asks: what consideration, if any, has been given to ensuring schools are protected from adverse harm resulting from increased airway traffic, and was this raised by the government in its submission on the third runway master plan?

Southern Metropolitan Region

John BERGER (Southern Metropolitan) (12:52): (213) My question is to the Minister for Education in the other place, Minister Hutchins, and in asking this question I pay tribute to the Camberwell Primary School. Every family should have a great local school, so I was delighted to visit last week with some exciting news: the 2023–24 budget includes funding for plans to upgrade the Camberwell Primary School so students can get and continue to get the world-class education they deserve. Thank you to principal Janet Gale, school council president Stuart Lindsay and parents association president Christina Woods for showing me around your vibrant school and telling me all about the challenges and opportunities that you face, with about 600 students. Camberwell students can learn French in the most extensive bilingual program in Victoria. With a modern IT program and fantastic teachers, Camberwell shows why government schools do it best. So my question to the Minister for Education is: will the Andrews Labor government budget benefit Camberwell Primary School?

Northern Victoria Region

Wendy LOVELL (Northern Victoria) (12:53): (214) My question is for the Minister for Transport and Infrastructure, and it concerns funding for the Watson Street and Hume Freeway diamond interchange in Wallan. The diamond interchange has been a priority project for the Mitchell Shire Council for many years, and when I raised the issue in 2019 the then minister stated:

The Department of Transport ... is currently progressing planning approvals that will enable this project to be considered for construction funding.

The Watson Street interchange upgrade is briefly mentioned in the 2023–24 state budget but without any mention of the amount of funding allocated or when the project will be completed. Will the minister provide clarity by providing me with the details of how much funding was allocated in the budget for the Watson Street–Hume Freeway interchange upgrade, the breakdown of that funding over the forward estimates and the estimated time line for completion of this important project?

Northern Metropolitan Region

Samantha RATNAM (Northern Metropolitan) (12:54): (215) My constituency question is for the Minister for Planning. Yesterday I was troubled to read reports that the owners of the Preston Market in my electorate, Salta Properties, are threatening to evict market traders and close down the market by January 2024. Salta claims the eviction is necessary due to the planning controls proposed for the site, which will give the market heritage protection and retain the existing market buildings. Yet this appears to be a thinly veiled attempt to intimidate both the traders and the government into compromising on protection before the planning controls are implemented. Darebin residents, in my electorate, are seeking the help of the government to prevent the owners from shutting down the market and steadily driving the traders out. My question is, Minister: given this escalating threat to traders, will the government now urgently consider compulsory acquisition of Preston Market in order to save this vital social, cultural and economic asset?

Eastern Victoria Region

Tom McINTOSH (Eastern Victoria) (12:55): (216) My question is for the Minister for Agriculture. This has been a really difficult year for all the hardworking people, businesses and communities in the Victorian native forestry industry. Workers have been stood down since November 2022 due to a court injunction. I know from visiting mills in Gippsland and talking with mill owners, managers and workers that supply constraints have been having a huge impact. This has been on the back of prolonged legal action and court decisions as well as the lasting impacts from bushfires. Minister, what is the Victorian government doing to ensure that local workers, businesses and communities have confidence in their future? The work to support workers and their communities has been taking place since 2019, but it is critically important now so that forestry workers and their

families get the best support available when they need it. I am committed to continuing to work with Gippsland workers, businesses and communities for a strong future in this great region.

Western Victoria Region

Bev McARTHUR (Western Victoria) (12:56): (217) My question is for the Minister for Regional Development and relates to the long-awaited intermodal freight hub in Ballarat. The hub was first considered in 1998, but it took until September last year – 2022 – just prior to the state election, for groundworks to begin. It was confirmed on 4 October, with Development Victoria on site for a photo shoot and a story, which started with these words:

Early works are now underway ...

... in preparation for major construction to take place next year ...

Through Senate estimates we now know the hub is part of the national review of infrastructure projects, despite the minister – and member for Ballarat – Catherine King stating that projects under construction would not be included in the review. Can the minister please explain, then, whether the project is in the planning phase or, as Development Victoria’s own photos suggest, work has already begun?

Western Victoria Region

Sarah MANSFIELD (Western Victoria) (12:57): (218) My question is to the Minister for Local Government. My constituents in Geelong care deeply about their libraries. Libraries are more than just places to find books, they are focal points in the community where people can meet, take their children, study and have access to knowledge that can and does change lives. But unfortunately our libraries are under threat, and my constituents are adamant that we must do everything we can to protect these vital assets in our community. Four Geelong libraries have recently just escaped closure, but the network is now facing reduced hours and closure on weekends as councils struggle to maintain operating costs. Successive Victorian governments have failed to support community libraries adequately, with the costs increasingly being forced onto councils, who are limited in their ability to raise revenue and are dealing with ever-growing cost shifting from state and federal government. Historically, library funding was shared 50–50 between state and local governments, but gradually that support has dwindled. Councils are now shouldering an unsustainable 83 per cent of costs. Minister, will you commit to protecting library services in Geelong by adequately funding and supporting their ongoing operation?

Western Victoria Region

Jacinta ERMACORA (Western Victoria) (12:59): (219) My constituency question is to the Minister for Small Business. Minister, the Western Victoria Region is home to a great many small businesses, from cafes to aged care and agricultural support. Small businesses sit at the heart of regional Victoria. They are critical to driving jobs. I have had the delight of speaking with many local business owners across the community. I know it can be challenging to be a small business owner, but so many Victorians take up the challenge, and that is why the Andrews government will always put local small businesses at the centre of its economic agenda. The Small Business Bus is a great resource for small businesses throughout metropolitan and regional Victoria. With business advisers on board, the Small Business Bus offers one-on-one sessions, business planning, grant assistance and much more, making it easier to mark up the challenge of running a small business. Can the minister tell me when the Small Business Bus will visit the Western Victoria Region so that I can share this with my local community?

Western Victoria Region

Joe McCracken (Western Victoria) (13:00): (220) My question is to the Minister for Transport and Infrastructure, and it relates to the completion of the Western Highway duplication between Buangor and Ararat. In a previous constituency question the minister was asked about the cost of the

security at the former Indigenous camp site east of Ararat that was abandoned in October 2020. Nobody is there and yet the site is being patrolled by security guards and is continually monitored. The minister was asked, ‘How much is this going to cost?’, and her response was:

Construction partners engaged by Major Road Projects Victoria ... are responsible for ensuring the safety and security of the site.

She went on to say:

... crews are continuing to maintain the safety and security of the site, with regular reports of individuals approaching security personnel at the site.

So the information that I seek is: (1) how many individuals have approached the site since it was abandoned in October 2020 and (2) can the minister please detail how much the security is costing, given she failed to in her last response?

South-Eastern Metropolitan Region

David LIMBRICK (South-Eastern Metropolitan) (13:01): (221) My question is for the Minister for Environment. Constituents in the Hampton Park, Lynbrook and Narre Warren South areas are still being heavily impacted by the Hallam Road landfill. The smell from the landfill is getting worse for locals. They are concerned about the safety of the odour and how much longer they will have to put up with it. People have reported the odour becoming so strong they cannot even open their windows. Some residents have been reporting headaches, dizziness and a reduction in their health because of the odour. They are also worried about what this is doing to children, especially since there are multiple schools close by. Residents have tried contacting the EPA multiple times about the odour but have not received any response. My question is: will the minister investigate the toxicity level of the odour and how safe it is for residents and children to be breathing in? How much longer can residents expect to be breathing this in from the tip?

Northern Metropolitan Region

Evan MULHOLLAND (Northern Metropolitan) (13:01): (222) My question is to the Treasurer. Since I last spoke on and about Mickleham Road, both the federal and state Labor governments have unfortunately put this project in limbo. As we know, the federal government announced a cutting task force – sorry, I mean actually an infrastructure review into critical projects committed to by the former Liberal government. Now the state government has fallen into line by announcing only stage 1 of this project through the 2023–24 financial year. Any further funding for stage 1 of this project is now ‘to be confirmed’ – entirely dependent on the federal government’s review – with stage 2 not even scoring a mention in the budget. This brutal state Labor budget is already making life harder for people of Greenvale, Yuroke, Mickleham and Craigieburn. The government cannot continue to take the micky with Mickleham Road. Therefore, will the Treasurer provide residents with certainty that stage 1 will be funded in its entirety, and will the Treasurer commit to stage 2 of this important project?

North-Eastern Metropolitan Region

Matthew BACH (North-Eastern Metropolitan) (13:03): (223) I have got a question for Minister Carroll today in his capacity as Minister for Public Transport. Will Minister Carroll commit to working with the City of Whittlesea and my community to extend tram route 86 from its intersection with McKimmies Road, Plenty, up to Plenty Valley town centre and the Westfield shops, more specifically. I actually asked this question more than three months ago to the Minister for Transport and Infrastructure because it clearly sits within the transport infrastructure portfolio, but after three months Minister Allan eventually responded to me to say that it was not her problem and I should ask Mr Carroll, so I am asking Minister Carroll. This project will provide a huge benefit to about 15,000 residents, who are constituents of mine and yours, President, in Plenty, Mill Park and South Morang. As you know, it has much support from the City of Whittlesea and also from La Trobe University. I know students who are studying there and working close to Westfield would enjoy the much greater connectivity. Too often folks in this part of the world are neglected or ignored. I would

like that to cease to be the case. Minister Carroll could conduct a review; he could work with the City of Whittlesea. First and foremost, some sort of response would be fabulous.

Eastern Victoria Region

Melina BATH (Eastern Victoria) (13:04): (224) My question is to the Minister for Agriculture. Labor's January 2024 closure of the native timber industry is an indictment. Your so-called transition package for those affected by this closure will not come anywhere near close to supporting people. My constituent Sai Madarapu and his wife recently invested their life savings when they purchased the Orbost IGA supermarket for the eye-watering sum of \$780,000 on the proviso that the industry would be there until 2030. They had seven years to recoup their investment. You have just ripped a vital industry out of this town. Sai is gutted because he could be forced to go bust even before his business opens. What financial supports will be available to retailers in Orbost to keep them afloat?

Sitting suspended 1:05 pm until 2:06 pm.

Bills

Public Administration and Planning Legislation Amendment (Control of Lobbyists) Bill 2023

Second reading

Debate resumed.

Tom McINTOSH (Eastern Victoria) (14:06): Bairnsdale Regional Health are taking positive steps to address the challenges in their community, including, for example, the great tyranny of distance in East Gippsland. The health service, led by Chris, is implementing a fantastic new program called HoloLens. HoloLens allows people in remote East Gippsland to wear a virtual reality headset and see a specialist in Melbourne. These are the kinds of advances in our society that are being led by people on public sector boards.

Hospital boards are paid, but it is not a lot for professional people. They are not volunteers, but it is worth noting their tireless work advocating on behalf of the community. Let us just say, overwhelmingly people do not do this sort of work for the money. Finding the right person for these essential roles in our community can be hard. This data is from the Victorian Public Service Commission: 81 per cent of board members volunteer their time, and 77 per cent of board members reside in regional and rural Victoria. Recruiting to these boards is a key component of ensuring public trust and accountability in these entities, and a key component of public trust in public entities is that the boards look like the communities that they serve.

A key part of that reflection of the community is gender parity. In the past women were under-represented on major Victorian public sector boards, so in March 2015 the government set a 50 per cent target for all new appointments to major boards to be women. The result of that was from 2015 to 2021 the number of women on major boards went up from 39 per cent to 55 per cent. That is for major boards. When you expand that to all boards, women on all boards have gone up from 36 per cent at June 2018 to 40 per cent at June 2021. This does not include school councils as that data is unavailable.

The percentage breakdown of board members shows 1.6 per cent identify as Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people and 18 per cent as culturally or linguistically diverse; 1.4 per cent identify as a person with a disability; and 77 per cent are regional and rural residents. There is more to do in terms of reflecting the Victorian community. Again, that is a key facet of public trust, which this bill is apparently trying to achieve and which is the direct subject of the *Operation Clara* report, which it is in response to.

We set a target for women on boards and that was met, like how on this side of the chamber we set a target for women representing the community in Parliament. I am proud to say we have met and exceeded that target. Those opposite have not set those targets and they have paid the price for that,

and we have seen over recent times that respect for diversity – which again is a key part of public trust; the public want to see representatives who are just that, representative – is not an area of public trust that the opposition are interested in.

Local government does deliver so many essential services for the community, and again these institutions need to be promoting trust in public administration, trust in the community and trust in each other. To do this the government is making sure these bodies represent the community. These thousands of representatives of Victoria are participating in democracy. They are representing their community, they are having a say and they are contributing to the contest of ideas and putting those ideas to a vote. All of these representatives and these boards must address the issue of conflict of interest, which is the fundamental point of the *Operation Clara* recommendations.

According to this bill, the purpose is to ‘amend the Public Administration Act 2004 and the Victorian Planning Authority Act 2017 to provide more control over lobbyists’. This is a very odd purpose and shows how rushed and sloppy the opposition has been in drafting the bill. In *Operation Clara*, IBAC was concerned not with controlling lobbyists but with the issues of transparency and with issues of integrity specifically relating to conflicts of interest. The recommendations from *Operation Clara* are to amend and strengthen guidelines and codes of conduct to explicitly address conflicts of interest arising from lobbyists. IBAC recommends that this is done through the Department of Premier and Cabinet amending the appointment and remuneration guidelines and the lobbyist code of conduct, as well as through the Victorian Public Sector Commission revising the code of conduct for directors. We need to get the consultation right and ensure that the concerns outlined in IBAC’s report are properly addressed. We will get any legislative reform we bring to this place right and not rush it to score cheap political points.

Public trust, accountability and integrity do not just stem from government-related public sector entities either, and we need to remember this. Every week I am out and about in Eastern Victoria meeting with constituents on the ground. A lot of the time these groups are committees that have some management responsibility. Committees manage volunteer clubs and associations at the local grassroots level. These are the football clubs, the rec reserve committees, the neighbourhood house committees – you name an important local institution in our community, and there is a team of volunteers coming together to take part in local democracy to further their interests and passions.

When I meet with these groups, with these committees, it is often those that have the people that are willing to step up and do the work that are most seeing their organisations, their groups, prosper, thrive, have success, support the community – whatever their endeavour is that they are doing. It is those individuals within that group, within that committee, that take the time and make the effort – I have talked about how they are volunteers, or those that are paid are often not paid a huge amount of money – that get the results and get the success that the rest of the community then gets to enjoy and celebrate. Whether it is sports clubs having success on the field or in whatever endeavour they may be pursuing or whether it is groups that are trying to help individuals in society, those that are facing hardship, they are there to support locals. So these committees and their governance are also representative, and the government has continued to support participation at the local level in sport and in other community activities by women and people from diverse backgrounds.

I want to use this time debating public accountability and integrity to highlight the work of these groups. Whether it is the committee of the Wurruk Community House or the Mornington Football Club, their work on the ground continues to build our community from the ground up through their representation and volunteering. These efforts go towards having a more trusting society where people know each other and work together to pursue their interests, and it is that building of community that builds in a robust strength. We weave a fabric of community by these people stepping forward and others coming around them and supporting them by having joint endeavours. That is when we get the best outcomes, and that to me is community. That these individuals come together to form committees, to form groups and to display that for the community to all enjoy and benefit from is something that we should truly acknowledge and celebrate.

Often these interests are essential. I spoke before about public boards for schools and hospitals, but as the Minister for Early Childhood and Pre-Prep is here with us right now, what about local kindergartens? The government has invested massively in kindergarten, has made three-year-old kinder free and is making huge investments in community infrastructure to make places available and get families back working if they choose to, particularly women. And we know that it is particularly women who are raising children and who are out of work, and by the time it is that they get back to work they have seen their peers advance ahead of them. They have stayed in the one place in their career advancement while others go forward. So everything we can do to support these families and these women, if they do indeed wish to get back to work, is absolutely critical.

The volunteers who run these facilities are representing their community, and I want it on the record as a key factor in building public trust. Public trust in our institutions is vitally important for our state and for our democracy. The people who put their hands up to take leadership roles in our community should be commended, and I have made a point of doing that in this contribution, especially for those groups in Eastern Victoria. We need to ensure in public life – and that includes in Parliament and on our essential boards of public bodies – that people are acting in the interests of all Victorians and not other, conflicted interests.

This bill, however, should be opposed because it is rushed and it is sloppy. The important matters raised in the *Operation Clara* report relating to conflicts of interest inherent when dealing with political lobbyists are matters that the government is pursuing.

Lee TARLAMIS (South-Eastern Metropolitan) (14:16): I move:

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

Motion agreed to and debate adjourned until later this day.

Motions

Budget 2023–24

Evan MULHOLLAND (Northern Metropolitan) (14:17): I move:

That this house notes:

- (1) the 2023–24 Victorian budget handed down by Labor will inflict further economic damage on Victoria and Victorians for years to come;
- (2) that Victoria's debt is set to reach \$171 billion by 2026 and interest repayments will double to \$22 million per day;
- (3) the decisions and actions of the Andrews Labor government are causing fiscal damage to Victoria and harming business confidence;
- (4) the government's ongoing tax grabs are hurting mum-and-dad investors;
- (5) CPA Australia, the Victorian Chamber of Commerce and Industry, Independent Schools Victoria, the Property Council and the Real Estate Institute of Victoria have all raised serious concerns regarding the government's approach to managing the state's finances;
- (6) the ongoing commentary led by the Premier and government ministers blaming the parlous state of Victoria's finances on the Reserve Bank of Australia and COVID-19 and refusing to take any responsibility for the dire financial state that Victoria is in;
- (7) the budget blowouts in excess of \$30 billion on major infrastructure projects is due to gross mismanagement and waste by the Andrews government; and
- (8) that due to this fiscal incompetence, it is clear that Victoria is broke, life is getting harder and Victorians are being punished for the Andrews Labor government's incompetence.

Victorians should have a government that works for them and that makes their lives easier. Government is supposed to be an institution that protects and empowers people, but under this government it has become an institution that Victorians fear. The best that Victorians can wish for from this government is that they are not in the firing line for the new and higher taxes. Each year

without fail Labor finds new ways to put a stranglehold on this economy and new ways to push up the cost of living. But this year the government has gone too far, and the Victorian public knows it. They have poked the bear. The reality has set in that Labor has played loose with the economy for too long, and now their only solution – their only solution – is higher taxes. There are 6.8 million Victorians who are going to be paying more and getting less because of this budget handed down last Tuesday. The Premier and his government are trapping Victorians with the price of their debt-fuelled spending and tens of billions of dollars in waste and blowouts. The budget reflects nothing more and nothing less than the financial mismanagement and lack of credibility and integrity of the Andrews government. This is not a budget that makes life better but one that burdens Victorians with more debt, more taxes, cuts to infrastructure and broken promises.

We believe in uniting Victoria and uniting Victorians. We believe that the role of government is to empower people to get ahead by forging their own path and achieving what they want to achieve, and instead we have a government that divides people. Labor has introduced almost 50 – they are almost at the half-tonne, at the G – new taxes since coming to government. Before last week's punishing new taxes were announced Victorians were already paying the highest taxes in Australia: \$5638 per person – more than any other state. Victorians can feel their wages being overtaken by inflation. They can see it when they visit the supermarket, try to buy a home or try to buy anything, basically. Prices are going up because this government have overheated the economy, and wages are going down because this government think your pay rise belongs to them.

It is a budget that punishes 6.8 million Victorians, who just want to get ahead. If you are a business wanting to grow and employ more people, you will be slogged with higher payroll tax, and if you are looking for a new home or house and land package, you will be paying more because developers will be paying more in land tax. If you are hoping to invest in the property market to be self-sufficient in retirement, the Treasurer says that you will pay an extra \$1300 per year, and you will go on paying \$1300 every year for the next 10 years. And if you are a renter, you will be paying more because of the government's new renters tax.

We even have Labor members, like member for North-Eastern Metropolitan Region – not Mr McGowan but Ms Terpstra, the gift that keeps on giving – suggesting that her government's new taxes:

... might encourage wealthy property –

owners to –

... sell multiple properties increasing supply. Is that a bad thing? Like how many properties does one need to own ...

Maybe Ms Terpstra should ask some of her own colleagues. Maybe she should ask the Attorney-General. Maybe she should ask the member for Essendon, who alongside his share portfolio seems to have quite the property investment portfolio. And as Ms Crozier pointed out yesterday in her motion, she seems to be taking several pot shots – rather unkind pot shots – at her colleagues as well.

I will just quote another Labor Party comrade – and I know a lot of you on that side have different views on him or rather do not like him – former deputy secretary Kos Samaras:

... I have a personal and moral objection to people on my side of politics owning more than their own home. My side of politics, the Left, should not own the roof over another worker's head.

What an insult. It was a gibe across the chamber to his own side, just like Ms Terpstra did to her own side. The Labor Party say they are the party for renters, but the Labor Party are too ashamed to admit that all their increases in land tax will do is punish renters with higher prices and less housing investment, further reducing supply. It is a renters tax and they know it.

I have been taking a very active role in the current stamp duty inquiry by the Economy and Infrastructure Committee and listening to the experts and getting their views on what land taxes will

do to investments. One of the experts we heard from was the CEO of the Real Estate Institute of Victoria Quentin Kilian, who said the proposed renters tax would immediately have an impact on supply. I am going to quote him directly. He said:

... supply ... is where we need to be focusing ... not disincentivising ...

He rightly noted:

It is already difficult for many people to find a property – we see often 40 to 50 people attending ...

open for inspections. He went on:

By further diminishing ... supply, it is going to put further pressure on people finding ... a home ...

And then we see the Treasurer saying that he is open to a rent cap. The committee – the stamp duty inquiry – was urged by several policy experts in the strongest possible terms against this kind of ludicrous, interventionist policy, but those on the other side of the house just cannot help themselves with their government intervention. It does not just undermine the market and undermine investment in new supply, which is the biggest driver of rent increases, but a further shortage of supply would further dwindle our housing stock, which already has vacancy rates of under 1 per cent.

As we have seen overseas – perhaps the members could go on a study tour if they are still allowed to go overseas – in San Francisco, for example, Stanford economists found that in the long run rent caps drove rents up, not down, because they led to a number of landlords converting their housing to other uses, and this further reduced the supply of rental units.

I am completely not surprised – they are not even here – by the Greens' lack of economic understanding in this regard, but I am terrified to hear these kinds of flippant comments and the floating of ludicrous proposals from our state Treasurer. At the very same time we now have a public housing waiting list with 70,000 Victorians waiting for a roof over their head. The security and stability that that provides is very important. These people have been left behind, and new taxes will only push that number higher.

On schools, if you are in my part of the state, families that send their kids to local independent schools do so because they struggle to get their kids into nearby public schools because of their lack of classroom space. They want to give their children the best start in life and send their kids to great schools, like Aitken College in Greenvale – they are certainly not happy with the Labor member up there – or Hume Anglican Grammar in Mickleham. Now this Labor government is hitting them with a schools tax, costing parents an extra \$1000 per child every year for the next decade. They are not elite and profitable schools, as described by the Premier. If the Premier was aware of the Victorian Registration and Qualifications Authority guidelines, he would know schools have to run as not-for-profits. It is under the regulations that he presides over, yet he is calling them profitable.

There are fantastic independent schools that take hundreds of thousands of students from working-class families and provide them with an education. Greenvale, after decades of advocacy by the community, only recently just got a new secondary college. It does not run years 10 to 12 yet, and so parents in Greenvale really only have scarce options for secondary schooling and send their kids to a not high-fee but relatively low-fee independent school like Aitken College. Similarly with Hume, Mount Ridley College, the closest public school, is completely over capacity with 2700 students. Maybe if those on that side of the chamber, as my learned colleague says, get outside the tram tracks and visit the growth areas they actually represent, without coming across from the other side of town where they actually live, they might understand what this tax will do to working families.

This tax is immoral, and I am very pleased that not only will the Liberals and Nationals oppose this immoral tax but we will repeal it when we come to government in 2026. When Labor taxes schools, parents pay. Let me be clear: we will oppose Labor's school tax, Labor's rent tax, Labor's job tax and Labor's debt tax, and we oppose these taxes because we are for Victorians. We say to millions of Victorian families: under the Liberal and National parties you will be thousands of dollars better off

each and every year. Under Labor, Victorians will continue to owe \$171 billion – that is \$25,000 for every Victorian man, woman and child – and they will pay \$22 million a day, each and every day, just to pay the Andrews government's interest bill. What kind of future is that setting up for our youngest Victorians – paying off the debt of a government they were too young to vote for?

Under Labor Victoria is broke and our roads are broken. Labor has been punishing Victorians with a \$380 million reduction in annual spending on roads maintenance since 2020. That is a massive 45 per cent cut. Our roads maintenance budget has now been cut by a further 25 per cent in this budget to just \$441 million. This is less than the last budget of the former coalition government in 2014, and that is before you factor in inflation, which has been made worse by this government with project cost overruns and mismanagement. Nothing personifies the lack of investment in roads more than when back in February the people of Wallan in my electorate had had enough of potholes on the Northern Highway, a state arterial road which VicRoads is meant to look after. They created a makeshift garden bed on the Northern Highway, put a tree in it and named it 'Wallan Botanical Gardens – sponsored by VicRoads'.

I asked the minister about this. I asked her to review the maintenance schedule. She came back to me several months later – four or five months later – and here is what she said:

In this instance, the pothole itself was not classified as an immediate hazard according to DTP's Road Management Plan and was therefore not included for scheduled repair with other defects to be fixed in future.

However, when the pothole was altered it become a high priority hazard due to the increased risk to road users and was addressed accordingly.

Isn't that interesting? Because there was a tree planted, it got fixed. Apparently it was not a high priority even though at least six people reported serious damage to their cars going on to the Northern Highway. You basically need a four-wheel drive to get to the Leader of the Government's electorate office on the Northern Highway. Otherwise you will be in deep trouble. Maybe –

A member interjected.

Evan MULHOLLAND: Yes, exactly. I will take the interjection from Mrs McArthur.

But we also saw health cuts in this budget, as I know Ms Crozier knows. Our local hospitals are underfunded, yet the state budget continues to confirm the Andrews government will cut \$1 billion from the health budget. This follows a \$2 billion cut to health in last year's budget. Worst of all, the budget figures confirm Labor's \$4 billion in 2022 state election commitments for hospital upgrades remains less than 8 per cent funded over four years. That is a \$3.7 billion shortfall for developments at the Royal Melbourne and Royal Women's hospitals.

Residents in my electorate of Northern Metropolitan have the right to feel duded. Labor promised an over \$1 billion package for northern hospitals – for the Northern Hospital and the Austin Hospital – and this remains 92 per cent underfunded, with only \$320-odd million committed to over six hospitals – not just the two but over six hospitals. I know my colleague Wayne Farnham in Narracan is pretty annoyed about the commitments of the government towards the West Gippsland hospital, as I know my colleague Dr Heath is as well. This budget is making it harder for Victorians in the northern suburbs to get decent access to health care.

This government is tired. This government has run out of ideas. Labor has run out of an agenda and it has no money left in the bank. It has actually given up on governing. We are almost halfway through the year and the government has only passed 10 bills. As I pointed out last week, we finished up at 3:30 last Thursday when they decided that governing was all too hard. What message does it send to working families that Labor is throwing into the wall in this budget? They have not addressed the cost-of-living crisis – they have poured petrol on it – and they are not even willing to do a full week's work to justify their decisions.

There were plenty of cuts to essential services, cuts to infrastructure, cuts to schools and cuts to hospitals, but there is one thing that was not cut in this budget, and that is the government's spin team. They have been hard at work doing the best they can to cover for the fact that the government has nothing new to announce and is just recycling the same projects over and over again. The spin team in the Premier's private office are hard at work. The Premier's office has more staff than the Prime Minister. Daniel Andrews has never justified why he needs, in the state of Victoria, more staff than the Prime Minister of Australia. You have to watch with a microscope to see any progress inching forward on these announcements, but that does not stop the army of spin doctors from doing their best.

Look at the Wallan diamond in my electorate, for example. At four separate state and federal elections the Labor Party has announced they are building the Wallan diamond, an essential piece of road infrastructure that needs to be built to provide a fast connection for residents of Wallan to the Hume Freeway as they are stuck in ever-increasing traffic. As a Liberal member for Northern Victoria was pointing out before, we still do not know answers to this. They said a while ago that they were undertaking planning, but then they said recently that they are undertaking a business case. They were undertaking planning and now they are undertaking a business case. They have moved any sort of start or completion date to 'TBC' because the federal government's infrastructure review means all infrastructure projects are on hold. We have not seen any members, whether it be the member for Yan Yean, the member for Kalkallo, other members for Northern Metro, other members for Northern Victoria or the federal member for McEwen, fight to keep the \$50 million that was budgeted by the former coalition government for Wallan, because they do not actually care about our growth areas.

