



Hansard

LEGISLATIVE COUNCIL

60th Parliament

Thursday 18 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

Matthew Bach

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

¹ Lib until 27 March 2023

² LDP until 26 July 2023

Party abbreviations

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

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Thursday 18 May 2023

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

Papers

Papers

Tabled by Clerk:

Fire Rescue Victoria Act 1958 – Year Two to Five Fire Services Reform Implementation Plan, May 2023.

Ombudsman – Complaint handling casebook: Resolving issues informally, May 2023 (*Ordered to be published*).

Victorian Environmental Assessment Council Act 2001 – Reports on Advice on Aspects of Public Land Use Information, April 2023, under 26E of the Act.

Business of the house

Notices

Notices of motion given.

Bev McArthur: On a point of order, President, yesterday I raised a point of order in relation to Mr Batchelor's motion on nuclear energy, and I do notice that the motion has been amended to include Dr Bach's and my names. But it is still incomplete because it does need to include Mr Limbrick's name but also the key supporters of lifting the moratorium on nuclear energy, being the AWU national secretary Daniel Walton and the secretary of the Victorian branch of the CFMEU –

The PRESIDENT: Mrs McArthur, despite your success with your point of order yesterday, yesterday's point of order was clearly not a point of order and today's point of order is clearly not a point of order. But thank you again.

Adjournment

Jaclyn SYMES (Northern Victoria – Attorney-General, Minister for Emergency Services) (09:39): I move:

That the Council, at its rising, adjourn until Tuesday 30 May 2023.

Motion agreed to.

Committees

Legal and Social Issues Committee

Membership

Moir DEEMING (Western Metropolitan) (09:39): I move, by leave:

That I, Mrs Deeming, be a participating member of the Legal and Social Issues Standing Committee.

Motion agreed to.

Members statements

National Volunteer Week

Sheena WATT (Northern Metropolitan) (09:40): Volunteers are the very heart of our community. From community sport to emergency help and everything in between, our volunteers are essential to providing local communities with the care and services they need. To mark the beginning of National Volunteer Week I had the pleasure of visiting the Royal Women's Hospital and getting to sit down with Shannon and Devini, two incredible members of their volunteering team. As guides and wait

room support volunteers, Shannon and Devini are often the very first people you will encounter at the Women's, and they play a key role in helping patients and visitors to navigate the hospital and provide comfort to people who are often experiencing some of the most stressful times of their lives. To Shannon, Devini and each and every one of the Royal Women's Hospital's 60-person volunteer team, thank you for your tireless work in supporting our community. Your passion for putting patients first is inspirational. As the Parliamentary Secretary for Volunteers I will always work to support and celebrate people like Shannon and Devini, because when we back our volunteers we build stronger, more resilient and more inclusive communities.

Kyneton heritage woodshed

Wendy LOVELL (Northern Victoria) (09:41): On Tuesday this week members of the Kyneton and District Town Square Co-op travelled to Parliament to hand me a petition with over 1500 signatures that opposes the Andrews government's plan to demolish a culturally significant heritage bluestone woodshed that is part of the old Kyneton Primary School site. The redevelopment of the old Kyneton Primary School site is a project managed jointly by Creative Victoria, Development Victoria and Working Heritage. This project was a hot subject prior to the 2018 state election, and the Liberal Party backed the community to ensure the site was retained and community managed. Following the Liberals commitment, Labor asked the Department of Environment, Land, Water and Planning to conduct a community consultation, which found that the community wanted the site kept for community use with gallery space and areas for community groups. However, the community now feel their wishes are being ignored by the Andrews Labor government and fear that the demolition of the culturally significant heritage bluestone woodshed is imminent.

The debate about this historic, culturally significant building has been going on since the 1980s. Many residents in the community of Kyneton are appalled that the government has once again raised the prospect of demolishing it. Unfortunately, the petition could not be tabled, due to a wording error, but the intention is clear. The community want the culturally significant heritage bluestone woodshed preserved as part of the site for future generations. I have personally delivered the original petition to the office of the minister responsible for Creative Victoria and a copy of the petition to the minister responsible for Development Victoria, and I call on both ministers to stop the demolition and preserve this culturally significant building.

Parliament youth forum

David LIMBRICK (South-Eastern Metropolitan) (09:43): I had the pleasure last Wednesday of attending the Parliament youth forum. It was wonderful to meet so many young people enthusiastic about participating in politics and learning about how our Parliament works. The staff at Parliament also did a great job of organising the event and explaining the various mechanisms through which young people can contribute. Whether we agree on policy or not, members of this house should all welcome more active participation in politics. It would likely raise the tenor of debate and, dare I say, the quality of policy and laws passed.

Will Shackel

David LIMBRICK (South-Eastern Metropolitan) (09:43): Whilst I am acknowledging the participation of young people in policy and parliamentary process, I would like to make a special mention of Will Shackel from Nuclear for Australia. Will has travelled to Canberra to present a petition with over 5000 signatures calling for the legalisation of nuclear energy.

Bev McArthur: Great man.

David LIMBRICK: A great man – a great young man. Will has recognised the possibility of nuclear energy to solve our energy needs and founded Australia's first pro-nuclear youth movement. Not only this, he gave evidence to a Senate committee all by himself. His passion, knowledge and dedication are commendable, and I wish him continued success in his efforts.

Shirley Shackleton

Ryan BATCHELOR (Southern Metropolitan) (09:44): I rise today to pay tribute to the late Shirley Shackleton, a constituent and fearless campaigner for the people of Timor-Leste, who died earlier this year and whose life's work, the documentary film *The Circle of Silence*, premiered a few weeks ago at the Astor Theatre. Shirley was a force of nature. Her husband Greg was murdered in Balibo, Timor-Leste, in 1975 while working as a journalist covering the impending Indonesian invasion alongside four other men that we now know as the Balibo Five. Not even a makeshift Australian flag they painted on their house could protect them once the invading army decided their cameras were a threat. They were killed in cold blood by the Indonesian military to silence them. Shirley relentlessly lobbied governments in Australia and Indonesia to expose the truth of what happened in Balibo. She was a staunch supporter of the Timorese people's fight for independence, and she was dearly loved by our tiny neighbour.

Her legacy includes the Balibo House Trust, of which she was a life board member. The trust was created by the Victorian government under Premier Steve Bracks, who today remains its patron. Its work over two decades has restored the flag house in Balibo, opened a learning centre, built classrooms at schools, established a dental clinic, restored the fort and established a veterans museum. Their work is an exemplar of the enduring relationship between Victoria and Timor-Leste – a relationship we must all work to sustain. I was fortunate enough to spend time working for the trust when I was living in East Timor, getting to know Shirley and the other families. So today I would like to take this time to acknowledge Shirley and her impact. She will be missed but never forgotten, and her fight must live on in us.

Anthony Staley

Bev McARTHUR (Western Victoria) (09:45): Yesterday we farewelled a giant of Australian politics: Anthony – known as Tony – Allan Staley AO, born 15 May 1939, died 3 May 2023. We learned via the numerous erudite family and friend eulogies yesterday that his passion for politics was surpassed only by his love for family. While there was a chance he might have entered the priesthood, two days of theology studies saw him shift academic pursuits quickly. The vicar Dr French concluded the lectures must have been less than inspiring. However, Tony's final refrain to every conversation he had with anybody ended in 'God bless'. We were told Tony instilled in all who knew him the courage to be and a strong sense of self. I was honoured to know Tony as a dear friend all my political life, and my husband Stewart has also lost a very close political confidant of infinite wisdom. We are all saddened by his passing. We send our deepest sympathies to his children Sam, Richard, Jon, Ali and Lucinda; their families; and his world of friends. Vale, Tony Staley, and God bless.

Housing affordability

Aiv PUGLIELLI (North-Eastern Metropolitan) (09:47): Renting in Victoria is becoming like an episode of *Horrible Histories*. Let me share with you a few of the housing horror stories that Victorian renters are facing right now. There is a couple in the northern suburbs who are facing eviction from their home of 18 years. They both are over 55, have complex health needs and receive the disability support payment. They are facing homelessness as they find themselves 'completely excluded from the private rental market due to a lack of financial resources'. Their landlord owns three properties in their street and 10 in the area. Another story: a woman and her two teenage sons in the eastern suburbs have moved 40 times in the past six years. Imagine the cost, the stress and the disruption this causes. There is absolutely no end to the list of awful places that people in Melbourne and across Victoria are renting right now. In Brunswick you can pay \$310 a week for the luxury of a sweet, cosy apartment with no kitchen. I could go on. Homes are being offered in appalling conditions, and all the while landlords know that if tenants get too pushy when it comes to expecting basic living standards they can always bump up the rent and suggest they pay or find something else. The rental crisis is out of control. We need a two-year freeze on rent increases and a permanent rent cap in line with wage

growth. We need to take action now to fix this system so that all renters in Victoria have a decent, safe, secure and genuinely affordable home to live in.

Voice to Parliament

Renee HEATH (Eastern Victoria) (09:48): I would like to share some thoughts on the Voice to Parliament which may have been overlooked. This nation is in great need of reconciliation. Sixty years ago when Martin Luther King Jr delivered the world-shaking I Have a Dream speech he said:

I am happy to join with you today in what will go down in history as the greatest demonstration for freedom in the history of our nation.

Not only was this speech the benchmark of reconciliation and equality, but MLK himself, a hero of the civil rights movement, in fact said it was a demonstration of freedom. From this we see that when we begin to divide along racial lines there is intrinsically linked with that a loss of freedom, yet now somehow our nation is considering doing a 180. If we are not careful, the notion of being judged not by the colour of your skin but by the content of your character could simply become just a cliché, when in reality I believe it is one of the most important mindsets that we could ever adopt. When we are divided along racial lines, we risk repeating the hideous mistakes of the past. In my opinion we could get rid of section 25 of the Australian constitution. If we are going to amend our constitution, I believe we should be removing race from it, not putting race in it.

International Gita Mahotsav

Lee TARLAMIS (South-Eastern Metropolitan) (09:50): It was a pleasure to join my parliamentary colleagues in hosting Swami Gyananand Ji Maharaj at the Parliament of Victoria ahead of the fourth International Gita Mahotsav. The Gita Mahotsav is an annual celebration that takes place every year in Kurukshetra, India, that aims to spread the inspirational message of the Gita and promote peace, harmony and selflessness globally. After Mauritius, London and then Canada the fourth International Gita Mahotsav was held in Australia from 28 to 30 April. Seminars conducted during the event delved deeper into the philosophical aspects of the Bhagavad-gita, exploring the teachings on morality, duty and the path of self-realisation. In addition to the intellectual discussions, vibrant cultural performances showcased the diversity and beauty of Indian traditions and participants gained an understanding of this timeless scripture. Dance performances, musical recitals and theatrical adaptations of Gita narratives captivated the audiences, bridging the cultural gaps and fostering appreciation for the rich heritage of India.

The holy Bhagavad-gita is one of the most sacred and revered texts in the Hindu faith, which teaches a way of life that is universal and transcends race and religion. It was an honour to have the Gita Perma gifted to the Parliament of Victoria, which was accepted on behalf of the Parliament by Deputy Speaker of the Legislative Assembly Matt Fregon. Also in attendance were Consul General of India in Melbourne Dr Sushil Kumar and many other members of community organisations, temples and the Victorian Hindu community. Holding the fourth International Gita Mahotsav in Australia serves as a beacon of inspiration, uniting individuals from diverse backgrounds in their shared pursuit of spiritual growth and enlightenment. Its success would not have been possible without those dedicated, tireless volunteers and organisers.

Ballarat Foundation

Joe McCRACKEN (Western Victoria) (09:52): I rise to pay tribute to and recognise the Ballarat Foundation, who do enormous work in Ballarat to support the community. I recently attended the Ballarat Foundation AGM, and I wish to congratulate Wayne Weaire the board chair, the rest of the board and also Andrew Eales, who is the CEO. This week is National Volunteer Week, and the Ballarat Foundation are running a morning tea for donors, supporters and volunteers in the Ballarat area because they support the great place that Ballarat is to work, live and stay connected.

National Volunteer Week

Joe McCracken (Western Victoria) (09:52): I would like to publicly recognise all volunteers in the community, whether it is in a charity or a philanthropic organisation like the Ballarat Foundation or volunteering in a sporting club, a service club like Rotary or, dare I say, a Lions club. I am a member of the Parliamentary Lions Club. If you are not a member, sign up.

Bev McArthur: Is that an ad?

Joe McCracken: Yes, it is an ad. Services like Do Care, the RSL, progress associations, historical societies and even a committee of management – every contribution should be recognised appropriately. I want to thank every volunteer for donating their skills, their talents and their time for the benefit of the community. I have a very clear message for you: our community would not be what it is without you. So this week on National Volunteer Week we thank all volunteers.

Clyde Grammar

Michael GALEA (South-Eastern Metropolitan) (09:53): I was fortunate to attend the opening of Clyde Grammar school in Clyde North together with my fantastic colleague the member for Bass in the other place. Clyde Grammar is an independent co-educational, non-denominational school that works with its affiliated schools Casey Grammar in Cranbourne and Balcombe Grammar in Mornington. The welcome to country was sung by the very proud and enthusiastic grade 3s, as was the national anthem. Non-government schools are an important part of Victoria's education system, with over one-third of Victorian students studying in Catholic or independent schools. The Andrews Labor government invested \$5 million, which partnered with a significant school contribution of \$3.7 million to create the very impressive primary centre, which includes 14 classrooms, breakout areas, two collaborative learning spaces as well as the library and student and staff amenities. Congratulations to principal Leanne Evans and the CSV board.

South-Eastern Metropolitan Region schools

Michael GALEA (South-Eastern Metropolitan) (09:54): On another matter, I was delighted to join with my colleagues Mr Tarlamis and the member for Pakenham in the other place at Officer Brunt Road primary school, a fantastic new school that this government is building in the south-east. We were delighted to officially meet with the new school principal Sharon Mitchell as well as the new school principal for Alexander Boulevard primary school Mark de Lay. These two fantastic new government schools in the south-east will be opening for term 1 2024, and Mr Tarlamis and I cannot wait to see their construction progress through the remainder of this year. Congratulations to Sharon Mitchell and Mark de Lay.

Transport infrastructure projects

David DAVIS (Southern Metropolitan) (09:55): I want to draw the chamber's and the community's attention to the debacle that is occurring with infrastructure projects in this state. Almost every infrastructure project this government has touched in transport and elsewhere is over budget, and sometimes massively over budget. Whether it is the West Gate Tunnel, the Metro Tunnel at nearly \$4 billion over budget or the airport rail, all of these are over budget. But now it appears, through a process that predates the federal government's decisions, this government is going to chill, or put on ice, a number of important projects, including the Ballarat fast rail project and indeed the airport rail connection. Some of us have been around long enough to remember Joan Kirner talking about the rapid transit link to the airport. Labor talked big on these projects but never actually delivered.

Members interjecting.

David DAVIS: Well, we would have delivered it. It would be finished now if we had been in government. We would be in government. Let me be clear here: the government did choose an inferior model for the airport rail link that steals capacity off the Metro – six services an hour actually is the proposal – and there were better proposals on offer. They should have chosen the IFM proposal, which

actually meant we would have had new dedicated tunnel capacity from Spencer Street to Sunshine and then out to the airport.

National Volunteer Week

Harriet SHING (Eastern Victoria – Minister for Water, Minister for Regional Development, Minister for Commonwealth Games Legacy, Minister for Equality) (09:56): I rise today to congratulate and thank and acknowledge all of the volunteers across Victoria but particularly in the Eastern Victoria Region. This week is National Volunteer Week and the theme is ‘the change makers’. Right across the Eastern Victoria Region we see this every day in so many ways. We see it in times of greatest need: during droughts and bushfires, during flooding and storms. We also see it in times of great celebration, bringing our communities together, marshalling traffic, making scones, making sure that kids can be involved, and in everything from Clean Up Australia Day right through to tin rattlers and people who help our community groups to be their best. So to the carers, to the guardians, to the people who lend their time to help bring people together, thank you. To the wood-turners, to the people who hand out information at fetes, to the people who marshal at our country cricket and footy matches, thank you. To the people who are involved every day in so many ways to make our communities the best that they can be: you volunteers are the best of us. Thank you so much for all that you do, and happy volunteer week.

Western Victoria Region schools

Gayle TIERNEY (Western Victoria – Minister for Training and Skills, Minister for Higher Education, Minister for Agriculture) (09:58): I rise today in Education Week to celebrate some fantastic events in my electorate marking 151 years of public education in this state. Foremost is the near completion of the new state-of-the-art facilities at the Terang College P-12 in Strong Street, Terang. Once finished, Hampden Specialist School P-4 and Terang College P-4 will join Terang College 5-12 on one site in an education hub. This \$12 million investment to relocate two junior campuses is an especially proud achievement. Hampden is part of a very significant program of upgrading all of the specialist schools in Western Victoria, including Warrnambool’s Merri River School, Portland Bay School and Colac Specialist School.

This year’s Education Week theme focuses on physical activity, hands-on learning and student voice in education. Camperdown College, Mortlake P-12, Derrinallum College and Cobden Technical School are just some of the schools using this week to highlight curriculum initiatives, co-curricular programs and activities that make schools inclusive and able to cater for all abilities. As Minister for Agriculture, I am particularly interested in Cobden tech school’s Cows Create Careers program, which engages and educates young people about the dairy industry. A special shout-out too to Cobden tech’s Narelle Holliday, whose excellent work in promoting and delivering applied learning across the Western Victoria Region was recognised with the 2022 VACC Chair’s Award for outstanding achievement.

Business of the house

Notices of motion

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

That the consideration of notices of motion, government business, 2 to 93, be postponed until later this day.

Motion agreed to.

*Bills***Water Legislation Amendment Bill 2023***Second reading***Debate resumed on motion of Jaclyn Symes:**

That the bill be now read a second time.

David DAVIS (Southern Metropolitan) (10:00): I am pleased to rise and make a contribution to the Water Legislation Amendment Bill 2023. In doing so I pay tribute to the work done by our shadow minister Tim McCurdy in the other place and his interest and commitment to work in this area. I do note that this bill is a minor and technical bill in the sense that it fundamentally just delays, and – it is worth reading this – amends the Water and Catchment Legislation Amendment Act 2021:

- (i) to extend the last possible date for a provision of that Act to come into operation ...
- (ii) to make minor amendments to proposed new Part 4AA to be inserted into the **Water Act 1989** by that Act as to the regulation of places, rates and times of taking water; and
- (iii) ... other minor and technical amendments ...

It is, as I say, a very small act, but it is one that we are certainly not opposing, and we understand the reason why the government is bringing this act forward. It does clarify and make changes to the place-of-take legislation, which provides a new approach to protect the rights of water holders and provide assurances in the case of shortfalls. It alleviates the challenges posed by the Barmah Choke and the delivery of water to water holders further down the Murray. These provisions we certainly do not oppose. We certainly see the value and sense in them.

It substitutes a new section about the details that need to be recorded in the water register, and it provides a more clearly defined idea of the information that will be kept for water rights holders and place-of-take approvals. Clause 12 is related to fees accompanying the place-of-take applications, thus updating the previous amendment to better reflect the day-to-day operations and processes used, as multiple applications can be made each day, and it allows the prescribed fees to be lumped together. There is a change to the definition of ‘interstate water’ and how it is classified. Certainly there has been significant consultation by the opposition on this matter with groups like the almond growers, the Victorian Farmers Federation, the water brokers association and the Goulburn–Murray irrigation district leadership.

Obviously water is a very significant issue for our state and through the Murray–Darling Basin, and the Murray–Darling Basin is our major water catchment here in that sense for so much of our agricultural activity. It is important, I think, to note that there have been huge water volumes in this recent period of flooding, and we are at high capacity and over capacity in almost every one of our storages. The amount of water flowing down has been very significant, so we are actually at an unusual point historically. It is not unknown, I might add, but we are not where we were some years ago when water was in such short supply.

The floods have obviously had a huge effect across large areas of northern Victoria, and many communities are still recovering. I think that our thoughts across the chamber are with those people who have suffered so severely. We note that they need every bit of support that can be provided by the state government and indeed the federal government and local support as well. The impact on many of the economies has been very significant, and we are conscious of the need to really support the recovery. I welcome the fact that this chamber will go to northern Victoria at an appropriate time. I think that that is important symbolism and an opportunity to show that we are concerned and focused on supporting the people that have been impacted by these natural events and natural disasters.

I do also note that in some FOI documents that we have obtained the minister has written to the federal minister seeking delays in certain projects, and that is quite legitimate given what has happened with the flooding that has occurred. The ability to complete projects and complete committed projects has

been impacted by the floods. We understand that, and people in many communities are not in a position to follow through with many of the steps that would be in fact needed.

The history of the water catchment through the Murray in Victoria is a great history and a history of achievement. Victoria has led the way in using the water for effective agricultural and horticultural production remarkably, and we have built very significant industries in some of our northern regions. I pay tribute to the pioneers who did that work, but I also pay tribute to those on the ground today and those who have been savvy enough, nimble enough, to build markets overseas and elsewhere for our agricultural and horticultural products, which obviously are dependent on the security and predictability of the water supply. To the extent that this bill adds to some of that security we see the value in it.

I should note that water is something that we well understand. The flood inquiry has got significant work to do in this next period, and I welcome the fact that this chamber has established an inquiry to look at the floods. It will look at the matters around preparation and the matters around levees and the support for reconstruction that is needed in many of the areas of northern Victoria. It will look at the pre-planning, and I think that there is a lot for us to still learn to do much better in many areas. Things were not up to scratch. It is not my plan today to make this a highly political contribution, but I do note that there are significant steps and learnings that can be understood and applied better.

In the city we have seen the terrible spectacle with Maribyrnong and the impact on so many people. It does appear that government culpability is right at the centre of that – decisions made by planners and decisions made by government that have exposed families and people to really very significant impacts through that flooding. Arguably some of these outcomes are actually government induced, so these decisions that have been made by planners need very, very close scrutiny. The chamber has obviously talked at length about the establishment of that flood inquiry and the process around the establishment of that flood inquiry. I think it is important to note that Melbourne Water was the agency responsible for establishing the flood inquiry, but it, as an agency, was a body that had responsibility for the management of these floods, so you really had an agency inquiring into aspects of its own performance, and there are some problems with that. They did try to put Mr Wimbush into the chair of that. I have no issue with Mr Wimbush. I have seen him at work on a number of points. He is a very experienced planner at Planning Panels Victoria. He is a senior and respected person there. He was very clear that he had a conflict of interest. He declared that. I have seen those documents. He declared that up-front. God knows what the bureaucrats at Melbourne Water and God knows what the minister and the minister's office thought they were doing allowing that to go forward. I mean, they knew. They all knew. They were up to their neck in it, and they made a series of serious mistakes. In the end they have had to take a different tack, and I am hopeful that sensible outcomes will be achieved there.

I do note that the parliamentary committee that is looking at these matters, the flood inquiry, will be independent, and I hope that it does have the intestinal fortitude to really confront these issues. I know the government will not want to be supportive and fulsome in its honesty with that committee, but I hope Ms Shing, the minister, does attend, I hope her staff attend, I hope that the bureaucrats from Melbourne Water intend that inquiry and I hope that they are honest. I hope that the inquiry does not encounter resistance, does not encounter obfuscation and does not encounter an attempt to nobble its ability to undertake the work that it needs to do. I must say, in terms of a flush out of Melbourne Water and the bureaucrats in the Department of Energy, Environment and Climate Action, or DEECA, as it is now – the constantly changing department – we do need some really thorough thought about how that area is structured and which bureaucrats have levels of responsibility for a number of these key points. We cannot have it when government planning failures are directly responsible for the damage that has been done to so many people, and I do hope that the inquiry gets to the bottom of it.

I do hope the minister is prepared to become more candid and more honest about her position and the involvement of her and her office in the establishment of the so-called Wimbush inquiry. It is very clear when you look at the documents that her staff were asked multiple times to clear details – multiple times. The emails came in for approval. They went back with 'No, wait. Can't do it' or they went back

with 'Make these changes'. You have got directions from the minister's office, and yet she and her staff are trying to say that they did not have any responsibly. Well, it is bunk, of course.

The PRESIDENT: Mr Davis, you are flirting close to making an accusation against a sitting member, which you know you have to do under a substantive motion, not a second-reading speech. I would ask you to consider that as you continue your contribution.

David DAVIS: President, thank you. The water legislation is an important bill. Obviously, it is oversighted by the Minister for Water in her area of responsibility under the administrative orders. Obviously, our water authorities across the state, whether they be Goulburn–Murray Water in the north or Melbourne Water in the metropolitan area, have significant responsibilities, as do our catchment management authorities and other bodies for the management of water in this state. I think it is extremely important to see that our management of these resources is intimately tied up not just with the environmental outcomes that we all want to see but also with our economic future. That economic future is, as I have alluded to, both agriculture and horticulture north of the divide in particular, but it is also the towns – their water resources, their safety from flooding – in so many areas across the north of the state but equally in metropolitan Melbourne.

I am happy to conclude my contribution by again recording my sadness at what happened during those floods, by wishing the people impacted well and by hoping that the flood inquiry established through this chamber is able to take the steps that it needs to flush out the problems within our government system here but also within the bureaucracy. This task is an important one. As I have said, the minister also wrote to Tanya Plibersek, the federal minister, seeking some delays on completing a number of projects, and I understand the need for those steps given the huge impact on people in northern Victoria through the flood. The bill will go forward. It is a modest bill. It is not something that we oppose, but we will watch the implementation closely.

John BERGER (Southern Metropolitan) (10:15): Today I rise to contribute to the debate on the Water Legislation Amendment Bill 2023. The bill aims to clarify several provisions related to the framework, such as the place-of-take approvals, to ensure its smooth operation. It aims to avoid unintended consequences and ensure that the intent of the Water and Catchment Legislation Amendment Act 2021 is delivered. This legislation is also what I often talk about: good legislation, well thought out, with practical and clear implications.

Victoria is a state and ours is a country of droughts and floods, so we must take great care in the management of our precious water resource. Our land has suffered through drought and floods many times, and while the flora and fauna have had millions of years to adapt, we are yet to. Historically, water rights have been a source of worry and concern for some of the poorest and most vulnerable members of our society. Water rights should be a concern for all Victorians as they impact many areas of our lives, and they are vital particularly to rural Australians, who must deal with the immediate consequences of them every day. The people affected by this will ensure that our flood systems continue to function.

