



Hansard

LEGISLATIVE COUNCIL

60th Parliament

Thursday 23 March 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 23 March 2023

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

Petitions

Whitehorse City Council

Georgie CROZIER (Southern Metropolitan) presented, on behalf of Matthew Bach, a petition bearing 3815 signatures:

The Petition of certain citizens of the State of Victoria draws to the attention of the Legislative Council that the Whitehorse City Council, in a closed to public session, decided to cease the provision of aged care at home services after June 2023.

This action has been done in contravention of the transparency and community engagement provisions of the Local Government Act 2020. Furthermore, there is broad opposition to the substance of the decision within the Whitehorse City community.

The petitioners therefore request that the Legislative Council call on the Minister for Local Government to request the Whitehorse City Council to review its decision to cease aged care at home services, consult widely with the community and conduct deliberations at an open session of the Council in accordance with the provisions of the Local Government Act 2020.

Papers

Independent Broad-based Anti-corruption Commission

Letter from the Commissioner

David DAVIS (Southern Metropolitan) (09:35): I desire to move, by leave:

That the letter and its attachments dated 15 December 2022 relating to the Integrity and Oversight Committee from the former Commissioner of the Independent Broad-based Anti-corruption Commission the Honourable Robert Redlich AM KC to the former Presiding Officers be tabled.

Leave refused.

Papers

Tabled by Clerk:

Auditor-General – Understanding Victoria’s Contaminated Land, March 2023 (*Ordered to be published*).

Barwon South West Waste and Resource Recovery Group – Minister’s report of receipt of the 2021–22 Report.

Fire Rescue Victoria Act 1958 – Fire Services Implementation Monitor – Report, 2021–22, under section 142 of the Act.

Gippsland Waste and Resource Recovery Group – Minister’s report of receipt of the 2021–22 Report.

Goulburn Valley Waste and Resource Recovery Group – Minister’s report of receipt of the 2021–22 Report.

Grampians Central West Waste and Resource Recovery Group – Minister’s report of receipt of the 2021–22 Report.

Loddon Mallee Waste and Resource Recovery Group – Minister’s report of receipt of the 2021–22 Report.

North East Waste and Resource Recovery Group – Minister’s report of receipt of the 2021–22 Report.

Metropolitan Waste and Resource Recovery Group – Report, 2021–22.

Occupational Health and Safety Act 2004 – Workplace Incidents Consultative Committee – Report 2021–22, under section 126B of the Act.

Parliamentary Committees Act 2003 – Government response to the Integrity and Oversight Committee’s Report on the Inquiry into the education and prevention functions of Victoria’s integrity agencies.

State Sport Centres Trust – Report, 2021–22.

Subordinate Legislation Act 1994 – Documents under section 15 in respect of Statutory Rule No. 18.

Victorian Environmental Assessment Council Act 2001 – Notice of request to the Victorian Environmental Assessment Council for an Assessment of the values of the Immediate Protection Areas in the Central Highlands and East Gippsland, under section 26C of the Act.

Business of the house

Notices

Notices of motion given.

Adjournment

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

That the Council, at its rising, adjourn until Tuesday 2 May 2023.

Motion agreed to.

Committees

Parliamentary committees

Membership

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

That:

- (1) Ms Payne be a participating member of the Environment and Planning Standing Committee; and
- (2) Mr Ettershank be a participating member of the Legal and Social Issues Standing Committee.

David DAVIS (Southern Metropolitan) (09:40): I do want to say something. Obviously this is supported, but the issue I think is that the Integrity and Oversight Committee is a very important committee and the Legal and Social Issues Committee may well have to pick up work that it has not done. The Legal and Social Issues Committee – Mr Ettershank has gone on to that committee and it has been referred to there – is a committee that will have to take a bigger role in this Parliament if the Integrity and Oversight Committee is unable to do the work that is needed.

Harriet Shing interjected.

David DAVIS: Well, you are the one that has brought the Integrity and Oversight Committee into disrepute. You are the one who has actually behaved badly. You cut the feed.

Jaclyn Symes: On a point of order, President, Mr Davis is reflecting with unparliamentary language on a member of this chamber.

The PRESIDENT: Mr Davis, if you are going to make accusations against a sitting member, you need to do it in a substantive motion.

Harriet Shing: Further to the Leader of the Government's point of order, President, I would ask that the member withdraw.

The PRESIDENT: My interpretation would be that accusations were made against a sitting member, and if a member is offended personally by what someone has said, then the member called on to withdraw should withdraw.

David DAVIS: President, I withdraw that the member cut the feed.

The PRESIDENT: Try again, Mr Davis. Can you just withdraw without any other commentary, please.

David DAVIS: I withdraw.

Motion agreed to.

Members statements

Commonwealth Games

Harriet SHING (Eastern Victoria – Minister for Water, Minister for Regional Development, Minister for Commonwealth Games Legacy, Minister for Equality) (09:42): I rise today to talk about the Commonwealth Games and the impact that they will make throughout regional Victoria. It has been a delight and a pleasure to engage with regional communities, including in Gippsland as part of regional engagement forums that are talking about the opportunities and the processes associated with delivering road racing, rugby sevens, badminton and shooting to Gippsland in 2026. We have seen a range of stakeholder opportunities for input into the way that the games will be planned and the way that a range of infrastructure and facilities investments will be made. The commitment and determination of local communities and local governments to make sure that local jobs, skills and training opportunities, volunteer and social enterprise opportunities and indeed opportunities to showcase our beautiful region are front and centre.

With less than three years to go, we have released a goods and services procurement pipeline, and that is something which will deliver around 1200 opportunities for local companies to win contracts. This is about making sure that when we bring Victoria 2026 to life it is done with a call-out involving hundreds of millions of dollars, with everything from sporting equipment to medals, transport, security, catering, temporary infrastructure, marketing, telecommunications, IT, education services and so much more. Please do apply if you are interested in being part of this process.

Integrity and Oversight Committee

David DAVIS (Southern Metropolitan) (09:43): Today we have seen again this government deny the opportunity for the community to have the access that it is entitled to in full, in clear, by the tabling of a document in the chamber – the extraordinary revelations in the IBAC letter, the letter from Robert Redlich, in the last period of his time as Commissioner. I want to put on record that I think he by and large did an extremely good job. The truth of the matter is that the Integrity and Oversight Committee has not covered itself in glory. The truth of the matter is that committee has blocked access through the cutting of the feed. The committee has not allowed Mr Redlich to say many of the things that he ought to have been able to say. I have confidence that Mr Redlich knows the law. He is actually an eminent jurist, as we well know – all of us in this chamber – and could carefully and properly step through the challenges of dealing with live investigations and could deal with the challenges of making commentary at a parliamentary committee. It is extraordinary that the members of that committee were not able to hear all that they needed to hear from him and nor could the community hear all that they needed to hear. The IBAC letter dated 15 December should be in the public domain in a proper and formal way. I think it is extraordinary that the Minister for Water has tried to deny that.

Harriet Shing: On a point of order, President, Mr Davis has yet again reflected on a member of this chamber. Further to your ruling seeking that he withdraw his previous statements, I would ask that he withdraw the last sentence of his members statement.

The PRESIDENT: Mr Davis, a sitting member has taken offence at something you have directed at her. Can you please withdraw.

David DAVIS: On a point of order, President, we seem to be setting a new standard here –

Members interjecting.

David DAVIS: I am just seeking some assistance on the ruling. We seem to be setting a new standard where any offence taken by a member – it needs to be objectively offensive, it needs to be

clearly offensive. What I said was in no way objectively offensive, and if the member takes it so, that is just extraordinary.

The PRESIDENT: Mr Davis, it is not up to you to determine whether the member has taken offence. It is up to the member it was directed at who has taken offence. There are rulings that if a member has taken a point of order and asked a member to withdraw because they felt what was directed was offensive, the member that has made the statement or called the person a word or made an accusation needs to withdraw. I would ask you to withdraw, please.

David DAVIS: I withdraw.

On a point of order, President, I think we need to think carefully about this in the longer haul, and I would ask you to talk to the clerks at some length about this, because it cannot be that a member who has the slightest offence –

A member interjected.

David DAVIS: No, no, I am deadly serious about this. It cannot be that the distribution of Minties in the chamber offends someone and they must –

Harriet Shing: I didn't do it.

David DAVIS: Well, whoever did. I am just saying that the most trivial thing could cause someone the most minor of offence. There is a threshold on this, and it is about objective offence.

The PRESIDENT: In response to your point of order, Mr Davis, I think a lot of things can be explored in the Procedure Committee, but I am going on previous rulings that this has been the standard that has been set before. But I am happy to have conversations, and as always I am not going to pretend that I am the fount of all knowledge of the standing orders or the procedures or previous rulings. I am always open to commentary, emails and discussion at any time when someone thinks that my ruling might not be completely on point.

TPI Victoria

Jeff BOURMAN (Eastern Victoria) (09:48): TPI Victoria has been serving the veteran community for nearly 100 years, having been established in 1926. 'TPI' means totally and permanently incapacitated as a result of military service. This is not just limited to physical injuries sustained during service but extends to other injuries as well. The experience that someone has while serving can result in injuries that are not apparent to the outside observer and also are not apparent to those that have those injuries. I am of course talking about PTSD or shell shock or any of the other names given to the psychological trauma caused by those experiences. TPI Victoria provides advocacy, welfare and connection to those veterans who need or want it.

These are more than just words to those that need that help from TPI Victoria; they are a conduit to that help, help that is usually desperately needed. I have noticed a tendency to associate these types of organisations with World War I and World War II veterans, but we have a new cohort of returned service men and women that will need help in time, being Gulf War, Afghanistan and peacekeeping veterans. We as a state Parliament do not send our people to war, but we as a state Parliament have a responsibility to help our returned veterans because they are part of our community.

Social housing

Ryan BATCHELOR (Southern Metropolitan) (09:50): The Andrews Labor government is building hundreds of new homes right across the Southern Metropolitan Region as part of the Big Housing Build, and last week I visited a brand new social housing development in Balaclava. A partnership between local, state and federal governments has transformed a car park next to Balaclava station into 46 social housing apartments: one-, two- and three-bedroom units, with specialist disability

accommodation as well, housing up to 129 residents next to the train and the tram and close to shops and services. Residents are due to move in next month.

While on site I spoke to Brad, who has been living in a rooming house for 21 years and will soon get a unit of his own, and the smile on his face said it all. These units are state-of-the-art and brand new – the benefit you get from building from the ground up. They are built to livable and accessible design standards, with wide doors and zero-level entry to all the units and balconies, and they have an 8-star energy efficiency rating.

Sadly, this is where some, like the Liberals, wanted us to have a car park instead of new social housing. That shows you their priorities. It is also disappointing that others, including the Greens, have been campaigning against new social housing developments across Melbourne. The kinds of benefits we see here you can only get by building from the ground up to modern and accessible standards. These new homes in Balaclava are seriously impressive, and we look forward to seeing more of this sort of social housing right across Melbourne under this government.

Medicinal cannabis

Rachel PAYNE (South-Eastern Metropolitan) (09:52): Last week Melbourne hosted Australia's largest medical cannabis conference, ACannabis, attended by over 500 delegates. We heard from medical professionals, researchers, manufacturers, producers, cultivators, regulators and patients. While the medicinal cannabis industry has only been in existence for six years, it is growing swiftly. The expected growth of the industry in Australia is a whopping 35 per cent.

Driving laws were the biggest barrier raised again and again at the conference. The research presented shows that the laws do not reflect the reality of medicinal cannabis medicine and how it is used. In fact new research from the Lambert Initiative found that if taken orally, impairment could be measured for up to 8 hours after use. Biomarkers such as blood concentration were found not to be useful in detecting impairment. It was exciting to hear about the new research and the growing recognition of medicinal cannabis as medicine.

Terry Norris

Lee TARLAMIS (South-Eastern Metropolitan) (09:53): It is with sadness that I rise to acknowledge the passing of Terry Norris. Terry was a beloved stage and screen actor and a member of the Victorian Parliament, serving as the member for Noble Park from 1982 to 1985 and as the member for Dandenong from 1985 to 1992 in the other place. He was a kind and decent man, a man of great integrity and compassion and a mentor to many. He cared deeply about and fought fiercely for the people he represented, ensuring they received the support they needed and deserved.

Terry was a talented actor with a successful acting career before venturing into politics. Some would say it prepared him well for Spring Street. Truth be told, Terry could have achieved more in his acting profession, but he chose instead to serve the people and pursue his beliefs and a better and more just world. Terry did it all, including a stint on the theatre circuit in the UK and dabbling in playwriting. But it was his television work that made him a household name across the country. It was *Bellbird* that launched Terry into the homes of Australians as the local town motor mechanic Joe Turner. But for a certain generation Terry will forever be known as Senior Sergeant Eric O'Reilly of the Riverside police station in *Cop Shop*. *Cop Shop* was a huge hit back in the late 1970s and early 80s. In my case I caught the reruns after the show had finished up, which I quite enjoyed. I watched quite a few of them. In today's digital world it is difficult to state how big the show was, but when it did air, it aired twice weekly, and people were glued to their TVs.

His successful acting career resumed and thrived post politics, rarely seeing Terry out of work. I know that many would have their own memories of and favourites from the various characters he played and the various roles. He was acting until very recently. He was in the *Jack Irish* series most recently.

He was always appearing in many different shows. I would often not know that he was going to be in one – I would be just watching TV, and I would go, ‘Oh, there’s Terry. I didn’t know he was in that.’

I was fortunate to have met Terry on many occasions. Like many others, I was a beneficiary of his wisdom and insights. He was always happy for a chat, which usually included a run-down on party matters and what was happening in the local community. I know that he would be very proud of all the things that are occurring in Noble Park at the moment, having represented that area. A former member for Narre Warren South Dale Wilson, who worked for him for the 10 years that he was in Parliament, used to regale us with many wonderful stories from his time working for Terry.

Terry was a genuine, lovely man who will be sadly missed by the Labor movement and all who knew him. My thoughts are with his family and friends, and we will remember his lifetime of contributions. Vale, Terry Norris.

Climate change

Aiv PUGLIELLI (North-Eastern Metropolitan) (09:56): It has been a big week. We have covered a lot of ground. We have heard about TikTok. We have heard about Minties. We have seen parties come together to call out hate where it resides and tackle it head-on – all things I would be keen to hear raised in this place a little more often.

But as a young person in this building it would be remiss of me to not draw attention to some other news that we have seen this week, and that is the latest report from the United Nations Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change. The report notes that our children will never experience childhoods as cool as ours, and my childhood was not that cool to begin with. I say this because the report had this graphic that shows how the average global temperature has changed across generations. Pair this with a world where it is more expensive, more difficult to simply get a roof over your head and more expensive to get an education, where your wage does not keep up with rising inflation. Young people are expected to plan for a future which is increasingly unstable and increasingly uncertain – it is cooked.

But what the IPPC report notes overall to give us some hope is that the degree of warmth and the subsequent health of the environment, wildlife and ourselves can still be altered depending on the policies and actions taken today. The window to act is almost closed. On behalf of some of my very keen young constituents, for example on TikTok, I urge us all to act as if our lives depended on it – because they do.

Business of the house

Notices of motion and orders of the day

Lee TARLAMIS (South-Eastern Metropolitan) (09:58): I move:

That the consideration of order of the day 1, for the resumption of debate on the motion for the address to the Governor in reply to the Governor’s speech, and notices of motion 2 to 36, government business, be postponed until later this day.