They do not actually care about what they are doing. Just ask the residents of Kalkallo who were out at the Hume Community Market on the weekend who spend an hour and a half in traffic every morning because the government has bungled their planning system. They cannot actually get out onto Donnybrook Road because it is a single lane, even though they have been warned for almost a decade while they have been in government that Donnybrook Road needs to be duplicated – still nothing in this budget for Donnybrook Road. This is happening all across our state. Whether it be in Point Cook or whether it be down in the south-east, the government is not investing in our growth areas and the road infrastructure that we need.

The unfortunate reality is that for as long as this government is in power, Victorians will continue to pay more and get less because this government simply cannot manage money. It has run out of an agenda. It is now spinning its way through every week rather than tackling the serious problems facing our state. Victoria deserves better. Victoria deserves a government that backs it and delivers for it.

Michael GALEA (South-Eastern Metropolitan) (14:36): I also rise to speak on this motion. I do thank the member for raising the 2023–24 state budget, as it allows this house to discuss the critical investment that this budget is delivering. However, I emphatically do not support this motion, which is incorrect in its assertions. It is something that seems to be a bit of a pattern amongst those opposite, making some incorrect assertions. The motion disregards the vital investment in needed services that will hugely benefit this state. This budget is responsible and considerate of the impact the unprecedented COVID-19 pandemic has had on our economy and the measures that were necessary to adequately respond to it. The revenue measures in this budget are carefully considered and are an important component of the debt recovery plan being implemented by this government as it gets on with the job of doing what matters.

This budget has delivered on what matters for my constituents in the South-Eastern Metropolitan Region and many others by supporting the services that our growing communities require, providing transformational investment to improve our society and delivering on the Andrews Labor government's election commitments. This budget has delivered meaningfully for my region, building upon the continued investment of previous budgets to ensure that our communities are supported and receive the services and infrastructure that we need in my fast-growing part of Melbourne.

Each budget too in the previous Parliament delivered significant reforms and groundbreaking investments. For example, previous budgets included the \$5.3 billion Big Housing Build, the two budgets that provided \$5.1 billion in critical mental health reforms and almost \$5 billion to support universal three-year-old kinder. These transformational programs provide the support Victorians need, and they deliver on what matters.

This year's budget is responsible, and it provides ongoing support for the programs that benefit Victorians and are supported by Victorians. The Andrews Labor government continues to deliver critical funding towards substantial investment in new and upgraded schools, hospitals and health care, early childhood education, transport infrastructure, TAFE, sports and communities. The budget is delivering for my constituents, providing the services and investment in communities that my region needs. New schools are being delivered. We have got new schools: Thompsons West and Clyde North – both primary schools – and Casey Central primary school. We have also got the new Clyde North secondary school. These are of course on top of the schools already being built in that part of my region. There is also funding in place to upgrade and plan to upgrade schools across my region, including Cheltenham Secondary College, Cranbourne East Secondary College, Cranbourne Park Primary School, Hallam Secondary College, Keysborough Gardens Primary, St Jude's Primary School and Carrington Primary School too.

The budget delivers for women, with women's health clinics at Casey Hospital, Frankston Hospital and the Monash Medical Centre, part of an almost \$58 million investment to deliver 20 women's health clinics across Victoria, which is part of a larger \$153.9 million budget package. In addition, Dandenong Hospital and the Monash Medical Centre are sharing \$320 million to upgrade hospital infrastructure to deliver better care for families across the south-east. Various local projects, road investment grants, sporting facilities, transport funding and other funds and projects are being delivered across Victoria.

I would be very happy to spend the rest of my contribution going over the rest of it, but I will also leave some time for others to go over theirs as well. But I do want to mention two more in my region: the \$70 million vital upgrade to Clyde Road at the intersection of Thompsons Road, and we are delivering on our election commitment to provide \$1.2 million for a pavilion upgrade at the Grices Road recreation reserve in Clyde North. This is part of a broader \$201.2 million program being delivered by the outstanding Minister for Community Sport, also the member for Kalkallo, who has taken a keen interest in this project.

I must say it is extremely disappointing that whilst we are delivering on our election commitments for the south-east we have others out there making things up and saying that we are not delivering them. Two days after the budget the local member for Berwick on the front page of the *Berwick Star News* was out there spreading untrue things about the budget, saying –

Members interjecting.

Michael GALEA: Well, it is a fine newspaper. Unfortunately –

Nicholas McGowan: On a point of order, President, I believe I saw a prop, but I could be mistaken. I would ask you to rule that props are not appropriate in this place.

The DEPUTY PRESIDENT: I think the member was referring to a newspaper article, and he is not required to table that, but I would remind everyone that the use of props in the chamber and the wearing of badges et cetera is not acceptable.

Michael GALEA: Thank you, Deputy President. I am happy to respect that. I am happy to table it. It is in the public domain of course too; it is the front page of a local newspaper. But it seems that those opposite do not want attention drawn to this. The quote is:

Mr Battin said the Berwick Churches Soccer Club was another promise broken by the State Government, with \$1.2 million pledged days before the state election.

“There are no new sports facilities planned in the Berwick electorate by Labor ...

Well, we have delivered it. We have put the full amount of \$1.2 million in funding in this project. I know that the adjacent local member, the member for Narre Warren South, who has been an outstanding advocate for this project – he has seen this from start to finish – has been dealing with the local sporting clubs, sporting clubs who have been distressed because their local member is telling them that they have not got it, but they do. So let us stick to facts if we can.

On the subject of facts, other members are saying that there is zero dollars in funding for schools in the Rowville electorate. Well, there are two schools being upgraded, public and private, in the Rowville electorate in this budget. So let us stick to the facts if we can.

Across Victoria there is a wide range of commitments that are being made in seats in my region and beyond. In the North-Eastern Metropolitan Region, where Mr McGowan is from, in Warrandyte we are putting \$300,000 into the Warrandyte Cricket Club. I am not sure who the next member for Warrandyte will be. If it is from the Liberals side maybe the former member for Kew will come crashing back into the Parliament, maybe even we will have some others interested, maybe some of your friends, Beverley – Mrs McArthur, I should say. Maybe an adviser to Dr Bach Tristan Layton will put his hand up for it. Who knows? There could be all sorts of people lurking in the shadows for that seat that is being vacated not six months after a state election – six months – abandoning the people of Warrandyte. It is very sad to see.

But across the state – across South-Eastern Metropolitan Region in Berwick, Clyde, Rowville and Frankston; in Warrandyte; and across other parts of the city as well and parts within and outside the tram tracks – this is a government that is delivering for Victorians, and we will continue to prioritise the most important things we can in this budget to deliver and continue to deliver for Victorians.

Beyond the south-east and beyond other parts that I have mentioned, it is important to mention some statewide initiatives as well. It is not just about local projects, in contrast to the narrow and negative perceptions of the opposition, who are intent on denigrating the support being delivered for Victorians. Members on this side are focused on delivering the things that matter to Victorians. That includes things like bringing back the SEC – investing \$1 billion in cheaper energy and cleaner energy through a state-owned energy company that will actively participate in the energy market.

The budget also looks towards the future, supporting Victorians to get the skills that our communities need and encouraging and supporting the future generation of skilled workers by delivering a 100 per cent discount on vehicle registration for eligible tradies and apprentices.

Members interjecting.

Michael GALEA: Apparently those opposite do not care about giving 100 per cent discounts for tradies on their registrations. They can keep shouting all they want, but we are still going to deliver. We are going to deliver that, doubling the 50 per cent discount that is already in place.

We all know that more skilled and trained workers are needed in various areas, so it is also good to see funding in this budget to train and deploy 25 paramedic practitioners to respond to and provide urgent care in the community. In addition, there is also funding to train 40 new MICA paramedics.

The Andrews Labor government supports aspiring and existing nurses. The last few years have reinforced their importance to us all. I applaud the government enshrining nurse-to-patient ratios and making it free to study nursing in this state. I am further pleased to see funding for more nurses and midwives for resuscitation bays, maternity night shifts, intensive care units, high-dependency units, coronary care units and aged care residential in-reach facilities.

It is more than adult education being supported. The government continues to deliver on our transformational program to provide universal three-year-old kinder, and I know the minister is very excited about that as well. In addition, there is funding to create 10 new bilingual kindergartens and

eight new toy libraries and to establish an extra 150 extra bush kinder programs each year. The fact is that this government is investing in the future of our state and delivering what matters. In my last few seconds I will say that I do not support this motion.

Georgie CROZIER (Southern Metropolitan) (14:46): I am very pleased to be able to rise and speak to Mr Mulholland's motion because this goes to a very significant issue that the state is facing, and that is our economic situation. What we hear from government MPs the entire time is just the trotting out of the spin lines and all of the rubbish that keeps coming out of this government, but the reality is that this state is in deep, deep financial trouble: \$171 billion in debt with \$10 million being paid in interest each and every day, rising to over \$22 million in just a couple of years time. Those people on the other side keep saying there is free this and free that – nothing is free. The taxpayer pays for it. For goodness sake, stop putting out that everything is free and that you are getting on and doing this because that is what is helping Victorians. Every Victorian is going to pay for the fiscal mismanagement undertaken by the worst Premier this state has ever had and the irresponsible ministers and the backbench that form this government.

There is no doubt at all that this budget is confirmation of an abject economic failure and mismanagement. It is astounding the numbers that keep coming out of government – the projections. Yet, as Mr Mulholland said, where is the narrowing of the staff within the Premier's office, the spin doctors that keep going out there and telling Victorians absolute rubbish? At some point you must take responsibility for the ongoing economic failures and mismanagement of this state. Stop blaming COVID, stop blaming the RBA, stop blaming the former federal government. It is pathetic.

This government was running up massive debt before COVID. Look at the figures. Go and look at the budget figures. Go and look at the performance figures in health – they will tell you. Look at what we are getting. We are no better off – it is getting worse. The outcomes are getting worse despite the waste and mismanagement, and we know where that is happening – it is in these massive infrastructure projects, over \$30 billion.

Nicholas McGowan: It is disgraceful.

Georgie CROZIER: It is disgraceful, Mr McGowan, utterly disgraceful and an abuse of taxpayers money, and we have seen this week the rotting that has occurred throughout these projects. Where is the accountability, where is the responsibility from the government? It is nowhere. We saw it through COVID: nobody took responsibility for the hundreds of Victorians that died because of the decisions made by your government.

Renee Heath: Shame.

Georgie CROZIER: Absolutely shameful. We had the Coate inquiry – the farcical Coate inquiry, where no-one could recall or remember – and yet you have the audacity to blame COVID for this rising debt that we are going to be saddled with. It is not us. It is our children and our grandchildren that are going to be saddled with this debt. At some point you must realise this, government, or are you so blind, are you so hopelessly inadequate with any understanding of prudent fiscal management –

Michael Galea interjected.

Georgie CROZIER: Mr Galea, I think that is –

Bev McArthur: You can't just keep blaming COVID.

Georgie CROZIER: You blame COVID for everything. You blame COVID for the elective surgery waitlist. Well, they were at record numbers prior to COVID – fact. You say you want the facts; there are the facts. You say that you are delivering for all Victorians, but you are not; you are divisive. We have seen that with the schools tax and with the land tax – all of these taxes that are going to flow on. Confidence is going to sap from this state – it is. How many times have I gone out in the last week and spoken to people who are seriously worried? They are worried about their kids' futures. They are

worried about whether they will be able to get jobs. This state government does not create productivity, it just spends.

You do not get it. We need innovation. We need entrepreneurship. We need confidence in this state to bring industry back, not drive it out, because the taxes being put on business are enormous. The taxes being put on schools that have never had these taxes applied before are going to flow through to those hardworking parents and hardworking Victorians. They are not elite. They are not sitting on a cliff top like the member from Kororoit does on the weekend or in the penthouse in my electorate of Southern Metro in the Capitol building. She does not even live in her electorate. No, we are not talking about those elite people. We are talking about mums and dads, Victorians, who have worked so hard, sometimes in two jobs, to put their kids through what they see as a better education system. Look at the literacy, look at our standards in education – they are falling. They are appalling here in Victoria. The shadow pandemic, the mental ill health of our children, is because of what has happened in this state because of your government, your MPs and your Premier's decisions. Shutting down schools was not a federal government decision; that was a local state government decision, and it was an appalling decision that is going to impact our children for years to come.

You cannot hide from the facts. This Premier, who is so autocratic in style, who wields so much power, who you are all just puppets to – he pulls the strings.

Members interjecting.

Georgie CROZIER: You are. He is so autocratic, you do not have any say. We heard that from former ministers Hennessy and Mikakos just the other day. The tentacles go everywhere from the Premier's private office. They go right into every agency. They go everywhere in this state. This state is corrupt. It is broke.

A member: In their speeches.

Georgie CROZIER: It is everywhere – in their speeches, in their talking points. This motion is incredibly important, because it actually spells out why we are in so much trouble and why Victoria is really going to struggle. You cannot just keep taxing your way out of this debt. As Mr Mulholland said, there are almost 50 taxes. Daniel Andrews looked down the camera to Channel 7 reporter Peter Mitchell and said, 'I give you my word, no more taxes,' or words to that effect. That is what he said on the eve of the 2014 election: 'No more taxes.' We have had nearly 50 new or increased taxes, so you cannot believe a word Daniel Andrews says. We saw through COVID how it played out with many of those decisions. And the Treasurer says nothing. He stands by it; he is one of the puppets that I am talking about. Andrews is so autocratic.

Members interjecting.

Georgie CROZIER: Well, Ms Stitt, you may laugh.

Ingrid Stitt: I'm just laughing at how ludicrous you are. How did it go for you in November?

Georgie CROZIER: It is not ludicrous – \$171 billion in debt. There is no accountability. This debt is bigger than that of New South Wales, Queensland and Tasmania combined, and it is rising – \$10 million a day in interest. And you are blaming everybody else but yourselves because of the mismanagement and the incompetence – the gross incompetence.

Ingrid Stitt: We're getting on with it.

Georgie CROZIER: No, you are not getting on with it. You are actually sending the state broke, and that is the problem. You keep talking about free kinder, and you do not get it. The taxpayer pays for it, Ms Stitt. It is not free; somebody has to pay for it.

Ingrid Stitt interjected.

Georgie CROZIER: You are laughing. It is the mums and dads who are working hard and who are paying their taxes. It is the small business –

Ingrid Stitt: It's about priorities.

Georgie CROZIER: Yes, priorities. Your priority is to spend, spend, spend without any accountability. The mums and dads who are working hard, who are paying their taxes and who expect better services are not getting them. They are not getting better health services. You cannot even get a hospital bed in this state, and you cannot get an ambulance when you need one. Children's literacy standards are falling. Job confidence and business confidence are declining. Look at all the stakeholders – the Property Council, the Victorian Chamber of Commerce and Industry, the Victorian Farmers Federation, CPA Australia, Independent Schools Victoria and the Business Council of Australia. All of these stakeholders have said this budget is appalling. It is bad for Victoria. It is bad for Victoria's future, and it is simply shocking that those opposite can mock the situation we are in and have no regard for what the taxpayer is trying to do – get ahead. All they are wanting to do is try and get ahead, yet you are taxing them into oblivion. It is clear that life is getting harder under the Andrews government, and Victorians are being punished for Labor's incompetence. I urge all in this house to support this motion.

John BERGER (Southern Metropolitan) (14:56): Today I rise to speak on the motion on the budget from a colleague opposite, Mr Mulholland. In making this speech, I rise to say that I know a little bit about family budgets. In fact I am a renter, Mr Mulholland. Did you hear me? I am a renter, and as a father of six, I know a little bit about what you need to do to make ends meet. I also know how important it is that our economy bounces back from one of the most financially uncertain times in recent history.

I was proud last week to visit some of my local organisations, schools, not-for-profits and more. The motion says the budget means that Victorians are being punished. This budget means that we will honour our election commitments and deliver on them, and that is what I did for four organisations that I visited last Tuesday. Last week I had the privilege of attending four deserving organisations to let them know some good news.

First I visited the Camberwell Primary School, where I met Principal Gale, school council president Stuart Lindsay and parents association president Christina Woods to let them know that we are kickstarting planning on upgrades to their fantastic school. Then I visited Vision Australia, where I announced we will provide a \$60,000 grant to help them continue delivering key information to our community. After that I met with Suzie from the Water Well Project. I was proud to announce that we were giving them \$100,000 to support the health and wellbeing of the migrant, refugee and asylum seeker communities. Finally, I visited the amazing team at Port Phillip Community Group to confirm that we will be committing to our election commitment of \$55,000 to support their efforts – promises made, promises kept.

This budget is sensitive to the ongoing cost-of-living crisis. This budget is a very typically Labor budget – one that sticks to our values, one that does the fair thing and the right thing. It addresses the key areas of government work and funding, the fundamentals that change lives: development and infrastructure, health and education. But there has also been one overarching theme in the budget – mitigating the cost-of-living crisis. When times are tough we need a budget that is compassionate but considered, and that is exactly what this budget is. We are in a hard place right now – everyone is. The cost-of-living crisis is not localised just to Melbourne. Belts everywhere must get pulled in and get a lot tighter.

Before the pandemic, we were faced with a very different climate. Economic growth and employment were particularly strong, averaging 3.3 per cent and 2.9 per cent a year respectively over the five years to 2018–19 – the highest of all states. The unemployment rate had fallen to a 10-year low of 4.6 per cent in 2018–19. The Victorian economy was experiencing an extended period of strong jobs growth,

with over 468,000 new jobs created between November 2014 and March 2020 – more than any other state or territory. We were leading the nation. This does not mean that we will turn our backs on the people that need help through this most tough time. This does not mean that we can bury our heads in the sand but that we face the reality. I am committed to ensuring that hardworking families – those families that are doing the hard work, the right thing – are rewarded.

Education is one of the most important things the government can invest in, and it is a massive investment to support families. Education can make the difference between having opportunities and being left in the dark. It opens doors. The Andrews Labor government believes in committing to ensure that our education system offers students across the state pathways to a future they want. This encompasses all levels of education, and we are investing in every level of education from kinder to tertiary education. This budget follows through on the commitments that were made in last year's budget and promises we made to the Victorian people in the 2022 state election.

One of those commitments is the ongoing funding of the free kinder program. All young Victorians deserve to have a leg-up, and free education, free kinder, is exactly how. The government knows this. With free kinder, families of all backgrounds will be able to access much-needed child care.

We are also transforming our specialist schools, with a \$235 million package for specialist schools in Victoria to enable them to deliver services better fit for students living with a disability. I visited Belmore School the other day, where a lot of students are disabled, and the facility that is being built there at the moment for those young kids is going to set them up well for the future. We look forward to seeing that building when it is complete. I will speak a bit more about that facility later on today.

Students living with a disability and their families often feel like the system is set up for their failure, and this is not good enough. Our systems should be established to support these people they cater to, and with over \$200 million our state's education system will be moving closer to a fairer, more inclusive model. I know this firsthand, having visited the Belmore School – a school that helps those in need, a school that works with those with the most complex issues, both physical and mental.

The Andrews Labor government is also pulling schools into the future by funding more energy-efficient schools. Schools deserve to be aligned with the future, so it is important that we address emissions from them. I am proud to be part of a government that believes in building our schools up rather than shutting them down. In my electorate of Southern Metro I was proud to announce last week that we will be supporting the planning process for upgrades to Camberwell Primary School, and there are countless other schools across the state also benefiting from the Andrews Labor government's budget.

But we know that this must all be paid for. That is why the COVID debt repayment plan will balance the necessary public spending with the appropriate fiscal restraint. That is why our budget is being implemented in a fair way, a balanced way. Revenue measures are aligned to the size of businesses by payroll, to the land owned by commercial, industrial and other investors. We will not compromise our economic growth and we will not compromise our prosperity. It is vital that households and small businesses continue to be supported to drive our economy. Their role in the economy and jobs growth is critical and will remain so as the economy navigates global challenges of high inflation and rising interest rates. That is why we are investing in households.

A responsible government recognises that it is important to invest in health and support families. It means greater outcomes for all Victorians. There are a couple of key areas that we are really focusing on in this budget. Women's health is a key issue in this budget. We believe that all Victorians' health issues should be taken very seriously, regardless of sex or gender. That is why we are funding \$65 million for 10,800 additional laparoscopies to treat debilitating endometriosis, which affects one in every nine girls and women.

We also recognise the unique struggles that First Nations women face, which is why we have set aside \$58 million for 20 new women's health clinics and a dedicated Aboriginal-led women's clinic. This

will help overcome some of the barriers to treatment that women face, such as costs, confidentiality, geographical location of services and cultural and communication differences. Additionally, \$12 million is going into research initiatives that will directly benefit women's health, such as an inquiry into women's pain management and early work to establish a women's health research institute. I am proud to say that this involves clinics and health providers across my great electorate of Southern Metro, with part of the funding that is going to improve women's health going to the Monash Medical Centre in Clayton and to the Alfred hospital on St Kilda Road.

We are also working hard to establish mental health clinics across the state, especially in Southern Metro, with one of them popping up in St Kilda and one in Malvern. We are funding the planning of these mental health and wellbeing centres as part of the \$95.7 million package to address mental health in Victoria.

There is much concern over the repayment of our COVID debt. As our Treasurer explained last Tuesday, the Andrews Labor government heeded advice and borrowed money to financially protect vulnerable Victorians. Ask any economist and they will tell you there is good debt and there is bad debt. Good debt is the kind that we have got. It is the debt you get from building for the future for the people of Victoria, and it is the kind of debt that turns into something meaningful. It is an investment, but it is time we started paying it back.

It is the work of the Andrews Labor government that is pulling this state into the future, and this budget just confirms that. That is why there will be a range of savings and efficiencies implemented across government, totalling \$2.1 billion over four years. This includes reductions in corporate and back-office functions, reductions in labour hire and consultancy expenditures and efficiencies across public non-financial corporations and public financial corporations. These savings are designed to make government more efficient while maintaining frontline services. This budget does what a budget should – support the people of Victoria. We are addressing the debt we accrued over COVID without harming Victorians, and we continue to do what matters. We are doing what matters to bring back the SEC, doing what matters in health and education and doing what matters for Victoria.

Ann-Marie HERMANS (South-Eastern Metropolitan) (15:06): I also rise today to speak to this motion that has been proposed by my colleague Evan Mulholland. I think it is fantastic that we are paying attention to what this budget is actually doing. The 2023–24 Victorian budget handed down by Labor is going to inflict further economic damage on Victorians for many years to come, and we happen to know that the debt that we already have is bigger than three states – New South Wales, Queensland and Tasmania. All of their debts put together are not as big as the Victorian debt. That is a major failing of this government, and we cannot blame all of that on COVID. Even if we do, we have to think about the fact that we were the most locked down city in the world. That did not help our economy at all. We also have to look at point (2) that he has in the motion:

that Victoria's debt is set to reach \$171 billion by 2026 and interest repayments will double to \$22 million per day ...

That kind of rising debt being left to my children and my children's children is just unacceptable. It is no wonder that so many people are leaving Victoria and moving to other states – and have already left Victoria. If we think that this is not going to hurt businesses further, then we are just kidding ourselves. I can tell you that in the south-east right now we have so many empty shops. You only have to drive down the main street and into the central shopping areas of Frankston and you will see many shops that have been vacant for a very long period of time. Go to Mordialloc, go to Carrum or go somewhere up near Fountain Gate and you will find empty shops. People's businesses have gone broke, and they are not even able to get tenants in these places. Meanwhile renters are competing for places to live in, and they are going to continue to struggle.

This budget is a horror budget. It is going to hurt aspiring Victorians, and it will punish them and make their efforts as they struggle to get ahead more punitive. The budget sets up the 555,544 people in the South-Eastern Metropolitan Region with taxes that are going to make them worse off. I can start by

talking about an area that is actually in my electorate in Dandenong. Locally I am really disappointed that the promised \$295 million upgrade of Dandenong Hospital announced in October last year has been significantly underfunded. This is a hospital that actually reaches out to many sectors of the community and many different multicultural groups, and yet what has happened in a safe Labor seat? It has been underfunded. What a surprise. Labor's financial mismanagement of the health system means that Greater Dandenong patients are not getting the health services that they need or that they deserve. In fact elective surgery waitlists remain high and ambulance response times continue to cost lives.

I am a former teacher. I value education, but there will be a cost to local families and children because of Labor's new schools tax. Schools in the south-east may be affected, and I am going to include schools that are in neighbouring areas and regions which people from the south-east do travel to. Let me just give you a little bit of a run-down of some of the schools in the south-east that may be affected by this payroll tax change for schools: Haileybury college, St Margaret's, Mentone Grammar and Mentone Girls Grammar, Woodleigh School, Huntingtower School, the Knox School, Beacons Hills College, Waverley Christian College, Maranatha Christian School, Hillcrest Christian College, Lakeside College, Casey Grammar School, Mazonod College, Chairo Christian School, St Bede's College and Heatherton Christian College. It may also eventually impact schools like Belgrave Heights Christian School, Lighthouse Christian College, Kilbreda College, Heritage College, John Paul College, Nazareth College, St Peter's College, St Francis Xavier College, St John's Regional College, Bayside Christian College, Minaret College, Killester College and Cranbourne college.

I am just putting out a few names for you to consider of schools that could end up in an area where people are already struggling to pay their bills, already struggling with the rising cost of living and will now have to fork out more for education. Why do they have to send their kids to these schools? It is because some of the government schools are either overcrowded or not sufficiently funded and do not have the resources they need, or they are not happy with the curriculum and the options that are offered to their kids. So what? We are going to hurt them in the south-east where people need the most support. Isn't that typical. Because nine of those 11 seats happen to be Labor seats, the government is really looking after their own here.

If we consider Dandenong's vulnerable communities, they are also going to be hard hit with higher rents because of Labor's new property taxes, and \$100 million will be cut from vital health programs that many rely on.

Since 2014 Daniel Andrews has introduced more than 20 new or increased property taxes, and each hike has made home ownership more out of reach for Victorians. He has now introduced what we would like to call the renters tax, because new taxes on home owners will ultimately be passed on to the people who already are struggling in the rental market.

This ongoing mismanagement of Victoria's residential building sector is further restricting the supply of homes. Let us consider Porter Davis, for instance. This was a significant builder around Berwick, Clyde, Cranbourne, Sandhurst and Pakenham, and now it is gone. And what about Rawdon Hill builders? What is going on in our state that the lucrative building industry is now buckling under the pressure caused by the Andrews government bowing down to the impossible to compete with terms and pay conditions of the union-government building projects. It is absolutely impossible for some of our tradies to get ahead with their businesses when they are self-employed. People do not want to work for them because they cannot afford to compete with government projects and all of their workers are wanting to leave and go and work in government projects where they are being paid phenomenal amounts of money to do the same job. It is simply not sustainable. If we want to look at what is going wrong with our debt, let us take a look right there, because that is a major problem where we have cost blowouts. This is just one of the major issues.

What does that do to our younger Victorians who are trying to save and sacrifice, and many of them have done this for years. They deserve a fair shot at making their dreams of home ownership come

true. Many of them are now struggling in the rental market, which has become more and more competitive and is going to become more difficult as homeowners have to pass on those costs to the rental market.

This budget has provided shocking taxes on those who are struggling and striving to get ahead. Where is Daniel Andrews's commitment to supporting young Victorians' dreams of home ownership? Where is Daniel Andrews's commitment to supporting those who are going to be renting as we see the prices are only going to go up? Let us take a look at things like the TAC. The TAC is constantly having \$3 billion taken out of it – it is being used as a cash cow – and distributed amongst other areas. How is that good management? If we were actually caring about what happens on our roads, with our traffic and with our accident prevention, we would be considering how we use that money in the budget. This is just appalling, the way it is being done.

Let us take something like emergency services. Do you know they did not even provide the costings for the 000 emergency service? In fact the costings for telecommunications were not provided, and we are still concerned about response times. Dispatch and response times have not been provided, overall expenditure for emergency services has gone down, CFA volunteer numbers are dropping and we are not hitting those recruitment targets. In fact if we look at back-burning measures, they have also been omitted due to being discontinued in their current form – so they say. The list just goes on.

I will take one more area of my portfolio, WorkCover. Well, everybody knows that we are now looking at a 42 per cent increase on premiums. This government has just got to be kidding. And do you know what, there are hints that that is not where it is going to stop. Have you any idea what that is going to do to businesses? If you hit WorkCover premiums, that is actually going to run more businesses into the ground – more empty shops, more people leaving Victoria, less taxes and less money in the system, because you are not stimulating the economy with a budget like this.

So how are we going to get ahead? Well, all I can say is that I am going to be supporting this motion, because it is an absolute disgrace to have budget blowouts of \$30 billion on major infrastructure projects. It is an absolute disgrace to be taxing payroll for teachers. Schools are going to have to make tough decisions in their curriculum and the way they set up their schools – what they put their money towards – because they will have to find that money to pay for it all. That means what? Less excursions, less hands-on learning, less camps – (*Time expired*)

Jacinta ERMACORA (Western Victoria) (15:17): I am pleased to speak on the motion brought by those opposite, which does not aim to do anything productive. It is merely framed to unfairly critique the government on what has been a once-in-a-generation fiscal event. The aim of this budget is to follow through on election commitments and to do the responsible thing and put in place a plan to pay off the COVID portion of the state's debt, which after all is the non-productive portion. Without a plan and some tough decisions in place, it will not be paid off.