Victorian rivers such as the Murray and the Goulburn support diverse ecosystems and create economic value for rural communities, so it is important for all Victorians that we do everything in our power to protect these waterways and to ensure that they can be used well into the future. The Victorian Water Act 1989 is landmark legislation in water management globally and has significantly impacted the state's water usage and management of water resources. The act is in many ways the best possible response to the concerns about sustainability in an area faced with a growing population and an increased demand for water. By establishing a framework for the use of water resources Victoria at the time was able to ensure that our water resources were managed to world-class standard, and we have been able to see it with our own eyes.

Legislation like this not only works but creates the framework needed to continually improve the use of waterways in Victoria. Just as importantly, the Water Act includes provisions which ensure that

Indigenous cultures' values are considered, as well as ensuring that the traditional Indigenous use of the waterways is not disrupted. The legislation ensures that Indigenous values and knowledge are considered in the management of water resources in Victoria. Indigenous knowledge of the land is in many ways far deeper than our own and goes back many thousands of years. By supplementing Indigenous knowledge with modern technology's ability to map and predict the weather and changes in the waterways, we can better map the actions needed to protect our rivers.

The Murray and Goulburn rivers are an essential part of the life of all Victorians, whether they know it or not. The proper management of the waterways is an important part of this legislation. Water systems can be fragile at the best of times, and while the use of waters for agricultural irrigation cannot and should not be stopped, we must carefully balance the health of ecosystems and the conservation of the waterways in Victoria with their use for irrigation. Victorian farmers have been consulted in the development of this legislation, and the greatest efforts have been made to ensure that the proper management of the water in Victoria has minimal impact on agriculture in Victoria.

While it is an unfortunate reality that Victorian farmers must make difficult choices with their resources when there are times of scarcity, the Andrews government has put in place many measures to prevent any harm. Victoria has robust drought preparedness measures and a response framework which can help alleviate the effects of droughts at all levels. It includes support for Victorian farmers, who can suffer dearly from the effects of drought, and ensures that the response to drought is proportional to the needs of the area. While the water bill does try to alleviate the impacts of drought, the Victorian government has also ensured that people affected will still be protected. To do this effectively Victoria requires legislation which can be both enforced readily and flexible enough that it can adapt to the current changing conditions that we face.

Water management cannot be static; it must be adaptable so that we are not caught off guard by rapidly changing conditions, either by the needs of the population or by the changing environment. Climate change is a major hurdle for our waterways going forward, not only reducing the water available to the rivers but also increasing the demand for water for irrigation. As our climate changes, we need more water for the continuation of agriculture in Victoria. This will require increasingly careful management of our waterways along with the implementation of new water-saving technologies to ensure the health of these rivers.

The bill seeks to ensure that the waterways are managed to the best possible degree well into the future. The proposed amendment to the Water and Catchment Legislation Amendment Act 2021 will ensure that the bill's powers and applications are in line with the original intent of the Water Act 1989. It will also ensure that the terminology used in the acts is unambiguous so the legislation can be utilised to its full extent. The proposed amendments will make changes to who, when and how much in relation to the taking of water to ensure the Water Act does not allow for overconsumption of water and the destruction of our waterways. These amendments are an important part of continuing commitments made by the original Water Act towards protection of Victoria's waterways.

The bill will also delay the default commencement of the new framework until July 2024. This will ensure there is enough time to engage with flood-affected communities, to consult and to ensure that the rules and regulations are reasonable. For many working people in the agricultural sector, water rights are a matter of life and livelihood, and water shortages can destroy people's lives. As such, it is crucial that we work responsibly together to manage these resources.

The Water Act 1989 ensured that water resources would be used fairly and efficiently. Proper utilisation of these resources is essential, and minimising waste is also important. With limited water resources, the efficient use of them is best weighed to ensure that we do not overuse our water resources. The original act also ensured water was properly conserved. This protected against certain risks to our water resources, and it was delivered through a framework of community and Indigenous involvement in planning. The system of water allocation which managed who can draw water and

what quantity was a crucial tool in preserving our rivers, and in 1989 it was an excellent step to protect our waterways, but we must do more.

The Murray River is a critical part of the livelihood of many Victorians, and we must protect it. We must ensure its best management. We cannot risk the livelihoods of farmers right across northern Victoria. While we cannot control the management of the Murray River outside Victoria, we can ensure that within Victoria we manage the waterways to the greatest extent possible, and we can also work alongside the Murray–Darling Basin Authority and other Murray states as collaboratively as possible to improve delivery risks. Ensuring that the legislation is up to date and fit for purpose goes a long way in achieving these goals.

There have been significant changes across the southernmost part of the Murray–Darling Basin over the past 10 to 20 years. That includes more water being delivered to the Murray users downstream of the Barmah Choke while at the same time the capacity of the choke has been decreasing. Shortfalls can be because of droughts and prolonged heatwaves, but they can be made much worse when the waterways are mismanaged. With climate change expected to increase the number of hot days, peaks in daily demand will exacerbate delivery challenges, which will likely continue to grow. When this occurs water can be delivered and used at these waterways where irrigation can lead to low capacity. This can be devastating to the local ecosystem. Shortfalls in critical periods can devastate agriculture and can within a short time ruin an entire harvest. That is why scarcity requires the strictest regulations. I can remember all too well the millennium drought and the impacts on our state.

As climate change brings longer and hotter dry periods, the stress on the water system will continue to grow. Proper management of this requires every state and territory to work together and cooperation between the government and local communities, who have deep knowledge of their local ecosystems and how they are used. Different areas within the state require a unique approach to water management. A farmer in the Goulburn–Broken catchment area uses water very differently to those in East Gippsland. This means that we must consider the many ways in which water is used.

In recent years we have seen the effects of the overdrawing of water from our most important waterways and how it is made worse by climate change. Not only that, but in many other ways have things changed. New technologies such as desalination have changed how we must approach water management, and who knows what other changes will come in the decades. So these amendments must be the stepping stones to improved water rights in Victoria. There will also have to be a cultural shift towards viewing the water resources of Victoria not as a thing to be exploited but as an integral part of our state to be properly managed. I am sure all Victorians want to ensure we have access to this critical part of Australian ecology, as well as everything it supports, well into the future. I am incredibly proud of working to ensure this bill continues to support Victoria.

In the last election our side of this chamber promised that we would be a government for all Victorians, and that is what this legislation ensures. We are getting on with this bill, even though it is small, because we need to provide certainty for those who use water. That means all Victorians but particularly those who suffered through the October 2022 floods and are still feeling the effects to this day. In fact this bill was not considered before these floods. As this house knows all too well from last sitting week's debate and in fact from much of this term of the Parliament, the devastation of the flood event is real and it is tragic. Thousands of Victorian farmers and water users were impacted in the declared systems where the place-of-take approvals framework will be implemented. These farmers deal with enough.

Before I end today I want to discuss what the water shortfall is. It is when the water cannot be delivered when there is water needed, even when the water is entitled to be used, whether by irrigators or the environment. It happens when river operators cannot deliver water to water users. This might happen during a heatwave, or the long distances from dams might mean water cannot be delivered in time. In December 2022 our government published the *Victorian River Murray Shortfall Response Plan* to ensure a coordinated response to any shortfall events in the Murray system. We can be as

comprehensive as possible, but this place-of-take approvals framework strengthens compliance in this event. It means that if anyone takes more than their approved allocation during the shortfall, they will be punished. It is vital that these technical changes in the bill allow for market transparency. We need an accountable, fair water market, one that gives public access to the right information, the important information about the operation of the water market. So I am proud the Labor Andrews government is improving accountability and transparency in our water market. This is on top of the extensive work that we are doing to ensure strict compliance is maintained. We must make clear that in Victoria we are all in this together, and we will not tolerate non-compliance with our water laws.

Finally, we are working closely with communities right across Victoria, whether it be traditional owners, farmers, irrigators or residents, to support them through the flood recovery. The former Minister for Water in the other place, recently retired Minister for Water Minister Neville, and Minister Symes when she was Minister for Agriculture did the hard work on this. They attended the community round tables in Tatura, worked collaboratively with the Victorian Farmers Federation peak body and raised concerns at the ministerial council in Canberra. We are all in this for the long haul, as we know this is a long-term issue and one we must all work together through. I commend the amendments to the house.

Sarah MANSFIELD (Western Victoria) (10:28): I rise today to speak to the Water Legislation Amendment Bill 2023, and as we have heard already in this chamber, this bill's primary intention is to delay the implementation date of place-of-take approvals by 12 months. The bill also makes some technical changes which support the functioning of these new approvals. I want to say thank you for the work of the departmental and ministerial staff, particularly Rose, Alieta and Georgia, who answered our many questions on the topic during briefings. We appreciate your collegiality in engaging with us in this space.

The Greens support this bill in its acknowledgement that disaster recovery is ongoing for our regional and rural communities affected by the 2022 flooding event and that drought events are increasing. We agree that we must protect our precious water during these shortfall periods. We acknowledge the impact of last year's flooding events on our state. They have been reminders yet again of what is so special about our regional communities: resilience, care and compassion in the face of catastrophe. These communities endured yet another natural disaster and continue to rebuild with hope and strength in the face of an uncertain future where climate change is our reality.

If we were not already aware that we are living amidst a climate crisis, 2022 should have been a wake-up call. Australia experienced five major flooding events. We lost upwards of 30 human lives and saw widespread destruction of precious ecosystems. Planning for a future in which a changing climate is our reality must be the focus of our government. This means ending all new coal and gas projects, streamlining our renewable energy transition and investing in community-level climate change and disaster mitigation – not after the next flooding event, millennium drought or worse. We need action now. The Greens are founded on a history of fighting for our waterways, and the Victorian Greens will continue to do that. Our waterways are living beings, but they are facing a death sentence due to overextraction, exploitation, corporate greed, corruption, mismanagement and blatant disregard for cultural and environmental needs. While Labor and the coalition appear to be united in supporting water policy which prioritises corporate interests, the Greens will continue to advocate for the interests of our environment and our regional communities.

Place-of-take approvals are yet another framework patched onto a broken system. I welcome the government's acknowledgement that rationing is needed to protect our environment and our communities during droughts, but this is yet another example of the way in which water legislation is reactive and points to the need for major reform in the way in which we treat our rivers. Water in rivers has been turned into a market. Volumes of water are assigned a dollar value, commodified and traded as though water can be neatly dissected from the land and the life it supports. Huge amounts of water are traded every day by speculators with no connection to the water itself to make money, potentially

increasing the price of water for those who actually need it. This colonial, capitalist construction of water dissects it from the land and from the lives that it supports, including our own.

I commend the government on the *Water Is Life: Traditional Owner Access to Water Roadmap*, and I would particularly like to point out part B, the statements from traditional owners demonstrating the inextricable connections between water, land, air, all living things and culture. How do we put a price on that? Unpicking this mess and moving back to a holistic understanding of water that existed for tens of thousands of years in this country is perhaps an almost impossible task given how heavily modified and exploited our rivers are and how entrenched the market model is, but a starting point is increased transparency so at the very least we have a clearer view of what is going on in that market.

It has been broadly acknowledged that the water market is opaque relative to other markets. The lack of transparency creates information asymmetry and mistrust in the system. There have been several reports and recommendations to governments regarding this issue, and we recognise that late last year the federal government committed to implementing the Murray–Darling Basin *Water Market Reform* road map. With the legislation before us we are disappointed to see that the Victorian government has yet again missed the opportunity to make major reforms to the transparency of our water market. The 2021 bill implemented stronger deterrence to water theft, including revised compliance mechanisms, and it also introduced that the water register must include information regarding individuals along with corporations who hold 2 per cent of a declared system. That simply does not go far enough.

Let me take a moment to step the chamber through what the Labor government's so-called water market transparency reforms mean in practice. Currently the median high-reliability water share in northern Victoria is 6.8 megalitres. This accounts for 0.00027 per cent of high-reliability water shares in northern Victoria. However, at present the Labor government's regulations are only to release information for water holders with 2 per cent of water allocations within any given system, so at present the public is only able to access information on those corporations that own 10,000 – yes, 10,000 – times the amount of water shares as compared with the average water holder. The holders of 2 per cent or more of a declared water system are unsurprisingly few, and some of those holders are also fairly unsurprising. They include the Commonwealth Environmental Water Holder and the Victorian Environmental Water Holder, important players in ensuring we have environmental flows that ensure river health. They also include some large corporate investors, and a quick Google search of these water holders comes up with terms such as 'institutional investors', 'asset managers' or 'corporate trust'. What this shows is that water is being treated like shares to be bought and sold.

In 2021 an ACCC report revealed that institutional investors made up about 11 per cent of water shares across six market exchange platforms, yet the only information we have publicly available is about those that own 10,000 times that of the average water holder. Who is advocating for the environment in this economic market? Where are the voices of traditional owners, small producers and regional communities? The water market is opaque, and this government's reforms are piecemeal. That is why we will be introducing amendments that constitute stronger reforms to water market transparency, and I would ask that these amendments are circulated now if possible.

Amendments circulated pursuant to standing orders.

Sarah MANSFIELD: I will speak further to these amendments during the committee stage, but in summary while we have no objection to the changes in the bill, there is so much more that could be done to care for our river systems. Large volumes of water are owned and traded by entities that have no connection to the land or waterways. They are simply in it to make money, and there is very little information available about who these entities are. The Greens will continue to push for greater transparency around our rivers so we can safeguard our communities and smaller water holders such as our traditional owners and agricultural landholders.

Gaelle BROAD (Northern Victoria) (10:36): It is my pleasure today to speak on the Water Legislation Amendment Bill 2023, and the Nationals do not oppose this bill. The government

introduced the Water and Catchment Legislation Amendment Act into Parliament in 2021, and they have not been able to roll out the changes by the legislated deadline of 1 July 2023, and due to the floods and low uptake of the initial consultation they need more time to consult and inform stakeholders and those affected about the place-of-take changes. The main provision of this bill is to amend the Water and Catchment Legislation Amendment Act 2021 to allow the place-of-take changes to be implemented by June 2024 at the latest. Further, it clarifies and makes minor changes to place-of-take legislation, which provides a new approach to protect the rights of water holders and provide assurances in the case of shortfalls. These changes will also alleviate the challenges posed by the Barmah Choke and the delivery of water to water holders further down the Murray.

Water is such a critical part of the lives of many thousands of people in my electorate of Northern Victoria Region that it deserves to be discussed well in this house. Most of us know only too well the importance that water has for the economic wellbeing of our rural and regional communities, but water management is an extremely complex issue, and I am very grateful to my Nationals colleagues for their understanding and advocacy in this area. Tim McCurdy is Shadow Minister for Water, and he is a former irrigator and still lives on the Murray. We need to balance irrigation rights, town use, consumptive uses, recreation on the rivers and the environment, and as my colleague the member for Gippsland South put it so neatly:

This legislation ... is yet another piece in the puzzle of water policy to try and deal with those issues of scarcity and who should get the water that everybody wants.

The bill aims to protect existing water users' rights to have water delivered down rivers and empower water users to manage their own delivery risks. There are lots of different producers that depend on irrigation, including almond growers, citrus growers, table grape and wine grape growers, and this legislation provides a way to balance their needs, especially on hot days when everyone wants to irrigate on the same day. I grew up on a horticulture farm, and I remember many Christmas Days when my dad was out irrigating to keep the plants alive. This bill is essentially a chance for the government to spend more time updating the introduction of the place-of-take approvals. This will allow further discussion with the irrigation community, particularly those people downstream of the Barmah Choke on the Murray system.

The Barmah Choke is an interesting phenomenon. It is a narrow section of the Murray River that runs through the Barmah–Millewa forest on the Victoria–New South Wales border. Although it is known as the Barmah Choke, it is actually made up of three key flow-constriction points – the Tocumwal Choke, the Barmah Choke and the Edward Choke. Trade is restricted downstream of Cobram and upstream of Echuca. In fact the choke restricts the flow of the Murray River to just around 7000 megalitres per day downstream. This is the lowest flow in any stretch of the Murray. It limits the delivery of irrigation water during periods of peak demand, generally in spring and summer. Trade from above the Barmah Choke to below the choke is restricted to protect the delivery of water downstream. It is a restrictor and literally is a choke in the system, and that is why, whether you are upstream of the choke or downstream of the choke, it is really important. That is what this legislation is addressing, particularly for people who are downstream of the choke, because of that 7000-megalitre restriction. How that water is used and managed is what this legislation addresses, and we do need this sort of legislation to come in to ensure that if we face significant challenges with the delivery of water down the Murray system in the future, everyone's rights are considered.

This bill does clarify some sections of the Water and Catchment Legislation Amendment Act 2021. It protects the existing rights of Victorian water users and provides a bit more flexibility to manage their own delivery, and this is a good thing. But of course no discussion about water would be complete without looking at buybacks, and unfortunately I notice the idea of buybacks seems to be creeping back onto the agenda lately at the federal level. Many people are rightly concerned and for good reason. My colleague the member for Mildura Jade Benham gave a very good example of how water buybacks destroyed the small town of Tresco near Lake Boga. She said when water buybacks came along, desperate farmers sold off their water. The farmland became unviable, and tragically people

walked off their land, leaving Tresco looking like a Third World country. Buybacks also place more pressure on irrigators that remain and bear the increased cost of keeping irrigation channels open. I have spoken with many primary producers across the region who cannot understand why water was unbundled from the land and that people who do not use it can trade in it to make money, but that is a matter for another day.

Certainly, it is very strange to be considering water buybacks for environmental use when we have had floods in recent times. In October we saw floods devastate a lot of northern Victoria; over 63 local government areas across the state were flooded. Looking at the aerial shots, the amount of water – the volume that just stretched for mile after mile – was incredible. For lots of primary producers across the region, their farms were inundated with floodwater for weeks and weeks. I remember trying to drive across roads, and roads right across state were cut off in so many parts. There were people whose homes were destroyed and are still without housing, waiting for insurance companies to finalise arrangements; there are restrictions on building supplies that are affecting the industry. It has really been a very difficult period for so many towns, especially in Rochester, where people are still living at the relief centre – and this is over six months now since the floods took place. I remember hearing a story of a man who went with his son out in a dinghy to help neighbours where stock losses were significant and about the heartache for those families. Others had to sell stock because they had no ability to feed them as well. It was a very, very difficult period. There were helicopter supplies having to get to places that were stranded.

We know that the flood inquiry is taking place – the parliamentary inquiry which I am part of; I am on that committee. I really do encourage people who had an experience of the floods from all different angles and involvements, whether they were part of an agency that was involved in the floods or responding, whether they were part of the local council or whether they are residents that were impacted, if they want, to share their stories of that impact. It is really important for the committee to get that feedback so that we can look at what can be done better as we prepare for floods in the future. Submissions to the flood inquiry close on 5 June, so to find out more you can go to the Victorian parliamentary website.

But as we know, whilst we speak of floods, dry times will come again, and it is very important that we manage our water resources effectively. We know that across regional Victoria primary producers produce the food that we enjoy every day, and they are exporting top-quality produce around the world, so it is essential that we manage the water as a resource to enable that to happen. So while we do not oppose this bill, we still have genuine concerns about the management of water in Victoria. More could be done and should be done for irrigators and communities who rely on this water.

Jacinta ERMACORA (Western Victoria) (10:45): I am pleased to speak on the Water Legislation Amendment Bill 2023, which is intended to clarify and strengthen water delivery rights and make some minor amendments to the Water Act 1989. The most significant element of this bill is its timing. The bill will delay the default commencement of the new framework from July 2023 to July 2024. This will ensure that there is enough time to engage with flood-affected farmers on the implementation of the new framework so that the rules and regulations work for the agriculture sector and to provide irrigators sufficient time to prepare for the commencement of the framework.

Water is fundamental to our lives – to plant and animal life cycles and the health of our planet. It is a fundamental element of our places and our social and cultural lives. It is fundamental to industry, tourism and our economy. Emphasised in this bill is its essential importance to the agriculture industry. Water is essential for our health and wellbeing, literally able to make a difference between life and death. It is one of the world's most precious commodities, and due to climate change it is increasingly unpredictable; hence the need for thoughtful, considered, commonsense regulation of our water to safeguard our future. Across our nation those with access to water rights seek to safeguard their portion, and there is also an increasing understanding that we need to maximise the potential of our water supplies, using them most when there is surplus and leveraging caution during dry times.

In the face of climate change Victoria under the Andrews Labor government has been leading the nation, working towards the best possible water reforms for our systems and regulations. *Water for Victoria* was launched by the former Minister for Water Lisa Neville in August 2016. Since then significant progress has been made in meeting the challenges of climate change and population growth and taking action to ensure our water system is modern, efficient, future focused and affordable. I would like to take a moment to acknowledge the work done, as my predecessors have, by the previous minister Ms Neville in the launch of the *Water for Victoria* policy, with each of the chapters focusing on key variables, in particular agriculture, climate change, communities, water for urban environments, trading rules and reform initiatives. Among those it includes initiating progress on gender diversity within the water sector as well as initiating progress on inclusion of Indigenous communities in the economy of water. That work was initiated prior to the Gender Equality Act 2020 and proved to be very leading in the gender space. I thank former Minister Neville for her work.

Water for Victoria established an approach which focuses on strengthening local relationships, putting community at the centre of decision-making, and the delivery of priority water projects for Victoria's cities, towns and regions. It is being implemented in a spirit of collaboration with water corporations, catchment management authorities, the Victorian Environmental Water Holder, traditional owner groups, local government, community and water users, in particular the agriculture sector.

The bill we address here today continues the commonsense and community-engaged reform. It will clarify several provisions related to the new place-of-take approvals framework to ensure its smooth operation in line with the intent of the Water and Catchment Legislation Amendment Act 2021 and avoid unintended consequences. Climate change is expected to increase the frequency of hot days and the length of warm spells, causing peaks in daily demand. This is already most apparent across the southern-connected Murray–Darling Basin over the last 10 to 20 years. The place-of-take approvals will give clarity and protect existing water users' rights to take water during a shortfall. This will also give users flexibility to manage their own delivery risks.

Importantly, the place-of-take approvals manage approvals to take water and delivery rights in declared systems, such as the Murray River system, where there are increasing delivery risks. The Department of Energy, Environment and Climate Action has worked closely with Goulburn–Murray Water, Lower Murray Water and Southern Rural Water to make sure systems and processes are updated for them to manage their customers' place-of-take approvals when the new framework comes into effect.

Southern Rural Water, in my part of the world, will not be impacted as much by this new legislation as it is not a declared system and due to the fact that there is no current shortage of water and there are very few dams, unlike the major irrigation systems in the north of our state. That being said, it does give all irrigators of water the opportunity to be more informed of their rights. Water transparency rights, which I will touch on later, will also benefit water corporations such as Southern Rural Water, as information will be available on websites.

The changes will also provide for a more effective and consistent enforcement and compliance regime for non-compliance with the conditions of taking water. These changes mean that pumps or outlets where existing water users take water will be described as an approved place of take. It is as simple as that. Entitlement holders' existing delivery rights will be maintained.

Where delivery risks are increasing, the Minister for Water will be able to make rules to cap new extraction shares to protect existing entitlement holders' rights to have water delivered and to allow trade to give them more flexibility to manage their own delivery risks. This includes assessing any applications from people wanting to move extraction share between properties or water users within the lower Murray, which is possible now as long as there is no impact on existing entitlement holders' rights.

Some small but important technical clarifications will ensure smooth operation of the water reforms. In particular the technical changes involve making sure tenants, not just landholders, can hold place-of-take approvals in line with the intent of the legislation; making sure that water shareholders and others with rights to future allocations through lease arrangements can retain their place-of-take approvals with their allocation account empty, ready for allocations; making sure someone from interstate can trade it to another person; making sure existing powers to trade all types of Victorian water allocations interstate are retained; enabling place-of-take application fees to be prescribed under regulation, consistent with how equivalent fees are currently set; enabling water market transparency related amendments to commence separately from place-of-take approval amendments; and enabling rules for place-of-take approvals to be made without a regulatory impact statement if made in accordance with the allowable exemption requirements set out in the Subordinate Legislation Act 1994. This will smooth things out significantly.

Another important technical change in the bill will enable market transparency related amendments to commence separately from the place-of-take approvals framework. This means that the market transparency improvements with the community, which have been thoroughly consulted on, can be introduced from 1 July 2023 and earlier than the place-of-take approvals framework. This will provide additional time for consultation with water users on the rules and regulations that give effect to the place-of-take approvals framework without unnecessarily delaying the market transparency improvements until 2024. So in effect this bill will delay the default commencement of the new framework from July 2023 to July 2024, allowing comprehensive consultation to ensure best possible outcomes.

The Andrews Labor government is committed to deep, inclusive and thorough community engagement to ensure that all views and feedback are received and considered. This bill seeks to ensure there is enough time to engage with flood-affected farmers on the implementation of the new framework so that the rules and regulations are sensible and to provide irrigators sufficient time to prepare for the commencement of the framework. Consultation on detailed rules began through the appointment of a consultative committee in September 2022. This was to ensure quality insights came from the irrigation community and the building of trusted relationships between stakeholders, leading to greater collaboration and participation in the changes.

Wider consultation had been planned for October and December 2022, with a pause in November due to the election period. However, the floods were a major disruption and are continuing to impact communities. Even now they continue to deal with the after-effects on their land, which have resulted in a delayed and extended harvest period. Agriculture Victoria data records that as of 9 December 2022 more than 28,000 outbound telephone calls were made to farmers impacted by flooding to assess flood damage and address any animal welfare issues. The effect of these floods on farmers and communities is enormous and heartbreaking: livestock deaths, fences damaged, hay and silage destroyed, stored grain losses and pasture losses. Field crops lost were identified as 218,640 hectares, total farm affected area was 498,629 hectares and perished beehives number 1164 and now require feeding. Honey flow losses came in at 208 tonnes. It is daunting to think about the implications and the real story behind this data. So it is hardly surprising that in December 2022 and 2023 irrigators who did attend the consultation session told us that their communities lacked the bandwidth to contemplate the reforms. By extending the default commencement date of the amendment act until July 2024 more time will be taken to implement an improved framework for regulating the place-of-take water, and flood-affected users in northern Victoria will have time to consider and adjust to the new reforms. It also gives us time to address technical matters in the amendment act relating to these provisions to ensure the smooth operation of the water reforms and avoid unintended consequences, including to interstate water trade arrangements.