Motion agreed to.

Bills

Heritage Amendment Bill 2023

Second reading

Debate resumed on motion of Lizzie Blandthorn:

That the bill be now read a second time.

Tom McINTOSH (Eastern Victoria) (09:58): I rise delighted to speak to the Heritage Amendment Bill 2023. I am excited about it because when talking about heritage and preserving so much of our

history and culture and everything that makes Victoria great, this bill is modernising the practices by which we can do so, by which we can preserve it.

Our heritage makes us all that we are today. It is a combination of so many things – places, objects, buildings, people, it all feeds into it – and I believe that here in Victoria we have the best culture in the world. One of the big contributors to that is our multicultural culture, if I can say that. It is that blending of food, faith, language, fashion and cultures. It is the melting pot of Victoria that makes it such an amazing place to live. I was fortunate when I was younger: I would work hard, I would do overtime, I would live away, and then I would travel around the world and see so many different places. And I am so fortunate that I am able to call Victoria home. It is also why I am so proud to be here in the Victorian Parliament, and I will put on the record that I truly believe Victoria is the best place in the world in which to live. I think much of the world looks at Australia and thinks how great our culture is – that we have a very fair way of life – but I think the best of it comes from Victoria. Much of the best of what has fed into the culture of Australia and so much that we have has come from Victoria.

It would be remiss of me not to mention some of the things that feed into the culture that we all enjoy. Of course there is the AFL, Victoria being the birthplace and the home of Aussie Rules footy, and for me growing up Dean Jones was quintessentially Victorian. But there are other things. Obviously we have our arts. The comedy festival is fantastic, and we have our graffiti and our art, so there are many, many things that feed into it.

Underpinning all that is tens of thousands of years of history of our First Nations people. I spoke recently in this place about some of the heritage sites of our First Nations people – eel farming in the west and sacred places of meeting – and of course care for country, which we are adopting more and more today. At every citizenship ceremony or every welcome to country I go to I am blown away when elders wholeheartedly welcome all of us onto the lands on which we gather and basically just ask that people respect each other, respect the environment and respect the animals. I think it is such a beautiful foundation for our culture – after the last 200 or 300 years, which have been horrendous, quite frankly, for our First Nations people – and that welcome when new citizens come to Australia is fantastic and it sets the tone. The waves of migrants we have had have all brought their various cultures, and over the last few hundred years that has sped up more and more, which has just added to what we have here.

My family arrived in around about 1854. It was an interesting year, because that was the year of the Eureka rebellion, which my great-great-great-grandfather happened to be at. He was arrested at the time, but I and my family are very proud that he was there, because that has led on to much of our culture and is a fundamental point in the heritage of Victoria and Australia and was important to workers around the world. What came out of those disputes has laid the framework for things like the 8-hour day and pay and conditions that we have all enjoyed. I spoke in here yesterday about equality, and it is those underpinnings of our working conditions that allow for equality, allow for home ownership and allow for family.

As I said, we are very proud that the family were in Ballarat and on the goldfields at that time. I spoke a little bit about this at the Gippsland Trades and Labour Council in Morwell last week at their Labour Day dinner, which was held a few days later. It happened to be St Paddy's day too, which was pretty good, but it also happened to be the evening that Collingwood were playing Geelong. The TV happened to be on the side wall, so I was a little bit distracted throughout the speech as Collingwood gave Geelong a real thumping. But Collingwood Football Club, much like the Labor Party and the labour movement, are an absolute core fundamental to me and my family because my great-grandfather, who was also Tom, was on the committee of the Collingwood Football Club. I know there are a few Collingwood supporters in here, so I have actually brought a little prop, which I might be able to distribute around later on. My great-grandfather was on the committee, and this is his 1909 Collingwood membership ticket. He did not have to have it stamped. I note that Carlton have something similar on their website from 1935, so they were only about three decades behind where we were then.

The reason why I really want to raise the Collingwood Football Club is because Victoria Park, which I remember going to as a kid, definitely did not have the amenities of today's AFL football ovals. When going to the toilets and whatnot and for people trying to get to the bar it was quite a different experience. But it was vibrant and really captured the working-class spirit that came out of what back in those days were the Collingwoods, and I will even give Richmond a small shout-out, growing up on the banks of the Yarra: big families, small houses. But, by gosh, when they could get out to the footy, they were there and they were there in huge numbers.

I have had the privilege and the pride of being able to take my boys to Victoria Park. Fortunately it has been preserved, and that is because it is on the Victorian Heritage Register. That is the beauty and that is what we are talking about. It is there, the stands are still intact, they are being used – I have had the privilege of playing in the pub footy league which uses Victoria Park on days when is not being used. This state government has also invested money to ensure that our female footballers, who are just going from strength to strength, are able to use the facility. Our VFL men's teams use it and our umpires train there. The value of acknowledging and respecting heritage is that you capture something that is quintessential to what it is to be Victorian – and indeed Australian – but you are preserving it for future generations to enjoy and to use. Again, I come back to the point: I could not be prouder of the fact that this bill is modernising our ability to preserve, protect, enjoy, respect, all these things. I could go on about Collingwood for a lot longer but I have promised people I would not, so we will move on to some other items.

These amendments are intended to allow for the publication and inspection requirements to be met in a more modern and flexible manner which would minimise disruption. The amendments also allow the Heritage Council to conduct its hearings online via audio or audiovisual link, and I think for any of us who are engaging in a public way, these modern facilities engage people, they allow more people to get involved and it does not matter what people's abilities are – age or whatever it might be, not being able to get out on a dark night or be able to get somewhere – they get to be involved. These changes increase opportunities for the public to participate in the heritage process through these more accessible methods of communication. The changes are largely modernising existing processes and enhancing public access to statutory documents. It is vitally important that we protect heritage. To do that we need to make sure we are using the most up-to-date processes, and that is why I am so excited about this bill.

In Eastern Victoria, Heritage Victoria is investing in several important projects to protect and conserve Victoria's heritage. These include the Omeo courthouse; the church at the Lake Tyers Aboriginal Trust; the Hinnomunjie Bridge; a social history of the Latrobe Valley – I have spent a bit of time in the historical society there, it is fantastic the things that you learn; Mount Martha House; Manyung recreation camp; the Traralgon courthouse; the no. 21 dredger used in the Morwell open-cut mine, which is a massive machine; and the Cape Schanck lighthouse station and McRae lighthouse. Just from this list you can see the immense diversity of our history, from social to engineering to justice, religion, war and maritime, all such important parts of our state's history to remember.

At the moment I am engaged with a group working to restore an old pub in Eastern Victoria, the Rosedale Hotel. You have got plumbers, you have got tradies – three guys have come together who have lived and worked in the town all their lives, been at the footy club, and what I love is that they are bringing back to life the facade of a beautiful old pub. When you drive through a town like Rosedale you want to see the pub alive, with the beautiful stables out the back. We get the facade updated – we preserve and maintain that heritage, that history – but then inside gets used, it becomes activated. The refurbishment and renovations allow, particularly in a town like Rosedale where both pubs are not currently open, people to come together. The owners have told me – they are very genuine about this; they have all still got their day jobs – it is not about making as much money out of it as they can. It is about bringing community in, making sure that the footy clubs, the netball teams, whatever sports groups, different community groups, can come in there and be together. And I think that is really, really important.

The pub is heritage listed. Private investors buy these heritage-listed places with their own money and do them up, resulting in multiple benefits for the community, as I have just touched on. But it is not always easy to comply with the heritage requirements, and Cam and I have talked about this, so a huge shout-out to the group and the work they are doing. Of course the needs in opening a business have to be balanced with the importance of protection and the importance of expertise in ensuring history is protected in the best way.

Also, a shout-out to all those people working to protect our history from a planning perspective. There is clearly a balance between protecting the past and building the future, and this bill works towards making this process simpler. The amendments in this bill do address the balance, and they increase certainty for owners. Owners will be notified of decisions sooner and within set time frames. Owners will be able to request minor amendments to a permit without a fee. Owners will be notified if a permit exemption is being revoked or amended. Where a place has multiple owners, only affected owners will need to be involved – for example, in an apartment complex, only the owner of an apartment undergoing works or activities will need to give permission for a permit application, rather than all owners in the complex. Owners of unoccupied residences can give consent for entry or receive two days notice of entry rather than being served a search warrant. References to owners have been updated to include government asset managers, so that both are notified in the same way. The bill allows for applications to exclude a place or object from the Victorian Heritage Register to provide a more effective way of establishing the heritage significance of a place or object in the early stages of major infrastructure projects.

As you can see – and I could go on and on about the other things this bill does – it is very clear I think to all Victorians who appreciate everything that Victoria is: quintessentially what it is, the essence of what it is. I mean, this building in itself has an incredible history, and I know some in the chamber are absolutely down to the day of the date and the year. I am not that across the detail, but by gosh I appreciate and value it every time I am here. I grew up in Ballarat, and I had the privilege of working on Nazareth House and working in Sovereign Hill. I am not sure Sovereign Hill is even heritage listed, but God it feels like it is. What the buildings – and I am only talking about buildings; I am not even really going into objects and other places of gathering so much today – provide to this state is amazing. It is a reminder of the wealth that did flow from the goldfields in incredible times. Ballarat Trades Hall, I believe, may have been the first trades hall in the world; maybe it was the Victorian Trades Hall on Lygon Street – I am not sure. Both those buildings stand as a reminder of the wealth that was generated – that there was a fair distribution of that wealth. We see that because that wealth permeated around our suburbs and still makes up many of the beautiful buildings that we see today that we are preserving and enjoying. I am proud to have spoken on this bill.

John BERGER (Southern Metropolitan) (10:13): Today I rise to speak about the Heritage Amendment Bill 2023. When I think of the word ‘heritage’, to me it means something that is old and something that needs to be protected and needs to be preserved. If I take myself back to my family farm up at Yea, we had an old homestead that was built in the late 1900s. Invariably as buildings get older, you need to do a few adjustments to things. It had a 9-foot tongue-and-groove verandah that ran all the way around the homestead, and it needed to be repaired. At the time when we were repairing it, there were some old newspapers that had been preserved there for some years. We were able to go back and look at a time when that first verandah was put down, and we were able to relate to the things of the day that were going on. We found it quite instructive, so once we finished our job of restoring the verandah, we put the current day newspapers down. Probably we will be coming up to a time in the next decade or so where these things will need to be replaced, and the people that will pull up that verandah will understand the historical value that it had – whatever the news of the day was as we went along. I just wanted to mention that because I think it is important that heritage has these links to people over time, and they should be protected.

This bill affects the portfolio of planning, which is the responsibility of a minister in the other place, Minister Kilkeny. I make this important sidenote to congratulate Minister Kilkeny. In the last sitting

week of Parliament, on the Wednesday, Ms Kilkenny rose to speak in her first question time in Parliament in her capacity as the Minister for Planning.

This bill, as I will get to in the bulk of my speech, is widely supported. The amendments proposed in the bill are widely supported by all the relevant stakeholders. Our government has done its due diligence, and I commend the work done to craft these amendments. The bill's purpose is to make operational improvements to the Heritage Act 2017. Key heritage as well as community groups have been consulted. These include the National Trust, the Royal Historical Society of Victoria, the International Council on Monuments and Sites and the Heritage Council of Victoria. Stakeholders have made it quite clear – consulted parties support the amendments and safeguards, which ensure cultural heritage is not undermined.

I want to make reference to the tabling of the statement of compatibility and the second-reading speech. In accordance with section 28 of the Charter of Human Rights and Responsibilities Act 2006, the Heritage Amendment Bill 2023 is compatible, and on the second-reading speech, the bill will require searchable versions of the Victorian Heritage Register and Heritage Inventory to be made available online. I will get to the substance of the bill shortly, but I want to associate myself with these remarks.

The bill will introduce several practical changes. They include that the Heritage Council will be able to call on the funds set aside as a security measure. For instance, this could be a bank guarantee to ensure compliance with permit conditions or could ensure that when other places have multiple owners, only those directly affected by the act need to be involved. Importantly, it prevents someone from being guilty of an offence if they are acting in accordance with a notice or order served on them.

So what is the bill actually trying to accomplish? It responds to problems that became evident during the pandemic. Clearly when people were in lockdown it was unreasonable to demand access to documents in person; therefore the bill provides for online access to heritage hearing documents and notices. It also removes the requirement that during a state of disaster documents need to be provided in person – something quite reasonable, if you ask me. But ensuring transparency, it always allows for online access of these important documents and public notices, and in addition it clarifies that the Heritage Council can conduct a hearing online at any time.

These amendments also create an avenue for proactive assessment. I think of the tragedy of the Corkman hotel in Carlton. The Minister for Planning at the time, recently retired member in the other place Minister Wynne, said that the government would review penalties after the Corkman pub was demolished. Indeed Minister Wynne went on to say, in quite colourful language, that:

... these cowboy developers thumbed their noses at Victoria's building and planning laws –

and –

... wilful and illegal destruction of our heritage will not be tolerated.

And I agree; it must not be.

Heritage is important, so proactive assessment of the significance of the affected places and objects will be completed by Heritage Victoria and the Heritage Council long before a project begins. In the early stages of major infrastructure projects, again, this makes sense. The bill makes operational improvements that resolve issues that have arisen since the original piece of legislation, namely the Heritage Act 2017, came into force.

Now I have said what the bill does, I want to let everyone know what the bill does not do. I know it is important to outline the scope of the bill for everyone's sake. The bill only deals with significant state heritage. Local heritage is managed by local government, plain and simple. It is managed in accordance with the Planning and Environment Act 1987. Local heritage is protected by this – namely, it is protected by the heritage overlays included in local planning schemes.

I had the opportunity to visit the South Melbourne town hall, and it had some structural issues that needed to be dealt with after a water pipe burst and the water collapsed the roof internally.

When we were in there we were able to observe some of the intricate work that was done by a lot of the craftsmen many years ago. To replicate the work that was done all those years ago was quite a task for the current-day builders. The carpenters and plumbers were able to replicate that work to great effect. It is quite interesting: when you see these town halls from the outside you do not have an understanding of what they look like on the inside. I do not think you give them a second thought as you drive past them, but having the opportunity to go through the building itself you just look at the size and scope of the building that was put together many years ago. It is really important that we protect and ensure that the buildings maintain their livability and the opportunity for the public at large to enjoy them. I wait with bated breath to see the conclusion of all that work that is being done. I think it is going to take some years for it to come to its full completion, but the work that has been done by the tradesmen and all those involved is doing everything to make sure that these things last another 100 years.

I note the contributions from the second-reading debate in the Legislative Assembly in the last sitting week, and it is always a pleasure when the house can work together in a bipartisan fashion. I would like to draw reference to the member for Gippsland East in the other place Mr Bull, who noted that the bill was uncontroversial. I would also like to associate myself with the remarks of the member for South Barwon in the other place Mr Cheeseman. Mr Cheeseman spoke about his time on the City of Ballarat council and the importance of preserving our heritage. The member for Ovens Valley in the other place Mr McCurdy said:

The work the Heritage Council and Heritage Victoria do is vital in ensuring our history is preserved for future generations.

Finally, in referencing other members' contributions to this important bill in the other place, the member for Laverton, my friend in the other place Ms Connolly, talked about the importance of preserving buildings for history and the legacy of the labour history.