The main mechanism in this budget is to ensure that the COVID debt is paid off via the introduction of a temporary and targeted levy. This levy is targeted to those who are most able to pay. Not everyone did poorly during COVID; in fact some businesses were able to achieve significant increases in profits, and certainly property owners have experienced significant increases in value over the last four years. Certainly I could give one example with the federal JobKeeper: Harvey Norman was a very well known example of doing extremely well out of COVID.

I congratulate the Treasurer Tim Pallas on taking the tough decisions to pay this debt off. It is never easy to take responsibility, but that is exactly what this government is doing. Ensuring that the levy is targeted at those who have multiple homes and those most able to pay is the fair thing to do in the current cost-of-living environment. This government is not shying away from keeping Victorians safe during the pandemic, because COVID-19 did have a real and profound impact on Victorians, and the government has not sought to minimise that.

In 2020, while Victoria was in the midst of the pandemic, the government set a strategy to keep Victorians safe, and a part of this plan involved the government investing \$44 billion to fund the extraordinary needs of the health system in response to COVID. We had vaccination centres. We had additional hospital wards. We had extraordinary amounts of PPE. We had ventilators. We also had the cost of the science involved in the invention of the vaccine, although that was a joint global effort. The government also acted to protect jobs and support vulnerable Victorians. We did not cut TAFE and education or sell off public housing. We spent money to keep people alive, knowing this was a once-in-a-lifetime event. An immediate priority was to save jobs. As Labor, we understand the importance of a low unemployment rate and fostering opportunities for people to enter the workforce. I stand here proudly stating that our pledge of creating 200,000 jobs at the end of 2022 was a raging success.

We cannot ignore the financial cost of the COVID pandemic, but we also cannot ignore that the COVID pandemic was a once-in-a-lifetime event. No government around the world was fully prepared to brace against the economic impact of COVID. So we did what we needed to do: we borrowed money to protect lives and support families, workers and businesses during the global pandemic, as most governments did around the world. We also used the money to help small business and tourism across our state. We provided just under \$1 billion in payroll tax relief to businesses by providing refunds and waivers for small and medium-sized businesses. Our grants supported hospitality, entertainment, tourism businesses, non-essential local retail and other small businesses such as florists and garden suppliers.

This government has a plan to rectify this COVID debt. Unlike most governments, we have instituted a COVID debt repayment plan, which ensures we repay the COVID debt. This is in addition to the budget's plans to keep its promises, boost jobs and grow the economy to return to an operating surplus by the 2025–26 financial year. The COVID debt repayment plan will balance the necessary public spending with appropriate fiscal restraint. The measures in this budget are being implemented in a balanced and fair way.

To comment on regional Victoria alone, which is where my electorate falls, the unemployment rate as of this month is 3.4 per cent. I must say this unemployment rate in regional Victoria is around half of what it was at the last change of government, in November 2014, when those opposite were in government. Overall, jobs have grown by more than 340,000 since September 2020, the worst point in the pandemic economic downturn. So there is no doubt that the Victorian government navigated the economic challenge of COVID successfully.

Turning to the motion's claim that the budget will inflict damage on Victorians, I disagree with this proposition. More broadly, across the state the budget has focused on health, education, training and jobs because we recognise that, in order to maintain a strong economy, the work starts from the ground up in every community. This includes following through on our kinder reforms, renewable trade training and free TAFE.

In Western Victoria alone, I was thrilled last week to announce several budget initiatives that do the opposite of inflicting damage on Victorians; rather, they help them. South West TAFE in Warrnambool will benefit from a new tech school that will provide school students in the district with opportunities to explore cutting-edge and emerging technologies to see what prompts their interest in a career. Some of the learning areas include robotics, automation, coding, AI, drone technology and other emerging technologies, including STEM. South West TAFE are also receiving a new building innovation and design centre, including a large trades workshop with specialist equipment for initiatives like green plumbing, solar and battery electrical systems, sustainable integrated building designs and new construction technologies, boosting Victoria's already growing renewable economy.

Then there has been a strong focus on providing women with the health services they need. In my contribution yesterday I mentioned how the augmented comprehensive women's health clinic in Warrnambool is already changing the way women's health issues are treated, providing care and

support for conditions like endometriosis, pelvic pain, polycystic ovary syndrome, perimenopause and menopause.

I also mentioned Warrnambool Base Hospital and the PET machine. That scanner will provide cardiovascular diagnoses, cancer diagnoses and neurological disease diagnoses closer to home for country people. These periods of time are extremely stressful, and to have a PET scanner in Warrnambool will mean that many people do not have to travel anywhere near the distance they had to previously.

The budget also awarded \$5 million worth of upgrades to Our Lady Help of Christians Primary School in Warrnambool. This is going to involve six brand new classrooms, because the school is growing. An additional \$100,000 has been awarded to the Warrnambool Community Garden, who have been including the community across Warrnambool in a gardening experience that is educational, demonstrating sustainable gardening and healthy eating. And \$1.25 million has been awarded to upgrade facilities at the Portland Gymnastics Club. The Portland gymnastics facilities are too small. In actual practicality the roof is too low, and when some of the senior gymnasts spin around on – whatever it is, I am not sure what the –

Tom McIntosh: The bars.

Jacinta ERMACORA: the bars, yes, they have to bend their knees in order to not hit the roof. You only need to walk in there to see that that money will be very well spent on a club with 200 members in a very much outer regional community.

And so the evidence is irrefutable: the government keeps its promises and Victorians can be assured that the government's debt reduction strategy is fair, temporary and targeted.

Renee HEATH (Eastern Victoria) (15:26): I rise to speak in support of Mr Mulholland's motion, and it is probably clear where I am going to start. Since coming into government in 2014 the Labor government has waged war on regional jobs. First it was the power industry: with the closure of Hazelwood a thousand jobs were lost, and we were promised that those jobs would be replaced, yet we are still waiting. Now there is the native timber industry, and once again thousands and thousands of workers' jobs are going to be lost and families will also be hurt due to that decision. Labor has no plan for the thousands of jobs they are ripping out of the community, and free TAFE just will not cut it; that is not a sustainable pathway from a full-time job or a career. Some of these people are from families that have worked in these industries for three generations, and that is the option they are faced with.

I have to say I find the time for an ideological decision like this so strange. The state does not have the money to compensate the communities, because the state is drowning in debt. I have said it many times in this place, but because of the \$171 billion in debt that this government has racked up, we are paying \$10 million per day in interest alone. May I remind you that there is no such thing as government money – there is taxpayer money, and it is the private sector that funds the public sector. So you would think that this government, which is funded by the community that it is meant to serve, would show the native timber industry a little bit more respect. We should not be shutting down industry, we should be encouraging it and we should be boosting industry, especially when we find ourselves in a financial crisis like we are in right now.

The regional development budget – and may I remind you the purpose of this budget is to 'build prosperous and livable regions'; that is the purpose of this fund – has been cut in half. What an interesting time to cut this fund in half. The decision to make the native timber industry close will instantly make these regions less prosperous and it will make them less livable, and we can tell this because there are literally thousands and thousands of families that are going to have to move out of these regions. You cannot paralyse the private sector and then expect that the government can continue resourcing the jobs that they are meant to do – and some of these jobs are just bare minimum, like fixing potholes in roads. Our roads are in a terrible state of repair, they are not fit for purpose and we

cannot fund that. Basic upgrades in schools: we cannot fund that at the moment because the state is broke. Healthcare infrastructure: our communities are growing yet our health infrastructure is not; it is paralysed, it has to stay the same, because we have no money to fund it.

Agricultural funding is down 34 per cent from last year, from \$687.3 million to \$454.8 million. I said before that this decision to close the native timber industry is not practical, it is ideological, and please allow me to share some facts to back this up. Ninety-four per cent of public native forest estate is locked up in parks, reserves and water catchments. Six per cent is available for timber production, and around 0.3 per cent of that area is harvested each year. That is four out of every 10,000 trees, and they are replanted. Our native forest resource is renewable. All areas that are harvested are replanted, and we know that only new growth can store new carbon. Timber products store carbon, and trees that replace them are removing more carbon from the atmosphere. Our native forest industry is environmentally and ecologically sustainable. Prior to harvesting, all of these areas are subject to preharvesting surveys to identify the presence of threatened species, both flora and fauna, and if they are found, the areas are set aside from harvesting. There has not been one species of animal that has become extinct because of timber harvesting in Victoria. But no-one talks about that, do they? Old growth has been set aside from harvesting for many years, and currently regrowth from the 1939 fires is what we are harvesting.

I will continue. The alternative to harvesting a small area of our native forest in Victoria is importing the same products from overseas from countries that do not have the same standards and may not be replanting or environmentally or ecologically sustainable. In my opinion, that is absolutely disgusting. What we are doing to the environment because of this decision is so hypocritical, because there has not been anything made extinct because of the native timber industry, and the impact of closing down our native forest industry will be felt most by communities in my area, like Gippsland, which are still recovering from the closure of other industries.

Recently I spoke about this, and I just want to return to it. One thousand jobs were lost with the closure of Hazelwood, 600 jobs will be lost with the closure of Loy Yang A, 200 jobs with the closure of Loy Yang B and 500 jobs with the closure of Yallourn, and we are getting a replacement of 200 to 400 jobs with the renewable energy project. I just think that is absolutely ridiculous. We are sick of excuses. After the delivery of this horror budget, the Labor government have tried to blame everybody but themselves. The Reserve Bank of Australia they have tried to blame. COVID they have tried to blame – and even the federal government. Economists have repeatedly rejected the poor excuse and have just labelled it financial incompetence, and I would have to agree.

When Labor runs out of money, they come after ours. They come after our communities, and they are paralysing the economy. Labor's addiction to taxes is destroying this state, and it is at a time when Victorian families can least afford it. Under Labor you have higher energy bills, higher grocery bills, higher water bills, increased school fees and higher rents. My colleague in the other place the Shadow Treasurer Brad Rowsell put it perfectly. He said:

... I say to every Victorian: you deserve better. You deserve a government that backs you and delivers value for money with your hard-earned taxpayer dollars.

I completely agree with that. Under good government, people prosper. Under the Labor government, people suffer. Victoria is worse off under this budget, and Victorians are worse off under Labor.

I am just going to turn my attention quickly to health care. The state Labor government made over \$4 billion worth of healthcare commitments in our state. We saw in this budget that what they have actually delivered is \$320 million allocated across this whole budget, which to put it into perspective is 7.95 per cent of what they promised. That is unbelievable. If they could not afford it, why did they promise it? Health care in our region is vitally important, and I have spoken about this in recent weeks.

Why is it so important? As our communities grow in the regions, the health infrastructure to support them must grow too. According to Pancare Foundation:

Evidence shows the further from a metropolitan centre a cancer patient lives, the more likely they are to die within five years of diagnosis.

This is just criminal. We need to be supporting healthcare infrastructure in our regions.

Tom McINTOSH (Eastern Victoria) (15:36): I am delighted to stand and be able to talk about the budget. However, I do so while opposing the motion that has been put forward by Mr Mulholland. I am delighted to talk about the election commitments that the government is delivering on, whether they are in schools and TAFE, infrastructure, health, what we are doing to support our community organisations, support with cost-of-living pressures, innovation or our sports clubs. I have a variety of investments the government is making across Eastern Victoria I want to speak to. But that gives you an understanding of the flavour of the investments that the government is making. I am absolutely proud we are doing so.

I want to start off by talking about schools and TAFE. There is so much to talk about, and I have got limited time – I understand I have only 5 minutes – so I am going to have to move quickly through this. We have got planning upgrades, which are absolutely massive for a number of schools across Eastern Victoria: Mount Eliza North Primary School, Eastbourne Primary School in Rosebud, Lakes Entrance Primary School, Paynesville Primary School and Leongatha Secondary College, not to forget \$200,000 for a new playground at Rye Primary School. This is massive for the kids, for the families, for the local communities and for the future employers in these areas. Additionally, on the TAFE front there is \$5 million for the clean energy centre at TAFE Gippsland. We know there are tens of billions of dollars of investment coming down the pipeline for offshore wind, and we want to make sure that we have the workers equipped to meet the massive demand that is coming to the region and to Victoria.

On infrastructure, there is \$10 million to rebuild the Dromana Pier. I was there with community members just last week; we had a great turnout. There was howling wind and it was raining, but we had a really good time being there together, enjoying and celebrating what is going to be great for the area. That morning I also met Minister Kilkenny at the Schnapper Point boat ramp in Mornington, with another \$1.6 million for that. These investments are not only great for locals but it is great for all Victorians to be able to get out and enjoy the beautiful coast that is there off those piers and jetties.

There is \$3.2 million for a new CFA station in Yarram, and I can tell you that there has already been great feedback from the community that that investment is coming. Perhaps Acting President McArthur might like to join me and bring a skateboard down and get around this one: Dromana is getting \$1 million for a new skate park, which I am sure will be very much appreciated by our youth in Dromana. I look forward to celebrating that with them. Additionally, there is \$500,000 to upgrade the Capel Sound foreshore reserve campground. We know how busy it is on the peninsula come holiday time, with campers and people enjoying the foreshore, so this will be a very welcome investment.

With health I want to start off talking about the \$70 million that is allocated for Maffra for the upgrade to aged care at the Maffra Hospital. This is huge for the town. We have made other investments in the town, whether that be through the local gymnasium, which is absolutely booming, or whether that be with the Maffco Brewery that I spoke about in my members statement this morning. But this is another huge, huge investment for Maffra: \$70 million. There is the West Gippsland Hospital, the new comprehensive women's health clinic at Frankston Hospital and Latrobe regional hospital – massive, massive investments. I also want to raise the new mental health and wellbeing local in Leongatha and planning for a new mental health and wellbeing local in Sale, which are going to be incredibly valuable assets to the community.

Some of the smaller grants, which I do not think we can overlook the value of, are: \$100,000 for Olivia's Place to support families in Gippsland; \$100,000 to Kaitlyn's Kitchen in Orbost; \$100,000 to

Rosedale Neighbourhood House; \$50,000 to Leongatha Community House; \$50,000 for Southern Peninsula Community Support based in Rosebud, who do an incredible job supporting the community and particularly supporting those in hardship; \$50,000 for Fusion youth support on the Mornington Peninsula, who also do incredible work supporting some of our youth in the most disadvantaged positions, supporting them in accommodation and within their lives; and \$30,000 for Peninsula Home Hospice for specialist palliative care. I dropped in there the other day, and they are a beautiful bunch of people doing incredible work helping people at the end of their lives. They are not helping just those people but also the community, loved ones and families.

I also want to talk about the free rego for trade apprentices. I was an apprentice, and this is a fantastic initiative. When you have got to use your own car to get to and from work and take your tools, there can be heavy loads. It is sensational.

In innovation, there is \$250,000 for Victoria's first Indigenous-run oyster farm at Lakes Entrance, and I am very much looking forward to getting down there and having some of those oysters. And for sport, there is \$800,000 at Lakes Entrance for the indoor sporting facility, \$400,000 for netball upgrades at Buchan Football Netball Club, \$350,000 towards a pump track extension at Lions Park in Sale, \$150,000 for upgrades at the Bairnsdale Clay Target Club and \$120,000 for equipment upgrades for the Mallacoota gymnastics club.

Evan MULHOLLAND (Northern Metropolitan) (15:42): I would like to say thank you for the contributions given to this debate, particularly by my colleagues – especially Ms Crozier, who I think made some insightful points about how when Labor says that something is free, every Victorian should be worried, because while it might be free for them, free for them is actually opening up the wallet of hardworking Victorians and taking their money for their own personal preferences. I want to thank other colleagues as well: Dr Heath, who spoke passionately about the timber industry and jobs in her electorate that have been lost – the government promised retraining, but they have not come to the table really on that – and also my colleague member for South-Eastern Metropolitan Region Mrs Hermans, who is just the exact kind of advocate the people in the south-east have been crying out for, because they are certainly not getting representation from their local Labor members of Parliament.

One thing that a lot of colleagues on the other side of the chamber were quick to point out is that this is just COVID debt. This is just COVID debt we are dealing with, and they want to forget the fact that almost as high as the COVID debt, which is just over \$30 billion, there is \$30 billion of infrastructure waste and blowouts. But let us have a look at what they defined as COVID debt. 'What was COVID debt?' one would ask. Let us have a look at some of the things they spent on, like the zero emissions vehicle subsidy, which was part of their COVID spending. Electric cars were subsidised at \$3000 a car starting 1 July 2021 during the pandemic. Almost everyone buying a new electric vehicle is on a high income. Who else can afford \$70,000 for a sedan? Labor wants to talk about their COVID debt and COVID spending, but this is upper-middle-class welfare.

Tom McIntosh interjected.

Evan MULHOLLAND: I very much doubt that many of those in the Eastern Victoria Region, which Mr McIntosh represents, can afford a \$70,000 vehicle, which the government was subsidising through its COVID spending that it now has to repay.

What else was there? There was also the \$15 billion sponsorship of Netball Australia. There is another COVID spending the government has to recoup out of the wallets of hardworking Victorians. Let us see: we saw a job advertisement for a manager of inclusion and diversity at the Suburban Rail Loop Authority on a salary of up to \$238,000 – that might be part of the 10 per cent cut they are wanting to recoup from the public service! – and we saw a \$96 million package, including \$1.5 million to give each school-age child a fishing rod. This is the kind of COVID spending that members opposite –

A member: But didn't they ban fishing for a while? You couldn't go fishing.

Evan MULHOLLAND: Exactly. So they want to talk about it like it is COVID debt, but we are seeing spending they wrapped up in COVID debt. They want the Victorian people to think that this COVID debt was all in keeping people safe during lockdown or it was all going into vaccines, but it was actually a slush fund for fishing rods, for electric vehicles, for high-end salaries for suburban rail loop authorities, and they want to cover it literally with the mask of COVID by saying, 'This is just COVID spending,' even though they know that the debt trajectory prior to COVID was just as bad. The government could not say no to a single project. They have not had any sort of fiscal constraint since they came to government. They did not learn the lessons of the Cain and Kirner era of big spending, and now they have got Victoria into an even worse position fiscally, so they should be condemned for this budget and the house should support this motion.

Motion agreed to.

Hemp industry

Rachel PAYNE (South-Eastern Metropolitan) (15:48): I move:

That this house:

- (1) notes the enormous utility of industrial hemp:
 - (a) in textiles, rope, food, oil, bioplastics, construction materials including hempcrete and fibre panels, insulation, animal fodder and biofuel;
 - (b) as a carbon dioxide reducing 'carbon sink', capable of absorbing more carbon dioxide per hectare than many forests or commercial crops;
- (2) further notes that while there has been a rapid expansion in industrial hemp production nationally, as of April 2023 there are only six growers cultivating a total of 169 hectares in Victoria;
- (3) requires the Economy and Infrastructure Committee to inquire into, consider and report, by 15 November 2023, on:
 - (a) issues, barriers and opportunities within the current Victorian industrial hemp industry;
 - (b) the current Victorian industrial hemp industry compared to other relevant jurisdictions;
 - (c) the constraints and confounders to expanding the industrial hemp industry in Victoria;
 - (d) the environmental benefits and costs of an expanded industrial hemp sector;
 - (e) how industrial hemp can be best utilised to assist Victoria in meeting emissions reduction targets;
 - (f) how the Victorian government could support industry development and growth across Victoria;
 - (g) whether the regulatory and licensing framework for hemp cultivation and hemp products may be streamlined to benefit the expansion of the industrial hemp industry, including but not limited to the introduction of a standalone industrial hemp act;
 - (h) key elements for the potential development of a hemp industry plan for Victoria; and
 - (i) any other relevant matters.

I rise on behalf of Legalise Cannabis Victoria to speak to motion 70 standing in my name. We are seeking the support of this chamber for a parliamentary inquiry to be conducted by the Economy and Infrastructure Committee into the potential for industrial hemp to sow the seeds of Victoria's future.

Let us shine a light on this ancient, much misunderstood and incredibly versatile, resilient and sustainable crop and explore its potential. The hemp industry is not new. Hemp was one of the first plants to be spun into fibre many thousands of years ago – 8000 years ago in the case of the decorative rope in Taiwan. For centuries rope, fabrics and industrial materials were made from hemp fibre. Hemp was commonly used to make sail canvases. In fact the word 'canvas' is derived from cannabis. But when marijuana was banned as an illicit substance across much of the globe, industrial hemp was caught in the same web and its use dissipated despite it remaining so fundamentally useful. Fast forward to today, and we are seeing a hemp resurgence globally but also a great untapped potential.

Australia legalised industrial hemp production at the same time as Canada; however, in Canada the hemp industry is worth \$587 million, with projections reaching \$2.4 billion by 2030, while our

national farm gate here in Australia is worth \$15 million, so we can see that industrial hemp is a multimillion-dollar industry internationally.

Specifically bred for seed and fibre production, hemp is not psychoactive, and it has many varied uses that include food, oil, paper, bioplastics, animal fodder, biofuel, construction materials like hempcrete and many more. In fact hempseed is higher in protein than beef. In modern textile production the woody fibres of hemp blend well with many other fibre types. Hemp fabrics are stronger, more absorbent, more durable and provide better insulation than common cotton fibres. In fact my outfit today is completely hemp.

Members interjecting.

Rachel PAYNE: Thank you. I think I look quite lovely in it too. As I was putting it on this morning, I discovered from the labelling that it also has a UV protectant, which is pretty amazing for the Australian economy and climate.

I also just want to talk a little bit today about how this morning I hosted a few of the hemp industry's greatest. We have had some people here who are producers and innovators in this industry, who were able to showcase things like hemp carpet and hemp fibre and fabric. We had part of the plant here which shows you the stalk and that the outside of that material is a strong fibre and inside of that are the hurds, and then you obviously have seeds, so the whole plant can be used. It is so durable and robust and grows within 100, 120 days. In fact one of the producers that we had here today could guarantee that within 100 days you would have enough fibre to build a house. When we are talking about the fact that an industry is completely shutting down, when it comes to old-growth forests, I think that we can offer a viable alternative, and I will talk more about that in a little while.

Let me come back to hempcrete, because I am really excited by hempcrete. It is an incredible and very durable product, but it also offers a future for sustainable building. Hempcrete is recyclable, it is non-toxic, it is fireproof, it is biodegradable, it is mould and humidity resistant and it has excellent acoustics. One of hempcrete's most exciting features is the way it is crack resistant under movement. Now, as we have just experienced another earthquake, I dare say that we might be exploring new alternatives in building and construction, particularly around earthquake-prone areas.

Just going back to that point about it being fireproof, the resistance of hempcrete means that for 4 hours it can withstand 1800 degrees Celsius temperatures. Australian bushfires are devastating to communities, and to offer an alternative building material that can provide that assurance and may even result in your house still standing after a fire has been through your property is pretty impressive. It is something where we should really be pushing forward and investigating all the opportunities that we have here, particularly as we have a housing shortage and are having changes around the forestry industry.

Hemp also has immense environmental potential. Hempcrete uses minimal water and does not rely on pesticides, making it a popular and economical choice for building and construction. The environmental benefits of industrial hemp do not stop there. It is capable of absorbing more carbon dioxide per hectare than any forest and almost any other commercial crop. Not only is hemp a super absorber of carbon dioxide, it is a replenisher of soil. It also grows at an incredible pace. As I mentioned before, it takes 120 days to reach harvest. Once it is ready for harvest, 1 acre of hemp can, for example, produce just as much paper as double the amount of much slower growing trees, and it gets there in a much quicker time frame. It is hardy and resilient. Hemp can grow on land unsuitable for other crops and can weather many environments, making it a potentially powerful plant in the Victorian climate. We acknowledge the work of the Victorian government on climate action and emissions reduction in Victoria, and we hope that industrial hemp can be a powerful tool for the fight against climate change, as hemp's rapid growth enables it to sequester carbon at a rapid rate.

Just on the point that I touched on earlier around the government's announcement to end native logging in Victoria, I know that many of my colleagues have been very impassioned by this discussion this

week. But what I am trying to bring here is an opportunity. Fibre production can pivot. We do have an opportunity to consider industrial hemp as a viable alternative. With hemp, our state can meet the growing need for building materials and fibre pulp. Broad support for this industry will help us kickstart a new era in Victoria's fibre future with a boost to industrial hemp. All around the world we see the hemp industry re-emerging and flourishing, but we in Victoria are really lagging behind. This can create jobs, it can stimulate the economy and it will support the environment. With the immense versatility, resilience and sustainability of industrial hemp in mind, its rapid expansion nationally and internationally is not much of a surprise. What is a surprise is that despite the growth and versatility of this industry elsewhere, right now in Victoria there are six growers cultivating a total of 169 hectares.

At Legalise Cannabis Victoria we have had the opportunity to meet with industry groups and a number of stakeholders in Australia's agricultural and hemp industries. We have heard that Victoria has immense potential for an expanded industrial hemp industry but also that this industry and its immense potential are overlooked, undersupported and suffer from a confusing regulatory environment. We know hemp has huge utility and versatility, so what we are asking the committee to find are some answers to some important questions. How does the Victorian industry stack up? Where are the barriers? How big could a Victorian hemp industry become? Can it help us meet our emissions reduction targets? Should we be cutting the red tape? Should we be incentivising investment via a grant scheme or something similar? These are important questions that we believe are best answered by a parliamentary inquiry to expand on the work of the hemp task force in the last term of government. Let us examine what other jurisdictions are doing and hear from the experts. Let us find out what an expanded hemp industry could mean for the Victorian economy, Victorian jobs and Victorian emissions reductions. Given industrial hemp's huge potential, seemingly untapped in Victoria, let us see if we can sow the seeds for Victoria's future.

Jacinta ERMACORA (Western Victoria) (15:58): I agree with Ms Rachel Payne that the hemp industry has huge potential for enormous utility and importance. I also note the rapid expansion in industrial hemp production nationally and indeed internationally.

Victoria makes such a significant economic contribution to the nation through our traditional thriving agricultural sector. If we look at our top agricultural industries, we lead production for our nation. We have a magnificent wool industry. Data collected by Agriculture Australia shows that in 2021–22, Victoria exported 174,000 tonnes of wool exports, valued at \$1.68 billion, a 27 per cent increase on the previous year. By value, Victoria is Australia's largest wool exporter, accounting for 51 per cent of the nation's wool exports. In 2021–22 Victoria's total grain exports were valued at \$4.4 billion, up 73 per cent year on year, making Victoria the third-largest grains exporter by value, accounting for 13 per cent of Australia's total grain exports, valued at \$8.3 billion. In 2021–22 the value of Victoria's beef exports was \$1.7 billion, representing 39 per cent of all meat exports. Victoria is the leading contributor to Australia's dairy industry, accounting for 77 per cent of Australia's dairy exports, valued at \$2.1 billion. There is no doubt our southern climate provides our farmers with excellent growing conditions, and it would seem prudent to look into how Victoria can capitalise on the fast-growing hemp market.

As of April 2023 there are only six growers cultivating a total of 169 hectares of hemp in Victoria. There is already a great deal of work being done in this space. This government has already made changes to support the development of a hemp industry in Victoria. Last year this government passed the Agriculture Legislation Amendment Act 2022 to support the cultivation of hemp crops and their subsequent industrial use, and I acknowledge the important research that was undertaken by the industrial hemp task force established by the Andrews Labor government in 2019. The task force engaged directly with industry stakeholders, participants and research organisations to gain a thorough understanding of the industry, exploring its challenges and opportunities and how Victoria can maximise hemp's economic potential. This motion is also timely due to the Andrews Labor government already having funded a research trial to support the cultivation of hemp across Victoria.

Agriculture Victoria has co-invested with AgriFutures and industry in national industrial hemp variety trials and hosts the Victorian trial at Hamilton in south-west Victoria, in my seat.

As outlined in the AgriFutures Emerging Industries report *Industrial Hemp Variety Trials: Results from the Hamilton Smart Farm Trial for the 2021–22 Growing Season*, the trial included the evaluation of six hemp varieties provided by industry and sown at three sowing times. The varieties selected for inclusion in the trial ranged in origin, sex expression, end use, maturity, height and yield potential. Initial results are encouraging, and the trial will be repeated for growers to have confidence in achieving the same results or better in different seasons. Optimising agronomy, including sowing time, nutrition requirements and water requirements, will provide further benefits with respect to yield, quality and the cost and ease of production. Importantly, all varieties remained below the Victorian THC limit of 0.35 per cent for each of the sowing times. These findings provide hemp growers with information to guide their decisions about the varieties to plant to maximise profits in the southern environment. It is recommended that the industrial hemp variety trials continue and separate experiments be conducted to address specific agronomic issues, with the results of the trials made available to growers to help guide decisions about which varieties to plant for Victorian conditions. This research, specific to Victoria, is of great value as the hemp industry grows at a rapid pace due to many valid reasons. This referral motion to the Economy and Infrastructure Committee can expand on this research using the Parliament's resources and investigative powers.