In conclusion, this bill represents sensible, commonsense and above all responsible reforms in a timely manner. I congratulate all of those involved in trying to participate in the consultations in the face of the floods. I thank for all their efforts the farmers and irrigators in that space and hope that once the

recovery progresses enough the engagement will be able to start again effectively. This is a largely technical bill which seeks to take the time to complete important consultation for the many community members affected by the major floods in northern Victoria, and I support this bill.

Michael GALEA (South-Eastern Metropolitan) (11:00): I am delighted to rise to speak on the Water Legislation Amendment Bill 2023. In doing so I would like to acknowledge the work that Minister Shing has put into this bill. I would also like to acknowledge that I quite enjoyed listening to the previous contributions, both from Ms Ermacora and from Mrs Broad. Obviously it is very good to have a regional perspective when discussing these matters, so I very much appreciated their contributions.

Water is a precious resource that plays a vital role in our lives and the sustainability of our communities. It is of course essential for agriculture, it is essential for industry and it is essential for the wellbeing of us all, for humans and for the environment. As custodians of our natural resources, we are responsible for ensuring that we manage water sustainably and equitably, and that is what this bill seeks to do. The Water Legislation Amendment Bill 2023 does hold, you could say, a significant significance, as it seeks to address critical issues and strengthen water delivery rights. Through amendments to the Water and Catchment Legislation Amendment Act 2021, this bill aims to clarify and enhance the framework governing water management in our state and in our region. It is a proactive step towards ensuring the efficient allocation and utilisation of our precious water resources.

In the following discussion on this bill I would like to provide firstly a comprehensive overview of the bill, including its objectives and its proposed changes, as well as the anticipated impacts of the bill. We will delve into the context surrounding the bill's introduction and the need for its provisions, and additionally I would also like to take some time to shed light on the extensive community consultation that has taken place, which has been done to ensure that the concerns and opinions of relevant and important stakeholders have been taken into account. I would also like to explore the importance of water market transparency and how this bill will actually address that critical aspect as well. Transparency in our water markets fosters trust, accountability and above all fair resource allocation. I would like to also discuss the existing transparency measures in place as well as the rationale behind supporting or opposing certain amendments.

First off, it is also worth noting that the Andrews Labor government has already been actively supporting communities affected by the devastating floods over the past year in Victoria, especially in northern Victoria. The government has provided – as I have spoken about in a number of previous speeches in this place too, including a fabulous motion put by Ms Lovell, I believe in our last sitting week, to have a regional sitting in the next year up in northern Victoria in the flood-affected areas; it was a good opportunity to join in support of that and also to speak about the support that we have provided for our flood-affected communities – as members will know, additional financial assistance, relief centres, accommodation and of course case support to help plan a path forward for our flood-affected Victorians. This approach does stand in contrast to that of some members perhaps who have shown less concern about areas outside of some very inner local government areas. This is a government that actually looks after all Victorians, whether in the regions, in the suburbs or in the inner cities.

The extension of the default commencement date of the Water Legislation Amendment Bill 2023 from its previous proposed implementation date of 1 July this year to 1 July next year actually aims to provide flood-affected water users, in northern Victoria in particular, with the additional time that they need to recover and to adapt to the proposed reforms. The extension recognises the challenges faced by these communities, and it demonstrates the government's commitment to their wellbeing. It also acknowledges the complexities that arise when you implement reforms during a period of recovery, which can be particularly challenging for those who have faced immense challenges in the aftermath of those devastating floods. So it is good to see that this will allow those communities the extra time that they need.

The minor amendments proposed in the Water Legislation Amendment Bill 2023 do aim to clarify and strengthen water delivery rights, providing water users with clearer and more certain rights in order for them to extract a share of the flow in the river during rationing restrictions. These amendments may be considered small in scale, but they do play a significant role in ensuring the smooth operation of these water reforms and avoiding unintended consequences. By enhancing the functionality and the certainty of the Water Act 1989, the government will be promoting a more efficient and effective water management framework for Victoria.

Overall the Andrews Labor government's approach to the floods and the Water Legislation Amendment Bill 2023 combined demonstrate a commitment to supporting communities and ensuring sustainable and equitable management of water resources. By providing comprehensive support to our flood-affected communities and proposing amendments to strengthen water delivery rights the government aims to empower water users and promote responsible water management practices. These efforts will benefit not only current water users of course but also future generations by ensuring a more sustainable supply long into the future.

The aforementioned amendment act, which received assent in November 2021, aimed to amend the Water Act 1989 and introduce reforms to clarify and strengthen water delivery rights. However, specific provisions of that act have yet to come into effect, including the new place-of-take approval provisions that my colleague Ms Ermacora referred to just previously. So it is essential to understand the current status of the amendment act to contextualise the proposed amendments of the Water Legislation Amendment Bill 2023.

This bill seeks to extend the default commencement date of the amendment act from 1 July 2023 to 1 July 2024. As discussed, this extension is very necessary to provide our flood-affected water users in northern Victoria the time that they need to understand and adapt to these new reforms, and by granting this additional time we also acknowledge the challenge that these users face and ensure that they will have sufficient opportunity to engage with the changes meaningfully. The delay will also help manage the technological risks associated with updating the Victorian Water Register, providing a more robust framework for implementing these place-of-take approvals.

The amendment act introduced a new place-of-take approvals framework which requires updating the Victorian Water Register to support its implementation. Given the complexity of the task and the inherent technological risks, it is imperative to allow for additional time to ensure a smooth transition. Updating the Victorian Water Register's functionality requires careful planning and testing in order for us to minimise disruptions and ensure that there is accurate recording and management of our state's water entitlements. The extension of the commencement date provides the necessary time frame to mitigate these technological risks and facilitate the seamless implementation of these reforms.

I think it is also important to clarify that the proposed amendments in the Water Legislation Amendment Bill 2023 will not impact the cost of water. These changes primarily aim to provide clearer and more certain rights to extract water during periods of rationing restrictions. So the objective is to ensure that water users better understand their entitlements and can make informed decisions regarding their water usage. The proposed amendments do not introduce cost-related implications, which is important to note, but they do focus on strengthening our water delivery rights.

The proposed amendments contained within the Water Legislation Amendment Bill 2023 offer significant benefits to water users by providing clearer and more certain rights to extract water during periods of rationing restrictions. This clarity will ensure that water users have a better understanding of both their rights and their obligations when this period is defined and declared. By improving the transparency and the certainty of water delivery rights we will be empowering water users to manage their water usage more effectively and more efficiently, particularly during those high-demand periods when the pressure on and the demand for water is coming from all directions. These benefits contribute to a more sustainable and equitable water management system.

The Department of Energy, Environment and Climate Action has undertaken comprehensive stakeholder consultation throughout the development of the Water Legislation Amendment Bill 2023. This consultation process involved engaging with a wide group of stakeholders, including the water users themselves of course, industry representatives and community groups too. Through these consultations valuable insights and feedback have been gathered and helped to really shape these proposed amendments to ensure that they align with the needs, the expectations and the demands of the various stakeholders involved.

Let us take, by way of example, the place-of-take consultative committee, comprising representatives from irrigators across Victoria's declared systems, which has provided valuable advice on the proposed amendments and the implementation of the place-of-take approvals framework. Their input and their expertise on the subject matter have been really instrumental in refining the reforms and ensuring that they are both meaningful and effective, as well as very practical too. Additionally, the support from rural water corporations – and my colleague Ms Ermacora referred to the Southern Rural Water corporation as well as many others too – and the Victorian Farmers Federation further underscores the collaborative efforts and shared vision in improving water management practices in this state.

So based on the extensive stakeholder consultation, which was conducted, as I said, by the Department of Energy, Environment and Climate Action, there is a strong level of confidence that there will be broad support for the clarifying amendments in this bill, the Water Legislation Amendment Bill 2023. The feedback which was received by government from stakeholders during the consultation process has indicated broad general agreement with the need for these amendments in order to achieve the original intent of our government's water reforms. This broad support reflects the inclusive and collaborative approach that we have taken in shaping these proposed amendments, which is to ensure that they are well aligned with the interests and perspectives of all water users in our state.

The Water Legislation Amendment Bill 2023 builds upon the existing water market transparency agreements that were passed in 2021. These arrangements resulted from the extensive public consultation conducted by the Victorian government both in 2019 and in 2020. It also reflects the community's desire for greater transparency in water markets, so it also aims to ensure and to enhance the accountability and the fairness of our water management practices. During this consultation process it did become evident that the community overwhelmingly supported greater transparency in our water markets, including by publishing information about significant water owners. This reflects the community's rightful expectation of increased accountability and access to important information about the largest holders of water shares in each of our state's declared systems. The proposed amendments in the Water Legislation Amendment Bill 2023 do align with these desires and aim to address the community's call, which we as part of this government have listened to, for improved transparency.

I do note that whilst the proposed amendments in the Water Legislation Amendment Bill 2023 aim to enhance that water market transparency, some concerns have been raised regarding specific details and implementation of these amendments. I know that Minister Shing is highly engaged with this matter, as is the Department of Energy, Environment and Climate Action, and they will be continuing to work through these concerns with stakeholders as part of the implementation process of this legislation. That work, I understand, is already well underway.

The Water Legislation Amendment Bill 2023 is significant in our ongoing efforts to improve our water management practices in the state of Victoria. It addresses crucial aspects, such as clarifying and strengthening water delivery rights and providing more certainty during rationing restrictions – as we all know, whilst we have had quite substantial rainfall in the past few years, it is not going to last forever, especially with weather systems changing all the time, and it will not be long before we are faced with some very tough challenges again in many, many parts of our state. It also updates the regulatory frameworks to align with the evolving needs of our water users.

By enacting this bill we can better manage water resources, support our flood-affected communities and ensure the sustainable use of water for all stakeholders involved. The proposed amendments in the Water Legislation Amendment Bill 2023 have been carefully developed based on extensive stakeholder consultation and support from key industry representatives. I am confident that these changes will positively impact water management and delivery rights in our state. By allowing more time for flood-affected users to adapt to the reforms, addressing technical matters and enhancing transparency, we can strengthen the overall framework for water management in Victoria. For these reasons, I do commend this bill to the house.

Tom McINTOSH (Eastern Victoria) (11:15): I am very excited today to speak on the Water Legislation Amendment Bill 2023. There is a number of reasons for this, which I am going to talk you through. I know some people think this is a technical bill, but I want to tell you: I have been thinking about this, and there is nothing dry about water.

Members interjecting.

Tom McINTOSH: God, that was a good one, wasn't it? To go into further detail as to why I have a deep appreciation for water, having grown up on a farm we were dependent on tank and bore water. We had no connection to a town supply, so I deeply appreciate how important water is. I am going to speak to this later.

There are many things I want to highlight in my contribution to this bill today, but I will start by acknowledging my colleague in our region of Eastern Victoria, Minister Shing. Minister Shing is the water minister.

Jeff Bourman interjected.

Tom McINTOSH: I will acknowledge Mr Bourman is also here. Thank you, Mr Bourman. I wanted to acknowledge Minister Shing – I have only been in this place for maybe seven or eight months, but shortly after I came in, the floods occurred – because, as Minister for Water, Minister Shing spent a lot of time doing a lot of hard work on the ground with communities. I just want to put on the record that it is acknowledged, and I am sure the communities across particularly northern Victoria who were so heavily impacted appreciated that and acknowledge that as well.

In Eastern Victoria I have had the pleasure and I have had the opportunity to visit and spend some time with Gippsland Water. Gippsland Water are doing some really impressive, ingenious things with their wastewater to make sure we are getting the most out of all the water. I have already said water is incredibly important to us. I am excited about it because it is probably our most precious resource. Without water we are in a lot of trouble, and on a dry continent like Australia that is very evident – unfortunately – very frequently to all of us.

I visited Dutson Downs, which is a property many of you may not have heard of. It is 8000 hectares probably 25 to 30 minutes south of Sale. They are doing incredible things there. Mr Galea, I will actually mention you in this because many of your constituents are great contributors to some of the work being done on the farm. They take 180,000 tonnes of green waste every year, and with that and the wastewater from both residential and industrial water flows – treated water coming from Morwell and the like – they are able to create 60,000 tonnes of organic compost every year. This is just the start. This is a brilliant example of the circular economy, where we are not wasting the organic compost and we are not wasting water just letting it run down. Back in the day it used to run down an open sewer straight into the beach basically. There were some treatment ponds along the way. There was a name – I forget it now – for that canal, but people were advised not to swim in it.

On this massive 8000 hectares, the compost creation is basically a small component of it. They are capturing that water, using the compost. This compost is sold at profit by Gippsland Water to our agricultural businesses, who love it as a product. We actually spent quite a bit of time driving around because it is such a big property, and it borders onto the dunes of Ninety Mile Beach, so we are talking

about marginal land. I have got a photo where my hands are in amongst – you typically see soil on a farm – sand. But they are growing incredible crops, like canola. The locals call them emus, running about getting in amongst it all, but they have thriving crops of canola. They have various crops. They have got cattle there, they have got sheep there, and it is all happening because of their approach to the way that they manage this marginal land. The organic matter they are making there and their recycled water use are great examples of what we as a society can all strive towards in that circular economy.

The other thing they are doing there, I should note, is that they have been able to maintain over many years hundreds of acres of remnant bush, and they are growing more remnant bush in strategic areas to benefit not only the farm but two endangered species. They have partnered with Zoos Victoria – there is the golden bell frog and the Pookila mouse – to work with Melbourne zoos on breeding them and working with those remnant areas of habitat to ensure that those species not only come off the endangered list but begin to thrive in that area.

There is another thing I have been able to do with Gippsland Water, and the reason I want to keep raising Gippsland Water and indeed, as Mr Galea said before, so many of our water boards is the work they are doing on the ground and doing in local communities is breathtaking. When you think about those opposite, who perhaps have their focus on privatisation and where they want to go with things, it is great to see the work that is being done when the community and all of our best interests are put at the forefront. I will acknowledge a member for Northern Victoria is here. Thank you for being here. It is a pity a few more of your colleagues are not here, but it is good that you are here.

I was fortunate enough to visit the Drouin wastewater facility. I must say Mum was pretty impressed. I got my first plaque there. Minister Shing was busy with other duties, as I alluded to earlier, but I got to open the \$50 million upgrade to the Drouin wastewater treatment facility. It was incredible walking around and seeing all this water. I go back again to the holistic view that Gippsland Water have. On their treatment ponds they have got floating solar panels to help with the energy generation for the treatment process – that is just the first point. Anyone who is about to have lunch might want to tune out, but we were walking over these incredible treatment plants, which look somewhere between a Milo and something a bit lighter in colour – maybe a caramel Milo; do they make those? But there was no smell. Due to the microorganisms living within the water and treating that water there was no smell at that time, which was quite incredible as I was walking across it, looking down and thinking it would be a very different situation. So again the work that is going into the capture and the treatment of that water is ensuring it is going back in, being used in a manner that would not be possible otherwise.

We need water for our homes, we need it to grow our food, we need it for industry and we need it for the products we use every day, and of course the environment also needs the water. In essence it sustains the planet we live on. Water is incredibly powerful. We watch the water in the landscape rejuvenate the bush. I mentioned before I grew up on a farm. I am glad Dr Bach is here. I am sure when I was on the farm and we had droughts and the dams were disappearing he was probably in a university club, I do not know, talking about privatisation or something along those lines. But I must say the time spent in those university clubs means he is very eloquent in his speaking – something I could never emulate, but I will try. I am learning bigger and bigger words every day just by listening to him. We were living on tank water or bore water and literally the dams and the lakes disappeared, so for recreational purposes, for agricultural purposes, for simple drinking water, it just was not there. That is forever burnt in my mind.

Not to talk too much about the opposition, but something they are not keen on is insurance policies. They would rather leave it all to the market and just hope that everything works out all right. But Labor governments have made investments in the past to make sure we have water for today and for the future, because although we have been through a wet cycle, that is not always going to be the case, and even when we are in wet cycles or particularly when we are in dry cycles –

Matthew Bach interjected.

Tom McINTOSH: You were not in uni for that one. I am sorry, Dr Bach. I have obviously thrown you, because that is the worst jibe I have heard from your side. Most of them are very good. That was one of your worst. I have lost my place. I do not have notes. I am not speaking from notes, Dr Bach, so I will have to recall where I was.

With the cycles that we have lived through and that we are living through, we know water is going to become, particularly in certain periods, more and more scarce, so we need to collectively work to ensure that our use of our water is better and better. I really hope that in this place and in parliaments around Australia the collective understanding and acknowledgement of that is deeply understood.

I think if we look at Australia over a very long period of time, tens of thousands of years, like our Indigenous people have, with that deep respect for the land and that deep respect for bush management, for water management – it is a conversation that I have had with Indigenous peoples across eastern Victoria and conversations I have had with Gonnai/Kurnai land management – it is about looking at that sustainability. I am a big believer in sustainability. I do not think it matters whether you are talking about economics or whether you are talking about the environment. It all comes together. It is all part of the bigger process that we need to support us. So that is always why am so proud to stand up here and talk about everything that the government is doing with regard to climate change, everything the Minister for Environment is doing, everything the Minister for Energy and Resources is doing and why we have been at the front of the pack for years and years – probably two decades now – while those opposite, whether it be here or in Canberra, have just refused to acknowledge it, refused to talk about it. You know the energy minister is leading something that I am incredibly proud of, the offshore wind industry, which Labor governments have put time and effort and energy into, that is going to provide the energy we need for this state, for this nation, and be a powerhouse for the rest of the century. The whole world is moving this way, and it is just such a shame that we have for so many years not been on the front foot with all this.

As I said, things are changing at a rapid rate due to climate change. I was just reading this morning the report from the World Meteorological Organization, which tells us what we already know – that we need to rapidly decarbonise our economy to limit temperature rise. That report predicts record temperatures in the next five years. Reports they had previously made contain predictions that had been made about temperature rises that are being exceeded. So in this conversation about water management, water use, a holistic view of water and everything it provides to our agriculture, to our industries, to our residents, to our environment, to species survival and to our species' survival, it is important that these two conversations are absolutely linked.

To the bill itself: we heard from water users during extensive consultations that they needed more time to understand the place-of-take framework changes, so we have extended the start date. This will ensure that in particular those in flood-affected communities are given the time to understand the changes to the place-of-take framework as well as allow time for additional consultation.

The new framework will replace current complex provisions and make it clearer for existing water entitlement holders when they can use water during a shortfall, such as high water demand periods. It will not affect anyone's water shares. It simply gives water users more certainty about their water entitlement when demand exceeds the amount of water flowing down the river. Existing entitlement holders can be assured that current arrangements will remain in place in case of any shortfall over the summer 2023–24 peak demand period. With climate change expected to increase the frequency of hot days and the length of warm spells, peaks in daily demand are likely to continue to increase. The legislative reform is part of a broader program of work with Victoria working alongside the Murray–Darling Basin Authority and other southern basin states to improve management of Murray delivery risks and support water users to manage delivery risks.

I think this bill and everything in it and everything I have talked about are important, because I and those on this side think about future generations. It is great to see kids in here today, and this will help ensure a great future for our young.

Ryan BATCHELOR (Southern Metropolitan) (11:30): I am very pleased to speak on the Water Legislation Amendment Bill 2023, which will amend the Water and Catchment Legislation Amendment Act 2021, which upon commencement will itself amend the Water Act 1989 in order to clarify and strengthen water delivery rights. The bill will also make minor amendments to the Water Act 1989. Principally the bill's purpose is to extend the default commencement date of the amendment act from 1 July 2023 to 1 July 2024 to allow more time to implement an improved framework for regulating the place of taking water – the place-of-take approvals framework, as many in the trade know it – so that the flood-affected water users in northern Victoria have time to consider and adjust to the new reforms. As a member of the Council's environment committee that is examining and inquiring into those flooding events from last year, I am sure the amendments contained in this legislation will be appreciated by those communities. That committee is undertaking a lot of detailed work in relation to the impacts of those flooding events from last year. The bill will also address technical matters in the amendment act relating to these provisions before the amendment act commences operation to ensure the smooth operation of the water reforms and avoid unintended consequences of the reforms, including to interstate water trade arrangements. I suppose it is important today in the context of this debate that we are not relitigating or going over old debates that have passed us by about the introduction of these frameworks and other measures from the 2021 bill.

It is obviously an important topic, the issue of water rights and the issue of management of our incredibly important water resources, particularly in a country like Australia that is known for its unpredictable climate. We heard Mr McIntosh talk about the impacts that climate change are having on our climate. We know that the forecast from the Bureau of Meteorology is that we have got some very hot years ahead. So the management of our rivers and our water resources is paramount for our survival, for our prosperity and for overall environmental sustainability.

It is important in debates such as this to acknowledge the important role of riparian rights in the context of water management frameworks. Riparian rights refer to the legal rights and responsibilities of individuals or communities who own land adjacent to a river or water source, and these rights have been established to ensure a fair and equitable distribution of water resources and to protect the health and vitality of our ecosystem. Riparian rights acknowledge that rivers are not isolated entities but are interconnected systems that support a diversity of flora and fauna. The health of these ecosystems is intricately linked to the availability and quality of water, and by granting riparian rights we recognise the responsibility to maintain and sustain the delicate balance of these ecosystems and ensure that water is used judiciously without causing irreparable harm.

It is also of paramount importance to safeguard the natural fecundity of our rivers. Fecundity refers to the fertility and ability of an ecosystem to support its life and sustain its productivity. Our rivers with their water supply have nurtured an array of plant and animal species for millennia. They have sustained human settlements for tens of thousands of years, provided food and water for modern agricultural practices and served as lifelines for countless communities. But of course population growth and the increasing demands of industry and agriculture do place a strain on our water resources. Unchecked extraction, pollution and the alteration of river flows threaten the fecundity of our rivers, endangering their delicate ecosystems and the services they provide. But through proper management such as would be facilitated by this bill and the amendments that it seeks to make to our water framework, we can work to prevent irreversible damage to our natural environment and the disastrous consequences that would have for the wellbeing of current and future generations.

Effective river and water management strategies are vital to address these challenges. We have got to prioritise sustainable use of our water resources with a clear focus on their conservation, on their efficiency and on innovation. Embracing technologies to promote water-saving practices in agriculture, implementing efficient irrigation systems and encouraging responsible domestic water consumption are just some of the measures that we can adopt to ensure a balanced and equitable distribution of water across our community. Of course we must do more to invest in the protection and restoration of riparian habitats. Our riparian zones play a crucial role in filtering pollutants, reducing

erosion and providing habitat for a diverse range of species. By preserving and rehabilitating these areas we can safeguard the fecundity of our rivers, promoting healthy ecosystems and enhancing the resilience of our landscapes. To do so, as with many things that we must embark upon, collaboration between various stakeholder groups is essential in achieving sustainable river and water management. Governments at all levels, communities of all types – industry, agriculture, environmental organisations – must all work together to develop comprehensive and inclusive policies that prioritise long-term sustainability of these precious resources. By engaging in this type of approach, working collectively we can leverage the wisdom from all parties to tackle the complex challenges we all face.

One of the more important key technical changes that this bill makes will enable market transparency related amendments to commence separately from the place-of-take approvals framework, which I mentioned earlier in my remarks. The importance of separating these changes means that the market transparency improvements, which the community have been thoroughly consulted on, can be introduced from 1 July 2023, earlier than the place-of-take approvals framework. It enables some parts of the measures that were previously endorsed under the prior amending act to be enacted earlier than other parts. The revised time frames for the place-of-take approvals framework will provide additional time for consultation with water users on the rules and regulations to give effect to the place-of-take approvals framework without unnecessarily delaying those important market transparency improvements. Reforming the transparency of our water market is important work. It improves the accountability and fairness of the water market and gives the public access to important information about our largest holders of water.

The bill also does some important work in fixing some issues which have emerged in the management framework. I particularly want to draw on some work the bill does in substituting notes at important sections. Clause 14 amends section 36 of the Water and Catchment Legislation Amendment Act to substitute the note at the foot of proposed section 33T(4) of the Water Act to explain that approvals under part 4AA of the Water Act are also required before water can be taken under a limited term transfer. Clause 15 amends section 37 of the Water and Catchment Legislation Amendment Act 2021 to substitute the note at the foot of proposed section 33TA(3) of the Water Act 1989 to explain that approvals under part 4AA of the Water Act are also required before water can be taken under an assigned water allocation. Clause 16 amends section 38(2) of the Water and Catchment Legislation Amendment Act to substitute the note at the foot of proposed section 33U(4) of the Water Act 1989 to explain that approvals under part 4AA of the Water Act 1989 are also required before water can be taken under an assigned water allocation. Clause 17 amends section 39 of the Water and Catchment Legislation Amendment Act to substitute the note at the foot of proposed section 33V(2) of the Water Act 1989 to explain that approvals under part 4AA of the Water Act 1989 are also required before water can be taken under a further assigned water allocation. Clause 18 inserts after section 39 of the Water and Catchment Legislation Amendment Act 2021 a new section 39A of the act, which will insert a note at the foot of section 33AG(1) of the Water Act to explain that approvals under part 4AA of the Water Act 1989 are also required before water can be taken under an approval granted under section 33AG(1).

Whilst it may be a bit of laborious detail, it is important to demonstrate that the frameworks that exist under water management in Victoria and certainly as part of the national frameworks which have been negotiated over many years in relation to the Murray–Darling Basin and its associated plan do contain an important amount of technical detail – detail which it is important to get right. So what this bill is seeking to do by amending these various sections is ensure that what can be a very technical area of regulation – and I use that word affectionately and deliberately as regulation obviously has various meanings in a water context – can be executed efficiently and effectively. And I know that Minister Shing has a personal commitment to such matters, and it shows from her dedication to these tasks.

So I think what we have been able to demonstrate here in the Parliament through the consideration of this bill, and as I have previously outlined over the course of this speech, is that the government take seriously the management of Victoria's water framework, that we understand the importance of

riparian rights to the effective management of all parts of our river system to sustain the necessary fecundity so that these rivers can sustain us and that the approach the government have been taking has been one of detailed and extensive consultation with water users over the course of this project – getting into the detail, into the weeds perhaps, it may be appropriate to say.