This reminds me of the importance of the Curtin Hotel, a place near and dear to many in this place and indeed those in the wider union movement. Just across the road is the workers parliament, and I know the importance and significance of having its heritage preserved. Given all of the works that were undertaken there earlier on and some of the things that were discovered once the facades internally were pulled down, it is just astounding that we were able to preserve them for all time. There are number of times I have attended meetings in the main hall room there, and it is magnificent to see that they are still there for all of our union delegates and members to see.

I would like to talk about the bill in detail now. In division 1 it outlines that the principal act contains several notification and publication requirements. The amendments proposed to the division allow the Heritage Council and executive director to be compliant with the law but through the new means of online publication. Basically these amendments modernise the principal act. They allow its requirements to be met in a more modern manner and minimise the fear of breaching the law as could happen if there were disruptions like we recently saw in the pandemic.

I would also like to talk to division 2 and the amendments in relation to hearings conducted by the Heritage Council. This is similar in purpose to the previously outlined purpose of the bill. Part 12 of the principal act governs the conduct of Heritage Council hearings. Division 2 of part 2 of the bill makes a few amendments to part 12 to allow the Heritage Council to conduct hearings electronically. Let us be real, basically half or more of our meetings these days are held electronically. Why shouldn't these meetings take place electronically? It is a no-brainer; the purpose is clear. The bill allows the Heritage Council to have greater flexibility in conducting proceedings and to minimise disruption to orderly business if the situation arises again where people cannot meet in person.

There are also a lot of housekeeping measures in this legislation; for instance, clause 35, clause 36, clause 38, clause 40, clause 41, clause 43, clause 44, clause 47 and clause 52 all amend a relevant section of the principal act to incorporate references to additional land.

This goes back to the sort of work we did a few weeks ago on the Statute Law Amendment Bill 2022, ensuring properly written, cohesive legislation. But here is a big clause, and I want to read it. The explanatory memorandum to the Heritage Amendment Bill 2023 reads:

Clause 57 amends section 87 of the Principal Act. Section 87 sets out offences in relation to knowingly or recklessly performing certain activities in relation to registered places and registered objects. The clause amends section 87 to provide that these offences do not apply to works or activities carried out in accordance with –

- permits issued under Part 4; or
- show cause notices; or
- repair orders; or
- rectification orders.

Clause 58 sets out offences in relation to negligently performing certain activities in relation to registered places and registered objects. Unfortunately it is too late for the Corkman hotel, but it is not too late for future heritage sites. This bill is important.

We also will be making the process more transparent and consistent in other ways. This includes nominating and including places and objects in the heritage register in a more open manner. How? Nominations for land and objects integral to places will, assuming this law is passed, be subject to the same provisions as other nominations. Applications are to be made on a prescribed form. This is accounted for in new sections 27A and 27B. Owners must now also be notified of a decision regarding a refused nomination and any other outcome by the heritage council if their property is going to be nominated to be heritage registered. And now the heritage council will be able to hold hearings on any matters that may be relevant, not just the matters that are raised in submissions.

As I wrote this, I could not help but consider the areas in my electorate that are heritage worthy. Like any other member, I am a bit biased, but I could not help thinking that this legislation ties into that, particularly the proactive assessment of something's heritage, which this bill actively considers. Think of Chapel Street, which is less than a few minutes walk from my office. Most of the buildings date back to three periods, either the 1860s, the 1880s or the 1890s, and the emporium-developed stage of 1900 to 1915. In the Windsor section, in that beautiful neck of the woods, some of the buildings date back to the 1850s – modest in scope but rich in history. The Heritage Act provides protection for these historic places. Places that are currently protected by the Heritage Act include Flinders Street railway station, Ned Kelly's boyhood home in Beveridge and indeed this very building, this very room.

As I mentioned in my contribution to the debate on the Human Source Management Bill 2023, our government has proudly and widely consulted on these matters. We want our laws to be the most effective possible. That is why this government has consulted with heritage bodies, non-government organisations and government agencies. These include the exhaustive list of the Major Transport Infrastructure Authority and the Department of Transport and Planning, the Heritage Council of Victoria and others. The fact is that these consulted parties support the amendments as safeguards that ensure the protection of cultural heritage. They are supported as amendments, and they ensure recognition of these sites and so much more.

Melina BATH (Eastern Victoria) (10:28): I rise and am very pleased to speak this morning on the Heritage Amendment Bill 2023. I will go through some of the provisions of the bill. When we have these bills in the house it always provides a great opportunity for us to talk about our regions, as we have heard in previous speeches, but also to highlight some of the very worthy projects that are either on the table or have been completed over recent years. That is what I wish to do again. The bill amends the Heritage Act 2017 to provide for exclusion determinations and to make other amendments to

improve the operation of the act and for other purposes. These legislative amendments will create the following reforms, in theory. They will provide online access to heritage documents and notices in Heritage Council of Victoria hearings, they will allow for applications to exclude places and objects from the Victorian Heritage Register and they will clarify and improve the operations of the Heritage Act.

When we look at heritage documents and notices, there are people in our electorates right across Victoria who dedicate their lives to the amplification, the investigation and the sharing of historical knowledge. I am sure we can all think of different people in our own towns and communities that do that. I know there is a lovely lady in Leongatha who launched a book last weekend on her knowledge. She is a former secondary school history teacher. I think there are a lot of those people who have that enduring passion not only in education but also in telling the important stories, and there are certainly many to be told in the Eastern Victoria Region.

Not only are our historical buildings and heritage buildings and the way they are maintained and preserved very important – hence this bill is on the table today for debate and passage through this house – but it is important to acknowledge those people in our electorates. For example, the mountain cattlemen’s society. They have very small structures now. They can be fences of historical nature or Craig’s Hut, which was there and had been burnt and rebuilt in the period and particulars of its original form. They very much hold history of their forebears close to their hearts. They are called mountain cattlemen, but they assure me that that is a gender-inclusive word, and they have stated so on many occasions. Their passion for their region and the High Country is well documented.

To that point, I heard a Labor member for Eastern Victoria talk about the Omeo courthouse, a beautiful building that is – and often they are – in need of ongoing restoration. When I was in Omeo a few years ago there was the mountain cattlemen’s annual get-together. My family hired the former bank, which has many different levels and places and still includes the vault, which was safely locked so we could not put any children in it. The bank has been converted into accommodation, and it was a fantastic experience for us all. I think that is part of the modern interpretation of heritage: we need to continue to preserve and keep often the facades and the integrity of buildings but make them purpose fit for our modern-day society so that they can be used and enjoyed.

Another such building that has been repurposed over a long period of time is the Traralgon courthouse, and I give a shout-out to the dedicated committee there. The Nationals have been around for about 106 years, and on our 100th birthday we had celebrations right across regional Victoria. We held our 100th birthday celebration in Traralgon in the Traralgon courthouse. We were sitting in the actual courthouse. We staged a Q and A session and the atmosphere in there was really electric because we were not only celebrating our 100 years at the time but also feeling the vibe and the historical context of all that had happened in the Traralgon courthouse before. It would be remiss of me not to congratulate those people who are still involved in that, so thank you to all on that committee.

The other one that is quite close to my heart is the Morwell Historical Society. Again, when we talk about the repurposing of old buildings, traditional buildings, we see that that historical society is in the place of the former masonic lodge. I am sure people in this house will understand that in the past masonic lodges were the most magnificent of buildings and even in our small little towns – there is one in Walhalla, at the top of a hill – masonic lodges were well used and very widespread. But with the time and the change of times, many of the masonic lodges sit idle. This one in Morwell has been repurposed into a lovely events space and repository of information and artefacts for the Morwell Historical Society.

I do have a vested interest, because a former president of the Morwell Historical Society, Bruce McMaster, also went to school with my mother. I think they may be becoming historical entities themselves now. Bruce has resigned and Alan McFarlane, a former councillor in Morwell, is the president there. The whole integrity of the way they deal with historical documents and artefacts is to be celebrated, and they share it with the community. They often have regular events as well.

Martin Cameron and I happened to be in the Morwell Historical Society building the other day because we were promoting scones. Scones probably could also be seen as a historical food source; they have been around since Methuselah. The evening branch of the Morwell CWA is running a scone drive, and they are trying to win a hat-trick – three back-to-back – for the most scones sold across the state by a CWA. I know I might be slightly digressing for this, but it is a really worthy cause. They will help you. If you cannot eat the scones yourself or go down and buy them, you can buy them virtually and then donate them to a charity. A big shout-out to all the fantastic people who run the evening branch of the Morwell CWA. I think that is so wonderful, because it shows the level of passion that people have not only for scones but for the CWA.

Getting back to the topic, I heard a member talk about lighthouses in Eastern Victoria Region, and again, they are an amazing source of beauty and the signalling of a bygone area in terms of communication and monitoring and alerts for our seafaring ships. I have experienced the beauty of the Wilsons Promontory lighthouse on a number of occasions, but a little while ago we trekked down there and stayed overnight and had the experience of being in the lighthouse, and you feel like you are in a very special place, which Wilsons Promontory is.

The whole township of Walhalla is the most beautiful, unique and time-capsuled town – I think almost in Victoria, and I will argue that point as an Eastern Victoria Region member. It is in that beautiful valley, and many of the buildings there have been remodelled to be very sympathetic to the history and custom and architecture of a previous time. One that is true to form is the Goldfields Railway. Like so many of the historical buildings that this bill will capture, volunteers are at the heart of the restoration and fundraising efforts for whatever the particular event or building might be. I saw the Goldfields Railway crew at the Erica show the other day. Graeme Skinner is just an amazing advocate and passionate restorer, and there were many others there as well. They are always inclusive. They need to fundraise to re-establish their machinery, and not only their machinery but their track and new carriages, in order to service the community. I have digressed, because a carriage is probably not contained within the heritage bill in terms of buildings and the register. But these are very important elements of why people need to come to regional Victoria and come to Walhalla.

The bill makes a number of amendments in relation to notices, publications and inspection of documents. The principal act contains a number of notification requirements as well as requirements for certain documents in the heritage register to be made physically available for inspection. As I said, information is important in general, but to be able to have that in a format that is serviceable for a wide range of people is also very useful.

I thank our Shadow Minister for Planning Mr Hodgett in the other place for doing some extensive research into this. I know that there were some concerns around clause 100 in relation to the general powers of entry within this bill – that an inspector or authorised person must not enter a residence unless there are certain stipulations agreed with. There were some concerns around that. However, Mr Hodgett certainly did a great deal of investigation and spoke to a range of stakeholders, including the Municipal Association of Victoria, Ratepayers Victoria, the Property Council of Victoria, the Master Builders Association of Victoria, the Housing Industry Association, the Royal Historical Society of Victoria and others – the National Trust of Australia. At the end of that we felt that as long as the government is true to form in terms of the objects and aims within this bill and as contained within clause 100 – if the integrity is upheld within that clause – then it would be reasonable to continue and let this pass through this house. With those few words, I will leave my contribution there.

Ryan BATCHELOR (Southern Metropolitan) (10:41): I rise to speak on the Heritage Amendment Bill 2023, which is designed to improve the operation of Victoria's Heritage Act 2017 by doing a range of things, including providing for online access to notices and the inspection of documents and inspection of notices. It allows for applications for exclusion from the Victorian Heritage Register and clarifies and improves the operation of the Heritage Act. In making my contribution today it is important to note, in the context of the broad framework of heritage legislation and planning legislation that applies across Victoria, that the Heritage Act and this bill in particular deal with matters of state-

significant heritage. Obviously there is a multilayered framework involved in our heritage and planning schemes that deals with heritage on a number of levels, and this deals with issues of state significance. Obviously at a more local level these are dealt with by other pieces of legislation and the associated planning schemes that are a product of that legislation.

The development of this bill arose following extensive consultation with heritage bodies, non-government organisations and a range of government agencies, all of whom have got an interest in making sure our state's heritage is preserved. It is good to see that there is so much engagement on these questions across government and through the Major Transport Infrastructure Authority, the Department of Transport and Planning, the Heritage Council of Victoria, Australia ICOMOS, the National Trust of Australia and the Royal Historical Society of Victoria, overall led by the public servants who oversee these issues within the various government agencies. It is important to note that that consultation has revealed that people do think we need to provide the sorts of safeguards that this bill is proposing and ensure that the recognition and protection of cultural heritage in Victoria is not undermined. I am sure all members share the commitment that we all have to making sure that Victoria's heritage is protected. That has certainly been something that has been reflected in other contributions that have been made during the course of this debate.

One of the important things the bill is doing is updating the mechanisms that exist in the principal act to facilitate better, broader, more modern and more digital access to heritage processes than were conceived as being necessary or conceived as being possible when the original and principal act was developed. Obviously the bill responds to particular concerns and particular limitations that became evident in that principal act during the COVID-19 pandemic, when the sorts of engagement, consultation and inspection regimes that we had been accustomed to doing and accustomed to having as part of our everyday lives suddenly were not possible due to the particular nature of the circumstances and requirements for distancing that that period required. But it is important to draw lessons from then.

What this amendment bill facilitates is improvements and the continuation of access to the heritage processes if those circumstances or similar circumstances, such as disaster, were ever to strike us again. It allows for notices and documents held by the Heritage Council and the relevant executive director to be made available for inspection either in person or online. In a particularly restricted set of circumstances, namely, the declaration of a state of disaster or a pandemic or a state of emergency, it enables the inspection regime, which is an important part of the broad heritage framework, to be restricted to online access so that we can maintain safety and access to heritage documents at the same time.

This also responds to the desire of many Victorians for government services and processes to be adapted and updated to be more modern and flexible so that a body like the Heritage Council itself can expressly conduct its meetings via video link-up. It is important for governments to make sure that the legislative framework that governs our public institutions is modernised and takes advantage of the latest technology, because we know that accessing technology in such ways can be a great facilitator of public participation in the administration processes of government. Giving people, and more people, easier access to the statutory documents that they are entitled to is a good public policy objective and one we should support.

The other significant change that is occurring with the bill that is proposed before us today relates to applications for exclusion from the heritage register. At the moment under the processes and the principal act there is no ability for agencies who are delivering major government infrastructure projects to confirm the heritage significance of a place or object during planning stages. Therefore there is a significant risk that major government infrastructure projects could be disrupted or delayed by the receipt of a new nomination to the heritage register after works have started. The bill makes amendments to allow agencies to apply to the executive director of Heritage Victoria to exclude a place or object from the register.

Any such applications would be required to provide detailed information to support a case for exclusion, including reasons why the place or object should not be included in the register based on assessment criteria published by the Heritage Council itself. It is very much the assessment criteria from the Heritage Council itself being the benchmark and the standards by which such applications should be made. Applications reviewed by the executive director will need to be assessed against the same threshold as applications for inclusion. Decisions to grant exclusion will be made public, and anyone with a real or substantial interest will be able to request the Heritage Council to review the decision. These changes will allow the significance of the heritage place or object to be established and taken into account in the planning stages of the project. As I mentioned before, there has been consultation on these changes with relevant heritage bodies, non-government organisations and government agencies who are involved in these processes from time to time, and consulted parties support the amendments as safeguards to ensure that the recognition and protection of cultural heritage is not undermined.

The bill also makes some general changes and a number of operational improvements to the Heritage Act. Some of these changes relate to processes used for issuing heritage permits, consents for archaeological sites and entering places and objects onto the Victorian register. We believe that they will improve heritage outcomes and make it easier for people to engage with heritage in Victoria. One of the things that will occur to make things a bit easier for people is that the bill will enable minor permit amendments without requiring applicants to pay a fee, so works or activities proposed by the applications are less harmful to registered places or objects and deliver improved heritage outcomes. The amendments will increase certainty for owners by notifying them of decisions sooner and within set time frames and make it easier for communities and stakeholders to participate in heritage processes. I have mentioned how the amendments for online access will make it easier for community members to ensure that their views are heard.