One important issue to be explored further is the sustainability value of this product. Hemp products are often a more sustainable and environmentally friendly source than traditional products, and hemp has an incredibly wide range of applications for different industries. The textiles and apparels industry is benefiting from the use of hemp – and I acknowledge the outfits being worn today – as a sustainable alternative to conventional fabrics. Hemp fibres can be processed into eco-friendly and very durable textiles for clothing and home furnishings. Food and nutrition industries are increasingly using hempseeds. They are highly nutritious and can be ground into flour, pressed for oil or consumed whole. It does make us wonder what we may have been missing out on, as they have been found to be rich in essential fatty acids, proteins, vitamins and minerals, and these benefits can be incorporated into various food items, including protein powders and cooking oils. Paper and packaging industries use hemp pulp to manufacture materials, and hemp requires fewer chemicals and water in the production of paper materials than traditional wood pulp.

Construction and building materials can be derived from hemp fibres when combined with lime or other binders to create a versatile building material called hempcrete. Hempcrete is insulating, with excellent thermal properties, and is lightweight. It can be used for producing fibreboard, insulation materials and biodegradable plastics substitutes. Hemp also has a place in the biofuels and energy industries, where hempseeds can be processed to produce biofuels such as biodiesel and ethanol. Products such as hempcrete used for sustainable construction and hemp-based biofuels could considerably contribute to reducing carbon emissions and promoting renewable energy sources as we move to becoming a carbon-neutral state. This is a priority of the Andrews Labor government, and increasingly the environmental benefits and costs of an expanded industrial hemp sector are being seen as the way of the future.

A stand-out benefit of hemp production is carbon sequestration. Hemp plants grow rapidly, with high carbon dioxide absorption, as Ms Payne mentioned. During photosynthesis hemp plants capture and store large amounts of CO₂, reducing greenhouse emissions and making it a valuable tool in combating climate change, provided the harvested hemp is used in durable products, thus locking its stored carbon. Hemp aids soil health and erosion control due to its deep extensive root systems, which help prevent nutrient run-off and can even remediate contaminated soils by absorbing heavy metals and toxins. The market demand for environmentally sustainable and carbon-neutral products provides opportunities for growers to explore.

In conclusion, this interest in sustainable practices and the transition to a net zero economy presents opportunities for the expansion of the hemp industry in Victoria. Ongoing research and development

efforts can help address existing challenges and optimise the environmental performance of the industry. I reiterate my support for this motion and its referral to the Economy and Infrastructure Committee for further consideration of this fast-emerging industry and the benefits it may generate for our farmers and our state.

Georgie CROZIER (Southern Metropolitan) (16:08): I rise to speak to Ms Payne's motion that we are debating today on industrial hemp and having this referred to the Economy and Infrastructure Committee for inquiry. There are a number of elements in Ms Payne's motion that look at the barriers to hemp production, but I will come back to that point. There is a reporting date of 15 November, and I note that that committee has a number of other very important inquiries going on. I would just make this point to those on the committee that those references are already there. There is a local government inquiry, there is a stamp duty inquiry, there are a number of self-referenced ones into the arts and –

Bev McArthur: Gassing pigs.

Georgie CROZIER: Pig gassing – that is right, Mrs McArthur. This committee has a lot of inquiries, and this reporting date of 15 November I think is unachievable. I would ask that the committee look at that if this goes through today, because it is unachievable for that committee to do the body of work that they need to do in those important areas and then take on this one. I make that point.

But Ms Payne asks, 'What are the barriers?' and wants to explore those issues. There is one element of the motion that talks about the Victorian government supporting the industry and how that could be done in growing the industry. I make the point that in 1998 it was in fact the former Kennett government, a Liberal government, that led the way as the first jurisdiction in Australia to legalise commercial farming of hemp for non-food products. So those over there who continually criticise Jeff Kennett and what he has done, take note, because he led the way here, and there has been very slow progress in Victoria ever since.

I note that the government itself in 2019 formed an industrial hemp task force. I have just been reading through their report because it basically looked at exactly what this inquiry is looking at. Its terms of reference included:

examine information from key stakeholders on the current state of the industry, issues, barriers and opportunities –

virtually what Ms Payne is asking for –

consider uses of industrial hemp in other jurisdictions and appropriate learnings for Victoria;
examine how the ... government can support industry ...

again, straight out of this motion. The task force's words have been put into this inquiry referral, which is somewhat curious. The task force's terms of reference also included:

examine the regulatory and licencing framework ... and
consider any ... other matters.

There are certainly some issues here. And I want to make the point that Ms Patten, who sat on that task force, obviously is very close to Legalise Cannabis and is advising them. Where this task force could not get any further, it has come into the Parliament now, and that is why we are debating this motion this afternoon.

I do not have a problem with committee work being done and I do not have a problem with this Parliament doing inquiries into issues. I was curious as to whether the Leader of the Government would be speaking on this motion because she was the Minister for Agriculture at the time and was on the task force. She would have some very good insights. It is quite an interesting report because it talks about the industry snapshot – hemp and cannabis and what they are used for; how the entire plant is used for boiler fuel and feedstock; how the cell fluids are used for other things, and the stalk, the

leaves, the flowers and the seeds. I will not go through everything, but it is a very detailed snapshot of how hemp can be utilised. I think Ms Payne made that point about the versatility of the product. She mentioned that around paper.

The motion makes the point that there are six growers with only 169 hectares in Victoria. That is nothing. This task force talks about 200 hectares, so it has gone backwards since 2020. It is not very viable, it seems to me. I note that this report talks about how most Australian commercial production is in Tasmania and that there were approximately 1600 hectares planted in Tasmania with a farm gate value of only \$4.5 million. That is seriously nothing. Off the production of 1600 hectares, I am not sure that that is a really good utilisation of land. Those who have worked in agriculture will know exactly what I mean. That is just a very small component. Western Australia had 280 hectares and there were 200 hectares in Victoria, so we are going backwards.

That might be a point that the inquiry can have a look at, but I am concerned about some of the issues raised in the report. I know there were ministerial visits to the United States. Obviously Ms Patten was heavily involved. I think the task force went to Canada, China and Europe, so they did a big world trip on this, and Ms Patten was obviously at the Australian Industrial Hemp Conference. But then we get to the real crux of where Legalise Cannabis is going and that is the cannabinoids and legalising cannabis.

Those of you in the house know I am strongly supportive of medicinal cannabis. I do not support legalising cannabis. I think there are too many barriers still that the police have raised and others have raised, and I am very concerned about the mental health impacts on people. I certainly know too many people who have got very sad and severe mental health issues after using cannabis. Nevertheless, there are some interesting aspects to this task force report that was undertaken by the government. It does talk about regulation here in Australia and here in Victoria. I think that this is probably where Ms Payne is trying to go to in terms of having a look at what needs to be done.

So I make these points in debate today. As I said, I do not have a problem with an inquiry being undertaken, but I do have a problem if it is a backdoor way of looking at legalising cannabis itself for personal use and other uses, which you have been elected into this house to achieve. Mr Ettershank is laughing at me, but I have read this task force report and it has set a few alarm bells off for me. I think that the committee, when it does consider these things, understands what the government has already done in relation to this and where we are going in this endeavour to have further agricultural endeavours. As I said, knock yourself out; if you want to grow hemp and it is regulated and legalised for food sources – or other plant derivatives for paper or whatever – then that is part of an enterprise. Go for your life. But I do have concerns, looking at what is being undertaken in Tasmania and other states and the very limited usage of productive land to grow this. With those words, I will say I wish the committee well, if the motion does pass the chamber, in looking into this issue. It is an interesting look, but I would also urge the committee to look at what the government has already done.

Michael GALEA (South-Eastern Metropolitan) (16:16): I rise to speak on the motion put forward by my colleague from the South-Eastern Metropolitan Region Ms Payne, and I rise to speak in favour of the motion. I also commend her for bringing this motion forward to us. This motion allows us to discuss a significant agricultural and industrial opportunity for economic growth. Diversity in economic production and employment is a hallmark of our state's economy. Some other economies rely on a single sector or even a limited collection of commodities for economic growth, employment and success. Here in Victoria we have many important industries, including tourism, manufacturing, retail, health care, construction, education, professional services, finance, mining and agriculture.

Within the agricultural industry that diversity is also felt. Grain, horticulture, milk, beef and sheep are top production commodities in the sector. We are the nation's largest food and fibre exporter, with animal fibre, particularly wool, being one of our most significant exports even to this day. Victoria also produces more milk than all other states combined, with 63 per cent of Australia's dairy milk produced in Victoria this financial year. This government has provided ongoing and firm support to

our agricultural sector and has been committed to exploring the development of new opportunities in the industry.

Hemp constitutes one of several opportunities to cultivate and develop new crops in our state's agricultural sector, with various employment, export and productive opportunities. I am glad to know that in this space the Legalise Cannabis Party and Labor have been the leading parties looking to the continued and growing prosperity of hemp agriculture in Victoria. Under Labor the future of an industrial hemp industry in Victoria is looking bright.

I note that in 2020, as Ms Crozier referred to, the Industrial Hemp Taskforce, established during the previous Parliament, handed down its report. I note the work of the members of the task force, including Minister Thomas in her previous capacity as agriculture minister and former members of this place, including Fiona Patten and the former member for Mildura Ali Cupper. The task force spent 12 months engaging with industry experts and stakeholders and identified various opportunities and issues that were facing the sector. Opportunities outlined in the report include improving the processing capability, closing knowledge and experience gaps in hemp cultivation, addressing regulatory barriers and creating a more straightforward and accessible marketplace. Challenges include a lack of investment in processing capability, confusion within the industry between hempseed and hemp fibre markets, prohibition on the use of hemp leaf for feedstock and high costs for transport and water.

The terms of reference for the task force were to examine information from key stakeholders on the current state of the industry, issues, barriers and opportunities; to consider uses of industrial hemp in other jurisdictions and appropriate learnings for Victoria; to examine how the Victorian government could support industry development and growth across Victoria; to examine the regulatory and licensing framework for hemp cultivation and hemp products; and to consider any other relevant matters. The task force looked into the myriad uses of hemp, many of which are referenced in Ms Payne's motion – and referenced even more strikingly and illustratively by her dress today. It is fairly impressive to hear that it actually is hemp. These also included things such as food, animal feed, hygiene products such as soap and shampoo –

Bev McArthur interjected.

Michael GALEA: I am sure you could find many new pieces to wear from the hemp collection as well, Mrs McArthur. I am sure the two of you could have a fantastic day out shopping together – but also things such as cooking oils, bioplastics, semiconductors, ink, paint, fuels, mulch, insulation, cement, papers and various other industrial and consumer textiles.

The task force explored the state of the industry across Australia. This includes the regulatory environment and also farming locations, irrigation practices, yields and growing conditions. I would also note that the growing cycle during the operation of the task force was 2019 to 2020. At that time Tasmania grew most of Australia's commercial hemp crops, with 1600 hectares compared to, at that time, just 200 in Victoria. In Victoria that 200-hectare production was lower than the 600 hectares in 2017–18, with the decline primarily attributable to low water availability at the time. The task force found that the hempseed was the primary produce from growing hemp in Victoria. The report also discussed the requirement of holding an authority in the Drugs, Poisons and Controlled Substances Act 1981; the number of authority holders increased in 2017, when hempseed was approved for use in food.

There was an investigation into the state of hemp products in other jurisdictions, primarily Canada, China and various parts of Europe, most notably France. The task force meetings included briefings and discussions with representatives from key stakeholders, including iHemp Victoria, the industrial hemp association, the Australian Industrial Hemp Alliance, Textile & Composite Industries Pty Ltd, Australian Primary Hemp, CSIRO Agriculture and Food division, Cann Global Ltd, SuniTAFE

SMART Farm, Mallee Regional Innovation Centre, Sunraysia Community Health Services and Agriculture Victoria.

So this motion does relate to many of the issues that were touched on in that report, but an inquiry by the Economy and Infrastructure Committee could update and build upon the work of the industrial hemp task force. It would also benefit the future of the emerging hemp industry in Victoria. The Agricultural Legislation Amendment Act 2022, introduced and passed by the Andrews Labor government, included increased support for the cultivation of hemp crops and further industrial uses of the components of hemp cultivation. The legislation included provisions standardising the maximum allowable levels of THC, creating consistency with the other states and territories in Australia. The amendments also widened the eligibility criteria for licence applications, strengthened the fit and proper person test for applicants and made other changes to improve the administration and enforcement of the act.

In the current growing season, six authority holders are growing commercial crops, covering an area of 169 hectares. Returning to the impact of the industrial hemp task force, a significant achievement was the facilitation of a memorandum of understanding between Australian Primary Hemp and SuniTAFE in Mildura. The partnership, established under the SMART Farm project, enabled research and development into the suitability of low-THC hemp varieties. This is essential research, as instances in which a crop's THC level exceeds the legislated maximum would necessitate the destruction of that crop, as it has in Tasmania when that has occurred.

The motion also touches on the ability of hemp to be used in carbon sequestration. There is a comparatively high carbon sequestration rate for hemp compared to other plants. Some estimates are that industrial hemp can absorb as much as 22 tonnes of CO₂ per hectare under appropriate conditions. Biomass production occurring from the conversion of atmospheric carbon through photosynthesis enables the sequestration. In addition, due to the capability of hemp to grow up to 4 metres in 100 days and grow a second crop in a year, hemp is an exceptionally fast crop for agricultural carbon sequestration as well, which is potentially very exciting. Compared to forests, which take years and decades to mature, the ability of hemp crops to provide a more frequent carbon capture is evident. That being said, effective sequestration requires that the agricultural yield be used in sustainable and longer lasting products to enable that longer term storage of the carbon that has been captured.

The beneficial use of hemp crops creates a viable opportunity for a substantive expansion of the hemp industry. As we reach and work towards net zero emissions, there will be an increased and long-term demand for carbon-neutral projects and carbon sequestration. Hemp and forests could provide a comprehensive mix of this planting.

Hemp is still a relatively new industry in Victoria and indeed in the nation. It is still in its infancy across the agricultural sector. However, it does have the burgeoning potential to contribute to this industry, the broader economy and employment, and it may play a big part in our response to climate change. Just over six years ago, in 2017, the Australia New Zealand Food Standards Code was amended to permit low-THC hemp whole seeds to be sold or used as an ingredient in food. To an extent, this was the launching pad for growth in the hemp industry across Australia. Tasmania, in many ways – not least of which has been gross yield – already have the most developed hemp industry, having passed their Industrial Hemp Act in 2015. Simply put, this gave them a head start. This proposed inquiry would allow us to explore further how the Victorian government can support and benefit from growth in this industry in our state, and for those reasons I support this motion.

Bev McARTHUR (Western Victoria) (16:26): I rise to speak on this motion. I find it curious that the Legalise Cannabis Party found it impossible to support the roads motion going to the Economy and Infrastructure Committee because they thought they only knew about it a couple of days ago – as I understand it, on Thursday. It is the same amount of time ago, I understand, that we learned of this motion – Thursday – even though the roads motion had been on the agenda since December. Nevertheless we are asked to support the motion that we have just learned about. I also find it curious

that the Labor Party, and I imagine the Greens and I am sure the Animal Justice Party, if given a chance to vote, will be happily supporting the reference too.

I am on this committee. It is getting a bit overwhelmed with inquiries. But you have seen fit to send another one there potentially, even though we have got this 2020 industrial hemp update from the industrial hemp task force. It seems like we are just reiterating what has already been done. Are we going to have an inquiry each year to keep updating the state of the nation on hemp, potentially? I am particularly interested in point (2) of Ms Payne's motion, which:

further notes that while there has been a rapid expansion in industrial hemp production nationally, as of April 2023, there are only six growers cultivating a total of 169 hectares in Victoria ...

It is clearly not viable. I tell you, as a farmer, if there is an opportunity to invest in agriculture, we will do it. Obviously the farmers who know about agriculture have realised this is not a viable activity. There is no way, if we go to point (f), that 'the Victorian government could support industry development'. There is no way the taxpayers should get involved in supporting this fledgling operation. If it is viable, the entrepreneurs will be in it like a flash and they will be making money out of it. You will not need government investment at all, and you certainly should not be asking the taxpayer for anything. We could probably short-circuit the whole thing on the committee – just cut and paste this whole document.

A member interjected.

Bev McARTHUR: Oh, sorry, it is a prop. I am sorry, Acting President. Poor Mr Galea got pulled up for his prop before. I thank you that you did not pull me up.

It is like: we have had the report; can we just cut and paste the whole thing and be done with it? You could probably shorten the time of the whole inquiry. A week would see us out and we could get on with the gassing of pigs, the arts industry and whatever else we are potentially doing on the committee, where we are working way too hard. There is nobody here from that committee, is there? No, Mr McIntosh is on it. Acting President Berger is on it. We are overwhelmed with the work, aren't we? And here we go, we have got another one lurching into our lap.

But I make the point that we are very generous on this side of the house. Even though you do not support anything we put up, we apparently are supporting this motion. I am sure you will not need any government intervention. If it is a viable operation, the farmers of Victoria will be in the market in no time. I will just refer to Ms Patten's work. It is great that she is working for you at the moment, and she has obviously brought this forward. Next time just a bit of quid pro quo: if we are supporting your motion, you could just get on board and support ours too.

Sarah MANSFIELD (Western Victoria) (16:31): I rise to speak today in support of the motion from Ms Payne in relation to an inquiry into the industrial hemp industry here in Victoria. Across the country Greens MPs have long been advocates for removing regulatory barriers to hemp production, so I am pleased that Ms Payne has moved for this inquiry with the view towards supporting industry growth and development. Compared to countries such as Canada and China, Australia has been slow to accept hemp's potential as a versatile and climate-friendly crop, especially in its parallel applications to resource-heavy crops such as cotton. Although hemp has been legalised in Australia since 2017, the industry has not been given the opportunity to catch up in areas such as research and development, and the industry remains in its infancy.

Hemp has applications across many different industries but is misunderstood as a crop. Most people are not aware that the particular cannabis plant used to grow it contains less than 1 per cent THC. We have heard today already about the many benefits of hemp – of the hurds, the bast and the seed – and of the applications in textiles, biofuels and our food industry, so I want to take the opportunity to touch briefly on the opportunities that this plant provides us as an investment in regenerative and sustainable agriculture for our farmers. The Greens have said it before, but it is increasingly imperative we leave a legacy of supporting farming practices that care for and regenerate the land. Regenerative agriculture

brings together a range of farming practices that improve soil health and enhance land productivity. As a crop with a deep root system, hemp naturally fortifies soil microbes and prevents erosion, giving it the potential to contribute to regenerative practices already present in Victoria. Furthermore, hemp is well regarded for its role in carbon sequestration. Research suggests that hemp may be twice as effective as trees at absorbing and locking up carbon through photosynthesis. Carbon sequestration and soil health are just two positive aspects of hemp, and gaining a more robust understanding of hemp's environmental benefits is therefore a very worthy element of this inquiry.

Local farmers are of course an important cornerstone of our economy and the heart of our regional communities. They are the people who have chosen to live a life that is intimately linked to the key cycles of our ecosystems: growth, yield and regeneration. Supporting farmers with the resources to make informed choices about how to sustain this regeneration will keep our land healthy for generations to come. I hope that we can all agree in this chamber that supporting regenerative practices in our agricultural industry will strengthen our ability to locally produce the raw materials we need in daily life, including the clothes on our backs, because as our climate becomes hotter and the costs of importing and manufacturing on the global market soar, an investment in Victorian supply chains that are kind to our environment is an absolute no-brainer.

I hope that the members of this chamber across all sides of politics can acknowledge that an inquiry such as this which has been raised today would provide an opportunity for us to be leaders in sustainability in this country's agricultural industry. The Greens welcome the opportunity for a hemp inquiry and are pleased to support the motion.

David ETTERS HANK (Western Metropolitan) (16:34): It gives me great pleasure to speak on motion 70 introduced by my Legalise Cannabis Victoria colleague, the sartorially splendid Ms Payne. It is high time that we explored the economic and environmental benefits –

Members interjecting.

David ETTERS HANK: It is high time – for the peanut gallery – we explored the economic and environmental benefits that industrial hemp can bring to Victoria. Industrial hemp has enormous potential to replace unsustainable and damaging raw materials across any number of industries. As a food, as fibre and as a cellulosic source for paper, building materials and suchlike, it offers many opportunities for Victorian agribusiness innovation. Hemp provides an alternative raw material source to many existing unsustainable materials and, in so doing, helps build sustainable consumption and production patterns based on a circular economy, consistent with the UN's sustainable development goal number 12, 'Responsible consumption and production'.

Hemp's environmental credentials are impressive too. It is biodegradable and capable of breaking down completely in three to six months. It has uses in land regeneration and remediation of contaminated environments, and of course, as has been discussed previously, hemp's rapid growth enables it to sequester carbon at about twice the rate of your average forest.

Hemp is well suited to Victorian growing conditions, tending to thrive in the same soils and locations as wheat, barley, corn, carrots and potatoes, and it offers farmers an alternative crop that helps protect them against monocrop price fluctuations. This is of real benefit to our primary producers.

The economic benefits of industrial hemp are broad, but a good place to start is the revenue that production would bring to Victoria. To give you an idea of the crop value of industrial hemp, 1 hectare of industrial hemp can produce up to 10 tonnes of raw hemp. Industrial hemp has three components: the outer bast fibre is primarily used for textiles and ropes; the woody inner hurd is mainly used in building materials, paper and increasingly in plant-based plastics; and the seeds are an excellent source of food and oil. After processing, bast fibre is worth about \$6000 per hectare, the inner hurd will earn about \$5500 per hectare and seed is about \$3000 per hectare, so producers could earn around \$14,500 per hectare, which is double that of cotton with less than half the water and half the production costs. That is great news.

But we have a problem. Processing infrastructure is essential for industrial hemp, as it is with most products. The process required by producers to break down the plant into marketable components needs specialised equipment to do the job, and that equipment needs to be located proximate to the hemp-producing region to make it viable. The current state of affairs is we can grow hemp, although we are getting our arses kicked by Tasmania. But we can certainly grow the stuff, and we can chop it up and we can bale it. But to refine that raw material to actually add value to the product, we are currently mainly exporting it offshore for processing and then shipping it back here, exactly the same way we deal with our timber pulp processing. It defies logic, and it is certainly not in the best interests of Victoria or Victorians. If we are to create a viable hemp industry that creates long-term, well-paid employment and that benefits our primary producers and our regions, we need to build the infrastructure to process industrial hemp here in Victoria. We also need to be actively identifying and capitalising value-adding downstream manufacturing, again to create good jobs that are well paid, particularly in regional and rural Victoria.

With an early exit from native logging at year's end, we have a unique opportunity for industry innovation and transition and the development of an alternative for paper pulp that the state should seize now, starting from the base of a well-considered parliamentary inquiry. One of the desirable outcomes of this inquiry would be the formulation of an industry plan for the growth and development of an industrial hemp industry, a plan that combines all facets of the industry, from research and development to agricultural production through to manufacturing and sales.

Bringing all these threads together will require a long-term vision and government support. That is where we as a house come in. Internationally the market for industrial hemp is currently at \$11 billion per annum and is expected to grow to \$27 billion by the end of this decade. With government support we can develop an industry that adds value for our farmers, creates much-needed jobs in our regions and increases Victoria's export earnings, all while helping Victoria meet its emission reduction targets.

I would like to pick up a couple of points that were made by Ms Crozier in her contribution, first of all the suggestion that this might be a back door to legalisation. For too long industrial hemp has been sort of like the victim of a drive-by shooting, caught in the crossfire of the prohibition on cannabis. Meanwhile, Victorian farmers are keen to get a foot into this fertile international market, and it is now time that we give Victorian hemp a chance to thrive rather than struggling with the current cumbersome regulatory framework. Can I say that this is not simply the view of Legalise Cannabis Victoria; this was certainly the impression we got when we met with Ms Germano, the president of the Victorian Farmers Federation. Secondly, Ms Crozier, I also want to make the point – and I think this is a really important point in terms of this conflation of medicinal cannabis or adult-use cannabis with industrial hemp – that these are very, very different types of plant, and to be able to grow industrial hemp it has to have less than 1 per cent tetrahydrocannabinol. In other words, you could smoke a hectare of industrial hemp and you would get none the higher for it. You may die of asphyxiation, but you certainly would not get stoned. Again, I talk about this sort of drive-by mentality that hemp is cannabis is whatever –

Georgie Crozier interjected.

David ETTERS HANK: Yes, that is where you were going.

The second thing is with regard to the interim report, and I think the important word here is 'interim'; it is just that. It is an interim report, and the process of the production of that report was gutted by COVID. So the report, the task force work, was never completed, and the department has – and we have met with them – no intention of bringing that report to any finality, the task force work on that. So the process that we are proposing is not to duplicate the work of the task force but rather to update the process and to finalise it – to actually come up with some good working recommendations to address the state of the industry.

In conclusion, I would suggest and would commend to the house that this is a proposition worthy of full consideration, and I urge all of those in this place to lend their support to this inquiry. I commend the motion to the house.

Aiv PUGLIELLI (North-Eastern Metropolitan) (16:43): I rise today to support this motion and to welcome the opportunity that industrial hemp brings for Victoria, and I also wish to acknowledge the contributions that have been made in the debate before me, acknowledging the work that the Parliament has done on industrial hemp but also now acknowledging the opportunity that we have to move forward. Now is the time for our state to move beyond the misconceptions of the past and to embrace hemp as the amazing fibre that it is. It is such a shame that the stigma associated with cannabis, as mentioned by Mr Ettershank, has meant that the industry is really far behind where it could be. Industrial hemp holds enormous utility and potential for the creation of climate-friendly jobs in the future as well as great opportunities for regional development and regenerative agriculture, as my colleague Dr Mansfield has already covered. The versatility of industrial hemp cannot be overstated, and by fostering the growth of the industrial hemp sector we can create a multitude of jobs that contribute to a sustainable economy.

Many of you in the chamber will remember when I spoke recently of attending Groovin the Moo, the music festival out in Bendigo, surrounded by young people. Something that I noted quite particularly in attending that event was that they had a stall distributing hemp clothing products, a range of different products that were entirely made of hemp. This is the thing: young people get it. We understand that we have products like this that can be looked into, can be expanded to answer questions that are posed by the climate crisis and jobs of the future in our regional areas, and we are on board. It is time for the Victorian Parliament to catch up.

As the world grapples with the urgent need to combat climate change, the cultivation of industrial hemp with its carbon-capturing properties becomes all the more crucial. By expanding hemp production we can help to reduce greenhouse gas emissions and mitigate the impacts of climate change. Despite the promising potential, the current industrial hemp industry in Victoria remains sadly underdeveloped, and this inquiry would provide important insights into the industry's capabilities – and that I would absolutely welcome.

By capitalising on the vast potential of industrial hemp we can create new jobs, reduce carbon emissions and pave the way for a greener and more sustainable future. I think our community, and particularly our young people, expect that of us.

Rachel PAYNE (South-Eastern Metropolitan) (16:46): I just want to say thank you to everyone who has made a contribution today and probably just go through and summarise some of the fantastic contributions that we did receive.

Particularly my colleague Ms Ermacora really highlighted in a fantastic summary the nutrient benefits of hempseed. I do suggest, if you have not tried it yet, that you make sure you do put it in your smoothies. It is very, very good for you – very high in protein. She also went through the building materials and, as we discussed, hempcrete and the sustainability of the future of hemp.

Just in response to Ms Crozier's comments – and I know my colleague David Ettershank has made some comments, and I totally agree with you. You have hit the nail on the head in the way of 'off the back of the task force'. There has been no indicator that we have ever hidden that there has already been a task force, but as my colleague Mr Ettershank highlighted, that task force only produced an interim report, then the task force was dissolved. There is no question that that work has created such a body of work, and we obviously want that work included, but we just need it finalised so that we can get to a position where we are looking at how we can create legislative reform to make this industry flourish.

Mr Galea, I would love to thank you – a colleague from South-Eastern Metro – for reviewing the future direction of hemp and also highlighting that hemp is in its infancy. We do have an opportunity

here to really grow the industry, and I believe that this inquiry will, off the back of the work of the task force, come to that conclusion.

Mrs McArthur, interestingly, obviously had a few things to say, but as I can reiterate, the Victorian Farmers Federation do support it. There are a lot of farmers out there very interested in hemp, but their biggest complaint is that the regulation is too strict, it is too complicated, there is too much red tape and there is too much burden on them trying to activate their excitement in this industry. I also just make the point that we did discuss this with colleagues of Mrs McArthur, and it was taken to the party room and the shadow minister replied, so I do know that there was that dialogue there.

Ms Mansfield highlighted the growth, yield and regeneration and the importance of regional Victoria being front and centre in this conversation, and obviously the environmental benefits are something that we can all agree on on this side of the chamber.

I would also like to thank my colleague Mr Ettershank, who talked about the specialised equipment for production that we need and highlighted the fact that we are exporting raw materials for production. Again, there is a real opportunity here for there to be a viable industry, and there is a lot of interest in investment in Victoria.

Finally, Mr Puglielli, I would like to also thank you for your contribution and for highlighting the stigma that hemp is subject to and the fact that young people do get it. We do. We do want this to be a part of our future.