Members interjecting.

Ryan BATCHELOR: It is an undulating debate – it is, absolutely – and it is a debate that stands the test of time. What this bill does recognise is that there are communities in Victoria who have recently been flood affected, and the bill, by breaking the nexus between the introduction of the market transparency features and the place-of-take approvals framework, allows part of these measures to be implemented sooner and part of these measures to be implemented later so that these flood-affected communities do have more time to understand how the place-of-take framework will occur and to allow time for additional consultation. And importantly, this new framework will replace current provisions which are very complex.

Matthew Bach: On a point of order, President, regarding tedious repetition, you would be aware no doubt that on 21 November 1979 President Grimwade ruled that a speaker was engaging in tedious repetition. I have now heard about these particular frameworks on, I think, five or six occasions. I am not particularly good at doing the numbers, but my understanding is that almost every member opposite is intending to speak on this bill. If this ruling from the Chair perhaps could be expanded again on the basis that every single member of the government is intending to engage in tedious repetition, could we, largely in the interests of my mental health and wellbeing, cease this debate and move on?

Lee Tarlamis: On the point of order, President, Dr Bach made a reference that all members on this side will be speaking on this debate. I do not intend to speak on this debate, so that is incorrect.

The PRESIDENT: That is up there with the Bev McArthur point of order. Thank you, Mr Tarlamis.

Harriet Shing: Further to Dr Bach's point of order, President, he would also note that there have been numerous rulings from the Chair, including from President Smith and President Atkinson, which have gone to the fact that tedious repetition is not made out where indeed there has been new material or related material introduced to support the claims that are being asserted in the context of parliamentary debate. So Dr Bach may be well advised to look at those particular rulings in the context of the intricate subject matter of this bill, which are germane and relevant to the subject at hand.

Sonja Terpstra: Further to the point of order, President, if we are talking about tedious repetition, perhaps I would draw Dr Bach's attention to the King's coronation speeches that were made by those opposite. I think every member on the opposition benches mentioned Timbertop.

The PRESIDENT: I do not think that is a point of order either.

Matthew Bach: In the interests of good-natured debate I would be happy to accept Ms Terpstra's point of order and have those references struck out. But nonetheless, further to the point of order, President, Ms Shing and those opposite would also be aware that in 1991 President Hunt ruled that content from one member's speech can be ruled to be tedious and repetitious, even if it was the first time that that member had spoken about it, if indeed that exact content had been referenced by other people. Given that all those opposite are referring to notes that appear very common, I would urge that the point of order should be upheld.

Harriet Shing: Further to the point of order, President, as Dr Bach would also be aware, former President Atkinson has ruled in relation to the subject matter of a bill that it is neither tedious nor repetitious where the materials being discussed at hand are germane to the debate as part of the second reading.

The PRESIDENT: Dr Bach, I am not going to uphold that point of order, but I appreciate you looking at previous rulings, because it is actually quite helpful. I would have said that Grimwade in 1979 was not actually referring collectively to all individual speakers repeating similar stuff. I think Grimwade might have been referring to one particular speaker maybe repeating themselves, but I do appreciate that in 1991 Hunt said a different thing, and I am happy to look at that. I understand that, but at this point I will not uphold the point of order. There have been a lot of conversations recently about practices in the chamber – practices around reading speeches and a number of other things – and me being an old man, having been here a long time, I have asked the clerks to look at all these practices because I think some of these practices that you can refer to back to the 1970s actually have not been adhered to for decades. So when does a practice stop being a practice? But I appreciate your point of order, and I will look at that ruling from President Hunt. I did not know it existed, so I will look at it. Thank you for that.

Ryan BATCHELOR: I am not sure that anyone else in this debate has spoken about the importance of the need to safeguard the natural fecundity of our rivers. I think that is entirely un-repetitious because we know that fecundity refers to the ability of an ecosystem to support life and sustain its productivity, which is probably a concept that we need to reflect on here with those types of interjections from Dr Bach and the opposition in general, reflecting on what is required on their part to sustain their own life and to sustain the productivity of their engagement in the debates in this chamber.

This is an important bill. It does important things. It is rather technical in places, but I think we should embrace the technicality and we should embrace the detail, because it is serving an important purpose to safeguard the water of Victoria.

Sonja TERPSTRA (North-Eastern Metropolitan) (11:48): I rise also to make a contribution to this debate in regard to the Water Legislation Amendment Bill 2023. I hope it is going to be a unique contribution, because I must say I have been in the chair and in the chamber most of the morning and have had the opportunity to listen to many of the contributions here today, and I think, just following on from what Dr Bach said earlier, every member in this chamber would be very hard pressed to contribute to anything in any way, because when you are talking about a bill the nature of it is that it contains certain points that each member addresses when they make their contribution. So it is kind of a really interesting stretch that Dr Bach has made on repetition, because I do not think that is the case.

But nevertheless this is an important bill. It is about ensuring an appropriate framework. I might just say – I am going to talk about the bill – that the flood event that happened last year, in 2022, was a very exceptional event in terms of the scale and size of the flood event itself. I think the weather pattern that preceded the floods has happened only four times in history since records began. So I think it is only appropriate that the government look at ways and measures in regard to not only water but how we might help flood-affected communities. We know this only too well on the government benches. I think what I am sensing – and I have certainly been looking at lots of media around responses to communities – is that most communities appreciate that they were well supported by volunteer organisations like the SES and others, who provided critically important help and assistance to flood-affected people.

I have heard people talk about the timeliness of warnings and how they appreciated some of the warnings that came through but also how they were not quite sure how to act in regard to some of those warnings. I can say, as someone who has experienced a natural disaster myself – I was living in Canberra in 2003 when the bushfires came through there – that no-one came to get us out. We were having to rely on radio warnings and the like that were quite outdated. So it is good to see that while it is sad that we have all these natural disasters happening, with each one we learn something from them and we fine-tune and improve our responses to them. People have different responses to these sorts of events as well. Some people choose to stay; some people choose to go. I know when I was in Canberra, we got out. We were not going to hang around. I think I had a six-month-old baby on my

hip and no shoes on my feet when I ran out the door and tried to get in our car and then got caught up in traffic.

These things happen, but we learn from them as we go, and that is really important. Particularly with flooding events what we have seen is that, for example, the government made available to flood-affected residents the short-term housing at Mickleham in our COVID facility. So that facility has come in very handy, and it meant people had some certainty. I remember when I was in Canberra, we had just moved there. We had been there for six weeks, so we knew no-one. We had nowhere to go, and we ended up that night staying in someone's house whom we did not actually know. They were a security guard whose parents were refugees; they had fled their country. We met them and they said, 'Please come to our house and stay the night.' I remember my son was covered in ash and soot, but I appreciated having for that night a roof over my head and somewhere safe to go to clean up and all the rest of it. So likewise with flood-affected communities, people who were able to go to Mickleham when their houses were impacted by floodwaters were able to have some rest and respite and some certainty about their accommodation needs, for the short term of course. In the aftermath of the floods what we know is that people then have to deal with insurance, rebuilding and all those sorts of things, and it is very challenging.

I think what also happens when we think about floods and floodwater is that often people underestimate what flooding means. They think they will just get some floodwater rising, but when floodwaters actually rise a metre or 2 metres and homes are completely inundated, it is what is in those floodwaters that is particularly nasty. There is sewage; there is debris. There is all manner of nasties in there. So I think assisting people to understand that floodwater is not just like water rising out of a creek – that there is all manner of really horrible stuff in there, and getting out is probably the best thing you can do for yourself and your health.

The reason why I talk about these sorts of things is because of the impacts of climate change, and this is one of the things that this bill actually goes to addressing. We know climate change is expected to increase the frequency of hot days and the length of warm spells, and peaks in daily demand for water are therefore likely to continue to increase. The legislative reforms form part of a broader program of work for Victoria alongside the Murray–Darling Basin Authority and other southern basin states to improve management of Murray delivery risks and support water users to manage their own delivery risks. It is a challenge, because people think catchment management authorities just have responsibility for providing drinking water, but actually they do not. They provide water to irrigators. That is what they do. People buy water rights. I know Mr McIntosh's contribution talked about this earlier, and others have talked about water rights and purchasing of water and what that means for people and communities as well.

To go back to the impact of the floods in relation to this bill, what we know is that the bill was not considered before the October 2022 flood event. We know the devastation that the flood events caused across Victoria, particularly for regional Victorians; we know that that has been devastating. Thousands of Victorians are dealing with the flood recovery today, and we know this is a long and difficult and at times distressing process. I want to acknowledge all of those regional Victorians who are flood affected and pass on my heartfelt sympathies and really deepest condolences to those families. Loss of life in some of these events is never a good outcome. But certainly I want to pass on that we understand and sympathise with the difficult times that many Victorians are still going through and the major clean-up efforts and all that stuff that they have got to go through now. It is very draining; it is distressing. But nevertheless it is something that I think people do not necessarily think about – the long tail, if you like, of a climatic event like this. This is why we need to have fit-for-purpose legislation around water that addresses the challenges that we find ourselves facing.

For the many Victorians who were impacted by the floods and for the farmers and water users in our declared systems, the place-of-take approvals framework will be implemented. This is going to clarify the place of take, if you like. This is a term that I have just learned about in preparing for this debate today.

A member: Good term, isn't it.

Sonja TERPSTRA: It is a very interesting term – not as interesting as the word ‘fecundity’ perhaps – around management of our water. Nevertheless ‘place of take’ is kind of up there, right? So there you go. You would think in debating such a technical bill that you would not have the opportunity for such lyrical prose, but here we are. It is relevant, it is necessary and it is not repetitive either; it is interesting nevertheless.

We know that farmers have had enough on their minds with flood recovery and simply in many cases have not had the bandwidth to engage with consultations on the implementation or adapt to the new framework in these last two months. They have had many other things on their minds, as they should have, just trying to get their businesses, their lives, their livelihoods and their homes back in order. We know that is a very challenging thing, and as I just remarked upon earlier, although that flood event impacted communities, the long tail of those floods is the recovery process. It is ongoing; it is ever changing as people step their way through that long tail. So again, our thoughts are with those farmers and those communities who are still in the recovery and rebuilding process.

In January this year, when we restarted consultation – it had been paused because of the floods – the turnout to the consultation sessions was low. Those that did attend told us they had little bandwidth to prepare for the changes as obviously, as I just remarked upon, they were dealing with other things. So really this was not a top or high priority for them, and that is completely understandable. As I said, imagine if you were a farmer living along the Goulburn near Shepparton and your farm was flooded. You would have spent the past six months dealing with insurers, applying for government grant relief, working with community, assessing damage, putting in 16-plus-hour days to repair your farm, your pumps, your fences, your paddocks – the list goes on and on and on. As I said, our sympathies and thoughts are with those farmers who are still battling and going through that. But that is why we are delaying the commencement of the place-of-take approvals – for these reasons. We recognise that there needs to be a little bit more time to allow these things to be bedded down and allow people to have appropriate time to think about these things. This will give regional Victorians the time they need to be ready and informed. It is appropriate; it is an appropriate measure to take just to pause these things, but certainly things will get back on track soon.

Business interrupted pursuant to standing orders.

Questions without notice and ministers statements

Maribyrnong River flood review

David DAVIS (Southern Metropolitan) (12:00): (145) My question is to the Minister for Water. Minister, on 15 December at 2:39 pm a staffer in your office emailed other staff in your office and Melbourne Water staff in response to a requested approval of the Maribyrnong River flood inquiry headed by Nick Wimbush. It stated:

Hi sorry [blank] can you please not send the OK

Minister, isn't it a fact that your office paused the approval for the Maribyrnong River flood inquiry and that this is inconsistent with your statements in the chamber? In short, you have misled the house.

Harriet SHING (Eastern Victoria – Minister for Water, Minister for Regional Development, Minister for Commonwealth Games Legacy, Minister for Equality) (12:00): Well, Mr Davis, I am glad to see that if nothing else you are consistent in your question time strategy. To that end, I just want to put again on the record for the avoidance of any doubt you might have that neither I nor my office have had any involvement in the independent review being undertaken by Melbourne Water following the October 2022 flooding events. Further, Mr Davis, neither I nor my office have had any involvement in the appointment of Mr Wimbush, in the probity advice in relation to Mr Wimbush's appointment, in changes to the membership of the panel or indeed the terms of reference of that particular technical review. So, Mr Davis, the answer to your question is no.

David DAVIS (Southern Metropolitan) (12:02): I asked whether you had paused the approval, and you did not answer that, pointedly. Minister, Melbourne Water became increasingly restive on the day of 15 December as it progressed, sending repeated requests for approval emails to VICMIN staff in your office, to the extent that by 1:06 pm emails were sent stating:

Melbourne Water has chased up ... about the ... approval

Minister, doesn't this sequence show again that your office was involved directly in the approval of the flood review and that you have now been caught out tampering with, intervening in and directing an independent agency?

Harriet SHING (Eastern Victoria – Minister for Water, Minister for Regional Development, Minister for Commonwealth Games Legacy, Minister for Equality) (12:02): Let me say this again. Mr Davis, I was sworn in as a minister at 5:30 pm on 14 December. That went for about half an hour. After that time I caught up with my dad, went out and had some dumplings. You might want to look into that as well. Then the following day –

David Davis: On a point of order, President, this is a serious matter and the minister's activities on the night of the 14th are completely and utterly irrelevant. They are beside the point. I am asking about activities on the 15th, and her dumplings are completely beside the question.

The PRESIDENT: Let us not get bogged down now. I think the minister was coming to the answer.

Harriet SHING: I am trying to introduce some new material here, Mr Davis, that might actually help you. I am not sure what else there is that I can add. I think we might be approaching a dozen times that you have actually been asking the same question. I was sworn in on the 14th. On the 15th I was advised that Mr Wimbush had been appointed to conduct this technical review by Melbourne Water. When I go back to exactly the documents that you are referring to, Mr Davis, the very documents –

David Davis interjected.

Sonja Terpstra: On a point of order, President, I cannot hear the minister's answer. There is so much noise and constant interjection coming from Mr Davis that I cannot hear. The minister should be able to continue in silence.

The PRESIDENT: I uphold the point of order. If you are going to ask a question, I think you would like to hear the answer. I also have to hear the answer as well in the duty that the chamber has given me. Minister Shing, you have run out of time. Let us put the minute back up, please, so we can all fulfil what we are required to do.

Harriet SHING: Mr Davis, the documents that you have show that the Melbourne Water memo was sent internally to endorse Mr Wimbush on 1 December and that a Melbourne Water official endorsed the recommendation in the memo to appoint Mr Wimbush on the 1st. I was not sworn in until the 14th. Mr Davis, there is nothing here, no matter how you seek to contrive it.

David DAVIS (Southern Metropolitan) (12:05): I move:

That the minister's answer be taken into account on the next day of meeting.

Motion agreed to.

Gambling regulation

David ETTERSHANK (Western Metropolitan) (12:05): (146) My question is for the minister for gaming, represented by Minister Blandthorn in this chamber. The City of Brimbank in my region holds the unenviable record of the highest poker machine losses of any local government area in Victoria – over \$1.29 billion over the last decade. The Gambling Regulation Act requires gaming machines in hotels and clubs to be shut down for 4 hours each day. This mandatory break is aimed at protecting vulnerable people from gambling-related harm. However, venues in Brimbank are

seemingly colluding to circumvent the law by staggering their opening and closing times to ensure that people can keep gambling 24 hours a day by simply moving between proximate venues. So my question is: what does the minister propose to do to address this loophole and prevent this type of exploitation of vulnerable problem gamblers?

Lizzie BLANDTHORN (Western Metropolitan – Minister for Disability, Ageing and Carers, Minister for Child Protection and Family Services) (12:06): Thank you, Mr Ettershank, for your question. I will pass it to the minister for gaming and ensure that she provides you with an answer.

David ETTERS HANK (Western Metropolitan) (12:07): I thank the minister for her response. The Alliance for Gambling Reform recommends mandatory poker machine closing hours of midnight to 10 am. Has the minister considered this type of law reform as a solution to the issues I highlighted?

Lizzie BLANDTHORN (Western Metropolitan – Minister for Disability, Ageing and Carers, Minister for Child Protection and Family Services) (12:07): Thank you again, Mr Ettershank, and I will again pass your supplementary question to the minister and ask that she provide you with an answer in accordance with the standing orders.

Ministers statements: Djimbaya kindergarten

Ingrid STITT (Western Metropolitan – Minister for Early Childhood and Pre-Prep, Minister for Environment) (12:07): Last Friday I had the privilege of officially opening the Djimbaya kindergarten in Bendigo with Deputy Premier Jacinta Allan MP and Speaker Maree Edwards MP, both passionate advocates for early childhood education in their communities.

Djimbaya is run by the Bendigo and District Aboriginal Co-operative (BDAC) and, from this year, provides 15 hours of kindergarten to both three- and four-year-olds. This kindergarten is a fantastic example of how integration works for the benefit of families. As well as being a place for little ones to start their education journey, this centre is also a place to come for child health and family services. Housing the kindergarten and the community services at one site fosters links to culturally safe health services for families and ensures that the local Aboriginal community can access the services they need when they need them.

The fantastic work of BDAC, the board and the CEO Dallas Widdicombe means this service is already supporting better outcomes for the community. The teachers and educators, led by centre director Emily Gerber, are doing amazing work every day, delivering a tailored play-based program that fosters cultural connection for Aboriginal children while also supporting non-Aboriginal children to learn about Aboriginal culture. The curriculum was developed with input from elders and the traditional owners, the Dja Dja Wurrung, and incorporates lots of play within nature and with natural materials. Congratulations on the fantastic effort of everyone involved, and I look forward to seeing Djimbaya grow.

Inspector-general for emergency management

Ann-Marie HERMANS (South-Eastern Metropolitan) (12:09): (147) My question is to the Minister for Emergency Services. Minister, has the Andrews government implemented all the recommendations from the inspector-general for emergency management's *Review of Victoria's Preparedness for Major Public Health Emergencies, Including Pandemics* and the *Review of Victoria's Emergency Ambulance Call Answer Performance*?

Jaclyn SYMES (Northern Victoria – Attorney-General, Minister for Emergency Services) (12:09): I thank Ms Hermans for her question and take the opportunity to thank the IGEM for the important role that he and the office play in relation to supporting emergency services and the independent oversight in relation to responding not only to business as usual but also to emergency events and the like. In relation to the acquitting of those recommendations, I will have to take on notice the exact recommendation and status, but it is always the work of the IGEM that is the independence of their work, and the recommendations are always considered by government – usually always accepted, and

I think in that case that is also the case. So in terms of the implementation and the status, I will give you a new version of where we are up to.

Ann-Marie HERMANS (South-Eastern Metropolitan) (12:10): I thank the minister for her response and look forward to getting further information. Minister, will you release a copy of the MOU that has been agreed to with unions on greater roster flexibility to support ESTA to meet demand, as was highlighted in recommendation 7?

Jaclyn SYMES (Northern Victoria – Attorney-General, Minister for Emergency Services) (12:11): I can confirm, in terms of that recommendation, that has been progressed. There is an MOU that exists between ESTA and the unions in relation to rostering. All of that will feed into the enterprise bargaining negotiations, which are also about to kick off. I do not own that document. That is a document that is in the possession of ESTA and negotiated with the unions. I do not personally have a copy, so I will not commit to releasing something that is not in my possession.

Timber industry

Sarah MANSFIELD (Western Victoria) (12:11): (148) My question is for the Minister for Agriculture Gayle Tierney. Victoria's last white paper mill at Maryvale announced their closure at the beginning of this year. They were one of the biggest users of native forest timber and pulp and therefore a key driver of native forest logging in Victoria. Now that this mill has closed it seems very obvious that the transition out of native forest logging needs to be brought forward to protect not only our forests but also our workers and communities, yet we have had almost no response from the government. If we are talking about revenue and a tough budget, independent costings show that bringing forward the transition would save the government hundreds of millions of dollars. Will the government bring forward the transition plan to start right now?

Gayle TIERNEY (Western Victoria – Minister for Training and Skills, Minister for Higher Education, Minister for Agriculture) (12:12): I thank the member for the question. It is a question that has been put to me before in this house, and it is one that has taken a lot of resources of the government in terms of its decision-making and its deliberations. The fact of the matter is that we have always said, right from the beginning, that there would be a managed transition, and that plan, the timber plan, has been in place since 2019. This house also is aware that there has been significant legal action taken in terms of the logging of timber, and that has resulted in a number of decisions. In fact there is an appeal that is being worked through. It was heard on 23 March, but as yet there has not been a decision.

The primary purpose of this government in all of this very complex and difficult situation is to ensure that there is support for the workers, there is support for industry and there is support for timber communities. We have done that in all sorts of ways. There are support payments, there is an opt-out scheme and of course there is a timber community fund as well. All of those things are in place. We will continue to monitor the situation, and we will continue to look at the implications of court decisions that have taken place so far.

Sarah MANSFIELD (Western Victoria) (12:14): My supplementary question is: is the Andrews government still covering or subsidising wages of workers at this mill and, if so, how long does it intend to continue doing this?

Gayle TIERNEY (Western Victoria – Minister for Training and Skills, Minister for Higher Education, Minister for Agriculture) (12:14): I thank the member for her question. This is similar to what has occurred in the past. In terms of Maryvale, Maryvale has not closed. Part of its operation is closing, but it has not closed. We are in active negotiations with Opal in respect to its other operations. So let us get that fact out. The reality is that there will be some redundancies later this month, but in terms of the other part of their operations, in terms of cardboard et cetera, they continue to operate. I think that you need to also be very clear about and make a distinction between the Maryvale operations as such and of course the other parts of the timber industry, particularly the sawmills.

Ministers statements: agriculture training

Gayle TIERNEY (Western Victoria – Minister for Training and Skills, Minister for Higher Education, Minister for Agriculture) (12:15): I am pleased to update the chamber on how the Andrews Labor government is supporting agriculture colleges and our emerging young farmers, agriscientists and agribusiness owners. Recently I visited the University of Melbourne’s Dookie agriculture campus to view the \$2 million recently upgraded dormitory facilities. Ten rooms have been redeveloped with ensuites, and there is an ambulatory suite and a new kitchen facility. Whilst I was there I announced a further \$21 million collaboration between the government, the agricultural college modernisation program and the University of Melbourne to build at least a further 85 rooms with ensuites. These much-needed upgrades will ensure more students can comfortably access the courses provided at Dookie. Dookie has been supporting regional students since 1886 and provides the opportunity for Parkville campus students to have a rural experience. During my visit I met six young women in their first year of training to be veterinarians. Many of them had no previous experience of livestock handling and were relishing the chance.

Whilst at Dookie I also officially opened this year’s Upskill and Invest – Young Farmers scholarship, encouraging the next generation of farmers to apply and contribute to the future of Victoria’s vibrant agriculture sector. The program offers scholarships of up to \$10,000, with each recipient initially receiving up to \$5000 to support their training and study and up to \$5000 to invest in putting their new skills into practice. Since 2015 the Upskill and Invest – Young Farmers scholarship program has successfully supported 99 young farmers from a range of agricultural sectors. These are just some examples of how this government supports regional communities, ensuring young people get the training they need to fill the jobs that are available locally.

Timber industry

Melina BATH (Eastern Victoria) (12:17): (149) My question is to the Minister for Agriculture. Minister, your government’s media release on 22 April announcing the upgrade of the St Kilda Pier boasted that ‘Darwin stringybark timber decking’ forms ‘a strong base for the new pier’. Given Darwin stringybark is not grown in plantations and is sourced from the native timber industry of the Top End of Australia, can you explain why you are closing Victoria’s native hardwood timber industry while boasting the use of timbers from the Top End’s native hardwood industry?

Gayle TIERNEY (Western Victoria – Minister for Training and Skills, Minister for Higher Education, Minister for Agriculture) (12:18): It is a bit of a long bow to say the very least, but again my answer does not differ in that we are providing support to the timber industry when they are facing very, very difficult challenges. We have done so for a long time, and the last seven or eight months have been particularly difficult given that there has been a shortage of timber supply. We have made sure that workers have continued to be paid. We have provided industry support. We have made sure that timber communities have been supported and that they have been empowered with the ability to design projects that will assist their communities in the transition. To come in here and rely on a line from a media release that is in the province of a different minister is really ridiculous, and I do not think it is very respectful in regard to the timber industry.

Melina BATH (Eastern Victoria) (12:19): I thank the minister for her response. Given the Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change supports sustainably harvested native timber in construction, will you ensure that in future where Victorian hardwood timber can be used in state construction it is given preference over imported or interstate species?

The PRESIDENT: My problem with the supplementary is that this minister is not responsible for procurement in those sorts of projects.

Georgie Crozier: On a point of order, President, in terms of what Ms Bath was speaking about, it is supporting sustainably harvested native timber, so that does come under the minister’s purview.

The PRESIDENT: Ms Bath, do you want to have a go at rephrasing your supplementary?

Melina BATH: Minister, what is your policy for state-funded construction in relation to Victorian native hardwood timber over imported or interstate species?

The PRESIDENT: The minister can answer as she sees fit.

Gayle TIERNEY (Western Victoria – Minister for Training and Skills, Minister for Higher Education, Minister for Agriculture) (12:21): I thank the member for the supplementary. The fact of the matter is that that in no way is connected to my portfolio. What is connected to my portfolio is the timber industry, and the mere fact that this question is being asked shows no consideration of where the timber industry is at at the moment. It is in a very difficult situation –

Members interjecting.

The PRESIDENT: Order! The minister has got a right to be heard in silence. She has had two questions and a ministers statement where she has been interrupted with interjections, and if she wants to take the 30 seconds let us hear her in silence.

Gayle TIERNEY: Again, this government is very much focused on ensuring that there is the reliable support of government in respect of workers in the timber industry and when it comes to the industry as well. We also know that timber communities are incredibly important. We will continue to make sure that we keep a very close eye on what is happening in terms of the legal challenges that are before the industry, and we will also make sure that we will continue to support those that are involved.

Melina BATH (Eastern Victoria) (12:23): I move:

That the minister's response to this question be taken into consideration on the next day of meeting.

Motion agreed to.