The changes in the bill will also prevent the notification of permits and other key documents over the Christmas period, when community members will be less likely to engage. I think everyone will agree that it is better to have processes in place that stop the cover of the Christmas break being a means of obfuscating consultation in those periods. A provision for additional time is being given through the bill for responsible authorities and councils to make submissions in the permit process. I think you can demonstrate from that part of the contribution that there has been extensive consultation and there is general agreement. The purpose of this bill is to make access to heritage processes simpler because of the importance of state-significant heritage sites in Victoria.

Other members have given some really eloquent contributions about important heritage sites within Victoria and within their electorates. Noting that this is a bill about issues of state significance, I did just want to take a bit of time to talk a little bit about one of my favourite places of state significance in Victoria's heritage and a building that is on the Victorian Heritage Register and in the Victorian heritage database, and that is the Victorian Trades Hall, which for many of us in this place is a building with a lot of fond memories. For those of us who have had the privilege of being there recently, it is a thriving hub of progressive activism in Victoria and, thanks to the efforts of the union movement and the state government, looks fantastic – looks revitalised. The exceptional heritage and importance to Victoria that has flowed through those halls over the course of the 150-odd years that that building has stood on the corner on Lygon Street in Carlton is a testament to the strength of political activism in Victoria and to the strength of the Victorian union movement, as is the fact that it is a site of living heritage. It is a site that, thanks to the efforts of the union movement and the government to restore, rebuild and strengthen the physical infrastructure of that building, has maintained its core place as a centre for trade union activism and community activism in Victoria.

I want to read a little bit of the commentary on the Victorian heritage database about Trades Hall. It is Australia's oldest and largest trades hall, and according the Victorian heritage database:

... stands as a symbol of the importance of organised labour within Australian society. Its relatively intact interior and exterior provide an evocative testament to the living traditions of the Australian Labor movement.

In particular, flags, banners and honour boards (including one commemorating the leaders of the eight hours movement) are significant artefacts tracing more than a century of union history, and are important historical records in their own right. Trades Hall's role in Australia's political history is also significant. In particular, activities leading to the birth of the Labor Party –

which I am sure all members on this side will be proud of –

and support of the great industrial campaigns of the 1890s took place here ...

Trades Hall is of social significance as a centre of radical and working class politics and activism in Victoria for over 100 years. Major campaigns and struggles that have had important ramifications for Victorian and Australian society have been coordinated from Trades Hall, and the building continues to serve as a focus of union organisation and left-wing political activity.

Those are words from the Victorian Heritage Register. I think they sum up the importance of that particular building to Victoria's both physical but also living heritage and the embodiment of the values that have flowed through the halls and we can see continuing now and into the future. That is why I believe that whatever we can do in this place to strengthen the systems and processes around heritage in Victoria we should be undertaking. I think the bill, in a number of very key ways, facilitates greater public participation and engagement through the use of more flexible and modern online services.

It facilitates that public engagement in our heritage activities. Hopefully by doing so more Victorians can learn about the wonders of our heritage and the wonders of our past and, importantly, use that as inspiration for the future. Heritage does mean a lot, but I think it can mean so much more when it can motivate us to continue the sorts of important and positive changes that so many of our heritage sites around Melbourne and around Victoria more broadly stand as symbols for. Trades Hall, just up the road in Carlton, is a great example of where our heritage is being preserved, is being protected and is being used to inspire the next generation, who will continue the traditions so that heritage is not something that is of the past but is certainly of the present, and the spirits of that living heritage are in our values.

This bill is a part of protecting those sites of statewide heritage significance. It will improve the operation of Victoria's broad heritage framework. I am proud to stand with other members of the government in supporting it here today.

Ingrid STITT (Western Metropolitan – Minister for Early Childhood and Pre-Prep, Minister for Environment) (10:56): I am really pleased to rise and make a contribution to the Heritage Amendment Bill 2023, and I acknowledge the contributions of members today. I think it is fair to say that whatever your political persuasion there is much love in the chamber today for Victoria's unique heritage and historic buildings and the need for us to be vigilant about protecting our shared history.

The bill today does a number of important things, including improving the operation of the Heritage Act 2017. It provides, as a number of colleagues have already pointed out, online access to notices and inspection of documents and notices. COVID-19 really highlighted the need for us to modernise the provisions in the act around these important accessibility issues. The bill also clarifies and improves the operation of the Heritage Act and allows applications for exclusion from the Victorian Heritage Register.

It is probably worth contextualising the bill that is before the house today and just recapping what the Heritage Act actually does in Victoria. It provides protection for historic places and objects of state-level cultural heritage significance in Victoria. Examples of places protected by the Heritage Act include the Flinders Street railway station, an iconic building in our city; Parliament House of course; the Murtoa Stick Shed; and Ned Kelly's boyhood home in Beveridge. Examples of objects protected by the Heritage Act include the Eureka flag from the 1854 Eureka Stockade and the Minton peacock from the *Loch Ard* wreck on Victoria's coast near Port Campbell in 1878. There are currently 2385 places and objects included in the heritage register, so there are certainly significant pieces of history on that register. The act is administered by Heritage Victoria, and Heritage Victoria is part of

the Department of Transport and Planning. Victoria's system for protecting heritage is largely consistent with the frameworks that exist in other Australian states and territories. The Heritage Act establishes the heritage register, and the register lists places and objects that are significant to the history and development of Victoria.

Works or activities that may impact on a registered place or object require a heritage permit from the executive director. The Heritage Act does establish the Heritage Council, and of course the Heritage Council is an independent statutory body. It is the body that decides the places and objects that are added to that heritage register. It also hears appeals on permit applications, and of course it provides important advice to the Minister for Planning and promotes the understanding of Victoria's cultural heritage through education and information programs.

It is interesting. I did not know until doing a little bit of reading about this bill that shipwrecks are protected in Victoria under the Heritage Act and the Commonwealth Underwater Cultural Heritage Act 2018. All shipwrecks and shipwreck relics that are at least 75 years old are automatically protected by these two acts, so there you go. Who knew? But of course there are a number of really significant shipwrecks from the late 1800s that are important to the way in which white settlement occurred in Victoria. I guess I am also mindful that we are dealing today with recent history. I just want to acknowledge that the history of our state and our country goes back some 60,000 years to the single continuous custodianship of the traditional owners of the land that we are all privileged to be on.

I will not repeat the contributions that some of my colleagues have already made. What I will say is that I think it is really important that our planning and heritage frameworks make it easier for communities to participate in heritage processes. I think that there is an enormous amount of interest out in the community about the history of our state, the history of our city and of our regional centres, and so anything that we can do to make it easier for communities to participate in our heritage processes should be welcomed. These amendments do provide, as others have noted, for online hearings and online access to key documents and notices. This means it will be much easier for community members to ensure that their views are heard, which is incredibly important. There are not too many people in our community that do not have a view about heritage and planning. They hold strong views, and in this way they will have more ability to be heard.

In addition, I think it is important to acknowledge that significant consultation has occurred around these legislative changes. The government agencies and organisations that have been consulted include the Major Transport Infrastructure Authority, the Department of Transport and Planning, the Heritage Council of Victoria, the National Trust of Australia and the Royal Historical Society of Victoria. All of the consulted parties did support the amendments as safeguards to ensure that the recognition and protection of cultural heritage is not undermined.

The bill makes changes to the Heritage Act, which is focused, as I have said, on those state-level significant buildings and such, but the bill does not make changes to local heritage, which is governed by the Planning and Environment Act 1987, so engagement with councils is planned during the release of the implementation material to ensure that there is an understanding and confidence in the proposed reforms. I think it is fair to say that the bill today contains amendments that are non-controversial in nature and are all about enhancing the ability of the community to have their say but also streamline some of the processes involved in these matters.

I just want to touch on a few of my local community's much-loved historical buildings before I talk about another very special building. Of course I am from Melbourne's west, and we are very proud of our industrial history in the west. There are a number of significant buildings that I just want to call out, in particular the John Darling mill, which is at Albion station, which I am very lucky to be able to see from my house. It is a beautiful example of an old red-brick mill. It is very significant historically. It is of architectural and historical significance to the state of Victoria, and it is on the heritage register. I have been going past the John Darling mill for years and years and years, either flying up that overpass on Ballarat Road or on the train, and I have long wished for that particular building to get a

little bit more love. I am really pleased that our government has committed to an \$80 million upgrade of the Albion station, which will also include the ability for that whole historical precinct to be opened up and enjoyed by the community in a way that it just has not been able to for many, many years. One of the really great benefits, I think, of our transport infrastructure program right across the state but in particular in Melbourne's west is that it is a real opportunity for urban renewal of these fantastic historical buildings which we are all incredibly proud of but I think it is fair to say are not being utilised to their full potential. This is a real opportunity for that urban renewal and for the community to be able to once again take great pride in having buildings of such significance in our area. That is just one small example of why I think such a strong focus on protecting and enhancing the way in which we manage our historical buildings and memorials is so important.

Of course the area of Melbourne's west that I live in is also a very significant area for its industrial history, and the Sunshine Harvester case and the Sunshine Harvester factory will be familiar to many, not just westies but people who take a keen interest in our industrial history in this state. Of course the factory is long gone, but what has been left behind is a number of really important memorials. There is the Sunshine Harvester hut at the baseball oval just near my house, which dates right back to the very start of the Sunshine Harvester story. Many years later of course Massey Ferguson took over that whole site, and the rest is, you would say, history. But because of the workers that came to the area to work at the Sunshine Harvester plant, the whole municipality around Sunshine and Albion exists basically because of that huge employment opportunity that the Sunshine Harvester factory provided. I know that it is something that locals are really passionate about preserving.

There is also of course the HV McKay Memorial Gardens in Sunshine, which is also a culturally significant place in the area which was established by the Sunshine Harvester Works in 1889, and those gardens are still there today. The reason that we have such a rich and proud history in terms of working hours and conditions in Victoria, won by working people and the union movement, is in no small part due to the efforts of people who worked at the Sunshine Harvester factories in Melbourne's west.

If I can just very quickly in the time I have got left talk about one of my favourite buildings in the country, and that is the Victorian Trades Hall Council. I was very lucky as a young woman to get one of my first jobs at the Victorian Trades Hall Council as the receptionist. You learn a lot about a place being the receptionist in any organisation, and Trades Hall was no exception. Back then the building was incredibly dilapidated, the roof was leaking and I think we were all out the back in what they used to call the 'new wing', which was from the 1950s or 60s. But I just want to really acknowledge the incredible work, thanks to a whole range of different people and of course the Victorian government and Heritage Victoria and the Trades Hall Council executive, on restoring that building so magnificently. It is one of a kind, it is the oldest workers parliament in the world, and I think it is something we should be enormously proud of in Victoria. I thank the chamber and I commend the bill to the house.

Jacinta ERMACORA (Western Victoria) (11:11): I am pleased to be speaking on this bill, the Heritage Amendment Bill 2023. The Heritage Act 2017 protects places and objects of significance – all historical and archaeological sites and underwater cultural heritage, as mentioned by my colleague Minister Stitt. Heritage has always been of significance to me, and I am proud that across our state of Victoria we have many examples of fine architecture and architectural buildings. It is pleasing to see how often across our state historical heritage-registered architecture sits comfortably side by side with new buildings or developments, showcasing both the past and the present. Three examples in Warrnambool are the St Joseph's church, where a community hall is being built in between a beautiful old bluestone church and a heritage-listed presbytery on Lava Street. The Uniting church in Warrnambool also has a similar modern building – sympathetic, but proudly modern as well. And the Anglican church on Henna Street now also has a beautiful hall adjacent to its bluestone church.

The Heritage Amendment Bill 2023 will strengthen our ability to make good decisions that positively impact both planning processes and heritage conservation. In Warrnambool some of our more

outstanding examples of heritage include Proudfoots boathouse and the Botanic Gardens, which were made or designed by William Guilfoyle – and they are absolutely beautiful. It is wonderful that Warrnambool City Council allocates resources for the maintenance and care of those gardens by a highly qualified person. The Fletcher Jones garden and factory is a particularly interesting 20th century addition to the heritage list in Warrnambool and quite well known. The factory and gardens were established in 1948 by David Fletcher Jones. His ‘modern, new, decentralised garden factory’, as it was referred to at the time, was a result of growing demand and advanced views on employee satisfaction and engagement. The company became renowned not only for the quality of its clothing – an iconic Australian brand – but also for Fletcher Jones’s progressive approach to employee–employer relations and an innovative shareholding scheme. As we all know, there are so many stories behind this heritage.

If you were an employee of Fletcher Jones, you were automatically a shareholder, and David Jones, the founder, believed that satisfaction of workers and involvement and commitment of workers influence, positively, a business. Warrnambool is still awash with qualified tailors and dressmakers as a result of the heritage of Fletcher Jones. There are plenty of people that used to work at Fletcher Jones who now run their own businesses making clothing and altering clothing in the city. The Fletcher Jones factory and the gardens are now a hub for small retail enterprise and the arts community in the City of Warrnambool.

I want to acknowledge the volunteer work and commitment of Julie Eagles, who has contributed a lot of her own time and energy seeking out the stories and experiences of former staff members of Fletcher Jones, documenting them and celebrating those stories. It is very easy to lose the stories of the people within a heritage scenario. The building is there, the gardens are being preserved, but the people were what made it. So I congratulate Julie on the work she does in that space.

The bill seeks to update the Heritage Act 2017 and improve Victoria’s heritage processes so that we can continue to safeguard our collective history. It will bolster online processes and access to documents, facilitate proactive heritage assessments during the planning of major projects and apply several operational improvements throughout the current act. The Heritage Act is administered by Heritage Victoria and also establishes the heritage register, which lists places and objects that are significant to the history and development of Victoria. There are 2385 places and objects and approximately 650 shipwrecks, as mentioned by my colleague Minister Stitt, on the heritage register. They are key remnants of Victoria’s past that we are committed to protecting into our future.

I think it is worth acknowledging at this point that the heritage that this bill addresses is not Indigenous heritage. It is not referring to the 60,000 years of heritage. That involves another separate planning process. This is essentially and largely since settlement of this land, the heritage, which is really quite a short period of time relative to our First Nations people.

In drafting the bill cabinet consulted with heritage bodies, non-governmental and community organisations and various areas of government. This includes the Major Transport Infrastructure Authority, the Victorian branch of the National Trust of Australia, the Heritage Council of Victoria, the Royal Historical Society of Victoria and the International Council on Monuments and Sites. We have seen broad support from stakeholders for proposals it contains.

There are a number of essential improvements proposed with the legislation before us today. The Heritage Council of Victoria has confirmed that it supports the change to remove ambiguity and streamline operations. This will speed up approvals, and I do not think anybody involved in the development sector would argue with anything that improves the approval process. The amendments to the act will ensure the Heritage Council can conduct hearings online as well as require that notices and documents be made available online. It is quite ironic that we have to do an amendment to an act to be able to do that online after COVID, so it is good that we are doing this. It will allow applications for exclusion from the Victorian Heritage Register and will deliver operational improvements to the

Heritage Act. In short, these proposals not only modernise our heritage process but also make it more transparent and more accessible to all.