Thank you, everyone, for your contributions. I appreciate the support.

Motion agreed to.

Bills

Public Administration and Planning Legislation Amendment (Control of Lobbyists) Bill 2023

Second reading

Debate resumed on motion of David Davis:

That the bill be now read a second time.

Evan MULHOLLAND (Northern Metropolitan) (16:50): I rise to speak on this bill, and I would like to thank Mr Davis for his spearheading of this bill and his spearheading of integrity in this state. Some things the government does not seem too keen to shine a light on are issues around corruption in this state. This bill would make an enormous difference in lifting the standards of public governance. The Labor Party has allowed a culture of favouritism, backroom deals and corruption to engulf their government. We saw from the *Operation Clara* report tabled in the Parliament in February this year that the lobbying behaviour in Victoria has begun to take a cavalier disregard for requirements and rules for both the lobbyists register and directors' duties to make open and honest declarations. Let us revisit what *Operation Clara* actually found:

... former Victorian government –

Labor –

minister, Theo Theophanous, improperly lobbied in favour of the proposal on behalf of AEC, including by misusing his position as a member of the board of the Metropolitan Planning Authority (which later became the Victorian Planning Authority). He failed to declare a conflict of interest and to comply with a requirement to register a lobbying client. In lieu of direct payment for his lobbying, he obtained benefits from AEC and its associates in the form of donations to his daughter's campaign for election to the Victorian Parliament.

I am proud to represent the good people of Northcote in this place as a member for Northern Metropolitan Region, and I am proud that we always have a diverse selection of candidates for our inner-city electorates. Unfortunately we already knew the dirty tricks that the Labor Party were playing in the seat of Northcote, particularly trying to deceive Liberal voters in the seat of Northcote. We saw

that by the Labor Party. We had that plastered across the media as well – about people handing out fake how-to-vote-Liberal cards – but we did not think the Labor Party would stoop so low as to shamefully use ex-Labor ministers to use their influence over planning policy to buy the government another term in the seat. Doing this kind of thing is really beyond the pale. Kat Theophanous, who I quite like, has clearly got a long and successful career ahead of her on the Labor front bench if she is willing to turn a blind eye to all of this.

This bill ensures all the recommendations of the *Operation Clara* report are adopted in full and entrenched in legislation:

... obvious weaknesses exposed in Victoria's planning system through poor Victorian Planning Authority governance relating to multimillion-dollar planning decisions will be addressed. Corrupt and unwelcome influences on critical planning decisions will be diminished.

And yet we saw reported in the *Age* last month that the Premier has taken the opposite conclusion to *Operation Clara*. Rather than reflect on the corruption from the state government authorities on planning decisions, they are looking instead to grab more power – set on a bid to override councils and cut them out of planning decisions entirely.

We are seeing IBAC report after IBAC report condemning this government. You have got the Premier calling the former commissioner of IBAC Mr Redlich some 'bloke who used to run an agency'. That is not the way we should speak about eminent people in this state that used to run an authority that is charged with looking into corruption. And when they do call out corruption we should take that advice, not only as an educational opportunity, as the Premier liked to describe it. We should take that advice, own up, come to this place and adopt the recommendations they are putting forward. What Mr Davis has helpfully done is put in a bill operationalising what IBAC is saying that this place needs to do, which is a good thing.

The Premier, through this bill, wants to frame himself as a solution, but I think he is in fact the problem. He thinks that everybody is beneath him, and now we see him snubbing the highly respected Victorian Ombudsman Deborah Glass. He pushes her away as he pushes everyone who dares criticise him and his actions. Anyone that points out that he is presiding over a corrupt government is cast aside. The Premier's values are in question. As I said, he was arrogant enough to call Operation Daintree an 'educational report'. As the Ombudsman said, this was not an educational report, it was a damning report about misconduct of ministerial advisers and ministerial responsibilities for those advisers. That came after the Premier's characterisation of the concerns raised while in office as 'someone who used to do a job who has written a letter that apparently says a whole bunch of stuff'. Apparently he still has not read that letter from Mr Redlich, even though it is widely available.

I think the house does need to support this bill. We need to come together. I was quite impressed by Dr Tim Read's comments on this issue. They were also particularly animated about what they had seen in the electorate of Northcote both during the election and of course in this report. I think it is up to us as sensible, mature, elected representatives to come together, and when we get a report like this that has such damning findings, then it is up to us to act on it, and people put us here to act on it. So clearly the Premier needs a reality check. He cannot be trusted to act with integrity on his own. That is why I urge all here to support this bill.

David ETTERS HANK (Western Metropolitan) (16:57): I rise to make a contribution to the Public Administration and Planning Legislation Amendment (Control of Lobbyists) Bill 2023. This bill aims to implement the recommendations of the Independent Broad-based Anti-corruption Commission's special report on *Operation Clara*. The special report stresses the need for reforms to the regulation of lobbying in Victoria and makes recommendations to bring Victoria into line with other jurisdictions.

The report recommendations include amendments to various non-statutory codes of conduct to ensure that a lobbyist is ineligible for appointment to any public entity with functions relevant to the director's lobbying activities; to ensure that individuals seeking nominations to a public entity board register any

lobbying activities that have taken place within a specific period; to prohibit public entity board directors from engaging in lobbying activities on any matter that relates to the functions of that public entity; and to require that public entity board directors comply with integrity requirements, including conflict-of-interest provisions, in relation to representations they have made prior to their appointment.

We understand also that the government has given in-principle support to the recommendations of the report and has already commenced work to strengthen the framework around lobbyists. We look forward to seeing the outcome of the government's work. I am pleased in that context that all roads appear to be leading to reform.

In broad terms Legalise Cannabis Victoria is supportive of any measure that advances Victoria's integrity system and strengthens our political institutions. As legislators and public office holders we need to ensure public administration is conducted in a manner that is transparent and supports the interests of the people of Victoria, who we have all been elected to serve. We are supportive of any steps towards enhanced integrity, so we will support this bill, noting that the reform it intends to achieve will ultimately be achieved via a different government-led vehicle.

David DAVIS (Southern Metropolitan) (16:59): I am pleased to rise and indicate that a number of speakers have contributed to this debate from all sides of the house. I thank those on this side of the house that have supported the bill. I think this is a very sensible, practical bill. I thank Mr Ettershank and Ms Ratnam for their support of the bill as well.

This is a process that we are embarked upon at the moment where a series of bills come forward to the house to strengthen our integrity regime, effectively under the guidance of IBAC as it brings reports to the Parliament, reports that lay out deficiencies and weaknesses in our integrity regime.

The *Operation Clara* report is such an occasion. It lays out rampant, clear weaknesses in our integrity regime, weaknesses in the lobbyists register and weaknesses in the planning legislation, and following IBAC's report this bill seeks to put into place those protections that are needed. This bill does not claim to do everything. It claims to respond specifically to the four recommendations made by IBAC in *Operation Clara* and to put them into operation. I urge all those in the chamber to support this bill. We believe it is an important bill, and we would look forward to its passage.

Council divided on motion:

Ayes (22): Matthew Bach, Gaele Broad, Katherine Copsey, Georgie Crozier, David Davis, Moira Deeming, David Ettershank, Ann-Marie Hermans, David Limbrick, Wendy Lovell, Trung Luu, Sarah Mansfield, Bev McArthur, Joe McCracken, Nicholas McGowan, Evan Mulholland, Rachel Payne, Aiv Puglielli, Georgie Purcell, Samantha Ratnam, Adem Somyurek, Rikkie-Lee Tyrrell

Noes (13): Ryan Batchelor, John Berger, Lizzie Blandthorn, Jacinta Ermacora, Michael Galea, Shaun Leane, Tom McIntosh, Harriet Shing, Ingrid Stitt, Jaclyn Symes, Lee Tarlamis, Gayle Tierney, Sheena Watt

Motion agreed to.

Read second time.

Third reading

David DAVIS (Southern Metropolitan) (17:08): I move, by leave:

That the bill be now read a third time.

Motion agreed to.

Read third time.

The PRESIDENT: Pursuant to standing order 14.25, the bill will be transmitted to the Assembly with a message requesting their agreement.

*Business of the house***Notices of motion and orders of the day**

Lee TARLAMIS (South-Eastern Metropolitan) (17:08): I move:

That the consideration of the remaining notices of motion and orders of the day, general business, be postponed until the next day of meeting.

Motion agreed to.

*Statements on tabled papers and petitions***Department of Treasury and Finance***Budget papers 2023–24*

Lee TARLAMIS (South-Eastern Metropolitan) (17:09): I rise to speak on the budget papers 2023–24, specifically in relation to the veterans portfolio, in acknowledging the recent inauguration of the Lemnos Remembrance Trail on the northern Aegean island of Lemnos. Members may be aware that the Governor-General of Australia His Excellency the Honourable David Hurley recently attended the annual commemorative service on Lemnos held this year on 3 May. The service is held to honour all those who served on Lemnos during the Gallipoli campaign. I have attended this service in previous years, as have many other members and former members of the Victorian Parliament.

Lemnos played an important part in the Gallipoli campaign as an advanced base. It was the place where thousands of soldiers came before the landings at Gallipoli and where they returned for rest and recuperation, the place where major medical services were established, including Australian nurses, and the place where the soldiers returned after the evacuation of Gallipoli. It is also the location of the graves of 148 Australians who remain on the island in its military cemeteries. It is an important place of remembrance of the service of many Victorians who served in the campaign. Box Hill born nurse Clarice Daley served there; Private Ted Tozer from Blackburn, a relative of mine, served there; and Albert Park electrician Corporal George Knight is buried there, as is Oakleigh's William Withers.

The Australian Governor-General joined the President of the Hellenic Republic Katerina Sakellaropoulou at the service. This was the first time that the Australian Governor-General has come to Lemnos and that both of these office-holders have attended these services. Also present were many other dignitaries, including the Australian ambassador to Greece Arthur Spyrou, the Hellenic deputy defence minister Nikolaos Hardalias, the prefect of the North Aegean Mr Konstantinos Moutzouris and the mayor of Lemnos Dimitrios Marinakis.

After the service at East Mudros cemetery, where over 900 Allied service personnel are buried, including 98 Australians, the dignitaries moved to the Australian Pier and its memorial for the inauguration of the Lemnos Remembrance Trail. Members may be aware that the Victorian government supported the installation of the memorial on Lemnos in 2018, following a submission by the Lemnos Gallipoli Commemorative Committee, and I participated in the official unveiling. The Australian Pier had been identified through the research of historian Jim Claven, who was also secretary of the committee. It was here that the first Australian troops came ashore on Lemnos in March 1915, some of them erecting the pier, enabling the landing of medical equipment for the first Australian stationary hospital and the first Australian medical facility to be established on the island. One of the medical officers who served there would after the war become Premier of Victoria – Kyneton-born Major Stanley Argyle. It was during the inauguration of the memorial in 2018 that the committee and the regional authorities committed to the creation of the heritage trail on Lemnos, identifying and linking sites on the island connected to the Gallipoli campaign. This proposal was later taken up by the Australian government as the Lemnos Remembrance Trail, with Jim Claven engaged as the historical consultant in the development of the concept.

The Australian Governor-General acknowledged the work of the committee, along with the prefecture of the North Aegean in instigating this project. How appropriate then that the new trail was commenced with a ground-breaking ceremony by the Australian Governor-General and the Hellenic President at the site of the Australian Pier memorial. As the Australian veterans' affairs minister the Honourable Matt Keogh MP said:

The ... Trail will allow travellers to visit key sites of significance, and a website will be developed to tell the Australian story on Lemnos for those unable to visit in person.

When completed, more than a dozen significant sites on Lemnos will be publicly accessible, giving visitors' insight into the experiences of the soldiers and medical staff on the island.

In inaugurating the trail, the Australian Governor-General said that the trail:

... as a memorial and as a means of education ... will be a place to reflect on the service and losses that were experienced during the Gallipoli Campaign ...

It will also serve as a bridge to understanding and appreciating the service of our modern veterans and men and women in uniform.

The mayor of Lemnos spoke of the new trail as an open museum that will bring to life the history of the Anzacs of Lemnos and offer every visitor a unique experience using state-of-the-art technology.

I want to thank the Australian government for taking on this important initiative and the Australian Governor-General for inaugurating the trail, which will honour the service of all Australians, including many Victorians and their descendants who served on Lemnos during the Gallipoli campaign of 1915–16. I would also like to acknowledge Mr Jim Claven, who has been a tireless advocate for building awareness of the role of Lemnos in the Australian Anzac story through his research, writing and presentations over many years. As a trained historian, communication professional and secretary of the committee, Jim has been an excellent partner for me and the other members of the Lemnos Gallipoli Commemorative Committee.

I would also like to acknowledge the volunteer work of the other members of the committee: vice-president Christina Despoteris OAM; treasurer Arlene Bennett; executive members Terry Kanelos OAM, Paul Sougeris, Malcolm McDonald, Deb Stewart and Vicki Kyritsis; as well as our committee patrons Colonel, retired, Jan McCarthy ARRC and Lambis Englezos AM. Without the tireless work of volunteers like these in our community, such great achievements as the inauguration of this trail would be a long sought after dream.

Department of Treasury and Finance

Budget papers 2023–24

Wendy LOVELL (Northern Victoria) (17:14): I rise to speak on the state budget 2023–24, particularly on the roads funding in the budget, which has been absolutely slashed. We have a crisis with roads here in Victoria, and this has been building ever since Labor came into government and they started slashing funding for roads, starting with the country roads and bridges program that was so popular amongst our small regional councils. Whether it is potholes on freeways, broken rims or crumbling shoulders of our roads, our roads are an absolute mess, and they are unsafe. Mrs Tyrrell borrowed my line this morning that our cars have to be roadworthy, but our roads are not roadworthy, and they certainly are not roadworthy under this government. To quote Mr McCracken, 'We do not drive on the left-hand side of the road in the country, we drive on what is left of the road,' because there is not much of the roads left to drive on.

Labor is punishing Victorians by cutting the road budget yet again. We have already seen how unsafe our roads are in Victoria. To date we have had 134 deaths on the roads in Victoria. This is compared to 97 at this date last year. That is an increase of 37 people who are not going home to their families tonight. That is a disgrace. It is an increase of 38.1 per cent on the deaths last year. This government should hang its head in shame.

Mr Berger tried to tell us that the government were doing a great job on roads. He obviously has not driven on a country road in a long, long time. He was telling us that this morning. But in this year's budget in particular the government have slashed road funding to just \$441 million. That is a 25 per cent slash on last year's budget and a 45 per cent slash since 2020. Our roads are a disgrace, yet this government is cutting funding out of the budget. They brag about an extra – what is it – \$1.2 billion or \$2.8 billion going in over the next 10 years. It is not nearly enough. The Liberal Party went to the election promising \$10 billion over 10 years for road funding, and that is what is needed to fix the crisis that we have here in Victoria today.

While there are many factors that contribute to the road toll, too many Victorian roads are plagued with crumbling shoulders and massive potholes. We see these right throughout country Victoria. Our roads were bad before the floods, but this government likes to say they are only bad because of the floods. I can tell you, I drive on roads in western Victoria in areas that were not flooded that are shocking. I have driven on roads in northern Victoria in areas that were not flooded that are shocking. Of course the floods did add to some of that and made those crumbling roads even worse, but that was because the fabric of the road had been compromised before the floods came, which meant that when the floods came it compounded them even further and made those roads unsafe for country drivers.

It might be all right for the Labor members who represent metropolitan areas to stand up and say, 'Our roads are fine.' They probably are fine inside the tram tracks, to quote Mrs McArthur, but outside the tram tracks our roads are not fine. They are not safe. Driving up to Bendigo the other day I saw massive sections of the Calder Highway just blocked off because you could see the potholes, the uneven surfaces. Everywhere we go in country Victoria there are signs that say, 'Uneven surface ahead'. There are signs that are reducing our speed limits. Reducing the speed limits is not an answer to road maintenance. We need genuine investment in our roads, and this government is not giving us that genuine investment.

I have seen crews out fixing potholes in pouring rain, just pouring a bit of hot mix into it. As soon as a car comes along it pushes it out of it. Our roads have these waves in them where they have put in inferior hot mix to fix the road and it has just stretched when the trucks drive on it, which makes it really unsafe, because it pushes cars all over the road. Mrs Tyrrell talked about driving on our roads being like driving in an earthquake, and she is absolutely right, because you never know where you are going to be pushed next by one of these waves in the road or by a pothole. My office is inundated with people complaining about damage to their cars because of this government's failure to maintain our roads.

Victorian Multicultural Commission

Report 2021–22

John BERGER (Southern Metropolitan) (17:19): Today I rise to speak on the Victorian Multicultural Commission's annual report for 2021–22. We are making progress for our multicultural Victoria, but recent events on the steps of this Parliament show it is not without its challenges for the multicultural commission, the VMC, and diverse communities in Victoria. This commission is dedicated to advancing the exposure and support of multiculturalism in Victoria. In a state where equality is not negotiable, this is vital work. Over the 2021–22 year the VMC had four strategic priorities: promotion and advocacy, investigation and reporting, community leadership and COVID-19 response and recovery. Within these priorities they identified three key focus areas to address: mental health, employment and family violence. The VMC focused on building community engagement, participation and representation, and it is this that I will discuss tonight.

The VMC advocates for CALD communities through active engagement with community stakeholders in the not-for-profit sector and government departments. The commission also conduct extensive research, which they use to develop submissions that help craft more reflective and responsive legislation. These submissions and this expert advice have helped inform legislation – for instance, the Victorian Mental Health and Wellbeing Act 2022 and, on a federal level, the Social

Services Legislation Amendment (Consistent Waiting Periods for New Migrants) Bill 2021, which addresses waiting periods for new migrants. And the commission has played an important advisory role on Family Safety Victoria's project steering committee, the Victorian government's Anti-Racism Taskforce and the Mental Health Ministerial Advisory Committee.

The VMC has also been successful in supporting the next generation. There is no better example than the Multicultural Youth Network. This network allows young people to form bonds and provide advice to government departments and the VMC on relevant issues. Co-designing, walking together and listening to lived experience is vital to its work.

The VMC recognises the importance of celebrating those who make a difference. The VMC's awards for excellence recognised 52 Victorians across 15 categories who have made Victoria more inclusive and welcoming to multicultural communities. The Victorian Multicultural Honour Roll recognises individuals and organisations who go above and beyond for Victoria's multicultural communities. The Victorian Refugee Awards saw 14 refugees and asylum seekers recognised for their accomplishments during the 2022 Refugee Week. I have personally seen the contributions immigrants have made to our community: for instance, Kamal Ibrahim and the community group One Ball and their work using soccer as a medium for change, and Ravneet Singh Sohi, a Sikh community leader who supports everyone from the elderly to newly arrived immigrants.

The VMC helps multicultural Victorians strengthen our state, and it is important that we have an independent body like the VMC working hard every day for our state to achieve its statutory purpose, the objectives set out in the Multicultural Victoria Act 2011.

The VMC works tirelessly for Victoria. They support vulnerable communities who are suffering. They held 32 COVID-19 forums and round tables to act as an effective bridge between CALD communities and the government to ensure departments were flexible to their needs. These meetings were critical in ensuring delivery of both information and essential supplies. This critical outreach led to material improvements to multicultural communities during the pandemic.

The VMC has also been incredibly integral in supporting art and artists in CALD communities. This work means that multicultural communities can express their experiences through the medium of art and help promote understanding and acceptance in the wider community, and it ensures that all stories, perspectives and lived experiences are represented.

The VMC, in partnership with Swinburne University, from my neck of the woods, established the Multicultural Film Festival and the schools competition. This festival and competition allowed multicultural experiences to be explored through film whilst also encouraging and empowering multicultural people to explore their artistic passions. Through the medium of short film, the VMC has helped individuals in the community to explore their creative and technical talents whilst also sharing their important stories. The five award-winning films were showcased at Federation Square, streamed on SBS On Demand and on the Victorian Multicultural Commission's YouTube channel and screened at the City of Casey's Bunjil Place.

I commend the VMC on their important work, and I thank the chairperson of the VMC Vivienne Nguyen and her team for their passion and dedication. The VMC should take deep pride in how they have thrived and the work they have done to promote multicultural Victoria. I know there is much work to be done, and I am proud that we have organisations like the VMC to help to boost the bonds of multicultural Victoria.

Department of Treasury and Finance

Budget papers 2023–24

Gaelle BROAD (Northern Victoria) (17:24): The report I wish to speak on is the state budget papers 2023–24. We are all part of history in this chamber: we have witnessed the worst state budget in Australia's history. Under Labor Victoria is going broke. Some are saying this budget is worse than

the disastrous Cain and Kirner years. The government has described this budget as their most difficult yet. Well, budgets are not easy. Ask anyone who manages a household budget; it is not easy to spend less than you earn. Managing the state budget is not the same as buying a house. It is a significant responsibility because the state of the economy has a direct impact on every Victorian. Under Labor Victoria's credit rating has dropped from AAA to AA. This government continues to waste taxpayers funds and somehow managed to create a budget that hikes up taxes and levies, yet the debt continues to climb.

Victorians pay more tax than any other state or territory, and instead of reducing wasteful spending, this government has introduced new taxes. Since Labor was elected nine years ago, Victoria's tax take is set to double. Under Labor Victorians pay more and get less. We have the highest debt of any state – more than Queensland, New South Wales and Tasmania combined. In 2014 our state debt was \$22 billion. Now it is over \$100 billion and is forecast to reach \$171 billion by 2026. We are now paying over \$10 million a day in interest, and that will rise to \$22 million a day by 2026. The government often refers to free kinder and free TAFE, but nothing is free. All Victorians are paying for it. Only this government could manage to cut 4000 public sector jobs and end up with a wage bill that goes up a further \$5 billion over the forward estimates.

There is little good news in this budget for regional areas, so it is no surprise that no regional paper was published. The recent state budget reduces funding in key areas, including regional roads, health and agriculture. The regional development budget has again been cut – halved – in this year's budget. Since 2020 it has been slashed by 80 per cent. Victoria's road maintenance funding has been cut by 45 per cent since 2020. This government has bypassed regional Victoria. As the Kilmore and Shepparton bypass projects missed out on funding in the budget, large trucks are going to continue to drive right through their main streets.

Labor has cut a further \$1 billion from the health system after cutting \$2 billion in last year's budget, despite the crisis that we are experiencing. I spoke to a lady in Bendigo who attended Bendigo Hospital with up to 50 people in the emergency waiting room and ambulances lined up as drivers could not leave because no beds were available. There is no plan in this budget to solve regional Victoria's health workforce issues, and more people are going to be on the waiting list. Major hospital redevelopments and upgrades that are badly needed in regional towns like Mildura and Shepparton have not been funded. Agriculture funding has also reduced by 34 per cent on last year. In relation to the Commonwealth Games, the government has dropped the baton. The games are less than three years away, and we need further information to ensure these games leave a legacy.

Sadly, I have raised this issue a number of times in the Parliament, but there is nothing for stroke support centres. The Bendigo centre along with Shepparton and other centres have closed their doors. I just want to acknowledge the local staff in Bendigo who are giving their time in a voluntary capacity over the next six months to support stroke survivors and their families. When I see cost blowouts and money wasted by this government, I am very frustrated when groups like this do not receive the support that they deserve. Stroke can certainly happen to any one of us, and it was very sad to read in the *Bendigo Advertiser* just today about Harriet Caldwell, a teenager from Bendigo that experienced a rare spinal stroke on 4 May and has been told she may never walk again. It is encouraging to learn that she has had some movement with physio treatment, and the local community has already raised \$50,000 to support the family. It is a tough road now, travelling between Bendigo and Melbourne to get help, and we wish Harriet well with her recovery.

This budget has also placed further pressure on the housing sector – \$1 billion in taxes on property will flow directly through to higher rents, and there is no stamp duty relief for first home buyers in this budget. Businesses have been hit with WorkCover premium increases, and schools have been caught off guard, forced to pay payroll tax to contribute another \$420 million. A coalition government will repeal this payroll tax in 2026 if elected to government. It is a budget that shows this government plays favourites, and life is only going to get harder under Labor. I am looking forward to a change of government in 2026.

Holmesglen Institute*Report 2022*

Ryan BATCHELOR (Southern Metropolitan) (17:29): I rise to note the 2022 annual report of the Holmesglen Institute of TAFE – just up the road from where I grew up in the electorate of Southern Metropolitan – which was tabled on 2 May this year. Last year Holmesglen enrolled over 18,000 learners in their senior secondary certificates, vocational programs and higher education degrees. An additional 7000 learners enrolled in their skill sets and non-award programs, helping them to develop foundational or specific work-related skills. In 2022 Holmesglen TAFE celebrated 40 years of supporting learners, business partners and the local community through exceptional education, training and applied research. One of the defining features of Holmesglen is the range of courses that aims to help learners develop work-related skills while gaining qualifications to help them find a job. They offer a wide range of courses, both in person and online, focused on building future-ready graduates. Holmesglen have taken up the Labor government's free TAFE initiative, offering tuition-free pathways to students studying certificates in building and construction, business, law and IT, education, health and community services.

The Andrews Labor government is committed to the rebuild of the TAFE system, which was obviously so badly decimated under the previous Liberal government, because we know the skills that we need to build Victoria are learned at TAFE. Since 2014 the Labor government has invested more than \$4 billion into the TAFE and training system to ensure that Victorians have access to high-quality education and rewarding career paths. This includes an investment of over \$500 million in the 2023–24 state budget announced last week. Our free TAFE initiative has so far provided access to priority training for more than 137,000 students across Victoria, saving them \$340 million in student fees.

It was a bit concerning to note members opposite in their contributions on a motion earlier today questioning whether the free TAFE program was sustainable. I hope that this is not an indication that their future plans are to sharpen the axe for TAFE again.

Members interjecting.

Ryan BATCHELOR: You did, you did. We know they have got form. The previous coalition government ripped a billion dollars out of TAFE, shut down 22 TAFE campuses and sacked 2000 teachers. That is their attitude to the TAFE system here in Victoria: shut down our TAFEs. And instead –

Members interjecting.

The PRESIDENT: Order! Statements on reports are usually heard in silence, so let us have a go at that.

Ryan BATCHELOR: More students are getting the skills they need for the jobs that are being created in the Victorian economy. Across our economy free TAFE is delivering the pipeline of skilled workers that we need. As of January 2023 we have delivered on our election commitment to change the eligibility criteria for government-subsidised places, making free TAFE available to people with higher level qualifications. We are also offering the opportunity to enrol in more than one free course on a specified training pathway, opening up eligibility to more than 2 million Victorians with an existing higher qualification. We have removed the once-in-a-lifetime limit on free TAFE courses within specific training pathways, including nursing, early childhood, community services and building and construction. This means that more than 80 free TAFE qualifications, micro-credentials and short courses are now available to Victorians in 2023 to address our highest priority skills and training needs. The expanded eligibility criteria allow people to go back and retrain later in life even if they have already completed a course or higher education degree.

Free TAFE offers pathways to vocational education for students who previously found it out of reach, and the numbers do not lie: free TAFE has increased access for women, unemployed people and students with a disability. Since the beginning of the program we have seen increases across all sorts of marginalised and diverse groups in TAFE courses. Amongst those enrolling in fee-free courses are 59 per cent more women, 42 per cent more learners who identify as having a disability, 46 per cent more culturally and linguistically diverse students, 50 per cent more unemployed Victorians who are seeking jobs after gaining qualifications and 22 per cent more students in regional Victoria. Places like Holmesglen TAFE and things like free TAFE qualifications are the backbone of the future skilled workforce in Victoria, and this government is investing to support them.

Department of Treasury and Finance

Budget papers 2023–24

Melina BATH (Eastern Victoria) (17:34): I would like to speak on the budget papers 2023–24 and specifically speak about the *Victorian Forestry Plan*. There is so much to say, but I will keep my contribution tight today in relation to two aspects. One of those aspects is the plantation industry and the so-called transition to plantation. What this government has failed to do for more than five years is to actually use that lead time to put plantation trees, replacement trees, into the ground. Indeed Australian Bureau of Agricultural and Resource Economics – and these are not my statistics, these are from ABARES – has clearly stated that over the last few years plantation estate in Victoria has shrunk by 50,000 hectares. That is 50,000 less than there was some period of time ago. That is made up of softwood and hardwood as well. On top of that, again from ABARES, we see that there will be around 3600 workers who will now lose their jobs because of the closure of the native timber industry that the government is closing in January 2024.

Indeed the government is spruiking and making comments around the \$200 million to support worker transition. It is absolutely insufficient for this government to put that out. I understand that it could well be reprioritised as soon as it hits the table, but the transition packaging, in relative terms, equates to somewhere around \$50,000 per worker. Now, these are not just workers. Many of these people are the small business operators, the contract harvesters, who have millions of dollars worth of debt because they had to tool up in order to get the new contracts for the hardwood timber industry.