Ministers statements: Victims of Crime Consultative Committee

Enver ERDOGAN (Northern Metropolitan – Minister for Corrections, Minister for Youth Justice, Minister for Victim Support) (12:23): I am pleased to update the chamber that the new term of the Victims of Crime Consultative Committee has begun, with their first meeting scheduled for next week. The Victims of Crime Consultative Committee is an invaluable part of our criminal justice system in Victoria. It ensures that victims of crime have a voice and that they are heard. The committee brings together members of the community to discuss how we can improve policies, practices and systems for victims of crime. The committee hears from and speaks to the victims of crime commissioner, Victoria Police, the Office of Public Prosecutions, the judiciary, the adult parole board and of course victim support service providers. The committee also advises me, as Minister for Victim Support, and the Attorney-General on victim-related issues.

This government is committed to improving the victim support system in our state to ensure that it is effective in supporting victim rights. This starts with transformative investments such as the establishment of the victims legal service, which I was proud to see commence in March, and will continue with the work of this committee. We are always looking for ways to improve the system so that it can respond to the unique challenges faced by victims of crime, informed by their voices.

In the previous sitting I thanked the outgoing members of the committee for their work to improve the system for victims of crime. Today I welcome the new appointments to the committee and wish them well for their term. I am looking forward to joining them at the inaugural meeting next week. I will be thanking them for their bravery in sharing their stories and lived experience and for their commitment to making the system better for other victims of crime in our state.

Firefighters presumptive rights

Wendy LOVELL (Northern Victoria) (12:25): (150) My question is for the Minister for Emergency Services. Minister, during debate on the Forests Amendment (Forest Firefighters Presumptive Rights Compensation) Bill 2021 former member Tania Maxwell put forward amendments to include three female-specific cancers on the list of cancers included in the presumptive rights for firefighters. In exchange for Ms Maxwell not putting her amendments to a vote, the minister at the table gave assurances that you would work towards the inclusion of female-specific cancers in the scheme. Two years later there is still not a single female-specific cancer listed on the schedule of cancers eligible for presumptive compensation. Minister, when will the government extend presumptive rights for compensation to both CFA volunteer and FRV career firefighters for female-specific cancers?

Jaclyn SYMES (Northern Victoria – Attorney-General, Minister for Emergency Services) (12:25): I thank Ms Lovell for her question. It is a really important issue, but there are a few facts that people like to forget, and some of those facts include that they were members of cabinet when it considered these issues – part of a team that, despite international evidence, would say, ‘We are not convinced that there is a direct link between cancer and firefighters.’ Ms Lovell, you were a member of the cabinet when the former coalition government had opportunities to implement presumptive rights for firefighters, and you squibbed it at the time. So it is an important context.

Georgie Crozier: On a point of order, President, I know the minister is going back in time. The point is that you have been in government for eight years. This question was directly related to something that occurred more recently than when Ms Lovell was in a previous government. So I ask you, President, to ask the minister to come back to Ms Lovell’s question.

The PRESIDENT: I will ask the minister to come back to Ms Lovell’s question.

Jaclyn SYMES: Thank you, President. Context is important, because when we were in opposition – I know it was a long time ago, absolutely – we committed from opposition to implement presumptive rights –

Wendy Lovell: On a point of order, President, I believe the minister is flouting your ruling. My question was specific to female-specific cancers, and as Ms Crozier pointed out, the government have been in government for over eight years now, they have had plenty of time and this commitment was given two years ago. When are you going to implement this?

The PRESIDENT: A point of order is not an opportunity to ask the question again, but I will uphold it. I ask the minister to get back to the question.

Jaclyn SYMES: I think the history of presumptive rights is important, because it is something we continue to build on. In relation to the commitment that we gave, irrespective of what you guys did, we then implemented that through legislation, which I think some people in this room opposed at the time. Finally we got presumptive rights through. We expanded it to forest fire workers; we expanded it to mechanics. Women firefighters are not excluded from the issue. We are talking about other specific cancers, and I have certainly given the commitment to advance that. The department has been formally consulting on expanding the scope of the protections, and that consultation is nearly finished. I am not in a position to make announcements today, but when I do make announcements I look forward to bipartisan support because of your renewed passion for an issue you could have done when you had the opportunity.

Wendy LOVELL (Northern Victoria) (12:28): So there has been no work in two years. Minister, last week I took part in Fire Rescue Victoria’s Fire Ops 101. During the day great care was taken to ensure that we were not exposed to the carcinogenic risks associated with fires. Caitlin and Michaela, the two FRV firefighters who were buddies to Jack Gatto and me, were young and female. They were also highly skilled, dedicated, passionate, kind, caring and patient, which are all skills needed to be

excellent first responders. Minister, why does the Andrews Labor government discriminate against female firefighters by including male-specific cancers in the schedule but not female-specific cancers?

Jaclyn SYMES (Northern Victoria – Attorney-General, Minister for Emergency Services) (12:29): I answered the question in relation to work on this important matter being underway, and I look forward to providing an update in due course – just not today.

Duck hunting

Jeff BOURMAN (Eastern Victoria) (12:29): (151) My question today is for the Minister for Outdoor Recreation in the other place, represented by Minister Shing. Minister, by reading social media it has become apparent that a segment of your constituency is being ignored whilst another is not. My constituents are being ghosted and have no effective dialogue, let alone relationship, with you or your office, which is a first as well as being quite disturbing. I have a motion passed in this place requesting documentation, but it is my understanding that ministerial diary entries are not usually released, if anything useful is actually released at all. In your inaugural speech, Minister, you mentioned that government should be transparent. Well, Minister, here is your chance to live those words. My question is: will you table your ministerial diary entries since you have assumed this portfolio that in any way have a relationship to the duck- and quail-hunting deliberations and changes or are in any other way connected to this issue and table them in a timely fashion?

Harriet SHING (Eastern Victoria – Minister for Water, Minister for Regional Development, Minister for Commonwealth Games Legacy, Minister for Equality) (12:30): Thank you, Mr Bourman, for that question, and in accordance with the standing orders I will seek an answer from the minister in the other place.

Jeff BOURMAN (Eastern Victoria) (12:30): I thank the minister for her answer. To enable proper government, consultation must occur. Consultation assumes that a certain balance of perspectives are presented and not just lip-service is given to the concept and only one side of the issue is actually consulted. It is very clear to me that hunting organisations have been frozen out. So, should the minister decline to release the relevant diary entries, will the minister state in writing categorically that she has not met with anyone who could reasonably be categorised as anti-hunting during her assumption of the outdoor recreation portfolio?

Harriet SHING (Eastern Victoria – Minister for Water, Minister for Regional Development, Minister for Commonwealth Games Legacy, Minister for Equality) (12:31): Thank you, Mr Bourman, for that supplementary. Again, in accordance with the standing orders, I will seek an answer from the minister in the other place.

Commonwealth Games

David DAVIS (Southern Metropolitan) (12:31): (152) My question is to the Minister for Commonwealth Games Legacy. Is it a fact that the Commonwealth Labor government is contributing no money whatsoever to the 2026 Commonwealth Games to be run in regional Victoria and that the Albanese government will contribute nothing to the legacy of the Commonwealth Games?

Harriet SHING (Eastern Victoria – Minister for Water, Minister for Regional Development, Minister for Commonwealth Games Legacy, Minister for Equality) (12:32): Mr Davis, I am so pleased that at this late stage of question time you have been given an opportunity to ask about the Commonwealth Games and the Commonwealth Games legacy. We are here in Victoria really well placed to deliver, host and manage international sporting events, and it has been a wonderful thing to see the level of engagement that is escalating and increasing. The enthusiasm right across rural and regional Victoria is a sight to behold, and the regional engagement forums that I have been part of, alongside the legacy round tables that are coming up around the regional hubs and further beyond those areas, are about understanding the way in which communities can contribute to the development and delivery of the games – this world-first opportunity for rural and regional Victoria to shine.

David Davis: On a point of order, President, we are 2 minutes in now and the minister has not gone near answering the question about what the Commonwealth Games legacy will be from the Commonwealth.

The PRESIDENT: We are actually 1 minute in. I ask the minister to continue.

Harriet SHING: Mr Davis, I am looking forward to using the rest of these 2 minutes to talk to you about the benefit of the Commonwealth Games and what they will deliver and in addition to that to talk about the way in which these games will contribute more than \$3 billion to the state's economy. They will create around 7500 jobs in the lead-up to, over the course of and following the games themselves.

As is the case for all major international events, assistance is required from the Commonwealth government in relation to the areas of support that will formulate the basis for a partnership under the responsibility of the Commonwealth government. This includes immigration, customs and border control, and it also includes ongoing conversations that the Deputy Premier in her role as Minister for Commonwealth Games Delivery is continuing to have with federal counterparts. This is about making sure, as we partner with the Commonwealth to deliver a beautiful example of intergovernmental cooperation between councils, the Victorian government and our friends in Canberra, that we are pooling resources, that we are in a position to secure the funding, the assistance, the resources and the engagement from each other not just to deliver the games but to deliver the infrastructure and the opportunities to develop and deliver increased visitor –

David Davis: On a point of order, President, we are on the home stretch with time here. There are only 20-odd seconds left. The minister has not gone near responding to the simple point that the Albanese government will contribute nothing, zilch, to the Commonwealth Games legacy. That is what she needs to answer.

The PRESIDENT: Mr Davis, I am not upholding your point of order. My concern is that you have asked a question about what the federal government is going to do. This minister cannot speak for the federal government in terms of what contribution they are prepared to make to anything in the future, I would have thought.

David Davis: Further on the point of order, President, the state government sought a contribution from the federal government, which has not been forthcoming. Consequently, it is my contention that I want it confirmed by the minister that the federal contribution to the legacy will be zero.

The PRESIDENT: I am not too sure if you put that in your original question, but I am happy for the minister to respond in the time she has left.

Harriet SHING: Thank you, Mr Davis. Let us again step this out for you. The clue is in the title: Victoria 2026. There are a few budgets to go, and we are continuing our discussions with the Commonwealth around the way in which the funding, engagement, support and partnerships can be developed to deliver an extraordinary games to Victoria. I hope you will come along.

David DAVIS (Southern Metropolitan) (12:37): I take it from what the minister said that she actually has no proper response to the fact that there will be no legacy from the Commonwealth. But I ask this question in response to her substantive answer: given the lack of Commonwealth government funding, how many homes will the legacy of the Commonwealth Games see remaining in Ballarat?

The PRESIDENT: I am struggling, Mr Davis, to see how that is connected to the substantive question.

David DAVIS: It is connected very directly, President, by the fact that we are talking about the Commonwealth Games legacy. Will there be any homes in Ballarat as a part of that legacy?

The PRESIDENT: But I think the legacy may be determined on whether it is a legacy from federal or state funding into the future. The minister can answer as she sees fit.

Harriet SHING (Eastern Victoria – Minister for Water, Minister for Regional Development, Minister for Commonwealth Games Legacy, Minister for Equality) (12:38): Thank you, Mr Davis. It is a shame that you were only given this question 4 seconds before you got to your feet, because had you turned your mind to the wonderful opportunities of Victoria 2026 before you actually looked at that piece of paper for the first time you would know, as Mr McCracken also knows, that there will be 1800 athletes housed in the Ballarat village, that this will be a really wonderful way to bring athletes together and that the work is well underway to making sure that elite athletes have accommodation for the games that meet the high standards established and required under the delivery of any Commonwealth Games anywhere in the world. So, Mr Davis, I am not sure why it is that you think we are not actually proceeding with the development of this accommodation. Mr McCracken would probably be well served to take you around Ballarat and talk you through it. He is right over there behind you.

Ministers statements: Queenscliff ferry terminal

Harriet SHING (Eastern Victoria – Minister for Water, Minister for Regional Development, Minister for Commonwealth Games Legacy, Minister for Equality) (12:40): We might think that when we describe the word ‘terminal’ it relates to the Liberal Party’s internal affairs and health, but today I want to talk about the Queenscliff ferry terminal, which has recently officially opened. This is a newly refurbished multimillion-dollar upgrade which will offer passengers a world-class gateway to Geelong, the Bellarine and the Great Ocean Road.

The ferry service itself has operated since 1987. It is the busiest car and passenger ferry service in Australia. It carries more than 960,000 people – that is far more than voted for you in the election, Mr Davis – and 250,000 vehicles every year. Thanks to this upgrade, passengers can experience a more accessible and comfortable journey as they embark on a trip across our beautiful bay. This is about making sure that we have infrastructure that meets the needs of the community. The enhanced visitor standards and facilities include modern bathrooms, a retail space and dining spaces with spectacular views of the bay – the deep water in which perhaps, Mr Davis, you find yourself these days.

We have also improved the safety and accessibility of the ferry terminal, and the final stage has delivered a new public boardwalk, providing a really accessible and safe route for passengers to board and to disembark. The project has supported 71 new jobs during construction and an additional 22 new ongoing jobs within the ferry operations. Perhaps some of your colleagues, Mr Davis, across the way might be interested in applying for one of them. A new Queenscliff ferry terminal was a key commitment in the Geelong City Deal, and it was jointly funded by the Australian government and Searoad Ferries. It is about making sure that we can see this ferry experience shine now and into the future. Congratulations to everybody involved.

Written responses

The PRESIDENT (12:42): Can I thank Minister Blandthorn, who will get both answers for Mr Ettershank from the minister for gaming; Minister Symes committed, for Mrs Hermans’s substantive question, to get a written response; and for Mr Bourman, Minister Shing will get both answers from the Minister for Outdoor Recreation – all in line with what is prescribed in the standing orders.

Sarah Mansfield: On a point of order, President, I do not believe Minister Tierney answered my supplementary question, and I would respectfully request a written response to the question.

The PRESIDENT: If you do not mind, I will review that in *Hansard* after question time and get back to the chamber once I have had a look at it.

Constituency questions

Southern Metropolitan Region

Ryan BATCHELOR (Southern Metropolitan) (12:43): (180) My question is to the Minister for Health. The Victorian Heart Hospital in my electorate of Southern Metropolitan Region opened in February 2023. How many patients has the hospital treated since its opening? The Victorian Heart Hospital is Australia's first state-of-the-art specialist cardiac hospital. The hospital integrates cardiology services with research and education, allowing patients with heart disease access to world-leading cardiac care and groundbreaking research under one roof. The hospital will also play an integral role in training Australia's future cardiac specialists, with close to 600 students across medicine, nursing and allied health undertaking training every year. It is also integrated into a world-class research precinct. Last week I toured the hospital along with many, many of my colleagues. It is an outstanding facility. We are very lucky to have it in the Southern Metropolitan Region, and I would like to personally pay tribute to the clinicians, nursing staff, orderlies and support staff for the tireless work they are putting in day in, day out to support those suffering from heart disease.

Northern Metropolitan Region

Evan MULHOLLAND (Northern Metropolitan) (12:44): (181) My question is to the Minister for Planning. I ask this on behalf of many residents in Westmeadows who have contacted me to express their great concern about proposed draft amendments to the Hume planning scheme that would allow industrial development on the buffer zone between the discontinued Cleanaway landfill site and existing houses. Since the 2014 environmental audit, it has been clear that the groundwater of the proposed development site remains contaminated to a depth of 15 to 25 metres. Residents are concerned that toxic leakage would impact the preservation of the Moonee Ponds Creek and native grassland area, and the assessment notes that disturbance of and interference with the groundwater could have adverse impacts and effects on nearby residents and that it is already in need of constant monitoring. While there remain health and amenity implications for local residents of Westmeadows, I ask whether the minister will listen to the overwhelming views of residents and Hume City Council and send this proposal back to the drawing board.

Eastern Victoria Region

Tom McINTOSH (Eastern Victoria) (12:45): (182) My question is for the Minister for Outdoor Recreation in the other place. Minister, recreational fishing in Eastern Victoria is booming, especially in the Gippsland Lakes. The increasing popularity of recreational fishing combined with the increasing fish stock have resulted in benefits to both local communities and recreational fishers from Gippsland and beyond. What is the government doing to facilitate this boom and to promote recreational fishing and boating in the Eastern Victoria Region? Projects under the Better Boating Victoria program will bring benefits to this region, including the newly announced upgrades to the Metung boat ramp and previous upgrades such as to the Apex Park boat ramp in Lakes Entrance. These projects will make it easier for locals and visiting boaters to enjoy a day out on the water at the iconic Gippsland Lakes, with construction set to start on the Metung boat ramp within weeks. I also recognise the effort that has been made regarding fish stocks, as I recently joined the minister to release some beautiful fish by hand. These efforts ensure a bright future for fishing in Victoria.

Southern Metropolitan Region

Katherine COPSEY (Southern Metropolitan) (12:46): (183) My constituency question is for the minister for transport. In my constituency we have bus timetables that have not been updated in 30 years. I have been contacted by constituents about the 800 bus, which runs from Chadstone shopping centre to Dandenong. It runs a reduced service on Saturday and it does not run at all on Sunday, which is the busiest time for local workers, leaving many unable to get to work via public transport. Public transport is important, and it is vital for our essential workers. Reduced services – in fact non-existent services on Sundays – disproportionately affect so many shift workers, weekend and

casual staff and people in households who depend on public transport to get around. These outdated timetables leave people stranded in my electorate. When will the minister reform the 800 bus timetable to meet the needs of my community seven days a week?

Western Victoria Region

Bev McARTHUR (Western Victoria) (12:47): (184) My question is for the minister for energy and environment in her capacity as minister responsible for the Great Ocean Road Coast and Parks Authority, that huge new quango that we have just inherited, and concerns the proposal to charge tourists to see the Twelve Apostles. Now, I am not opposed in principle to user-pays fees. In fact I have advocated for them for tourists visiting the Great Ocean Road – for example, through car parking charges because at this point in time local government has picked up the bill for toilet provision, rubbish collection and road infrastructure, so they need to be reimbursed if they are going to continue in that fashion. But I have two concerns for the minister: will the tourist revenue be shared with the local councils in the area or is this new charge just to fund the new level of bureaucracy GORCAPA represents, and is this new policy to charge for access to public land just the latest example of her government restricting Victorians' access to their own national parks and Crown land?

Southern Metropolitan Region

John BERGER (Southern Metropolitan) (12:48): (185) My question is for the Minister for Manufacturing Sovereignty in the other place, Minister Carroll, and I am proud that this side of the house supports advanced manufacturing. This is a \$31 billion industry vital to the state's economy. There are more than 23,000 manufacturing firms in Victoria, which support 260,000 jobs, and they are 30 per cent of our country's manufacturing output. Our government is providing support through investments like the Breakthrough Victoria Fund, the Manufacturing and Industry Development Fund, the Australian Medtech Manufacturing Centre and the \$20 million government initiative to support the growth of medical technology and manufacturing in Victoria. Due to our government's strong support, global companies like Moderna and CSL are choosing to invest in Australia, so I ask the minister to please provide me an update on the projects currently being supported by the government or private companies to develop advanced manufacturing in the community of Southern Metro.

South-Eastern Metropolitan Region

David LIMBRICK (South-Eastern Metropolitan) (12:49): (186) My constituency question today is for the Minister for Public Transport and concerns the Frankston and Werribee train lines. For commuters travelling to work in the bayside suburbs of my electorate, the train commute has been quite handy as it has previously travelled straight through from Werribee to Frankston. My office has been informed that recently, despite all announcements indicating that the train will continue to run to Frankston as normal, when arriving at Flinders Street station it is then announced that the train will not be running through to Werribee or Frankston but returning on the same route. This has left commuters in a situation where they need to listen carefully lest they end up back where they started. My question for the minister is: will you or a representative from your department meet with Metro Trains to ensure accurate information is provided to commuters travelling on the Werribee and Frankston lines at the station they depart from?

Western Victoria Region

Joe McCRACKEN (Western Victoria) (12:50): (187) My question is to the Minister for Environment, and it relates to the potential destruction of nesting and breeding grounds of the brolga due to a seven-turbine windfarm proposal at Brewster, just east of Beaufort in my electorate. The brolga is listed as endangered under the Flora and Fauna Guarantee Act 1988, and the last brolga census conducted by the Department of Environment, Land, Water and Planning estimated the population in Victoria was just 635 birds. The proposed seven-tower wind turbine development in Brewster will have a significant impact on the future survival of the brolga. I toured the site and saw brolgas with my own eyes. The Victorian Brolga Assessment and Mitigation Standards: For Wind

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Energy Facility Permit Applications stipulate strict rules and buffer zones when assessing the impact on the brolga and their breeding grounds. So my question to the minister is this: will the minister intervene to ensure all rules, buffer zones and regulations are adhered to in order to protect the breeding habitat of the brolga and ensure its long-term survival?

Northern Victoria Region

Georgie PURCELL (Northern Victoria) (12:51): (188) My question is for the Minister for Agriculture. Recently one of my constituents reported a neighbouring property in Huntly to the Department of Energy, Environment and Climate Action for animal cruelty concerns towards farmed sheep and goats. At this farm animals do not have sufficient food, often become visibly sick and lame and are left untreated to suffer and die in the elements over a number of days. The bodies are then also left to rot over extended periods instead of being removed and disposed of appropriately. This is causing great distress to my constituents, who are concerned for animal welfare as well as the protection of the environment and surrounding waterways. Since being reported to DEECA, the issue has persisted over a matter of months now, without improvement. So my question to the minister is: what was the outcome of DEECA's investigation into this farm, considering animals continue to suffer and die there?

Eastern Victoria Region

Renee HEATH (Eastern Victoria) (12:52): (189) In the Eastern Victoria Region at least 2300 jobs will be lost due to the closure of the native timber industry, 1000 jobs have been lost due to the closure of Hazelwood, 600 jobs will be lost due to the closure of Loy Yang A and 200 jobs with the closure of Loy Yang B and 500 jobs will be lost with the closure of Yallourn. Labor has boasted of 6000 new jobs with the Victorian renewable energy terminal, something locals have welcomed. However, I have learned that this project will only deliver 200 to 400 jobs in Hastings. Is Labor serious about a plan to replace at least 4600 jobs that this government destroyed with 200 to 400 jobs? My question is for the Minister for Employment. This government has obliterated jobs and industry in the Eastern Victoria Region and with that the communities that rely on them. What is your plan to rebuild these damaged communities?

North-Eastern Metropolitan Region

Matthew BACH (North-Eastern Metropolitan) (12:53): (190) I have got a constituency question today for the Minister for Roads and Road Safety. Will the minister come with me to Blackburn to meet with the Whitehorse Active Transport Action Group in order to discuss safer pedestrian crossing access at Blackburn Road. President, as you would be aware, a section of Blackburn Road is a state highway in our electorate. It is 1.4 kilometres long and it does not have any safe crossings. That part of our electorate is home to many young families and it houses many schools, so members of the Whitehorse Active Transport Action Group, who my team and I have recently been engaging with, are of the view – as am I – that something needs to be done about it. Here is an un-fun fact for you: no other state highway across the eastern corridor has such an extended distance between safe crossing points. I would urge Minister Horne to look in the upcoming budget at providing funding to allow this to occur. First things first though, I would love her to come to Blackburn to meet with me and the group.

Southern Metropolitan Region

Georgie CROZIER (Southern Metropolitan) (12:54): (191) My question is to the Treasurer, and it is in relation to the State Revenue Office targeting GPs by imposing payroll tax on medical practices. The question I want to ask the Treasurer is: will he meet with the Royal Australian College of General Practitioners as a matter of urgency to rule out this tax? In discussions with GPs in my electorate they have raised serious concerns about the implications of taxing medical practices with a payroll tax liability. What is particularly concerning is that this is a retrospective tax which will be backdated by up to five years. This is a very, very bad tax. We know that it is a blatant cash grab from the

government. We know the state government have plunged Victoria into a very serious and detrimental fiscal position, so they are going out there to get money from anywhere they can. But taxing GPs like this will have serious implications for the delivery of health services across the state. As I said, I would like the Treasurer to rule this out and meet with the college as soon as possible so that they can get clarity.

Eastern Victoria Region

Melina BATH (Eastern Victoria) (12:56): (192) My constituency question is for the Minister for Disability, Ageing and Carers. Last night, in response to an adjournment debate about the Traralgon Men's Shed, the minister doubled down, stating that a new men's shed, a new facility, will replace the existing men's shed. The department has since corrected the minister this morning and her error, stating that the funding is actually \$80,000 for a refit. It might seem like I am being pedantic, but this men's shed is vital for the mental health, wellbeing and all-round sociability of these fantastic people. So what I ask is for the minister to come to Traralgon and explain to the people that she will provide that money in the upcoming budget.

North-Eastern Metropolitan Region

Nicholas McGOWAN (North-Eastern Metropolitan) (12:56): (193) My constituency question is to the Minister for Ambulance Services, and it relates to ambulance response times, in particular code 1 incidents, which receive a lights-and-sirens response. These are for patients that require urgent paramedic and hospital care. Ambulance Victoria has two official response time targets – respond to code 1 incidents within 15 minutes for 85 per cent of incidents statewide and 90 per cent of incidents in centres with populations greater than 7500. The latest data highlights a worrying trend. Not one of the local government areas within our electorate, President, achieved the response time targets. This was also the case with data reported throughout 2022. During 2022 the highest response time percentage was Darebin at 77.7 per cent, the worst being Nillumbik – a staggering 40.4 per cent, well below the response time targets. The latest data shows a slight improvement from the previous quarter. However, compared to the same time last year, performance has barely improved, with some areas actually decreasing. So my question to the minister is: what measures are the government implementing to make sure that the downward spiral of service efficiency, which was putting lives at risk in 2022, does not continue in 2023?

Southern Metropolitan Region

David DAVIS (Southern Metropolitan) (12:58): (194) My constituency question today is for the Minister for Planning, and it concerns the Ashburton shopping centre. I have had a number of representations from traders in that centre and from owners of properties, and they concern the proposed Ashburton heritage overlay. Ashburton is a very busy and popular shopping centre. There are some buildings of significance there. I for one am generally a strong protector of heritage and a strong advocate for good heritage protection; however, in this case it does not appear to stack up. Despite some of the material, I do not think it stacks up, so I am asking the minister to be aware of the proposals to put an overlay preventing any changes to the Ashburton shopping centre and, if that occurs, to make sure that there is broad consultation. I am concerned that traders will be impacted and owners will be impacted through an outcome that is not well documented or sufficiently strong.

Sitting suspended 12:59 pm until 2:03 pm.