Facilitating online access to the Victorian Heritage Register and the Heritage Inventory also means that they are available electronically even when physical access is impeded, such as during a state of disaster or an emergency, or indeed – dare I say it – a pandemic. Owners of heritage places and objects will have increased certainty via the enactment of this bill. There will be faster and more diligent notification of decisions and permit revocations. There have certainly been, in my experience, lots of projects that do require heritage approvals, and reaching and achieving those approvals has often been a delay point for a major capital project. Other delay points are sometimes the EPA and sometimes the native vegetation and biodiversity. So I do reiterate how much this is a positive step to make things speed up a little bit.

The ability to access online hearings as well as key documents and motions will also make it simpler for community members to engage and ensure they can express their views in important heritage decisions. Under these particular circumstances relevant notices will no longer be required to be displayed in offices. Privacy considerations will also ensure that personal information is protected in materials made available electronically.

In a further improvement to our heritage protection processes, the bill sets out a framework for exclusion applications whereby heritage significance can be proactively assessed and settled in the early stages of major infrastructure projects. This is particularly important if we safeguard our heritage and also facilitate the ability of growth projects to advance in a timely manner.

Continuing heritage nominations are an essential component of protecting our cultural history. However, under current arrangements, without a mechanism for settling heritage determinations in advance, as this bill provides, major planning projects are restricted to reacting to heritage concerns as they arise. When this occurs midway through a major project, it can significantly blow out both the time frames and budget. The resulting disruptions can be substantial, even if it is ultimately determined that the heritage protection is not applicable. Whole communities living and working around infrastructure projects as they take place are often further inconvenienced. I think it is fair to say that as much as new infrastructure is embraced by communities, it is always a relief when major projects are completed.

The test outlined in the bill to grant an application for exclusion is a high bar. It will only be granted if the place or object has no reasonable prospect of inclusion in the heritage register. It is a little bit like our speeding system on the roads – if there is very little traffic on a country road, the speed limit means you can go a lot faster. It is the same here – if there is very little heritage significance, there is a capability of leaping straight ahead and saying, ‘No, this is not relevant. Go straight ahead.’ That is the lay explanation. The process is balanced by several safeguards, including that the applications may only be made by certain prescribed classes, that they must be supported by detailed information and that the Heritage Council’s decisions are made public and opportunities are made available for review.

There are several operational amendments to the Heritage Act, which was last updated in 2017. These will improve both its efficiency and its transparency. These changes include allowing some minor beneficial alterations to applications without charge, facilitation and revocation of outdated permit exemptions and further enhancements of protections of archaeological sites. The bill will make a generally positive impact in circumstances where proposed works are identified as harmful to a registered place or object by enabling applicants to amend their permit applications without a fee. Significantly, owners of heritage places and objects will also have increased certainty via the enactment of this bill. There will be faster and more diligent notification of decisions and permit revocations.

For those who may be concerned about privacy due to online access, if this bill succeeds in amending the Heritage Act to ensure that permit applications are available electronically, no personal information

of any individual is to be publicly available. The address of the location of the place or object subject to the application is the only identifying information.

Heritage is important. It is highly valued by all generations in our communities. People value our heritage as place makers. It is valuing places and objects in our community that makes our places special. That is why the heritage places in the south-west of Victoria are highly valued and respected by the community. I fully support the changes that this bill will make to streamline the process.

Nicholas McGOWAN (North-Eastern Metropolitan) (11:26): It is a great honour today to rise and speak on this bill. For very many people heritage – in the common sense of the word when we hear about things being heritage listed – often divides people, and yet right across the world, including locally here in Australia and Victoria, we would be all the worse off without these protections. I think that almost goes without saying, but I will say it nonetheless.

Here in Victoria there are some 2400 places and objects that are significant both in the sense of history and the development of our state and which are included on the heritage register. When a property is included on that register it does not necessarily guarantee that that object or place will never be changed, nor does it prevent an owner from using that object or place for a different purpose. But what it does do is help preserve for our children and our children's children an aspect of our society which is deemed to be incredibly valuable by all of us. It is important to understand that successive governments in this state have over very many years invested not only in identifying objects and places but in their restoration or their upkeep, and that is a critical component.

It is also important to give some life to what we are discussing here today overseas and abroad in communicating an understanding of the full treasure, the full value of heritage, but also then perhaps looking closer to home. Perhaps I might start close to home, and then I might look overseas and abroad at the significance and importance of preserving every bit of heritage that is possible.

I will indulge here because I will look first at the Eltham library. It is relatively new; in fact this was in 1993. It is a beautiful library. It is the second library in my lifetime in Eltham. It is heritage listed because it is a mudbrick library. For those of you who are familiar with the opera house in Sydney Harbour, and there are not many who are not, it bears some resemblance to that approach to design. It is personally one of my favourite buildings in the suburb of Eltham.

Another one which will be well known to those present today is Montsalvat. Montsalvat was founded in 1934. It is Australia's oldest artists community. It is home not only to artists to this very day but to very many ceremonies and events that take place there. I have been there for not only celebrations but also mournings – for funerals – and it is a place that is of very important local and state significance.

It would perhaps surprise some people who are listening today, or who may look in the future at what has been said in this place, that any number of local cemeteries too can be included as sites that are worthy of protection. In my district again, Eltham cemetery, Hurst family cemetery, Kangaroo Ground cemetery, Nillumbik cemetery, Queenstown cemetery and Arthurs Creek cemetery are all cemeteries that for their own reasons have attracted heritage protection with the register. I have seen the cemetery in Eltham evolve over the years, and it has become today a very remarkable place, a place that is not just the final resting place for very many hundreds of locals and those who are from further afield but a place to reflect and spend time in. It started off as a small community of locals who were keen to ensure that it was not only preserved but expanded, and over my lifetime I have seen that cemetery turn into quite an amazing tribute in very many ways to all those people who have their final resting place there.

Again in the Shire of Nillumbik, other areas of note include the Alistair Knox Park, the Monash Bridge, the Christmas Hills Mechanics Institute and the Eltham justice precinct. One that I am particularly, I suppose, connected to is the old courthouse in Eltham. When I was, I am sad to say, much younger than I am now I was fortunate that I was able to gain employment at the youth access service centre in Dudley Street in Eltham. I think I was in the order of 14 or 15, which made it, I guess,

legal to work as a cleaner at that stage. I was a cleaner: I went there after school and cleaned toilets and vacuumed the floors and did the dishes. Very shortly after I started that job in Dudley Street, the centre moved to the old courthouse in Eltham, and that courthouse to this day continues to be used as a facility. I was part of the team, the workforce as it were, that went into the courthouse and continued to clean and marvelled at the courthouse – the old safe that is included in that courthouse. I took great pride not only when I worked there but also in subsequent years when I returned and had the opportunity to attend meetings by the many community groups who continue to use that for any number of meetings and services, including counselling.

I was listening before to the discussion in this chamber by my fellow member Melina Bath, and I could not help but observe and perhaps be a little bit envious that she might be having some more scones than I am. I am particularly fond of scones, so I was very keen to hear that they too – well, I am not sure the scones themselves are protected; the argument might be put, but nonetheless I would be only too keen to understand that aspect of protection more and to perhaps at some point visit with you.

Members interjecting.

Nicholas McGOWAN: It is important for the public record that I am not really a cream and jam person. I am more just a cream person. I do not like my cream infected with the jam.

Harriet Shing: Now it's on the public record for the rest of all time, Mr McGowan.

Nicholas McGOWAN: For the rest of all time that is on the record. So if someone comes and –

Harriet Shing: Just cream. That is weird.

Nicholas McGOWAN: Just cream. I am happy to have the jam on the side, but those who infect the cream with the jam are egregious.

Harriet Shing: No coming back from that one.

Nicholas McGOWAN: There is no coming back from that one, that is true.

I will make my way back to the bill itself. I said at the beginning of this discussion that I think it is important to see this bill within a context. Not only is that a local context, but perhaps there is an international aspect to this as well, in helping communicate to those who perhaps are not as enthusiastic about heritage protections as some of us might be that internationally these kinds of protections serve us particularly well. If we can be leaders in this space, particularly in terms of the bill and bringing everything online and making it simpler for the public to interact, then that is a positive thing. I have written a note of a couple of places I have had the good fortune of visiting throughout the years, and I understand their importance culturally as significant places. One that comes to mind for me in particular is visiting in Türkiye the Pamukkale calcium baths – an incredible site that requires ongoing protection. For those people who are fortunate to visit that at some point in the future, they would well understand the value of protecting the site, which has such a rich history but also is a very fragile environment in very many ways.

I was also very fortunate in my time overseas to have the opportunity to travel to places like Aleppo in Syria. Aleppo has a magnificent, or I should say had a magnificent – it continues to have it, but unfortunately it is afflicted by war – medieval fortified palace. At night-time, if you were lucky to be in the city of Aleppo, the entire city was dominated by this fortified palace, which was lit up. If you were on the rooftops having dinner in Aleppo, you could not help but observe and see one of the most magnificent cities on earth.

That reminds me somewhat of the pyramids, and not only of Cairo and Egypt. We all talk about Egypt when we think about pyramids, but people in this chamber might be surprised to know and learn that in fact there are more pyramids in Sudan. They are much more numerous; however, they are smaller, much smaller than the pyramids of Egypt, which of course attract much more attention and fame because of their size.

I am reminded also of the salt mine in Kraków. This just goes to show how not only here in Victoria but also right across the world very many things, places and objects can attract protection. Some might be surprised to hear that a salt mine can attract protection. The salt mine in Kraków I would rate as one of the most magnificent tourist attractions throughout all of Europe. It was considered and used for very many purposes throughout various world wars, but to this day it operates for tourists who visit Kraków. It is a very sombre but beautiful city for many reasons, and it would be remiss of anyone to visit that city and not visit the salt mine.

I have also had the great fortune of going to the ancient city of Xi'an, where the terracotta warriors are. I think that was back in the year 2000. Tens, if not thousands, of terracotta warriors remain to this day protected and preserved for all time so the people of the world can both admire and understand the great history of China and the great history of the people in that place.

Speaking of history, Yemen is a country that does not attract much discussion in this place. Yemen is a country which I am particularly fond of, and I have been there a number of times – I am very fortunate to have been there. I found myself in the enviable position at one point of being in Marib. Marib is not necessarily a place that many would know of, but it is significant in this debate today because, unbeknownst to me at the time, there is an ancient dam system. In fact it is one of the great treasures of the ancient world. It is an ancient dam system, where literally the remnants of a gargantuan built dam are preserved and used. It is even rumoured that that entire area was the resting place, the home, of the palace of the Queen of Egypt, Cleopatra herself. For those who are keen to go to Yemen, unfortunately you may have to wait some time, but when you do go and you go to Marib, you will be most delighted.

I have got one other example from abroad and then I am going to come back home to Victoria, and again it illustrates I think the importance of thinking outside the box when it comes to heritage. On this occasion I talk of a prison cell. There are many prison cells; in fact there are many prisons, including one in Ireland that jumps to mind, but this one is not in Ireland. There was a prisoner, and the prisoner's number was 466. That prisoner was admitted to this prison in 1964, I think I am correct in saying. That prisoner was referred to as prisoner 46664. To this day that is a somewhat cherished number, because of course that was Nelson Mandela's number and the prison was on Robben Island. It further illustrates my point that we can protect very many things. Often in public discourse heritage items, objects and places that are protected receive initial ire and sometimes criticism. There was probably a point in time when those in South Africa itself considered the protection of Nelson Mandela's prison cell as something abhorrent. Thank goodness we are well away from those days and at a point where it is something that is now somewhat of a revered number, certainly for the people of South Africa but, I would argue, for the people of the world.

I think that gives very many examples of why we can be proud of our history and why we need to not only protect it but also seek to ensure that we ourselves capture it and make it available to the public in a way that is accessible, particularly in this modern age.

With that being said, I will turn specifically to the bill itself. It is clear to me that while much has been said in this place – and very little I disagree with – I do repeat and echo member Bath and some of her comments with respect to the general powers of entry in clause 100. I am somewhat concerned with respect to the absence of written consent and there only being two clear days notice. It would be my preference and it would be remiss of me not to state that I think that period should be a longer period. I think, like any of us, we are busy. We could be overseas; we could be working; we might just be away from our homes for a couple of days. I do think it is important that a reasonable amount of time is given when notices are served. I think that would help the entire public have great confidence – not that they cannot have confidence – in the way we both conduct ourselves as a government and also conduct ourselves to ensure that the places and the objects that we seek to protect in Victoria are protected in a way that achieves buy-in and will forevermore provide them to the people of Victoria.

Harriet SHING (Eastern Victoria – Minister for Water, Minister for Regional Development, Minister for Commonwealth Games Legacy, Minister for Equality) (11:41): We have heard a wideranging number of contributions today, and what they have really shown to us is the rich context and place-based importance of heritage to every part of Victoria. Indeed sitting in this building it is very easy to be brought back to the starting point of post-settlement identity and what it has meant to really tap into the aesthetics of a period, the social ideas and priorities at play during those times and the nature of specific professions. Again, here in Parliament, looking at the perpetual updates on renovations that we have here, I suspect this building – or indeed both buildings, because it is two buildings – will be shrouded in scaffolding until the world in fact stops turning, but that is okay because it is as much about conservation and preservation as it is about renovation.

Heritage here in Victoria occupies a really important space in our understanding of history and the recognition that we have and ought to always have for history in the context of where we are heading. What I would encourage anybody to do who is interested in this debate – and I know that there are many committee organisations and groups and individuals who have dedicated much of their lives to cataloguing and to documenting history as it manifests in buildings, in ruins and in locations that have had contact post-settlement – is to honour that work and have the necessary level of public record of that work. A browse through the Victorian Heritage Register online is something that you would be well worth investing some time in. It is broken up into segments of history, and it is really fascinating to be able to see the evolution of building styles, the way in which various types of buildings and of structures and of treatments of land have changed over time and also the concentration – growing over time – of the number of buildings, particularly as we work our way into either the centre of Melbourne or indeed major regional centres. Looking at that growth in everything from courthouses through to hotels and from mills, which Minister Stitt referred to, right down to a range of other areas – missions, shearers cottages, marks upon the landscape of structures long gone in their entirety but nonetheless ever important – we can take a journey through that time and understand what it is that we have done to grow and change and evolve over the period that we have been here post-settlement.

There is a range of interlinking frameworks that cover the field of heritage. When we look at the work that the Heritage Council does, it is important to note that its processes for determining what should go onto the register are well understood. It is also important to note that as we proceed with the work to understand and to participate in the way that the Heritage Act 2017 operates, online access becomes ever more important. That is what this bill is in effect changing – the ease with which people can obtain access to notices, to inspection of documents and to other processes.

It is also about making sure that we can allow exclusion from the Victorian Heritage Register. This is very separate from the heritage overlays, which are regulated by local council. That has been flagged in a number of contributions here today. But there is often an element of confusion about the way that different heritage systems overlap and interlink.

It is also really important to note that the Aboriginal Heritage Act 2006 is the instrument by which First Nations and traditional owner heritage matters are addressed. We have a number of components to the heritage system, and this bill amends the operation of the Heritage Act itself. They are the carve-outs that I have just talked to. Making sure that we clarify and improve the operation of the Heritage Act itself is why we are here today.