I would like to let my colleague have a short period of time, so I am going to just reflect for a moment on a contribution from a member of this house Ms Terpstra on 8 February 2023. Her words were – and I am quoting directly from her contribution on a debate on Mr Bourman’s timber motion:

Again I will note what was mentioned earlier, that the government has spent a lot of time working on and creating the forestry plan, which is a 20-year plan that is aimed at helping the industry ...

My next quote is:

... that when an industry transitions there are people who work in that industry and they have jobs, you cannot just flick a switch and turn those jobs off, because that has real-world consequences for people who work in those industries.

So here we have seen last Tuesday the flicking off of the switch seven years before it was destined under this government. This is an absolute outrage that this government would take away their livelihoods, their commitment, their productivity and their towns.

Department of Treasury and Finance

Budget papers 2023–24

Georgie CROZIER (Southern Metropolitan) (17:38): I rise to speak to the budget papers 2023–24. I know that I do not have a lot of time, but I will be speaking to this in the coming weeks because this budget is an absolute shocker. It is the worst budget. We have got a government that is out of control with its spending, as I have previously mentioned. I want to just go to some points in the

budget. I want to go to the Department of Health's mission statement and the objectives that they state in the budget. The mission statement talks about the vision, which is that:

Victorians are the healthiest people in the world.

Well, that is all very well to have a mission statement, but really it is just words on a piece of paper because the health outcomes of Victorians are the worst in the country. The amount of money spent per capita and the outcomes for Victorians who cannot get a hospital bed and who cannot get an ambulance describe just the dire situation of our health system. It goes on to say:

... the Government's commitment to a stronger, fairer, better Victoria by developing and delivering policies, programs and services that support, protect and enhance the health, wellbeing and safety of all Victorians.

Well, they are not doing that either. They are failing on so many measures. Even by their own performance standards they are continually failing to meet the targets. It is in black and white here in the budget papers, where those performance targets are continually not being met.

This is all very well and the government will put out their spin machine and they will get their big team of media gurus that are in every department, every agency and in the Premier's office talking about what they are doing and their by-line about what matters.

Actually what matters is delivery of good health care. I am increasingly frustrated, having worked in the health system and having been a patient and had the tremendous care of those who work in the health system, that Victorians are not getting the health care they deserve and need because this government has continually let them down.

They were failing before COVID hit – underinvestment, years of mismanagement – and now we have got COVID being used as an excuse because it tipped the system way over. The pandemic and the lockdowns ended years ago, but the impacts of those lockdowns, the impacts of those government decisions, are lasting. And they are very, very severe, because the numbers of young people with eating disorders and people with mental health disorders have increased. We know in lockdown family violence, drug abuse and alcohol abuse were terrible. There were so many issues, and the devastation for those families that were not able to see and be with their loved ones. Those issues are still having an impact as we speak today in 2023 even though I am talking about a number of years ago.

In the government's own performance measures they are letting us down; they are not doing what these objectives and the mission statement are trying to achieve. The objectives say:

- Keep people healthy and safe in the community
- Care closer to home
- Keep improving care
- Improve Aboriginal health and wellbeing
- Move from competition to collaboration

That is just code for amalgamations. That is code for a whole lot of closures of systems. That is code for not having care closer to home. That is code for having less services out in rural and regional Victoria. The objectives refer to:

- A stronger workforce –

we know the workforce plan is not there; we know there are population projections, but the workforce is not there –

- A safe and sustainable health system.

Our health system was once a proud health system, but it is a system now that has got systemic issues right through it. It needs total reform and to be looked at, because whatever the government is doing, it is not working. It is seriously not working, because the health outcomes, the number of Victorians waiting for elective surgery – as I have spoken about so many times – is far too high. I am not going

to cop another excuse about ‘It was the previous federal government’s fault,’ ‘It was Jeff Kennett’s fault,’ ‘It was COVID’s fault,’ ‘It’s the RBA’s fault.’ We are sick of the excuses. It is 2023. We went into lockdown to protect our health system, to get it under control, yet it is worse than ever. The investment has failed, and the outcomes for Victorians are getting worse. It is here in the budget papers. I will have more to say on that in future weeks.

Questions without notice and ministers statements

Written responses

The PRESIDENT (17:43): At the end of question time today I undertook to review the *Hansard* of Dr Bach’s supplementary question to the Minister for Child Protection and Family Services. The question was related to child protection. I have looked at the supplementary question and the minister’s answer, and I consider the minister has answered the question.

Bills

State Taxation Acts Amendment Bill 2023

Introduction and first reading

The PRESIDENT (17:43): I have a message from the Assembly:

The Legislative Assembly presents for the agreement of the Legislative Council ‘A Bill for an Act to amend the **Duties Act 2000**, the **Fire Services Property Levy Act 2012**, the **Land Tax Act 2005**, the **Payroll Tax Act 2007**, the **Planning and Environment Act 1987**, the **Subdivision Act 1988**, the **Taxation Administration Act 1997** and the **Valuation of Land Act 1960** and for other purposes’.

Ingrid STITT (Western Metropolitan – Minister for Early Childhood and Pre-Prep, Minister for Environment) (17:44): I move:

That the bill be now read a first time.

Motion agreed to.

Read first time.

Ingrid STITT: I move, by leave:

That the second reading be taken forthwith.

Motion agreed to.

Statement of compatibility

Ingrid STITT (Western Metropolitan – Minister for Early Childhood and Pre-Prep, Minister for Environment) (17:44): I lay on the table a statement of compatibility with the Charter of Human Rights and Responsibilities Act 2006:

In accordance with section 28 of the *Charter of Human Rights and Responsibilities Act 2006* (**Charter**), I make this Statement of Compatibility with respect to the State Taxation Acts Amendment Bill 2023.

In my opinion, the State Taxation Acts Amendment Bill 2023 (**Bill**), as introduced to the Legislative Council, is compatible with the human rights as set out in the Charter. I base my opinion on the reasons outlined in this Statement.

Overview

This Bill introduces a number of budget measures, and makes technical amendments to the *Duties Act 2000* (**Duties Act**), the *Fire Services Property Levy Act 2012* (**FSPL Act**), the *Land Tax Act 2005* (**Land Tax Act**), the *Payroll Tax Act 2007* (**Payroll Tax Act**), the *Planning and Environment Act 1987* (**Planning Act**), the *Subdivision Act 1988* (**Subdivision Act**), the *Taxation Administration Act 1997* (**Taxation Administration Act**) and the *Valuation of Land Act 1960* (**Valuation of Land Act**).

Many of the amendments made by the Bill do not engage the human rights listed in the Charter because they either do not affect natural persons, or they operate beneficially in relation to natural persons.

Human rights issues

The rights under the Charter that are relevant to the Bill are recognition and equality before the law, the right to property, the right to fair hearing and the right to protection from retrospective criminal laws.

Recognition and equality before the law: section 8(3)

Section 8(3) of the Charter provides that every person is equal before the law and is entitled to the equal protection of the law without discrimination. Discrimination, under section 6 of the *Equal Opportunity Act 2010*, includes discrimination on the basis of race, which is defined to include differentiation based on a person's nationality or national origin.

Clauses 27 to 33, 39 and 41 of the Bill increase the tax rate for absentee owners of land by 2% from the 2024 land tax year. Clause 39 of the Bill also lowers the tax-free threshold for absentee owners of land (other than trustees of trusts) from \$300,000 to \$50,000 from the 2024 land tax year.

The Charter implications of the original absentee owner surcharge provisions were addressed in the Statement of Compatibility accompanying the State Taxation and Other Acts Amendment Bill 2015. The Bill may engage the section 8(3) rights of natural person absentees because these amendments differentiate between taxpayers' liability on the basis of a person's nationality. However, any limitation on those rights would be reasonable and justified in accordance with section 7(2) of the Charter because the amendments are directed to implementing the underlying purpose of collecting surcharge rates of land tax from absentee owners of land. Differential treatment of foreign natural persons is central to the policy intent, which is to improve housing affordability for Victorians and to fund vital infrastructure by increasing the cost of holding land for foreign persons in the Victorian residential housing market.

Right to property: section 20

Section 20 of the Charter provides that a person must not be deprived of his or her property other than in accordance with law. This right is not limited where there is a law that authorises a deprivation of property, and that law is adequately accessible, clear and certain, and sufficiently precise to enable a person to regulate their conduct.

Duties Act amendments

Division 1 of Part 2 of the Bill inserts provisions into the Duties Act to allow for the taxation of corporate collective investment vehicles (CCIVs) on an equivalent basis to the taxation of trusts under that Act. The right to property may be engaged by these amendments where natural persons are members of CCIV sub-funds and become liable to duty in that capacity.

Division 3 of Part 2 of the Bill replaces the current eligible pensioner exemption/concession with a new eligible cardholder exemption/concession. The right to property may be engaged by these amendments as natural persons may be required to pay duty or an increased amount of duty where currently an exemption or higher concession applies.

To the extent that people's property rights are affected by the above amendments to the Duties Act, any limit is in accordance with the law, which is clearly articulated, not arbitrary, and sufficiently precise to enable affected natural person taxpayers to inform themselves of their legal obligations and to regulate their conduct accordingly. Any deprivation of property arising from the payment of duty under the CCIV amendments is further justifiable since these provisions are anti-avoidance in nature.

FSPL Act amendments

Clauses 23 and 24 of the Bill contain amendments to the refund and cancellation provisions of the FSPL Act to expressly preclude refund/cancellation requests the basis for which is a ground of objection under the Valuation of Land Act. To the extent that natural persons may overpay FSPL on the basis of an incorrect valuation and do not pursue an objection under the Valuation of Land Act, the right to property may be engaged. Any deprivation of property arising from limiting the grounds on which a refund may be issued, or an FSPL assessment cancelled, is justifiable since those affected remain entitled to dispute FSPL liabilities under the Valuation of Land Act. Further, the measures are designed to prevent revenue leakage and promote certainty of revenue that funds Victoria's firefighting services.

To the extent that people's property rights are affected, any limit is in accordance with the law, which is clearly articulated, not arbitrary, and sufficiently precise to enable affected natural person taxpayers to inform themselves of their legal obligations and to regulate their conduct accordingly.

Land Tax Act amendments

Division 1 of Part 4 of the Bill inserts provisions into the Land Tax Act to allow for the taxation of CCIVs on an equivalent basis to the taxation of trusts under that Act. The right to property may be engaged by these

amendments where natural persons are members of CCIV sub-funds and become liable to land tax in that capacity.

Clauses 27 to 32, 39 and 41 of the Bill increase the tax rate for absentee owners of land by 2% from the 2024 land tax year. Clause 39 of the Bill also lowers from the 2024 land tax year the tax-free threshold for absentee owners of land (other than trustees of trusts) from \$300,000 to \$50,000. These amendments affect natural persons who will be required to pay land tax at a higher rate, and from a lower threshold, than that which currently applies and as such the right to property may be engaged.

Clause 35 of the Bill temporarily lowers the tax-free threshold for owners of land (other than absentee owners and/or trustees of trusts) from \$300,000 to \$50,000 from the 2024 land tax year, for a period of 10 years. It also temporarily increases the rate of tax payable by those owners with total taxable land of \$300,000 or more. The right to property may be engaged as natural persons will become liable to land tax at a lower threshold where previously they were not so liable or will be required to pay land tax at a higher rate than that which currently applies.

Clauses 37 and 41 of the Bill temporarily increase the rate of land tax payable by trustees of trusts who own land with a total taxable value of \$50,000 or more from the 2024 land tax year, for a period of 10 years. The right to property may be engaged as natural persons may be required to pay land tax at a higher rate than that which currently applies.

To the extent that people's property rights are affected by the above amendments to the Land Tax Act, any limit is in accordance with the law, which is clearly articulated, not arbitrary, and sufficiently precise to enable affected natural person taxpayers to inform themselves of their legal obligations and to regulate their conduct accordingly. Any deprivation of property arising from the payment of land tax under the CCIV amendments is further justifiable since these provisions are anti-avoidance in nature.

Payroll Tax Act amendments

Clause 58 of the Bill corrects an omission in the Payroll Tax Act to specify the annual rate of payroll tax for the 2022–23 and subsequent financial years. To the extent that natural person employers will no longer be able to exploit a drafting error to avoid paying annual payroll tax, people's property rights may be affected. However, any limit is in accordance with the law, which is clearly articulated, not arbitrary, and sufficiently precise to enable affected natural person taxpayers to inform themselves of their legal obligations and to regulate their conduct accordingly.

Planning Act amendments

Division 1 of Part 6 of the Bill amends the Planning Act to clearly impose the Growth Areas Infrastructure Contribution (**GAIC**) on the certification of a plan of subdivision under section 35 of the Subdivision Act. To the extent that natural person landowners can no longer use subdivision technicalities to avoid a liability to GAIC, the right to property may be engaged.

Clauses 102 and 103 of the Bill correct anomalies in the Planning Act to provide that, following subdivision of a parent lot, GAIC is apportioned to child lots on the proportionate area of the child lot to the parent lot, excluding land outside the contribution area. To the extent that natural person landowners may no longer be able to take advantage of technicalities in the apportionment provisions to avoid a liability to GAIC, the right to property may be engaged.

Any deprivation of property under these amendments to the Planning Act is justifiable since these provisions are anti-avoidance in nature. To the extent that people's property rights are affected, any limit is in accordance with the law, which is clearly articulated, not arbitrary, and sufficiently precise to enable affected natural person taxpayers to inform themselves of their legal obligations and to regulate their conduct accordingly.

Taxation Administration Act and Valuation of Land Act amendments

Clause 108 of the Bill amends the objection provisions of the Taxation Administration Act such that an objection to either of the two valuations on which a windfall gains tax (**WGT**) assessment is based will be taken as an objection to both relevant valuations. In addition, clause 109 of the Bill amends the Valuation of Land Act to provide that an objection to either of the two valuations on which a WGT assessment is based will be taken as an objection to both relevant valuations.

To the extent that natural person landowners will not be able to manipulate valuation objections to minimise their WGT liability, the right to property may be engaged. Any deprivation of property arising from these amendments is justifiable as they are anti-avoidance measures. To the extent that people's property rights are affected, any limit is in accordance with the law, which is clearly articulated, not arbitrary, and sufficiently precise to enable affected natural person taxpayers to inform themselves of their legal obligations and to regulate their conduct accordingly.

Clause 110 of the Bill includes amendments to give councils discretion whether to adopt any amended valuations that result from a WGT valuation objection. These amendments may engage the right to property in circumstances where a natural person landowner overpays council rates on the basis of a valuation which is later found to be overstated for WGT purposes, and the relevant council declines to issue an amended rates notice reflecting the revised value. Any deprivation of property arising from these amendments is justifiable as the purpose of the amendments is to ensure revenue certainty and promote efficiency for municipal councils by ensuring that that WGT objections do not place an undue burden on councils. Aggrieved landowners remain entitled to contest property valuations for council rates purposes under the Valuation of Land Act.

Right to fair hearing: section 24

The right to a fair hearing as protected under section 24 of the Charter provides that a person charged with a criminal offence or a party to a civil proceeding has the right to a fair hearing. The right to a fair hearing applies to both courts and tribunals, such as the Victorian Civil and Administrative Tribunal. Generally, the right to a fair hearing is concerned with procedural fairness and access to a court or tribunal, rather than the substantive fairness of a decision of a court or tribunal determined on the merits of a case.

FSPL Act amendments

Clauses 23 and 24 of the Bill contain amendments to the refund and cancellation provisions of the FSPL Act to expressly preclude refund/cancellation requests the basis for which is a ground of objection under the Valuation of Land Act. To the extent that section 24 of the Charter is engaged and limited by these provisions, I am satisfied that any such limit would be demonstrably justified. These amendments have been introduced to prevent landowners from using alternative pathways to the objections process set out in the Valuation of Land Act to contest land valuations for FSPL purposes and in particular to prevent the circumvention of the strict timeframes set out in the Valuation of Land Act. Any limit on the right to fair hearing by this amendment is justified as it is a revenue protection measure intended to prevent revenue leakage and promote revenue certainty. Aggrieved landowners remained entitled to contest property valuations for FSPL purposes under the Valuation of Land Act.

Planning Act amendments

Division 2 of Part 6 of the Bill abolishes the GAIC Hardship Relief Board (**Board**). To the extent natural person landowners will no longer be able to seek GAIC relief from the Board, the right to fair hearing may be engaged. However, I am satisfied that any limit would be demonstrably justified. These amendments eliminate unnecessary regulation and administrative burdens and promote government efficiency. Under the amendments, natural person landowners will be able to seek GAIC relief on financial hardship grounds from the Governor in Council instead of the Board.

Taxation Administration Act and Valuation of Land Act amendments

Clause 108 of the Bill amends the objection provisions of the Taxation Administration Act such that an objection to either of the two valuations on which a WGT assessment is based will be taken as an objection to both relevant valuations. In addition, clause 109 of the Bill amends the Valuation of Land Act to provide that an objection to either of the two valuations on which a WGT assessment is based will be taken as an objection to both relevant valuations.

To the extent that section 24 of the Charter is engaged and limited by these provisions, I am satisfied that any such limit would be demonstrably justified. These amendments have been introduced to prevent landowners from manipulating the objections process to minimise their liability to WGT. Any limit on the right to fair hearing by this is justified as a revenue protection measure intended to prevent tax leakage and avoidance activity. Aggrieved landowners remained entitled to contest property valuations for WGT purposes under the Taxation Administration Act, albeit that both relevant values will be reviewed.

Clause 110 of the Bill includes amendments to the Valuation of Land Act to give councils discretion whether to adopt any amended valuations that result from a WGT valuation objection. To the extent that section 24 of the Charter is engaged and limited by these provisions, I am satisfied that any such limit would be demonstrably justified. These amendments have been introduced to ensure revenue certainty and promote efficiency for municipal councils by ensuring that WGT objections do not place an undue burden on councils. Aggrieved landowners remain entitled to contest property valuations for council rates purposes under the Valuation of Land Act.

Retrospectivity: section 27

Section 27 of the Charter is concerned with the retrospective operation of criminal laws. It provides that a person has the right not to be prosecuted or punished for things that were not criminal offences at the time they were committed.

Payroll Tax Act amendments

Clause 58 of the Bill corrects an omission in the Payroll Tax Act to specify the annual rate of payroll tax for the 2022–23 and subsequent financial years. The proposed amendment is to take effect retrospectively from 1 July 2022 to confirm the annual payroll tax rates that apply for the 2022–23 and subsequent financial years.

The provisions being inserted into the Payroll Tax Act do not amend any criminal laws and therefore section 27 of the Charter is not engaged. In any event, the retrospective operation of clause 58 is necessary to correct a drafting anomaly by which monthly payroll tax is imposed but an annual rate is not specified for the 2022–23 financial year. Importantly, clause 58 of the Bill does not in practice operate to impose payroll tax retrospectively. For the 2022–23 financial year, employers are already under a legislated obligation to pay payroll tax on a monthly basis at the relevant rate. The amendments only affect the annual rate of payroll tax which is relevant to the annual reconciliation completed after the end of the financial year, i.e. after 30 June 2023 in respect of the 2022–23 financial year, and part-year reconciliations where an employer has not employed for the full financial year.

For these reasons, in my opinion, the provisions of the Bill are compatible with the rights contained in sections 8(3), 20, 24 and 27 of the Charter.

The Hon. Jaclyn Symes
Attorney-General
Minister for Emergency Services

Second reading

Ingrid STITT (Western Metropolitan – Minister for Early Childhood and Pre-Prep, Minister for Environment) (17:44): I move:

That the bill be now read a second time.

Ordered that second-reading speech be incorporated into *Hansard*:

I am pleased to introduce this Bill, which amends the *Duties Act 2000*, *Fire Services Property Levy Act 2012*, *Land Tax Act 2005*, *Payroll Tax Act 2007*, *Planning and Environment Act 1987*, *Subdivision Act 1988*, *Taxation Administration Act 1997* and *Valuation of Land Act 1960* to ensure that these Acts remain consistent with their underlying policy intent.

This Bill delivers 2023–24 budget initiatives and amends several laws to ensure they support fair and effective revenue administration.

COVID Debt Repayment Plan – COVID Debt Levy

The Government's Covid Debt Repayment Plan, which aims to offset debt incurred assisting Victorians through the COVID-19 pandemic, contains a temporary and targeted levy that will apply for 10 years, expiring on 30 June 2033, with two components.

Firstly, the Bill will introduce a new payroll tax surcharge that will apply to employers who pay wages of \$10 million or more nationally. A rate of 0.5 per cent will apply for businesses with national payrolls above \$10 million, and businesses with national payrolls above \$100 million will pay an additional 0.5 per cent. The additional rates will be paid on the Victorian share of wages above the relevant threshold. This surcharge is expected to raise \$836 million in 2023–24 and is projected to raise around \$1 billion a year by the end of the forward estimates.

Secondly, the Bill will reduce the general rates land tax-free threshold to \$50,000. In addition, it will impose land tax surcharges and increase current land tax rates by imposing a temporary flat surcharge of \$500 on general taxpayers with landholdings between \$50,000 and \$100,000 and a temporary flat surcharge of \$975 on general taxpayers with landholdings between \$100,000 and \$300,000. Trust rates will increase in a consistent manner. For general taxpayers with landholdings over \$300,000 (and trust taxpayers with landholdings above \$250,000), land tax rates will temporarily increase by 0.1 per cent of the value of landholdings above \$300,000, in addition to the \$975 temporary flat surcharge. Following the conclusion of the applicable 10-year period on 30 June 2033, these changes will be reversed.. It is estimated that the increased land tax rates will raise an additional \$4.7 billion in revenue over the budget and forward estimates.

Better business tax

To support the growth of the Victorian economy, the Bill will gradually abolish business insurance duties (which apply to public and product liability, professional indemnity, employers' liability, fire and industrial special risks, and marine and aviation insurance) by reducing the applicable duty rate by 1 per cent per annum over a 10-year period commencing from 1 July 2024. Duty on business insurance will therefore be abolished

by 2033 and will result in the reduction of insurance duty revenue received over the budget forward estimates period by more than \$275 million.

To further support Victorian small businesses, the Bill will increase the payroll tax-free threshold from \$700,000 to \$900,000 from 1 July 2024, and subsequently increase further to \$1,000,000 from 1 July 2025. Around 6,000 businesses, who otherwise would have paid payroll tax, will stop paying when the threshold reaches \$1 million. More than 26,000 small businesses will benefit from the Government increasing the tax-free threshold to \$1 million. The Bill will also introduce a 'phase out' of the allowable deduction for payroll tax for businesses who pay wages over \$3 million. The *Payroll Tax Act 2007* (PTA) currently allows a deduction based on the tax-free threshold to be subtracted from Victorian taxable wages in determining the amount of payroll tax payable. The allowable deduction is adjusted on a pro-rata basis in accordance with the proportion of the employer's total Australian wages that are taxable wages and partly adjusted for employers who pay wages for part of a financial year. Under the 'phase out', businesses who pay wages between \$3,000,000 and \$5,000,000 will receive a progressively smaller deduction resulting in proportionately more payroll tax payable. Businesses who pay wages over \$5 million will not be eligible for the deduction in payroll tax on their taxable wages. This measure will commence from 1 July 2024 to give businesses time to adjust their operations to the new payroll tax framework and is expected to cost around \$62 million over the budget and forward years.

Revenue measures

The Bill will limit the existing payroll tax exemption applying to non-government schools to low-fee non-government schools as declared by the Minister for Education with the consent of the Treasurer. The PTA currently exempts from payroll tax, wages paid by not-for-profit non-government schools as defined by the *Education and Training Reform Act 2006* (ETRA), provided those wages are paid to people in relation to the provision of education within that school. In practice, this has the effect of exempting all non-government schools in Victoria from payroll tax. Under this budget measure, declared schools will be eligible for the exemption from payroll tax and non-declared schools would be liable to pay payroll tax and additional surcharges where their taxable wages exceed the tax-free threshold. This initiative will align the payroll tax treatment of high-fee non-government schools with that of government schools and ensure the benefit of this exemption only flows to schools that need support. Approximately 110 schools, or around the top 15 per cent by fee level, will lose their exemption. This measure is proposed to commence from 1 July 2024 and is expected to generate \$422 million across the budget and forward years.

The Bill increases the absentee owner land tax surcharge rate from 2 per cent to 4 per cent to align with the rate in New South Wales. The Bill will also decrease the minimum threshold for non-trustee absentee owners from \$300,000 to \$50,000. This means the surcharge will be payable if the total taxable value of Victorian land held by a non-trust absentee owner is equal to or exceeds \$50,000. There will be no change to the minimum threshold for trust taxpayers. These measures ensure that foreign property owners continue to contribute towards the provision of government services and infrastructure in Victoria, to the ultimate benefit of all Victorian property owners. This measure is expected to generate around \$1.2 billion in revenue over the budget and forward estimates.

Support measures

To support those impacted by builder insolvencies, the Bill will provide the Commissioner of State Revenue with the discretion to extend the existing land tax exemption for principal places of residence under construction or renovation by up to an additional two years effective from the 2024 land tax year. The *Land Tax Act 2005* (LTA) currently contains a principal place of residence exemption for land which is unoccupied and contains a residence which is under construction or renovation. The current exemption applies from the commencement date of construction or renovation and is available for a maximum of four tax years after the year in which construction or renovation commenced. This measure, commencing the day after Royal Assent, will provide the Commissioner of State Revenue with discretion to extend the exemption period by up to an additional two years where further time is required to complete construction due to builder insolvency. It is estimated the extension of the principal place of residence exemption will reduce land tax revenue by approximately \$2.4 million over the budget and forward estimates.

The Bill will introduce a number of land tax and transfer duty relief measures to provide further support to families providing housing to family members facing severe disabilities. Firstly, the Bill amends the *Duties Act 2000* (the Duties Act) to increase the special disability trust (SDT) deduction threshold from \$500,000 to \$1,500,000 for transfers of dutiable property to the trustee of an SDT, but only where the property is to be used as the principal place of residence of the principal beneficiary of the SDT. Secondly, the Bill will introduce an exemption from duty for transfers of property from immediate family members for no consideration to a qualifying person with a disability which is to be used as the principal place of residence of that qualifying person. Currently, duty exemptions are available to families who establish an SDT for the purposes of providing accommodation and housing to family members who suffer from a severe disability.

However, costs and complexities associated with establishing and operating an SDT have been onerous and prohibitive for some families. This measure will provide a similar duty exemption, without the requirement to establish an SDT, provided the qualifying person with a disability meets certain residency requirements and the dutiable value of the property does not exceed \$1,500,000. Thirdly, the Bill will also introduce a land tax exemption for land used as the home of an individual eligible to be the beneficiary of an SDT, even in the absence of an established SDT, provided there is no consideration or rent provided. The duties exemption and the land tax exemption will apply on the basis that the person with a disability meets the impairment and disability conditions of the beneficiary requirements of an SDT under the *Social Securities Act 1991* (Cth) or *Veterans' Entitlements Act 1986* (Cth) and meets other PPR exemption criteria. Collectively, these measures will assist people to provide long-term housing solutions for immediate family members with severe disabilities and are expected to reduce tax revenue by approximately \$5.4 million over the budget and forward estimates.

The Bill will assist pensioners and other concession card holders by increasing the land transfer duty exemption and concession threshold from \$330,001 and \$750,000, to \$600,001 and \$750,000. Accordingly, a full exemption from duty will be available for dutiable property that is below \$600,000 rather than \$330,000, provided that an eligible pensioner acquires an interest of 25 per cent or more and satisfies a residency requirement. Separately, if an eligible pensioner purchases a share or an interest in a property, the exemption and concession thresholds are currently assessed against the dutiable value of the fractional interest of the eligible pensioner, rather than the dutiable value of the whole property. The new measure will therefore be aligned with the first home buyer exemption and concession and improve fairness by assessing eligibility on the total value of the purchase, rather than on the fractional interest of the eligible pensioner. The proposed amendments are to have effect to contracts entered into from 1 July 2023.

The Bill will also introduce a new land tax exemption for land protected by a conservation covenant entered into with Trust for Nature, commencing from 1 January 2024. A conservation covenant is a voluntary legal agreement made between a private landowner and Trust for Nature that binds the landowner as to the development or use or the conservation of land subject to the covenant. The new land tax exemption will therefore support landowners to protect the conservation value of the land and is estimated to reduce land tax revenue by approximately \$3.1 million over the budget and forward estimates.

General taxation amendments

The Bill makes several amendments to Victoria's laws that will clarify their operation, correct drafting defects and remove anomalies that disadvantage taxpayers.

Corporate collective investment vehicles

The Bill will amend the *Duties Act 2000*, *Land Tax Act 2005* and *Payroll Tax Act 2007* to address the corporate collective investment vehicle (CCIV) reforms recently made by the Australian Government. CCIVs were established as a new fund management entity, intended to be an alternative structure to the existing trust-based management investment scheme to increase the competitiveness of Australia's managed fund industry and attract foreign investment. A CCIV is a company limited by shares, thus a single legal entity with all assets, liabilities and businesses of a CCIV assigned to one or more segregated sub-funds. Each sub-fund has its own set of members, who are at law shareholders of the CCIV, however the sub-funds do not have separate legal personality and no trust relationship is created between the CCIV and the members of a sub-fund in respect of the property held in that sub-fund. As CCIVs are brand new entities, existing Victorian taxation legislation views a CCIV as a single legal person and the sole legal and beneficial owner of all land across the CCIV's sub-funds.