*Bills***Water Legislation Amendment Bill 2023***Second reading***Debate resumed.**

Sonja TERPSTRA (North-Eastern Metropolitan) (14:03): Just before, the bells got me for question time and then we broke for lunch. I will continue my contribution, and I do not have very long on the clock, which is okay. But I was talking about floods and flood-affected communities just prior to the break, and what I was commenting on at the time was the fact that there was a need to pause the consultation for this bill because of the floods and the impact that they had. People in flood-affected communities were needing to attend to other, more important things, like trying to get their housing in order – people who might have lost homes or had damaged houses, and also farmers who were attending to their damaged farms. Of course that takes priority, and people would not have had the bandwidth to deal with this. In terms of what is happening now, as I said, what was the community consultation like up until the floods? What I think has been claimed by those opposite is that the consultation on the changes did not begin until late 2022, and that is not the case. Consultation on these changes had been a long ongoing process over several years in various stages, and that is why I was commenting before that when the floods hit it interrupted that whole process. Obviously we were keen to get the consultation back on track for that, but nevertheless the floods impacted that.

The Department of Energy, Environment and Climate Action has been consulting with affected water users since the Water and Catchment Legislation Amendment Bill 2021 passed, and initially consultation in fact began even before that bill passed in 2021 as part of the Water and Catchment Legislation Amendment Bill 2021's development. Throughout 2022 DEECA was working closely with our declared system rural water corporations – Goulburn–Murray Water, Lower Murray Water and Southern Rural Water – and their customer committees to make sure systems and processes are updated for them and to manage their customers' place-of-take approvals when the new framework comes into effect. They have worked with various water industry stakeholders as well. Also the place-of-take consultative committee, a very important consultative committee, had been established. It comprised eight irrigators from across Victoria's declared systems to provide advice to DEECA on the proposed new arrangements. This committee has provided advice on proposed conversion rules, rationing areas and extraction shares. It has also provided advice around how to communicate these changes effectively with stakeholders. Information about the new framework has been published on the Victorian Water Register website to help water users understand and prepare for the changes. Additionally, several webinars and face-to-face presentations have been provided to stakeholders and agencies about the changes and the proposed rules as well.

That is just a smattering of or a window into the consultation that happened. I know Minister Shing will be summing up very shortly. I only have a few seconds on the clock, so I might leave my contribution there. As I said, other contributors today have very ably covered the very technical aspects of this bill in great detail, and I look forward to Minister Shing's summing up on this bill. I commend this bill to the house.

Harriet SHING (Eastern Victoria – Minister for Water, Minister for Regional Development, Minister for Commonwealth Games Legacy, Minister for Equality) (14:07): We have heard a significant number of contributions about this bill in the course of the second-reading debate and indeed in the other place. At first blush this looks like a small bill that in fact has only a minimal impact, but when we reach into the rationale for bringing this bill forward as a standalone, the issue of timing becomes very clear as something to manage. It becomes an important priority because of the floods which occurred last October which had and continue to have a profound impact on communities not just, as some might have it, in the areas in metropolitan Melbourne but indeed around the state. Having spent considerable time in flood-affected communities, we know full well the impact that this has had and the bandwidth that this has taken for irrigators, for communities and for stakeholders, all

the way up into the border and the surrounding communities, who need the opportunity to be able to contribute to meaningful consultation and to understand the changes to a framework which are based in increased transparency and which will deliver a better measure of rigour to the way in which place-of-take approvals and transparency measures on the register are delivered.

It is important also to note the contributions around this chamber and in the Assembly that have gone in significant detail to the preparedness of the Parliament to improve the systems as they were contemplated when the bill was first introduced, and my predecessor Minister Lisa Neville fought to have an increased level of rigour and to provide certainty and accountability in the way in which the water register operates and the way in which Victoria sets a cracking pace for the national framework of regulation and oversight to operate. This is something which industry, communities and stakeholders have been looking for for a really long time. It is about making sure that we have the social licence, the community understanding and the commitment to long-term delivery of certainty in all parts of the system that will be affected by these changes. It is also about building on the work to refine an understanding of a system around general and specific place-of-take approvals – the way in which shortfalls and rationing may, and indeed probably will at some point in the not-too-distant future given the challenges of climate change, have an impact on the way in which water delivery, shares and other components of extractive and related systems operate. There is a very intricate and interlinked system of water management across this part of the southern basin, and we have worked really hard as a state alongside other jurisdictions in the matter of accountability and transparency. We are also continuing to drive that work here in Victoria, including through the mechanisms in this bill.

So separating the commencement of the place-of-take approvals from the commencement of the water transparency measure reforms will enable us to develop and educate and implement changes after relevant consultation has taken place, but it will also mean that we can have that greater level of transparency brought to bear sooner than may otherwise have occurred in conjunction with the refined amendments to the system following consultation.

As I said earlier and as a number of speakers have alluded to, we also need to manage the scarcity of the resource in a way which balances the interests and the rights of various licence-holders and shareholders. When I think about the way in which water is traded between irrigators and across the system in tagged and untagged systems and when we look at the Barmah Choke and the way in which that really constrained section of the river has a whole range of challenges for policy and regulation, it is evident that we need a system that leans into the practical realities of water management and natural resource management around the Barmah–Millewa area but also down to Cobden and up to Echuca and further beyond.

It has been good to hear from Mr Davis that the opposition supports this bill and the objectives of it. It has also been important to note Ms Broad's contribution on support of the bill and the place-of-take approvals framework. I note Ms Broad's interest in the horticulture industry and the importance of water. And this is also a relevant point to make around the industry and primary producers, food producers, and the work that they have done and continue to do to make a better and more efficient use of water: we have seen an increased volume of growers within the industry, but thanks to changes in seasonal cropping, for example, we have seen relatively stable levels of usage over the last sort of 20 or 25 years. Ms Broad touched on the Barmah Choke, which I referred to earlier, and the way in which that has an impact on deliverability of the resource, and the creep from the federal government and the national framework around buybacks and the impact that this would have on rural and regional communities up towards the border and in the southern basin.

Again, to restate Victoria's position: we are opposed to buybacks. They do not provide a measure of certainty that some might wish that they would. They increase the cost of water. They reduce the volume of water in the consumptive pool. And in fact they have long-term and very negative consequences for the way in which primary producers, food producers and rural and regional communities can plan for their futures. To that end, I also want to place on the record my thanks to and gratitude for the communities who are working so hard across the Victorian side of the southern

basin to deliver on a range of projects, including the Victorian flood plain management projects and the rehabilitation works that are occurring there. We have seen more than 600,000 hours put into returning water and planning to return water to our flood plains. We have also seen the use of proven technology and plant and equipment, such as pumps and regulators, being able to provide water to areas of our flood plains where overspill from banks simply will not deliver it in any consistent way, including where buybacks send vast volumes of water down the river.

This bill is an opportunity also to talk about the way in which better transparency will deliver a greater sense of confidence across our communities and across our stakeholders. This is about making sure that when we have reporting obligations being met for the water register the 2 per cent and the publication of information extend beyond corporations to individuals and that we also have those ongoing opportunities for people to seek information in accordance with the rationale and the basis for the register and the refinements set up as they have been.

I want to touch on Dr Mansfield's amendments and the way in which they will have an impact on the bill and the way in which the objectives of this bill might be able to be met through the committee stage and a discussion on what is being delivered through water transparency and the water register and the rigour that it provides. But in the first instance I note the Greens support for this bill and the objectives of it, including the practical reality of communities having more time to be part of consultations and discussions, and the consultative committee's work has been really important. Having opportunities for people to participate in virtual and face-to-face meetings to read materials and to understand the impact of the change of this framework is important, so to that end we are grateful to the opposition, to the Greens and indeed everybody across the Parliament in both chambers who has indicated that this bill is fundamentally important, appropriate, measured and needed.

I look forward to in committee perhaps talking a little more about the way in which balance of interests is occurring and will continue to occur and about the way in which we are continuing to lead Australia in water market reform and the work that is happening from Victoria to push other jurisdictions to improve compliance and transparency, and we know that increased compliance and transparency has a couple of really significant advantages for food producers and primary users as well as for communities. We saw this in the Pearson review in 2018. We have also seen that where we have a greater level of compliance, through metering for example, not only do we reduce water theft and not only do we have in Victoria therefore a really high level of compliance, but we are also enabling irrigators to be more efficient in the way in which they are using water. This then means a more efficient use of a finite resource, which is on balance an effective and important component of meeting future challenges, particularly as they arise in the context of climate change and volatility. We also need to acknowledge the work that continues to be done as flood recovery efforts and rebuilding efforts continue in the state and, as I said, up north.

It is a good thing indeed that Dr Mansfield in her contribution has referred in really positive terms to the *Water Is Life: Traditional Owner Access to Water Roadmap*. This is a piece of policy work that has been the result of very careful, respectful, enduring and thorough discussions with traditional owners. This is nation-leading work. It is work which other jurisdictions have expressed an enormous amount of interest in, and as we have a more evolved sense of what traditional owner access to water looks like, the notion of self-determination and the way in which allocations and use are refined through conversation and through iterative discussion and participation with owner groups is a key part of making sure that what we are planning for now collectively is done and underpinned with respect, with rigour and with self-determination.

I want to be clear: the government does not support the Greens amendment being proposed by Dr Mansfield today. We do not oppose the amendment because we are opposed to greater water market transparency. That is one really important point that I do want to put on the record. We are very invested in transparency, as evidenced by the work that we have done in previous development of the water register – the details that that register already provides and will continue to provide. The compliance measures in our system are very, very well established. Indeed this is nation-leading work

as well. We are leading the country in water market transparency, and to that end the reforms that we see in the act already enable the Minister for Water to be able to make further information publicly available through the water register if the community calls for it and if it is publicly consulted.

There are a range of measures that exist within the system already, whether they relate to restrictions or prohibitions in the event of shortfall and shortfall delivery issues, whether these matters relate to setting of fees, whether they relate to additional information being provided on the register or indeed whether they are needed because of the dynamic nature of the water system overall. It is therefore appropriate and responsible to have these mechanisms contained in regulation rather than in legislation. That enables us to have the flexibility that the community will need as the environment and market demand and upward and downward pressures continue to evolve. I will leave my remarks there, but I do look forward to this matter being considered in committee favourably and then to seeing with the will of this house the bill passed in short order.

Motion agreed to.

Read second time.

Committed.

Committee

Clauses 1 and 2 agreed to.

Clause 3 (14:23)

Sarah MANSFIELD: Can the minister please share the dates that community consultation meetings took place regarding place-of-take approvals up to 14 October 2022?

Harriet SHING: The community consultation was something which was undertaken for a number of years prior to the development of this bill. The bill itself was not in fact considered before the October 2022 flood events, and that is why we have got the extended period for engagement there. But what we have got is information that I can provide to you around the consultation, which has been a very long and very detailed process of conversation with communities. There have been a range of discussions between the Department of Energy, Environment and Climate Change – DEECA, which I will refer to it as from now on – with affected water users since the Water and Catchment Legislation Amendment Bill 2021 passed, and initially consultation in fact began before that bill even passed in 2021 as part of that Water and Catchment Legislation Amendment Bill 2021’s development. Throughout 2022 DEECA has been working closely with our declared system rural water corporations – Goulburn–Murray Water, Lower Murray Water and Southern Rural Water – and customer committees to make sure that systems and processes are updated for them to manage customers’ place-of-take approvals when the new framework comes into effect. They have also worked with various water industry stakeholders.

As a number of speakers referred to in this chamber and in the Assembly, a place-of-take consultative committee has also been established, comprising eight irrigators from across Victoria’s declared systems – they are the systems that are outlined and specified in the Water Act 1989 – to provide advice to DEECA on those proposed new arrangements, and there has been advice provided from the committee on proposed conversion rules, as well as rationing areas and extraction shares. It has also provided advice around how to communicate these changes effectively with stakeholders, and this is again part of the messaging, the conversation, the communication and the additional time that is needed and appropriate as part of this bill and the extended commencement date of July 2024.

Information about the new framework has been published on the Victorian Water Register website, and I would encourage anybody who is interested and would like to see that information to jump onto the site. That is about helping water users to understand and prepare for the changes, and several online, as I indicated in my contribution, webinars and face-to-face presentations have been provided to

stakeholders and agencies about the changes and the proposed rules. We have therefore – and I am trying to perhaps distil this a little for you, Dr Mansfield – been in pretty constant conversation with communities, whether through the consultative committee or indeed through those declared rural system water corps. So this is part of an ongoing provision-of-information, discussion, receipt-of-questions and response framework, and that will continue as part of the work to provide information on the changes to the framework and the way in which place-of-take approval systems will be amended for the benefit of water users and for the benefit of transparency as we move through this additional time following the impact of the floods.

Clause agreed to; clauses 4 and 5 agreed to.

New clause (14:28)

The DEPUTY PRESIDENT: Dr Mansfield, I invite you to move your amendment 1, which inserts a new clause and is a test for your amendment 2.

Sarah MANSFIELD: I move the first of my amendments:

1. Insert the following New Clause to follow clause 5 –

“5A What is recorded in the water register about water shares?”

For section 24(b) of the **Water and Catchment Legislation Amendment Act 2021** substitute –

‘(b) for paragraph (f) substitute –

“(f) whether any person who holds a water allocation under the water share does not hold a water-use licence that authorises the use of water under that water allocation on land and does not intend to hold such a water-use licence; and”.’.”.

I will speak to both, because the second is contingent on the first one passing. These amendments, if successful, would allow for the Victorian government to make records regarding water shares without an association with land publicly available on the water register. As some of those in the chamber would be aware, in 2007 the Victorian government unbundled land from water. By 2009, 5 per cent of high-reliability entitlements in northern Victoria were not associated with land, and in 2018 this figure had grown to 12 per cent, and while the scale of non-land-user water ownership has grown since unbundling came into effect, transparency measures have lagged behind. We do not know the full extent of this practice or have adequate information on the entities involved, and no-one we have asked has been able to provide this information, so we introduce an amendment to this house to increase the information publicly available regarding corporate, institutional and other non-land-using investors. Amendment 1 introduces that water shares without an association with a water-use licence and where there is no intent to hold such a water-use licence must be recorded on the water register, and amendment 2 essentially makes this information exempt from any regulation which would impede it from being publicly available.

We appreciate that, if passed, this legislative change will require further administrative work by the department and will need regulatory measures to support the implementation through processes that determine an intent to hold a water use licence, but we do not believe that these are insurmountable hurdles.

What we would actually like to see is full transparency of the water market, with everyone who holds water shares listed on the water register. There are many stakeholders and community members who have indicated that they want to see this. However, we have heard the concerns of some smaller farmers who feel that they may be put at risk of predatory behaviour by larger corporations who will try to buy them out of their water. This amendment does not affect those smaller farmers or in fact anyone with an associated use for the water. It is about shining a light on those investors and big corporations who are exploiting our water market purely for profit without concern for the future of our rivers or our environment. The people of Victoria deserve to know who owns our water.

Harriet SHING: Thank you, Dr Mansfield, for explaining the rationale for the amendment and indeed the other amendment that you have put around transparency. I just want to go to a number of the elements of your amendment that are problematic for a range of reasons, including as they relate to intent and to the way in which intent is purported to be maintained through an ongoing record. Having this as a precursor to a requirement for information being published means the accuracy of that information then becomes paramount. If we are not able to maintain accuracy, including as that might relate to really understanding, reflecting on and reporting on the nature of intent – intent that might change over time – then there is an enormous risk of unintended consequences around the rigour and the confidence in the system and the register overall. This would erode in significant part the work towards rigour, integrity and a system that operates transparently in the way that we have worked so hard to achieve. It is not clear how an ongoing record of intent could in fact be captured in a way that is meaningful and that is accurate. There are different grades of intent, including as they may evolve or change over time, including as they may be reflected in people's conduct or their representations as made, for example, to a corporation, to government or to any sort of regulatory body. That is again a very difficult thing to ascertain, to police or to oversight and then to act upon.

Making sure that we have specifics in regulation rather than in legislation is actually an appropriate approach to the way that we provide for that flexibility, as I indicated in my summing-up. This enables us to have a measure of dexterity that will, to my mind, actually address some of the issues that you have just raised in speaking to your amendment and that will look to address issues around manipulation through those discussions of non-water users and regulation of those water markets.

Going to the point I made earlier about the way in which we manage compliance and enforcement, going to the rigour that Victoria has in the way that we set out that framework and have led the charge for a range of processes for greater transparency in water systems and management systems not just in the southern basin but more broadly, it is evidence of our intent to do this in a way that does not just reflect better practice, does not just identify areas where non-compliance is taking place, but also provides greater mechanisms for efficiency for water users in ways which will deliver benefit to everyone.

We are working with the Commonwealth and with other basin states to be able to deliver on the *Water Market Reform* road map, including basin-wide legislation and the capacity to prevent the possibility of future water market manipulation, and that I think goes to the heart of the objective of the Greens amendment and the essence of what you have talked about in putting that amendment here today. Those transparency arrangements that were passed in 2021 were the consequence of really extensive public consultation and discussion about a social appetite to publish 2 per cent of water shares in the total system to make sure that we can actually have a measure of information that is accurate, that is not misleading and that is accessible to people who are after it in a way that does not then result in, for example, the publishing of a farmer's details and that we have got dexterity in the system to manage water allocations and licensing shares and the way in which restrictions, shortfalls, extractions or works licence approvals might be integrated into those shares.

So it is somewhat unclear as to how we infer intent. It is going to be all but impossible to oversight the mechanism of intent as it changes and as it may relate to the way in which somebody takes and uses water for specific or various purposes. To that end, we have capacity to have additional information included where it is appropriate, where the community is consulted and, really importantly, where the community calls for it, and that is why these ongoing conversations are so important. On that basis the government will not support the amendment.

David DAVIS: I just indicate that the opposition will not support the amendment. There have been discussions between the shadow and Dr Mansfield, and I think they have been constructive. Some of the objectives involved in these amendments are reasonable, and we understand the intent behind them. The minister has laid out a number of the reasons why we would also express some concern. But inherently I think some of this is about practicality too. So on this particular occasion we will not support these amendments.

Harriet SHING: Just to pick up on a number of the things that Mr Davis has said, and perhaps to give you some greater comfort following what you have talked about, Mr Davis, for avoidance of any doubt, the names of the largest water share owners, so owners greater than 2 per cent, including the individuals, will be listed on the register and information about allocation amounts with more than 20 trades per year will be listed on the register. The website will continue, as I said, to publish additional information, including lists of every water share and allocation transaction with volume and price. Alongside annual reports and long-term market analysis there will be that detailed and accurate information to support market participants and stakeholders to make decisions about water markets.

To perhaps close off on that point, regulations will also be used to exclude public search for water allocations, so public search for water shares and entitlements will continue to be based on an identification number and accompanied by the payment of a small fee, fees which can be set through the exercise of power by the water minister.

We are in a position to reflect what the community had said around reporting the names of large water owners and that being set at 2 per cent. That was as a consequence of community consultation and a diverse range of opinions from irrigators, water market participants, the wider agricultural and water industry and the general community. The definition of 'large' was a big part of those consultations and discussions, and the greatest support came in at defining it as anybody who owns over 2 per cent of water in a system. And the community was really clear that it did not support release of all individual information, including names, to achieve better water market transparency.

New clause negated.

Clause 6 (14:39)

Sarah MANSFIELD: Just following on from the discussion we have just had around transparency, does the minister have any intentions to increase transparency through regulation?

Harriet SHING: The way in which the regulations apply already enables that level of, as I said, dexterity around the information that can be sought and can be provided. There is a number of protections that also exist following that community consultation, as I indicated. When we go to providing the information that communities want, we want to continue to have further conversations about what that might look like. I am really happy in practical terms to continue those conversations with you about how that evolves over time. I think we have had a number of good, direct conversations about your position on a range of matters – the subject of water market reform, transparency and compliance within various systems – and as that evolves it might be something we can put a bit more shape around as far as the sort of thing that you are looking at goes, but there are inbuilt mechanisms to regulation for a range of different things to be considered. If you want to be more specific now, by all means I am very happy to work through that. Otherwise we can continue to have conversations about individual and general matters as they might come up, because it seems to me that there is an element of speculation in the sorts of matters you might be referring to.

Sarah MANSFIELD: Are there any specific measures regarding water market transparency that the minister is currently considering implementing using the provisions under regulation?

Harriet SHING: Thanks, Dr Mansfield, for that question. DEECA, as I indicated earlier, is delivering on a range of things to increase water market transparency – so that is the publication of the names of companies with 2 per cent or more in a system on the register. It is also about new requirements to provide clarity on different types of trade, and it is unclear what kind of purchase or transfer has occurred and what the price has been for that; undertaking an annual water broker audit, which is a list of the names of water brokers who meet those government standards and auditing requirements associated with the use of Victoria's water broker portal, and again that is a portal that is on the Victorian Water Register website, so again it is consolidation of information which itself lends a measure of transparency; and providing comprehensive water market information and analysis on the register website. New accessible information products have been added, such as the Water Market

Watch. That is a mobile application that provides information on water prices, intervalley trade opportunities and allocation announcements, as well as the 'Where can I trade' live schematic that provides detailed information on intervalley trade opportunities.

Those regulations will be crafted to give effect to transparency based on existing consultation, as I said earlier, but this could evolve over time, again, as I have mentioned earlier, around consultation and when and as community views might change. We are building new water register infrastructure that gives us a better functionality for those transparency measures as well. But one of the things that we do need to make sure that we do in the passage of this bill is have a system that operates effectively from 1 July whilst also providing that additional layer of time and the opportunity for ongoing conversations around transparency and accountability, including through the register.

Sarah MANSFIELD: Minister, with respect to the amendments we previously put forward, there was mention of transparency measures like this potentially having unintended consequences, and I was curious as to what some of those unintended consequences might be.

Harriet SHING: One example of an unintended consequence might be that if, for example, there is a requirement in legislation of intent and that intent changes and then changes back again or changes and then changes in a different direction and the system does not keep pace with that, then there may well be a significant detriment to the party that has notified of an intent and therefore a deterrent for people to notify intent. There are challenges associated with enforcement and with compliance, where intent must be drawn from certain circumstances and based on the identities, the conduct, the mindset – for want of a better term – of individuals or entities and the division of the use of allocations within a share. So this is the sort of unintended consequence that may well lead perversely to a disincentive for people to participate in those compliance measures, which are there in the first instance to provide a measure of transparency and accountability. That is the sort of thing that might yield very deleterious practical consequences, not just for that user, who may well be up against penalties, restrictions or in a worst-case scenario prohibitions, and that is in fact not what we want to achieve. We want to achieve that transparency, that accountability. We want to continue to lead the pace as far as the water register and those mechanisms of accountability go, but we also want to make it an accessible framework for water users to be part of a system which has a meaningful set of parameters by which enforcement can occur.

Sarah MANSFIELD: How many individuals or entities does the minister believe will meet the 2 per cent threshold for information to be made publicly available on the water register?

Harriet SHING: At the moment I think we have got about 15 corporations listed on the water register. If that does change over time, again, that information would be published, which is sort of the point of this 2 per cent or more. That transparency reform would mean that that information is available online. That, I hope, gives you a sense of the fact that the intention here is to enable people, including in the way that you just have, to understand the share within a system that is taken up by people, legal entities or individuals with more than 2 per cent of a system.

Sarah MANSFIELD: Would the minister consider following New South Wales lead in requiring that all members of Parliament record water ownership and share components within their annual declaration of interest?

Harriet SHING: There are not any proposals to create additional mechanisms for reporting, but completely separate to that, the register of interests that operates for Victorian Parliamentarians requires people to register on a document published by the Parliament of Victoria interests such as those that would be captured in the scenario that you are talking about. This is about the way in which a parliamentary accountability mechanism operates as distinct from what I think you are saying about water instruments, so very happy to get some clarification from you on that. But in the same way that you have to declare, as I declare, for example, my membership of the Donkey Society of Victoria, more significantly, or substantively, if you do have a water share, it would be anticipated that you

would be required to confirm that interest and indeed, as I recall on my feet now, a matter which might give rise to a perceived conflict of interest, if that helps.

Clause agreed to.

Clause 7 (14:50)

Sarah MANSFIELD: What is the intention of making a general place-of-take approval enduring?

Harriet SHING: Essentially what we want to have, Dr Mansfield, is a situation whereby approval is not required to be constantly sought where an account goes to zero. We want to make sure that again we do not see users left essentially without a system where that renewal does not take place. Again this is about a more efficient framework and making sure that we have that framework to improve on managing those approvals to take water and to have that water delivered in a declared system. It is about certainty of rights, it is about extraction rights in the rare event of a shortfall – so what that extraction share looks like – and it is about the flexibility to manage their own delivery risks. As I indicated in my summing-up, this is of particular relevance downstream from the Barmah Choke for making sure that we have the preparedness because we have anticipated the risks of shortfalls occurring in that context.

Making sure that we have that efficiency built in through the amendments proposed by this bill will provide a greater measure of certainty for water users. It will streamline the way in which the system operates, it will remove that risk of lapse and it will also make sure that over time we get that better buy-in from water users around the systems as they operate around the education, the enforcement, the compliance and the efficiency mechanisms overall, so this is about making sure that we do provide people with that measure of ease of use. We know that primary producers, irrigators and environmental water licence holders are in a position to use and to understand the impact of the use from their systems. Where and how water is taken, bought and sold is able to be understood uniformly and consistently where that is in a position to be able to be the subject of ongoing discussions around how our declared rural water corporations are working alongside water users to explain changing circumstances and conditions, again going back to my point earlier about climatic change and volatility and what it looks like to encounter the eventuality of a shortfall.

Sarah MANSFIELD: Has the government considered any potential risks of them being enduring and not requiring periodic reapproval?

Harriet SHING: Dr Mansfield, in coming up with this framework, there is a balancing of risk against benefit. Risk can never be removed entirely. It is about the way in which it is managed. The objective of the enduring approval is to provide a greater measure of certainty and efficiency for users at the end point and access to the system which is intended to operate itself in an enduring fashion. Were that not to occur and were an approval to lapse because of the total use of volume within a share, the impact of that would be more significant than the risk of deficiency in decision-making or lack of transparency because of the existence of an enduring approval, where we have compliance and enforcement mechanisms, transparency and publication mechanisms, including through the water register, built in in the way that is anticipated and proposed by this bill. So there are risks inherent in any system involving licensing and allocations, involving shares and conditions. This is a system like any other. There is risk in any system where there is an interface between user and market. This is where again, in the interests of providing ease and efficiency, compliance, transparency and enforcement, the enduring approvals process is something which falls on the side of something on balance which is much more significantly beneficial where those risks can otherwise be managed.