Making an effort to respond to the impact of the pandemic has been as much about access to documents and to information online as anything else. I think it is that forced innovation that we have seen across a variety of sectors and industries that is also at work in this particular bill. Providing that access to heritage processes online is key to the ongoing work of the Heritage Council, the register and the heritage system in Victoria and making sure that documents that are held by or on behalf of the Heritage Council and the executive director are in a position to be inspected either in person or online. This is of especial relevance to rural and regional Victoria. When we think about the number of heritage listings that exist across some of the oldest heritage places in Victoria, they are right to the borders of our states. They include things like the courthouse up in Omeo and historic buildings right

down to Port Albert and out to Warrnambool. They cover the areas as far west as you can imagine and then up to the border. We need to make sure in providing access and opportunities to inspect documents that an online capability is incorporated as part of the system by which heritage is determined, registered and then regulated over time.

We also want to make sure that there is a level of responsiveness to any changes that might occur to a situation whereby people could access documents in person. We have had no shortage of circumstances to test limitations on in-person access over recent years. Again, to go to the point that I made earlier about forced innovation, the opportunity to provide ongoing online access in such a case as these exceptional circumstances and therefore to limit access to information or documents in person is a really sensible middle ground, as is the access being provided to people wanting to inspect a document or a notice in person upon request.

This is a bill, again, that does strike a balance between people being able to attend an office and go through documents and information – a comparatively easier exercise for people in metropolitan Melbourne or with immediate access to those offices – and people, for example, with limited mobility, people with the tyranny of distance before them and people with challenges around access that may indeed prefer to access documents or notices online. That is as much as anything about inclusion – again, a consequence of what we are doing, not just in Victoria and not just around Australia but globally, to respond to the need of citizens to be able to find and consider information in written form virtually rather than only in person.

Making sure also that we have publication and inspection requirements able to be met in a really modern and flexible way minimises the disruptions that might otherwise be at play through a range of other situations, including social distancing measures. Further to that, the Heritage Council being able to undertake its hearings online or via audio or video link is an important component of that access and of safeguarding the business-as-usual operations that should and indeed must continue in circumstances where in-person hearings or consideration of decisions required would perhaps be very limited, again for reasons relating to social distance, emergencies or natural disasters. Preparation for potential limitations on access is very much at the heart of this particular bill, and in making sure that we also have a measure of better access for the public to be part of these processes, Heritage Council hearings can be undertaken online or via video link within public access points as well.

The bill does reflect to a large extent the process of modernisation, which is being rolled out with a significant measure of purpose across governments. I know that local councils are also working towards making remote and virtual access a greater part of what they do, and that also goes directly to the operation of heritage overlay decisions and the dissemination of information. When we are in a position to provide people with access to information early and with access to accurate information that tells a fulsome picture of the nature and status of a site or a building or a structure that comes within the remit of the Heritage Council's work, then we are better equipping our communities to understand, for example, how those sites, buildings or structures might fit in with the broader historical understanding of a geographical area. Ms Bath knows this only too well. When you go to a rural or regional town and you can talk about the way in which the courthouse, the hotel, dairies, for example, and town halls have all been developed within a specific time frame, you can see how communities have built themselves up over years, where the key points for growth are and have been and how that ties in to communities and to families, who have often got many generations of identity and connection to those particular towns and regional centres.

This has an amplifying effect on the work that is already taking place across the state of individuals, groups and organisations who are actively committed to understanding more about their communities and about the history of their environments, including by reference to the council overlay of that heritage piece and including as that interlinks with the Aboriginal Heritage Act 2006 as well.

So we have an opportunity here to make sure that we are not just aware of the challenges that exist around the current inability of agencies delivering major government infrastructure projects to confirm

the heritage significance of a place or object during the planning stages and therefore enabling, through this bill, agencies to apply to the executive director of Heritage Victoria to exclude a place or object from the Victorian Heritage Register but also in a position to make sure that through the streamlining mechanisms in this bill we can have threshold assessments as applications for inclusion able to be reviewed by the executive director and decisions able to be made public, with anyone who has a real or a substantial interest being able to request that the Heritage Council review its decision.

These changes allow the significance of a heritage place or object to be established and taken into account in the planning stages of a project. We have all seen, with the development at pace of infrastructure, projects and developments across the state to accommodate and recognise population growth and increases in demand for infrastructure and facilities, that it is amendments such as these that will make more sense around streamlining the processes associated with a request for exclusion from the register. On that basis I commend the bill to the house.

Lee TARLAMIS (South-Eastern Metropolitan) (11:57): I move:

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

Motion agreed to and debate adjourned until later this day.

Business interrupted pursuant to standing orders.

Questions without notice and ministers statements

Corrections system

Matthew BACH (North-Eastern Metropolitan) (12:00): (97) I have another question today for the Minister for Corrections. Minister, the paper from the Justice Reform Initiative released yesterday, *State of Incarceration: Insights into Imprisonment in Victoria*, notes that in 2022, last year:

... \$1 billion of Victorian taxpayers' money was spent on operating the state's prisons –

which the initiative noted –

... is a 96% increase from what was spent in 2012–13 ...

despite far fewer people occupying prison beds and a reduction in available programs. Are the details quoted by the Justice Reform Initiative right, and if not, how are they wrong?

Enver ERDOGAN (Northern Metropolitan – Minister for Corrections, Minister for Youth Justice, Minister for Victim Support) (12:01): Thank you, Dr Bach. I thank him for his interest in relation to the criminal justice system and in particular our corrections system. We have already said as a government that our focus is on keeping Victorians safe and giving people the best opportunity to turn their lives around whilst they are in our custody and care. I visited Loddon Middleton on Monday; we are focused on giving them the best chance to rehabilitate through initiating programs that give them the skills and training needed upon their release to reintegrate into society as best as possible. That is through employment pathways, that is through housing options and it is through providing mental health and other health services, because we know that people in our care usually have more complex needs.

In terms of the question about our investment in our corrections system, I make no apologies about investing great amounts of money into our corrections and justice system, because that is what we do as a government. We do what matters. People want us to invest in better outcomes, and as you would know, the number of people incarcerated in our state has decreased over the last three years. I think that is as a result, that is the dividend, of our investments.

Matthew BACH (North-Eastern Metropolitan) (12:02): I thank the minister very much for his fascinating answer. By way of supplementary, Minister, the report also noted a lack of culturally suitable services available to Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people, who comprise 12 per cent

of the state's adult prison population, which again has doubled in the last 10 years. What specific programs are available to that cohort in Victoria's prison system?

Enver ERDOGAN (Northern Metropolitan – Minister for Corrections, Minister for Youth Justice, Minister for Victim Support) (12:02): Thank you, Dr Bach. Victoria has the second-lowest rate of incarceration for Indigenous people. I will start off with that factual matter; I will dispose of that. In terms of providing support to our First Nations people, we have culturally appropriate spaces, we have specific health checks targeted to our Aboriginal population and we have an Aboriginal women's healing unit. There are a number of programs as well that are in the adult system and in the youth justice system, and there are many more I could talk about. The premise is that we acknowledge that our First Nations people are disproportionately affected and represented in our criminal justice system. That is something that we are looking at as a government and we take very seriously. There are a number of reforms that have been proposed that will come to this chamber in due course. I want to thank our Attorney-General Jaclyn Symes for her work.

Medicinal cannabis

David ETTERSHPANK (Western Metropolitan) (12:03): (98) My question is for Minister Blandthorn, representing the Minister for Health. As highlighted in my adjournment speech last night, the cost of medicinal cannabis – up to \$1000 per week for some patients – can be a hugely prohibitive barrier to access, particularly for those who are unable to work as a result of their severe illness. Put simply, medicinal cannabis legislation does not equate to access for thousands of patients. To this end, the Australian Medicinal Cannabis Association is seeking to establish Compass, a charitably funded compassionate access scheme that will provide subsidised access for certain medicinal cannabis patients in Australia and has sought seed funding, if you will pardon the pun, from the federal government. So the question I ask is: will the minister lobby her federal counterpart Minister Butler to support the AMCA proposal?

Lizzie BLANDTHORN (Western Metropolitan – Minister for Disability, Ageing and Carers, Minister for Child Protection and Family Services) (12:04): Thank you, Mr Ettershank, for your question and for your care and concern for people who are suffering. It is obviously a question for the Minister for Health, as you identified, and in accordance with the standing orders I will pass that on to her and she will let you receive a response.

The PRESIDENT: Before I call Mr Ettershank, while I am happy to take his supplementary, I feel like that was more of an adjournment matter than a question. But I will take your supplementary.

David ETTERSHPANK (Western Metropolitan) (12:05): I thank the minister for her response. By way of supplementary, I simply ask: will the minister meet with Lucy Haslam, the co-founder and chair of the Australian Medicinal Cannabis Association and Compass in the same context?

Lizzie BLANDTHORN (Western Metropolitan – Minister for Disability, Ageing and Carers, Minister for Child Protection and Family Services) (12:05): Thank you again, Mr Ettershank, and again I will pass that on to the Minister for Health for her consideration.

Ministers statements: victims legal service

Enver ERDOGAN (Northern Metropolitan – Minister for Corrections, Minister for Youth Justice, Minister for Victim Support) (12:05): I rise to update the house on last week's launch of Victoria's first victims legal service, the result of a \$7.3 million investment by the Andrews Labor government. The victims legal service provides free legal advice and support to people who have suffered injury or loss as a result of a crime. It can help them seek compensation from the person who committed the crime – the offender – but the service can also help victims of crime seek financial assistance through the existing Victims of Crime Assistance Tribunal.

I want to thank Victoria Legal Aid as well as community legal centres and Aboriginal legal service providers across the state. They are partnering with the government to deliver this vital service. The

victims legal service was co-designed in close partnership with legal stakeholders, including Aboriginal legal services and people that specialise in working with women experiencing family violence. We also consulted closely with the Victims of Crime Consultative Committee to ensure the service best meets the needs of victims of crime.

In just its first week of operation the victims legal service assisted 45 victims with information and legal advice. It also made 18 referrals to supporting providers for ongoing legal work. People can contact the victims legal service helpline on 1800 531 566. This is just one of the many ways of ensuring that the voices of victims of crime are front and centre in our criminal justice system. The government has invested close to \$100 million to deliver on its commitment to establish a new financial assistance scheme – a landmark reform for victims of crime in Victoria. Once the financial assistance scheme is operational, the victims legal service will continue to be there to support victims with legal advice and information.

Freedom of information

David DAVIS (Southern Metropolitan) (12:07): (99) My question is to the Attorney-General. In the last financial year the Andrews Labor government increased the number of challenges to information commissioner freedom-of-information rulings from 16 to 30, an 87 per cent increase. Why has the Andrews Labor government so sharply increased the number of challenges to rulings by the information commissioner, who is the independent umpire?

Jaclyn SYMES (Northern Victoria – Attorney-General, Minister for Emergency Services) (12:08): I thank Mr Davis for his question, but I do not dictate the legal decisions of individual departments or offices. That would be incredibly inappropriate. In terms of any decisions to exercise people's legal right, whether they be an individual or a government department, it is a matter for them, and in very many instances it is more than appropriate to challenge decisions that they want to get tested.

David DAVIS (Southern Metropolitan) (12:08): Minister, the 61 challenges to the umpire OVIC's rulings by the government since 1 July 2020 are a clear sign that the government is determined to keep its secrets secret. How is this model litigant behaviour?

Members interjecting.

The PRESIDENT: Order! Before I call the minister, I could not hear Mr Davis's question. Could you ask it again – not the secret bit, the question.

David DAVIS: How is this model litigant behaviour?

Jaclyn SYMES (Northern Victoria – Attorney-General, Minister for Emergency Services) (12:09): I thank Mr Davis for his supplementary question. I do not agree that it is a clear sign in the way that you have articulated it at all. I do not receive information. No-one seeks advice from me about whether to challenge a matter under the FOI laws, but there are many reasons that one may seek to challenge FOI that are in the interests of protecting personal information or commercial-in-confidence. There are a number of reasons that it would be appropriate to have these matters tested by an independent umpire, and that independent umpire ain't me.

Nature Fund

Katherine COPSEY (Southern Metropolitan) (12:10): (100) My question is for the Minister for Environment. The Nature Fund was established by the Andrews government to fund high-impact projects to stop the decline of Victoria's native plants and animals. It was given \$10 million in last year's budget, but that money has now been allocated, applications are closed and there is currently no commitment to any further funding. Will the government commit money to extend the Nature Fund in the upcoming budget?

Ingrid STITT (Western Metropolitan – Minister for Early Childhood and Pre-Prep, Minister for Environment) (12:10): I thank Ms Copsey for her question and her interest in these matters. Can I say

that I have had the pleasure of recently meeting with the chair and the CEO of the Trust for Nature, and they do amazing work in our state. They have been overseeing a really wonderful program of creating covenants to protect private land for many, many years now. It is a key part of our *Biodiversity 2037* strategy to increase the amount of public and private land that is rehabilitated and revegetated so that we can, within the environment space, play our part in driving down emission reduction targets. We have got very ambitious targets in Victoria, and it is really going to take a whole-of-government effort, including in the environment portfolio, to drive those targets down.

In relation to your specific question about funding for the Trust for Nature, I am not in a position to pre-empt what the deliberations of the budget may result in. That is a matter that has quite a process behind it, and of course the Treasurer will, at the appropriate time, make those announcements associated with the budget, including for the environment portfolio. But what I can reassure you of is that the Andrews Labor government is absolutely committed to supporting all of our various environment initiatives and in particular organisations like the Trust for Nature and the very important work that they do in getting very good environmental outcomes in our state.

Katherine COPSEY (Southern Metropolitan) (12:12): Thank you to the minister for that answer. I wish you well in those deliberations. To put some context around those, the New South Wales government has an equivalent fund that gives out roughly \$75 million per year. Other states have funds that are similar and give away much more than \$10 million a year. It is really a drop in the ocean when it comes to the extent of the biodiversity crisis that we are facing in Victoria right now. Will the government commit, in the upcoming budget, to scale up the investment in the Nature Fund to meet the size of the biodiversity crisis in our state?

Ingrid STITT (Western Metropolitan – Minister for Early Childhood and Pre-Prep, Minister for Environment) (12:13): I thank Ms Copsey for her supplementary question, and can I say that I am smarting a little bit at the comparison with New South Wales because since coming to government in 2014 we have invested over \$560 million in Victoria on biodiversity initiatives. That is the single-largest investment of a Victorian government ever. We are absolutely committed to our ambitious plans that are contained within the *Biodiversity 2037* strategy, and as environment minister – you have thrown down the gauntlet now by raising New South Wales – I am absolutely committed to ensuring that we continue to build on that record into the future.

Ministers statements: child protection

Lizzie BLANDTHORN (Western Metropolitan – Minister for Disability, Ageing and Carers, Minister for Child Protection and Family Services) (12:14): I rise to update the house on how the Andrews Labor government is supporting the recruitment of new child protection practitioners to support Victorian families. Child protection practitioners play a key role in keeping Victorian children safe, and it is this side of the house that back this workforce and the important work that they do. Since 2014 we have been proud to have funded an additional 1180 child protection practitioners to ensure that we keep Victorian children as safe as we can.

It is important to contrast this with when those opposite were in power. Dr Bach was a key adviser to a former minister, and they cut 500 staff from the Department of Human Services. In case you could not hear me, Dr Bach: 500 staff from the Department of Human Services. It is not only funding additional child protection practitioners where there is a difference in approach; we have increased funding in family services to over \$385 million. That is a threefold increase in funding compared to those opposite.