The Bill amends the *Duties Act 2000* and the *Land Tax Act 2005* to deem each sub-fund of a CCIV as equivalent to a separate unit trust scheme for duties and land tax purposes. Under this approach, CCIVs would be regulated and taxed as if they were trustees; property of the sub-funds would be treated as trust property, and the members of each sub-fund would be treated as beneficiaries/unit holders. Consequential amendments to the *Duties Act 2000* will also ensure the principle that each sub fund is deemed to be equivalent to a unit trust scheme is carried throughout each Act. The Bill will amend the *Payroll Tax Act 2007* to exclude amounts paid or payable by a CCIV to its corporate director as wages for payroll tax purposes. This is intended to prevent payroll tax from applying to payments from the CCIV to its corporate director.

Fire services property levy

The Bill amends the refund and cancellation provisions under the *Fire Services Property Levy Act 2012* (the FSPL Act) in response to the Victorian Court of Appeal case of *Valuer General (Vic) v AWF Prop Co 2 Pty Ltd* [2021] VSCA 274 (the AWF Decision). The refund and cancellation provisions under the FSPL Act allows collection agencies to refund or cancel payments for mistakes, such as duplicated payments or mathematical errors. In the AWF Decision, the Ararat Rural City Council sent notices to an operator (being the lessee of land) with Capital Improved Values calculated on the assumption that the wind turbines

connected to underground foundations were fixtures forming part of the land. The Court subsequently held that the fixtures did not form part of the land and should be excluded from the hypothetical fee simple estate to be valued by a valuation authority for FSPL and rates purposes. Following the AWF Decision, several wind farm operators have made refund requests under the refund and cancellation provisions in respect of historical FSPL paid. However, these provisions were not intended to provide a person aggrieved by a valuation with an alternative avenue to dispute amounts paid if they were otherwise too late to lodge an objection under the *Valuation of Land Act 1960* (VLA). Accordingly, the Bill will amend the refund and cancellation provisions to expressly carve out overpayments/errors, the basis for which is a ground of objection under the VLA. These amendments will ensure consistency between the refund and cancellation provisions in the FSPL Act and will adequately reflect the policy intent of the statutory scheme.

The Bill will make a minor amendment to the PTA to correct the omission of annual payroll tax rates being in place for the 2022–23 financial year and subsequent financial years in respect of regional employers and bushfire relief regional employers. The Bill will therefore amend the PTA by inserting the words ‘or any subsequent financial year’, in clause 1 of Schedule 1. This amendment will ensure that the annual payroll tax rates will apply for the financial year commencing 1 July 2021 continue to apply for the 2022–23 and future financial years, as was always intended.

Growth areas infrastructure contribution

The Bill abolishes the Growth Areas Infrastructure Contribution (GAIC) Hardship Relief Board in line with the recommendations of the Commissioner for Better Regulation. Section 201TE of the *Planning and Environment Act* (PE Act) empowers the Governor in Council to, on the recommendation of the Minister for Planning, grant a reduction of or exemption from GAIC liability in exceptional circumstances. The Bill will amend this to include financial hardship as an exceptional circumstance, which will provide an alternative means for landowners to seek relief from GAIC liability.

The Bill also closes a loophole in the GAIC provisions of the PE Act and its interaction with section 35 of the *Subdivision Act 1988*. The current framework enables developers to excise land for public purposes early and prior to GAIC being triggered, with the result being that GAIC liabilities on these parcels are never realised to state revenue, or are imposed on local government and other government agencies. Use of the section 35 loophole means that councils and other acquiring authorities were acquiring land with a GAIC liability on title which becomes a financial risk for them. This amendment introduces a new GAIC event, being the certification of a non-statement of compliance subdivision to ensure that any GAIC liability on land which is subdivided through section 35 of the *Subdivision Act 1988* is paid prior to transfer to an acquiring authority. This removes the financial risk and burden from councils and other municipal authorities and provides that GAIC continues to apply to all land within the contribution area on a broad hectare basis, as intended by GAIC policy.

The Bill also amends the PE Act to prevent GAIC from being apportioned from a parent lot to any child lot wholly outside the contribution area, where the parent lot is partly inside and outside the contribution area. This can lead to the apportionment of GAIC to a child lot that is not within the contribution area, or allocate a child lot that is partially outside the contribution area with a greater GAIC liability that it should otherwise be liable to. To prevent this unintended outcome, the Bill will amend the PE Act to provide that GAIC is apportioned to child lots based on the proportionate area of the child lot to the parent lot, excluding land outside the contribution area.

The Bill rectifies the unintended consequences of an earlier amendment to the Duties Act which aimed to close a loophole relating to acquisition of economic entitlements. This had the effect of triggering a GAIC liability at the time a person enters into an agreement with a landowner where the profits of the development of the land are split, but the title to the property remains with the original landowner. This brought forward the requirement to pay GAIC much earlier in the development cycle, and while a triggered liability can be deferred, it attracts interest from the time it is triggered, resulting in a higher liability than would have ordinarily been incurred. The Bill ensures that acquisition of economic entitlements becomes an excluded event. The Bill also includes a range of minor and technical amendments to ensure the Act is consistent with changes that have occurred in recent years to the Duties Act. Collectively, these amendments to GAIC will come into operation on the day after the day on which this Act receives the Royal Assent.

The Bill will also amend the *Taxation Administration Act 1997* and VLA to clarify the scope of objections lodged to valuations of land used in an assessment of Windfall gains tax (WGT). The WGT was legislated in the WGT Amendment Act and will come into operation from 1 July 2023, which will apply to land subject to a rezoning decision that results in a land value uplift of more than \$100,000. Value uplift is calculated as V2 minus V1, where V2 relates to the capital improved value in a post-rezoning supplementary valuation undertaken by the Valuer-General Victoria (Valuer-General) and V1 relates to the capital improved value in a pre-rezoning valuation of the land. Under the current WGT regime, landowners may object to either or both valuations and the Valuer-General can only consider and adjust a valuation which the owner has objected to.

An owner could therefore manipulate the value uplift on which WGT is calculated by objecting to only one of the valuations. Changes to the amendments to the *Taxation Administration Act 1997* and VLA in the WGT Amendment Act are proposed so that an objection to either V1 or V2 is taken as an objection to both V1 and V2. This would empower the Valuer-General to consider grounds of objection for both valuations and adjust either or both as part of determining the objection's outcome, if appropriate. In addition, the VLA is proposed to be amended (via the WGT Amendment Act) to give councils discretion whether to adopt any amended valuations that result from a WGT valuation objection. This ensures councils are not required to issue a secondary rate notice every time that a WGT objection leads to an adjusted value, such as in cases where the adjustment is minor, or substantial time has elapsed before the amended notice of valuation is issued. These amendments are proposed to take effect from the day after Royal Assent to be in place when the WGT commences on 1 July 2023.

I commend the Bill to the house.

Georgie CROZIER (Southern Metropolitan) (17:45): I move, on behalf of my colleague Dr Bach:

That debate on this bill be adjourned for one week.

Motion agreed to and debate adjourned for one week.

Victorian Future Fund Bill 2023

Introduction and first reading

The PRESIDENT (17:45): I have a further message from the Assembly:

The Legislative Assembly presents for the agreement of the Legislative Council 'A Bill for an Act to establish the Victorian Future Fund and set out the purposes for which money in the Victorian Future Fund may be used and to amend the **Duties Act 2000** and for other purposes'.

Ingrid STITT (Western Metropolitan – Minister for Early Childhood and Pre-Prep, Minister for Environment) (17:45): I move:

That the bill be now read a first time.

Motion agreed to.

Read first time.

Ingrid STITT: I move, by leave:

That the second reading be taken forthwith.

Motion agreed to.

Statement of compatibility

Ingrid STITT (Western Metropolitan – Minister for Early Childhood and Pre-Prep, Minister for Environment) (17:46): I lay on the table a statement of compatibility with the Charter of Human Rights and Responsibilities Act 2006:

Opening paragraphs

In accordance with section 28 of the *Charter of Human Rights and Responsibilities Act 2006*, (the Charter), I make this Statement of Compatibility with respect to the *Victorian Future Fund Bill 2023*.

In my opinion, the *Victorian Future Fund Bill 2023*, as introduced to the Legislative Council, is compatible with human rights as set out in the Charter. I base my opinion on the reasons outlined in this statement.

Overview

1. The purposes of the Bill are to establish the Victorian Future Fund as a statutory trust account within the Trust Fund under the *Financial Management Act 1994*.
2. The Bill also:
 - amends the *Duties Act 2000* so that the fund manager is a "qualified investor" under that Act;
 - provides parameters for money to be credited to, and applied from, the Victorian Future Fund;

- sets out a framework for the administration of the Victorian Future Fund, including the appointment of a fund manager; and
- outlines auditing and reporting requirements that apply to the Victorian Future Fund.

Human Rights Issues

No Charter rights are impermissibly limited by the Bill.

Clause 10(1) of the Bill enables the Treasurer to appoint a person to manage the Victorian Future Fund.

Clause 11(2) of the Bill requires the fund manager to give the Minister or Secretary any information that the Minister or the Secretary reasonably requires to comply with reporting obligations in respect of the Victorian Future Fund.

Clause 12(2) of the Bill requires the fund manager to give the Treasurer or the person carrying out an audit any information that the Treasurer or person reasonably requires in carrying out the audit.

The Victorian Future Fund reporting obligations are set out under Clause 11(1) and include information on the Fund's opening and closing balances, details of contributions made to the Fund, and details of payments made from the Fund in the financial year. As such, the information requested by the Minister or Secretary is unlikely to include any personal information.

Even if the fund manager is required to provide personal information in response to a request from the Minister, Secretary or Treasurer (for example, relating to its employees), in each case the request must be made reasonably (and not arbitrarily) and must be lawful in accordance with the Bill. Additionally, the fund manager and its employees would reasonably expect that some limited personal information would be requested by an auditor or otherwise recorded, and that they may be identified in publicly available documents, including in the Department's report of operations.

Accordingly, no person's privacy is either unlawfully or arbitrarily interfered with because of any of the provisions in the Bill. As such, in my opinion, the right to privacy in section 13 of the Charter is not limited.

The Hon. Jaclyn Symes
Attorney-General
Minister for Emergency Services

Second reading

Ingrid STITT (Western Metropolitan – Minister for Early Childhood and Pre-Prep, Minister for Environment) (17:46): I move:

That the bill be now read a second time.

Ordered that second-reading speech be incorporated into *Hansard*:

The Victorian Future Fund was announced in the *2022–23 Budget* as part of the Government's debt stabilisation strategy.

The purpose of the Fund is to help manage the fiscal impact of the COVID-19 pandemic and deliver positive outcomes for Victorians by reducing the debt burden on future generations.

Contributions to the Fund from the upfront proceeds received from the VicRoads Modernisation Joint Venture, and any additional contributions made to the Fund in the future, are invested to receive a financial return. Over the long term, this investment return is expected to exceed the State's cost of borrowing, meaning it improves the State's fiscal position more than simply paying down debt would.

This Bill seeks to establish the Victorian Future Fund as a Trust Account and clearly define its purpose, which is to provide funding for reducing the State's debt.

The establishment of the Fund in legislation is an important step to providing certainty regarding the governance and purpose of the Fund, which will support the State's credit rating agencies with assessing the impact of the Fund for credit rating purposes. Legislating the Fund is also aligned with the practice of equivalent funds in New South Wales and Queensland.

I commend the Bill to the house.

Georgie CROZIER (Southern Metropolitan) (17:46): I move, on behalf of my colleague Dr Bach:

That debate on this bill be adjourned for one week.

Motion agreed to and debate adjourned for one week.

Appropriation (2023–2024) Bill 2023*Statement of compatibility*

Ingrid STITT (Western Metropolitan – Minister for Early Childhood and Pre-Prep, Minister for Environment) (17:46): I lay on the table a statement of compatibility with the Charter of Human Rights and Responsibilities Act 2006:

In accordance with section 28 of the *Charter of Human Rights and Responsibilities Act 2006* (Vic) (**Charter Act**), I make this statement of compatibility with respect to the Appropriation (2023–2024) Bill 2023.

In my opinion, the Appropriation (2023–2024) Bill 2023, as introduced to the Legislative Council, is compatible with the human rights protected by the Charter Act. I base my opinion on the reasons outlined in this statement.

Overview

The Appropriation (2023–2024) Bill 2023 will provide appropriation authority for payments from the Consolidated Fund for the ordinary annual services of Government for the 2023–2024 financial year.

The amounts contained in Schedule 1 to the Appropriation (2023–2024) Bill 2023 provide for the ongoing operations of departments, including new output and asset investment funded through annual appropriation.

Schedule 2 of the Appropriation (2023–2024) Bill 2023 contains details concerning payments from the Advance to Treasurer in the 2021–2022 financial year.

Human Rights Issues**1. Human rights protected by the Charter Act that are relevant to the Bill**

The Appropriation (2023–2024) Bill 2023 does not raise any human rights issues.

2. Consideration of reasonable limitations – section 7(2)

As the Appropriation (2023–2024) Bill 2023 does not raise any human rights issues, it does not limit any human rights and therefore it is not necessary to consider section 7(2) of the Charter Act.

Conclusion

I consider that the Appropriation (2023–2024) Bill 2023 is compatible with the Charter Act because it does not raise any human rights issues.

The Hon. Jaelyn Symes
Attorney-General
Minister for Emergency Services

Second reading

Ingrid STITT (Western Metropolitan – Minister for Early Childhood and Pre-Prep, Minister for Environment) (17:46): I move:

That the bill be now read a second time.

Ordered that second-reading speech be incorporated into *Hansard*:

We are here today on the lands of the Wurundjeri people and I wish to acknowledge them as Traditional Owners.

I would also like to pay my respects to their Elders, past and present, and Aboriginal Elders of other communities who may be here today.

The Andrews Labor Government is committed to Truth, Treaty and Self-determination for Victoria's First Peoples. Just as we support a Victorian Voice, we support the establishment of a Voice to our nation's Parliament.

Speaker, today I deliver the *Victorian Budget 2023/24*.

I do this amid a booming jobs market, a healthy economy and every sign this state has bounced back.

Victorians are filling theatres, footy grounds, bars and restaurants.

We're meeting friends, family and colleagues for coffees, birthday parties, concerts.

The Melbourne Comedy Festival, the Formula One Grand Prix, the footy – all back, all better than ever.

Last year, the Andrews Labor Government put forward a positive plan to keep building the hospitals, schools, roads and rail that our state needs now, and for the future.

It was a plan to Do What Matters.

Speaker, I'm proud to be part of a government that delivers on that plan.

In this Budget we will:

- Deliver on every commitment we made at the last election
- Build better hospitals
- Back our incredible health workers with thousands more nurses and paramedics
- Build new schools and expand Free TAFE
- Train thousands of workers so the SEC can provide cheaper, cleaner energy
- Reform taxes, including changes to stamp duty
- Help Victorians beat the rising cost of living
- And responsibly address our COVID debt within ten years, by 2033.

Speaker, the COVID pandemic sent shockwaves through economies big and small, right around the globe.

When it hit Victoria, we acted quickly.

On the advice of the Reserve Bank of Australia, we borrowed billions of dollars to prevent economic scarring that would have left a generation out of work.

We used the state budget to protect household budgets and businesses.

We borrowed \$31.5 billion to pay for the tools to confront the emergency – such as hospital equipment, testing centres and business support.

Before COVID, we had the sort of debt that you take on to build, to invest, to grow an economy for the future.

But with the pandemic emergency, we borrowed to keep Victorians safe.

These two different reasons to borrow will be understood by any homeowner with both a mortgage and a credit card.

We're not going to cut back the mortgage that's funding our Big Build. But we are going to pay off our COVID credit card.

We're not the only government in this position.

But we are the only government with a plan to manage it, with our *COVID Debt Repayment Plan*.

This will ensure we manage our finances responsibly, so we can keep investing in the health, education, cost of living relief, transport and infrastructure that matters to Victorians.

Our Plan is temporary, targeted and above all, responsible.

It will raise an equivalent amount of funds, including interest, to address \$31.5 billion of COVID debt over the next 10 years.

It includes **three elements**.

Firstly, the Government will do its bit, restoring the public service back towards pre-pandemic levels, while not affecting frontline workers.

We'll make savings across government, totalling \$2.1 billion over four years, with reduced corporate and back-office functions and less spending on consultants and labour hire.

Secondly, we know some did better out of the pandemic than others – and it's only fair that those that did well contribute to the repayment effort.

We'll introduce a temporary and targeted COVID Debt Levy with two components. It will end in ten years, in 2033.

We'll ask large businesses with national payrolls above \$10 million a year – around 5 per cent of Victorian businesses – to pay additional payroll tax.

We'll also lower the land tax threshold and add a modest fixed charge, with larger landholdings also paying an extra 0.1 per cent of land value – that is zero point one per cent. Family homes are not affected.

Business profits are up 24 per cent over the past three years compared with the previous three. Land values have increased 84 per cent in the past 10 years.

We've structured the repayment plan in a way that's reasonable and proportionate to those with an ability to pay.

All up, the COVID Debt Levy will raise \$8.6 billion in COVID debt offsets over four years. It will end in 2033.

Thirdly, we'll use the growing Victorian Future Fund to help manage the COVID debt over the next ten years.

After this time, the state's balance sheet will be focused on productive investments such as infrastructure, which produce long-term economic benefits to the state.

Our plan will get Victoria's finances back on track by 2033 – to where they would have been without the pandemic.

Speaker, in the words of Ben Chifley, '*war costs do not end when fighting ceases*'.

Just as we took difficult decisions to protect Victorians through the pandemic, we are now taking responsibility for its fiscal legacy with our *COVID Debt Repayment Plan*. Kicking the can down the road is not an option.

Speaker, Victoria's economy is strong and growing, bigger now than before the pandemic.

It's forecast to grow further, by a healthy 2.75 per cent this financial year and an average of 2.4 per cent a year over the forward estimates.

This follows growth of 5.6 per cent last year, the highest growth of all states and territories – more than 50 per cent higher than the national growth rate.

The current jobs market is fantastic for workers, with more Victorians in employment than almost ever before.

Our 2020 target to create 400 000 new jobs by 2025 has already been smashed, with almost 440 000 jobs created in that time – two years ahead of our 2025 goal.

440 000 – these aren't just numbers on a page.

Every single one is a story of hope, of opportunity, of progress.

Unemployment is around the lowest it's been for nearly 50 years, and almost three full percentage points lower than the rate when we came to office.

This is no mistake. The Andrews Labor Government's investments have delivered the jobs we needed in the short term, and they're supporting our growing state into the future too. The number of women in work is near a record high.

Business investment is forecast to grow solidly this year.

Speaker I won't waste the Parliament's time demonstrating this city's merits over the second biggest city in the country, that one north of the Murray.

Suffice to say, Victoria is now home to the best student city in Australia and the friendliest city in the world, and has the country's most liveable city.

Across the world, countries are grappling with high inflation and rising interest rates, and Australia is no different.

Russia's invasion of Ukraine, and global supply chain disruptions have created shortages and driven up inflation.

But Victoria faces these headwinds from a position of strength.

Speaker, every budget is a document that recognises the challenges and opportunities of the times.

We know most of the heavy lifting in employment comes from small and medium businesses.

And we're keen to help this sector, and turbocharge job creation.

Stamp duty adds to the cost of buying commercial property – and we want to ease this burden for future buyers.

So, in this Budget we're committing to transitioning away from stamp duty in favour of an annual tax for commercial and industrial land.

This means businesses can invest where they want, when they want.

We estimate this reform will increase the size of the Victorian economy by up to \$50 billion in net present value terms.

In further tax reforms, we will abolish business insurance duty over a ten-year period – becoming the first state in Australia to do so.

And we will lift the payroll tax-free threshold from \$700 000 to \$900 000 from 1 July 2024, with a further increase to \$1 million from 1 July 2025.

This will save money for more than 26 000 small businesses, including 6 000 businesses that will stop paying payroll tax altogether – saving a small business with a \$1 million payroll \$14 550 per year.

These changes will save small businesses – with payroll of less than \$3.4 million in 2024–25 and \$3.6 million from 2025–26 – \$580 million in just the first three years.

Our Economic Growth package also progressively abolishes business insurance duty from 2024/25, saving businesses more than \$275 million in the first three years alone. Victoria will be the first state to remove this handbrake on business resilience, investment and growth.

Speaker, when comparing revenue between states, it's important to consider revenue from three key sources – royalties such as mining, Commonwealth grants and state taxation.

Victoria raises very little mining revenue, and our Commonwealth grants income has been consistently below our population share.

Nevertheless, I'm proud to say that, according to Australian Bureau of Statistics data for 2021–22, total revenue per capita was lower in Victoria than any other state.

After adjusting for measures in this Budget, Victoria will still be lower than NSW and all other states bar one.

With this Budget, we've now cut or reduced taxes and charges 64 times since 2014.

Speaker, we know the cost of living is tough and it's holding some families back, so we're helping where we can.

For too long, parents have sat around kitchen tables, doing complicated sums on whether it's really worth going back to work after starting a family.

And that's if you can even find a childcare place.

This has hurt family budgets, and it's hurt our state's bottom line too.

It's taken up to 26 000 women completely out of our workforce, and cost our economy billions a year in lost earnings alone.

We won't let that keep happening.

We're delivering an ambitious overhaul of early childhood education and care, to help parents get back to work. We're giving more pre-schoolers access to early childhood education, along with free three and four-year-old kinder right across the state.

Our Free Kinder will spread opportunity equally for kids and it will save money for families – up to \$2 500 this year alone.

Early education has positive impacts on the rest of a child's life.

To harness this, we're building 50 government-owned and run Early Learning Centres across Victoria, to serve communities with the greatest need.

In other initiatives to ease cost of living, we're bringing in a fourth round Power Saving Bonus, with \$250 to help households pay their bills.

We're helping our servicemen and women with the cost of living, by introducing the Victorian Veterans Card.

This will give vets discounts on vehicle rego, and free fishing and boating licences.

And we're giving free car rego to our hardworking apprentices who rely on their vehicles for work, saving them up to \$865 a year.

Speaker, we know exactly how compassionate and capable our health service workers are.

But these dedicated workers need more than our gratitude. They need our support.

Last year we launched our *Pandemic Repair Plan* for more staff, better hospitals and first-class care.

This Budget provides a further \$4.9 billion to help our health system emerge strongly from the pandemic.

This brings our total additional health investment to more than \$54 billion since coming into government in 2014.

There's a saying that if you save one life, you're a hero. If you save a hundred lives, you're a nurse.

We're funding extra nurses for our hospitals, as well as making it free to study nursing and strengthening nurse-to-patient ratios.

We're doing design work to build and upgrade several major hospitals, including the Northern Hospital and West Gippsland Hospital.

We're also delivering eight powerful PET scanners to health services across the state, including to Ballarat Base Hospital and the Werribee Mercy.

Speaker, women and girls everywhere are still not having their health issues taken seriously, which means they wait too long for treatment.

Their health concerns are often ignored, misdiagnosed or diagnosed late.

We'll give women's health the funding it deserves, with \$63 million for 20 new women's health clinics, a dedicated Aboriginal-led women's health clinic and mobile clinics.

And we'll help more Victorian families access public fertility care, with \$50 million to fund up to 3 375 treatment cycles per year.

We'll fund thousands of extra laparoscopies to help treat endometriosis, which affects one in nine girls and women. These investments are part of our plan to transform women's healthcare, ensuring Victorian women can access the support and treatment they need and deserve.

Speaker, mental health is one of the greatest challenges facing Victoria right now.

This Budget continues our important work of rebuilding the state's mental health system from the ground up.

We're committing \$776 million to dedicated mental health services and better health in the workplace.

We're implementing every recommendation from the Royal Commission into Victoria's Mental Health System, as we promised.

This will take a decade, or more.

The Royal Commission found Victorians needed more mental health support closer to home, so we are delivering 50 new Mental Health and Wellbeing Locals across the state.

Twenty-seven of these services are already underway. This Budget delivers three more, and plans for a further 20.

Local Services help patients, but they'll also save us money.

Each ongoing service is expected to deliver over \$70 million in benefits throughout the next decade.

Across the past four Budgets, including this one, we've invested more than \$6 billion into a kinder and smarter mental health system, one that supports all Victorians.

Education changes lives. It opens doors. It grants a passport to the future.

This Government believes there is no better investment we can make – from kindergarten, to school, through to TAFE and uni.

That's why in this Budget we're building more kindergartens, and it's why we made kinder free for Victorian children.

Speaker, Victorian families deserve great schools for their kids.

This Budget provides \$2.1 billion to build new schools and maintain and upgrade existing ones.

This brings our total additional investment to nearly \$15 billion over the past nine years.

Parents of children with disability need our support – and one of their greatest challenges is finding before and after school care for their kids.

To help them, we're expanding the Outside School Hours Care program to 30 specialist schools, as part of a \$235 million package to support these students and their families.

Speaker, in this state, we have skill shortages in almost every industry.

That's why we've expanded eligibility for training subsidies, including for our popular Free TAFE program.

That means *more* Victorians can study for in-demand jobs like healthcare, mental health, construction, early childhood and hospitality.

Our TAFEs, once padlocked shut, are now open and filled with students, many of them studying for free.

Before this year, accessing a subsidised TAFE course – including Free TAFE – was harder for anyone with a higher education qualification.

But now we've thrown open the gates for these people, because we need more Victorians who are willing to build new skills.

We'll also change the once-in-a-lifetime limit to Free TAFE, so students can take multiple courses in priority training pathways.

This means, for example, that if you want to work in community services, you can study free at both Cert IV, and Diploma levels.

We'll also build and upgrade TAFE campuses across the state, so students can keep studying in inspiring and built-for-purpose facilities.

Speaker, we've built so many of the roads, rail, trams and trains our state needs.

Since 2014, the Andrews Labor Government has been getting on with the Big Build: the Metro Tunnel, the Level Crossing Removals, the Suburban Rail Loop, the West Gate Tunnel, and the North East Link.

These projects are transforming the way we travel, and they're creating rewarding career paths for apprentices and trainees – who in turn supercharge the state's growth.

This Budget provides another \$7.3 billion to bring Victorians a world-class transport network.

We're getting on with the job of removing 110 level crossings by 2030 – 68 have already been taken away.

We're upgrading roads and intersections across the state.

We're going to give Melbourne's western suburbs the high-quality transport network they need.

We're increasing train capacity by up to 50 per cent on the Melton line, with a \$650 million upgrade.

We're making the Cranbourne, Pakenham, Frankston, Lilydale, Sunbury and Werribee Lines level crossing-free by 2030.

Speaker, 30 years ago our energy assets were sold outright – and these assets were run into the ground.

That privatisation failed us.

The Andrews Labor Government will bring back the SEC, and drive down power bills.

The SEC will increase renewable energy, reinvesting profits into Victoria rather than offshore.

In this Budget, we'll invest in the training we need for this workforce, with a new SEC Centre of Training Excellence.

And we'll fund six new Tech Schools across the state to improve students' hands-on learning in science and tech, to support the jobs of the future.

That's on top of ten Tech Schools we've already built since winning government in 2014.

The SEC will help deliver Victoria's nation-leading renewable energy targets – reaching 95 per cent renewable energy by 2035 and net zero by 2045.

This will drive the creation of 59 000 jobs and increase Gross State Product by about \$9.5 billion.

Speaker, in this Budget we're investing in Victoria's future.

This Budget invests a further \$12 million to continue supporting our growing mRNA industry in Victoria.

It will capitalise on our world-leading community of medical researchers, helping them to save lives with treatments that can be manufactured and sold from Victoria.

And this Budget continues to back Victoria's businesses to innovate and grow. We're establishing a new Industry R&D Infrastructure Fund and a Manufacturing and Industry Sovereignty Fund – creating partnerships to help businesses grow.

We're also boosting the Alice Anderson Fund – dedicating capital to supporting startups led by Victorian women.

And we're helping businesses go global through the *Boosting Victorian Exports* program, so they can reach international markets.

Speaker, as this nation heads towards a referendum, there has never been a better time to reflect on how we can better respect the aspirations of First Peoples.

A commitment to Aboriginal self-determination for Aboriginal people, with action on Voice, Treaty and Truth.

At close to half a billion dollars, this Budget is the largest whole of government Aboriginal Affairs investment on record – both for the Andrews Labor Government and in our state's history.

This includes funding for community-controlled organisations – because we know the best solutions are community-led.

We will also provide \$82 million for the First Peoples' Assembly of Victoria to enter historic Treaty negotiations.

This investment is a statement of the values of this Government – one that has shown the nation what it means to truly listen to Aboriginal people.

This is the next step as we walk together to a better future. Because a fairer Victoria starts with a better future for our First Peoples.

Speaker, regional Victoria is growing, with thousands of new residents generating record jobs.