Clause agreed to; clauses 8 to 22 agreed to.

Reported to house without amendment.

Harriet SHING (Eastern Victoria – Minister for Water, Minister for Regional Development, Minister for Commonwealth Games Legacy, Minister for Equality) (14:56): I move:

That the report be adopted.

Motion agreed to.

Report adopted.

Third reading

Harriet SHING (Eastern Victoria – Minister for Water, Minister for Regional Development, Minister for Commonwealth Games Legacy, Minister for Equality) (14:57): I move:

That the bill be now read a third time.

In doing so I wish to thank everybody who has contributed to this debate, and I move that it do pass.

Motion agreed to.

Read third time.

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

Motions

Early childhood education

Debate resumed on motion of Ingrid Stitt:

That this house recognises that the Andrews Labor government's ambitious overhaul of early childhood education and care, with a massive \$9 billion investment over the next decade, will give kids the very best start in life and will make early education fairer for all Victorian families.

And David Davis's amendment:

That 'families.' be omitted and replaced with 'families, but has failed to fully fund the required associated capital works leaving a black hole in funding.'

Ryan BATCHELOR (Southern Metropolitan) (14:58): I am pleased to speak on the motion in relation to early childhood education and care. I have got to get my head out of the wonders of water and into early childhood.

A member interjected.

Ryan BATCHELOR: That is right. There is a lot of crossover between the two subjects, of course: intricate detail, total uncertainty and a lot of play.

The Andrews government's commitment to early education and care is unparalleled in this nation. Both between jurisdictions and across time, no-one has a more ambitious early childhood education and care agenda than the Andrews Labor government. Our Best Start, Best Life reforms are investing \$9 billion over 10 years to fundamentally transform the Victorian system of early education and care for our three- and four-year-olds. It is not like we were coming off a low base. We were coming off the base of having one of the best early education and care systems in the country before this latest round of reforms. All we are doing here in Victoria is taking our early years to the next level.

Free kinder for all three- and four-year-olds: three-year-olds to receive 15 hours of kinder by 2029, four-year-olds transitioning to a universal system of pre-prep offering 30 hours a week of play-based learning over the next decade. It is a phenomenal change that is ahead of us. That will be accompanied and supported by the government stepping up to support the provision of early learning, particularly in those parts of the state where existing provision is insufficient, through the creation of 50 new government-owned affordable early learning centres. Our plan is to get them up and running and off

the ground by 2028, and it is happening right now. Work is already happening. This program is already well underway. The support that we are providing to families to help them with the costs of sending their kids to kinder will see this year 140,000 Victorian children go to kinder for free, saving these Victorian families up to \$2500. These are significant reforms that are investing in our children – investing in the next generation of Victorians – but also and importantly they are helping Victorian families with the cost-of-living pressures that they face on a day-to-day basis. It is a really remarkable reform agenda, an unprecedented and an unparalleled reform agenda, and one that I am very proud to support today.

One of the reasons I am really proud to be supporting this government's drive in the early years is because of what we know about the young brain. The scientific and medical research and understanding of the human brain has deepened a lot in recent years. We have learned a lot about what the brain does in those early years of life. That research has revealed the extraordinary potential for growth and adaptability that exists within each of us but particularly within our children. It is through those experiences in the early years that we can help shape that potential and set up a foundation for a lifetime of learning and success.

By the age of three a child's brain has already formed billions of connections, or synapses, between neurons, and this process of synaptogenesis is driven by the experiences and interactions that children have with their environment. The process of brain development amongst our children is driven by the stimulating environments that they are placed in, and it is those environments which then help drive that process in and of itself. The science of the brain is really spectacular. This neuroplasticity allows the brain to learn new things, to enhance cognition and to enhance its capabilities. It allows the developing brain to recover from trauma and strengthen after loss. It is this process of brain development that demonstrates to us the underlying importance of having these sorts of universal programs, because it is during this critical period that the brain is most responsive to its external stimuli, allowing the groundwork for future learning and development. High-quality early learning, high-quality preschool or kindergarten experiences, provide the optimal environment for fostering that kind of brain development and neuroplasticity growth, and that can achieve a whole range of cognitive, social and emotional growth. So high-quality early learning centres, high-quality early education and care, play an absolutely pivotal role in preparing children for success in their later years of schooling but also for later in their life.

International research has consistently shown that children who engage in high-quality preschool programs demonstrate across their lives better school performance, higher graduation rates and increasing later potential. A study by the Brookings Institution found that those who were enrolled in high-quality universal preschool programs demonstrated an enormous benefit in later year educational outcomes. Those children were 3 per cent more likely to finish school, 8.5 per cent more likely to attend university – or college as it is known in the United States – and 39 per cent more likely to finish their tertiary education if they had been enrolled in those high-quality early learning programs. And they were 32 per cent, so one-third, less likely to be living in poverty later in life if they had had the benefit of high-quality early learning.

So what the international evidence is telling us and what the scientific evidence is telling us is that if we have a decision to make about when and where we should be investing in our education system and in our children, providing greater access to high-quality play-based early education and care is exactly the sort of thing that we should be doing. These high-quality preschool programs and kindergarten programs can help foster social and emotional confidence, particularly when there is a balance between structured learning experiences and those opportunities for exploration and play. It is the way that our early childhood educators are able to – quite miraculously, I think – construct a learning environment that has both the delivery of structured content and an environment that is fostered and encompassed by play that allows children to be learning constantly and in ways that we can only admire significantly.

And the other thing I think it does, for any of us who have seen young children in these environments, is that it helps create a sense of curiosity and fosters a love of finding out things about their world that stays with these kids for the rest of their lives. This sort of high-quality education and care delivered by highly trained professionals, whether they be university educated or whether they be diploma-trained staff, has a lasting impact on our young kids.

Tom McIntosh: Kids love it.

Ryan BATCHELOR: They do. They absolutely love it. The other thing we are seeing as part of this program with the government's initiative to create 50 new government funded and run early education centres, particularly with the plan to co-locate them on school sites, is that they are acknowledging some of the difficulties that many parents have in dealing with the morning juggle. By having a system of co-located centres on school sites we can assist some parents – not all – with what we all know is the dreaded double drop-off.

Matthew Bach: Nightmare.

Ryan BATCHELOR: It is an absolute nightmare, and I am sure all parents both within this chamber and beyond will have had the experience of those morning runs and those afternoon pick-ups trying to shuttle between centres to drop off the kids. The other reason I think that this is such an important reform, not just for Victoria but also for our nation, is because I think we can see at the Commonwealth level that hopefully now we have a partner in future reform.

Tom McIntosh: Finally.

Ryan BATCHELOR: Finally, after nearly a decade of disinterest, a decade of nothingness, we have got a Prime Minister and we have got a federal government that care about the early years. There are significant reforms to our childcare subsidy that are coming into effect from 1 July this year – initiated by the federal Labor government – that are going to deliver both fee relief to families and also support ongoing reform that we hope and trust will better support the significant reform agenda that we in Victoria are progressing. And for just once in the last decade we will finally have a federal government that is pulling in the same direction as the state government in relation to the early years. We have a federal partner to help us deliver and expand this agenda.

The other thing we can do – and as a Victorian I take a lot of pride in being better than every other state in the country – is that we can tell them exactly how well it is going here and invite them to join our reform agenda, invite them to walk, I would say alongside us, but probably a little bit behind us, as we seek to get all of our kids up, our three- and four-year-olds, into early learning, into kinder, into pre-prep. We can really and truly revolutionise the early years here in Australia, because I think our nation is on the cusp of a massive transformation in the early years. Victoria is leading that agenda, and we think that is a really important reform which should have our full backing.

I just want to end my contribution by making reference to one of the outstanding kinders that I visited recently in the Southern Metropolitan Region, the St Kilda and Balaclava community kindergarten, which offers kinder programs run by qualified, degree-educated staff, supported by diploma-educated workers, to three- and four-year-olds – a great centre on Nelson Street in Balaclava. It has been there and doing this work since 1911. Upon walking through the not very grand front gate, I might say, you enter into a kind of educational wonderland and you see the looks on the faces of the kids as they are learning, you hear the sounds of their play echoing off the play equipment and underneath the beautiful trees that sit in the garden of this magnificent facility and you can see the benefits that sustained investment over time in developing a high-quality learning environment for young people delivers. It was a pleasure that I had recently to visit this particular kindergarten, and I have visited many more in the various parts of the Southern Metropolitan Region in the last few months, talking about the benefits of the state Labor government's investment in the early years. The message we get from everyone we speak to, whether it be educators, whether it be parents or whether it be the great many researchers in this field, is that what this government is doing is both nation leading and the very best thing we can

be doing for our youngest Victorians, setting them up and setting our state up for the best and brightest future.

Melina BATH (Eastern Victoria) (15:13): I am going to enjoy putting the context of my Eastern Victoria Region to this motion moved by Ms Watt. I note the government has been enjoying pumping up its own tyres over the last little while in the house, but I would just like to remind the government that things are not all rosy in Eastern Victoria Region, and I will outline some of the statistics in the context in which I say that. We know that early childhood learning and education are absolutely crucial for later success in life, for progressing through school and for, potentially and hopefully, achieving year 12 status and going on to a great job, whether it be in the trades, whether it be in a profession or whether it be in small business or elsewhere. We need kinder centres and we need centre-based care; it is absolutely vital for our regions – that nurturing, that socialisation that comes out, that confidence that our kinder teachers and childcare workforce provide, that friendship and that guidance. The very key issues around early literacy and numeracy are something that I am very passionate about. You see, as you go through educating secondary school students, those that sometimes have not had the benefit of either a stable home life or of progressing well through kinder and through junior primary school; you see the way they struggle and their frustrations. And we know – there have been many, many tests and reports out that suggest – that we need that very important early start to life.

Matthew Bach: Yesterday.

Melina BATH: That is right. One of the things that we see is the importance too of a focus on regional Victoria. That is my patch, and that is where I am saying the government, after the Labor Party being in government for 20 out of 24 years, has dropped the ball. There is a very important statistical report that comes out frequently, and it is the Australian Early Development Census. It looks at quantifiable measures of children as they progress in developmental stages. It is AEDC for short, the Australian Early Development Census. It looks at early development in a couple of domains. It looks at physical health and assesses a child on physical health, social competence and emotional wellbeing or emotional challenges. Language and cognitive skills is another domain by which this organisation assesses children, and communication skills. It also then does a matrix to assess different regions – different LGAs – in terms of two or more of those vulnerabilities, so it looks at the whole child, it looks at the region and then it says, how are these kids benchmarked both across Victoria and then nationwide? And in the statistics, unfortunately, with the Andrews government and previous Labor governments being in for 20 out of 24 years, we see that the area of Bass Coast is both higher than the Victorian average and higher than nationwide in two or more of those vulnerabilities. It looks at East Gippsland, and we can see that East Gippsland is higher in two or more of those domain vulnerabilities. Children are not achieving a benchmark nationwide level as they should, and indeed unfortunately – and there is no joy in saying this – significantly higher than state and nationwide is the Latrobe Valley for its progression of children through those domains in early childhood development.

That is one. Another one that we see that ties very much into this lagging behind of just those few examples that I have provided is the Mitchell Institute from Victoria University only recently in a report in 2022 examined access to child care. So we are seeing kids that are lower than they should be in vulnerabilities – or higher vulnerabilities, lower than they should be in status – and then looking at the cross link to the matrix of childcare availability. The Mitchell Institute looked at 50,000 neighbourhoods across the country – so it is nationwide again – and it said:

Our analysis shows that when it comes to childcare access ...

and this is a quote from their report –

where you live matters.

And there are childcare deserts. The report, which is labelled ‘*Deserts and Oases: How Accessible is Childcare in Australia?*’, describes childcare deserts as an area where there are more than three children per childcare place – so supply is not meeting demand. Again, there is no joy in this but these

are the facts: Latrobe Valley is certainly part of that desert landscape, as is regional and remote Gippsland. The minister has promised – we have seen this promise, it is regularly spruiked – that we are going to have childcare centres, but the only one I can read in the list around the Latrobe Valley is one for Glengarry–Yallourn, and I will explain that in a minute, by 2028. So we have an issue, we have a problem, and I will go into a constituent example in a moment. Besides that, it is a funny point that the government would say ‘Glengarry–Yallourn’ – these are not sister towns. They are in fact probably a good 20 minutes away from each other, so the government needs to decide whether it is building one in Glengarry to the east or in Yallourn to the west. I am sure the people of those towns would actually argue that both are warranted, but we are in a desert.

One of the other things that you see very often – and it is a vicious cycle – is the lack of child care in these deserts. We can look to places like Omeo and Orbost. You will not get professional people coming into those remote regions – fantastic regions, beautiful places – because of the lack of a childcare centre or a place for their young child. They may be a professional. They may be trying to work at the hospital as a nurse or a registrar or a doctor, or as a dentist or whatever. They are looking for and needing those childcare places, but they are not there, so then there is that vicious cycle of lacking not only childcare centres and places for children but also lacking professionals to go there. There is no incentive for them to go there because they are so concerned about how they will keep up their job, their professionalism, if they cannot actually access child care. Quite often you want, potentially, couples to come in who could both be professional and supply that workforce. So this is an issue that confronts many Victorian towns, and councils are often scrambling in that regard as well.

The other point I will talk about, and my constituent raises it, is in relation to the association between childcare accessibility and female workforce. I will just share with you that a fantastic constituent – I have raised her story in the past in this place – put her child’s name down when it was born in Latrobe Valley at six different childcare places. She is still struggling, absolutely struggling, to get that child into care. It is now a year old, and she said that she could get in there in another couple of years. So this lady, a fantastic mum, wants to get back into the workforce, and funnily enough she is actually working in the childcare environment, wants to go and be part of the solution, but her child cannot find child care. That is a frustration I have raised with the minister, and the minister is still to come back to me with an example of how she is going to solve that problem.

The other thing that also frustrates many people in my electorate is the end of the fantastic 30 years of operation of Moe Central Child Care and Kindergarten Centre. It was privately owned, and they had the highest standards. Indeed over 30 years we have had children going to that centre, growing up and then sending their children to that centre. But my constituents Gary and Jan Mason were incredibly frustrated that they ended up not being able to staff it. They wanted to go to great lengths to provide staffing to keep that centre open. It had somewhere around 30 places, so that is not insignificant in Moe, providing a service. It was well respected, but they could not actually access the workforce. They wanted to have conversations with government, and they felt that government had shut – do not be surprised – the private sector out of good communications and feeding into the solution. They wanted to have those conversations and just felt that there was nowhere to go.

The other thing that they were most concerned about is that they had a high number of children in out-of-home care or in child protection. They were well respected, very stable, and they had a lot of children coming in over decades in out-of-home care and child protection. They were really bereft. Part of their sadness in relation to having to shut their doors last year was the fact that they were really concerned about where these vulnerable children would go. To my mind we are not seeing that all is rosy. I understand the government has put their position, but if all was honey and syrup I would not be reading about these childcare deserts in Gippsland, the lack of services and the fact that our fantastic young people have got vulnerabilities and are over-represented in those cases.

So with those few words, I will make my conclusion there. When the government talks about how fantastic the record is, after 20 years out of 24 there are some very vulnerable children out there,

women who want to get back into the workforce and a list as long as your arm of young people waiting for child care.

Jacinta ERMACORA (Western Victoria) (15:25): I am honoured to speak – in fact I am delighted to speak – on this motion from Sheena Watt. It is a wonderful motion recognising the important support the Andrews Labor government is providing for our future generations. The Andrews Labor government is committed to giving Australian families a fair go, and the government has announced a staggering \$9 billion commitment over 10 years to completely reform Victoria's early childhood sector, the most significant change to the early childhood sector in a generation. The Best Start, Best Life reform includes free kinder programs for all three- and four-year-old children at participating services from the start of 2023; four-year-old kindergarten, transitioning to pre-prep, over the next decade, becoming a universal 30-hour-a-week program, with play-based learning available to every four-year-old child in Victoria; and establishing 50 new government-owned and affordable early learning centres, which we have just heard about the need for from Ms Bath. These centres will be built in locations across Victoria that have the greatest need and will make it easier for families to access education and care, including, in my outer regional electorate, in Portland, where child care has been assessed as in high demand. These initiatives build on the three-year-old kinder reform program which is currently underway. The government is investing almost \$5 billion over the decade, delivering 15 hours per week of three-year-old kindergarten for every child by 2029.

The story of 'Why early childhood?' begins with the research evidence on social determinants of health: the higher your education, the higher your income; the higher your income, the healthier you are. Early learning is generally accepted to be from zero to five years of age. The human brain is fully formed at birth and is pretty much set for life after the first five to eight years. During the first five years the brain establishes wiring and connection pathways that are largely there for life. It is accepted now that if this wiring is not well established in those crucial first five years or indeed if it is damaged in some way, the chance to reach full potential is reduced.

Herein lies the evidence base behind the Andrews government's investment in early years education. These strategies have been established in the UK and other parts of Europe for decades, and we know that they produce results. There is no doubt that the price and cost-of-living issues are a barrier to early childhood development. Again the Andrews government is leading the nation in this investment in the future of the people of our state. The strategy includes a number of actions and investments and a transition over time.

Quite simply, the Labor government is making kindergarten free. Up to 140,000 children started three- and four-year-old kinder this year with no fees. This is estimated to have saved families up to \$2500 in fees per child per year. This program alone is a commitment of \$270 million, and I might say I remember the struggle to pay kinder fees when our children attended Warrnambool East kinder. Importantly, families will not be out of pocket and will not have to claim savings back. Free kinder will make sure that no child misses out and will save families thousands. This strategy addresses early childhood development, early learning, cost of living, the need for child care, access to employment and family convenience all in one policy. This is an example of sophisticated policy that solves multiple problems in one go, and it takes hard work, solid research and deep consultation to come up with and implement this kind of strategy.

I want to give a shout-out to early learning professionals in Western Victoria. Established in 2003, ECKA, the Eureka Community Kindergarten Association Inc., is a not-for-profit organisation approved by the Victorian Department of Education to deliver quality, accessible early years education. Jo Geurts is the CEO of ECKA and has provided me with a comment on the Andrews government's early childhood strategy. She said that ECKA is extremely supportive of free kinder – that it was fantastic during COVID and a complete surprise when it was reintroduced this year and beyond. She said it was so welcomed and well received by families – that she can only assume some families would have missed out due to the stress on household budgets, as kindergarten is not compulsory. She said it is great that kindergarten is accessible for all, especially as we know brain

development from birth to five to eight years old is so critically important and makes such a difference, and that the extra two years for children to spend at kinder is a significant chance for their future and will set children up well for their future years in school. And finally she went on to say that she could not wait to see the data come out in years to come and measure the positive change that this reform can deliver.

A further benefit of this strategy is that it creates new jobs. This is a sector that primarily employs women. Boosting opportunities for women in the workforce will also enable more working mums to return to work, providing a system that works for all. It is estimated that the current lack of access to child care has prevented some 26,000 women from engaging in the workforce.

Over the next decade four-year-old kindergarten will transition to pre-prep – a universal 30-hour-a-week program of play-based learning. It will be a high-quality program that gives four-year-old children greater opportunities to socialise and learn through play. Pre-prep will be rolled out progressively starting in regional Victoria. From 2025 pre-prep will commence in Ararat rural city, Hindmarsh shire, Northern Grampians shire and Yarriambiack shire – all of these sites are in the western region of Victoria – and other areas of regional Victoria. The rollout will also give early access in 2026 to Aboriginal children and vulnerable children no matter where they live. Disadvantaged children whose parents hold a Commonwealth concession card will also have access in 2028.

Child care has not been working for working families. The fees are high, and many families have to weigh up the financial cost of going back to work. I remember when I returned to work after my first child was born; after paying childcare fees, I had \$3 left per week.

A member: I had 6 cents.

Jacinta ERMACORA: Did you? It just proved I was trying to keep my career going, because I certainly was not earning anything.

In some communities there is a shortage of places. That is why the Labor government is establishing 50 government-owned affordable childcare centres in areas with the greatest unmet demand. And I really appreciate the comments made by Ms Bath earlier about regional unmet demand, and I can confirm that the Andrews Labor government is addressing that. Where possible the centres will be co-located with schools – to avoid the dreaded double drop-off – and alongside hospitals, TAFEs and major employers to create convenient access for working parents. And there is confirmation of a further seven sites at Creswick–Clunes, Golden Plains, Maryborough, Melton South, Portarlington, Portland and Rockbank–Mount Cottrell.

Making education fairer and accessible to all and starting it from a young age to give our children the very best start in life is a game changer. This will benefit families with the cost of living, will alleviate pressure, particularly for working mums, and will encourage jobs in what we certainly know is a growth sector. These reforms are being rolled out over the next decade to establish an early childhood sector which will lead the nation and bring us in line with best practice around the world, and I am very proud to support this motion.

Lee TARLAMIS (South-Eastern Metropolitan) (15:36): I move:

That debate on this motion be adjourned until the next day of meeting.

Motion agreed to and debate adjourned until next day of meeting.

Adjournment

Gayle TIERNEY (Western Victoria – Minister for Training and Skills, Minister for Higher Education, Minister for Agriculture) (15:36): I move:

That the house do now adjourn.

Gambling regulation

Trung LUU (Western Metropolitan) (15:36): (230) My adjournment is for the Minister for Casino, Gaming and Liquor Regulation. The action I seek today is for the minister to act decisively to prevent further harm to my constituents. I call for the government to restrict the advertising of sports gambling online and betting ads on social media. This would involve stronger regulation, limits on advertising during sporting events and more investment on education campaigns to raise awareness of the risks of problem gambling.

The government has taken steps to combat the rise of sports gambling across the digital space. The rise of sports gambling online and betting on social media is causing significant harm to my community, especially within my electorate of Western Metropolitan Region. This includes the City of Brimbank, which has the largest losses within the state. The impact of exposure to gambling advertising is not limited to adults only. Children and young people are also at risk. Children are exposed to ads during sporting events which are frequently watched by their families. Data shows the losses from wagering and sports betting in Victoria reached an estimated \$2.3 billion in 2020–21. That \$2.3 billion estimate is a 42 per cent increase from the previous financial year.

Sports gambling advertising on social media is also concerning, given it is difficult to monitor and control. Social media is designed to promote as it engages the user, and the effect is it is possibly most highly effective in targeting vulnerable individuals and adapting its algorithms around these people. The harm caused by sports gambling cannot be ignored. We have a responsibility to act in the best interests of the community and protect the vulnerable people. I implore that you take some serious consideration and take action to prevent harm to my community.

Southern Metropolitan Regional all-abilities sport

John BERGER (Southern Metropolitan) (15:38): (231) My adjournment tonight is for the Minister for Community Sport in the other place, Minister Spence. In making this adjournment I pay tribute to the work that community sports do in local communities right across Victoria.

I recently attended a dinner with Blind Sports and Recreation Victoria, where I had the chance to meet with some amazing individuals supporting our blind and low-vision communities in Australia. Meeting these people who have faced incredible challenges throughout their lives and continue to fight to overcome them was quite emotional.

The Victorian Blind Cricket Association has been around for over 100 years and provides an opportunity for the visually impaired to participate in community sports. Blind cricket was invented here in Melbourne in the 1920s and has been played ever since. Blind cricket is a sport which can be played by partially blind people as well as fully blind people, allowing engagement with the community in a way that would not be available otherwise.

Community is important for the visually impaired. To be able to participate in their community is to be able to develop skills which will carry them for the rest of their lives. I was pleased to accept the invitation for me and my staff to play blind cricket, and I am excited to take up that offer soon. The truth is that communities right across our state are built around these clubs. My own election night celebration was held at the Mount Waverley Reserve in my community of Southern Metro, the home of the mighty Waverley Blues footy club, the cricket club and the tennis club. I know, as a former president of a local football club, the Broadford Football Netball Club from 2005 to 2007 in the Heathcote and district football league in northern regional Victoria, how important these clubs are to the community. They bring the youth into sport, both male and female, and bring the community together as a whole to support the town, both financially and in a community sense. They provide an economic benefit when away sides visit the town and bring a sense of pride to a community.

So tonight I commend the work done by the Blind Sports and Recreation organisation. Their work is incredibly valuable and should be supported in every way possible. These people give up their time to

ensure people can play sports. These opportunities can be truly life changing for an individual. So my question for the Minister for Community Sport is: what work is the Andrews Labor government doing to provide an opportunity for community members to enjoy all-abilities sports in my community of Southern Metro?

Guardianship administration reform

Katherine COPSEY (Southern Metropolitan) (15:41): (232) My adjournment this evening is to the Attorney-General, and I ask the Attorney: will you reform the Victorian Civil and Administrative Tribunal Act 1998, clause 37, schedule 1, relating to guardianship? I speak to an issue tonight raised by a disability advocate whose experience has shown the need to reform VCAT laws on guardianship. Uli Cartwright is a young Victorian man who is a filmmaker and rights advocate who also happens to live with a disability. He spent five years making a documentary about his life, entitled *Life is a Battlefield*. It was shown on SBS on International Day of People with a Disability, but then VCAT contacted SBS because in his documentary Uli had talked about going to VCAT for a hearing and about his financial administration order, and the law as it stands says he cannot do that without VCAT's permission.

Uli had been under a guardianship when he was younger, and that guardianship has since been lifted. SBS took Uli's documentary off their website after they got the letter from VCAT. Even though he was no longer under a guardianship, Uli's life was still subject to clause 37 of the VCAT act, which says he cannot discuss his own matters, so Uli had to find a lawyer, go to VCAT, have a hearing and get a waiver in order to be able to discuss his own life. Uli makes the excellent point that, if Britney Spears had her guardianship order made in Victoria, nobody could have written about it or said anything without VCAT's permission.