We recognise the need to promote the fulfilling career option that child protection offers Victorian jobseekers, and that is why last week we launched the latest round of our Go Where You're Needed campaign. Through the campaign we continue to attract a highly skilled, capable and diverse child protection workforce for metropolitan, regional and rural areas. The campaign is a key part of the government's work to attract and retain skilled staff to this sector. Supporting families is important and impactful, and you are helping to create better futures for Victorian children and their families. A

key element of the campaign is showcasing the positive difference people working for Victoria's child protection service make each and every day by protecting children at risk and keeping families strong. Child protection practitioners gain a wide range of professional skills and are specialists in working with families who are most at risk. They can choose their own career path and collaborate with other professionals to support families.

The campaign is running through metropolitan and regional radio, regional press and social media, including Facebook, Instagram and LinkedIn. We are proud to be promoting the work of child protection practitioners, not talking them down or cutting their workforce, like those opposite. There are child protection jobs – *(Time expired)*

Inverloch surf beach

Melina BATH (Eastern Victoria) (12:16): (101) My question is to the Minister for Environment. The Inverloch Surf Life Saving Club is under considerable threat from coastal erosion due to the degradation of the sand dunes on the surf beach. The cape-to-cape resilience project proposes major capital works including breakwaters, groynes, rock walls and renourishment to arrest this destructive environment through erosion. Minister, when will your government act to stop the Inverloch Surf Life Saving Club being washed away?

Ingrid STITT (Western Metropolitan – Minister for Early Childhood and Pre-Prep, Minister for Environment) (12:17): Thank you, Ms Bath, for your question. Of course this is a key issue, coastal erosion and sea rise. The combined effects of tides and storm activity and coastal processes and local conditions present real challenges to communities right along the Victorian coastline, and of course Inverloch is an example of where that is seen at its most stark. It is why we allocated \$16.9 million in our last budget towards various initiatives to tackle coastal erosion, and it is all contained in our *Marine and Coastal Strategy*, which is a publicly available strategy on the DEECA website.

It is incredibly important that we do work closely with communities along the coastline, and Inverloch is an important example of that. It is where DEECA is leading the first regional and strategic partnership, or RASP, under the Marine and Coastal Act. It comprises nine agencies and also involves the Bunurong Land Council Aboriginal Corporation. There has been extensive work done to consult the community about what mitigation strategies might best suit the situation in Inverloch. We have invested more than \$1.5 million down there installing coastal protection structures on the Inverloch surf beach to protect the public infrastructure, including the surf club that you have raised, and we have invested an additional \$850,000 in the RASP to fund that technical assessment that is going to be required to go to stage 2 of that program. I hope that gives you a little bit of a feel for what we are doing down at Inverloch.

Melina BATH (Eastern Victoria) (12:19): I thank the minister for her response. I take up her points about consultation, but to quote the Inverloch Surf Life Saving Club's environmental officer Warren Cook, a former member of the cape-to-cape resilience project stakeholder group who resigned in frustration due to inaction, Mr Cook says:

Consultation is good, but it has been going on for three years now. It's time for action ...

Minister, after three years of consultation, when will the funding be made available to implement the cape-to-cape resilience plan as a matter of urgency to save this lifesaving club?

Ingrid STITT (Western Metropolitan – Minister for Early Childhood and Pre-Prep, Minister for Environment) (12:19): I do take issue with the way that you are presenting that supplementary question, because I have just taken you through the investment that we have already made in stage 1 of that project. Stage 2 is now underway, and there is an additional contribution of \$3.3 million. I know that my colleagues who represent Eastern Victoria are very pleased with the work that is going on down there. The federal government has also contributed \$400,000 to undertake that important work, and the consultation with the community will continue. We are proud that we are able to work so closely with the community on these challenges.

Sports clubs funding

Rikkie-Lee TYRRELL (Northern Victoria) (12:20): (102) My question is for the minister representing the Minister for Tourism, Sport and Major Events. Can you explain why the grassroots football clubs who are attached to the leagues that are not affiliated with the AFL are unable to access the same government grants as those who are? Some of these clubs serve as community centres and emergency evacuation hubs and are in desperate need of facility upgrades. These individual clubs do not have the option to affiliate themselves with the AFL if their affiliated leagues choose not to.

Harriet SHING (Eastern Victoria – Minister for Water, Minister for Regional Development, Minister for Commonwealth Games Legacy, Minister for Equality) (12:21): Thank you very much for that question. For the record, I am not known for my prowess on the AFL or indeed the basic principles that underpin that particular code. I do understand, however, that it is a very, very popular leisure time activity. My process when watching any of these sorts of things is that I really just hope that both teams get out there and have a lot of fun. I am not ideally placed to answer that question on behalf of Mr Dimopoulos, but what I will do, given his comparative expertise in the area, is seek an answer for you from him in accordance with the standing orders.

Ministers statements: Deakin University India campus

Gayle TIERNEY (Western Victoria – Minister for Training and Skills, Minister for Higher Education, Minister for Agriculture) (12:22): I am pleased to update the chamber on Victorian universities leading the world in expanding to new frontiers. This month our own Deakin University vice-chancellor Professor Iain Martin and the Prime Minister Anthony Albanese officially announced the establishment of the GIFT campus in India. This is the first university in the world to open an international teaching campus in India. Deakin has had a presence in India since 1994, and this has facilitated strong collaboration on research, education and training. Set to open in 2024, the same year Deakin celebrates its 50th anniversary and 30 years in India, the international campus will deliver job-ready graduates to meet India's soaring skills and labour demands and bolster Deakin's commitment to providing a world-class education and learning experience for students around the globe.

Professor Martin said Deakin's approach was 'in India, with India, for India' and that as the university prepared to celebrate its 50th anniversary in 2024, opening a new India campus marked an exciting chapter for the university. Deakin vice-president of global alliances and CEO South Asia Ms Pawha said that the momentous occasion for Australia and India could not be surpassed. The new campus aims to provide a world-class postgraduate education to meet industry's skilled workforce demands within the country. The India campus will provide better opportunities for local students who cannot afford to travel and live in Australia to study. I congratulate Deakin University on this world-first achievement and look forward to hearing about the many achievements of Indian Deakin graduates.

Princetown land acquisition

Bev McARTHUR (Western Victoria) (12:24): (103) My question is to the Minister for Regional Development –

Members interjecting.

Bev McARTHUR: Exciting! Minister, compulsory acquisition powers legalise state confiscation of private assets and, as such, should only be a last resort where no alternative is available and there is an overwhelming public interest argument. I hope we are all agreed on that – hopefully. Yet opposite the Twelve Apostles your department plans the hostile and forcible acquisition of 32 hectares of land from the Nesseler family despite their willingness to invest private money and develop the site they have legally owned for more than 50 years. In October 2019 your predecessor Minister Symes promised the family cooperation on the development and stated that no compulsory acquisition would occur. What has changed now to justify this confiscation?

Harriet SHING (Eastern Victoria – Minister for Water, Minister for Regional Development, Minister for Commonwealth Games Legacy, Minister for Equality) (12:25): Firstly, thank you, Mrs McArthur, for identifying the importance of regional development to this chamber. I am grateful to you for that question. I want to perhaps correct a couple of the things that have been presupposed in your question around the history of this matter and engagement with the Nessler family and the broader community.

Within the Twelve Apostles precinct development process, we are actually really proud to be supporting this initiative that, once it is complete, will transform the visitor experience of this iconic part of the state, which really is world famous. It is extraordinary. But it is also important that we add the necessary level of amenity. That streamlined connection to the local attractions is really, really important, and that is where again the cultural and environmental context for this is also a key part of this work, as you would be aware and as indeed the community is aware. This is also something which Minister Stitt is very closely involved with to make sure that we are actually delivering this project, in partnership with the Commonwealth, to the standard necessary to reflect the ongoing priorities of the community now and indeed into the future.

As you have flagged, the development does include an international visitor experience centre alongside that infrastructure and those amenities, and we do want to make sure, as I said, that Shipwreck Coast visitation numbers continue to go up over the years to come and that we build that in – with my other portfolio hat of Commonwealth Games – to the experiences that Victoria 2026 will deliver.

There have been numerous conversations not just with the Nessler family but also with the community. You are right to identify Minister Symes’s ongoing interest in this matter, but it is also really important to note that there have been conversations and discussions with representatives from Regional Development Victoria and the Nessler family that have been going on for some time. I really want to make it clear that discussions are continuing with the family and that the community overwhelmingly does back this project going ahead in the terms that we have outlined. It is also really important to note the partnerships that we have with the Commonwealth whereby under the city deal we will contribute \$292 million and the Commonwealth will contribute \$183.8 million, with other delivery partners and the City of Greater Geelong contributing more than \$26 million. This is not something that is being done in a haphazard or laissez-faire way. We are working through the process, and those conversations with the Nessler family go on.

Bev McARTHUR (Western Victoria) (12:28): I thank the minister for her attempt to answer the question. But, Minister, the Nesselers over a very long period of time have shown their willingness and ability to develop this site without any requirement for state or federal taxpayer investment, and to forcibly acquire this family’s land simply because the government prefers different owners is beyond disgraceful. It is state-sanctioned theft. Your letter to the Nesselers further stated that you will exempt the scheme from the requirement for prior reservation, a process which allows public participation and consultation with the affected landowners. Such exemption is envisaged for minor acquisitions with little material impact or for cases of particular urgency. This is a vast and long-term project. Why are you removing another safeguard of the private property rights which define civilised society?

Harriet SHING (Eastern Victoria – Minister for Water, Minister for Regional Development, Minister for Commonwealth Games Legacy, Minister for Equality) (12:29): Thank you, Mrs McArthur. I do not think that this does in fact constitute the definition of ‘civilised society’ as you have just put it to the chamber. What I would, however, say, though, is that there are processes in place to do projects in a way which delivers environmental, cultural, visitation and economic benefit to our regions. That is why this particular set of projects under the deal are so germane to the idea of doing things properly and in an integrated fashion so that, as I said, we have got benefit to the region for years to come.

This is – and I will go back to the point that I made in answer to the substantive question – a matter that is continuing to be part of discussions with the Nessler family. There are various conversations happening not just with RDV but also within the planning framework and discussions about that system and the way in which it might impact upon delivery of the project. But overwhelmingly it is important to note that we are committed to doing this project properly and to doing the right thing by everybody who enjoys and indeed relies upon the Shipwreck Coast for all of the benefits that it delivers.

LGBTIQ+ equality

David LIMBRICK (South-Eastern Metropolitan) (12:30): (104) My question is for the Minister for Equality. The minister would know that I have a strong interest in the defence of the rights of Victorians; indeed it has been one of my main sources of disagreement with the government over the last few years. My question to the minister is this: do the rights of biological women and transgender women sometimes come into conflict?

The PRESIDENT: I am just concerned, Mr Limbrick, that you are asking for an opinion. Would you like to change the terminology?

David LIMBRICK: Thank you, President. The minister gave a ministers statement on Tuesday on the issue of transgender women's rights. Let me rephrase the question. What is the minister doing to find solutions for potential conflicts between biological women and transgender women?

Harriet SHING (Eastern Victoria – Minister for Water, Minister for Regional Development, Minister for Commonwealth Games Legacy, Minister for Equality) (12:31): Thank you, Mr Limbrick, for that question. I do note your very well articulated and well understood position on these matters. I have talked at length about the importance of making sure that vulnerable cohorts of Victorians are given the respect and the support and the visibility that they deserve and which we all should ideally enjoy.

There has for a long time been a tension, not of the creation of the trans and gender-diverse communities but of others, to seek to create a divide between people who are from our LGBTIQ+ communities and people who are not. It is a really dangerous distinction to my mind to be drawing, not just because what it does do is perhaps permit or encourage the stigma that we as LGBTIQ+ people live with but also because it seeks to excuse conversations in the name of civilised debate or different views that are, at their heart, about saying that one particular group within our community should have lesser rights to participate in a range of activities that we all take for granted – for example, being able to apply for a job and actually get it without your gender or gender identity or sexuality being part of a decision not to employ you, being able to retain your job, being able to participate in sport, being able to access health care and being able to access documentation that reflects your identity and is therefore necessary for international travel and for the dignity of participating in decision-making on everything from filling out forms to the way that you open your wallet and see yourself reflected on the various cards that you carry with you.

It is so important that we understand in these conversations the disadvantage and the stigma that are not just caused but are perpetuated and augmented by a conversation on this conflict between rights. It ignores the overwhelming views of Australians and indeed of Victorians that trans people should have the same rights as others to participate in everyday life and be given the same opportunities and indeed protections at law to do that wherever it is a thing that is required to be done. Again, really importantly, I want to see that any conversations about trans rights are done in a way that actually recognises the damage that they cause and recognises the desire for trans people simply to be able to live in the same way as everybody else.

David LIMBRICK (South-Eastern Metropolitan) (12:34): I thank the minister for her answer. It sounded to me from your answer – and I do not want to put words in your mouth – that you do not see that there is a conflict, because to my mind it looks like there may be situations where there are

conflicts and where the government may need to look for solutions on how to manage and deal with those conflicts.

The PRESIDENT: That was a statement, but I think the minister is prepared to respond.

Harriet SHING (Eastern Victoria – Minister for Water, Minister for Regional Development, Minister for Commonwealth Games Legacy, Minister for Equality) (12:35): Thank you, President. The nature of conflict in this particular issue, to my mind and indeed as articulated by this government and by a range of other people not just in Victoria but around Australia and the world, is that this conflict arises because there are people and organisations and groups, none of which I will name here, who think that trans rights should be able to be compromised because others feel uncomfortable. That is a conflict, to my mind, that is a contrivance – that is in fact something that seeks to excuse an argument, to denigrate, to weaponise against and to cause or perpetuate discrimination or stigma in the name of the idea of robust debate or a difference of views. The conflict does not come from the trans community; the conflict comes because people view the trans community as somehow different in a way that should enable them to be treated differently.

Ministers statements: Hamilton Sanctuary

Ingrid STITT (Western Metropolitan – Minister for Early Childhood and Pre-Prep, Minister for Environment) (12:36): Further to the topic of biodiversity, thanks to a half-a-million-dollar investment from the Andrews Labor government, the Hamilton parklands predator-proof fence upgrade is now complete. The new barrier around Hamilton Sanctuary will better protect endangered and threatened animals, including the eastern barred bandicoot and the fat-tailed dunnart. I cannot believe that. It is so cute; google it. The fence includes a floppy top to prevent predators from entering the enclosure. This extra protection allows for other endangered species to be released or temporarily housed in the area and will encourage the recovery of the eastern barred bandicoot population numbers in the area – the first Australian species, my friends to the right, to have its conservation status reclassified from extinct in the wild to endangered.

This is a significant investment from the Andrews Labor government in wildlife recovery following the 2019–20 bushfires and forms part of the \$62.2 million biodiversity response and recovery program. Hamilton Sanctuary will act as an emergency shelter location for animals affected by bushfires, giving them a secure home while they wait to be returned to their natural habitat when the risk subsides. The upgraded fence will keep these endangered and threatened animals safe from predators, encouraging population growth. This is a critical step towards protecting and preserving our precious biodiversity, and it is testament to the hard work and dedication of all of those who worked tirelessly to make it happen.

Written responses

The PRESIDENT (12:38): Can I show my appreciation to Minister Shing, who will get a written response for Mrs Tyrrell’s question to the minister for sport, and to Minister Blandthorn, who will get written responses to both Mr Ettershank’s questions to the Minister for Health.