When this Government first came to office, the regional unemployment rate sat at 6.6 per cent. It's now almost three whole percentage points lower.

We've supported regional business by cutting payroll tax rates for regional employers to just one-quarter of the metro rate.

This Budget invests over \$5 billion in regional Victoria, to support its success and tackle rising costs.

We're installing neighbourhood batteries in regional Victoria, to help push down power bills.

We're also upgrading schools around our state and investing in regional healthcare.

We've slashed the cost of train travel across the state, bringing regional fares into line with metro fares.

Because a trip from Ballarat to central Melbourne is just as important as a trip from Hawthorn.

This Budget commits to investing in another 23 new Victorian-made trains for our regional network.

From Morwell to Mallacoota to Murrayville, from Wangaratta to Warrnambool, we're continuing investments across our great state.

Speaker, in 2019, we moved to secure a long-term and sustainable future for Victoria's forestry industry – and for the Victorian workers who rely on it.

We put forward a 30-year plan to support the sector as it transitioned, backing long-term, sustainable jobs and giving local workers confidence about their future.

But since then, native forestry has been hit with increasingly severe bushfires, prolonged legal action and court decisions.

All of that has drastically cut the timber supply we can actually use.

Hundreds of workers across Victoria haven't been able to work a day in months.

It's not good enough for us to just cross our fingers and hope for the best. We need a plan to support workers and support jobs.

That's why we're stepping up to give these workers – and their communities, businesses, and partners along the supply chain – the certainty they deserve.

Native timber harvesting in state forests will end next year.

But work has already started on a proper, managed transition.

We'll match some workers and their skills to jobs right across land management and critical forest bushfire response.

We'll retrain others to help them get jobs in growing regional industries – like renewable energy or construction.

And most importantly, we'll back workers and their families with the financial and mental health support they need throughout this transition.

Just as we've always done, we're being upfront with the industry – and putting in place a plan to support every worker and every business.

Because we'll never leave them to go it alone.

Speaker, when we have the great honour of sitting on these benches, it is all too easy for us to get caught up in the headlines.

It is important to remember why we're here. Today, I would like to quote care leaver David:

"When I was 15, I was homeless and living in Residential Care.

My leaving care plan didn't really work out. I hadn't turned 18 yet and I'd stayed in nine hotels over six months.

In the end, I got so sick of moving hotels, I couldn't go to school anymore.

But then I linked with Compass and things changed."

When David was linked up with Compass – a wraparound program for people leaving care – the connection was made that radically changed his path.

A path towards stable housing, and a sturdier future.

We know this program works.

For people like David, and so many others, to have the best possible shot at life.

And so, in this Budget, we have expanded this program by investing \$33 million to help young people exiting residential care, into housing and towards independence.

Speaker, we know that a stitch in time saves nine – and we also know that early action can save a lot of money and heartache down the track.

Our world-first Early Intervention Investment Framework embeds actions that offer life-changing results.

It's smart policy that saves money and helps people before they reach crisis.

This year, we'll invest more than \$675 million, our largest package on record, which will return \$1 billion worth of benefits over the next decade.

Year by year, our cutting-edge Early Intervention Investment Framework is growing, saving money for Victorians but most importantly, changing and saving lives.

Speaker, in late 2020 we set a four-step fiscal strategy to restore the state's finances after the pandemic:

- **Step one:** Create jobs, reduce unemployment and restore economic growth
Almost 440 000 Victorians have secured a job since September 2020 – 109 000 more than in New South Wales.
- **Step two:** Return to an operating cash surplus
We continue to deliver on this step in 2022–23 with a \$2.9 billion operating cash surplus.
- **Step three:** Return to operating surpluses
Our operating result is expected to be in surplus by \$1.2 billion in 2026–27 – representing an improvement of \$15 billion since 2021–22.
- **Step four:** Stabilise debt levels
Our *COVID Debt Repayment Plan* provides initiatives and a strategy to stabilise our debt so we can look toward the future.
As a state, we're very close to stabilising our debt profile, but we're not there yet.
I am pleased to say that this step is within reach.

It's the reason why this Budget is demonstrably pursuing an economic growth strategy, because a growing economy, with stabilised debt, will bring down the relative level of debt we must manage.

Put another way, once debt is stabilised, it shrinks relative to the size of a growing economy.

To those who criticise our debt, I would say it is easy to forget.

It's easy to forget the arrival of the pandemic and the grim possibilities ahead if we failed to act effectively.

We faced stark images from places like Italy and New York, of hospitals and morgues tragically overwhelmed.

We feared an economy in ruins, with our prosperity evaporating.

We feared a generation with no jobs and no hope, like we saw after the first World War.

Through all our fears, we never doubted the resolve of the Victorian people. There was no panic.

But these were real dangers. That's why the International Monetary Fund recommended governments borrow, to protect their populations.

Thanks to Victoria's robust economic strength, we were able to do this.

We did this to support our health system, to protect our jobs, to help households and to save the things that matter most to us all.

We used these funds to build a bridge over that catastrophe, to the other side.

And here, now, on the other side, we have high vaccination rates, record jobs and an economy that once again is flourishing.

We have packed events, we have busy calendars, we are working in record numbers, and we are planning for the future with full confidence.

We, as Victorians, were greater than the sum of our fears – because hope defeats fear, every time.

Now, we're ready to capitalise on our booming economy and repay the COVID borrowings that made our success possible.

Our responsible *COVID Debt Repayment Plan* will put Victoria on a sustainable path to grasp the opportunities ahead.

We'll do this for our young people, who've made enough sacrifices through recent years.

They'll inherit a thriving economy – a growing economy – in which they can focus on the future rather than the past.

And they will inherit a state with world-class health, education and transport systems.

This is a Budget that responds to our times – growing the jobs of the future and helping Victorians that need a hand.

This is a Budget that strikes the right balance – delivering our promises, while doing what matters.

This is the Budget we need for the future – for a state that is stronger, fairer and more compassionate than ever.

This is our promise – we won't let you down.

Speaker, I commend this Bill to the House.

Georgie CROZIER (Southern Metropolitan) (17:47): I move, on behalf of my colleague Dr Bach:

That debate on this bill be adjourned for one week.

Motion agreed to and debate adjourned for one week.

Appropriation (Parliament 2023–2024) Bill 2023

Statement of compatibility

Ingrid STITT (Western Metropolitan – Minister for Early Childhood and Pre-Prep, Minister for Environment) (17:47): I lay on the table a statement of compatibility with the Charter of Human Rights and Responsibilities Act 2006:

In accordance with section 28 of the *Charter of Human Rights and Responsibilities Act 2006* (Vic) (**Charter Act**), I make this statement of compatibility with respect to the Appropriation (Parliament 2023–2024) Bill 2023.

In my opinion, the Appropriation (Parliament 2023–2024) Bill 2023, as introduced to the Legislative Council, is compatible with the human rights protected by the Charter Act. I base my opinion on the reasons outlined in this statement.

Overview

The purpose of the Appropriation (Parliament 2023–2024) Bill 2023 is to provide appropriation authority for payments from the Consolidated Fund to the Parliament in respect of the 2023–2024 financial year.

Human Rights Issues

1. Human rights protected by the Charter Act that are relevant to the Bill

The Appropriation (Parliament 2023–2024) Bill 2023 does not raise any human rights issues.

2. Consideration of reasonable limitations – section 7(2)

As the Appropriation (Parliament 2023–2024) Bill 2023 does not raise any human rights issues, it does not limit any human rights, and therefore it is not necessary to consider section 7(2) of the Charter Act.

Conclusion

I consider that the Appropriation (Parliament 2023–2024) Bill 2023 is compatible with the Charter Act because it does not raise any human rights issues.

The Hon. Jaclyn Symes
Attorney-General
Minister for Emergency Services

Second reading

Ingrid STITT (Western Metropolitan – Minister for Early Childhood and Pre-Prep, Minister for Environment) (17:47): I move:

That the bill be now read a second time.

Ordered that second-reading speech be incorporated into *Hansard*:

The Appropriation (Parliament 2023–2024) Bill 2023 provides appropriation authority for payments from the Consolidated Fund to the Parliament in respect of the 2023/2024 financial year, including ongoing liabilities incurred by the Parliament such as employee entitlements that may be realised in the future.

Honourable Members will be aware that other funds are appropriated for parliamentary purposes by way of special appropriations contained in other legislation. In addition, unapplied appropriations under the *Appropriation (Parliament 2022–2023) Act 2022* have been estimated and included in the Budget Papers. Before 30 June 2023, the actual unapplied appropriation will be finalised and the 2023/2024 appropriations will be adjusted by the approved carryover amounts under section 32 of the *Financial Management Act 1994* (Vic).

In line with the wishes of the Presiding Officers, appropriations in the Appropriation (Parliament 2023–2024) Bill 2023 are made to the departments of the Parliament.

The total appropriation authority sought in this Appropriation (Parliament 2023–2024) Bill 2023 is \$277 752 000 (clause 3) for Parliament in respect of the 2023/2024 financial year.

I commend the Bill to the House.

Georgie CROZIER (Southern Metropolitan) (17:47): I move, on behalf of my colleague Dr Bach:

That debate on this bill be adjourned for one week.

Motion agreed to and debate adjourned for one week.*Adjournment*

Ingrid STITT (Western Metropolitan – Minister for Early Childhood and Pre-Prep, Minister for Environment) (17:48): I move:

That the house do now adjourn.

Victorian Heart Hospital

John BERGER (Southern Metropolitan) (17:48): (260) My adjournment is for the Minister for Health in the other place, Minister Thomas. Recently I had the privilege of visiting Victoria's brand new heart hospital in Clayton. I pay tribute to Professor Stephen Nicholls, director of the Monash Victorian Heart Institute and the Victorian Heart Hospital for the insightful tour of this fantastic facility. In Australia we all know how impactful heart health complications are. One person dies every 12 minutes from heart disease, six Australians have a heart attack every hour and heart disease is a leading cause of death. So it is a big deal that Australia's first standalone heart centre is here in Victoria in Clayton's innovation cluster. It was great to see how integrated the centre was. The hospital provides clinical cardiology services, research and education to create a centre of excellence. Since the opening of the hospital in February 1000 patients have already been treated with the highest standard of care. This means that patients do not need to move around the hospital during extended stays. Bringing the service to them makes the experience less intense for staff and patients alike. I also had the honour of meeting staff members. They are all experts in their field, and this goes for the hundreds of clinicians and researchers working there. Their breadth of experience means that this hospital can provide a range

of integrated services – think prevention and intervention. They offer services like health checks and heart checks.

I remind the community of Southern Metro of the importance of regular screening for cardiovascular issues, particularly for those with a family history. This hospital will bring lasting benefits to my community, with 2150 cardiac surgeries, 108,000 consults and 30,000 emergency cardiac visits each year. With over 206 beds, the hospital will educate 300 undergraduate students, 260 postgraduate students and 20 PhD students every year. I was pleased to visit the classrooms and research facilities that these students will enjoy. As the father of a nurse and husband of a nurse, I know how these facilities will be appreciated.

I am proud to be part of the Andrews Labor government, who will always back our healthcare system. It is a government who promised, funded and delivered this hospital in partnership with Monash Health and Monash University. My adjournment to the minister is this: will the minister please inform me of what educational campaigns the Department of Health is undertaking to inform my community of Southern Metro of the importance of getting their cardiovascular health check regularly? Before I end tonight, I would like to say this: every 12 minutes someone dies from heart disease in Australia, so get tested.

PwC

David DAVIS (Southern Metropolitan) (17:50): (261) My matter for the adjournment tonight is for the attention of the Assistant Treasurer. I, like many, have watched with concern the developing issues with PwC. Around the world there have been people concerned at what we are hearing. PwC is a large and traditionally respected firm, but the revelations that have come out of Canberra from the material tabled in the Senate clearly indicate that the tax lead was involved in a series of steps in advising a previous government and that other parts of the company were aware of this and used it as a marketing approach to make money out of steps to defeat the very same provisions that had been put in place. Clearly there are a whole range of ethical issues here, but there are a number of practical issues as well. I notice the New South Wales Parliament has ordered an inquiry I think today, and I note that federal ministers have taken steps to ensure that tendering arrangements and other arrangements reflect some of the concerns. And I know that there are still outstanding matters.

My point here is that the Assistant Treasurer has responsibility for a number of these areas. He has got some oversight of the tendering and procurement arrangements across government. Obviously each and every government department that procures consultancy services or contracting services of the type provided by PwC has responsibilities. But at the same time the overall direction, the overall tone and the procurement rules are set centrally and it is a matter for the Assistant Treasurer.

What I am seeking from him today is for him to make a public statement about what steps he and the state government are taking to address these clear issues. He needs to step forward and indicate what changes in procurement practices and procurement rules are going to be put in place and what steps the government will take, given what are clearly very serious matters indeed. If I can be blunt here, waste is a hallmark of this government. We know that more than \$30 billion has been wasted in cost overruns on major projects. We know that shadow and ghost funding of projects are a part of it. We know that international organisations say that somewhere between 3 and 10 per cent of spending on large contracts is actually wasted or misused in some way, so bringing that down means more money is available for services. I say we cannot be too careful here, and the Assistant Treasurer needs to make an urgent statement.

Women's health

Rachel PAYNE (South-Eastern Metropolitan) (17:53): (262) My adjournment matter is for the Minister for Health, Minister Thomas. There was good news for women and gender-diverse people in this year's budget, particularly in women's health. We welcomed the government's announcement of \$58 million for 20 new comprehensive women's health clinics and a dedicated Aboriginal-led

women's clinic. The proposed clinics will be located throughout Victoria in areas where there is a real lack of specialist health care for women. This is so important, as we know that distance can be a huge impediment to people accessing proper health care. So it was disappointing to learn that one of the proposed clinics will be located within the Mercy hospital in Werribee.

As a publicly funded hospital, the Mercy should be providing a full range of obstetrics, neonatal and gynaecological care. However, women and gender-diverse people attending the Mercy cannot obtain contraception, abortion or family planning advice because the Mercy is Catholic run. This institutional discrimination against women and gender-diverse people happens at Catholic-run hospitals across Victoria. This is simply wrong. A public hospital should not be refusing ordinary public health services. If you live in Werribee, you are out of luck. There is no other public women's hospital in the area and no other options for women and gender-diverse people zoned for this hospital. So the action I seek is that the minister consider relocating the women's health clinic to the Point Cook Medical Centre or another location within the Werribee district so that women and gender-diverse people in this region are able to access the full range of reproductive health services.

Government performance

Renee HEATH (Eastern Victoria) (17:55): (263) My adjournment is for the Premier, and the action I seek is that he stop making city-centric decisions that are killing regional Victoria. Under Labor our energy bills are set to rise by another 20 per cent. Renters will be footing the bill for new land taxes, which of course will result in increased rent. Parents are paying more for independent and private schools, grocery bills are growing and the cost of living is soaring. I believe there is a reason that Labor are doing nothing to relieve the high cost of living Victorians are experiencing – the reason being that nobody in this chamber is currently experiencing a cost-of-living crisis.

One of the lines that Labor is running for this atrocious budget is that this staggering debt is due to COVID. Well, during COVID everybody in this place received a pay rise. While lockdowns destroyed our state, they did not destroy our state politicians – who got a pay rise. The average Victorian wage is \$65,000 per year; the starting point of a minister's wage is \$353,000 per year. Therefore a Labor minister earns 5.4 times the average Victorian wage. It is like no-one in here has ever had to balance a budget. This is evidenced by the \$30.7 billion in blowout costs. Labor promised the Metro Tunnel would cost \$5 billion; it has now blown out to \$18 billion. Labor promised that the level crossing removals would cost \$5 billion; they have now blown out to \$8.3 billion. Labor promised that the taxpayer would pay absolutely nothing for the cancellation of the east-west link, but the cost to the taxpayer has been \$1.3 billion. In fact the Premier said in September 2014:

There is nothing to walk away from, be very clear about this, the contracts are not worth the paper they're written on ...

And then he said:

This is not a legally binding contract.

This government have become so accustomed to living beyond their means that they have no concern whatsoever for the plight of the average Victorian. Well, I do, and I have seen the devastation that the closure of the power industry has caused in my region, I am currently seeing the devastation that the closure of the native timber industry is about to have on my region, and I am here to say enough is enough. It is time to take your hands off Eastern Victoria Region.

Sports clubs funding

Rikkie-Lee TYRRELL (Northern Victoria) (17:58): (264) My adjournment matter is directed to the Minister for Community Sport. After having already been raised as a question on 23 March, I firstly wish to draw the minister's attention to the lack of resolve on the matter. The original question sought an explanation as to why grassroots football clubs who are attached to leagues not affiliated with the AFL are unable to access the same grants as those who are. Some of these clubs serve as

community centres and emergency evacuation hubs and are in desperate need of facility upgrades. As these clubs do not have the option to affiliate themselves with the AFL if their respective leagues choose not to, they are at a distinct disadvantage not of their own making.

The original question was in reference to the Katandra football club. Their pivotal central hub serves as the only community centre in the district. They are currently making do with highly inadequate lighting for the football oval and are unable to safely conduct after-hours sports, training or events. This is an incredibly active group of volunteers who wish to encourage more social gatherings, particularly targeting those who are vulnerable to isolation and those only available outside of daylight hours. To facilitate this outstanding initiative, the club is looking for an avenue to secure funding for said lighting. As my original question was misdirected to the Minister for Tourism, Sport and Major Events, then subsequently handballed to the Minister for Community Sport, I request that the Minister for Community Sport treat this as a matter of urgency in order to inform the Katandra West community how best to proceed.

Shepparton rail line

Wendy LOVELL (Northern Victoria) (18:00): (265) My adjournment matter is for the Minister for Transport and Infrastructure, and it concerns the status of stage 3 of the Shepparton line upgrade project. In the wake of information contained in last week's state budget, the action that I seek from the minister is that she provide me with information clarifying the status of stage 3 of the Shepparton line upgrade project, including explaining the funding shortfall of almost \$77 million exposed in the 2023–24 state budget; the current expected completion date; and a commitment that the nine weekday return services will be delivered regardless of the Commonwealth funding review.

The people of the Goulburn Valley have been waiting patiently for many years for the delivery of improved rail services between Shepparton and Melbourne. Despite being in government for 20 of the last 24 years, it was only in 2020 that Labor finally promised to deliver nine weekday return rail services to and from Melbourne. These were to be delivered upon the completion of stage 3 of the Shepparton line upgrade, and funding of \$400 million was provided in the 2020–21 state budget, although no completion date was provided. This funding of \$400 million was also contained in the 2021–22 state budget, which also disclosed a completion date for stage 3 as quarter 4 of the 2023–24 financial year, and the same figures were included in the 2022–23 state budget. Included in the total estimated investment (TEI) figure of \$400 million is \$320 million of federal government funding that was committed in 2020.

The 2023–24 state budget handed down by the Treasurer last week has raised some concerns regarding this federal funding and in turn the project itself. On page 185 of budget paper 4, 'State Capital Program', the total estimated investment for the Shepparton line upgrade has changed from \$400 million to 'to be confirmed'. The breakdown of expenditure on the project is listed as \$323,324,000, a shortfall of almost \$77 million from the \$400 million included in past budgets. The budget also listed the estimated completion date of this project as 'to be confirmed'. Most concerning is a footnote in the budget regarding the project which reads:

The TEI includes \$320.000 million of Commonwealth Government funding. This project may be subject to the Commonwealth Infrastructure Investment Program review.

The information contained in the budget casts doubt over the future of this vital project and creates more questions than answers – namely, where is the missing funding of almost \$77 million, when will the project be completed, is the federal funding for the project going to be delivered as promised and will the state still deliver the project if federal funding is withdrawn? The minister needs to come clean with the people of the Goulburn Valley and reiterate her promise to deliver the Shepparton line upgrade stage 3 project and the much-anticipated nine weekday return services between Shepparton and Melbourne.

Short-stay accommodation

Aiv PUGLIELLI (North-Eastern Metropolitan) (18:03): (266) My adjournment matter is to the Minister for Consumer Affairs, and the action I seek is for the government to regulate short-stay accommodation such as Airbnbs to increase the housing supply available for rent. This morning I opened the Airbnb app and set the location to Melbourne, and it gave me over 1000 results. Over 1000 residences were off the rental market and advertised as short stay. Something quite bizarre actually is that it would not even give me the exact figure as to how many Airbnbs there were; it was just a vague 'Over 1000'. Is the government getting this information? Does the government have any interest in getting this information?

The only way the public can find out currently is through third-party websites collecting data. The website Inside Airbnb claims that in the last 12 months over 15,000 entire homes were off the market at some point due to being converted to Airbnbs. Fun fact: I actually checked these same stats a few months ago, and it was just under 14,000 homes, so it appears, according to this data, that over 1000 homes have been added to Airbnb in the past few months. Thousands of properties have been removed from the rental market for months on end. We are in the worst housing crisis we have ever seen, and the government is just allowing rental supply to disappear. We should not have to rely on third-party websites to try and figure out how many rentals have been removed. That data should be public, and the government should ensure that it is accurate. We also should not have entire homes being taken off the market unchecked.

I have additional concerns that the people being forced to use Airbnbs due to the lack of rentals are not then being afforded the same protections they would have if they were in a rental. I would also note that for the periods of time some short-stay properties are vacant the owners currently do not have to pay vacancy tax. We know that landlords are taking these homes off the market simply because they make more money from short stays, but I think the landlords and the government need to understand that housing is a human right and that just because you have commodified housing does not mean you are then exempt from housing people just to chase your own profit. My generation is increasingly being priced out of the housing market to buy. Now we have been left homeless due to the rental crisis, and many are feeling abandoned and frankly terrified for their future. Yet we are having to watch rentals being taken away and converted to short stay for landlord profit, and we cannot even get transparency on how many homes have been removed.

The government has a responsibility to house people. You have a responsibility to be a leader in the country on short-stay reform, to create a public registry of Airbnbs, to cap the number of days per year that a landlord can lease out an Airbnb and to allow owners corporations the power to ban short stays in apartment buildings – to do something to help. Stop dragging your feet, and get it done.

Child protection

Ann-Marie HERMANS (South-Eastern Metropolitan) (18:06): (267) My adjournment is for the Minister for Treaty and First Peoples in the other place. On 12 May I had the privilege of attending the very successful and well-attended community children's forum to receive feedback on the Aboriginal Children's Forum held in 2022 in Dandenong, a short walk from my electorate office at 31 Princes Highway, Dandenong. It was an honour and privilege for me and my much-respected colleague Dr Matthew Bach to be part of this forum, and it was disappointing not to have the minister or any minister from the government present to learn from this crucial and very vital community. We enjoyed the enlightening truth-telling of our local Bunurong people, who have lived in Dandenong for over 30 years. I want to commend these families, who deserve acknowledgement for their selfless support of many Bunurong families and children, teaching culture and helping parents to keep their children with their families and within their local community. These local Bunurong people bravely raised concerns about Aboriginal children being taken from their families in higher than average numbers in their local area as opposed to other regions. Some said children who are swiftly taken from

Aboriginal homes and placed in care often suffer more challenging circumstances and trauma. Many local Aboriginal people in the community feel their children are often worse off.

One brave Bunurong Aboriginal young adult raised a concern, which I now bring to the house. He said a few local people who are not biologically Aboriginal were ticking the Aboriginal heritage box, and this allowed people to access funding that was set aside to support Aboriginal communities. This was frustrating local Aboriginal people with the responsibility to teach and support heritage and cultural education when they knew the children under these claims had no family connection. There was a discussion about measuring this fairly. Therefore, Minister, on behalf of my constituents, the action I seek is for you to provide me with the information on the tests and measures that are being developed and implemented to determine Aboriginal heritage, thus ensuring claims and support for Aboriginal people are going to the people the funding was intended for.

Central Highlands Water

Bev McARTHUR (Western Victoria) (18:09): (268) My adjournment matter is for the Minister for Water and concerns an extraordinary proposal by Central Highlands Water to increase some charges over the next five years by 500 per cent. In its 2023 water price review submission to the Essential Services Commission, the water authority – a government entity – wants to increase water and wastewater charges for new growth zones from \$1500 to \$8000 per lot. Elsewhere, such as infill or current building areas, the increase would be 65 per cent of that amount. Quite rightly, the commission is unimpressed and has told Central Highlands Water as much. Central Highlands Water is not inclined to change its plan, arguing that it has ways to help customers deal with the increase. But one way or another, mum-and-dad customers, first home buyers and some of the 1.5 million immigrants coming to Australia in the next three years will still need to pay the much, much bigger bill. Central Highlands Water covers an area of Victoria including Maryborough, Clunes, Avoca, Waubra and Beaufort. If you want to wander down easy street, you will not find it in any of these locations. Yet this water authority clearly has its eyes shut to reality as if it exists in an isolated financial bubble.

Thanks to the Andrews government, energy bills are already unaffordable for too many. Is water the next battleground? These are essential services we are talking about – needs, not wants. It was just days ago that the Premier's latest budget was handed down. He told the media:

We're doing what matters – supporting families, jobs and fairness in rural and regional Victoria.

He needs to explain what is fair about a 500 per cent increase to the cost of getting water and wastewater connected to a building block. Such plans would have it running faster than inflation. The commission is assessing the price review for 14 water authorities, nine of which it is rather worried about: Wannon Water, Southern Rural Water and Coliban Water are on that list. The action I seek of the minister is that she gets involved in this impending financial disaster to ensure that an authority under her auspices does not slug Victorians unfairly and cruelly for the most essential service of all: water.

Melbourne Airport rail link

Trung LUU (Western Metropolitan) (18:11): (269) My adjournment is for the Minister for Transport and Infrastructure. Following the 2023–24 state budget tabled last week, the action I seek is for the minister to reprioritise the much-needed Melbourne Airport rail link over the Suburban Rail Loop (SRL) project. Our state is getting on with the Big Build, but Victoria's major projects are consistently delayed or cancelled. The needed Melbourne Airport rail link is a critical infrastructure project that our state and Melbourne's west so vitally need for connectivity. We are competing with Sydney for tourism, yet we are funnelling tourists and visitors into our great state by directing them to the confusing SkyBus service or the metro service. We have no dedicated friendly transportation servicing tourists directly to our city. This piece of infrastructure is one of the most critical things that our state needs, more so than the SRL.

Under Labor we are experiencing higher rents, increasing land tax, hikes in school fees and 32 major infrastructure projects shelved, including the Melbourne Airport rail link, Geelong fast rail and North East Link. Life is getting harder for Victorian families. So I ask the minister to seek action on why the government has been provided several billion dollars from the federal government in funding but no action has been taken with the Melbourne Airport rail link. Instead it is getting shelved. The link itself is connectivity for the west and for the state. So please, Minister, can you reprioritise this much-needed connectivity, being the Melbourne Airport rail link, over the Suburban Rail Loop project?

Health system

Georgie CROZIER (Southern Metropolitan) (18:13): (270) My adjournment matter this evening is for the attention of the Minister for Health, and it is in relation to urgent wait times for elective surgical procedures. As I have said many times, we know that Victoria's health system is under enormous stress and it remains in crisis. The latest data from the Victorian Agency for Health Information shows that almost one in four patients are not being treated within the clinically recommended time. The outcomes for too many Victorian patients are getting worse. They are getting sicker while they are waiting. Their quality of life is deteriorating and placing further pressure on an already overstretched health system. These tens of thousands of people are not just numbers; they are people. They are people who have got a multitude of issues that they are managing. It is incredibly frustrating for them and a huge concern for so many of these Victorians.

It includes Victorians like Ingrid, who contacted me in sheer frustration and worry with her story. She contacted me yesterday, telling me about how in February she had been referred by her local doctor for a colonoscopy, which was classified as urgent in a letter she received on 20 February, which stated that she would be contacted. Well, three months later, concerned by further symptoms, she contacted Monash Health and was told that she could not even schedule a date for this urgent procedure because gastroenterology services were so busy. In her email she said the nurse said:

Oh I'm sorry, gastroenterology is very busy so the wait can take some time.

Ingrid said:

I've been on the list since February 20th.

The nurse in the clinic she was ringing said:

It might be a while longer. Can you pay? Can you go Private?

Ingrid responded no. The nurse then said:

I can't give you a date, but it will be a while away.

Patients like Ingrid are left in limbo. She is understandably very worried about these further symptoms that she has got, and she is worried because the wait is extending. The longer she waits, the more advanced her undiagnosed condition could become, and that could result in a very catastrophic outcome. So the action I am seeking is for the minister to provide exactly the number of Victorians who are in the public system who have been contacted and who have been referred on but have then been told by the health service, 'We can't fit you in, because we don't have the capacity, so go private.' I think this is an important number that we need to know to understand exactly the true extent of the health crisis, and it is that action I would ask the minister to act upon.

Responses

Ingrid STITT (Western Metropolitan – Minister for Early Childhood and Pre-Prep, Minister for Environment) (18:16): There were 11 adjournment matters this evening to nine different ministers, and written responses will be provided in accordance with the standing orders.

The PRESIDENT: The house stands adjourned.

House adjourned 6:17 pm.