Although the balance between protection versus equal freedoms for vulnerable groups can be complex, recent changes have navigated these difficulties. The Guardianship and Administration Act 2019 stopped talking about 'best interests' and started talking about the 'will and preferences' and the rights of people with disabilities to make their own decisions. Victoria's Office of the Public Advocate supports the call to reform the law, saying:

Ensuring people can freely tell their own stories will increase transparency and promote public trust in this essential safeguarding system.

What is clear is that there is currently an effective gag order on all people with disability regarding VCAT decisions about them, meaning that the balance is currently far too close towards an old-fashioned protect, shield and silence approach to people with disabilities than the contemporary rights-based approach required under the UN's Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities. It does leave Uli wondering who the law is there to protect. So I ask the Attorney-General: will you reform the VCAT act, clause 37, schedule 1, so that people with disabilities have the same rights to tell their own stories as the rest of the community? If so, when will that reform take place and how do you plan to incorporate the views of people with lived experience like Uli and others in this reform process?

Victorian students parliamentary program

Matthew BACH (North-Eastern Metropolitan) (15:44): (233) I am not entirely sure why I am doing this, but I am going to direct another adjournment matter to the Minister for Education. I have now asked 50 questions of her this year. She has responded to two, so I am not quite sure what my chances are here, but I am going to give it another go. The other day, last week, I attended the Victorian students parliamentary program, and it was fabulous. It is actually organised by the minister's own department. The minister was invited to open proceedings, but something came up very late. She was busy and she could not attend. That was sad. I was invited to close proceedings, and it was just fabulous engaging with so many wonderful young people.

They actually discussed vaping and regulations around vaping. It was an interesting result at the end of the day actually. There was a final vote on vaping and only 10 were in favour; 46 were against. The

question being: vapes should be regulated in the same way as alcohol and tobacco – 46 were against and only 10 were for. A number of the arguments, and I heard several of them, were just fascinating and fabulous. I did not necessarily agree with all of them. But in my closing remarks and after my closing remarks when we engaged in a question-and-answer session some of the young people asked me if I would pass on the result to the minister to seek to get a response from her. I endeavoured to do that, so that is my adjournment matter for the minister tonight.

I think it is so important, when we seek to make laws, to talk to people who have – as numerous members of the crossbench like to say regularly – lived experience. While I am on this matter, I was talking to a young lady last night who has lived experience in the care system – Nikita Martin-Cu – and she made extensive commentary in the *Age* newspaper today about the dreadful situation that so many care leavers find themselves in.

As a quick aside, Ms Copsey was just talking about a similar issue. I am saying Nikita's full name because she is very happy for us to use her full name. She is a 20-year-old. However, there are regulations in place in the state of Victoria which prevent care leavers from being named. That is something we should change, because so many care leavers want to get out there and advocate and engage like Nikita.

Now, it is interesting. I have been advocating this week not only to legislate Home Stretch, which is a fabulous program put in place by this government after much agitation from Ms Crozier when she was the relevant shadow minister, but then to go further. Let us go to 25. Let us provide support to 25. I only want – and care leavers only want – the government to act as a good parent would. I reckon my girls are still going to be with me when they are 25. Why don't we do what a good parent would? And it is interesting because the government says this is actually not going to cost us more, it is going to save us money. This is what Mr Pearson said. I know I was pooh-poohing some of the other things he said this week, but this is fabulous. He said this 600 days ago when he introduced the bill that I then introduced this week:

Evidence shows that supporting care leavers is not only the morally right thing to do –
hear, hear –

it makes good economic sense, with downstream savings ...

The government needs to find savings in the upcoming budget. They should legislate for support for care leavers to 25 as a savings measure.

Zero-emission buses

Sheena WATT (Northern Metropolitan) (15:47): (234) My adjournment matter is for the Minister for Industry and Innovation, Minister for Manufacturing Sovereignty, Minister for Employment and Minister for Public Transport, the Honourable Ben Carroll in the other place. I hear from and meet with many members of my community in the Northern Metropolitan Region who are passionate about climate action, passionate about reducing emissions and passionate about less pollution, which is why I was excited to hear that the Andrews Labor government has announced that from 2025 every new bus on Victoria's public transport network will have zero emissions. Electric buses – frankly, this is fantastic. And I was also pleased to note that the Andrews Labor government is already replacing the state's diesel buses with electric and hydrogen ones, with our \$20 million zero-emission bus trial. My question for Minister Carroll is to ask if he could update me on how commuters and residents in the Northern Metropolitan Region will benefit from the implementation of this policy, whether from job creation, reduced noise, reduced emissions or just making the planet a better place.

Victoria Police medical policy

David ETTERSHANK (Western Metropolitan) (15:48): (235) My adjournment is directed to the Minister for Police, the Honourable Anthony Carabines in the other place, and relates to Victoria Police's workplace testing for alcohol and other drugs. Bill, as we shall call him, is a young detective

with Victoria Police. He has been prescribed a full-spectrum CBD which has a very low THC content. In other words, there is very little in the way of psychoactive elements to it. Off his own bat, Bill had a full chemical analysis of the product done and supplied this to his manager. The analysis found the THC component to be less than half a percent – a negligible amount and less than the amount recommended for over-the-counter sales in Victoria. However, this tiny amount of THC was detected in a routine drug test, and that led to Bill being suspended. The police medical officer even recommended that Bill be stood down, even though the medical officer stated that he knew nothing about medicinal cannabis. It is highly unlikely that Bill would have been recommended for suspension if he had been prescribed benzodiazepines or opioids, so I ask the minister: what is the policy for officers who take those impairing medications?

School mental health programs

Georgie CROZIER (Southern Metropolitan) (15:49): (236) My adjournment matter this evening is for the attention of the Minister for Education, and it is in relation to mental health support in schools. Last week I went to Bentleigh Secondary College. It is one of the excellent local schools in Southern Metropolitan Region. I spoke with the principal and a number of the senior staff there, but I also spoke with two student leaders, Sophia and Michael, who gave me an insight into some of the issues that they are dealing with in that school. One of the things that they were very concerned about was mental health programs and support for mental health first aid. They gave me this wonderful book, *Teen Mental Health First Aid Australia for Senior Secondary Students*. In this book there are some great points around various issues that teens can experience – anxiety disorders, depressive disorders, eating disorders and a whole range of other things – and then it looks at how to deal with those both from a peer-to-peer point of view and also how teachers and others can support students.

What they spoke about also was the impact of lockdowns. We know that they had a detrimental impact on many, many people and in particular so many children. Here in Victoria we were the longest locked-down city in the world. I think we are seeing the impacts of those school lockdowns with falling literacy rates and these mental health issues within schools, and that is what these two very excellent student leaders were talking to me about. During the lockdowns, as you are aware, President, I was on the pandemic committee, and we had Shadow Pandemic Victoria, which was a group of women, mothers and parents who grew literally organically through social media, raising the concerns that they were seeing with their children – the mental health impacts that the kids were experiencing during the lockdowns. It really was a most dreadful time, and it is one of the reasons why I have called continuously for a royal commission – because of the impacts that have affected so many people. Nevertheless, through that committee, they told us of the mental health issues.

These young leaders at Bentleigh Secondary College are reiterating those concerns some years later. So the action I am seeking is for the minister to advocate for sufficient funding in next week's budget so that these programs can continue in schools so that children can have the support that they require, because this is an issue, sadly, that is not going away. It is an issue that is growing, and anything we can do to support these young people at a very vulnerable time we need to do.

Meadow Creek solar farm

Rikkie-Lee TYRRELL (Northern Victoria) (15:52): (237) My adjournment matter is directed to the Minister for Planning. The action I seek is for the minister to visit the Meadow Creek Agricultural Community Action Group. I recently accepted an open invitation from the Meadow Creek Agricultural Community Action Group in order to gain a deeper understanding of the complexities associated with the proposed Meadow Creek solar farm at Bobinawarra. I would like to extend the same invitation to the minister. This proposed solar farm of a projected 330 megawatts covering 1400 acres is to be one of the biggest in the country. This specific piece of land is described in the *Hume Regional Growth Plan* overlay as strategic, premium agricultural land. The Victorian department of agriculture states that only 4 per cent of land in Australia is suitable for cropping on a regular basis. While it is currently in use for grazing, it is in the high-rainfall fertile rich-soil region

that supports cultivation. With flows into both the King River and Hurdle Creek, it also comprises a large portion of the water supply catchment area for Wangaratta's domestic use. It is a key transit passage for native wildlife between the previously mentioned waterways and the Meadow Creek state forest. It is also a known grass and bushfire-prone area that is unsuitable for industrial projects. The Department of Energy, Environment and Climate Action's own *Solar Energy Facilities: Design and Development Guideline* document seems to support the area's lack of suitability for the purpose. With 96 per cent of Australia's landmass deemed non-arable, surely we can find more suitable locations for green energy technologies that do not threaten areas of national food security.

Eastern Victoria Region health infrastructure

Renee HEATH (Eastern Victoria) (15:54): (238) My adjournment is to the Treasurer, and the action that I seek is that in the upcoming budget he does not neglect the critical healthcare infrastructure needed in the Eastern Victoria Region, in particular the promises made to the West Gippsland Hospital and the Wonthaggi Hospital. The Australian Institute of Health and Welfare rural and remote health report shows that people in rural and remote areas are more likely to be diagnosed with low survival rates. According to the Pancare Foundation, evidence shows that the further from a metropolitan centre a cancer patient lives, the more likely they are to die within five years of diagnosis. Among the factors contributing to this are accessibility to and distance from services; limited availability of support services like accommodation and transport; limited availability of specialists; less availability of diagnostics and testing; less availability of treatment services; and suboptimal chemotherapy treatments. We know the danger of this, because a later diagnosis can result in later or no treatment. In my previous work in health, I spoke to numerous patients who described the immense stress that the cost of travel and accommodation to see specialists and have treatment placed on them.

The *Herald Sun* reported last week that more younger Australians are now being diagnosed with bowel cancer than ever before. It now kills more people aged 25 to 44 than any other type of cancer. Breast Cancer Network Australia has highlighted that in Australia on average 57 people are diagnosed with breast cancer per day, and sadly, research shows that more and more young people are getting diagnosed with breast cancer. This is why the Eastern Victoria Region needs better access to healthcare services and the infrastructure that supports them. Like my colleague in the other place Wayne Farnham, member for Narracan, said this week, the delivery of this hospital infrastructure will be a test of the government's integrity. The Labor government has promised it, and the Labor government must deliver it.

Koala management

Georgie PURCELL (Northern Victoria) (15:57): (239) My adjournment matter this evening is for the Minister for Environment. The updated *Victorian Koala Management Strategy* was recently released. It outlines the government's goals and actions for the conservation and management of Victoria's koalas for the next 10 years. Significant, increasing issues impact Victoria's koalas, including the climate emergency, major bushfires and planned burning, road strike and the establishment of commercial blue gum plantations and habitat destruction. The vision for the strategy is to ensure Victoria's koala populations and habitat are secure, healthy and sustainable in the long term. However, the government will also be undertaking koala management programs at high-density populations in accordance with the strategy and framework.

On 8 May it was revealed that American company Alcoa had killed 152 koalas suffering poor health on land adjacent to its Portland aluminium smelter in Victoria. They were killed under the supervision of so-called independent experts during a series of checks undertaken since 2019. Alcoa's assessments found the population's health is poor, and over the last two years 60 per cent of animals checked were euthanised due to overpopulation and exposure to fluoride emissions. This was authorised by the conservation regulator.

Alcoa has acknowledged the potential impacts from its operations of fluorosis on wildlife around the site – it is a disease that causes malnutrition as well as skeletal and dental abnormalities – and now

plans to encourage a further 120 koalas living in forest near the smelter to relocate through the removal of a 17-hectare plantation which currently supports them. While koalas in the ACT, New South Wales and Queensland are listed as endangered, the Victorian government maintains that Victorian koalas are secure. The government estimates that 50,000 koalas live in plantations, the majority of which are in south-west Victoria. Wildlife groups across Victoria advocate for koalas in blue gum plantations and rescue countless koalas from road strike each and every year.

The recently formed Koala Alliance Victoria is concerned the species is not abundant and that it faces pressure from habitat loss, leading to disease and starvation. Advocates have also reported that planned burns are scheduled or have occurred in known koala habitat with no koala spotters present. Victorians, koala advocates and an increasing international audience as well as me would like to know whether the minister will commit to meeting with Koala Alliance Victoria to hear their concerns regarding the *Victorian Koala Management Strategy* and koala protection throughout Victoria.

Population policy

Joe McCracken (Western Victoria) (15:59): (240) My adjournment matter is for the Minister for Planning, and it relates to population policy in Victoria. Almost 20 years ago the 2004 publication *Beyond Five Million: The Victorian Government's Population Policy* outlined a vision for population in Victoria until the year 2025. There was an aspirational target set for regional Victoria for the population to be 1.75 million. At this current point in time regional Victoria's population is 1.58 million. More recently the Victorian government prepared the Victoria in Future publication, which was released in 2019 and which outlined future population projections. On page 11 of that report it looks as though Victoria may reach a population of 1.75 million around the year 2030 or thereabouts. I am a big believer in regional Victoria, and I am a believer that regional Victoria should have the opportunity to share in the state's growth. According to that same report, by 2056 there are projected to be an extra 4.286 million people in Melbourne but in regional Victoria only 746,000 additional residents. Why is that the case? Should we be a state of cities or a city state?

My idea is that we should be a state of cities. So the action that I seek is this: will the government establish a multiparty population task force or similar body with the view of coming up with a suite of measures to increase regional and rural populations? I do not necessarily mean the larger regional centres like Ballarat, Bendigo and Geelong; they are growing okay. I am talking about the smaller centres – centres with populations below 50,000. There could be significant incentives around stamp duty and other taxation measures along with improvements to the provision of services and transport infrastructure to support population growth and ensure country areas have the same opportunity to take advantage of growth that city areas do. This would be a transformational policy that would have effects for literally years and years to come. So the action that I seek, as I said, is that I encourage the government to consider this as an option for thinking about population policy into the future.

Business of the house

Evan Mulholland (Northern Metropolitan) (16:02): (241) My adjournment is to the Leader of the Government in the Legislative Council, and the action I seek is for the Leader of the Government to provide an explanation about why the government's agenda is so thin that this place needs to knock off a freckle past 3:30. We are on the eve of a horror budget. There are a lot of bills to discuss. There are a lot of bills in this place that we could be discussing. We could be discussing the brilliant Children, Youth and Families Amendment (Home Stretch) Bill 2023, which Mr Bach put in this place. We could be discussing how to make sure Denyer never gets out of prison so the families do not have to go through the torment of going to the Adult Parole Board of Victoria every couple of years. We could be discussing the Children and Health Legislation Amendment (Statement of Recognition, Aboriginal Self-Determination and Other Matters) Bill 2023. We could be discussing that.

What I would like is an explanation as to why we are knocking off a freckle past 3:30. Maybe the minister can ask the AWU workers or AMWU workers whether they get a 6-hour day, because that is what we are subject to in this chamber. I think as mature, sensible, hardworking elected

representatives we should be putting ourselves forward as equals of the community and as equals of people in my electorate – the people that work up in Campbellfield and the people that work up in Broadmeadows that do long hours. I think it is not good enough – it is absolutely not good enough – that we knock off early.

I would love to go back to Mr Davis's bill on Operation Clara and operationalising those sensible recommendations from that IBAC report with very disturbing findings about corruption and soft corruption. I would love to be going back to that bill, and I do not think it is good enough for us as elected representatives just to get to knock off and go home early. That is just not good enough. We are sent here by the Victorian people to do a job, and the government seems to want to knock off early. They have got a horror budget next week. They might have other things to do, and maybe they just want to go off home and hide under the doona about the debt position that we are in and hide under the doona about paying \$10 million a day in interest just to serve the debt that they have racked up. I think it is absolutely not good enough.

There are a lot of bills we could get to in this place. You know, in the last sitting week we were here till about 10 or 10:30 pm. We were doing our job. We were looking at important legislation, and now we are not. Now we all get to knock off early and the Labor members get to knock off early. So the action I seek of the Leader of the Government is to come back and provide an explanation as to why we have to knock off early.

Greening Euroa

Wendy LOVELL (Northern Victoria) (16:05): (242) My adjournment matter is directed to the Minister for Water, and it concerns Strathbogie shire's innovative droughtproofing Greening Euroa project. The action that I seek is for the minister to provide funding of \$3.8 million to Strathbogie Shire Council to complete the council's Greening Euroa project, an innovative initiative that will droughtproof the township of Euroa. The Greening Euroa project will help address the impact of chronic water shortages in Euroa during the autumn and summer months. The project will see treated recycled water from Euroa's wastewater management facility piped to underground tanks located around town and used to irrigate the town's school oval, sporting field, parks and gardens to ensure they remain green throughout the year.

Stages 1 and 2 of the project have been completed, and \$3.8 million is required to complete the third and final stage of constructing the pipeline to convey the water. The Greening Euroa project steering committee has worked hard to make the project a reality, with representatives from sporting clubs, user groups and the oval committee of management working together to virtually droughtproof their town. In December 2022 a memorandum of understanding was signed between council, Goulburn Valley Water and the committee members detailing the responsibilities for each party around the project.

I first raised the merits of the Greening Euroa project to the then Minister for Water in October 2021, seeking a commitment to provide the funding that will complete the project. I raised the issue of funding for the Greening Euroa project with the current Minister for Water on 18 August 2022, urging her to support this transformational project and commit the required \$3.8 million in funding to construct the pipeline and complete the project. Fortunately, the minister was in the chamber throughout the adjournment debate and was able to provide a response to my contribution directly. In her response the minister cited Labor's integrated water management grants program, where up to \$1 million is awarded to successful applicants for capital works projects. The minister indicated that Strathbogie shire had been encouraged to apply for this funding but in February announced that nine other projects were the successful recipients of grants through the program and that the Greening Euroa project had missed out. The minister has acknowledged the merits of the Greening Euroa project and must now show her support by providing funding of \$3.8 million to Strathbogie shire to make the project a reality.

State Coal Mine

Melina BATH (Eastern Victoria) (16:08): (243) This afternoon I would like my adjournment matter to be directed to the Minister for Environment. It relates to public land, indeed some fantastic public land on Parks Vic land at Wonthaggi, and it is the Wonthaggi State Coal Mine. It is a lovely, tranquil place where the lawns, grounds and historical buildings are kept in incredibly good working order. It is a lovely place for people to visit. However, back at the start of COVID the mine tours were closed – they were shut down – and a particular apparatus called a drift car, in which people were safely transported down into the mine so mine tours could operate, was removed and taken to Bendigo for structural assessment. It has sat there ever since.

The Friends of the State Coal Mine, who number upwards of 250 dedicated volunteers, are desperate for it to come back and be reinstalled for the recommencement of these wonderful community tours. Parks Victoria have been most sympathetic, and I met some of the Parks Victoria officers there the other day when I visited. I thank them for their very good service of this area. They are very keen also to have this drift car returned and have the tours up and going to share the history, the culture and the pride that the people of Wonthaggi have in this particular historical setting. I understand that there is on the table a request to government in the vicinity of \$1.5 million to have the drift car return, to have it assessed and reinstalled and to get it ready again for tours so that they can operate – ensure that it meets compliance standards et cetera. So the action I seek in the budget from the minister is to provide in excess of \$1.5 million for this drift car to be returned and restored and for tours to go on well into the future.

Regional bank branches

Gaelle BROAD (Northern Victoria) (16:10): (244) My question is to the Minister for Regional Development. Across Northern Victoria bank branches and agencies are closing, and I call on the minister to provide support to regional towns to ensure that local banking services remain. This month the ANZ branch in Myrtleford closes. The Cobram branch closed yesterday, and the Robinvale branch will close tomorrow. The National Australia Bank is closing in Alexandra, and they continue to reduce operating hours in many regional towns. The Commonwealth Bank has already closed branches, and Bendigo Bank plans to shut 16 regional agencies, including Golden Square, Cohuna and Pyramid Hill. Data released last year shows 575 Australian towns that once had at least one of the big four banks now have no form of bank at all. Many would say this is a federal issue, but bank services are a local issue.

My concern is for the residents across Northern Victoria who rely on visiting a local branch. Banks are trying to force customers to do their banking online, and many regional Victorians are being left behind. Some older Victorians are not digitally savvy, and they are wary of online banking and hacking and find it difficult to travel long distances for banking. People with disabilities rely on the support of local bank staff. In a world full of scams it is not easy to know who to trust. For many, English is not their first language and they rely on local bank staff. In Cobram nearly 20 per cent of households are non-English-speaking families. I spoke with local mayors and neighbourhood house coordinators, and when banks close their doors they are left to pick up the pieces. Local businesses rely on banks, and carrying large amounts of cash is putting them at risk. I was speaking to a business in Golden Square, and if the local agency closes they will need to go to a different branch and wait for up to 40 minutes in already long queues.

The move to digital banking also fails to recognise that in many regional areas people are living with poor mobile coverage and internet connection. Bank closures have a significant impact on regional towns and communities. As people are forced to go out of town to do their banking they will take their shopping with them. When branches close local staff lose their jobs. A Senate inquiry into regional bank closures is underway. Banks cite a lack of foot traffic in the front door, but at a public hearing yesterday my Nationals colleague Matt Canavan pointed out that ambulances do not get much traffic in the door either but we do not shut the door and stop the service. I acknowledge my colleagues Jade

Benham and Anne Webster, who fought hard and as a result Westpac decided to keep their branch open in Robinvale. I hope other banks will follow suit and reconsider closing regional branches. The big four banks just released their half-yearly results: over \$16 billion profit. We need to maintain access to banking services in regional Victoria. Our local communities depend on it.

Voice to Parliament

David DAVIS (Southern Metropolitan) (16:13): (245) My matter is for the attention, I believe, of the Attorney-General, but it also will be a matter of interest to the Premier and the Treasurer. It concerns the Voice proposal to amend the Australian constitution. I will make some general comments in a moment, but although this is obviously a national constitutional amendment under section 128 of the Australian constitution, it will clearly have impacts and outcomes for Victoria. We are a federation.

It is clear that the Voice proposals have the capacity, and I would argue the certainty, to impact on Victoria's arrangements and Victoria's position. For instance, the words for the referendum allow the Voice to implement or to advocate and to impact on administrative and executive actions. I would argue that a whole series of matters with the states fall into this category. Some of it is legislated, but some of it is clearly administrative and executive action. For example, federal-state agreements on quite a wide front are agreed between federal government and state governments at a national level, and indeed in some cases at an individual state-federal level. Intergovernmental agreements fall into this category too – even a body like the grants commission has a role in dispersing GST money and other grants and taking matters into account. The Voice will be able to impact directly on the grants commission and have its say with the grants commission, which will affect directly the money that Victoria gets from the national pool. The GST pool and its carve-up will be subject to intervention by the Voice, for example, and I could go on. Victoria has been the great loser out of many of these federal financial arrangements. We are the only state that has always been a net contributor and never received more than we put into the national pool. That has always been a negative for us, and this will worsen it.

There are a series of questions to be asked here, and I say that this is something the state government should look at. What I am asking the Attorney-General to do is look at the legal advice that the state government has about the impact that the Voice amendment, if carried, will have on intergovernmental arrangements, the grants commission and all of the federal-state agreements across a wide front and to release that advice so that people are informed about the impact on Victoria. How will the representatives of the Voice be elected, and what will the weight of Victorians on that be? I would argue we are likely to be short-changed, as usual.

Yvonne Higgins

Nicholas McGOWAN (North-Eastern Metropolitan) (16:16): (246) On Tuesday night of this week I was honoured to join Basketball Victoria here in the city at their annual awards. It was the first time in four years that those awards had been held, because of COVID. It was an honour for me to present on behalf of Basketball Victoria an award to Yvonne Higgins. I presented that award, sadly because Yvonne passed away two years ago, to James Whelan. He is the president of the Maffra Amateur Basketball Association. The award Yvonne was awarded with that night was the Jack Terrill Medal. It is named in honour of the former Basketball Victoria Country (BVC) founding president and long-time Basketball Victoria Country council member the late Jack Terrill. The annual award recognises a significant and outstanding contribution by an individual to basketball in country Victoria.

As a teenager Yvonne, I am told, first started playing and refereeing basketball as a junior and then played as a senior back in the 1970s. She played representative basketball for many decades with Maffra, playing in the division 1 country championships and forming great rivalries, I am told, against the likes of the Lockett girls from Ballarat, Marree Canny from Wangaratta and Wendy Smith from Korumburra. Yvonne coached domestic and representative teams for Maffra, including generations of families, all of whom gained far more than just basketball skills from her tutelage. She was a long-time team manager of the Maffra Country Basketball League team. She was also an A-grade referee,

and for close to 50 years she refereed at various levels, from domestic to tournaments, Victorian Junior Basketball League (VJBL) Friday nights, CBL and all major BVC events, including many medal games. Yvonne also mentored countless junior referees from not only Maffra but the Gippsland area to become better officials for the game of basketball.

According to Mr Whelan, the Maffra Amateur Basketball Association president, perhaps Yvonne's greatest achievement was being the face and lifeblood of their association and president for 35 years from the age of 27 to her time of passing at 62, some two years ago, as I have said. In that time Yvonne oversaw two stadium expansions due to the growth of basketball in Maffra under her leadership, to the point where their association was the biggest in the Wellington shire. For those in this chamber that are not familiar, Maffra has a population of around 5000. The association has a membership of some 700. Yvonne was instrumental and forward thinking, supporting multiple Maffra teams entering the VJBL competition, which was unheard of for a country association of their size to do at that time and has been since. During her time Yvonne won three division 1 country championships, two of which saw the teams invited to Darwin for the under-14 Australian club championships. I invite the Premier to join with me in recognising and celebrating the life and contribution to basketball of Maffra's unstoppable Yvonne Higgins.

Responses

Gayle TIERNEY (Western Victoria – Minister for Training and Skills, Minister for Higher Education, Minister for Agriculture) (16:19): There were 20 adjournment matters this evening, and they will be dispatched to the relevant and appropriate ministers.

Questions without notice and ministers statements

Written responses

The PRESIDENT (16:20): Before I call adjournment, Dr Mansfield called a point of order regarding a question time supplementary question to Minister Tierney and whether it had been answered. I have reviewed *Hansard* and I feel that the question was not completely answered, so I would ask Ms Tierney if she could get a written response in two days, given the lateness of the day. The house stands adjourned.

House adjourned 4:20 pm.