Constituency questions

Northern Metropolitan Region

Evan MULHOLLAND (Northern Metropolitan) (12:39): (108) At the 2022 election the Liberals were the first major party to commit to an education plan for Merri-bek North schools John Fawkner College, Glenroy College and Pascoe Vale Girls College, in consultation with RISE North – Residents Improving Secondary Education – a commitment that was matched by the Labor Party some weeks later. After consultation with the community, our side of politics committed to ruling out turning Pascoe Vale Girls into a co-ed school. Pascoe Vale Girls is a great school that caters for many in our diverse and faith communities in the north. They were very pleased to hear former education minister James Merlino rule out turning Pascoe Vale Girls into a co-ed school as part of the education plan but

are concerned that this may be revisited. Will the new minister offer the same commitment and keep Pascoe Vale Girls as a girls-only school?

Southern Metropolitan Region

Katherine COPSEY (Southern Metropolitan) (12:40): (109) My question is for the minister representing the Minister for Tourism, Sport and Major Events. Next Thursday the 2023 grand prix will begin, marking its 27th year impacting Albert Park – 27 years of public spending on an event with opaque decision-making and sparse community consultation. Every single year the grand prix has run at a net loss, relying on the government to prop it up with taxpayer money. To date, in under three decades, successive Victorian governments have spent over \$890 million on this event. To put it in perspective, this government found \$80 million to spend on the 2022 grand prix but only promised a quarter of that amount for the adaptation and resilience of coastal communities across the entire state. Close to \$1 billion of public money has been given to the grand prix. If the government believes spending on it delivers a net positive value, will it demonstrate this by finally funding a post-event cost-benefit analysis, as community activists in Albert Park have requested for years?

Western Victoria Region

Bev McARTHUR (Western Victoria) (12:41): (110) My question is for the Minister for Energy and Resources and relates to the Victoria to New South Wales Interconnector West and Western Renewables Link ministerial order published on 20 February. One effect of the order is to disapply the National Electricity Rules process, including the RIT-T. This regulatory investment test for transmission is an established requirement to determine optimal transmission routes, balancing price, quality, safety, reliability and security of supply. The National Electricity (Victoria) Act 2005 did not include this power to disapply until amended in 2020. A legal challenge to the validity of the decision made by the Australian Energy Market Operator in relation to the RIT-T for the WRL project was launched in the Victorian Supreme Court on 23 December last year. Minister, did your decision to use this power occur before or after you become aware of the Supreme Court proceedings, and was it motivated by it?

Northern Victoria Region

Wendy LOVELL (Northern Victoria) (12:43): (111) My question is for the Minister for Education and concerns acquisition of vacant land next to Toolamba Primary School in Wren Street. Toolamba Primary School has a current enrolment of 144 and is expected to grow significantly in the future. The school is currently landlocked, but in a stroke of luck a local family has offered the school a vacant block adjacent to the school for purchase at approximately 50 per cent of its market value. The block was valued at \$220,000 in September 2022. The school council has submitted a business case supporting the purchase of the land, but the Victorian School Building Authority has since indicated the soil is contaminated, with decontamination costs estimated to be \$113,000. Whilst the news is disappointing, the purchase of the land is a chance to futureproof Toolamba Primary School that cannot be missed. Will the minister provide the full funding required to purchase and decontaminate the block of land adjacent to Toolamba Primary School?

Eastern Victoria Region

Renee HEATH (Eastern Victoria) (12:44): (112) My constituency question is for the Minister for Tourism, Sport and Major Events. The question I ask is: when will the Andrews Labor government commit to matching the Liberal Party's promise to fund the upgrades to Hastings Park that the Hastings community so desperately need? The football–netball club lies at the heart of the Hastings community. With increased numbers of women participating in sport, the outdated facilities have become inadequate to meeting the growing demands of the club. Portable change rooms are not fit for purpose, and many parents have reached out to me pleading for support. Without dedicated women's change rooms, there are fears that participation will drop and the progress made in promoting women's sport will be for nothing. In September 2022 the Liberal candidate for Hastings Briony Hutton

announced a \$1.5 million commitment from the Liberal Party for stage 1 of the Hastings Park upgrade. When will the Andrews Labor government support women's participation in sport by matching the Liberal Party's commitment to funding these crucial upgrades at Hastings Park?

Eastern Victoria Region

Melina BATH (Eastern Victoria) (12:45): (113) My constituency question is for the Minister for Tourism, Sport and Major Events. The not-for-profit Friends of the State Coal Mine in Wonthaggi have serious concerns about the long-term viability of their mine tours, the function centre and the cafe of significant historical context. The underground tours, suspended at the beginning of the COVID lockdowns, have not been reinstated, and the cafe had to close in January this year. In an effort to bring about a positive solution to this hiatus in operations, the Friends of the State Coal Mine are holding a meeting on 29 March – next week – at the Wonthaggi Workmen's Club at 7 pm. They are absolutely positive about getting this reinstated, but they need support, so my question is: will the minister for tourism attend this meeting and find a way forward for this important tourist venture?

South-Eastern Metropolitan Region

Ann-Marie HERMANS (South-Eastern Metropolitan) (12:46): (114) My question is to the Minister for Roads and Road Safety in the other place. Recently I met with the owners of businesses on Progress Street and Nathan Road in Dandenong South. Progress Street and Nathan Road form a dead-end street, with the only way in and out via the Progress Street level crossing, which is now being closed. The clear solution is for Progress Street to be reconnected by the construction of the Dandenong bypass. My question is from the local businesses, who would like to know, as would I: when will the government start and complete the construction of this bypass extension?

Sitting suspended 12:47 pm until 2:03 pm.

Motions

Early childhood education

Ingrid STITT (Western Metropolitan – Minister for Early Childhood and Pre-Prep, Minister for Environment) (14:05): It gives me enormous pleasure to rise today to move motion 7 on the notice paper in Ms Watt's name:

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.

Before I get into my very long contribution on this wonderful topic – and I know that Dr Bach is looking forward to this enormously – we talk about kinder quite a bit in here, but that is because it is truly one of the policy areas where in generations to come I think we can all, regardless of our political persuasions, say, 'Yes, we were members of Parliament when these reforms were being implemented.' I really, truly believe that these reforms are transformative in nature. I thank Ms Watt for bringing this motion forward. I know that she is absolutely passionate about the kindergarten services in her region of Northern Metropolitan. I have been to quite a number of kinders with Ms Watt, and I can attest to her story-reading skills. I can fondly recall a fantastic event that I did with Ms Watt and Ms Theophanous from the other place with Eddie Betts, that football legend who is now a children's author and whose book was part of the first rollout of kinder kits last year. I thank Ms Watt for her ongoing commitment to this policy area and for bringing this motion before the Parliament today.

Of course, just recapping some of the changes that we are steering through in Victoria in relation to kindergarten, it is important I think to not just reflect on the latest round of reform announcements but to celebrate the fact that our three-year-old kindergarten reforms are nation leading. We are the first state in Australia to provide funded three-year-old kindergarten. We will be by 2029 providing 15 hours per week of three-year-old kinder for all children. This year saw free kinder introduced for all three- and four-year-olds across the state. I will have a bit more to say about that.

The Victorian government's investment of \$5 billion over 10 years to support the sector to deliver that three-year-old kindergarten commitment is incredibly important, and of course it is not only to support the building of the bricks and mortar and the infrastructure that we need for three-year-old kindergarten right across the state but it is also a huge opportunity to expand and train the next generation of early childhood teachers and educators. The three-year-old kindergarten reform alone will increase the workforce in this sector by approximately 5000 new teachers and educators. We have been getting on with building a very strong pipeline in that regard.

It is a staged geographical rollout, three-year-old kinder, as many of you will recall. Those members who have got regional and rural responsibilities will know that that was the first part of the state where we rolled out three-year-old kinder. We have been expanding that statewide in tranches ever since. I am pleased to say that last year was the full state delivering between five and 15 hours, depending on what stage of the rollout they were at. Notwithstanding the significant challenges of COVID in that sector with all of the issues around people being off sick and the disruptions of the pandemic, it was a really successful start to that three-year-old kindergarten statewide rollout.

Of course I could not make a contribution in this place on early childhood education and care and our reforms without acknowledging that none of it is possible without the incredible teachers and educators and educational leaders in this sector, who really are just one of the most magnificent workforces that I have had the pleasure to work with.

From 2023 we have flexible hours for three-year-old kindergarten, and from this year services can set their own hours of between 5 and 15 hours per week. This policy was set to maximise children's access to the reform's benefit; however, it does mean that there will be some variation in hours available to families between services and locations as we sort of flex up to the full 15 hours a week by 2029. Here is just a bit of a snapshot of how many of our kindergarten services are already delivering three-year-old kinder – it is a fairly high proportion of our kinder services: around 2700 services are currently delivering three-year-old kindergarten. I think that is a real testament to the way in which the sector – all of the providers and all of the workers in the sector – have really embraced this reform. And as I said, it is the first state in Australia to roll out three-year-old kinder.

Since 2019 there have been 179 major capacity-increasing infrastructure projects that have been approved to support the three-year-old component of our reforms alone. Just think about it: 179 major capital projects making sure that no matter where you live in Victoria your family can access a quality kindergarten facility. We have also rolled out, as part of the three-year-old reforms, 21 kindergartens on new and existing school sites, with up to 11 more, which I recently announced, to be delivered in 2024. A total of 40 kindergartens on school sites will be delivered between 2024 and 2026.

That just gives you a bit of an update on where we are at with three-year-old kinder rollout. It is a significant reform in itself, and of course on top of that the government has announced and got cracking on the Best Start, Best Life reforms, which are a \$9 billion commitment over 10 years comprising some of those key initiatives, which I will go to in a minute.

One of the really rewarding things about having the honour of this portfolio is going out and talking to the workforce in the sector, who say to me, 'Wow, we never thought we'd see the day when there would be this much investment in our work.' And I know that they say that to me not because they just like having well-funded programs but because they are genuinely committed to making sure that that funding makes a difference to children. They are, as I have said many times in this place, the most dedicated professionals that I have ever had the honour to work with.

In terms of the Best Start, Best Life reforms, this is pretty exciting stuff. I could probably recite this in my sleep these days, but I still get excited when I talk about free kinder, because this is an absolute game changer for families. We know how tough families are doing it in terms of the cost-of-living pressures that we are all experiencing right across the country. In fact right across the globe there are really significant financial pressures on working people. To be able to provide free kindergarten for

every three- and four-year-old child at participating services provides that access for children and families who might not have been in a position to be able to access and afford kindergarten. It just takes the cost right out of the equation. What I am hearing from many, many providers – and I do try to get out and about and visit as many kindergartens as I can – is that this is actually having a really positive impact on their enrolment numbers.

They are seeing families that they have never seen before participating in kindergarten this year – families who we know would have been priced out of kindergarten programs previously. It is not cheap. Before we introduced free kinder parents were paying on average about \$2500 per year per child. When you consider we are in an inflationary environment – we have had interest rate increases that are really putting a lot of pressure on families to meet their obligations, to meet their payments – this is just one of a number of ways that the government is assisting families and Victorians with cost-of-living pressures. I just think about the added benefit of what it will mean for those children who may not have been participating before we took the decision to fund this. That, to me, is what it is all about.

In terms of delivering a new universal pre-prep year for every four-year-old, again, this is something that we all ought to be incredibly proud of, and it is pleasing that New South Wales have made very similar commitments in respect to creating a pre-prep year for four-year-olds. In fact it was a policy area where Victoria and New South Wales were able to do some really great work collaboratively on what our shared vision for early childhood education ought to be in this country.

So from 2025 we will begin the rollout of pre-prep for four-year-old kindergarten. It will transition over a number of years, between 2025 and 2032. Now, some of you might think, ‘Well, wow, that’s a long time, why can’t you just get on with it?’ The reality is that there are a lot of things that have to be put in place to be able to deliver this reform properly, not least of which is recruiting, you know, another significant number of teachers and educators on top of the 5000 that we already needed for three-year-old kinder.

We estimate that as a total package we will need 11,000 new teachers and educators in early childhood education by 2032. That is a bit daunting, and some of our providers say, ‘Wow, how’re we going to meet that challenge?’ But I have to say that the Department of Education division that look after this policy area are an outstanding group of people. I have nothing but praise for the way in which they have tackled this reform in a very collaborative way with the sector. They have wasted no time putting together proposals for government around how we can build a really strong pipeline of teachers and educators and attract the people that we need in this sector over the next decade.

We have committed \$370 million to support that effort, and I guess the thing I want to say about these reforms is yes, they do have quite an eye-watering price tag attached to them, but we see it as an investment. We see it as an investment because every dollar that you spend in early childhood education and care you can almost double in terms of the economic benefits for the whole country. I mean, one of the wonderful benefits of these reforms, apart from the obvious, which is setting children up for the best start in life, one of the other great benefits, is it does allow for much greater workforce participation for parents, particularly women, and the economic benefits that will flow from that are significant.

Whilst we can look at a \$14 billion price tag and go ‘Wow that’s a lot’, you do have to put your money where your mouth is. You cannot just come out with a strategy and not back it in with strong investment and carefully tailored initiatives. That is what as minister I have sought to do, and I have wonderful support in those public servants in the Department of Education, in the early childhood division.

The pre-prep reform on its own is a massive piece of reform. I am really looking forward to getting out there and working collaboratively with providers and peak bodies in the sector – we have got a fantastic task force advisory group that is being set up that has a range of stakeholders already

represented. I am also really looking forward to having some direct consultation with workers in the sector – teachers and educators – and their industrial representatives so that we can continue to work really hard to elevate the status of that profession, to reward them for the incredible work that they do and to get behind them so that the community looks at the work that they do and really values it as well. We want people to not only choose this as a profession and a career, we want them to stay in these jobs, and we will be, through that \$370 million investment, pursuing a range of attraction and retention initiatives.

We also know that the Victorian government is responsible for the delivery – I am doing all right, right? Still got 13 minutes to go, and I have not even scratched the surface. I have not even got to the Kinder Kit contents yet.

What I was about to say is there are some different responsibilities at a state and federal level around early childhood education and care. Nobody wants to get into the weeds about who is responsible for what, but it is the case that Victoria is responsible for kindergarten funding and delivery through our providers across the sector, and there are a range of different types of providers in the sector, as Dr Bach will know. But the federal government is responsible for long day care, and I am really pleased that I have been able to work very collaboratively so far with the Albanese federal government, with Minister Aly and Minister Clare, on the important reforms that the Commonwealth will be pursuing in this area, which I think will dovetail with and really complement the work that we are doing in Victoria.

Members will be aware that the federal government will be having a Productivity Commission review into this sector. It will also be looking at ways that it can reform the childcare subsidy, which is another affordability issue for families. That combined with our free kinder hours will be an absolute game changer for families that are in full-time or significant part-time work. It will enable them to know that they can go out to work, or in some cases pick up additional hours, and know that their children are getting the very best quality care and education that our state can offer.

I thank the federal government for their commitment in these areas. They have announced that they are going to be working on an early years strategy for the nation, and of course Victoria will feed into that process and make our views known; I think they have a pretty strong sense of what our ambitions are in this area. I would like to think that we are, as a nation, open to a conversation about what early years education should look like nationally. We already have two years of early childhood education and care funded in Victoria; we are the only state to do so. South Australia are in the process of a royal commission to look at whether they do three-year-old kinder. The commissioner is a former Prime Minister of this country the Honourable Julia Gillard.

Other states and territories are looking at these questions, and I think it would be a wonderful thing if Australia could harmonise its offerings in terms of early childhood education and care. All of the really progressive countries in this area know that if you invest in the early years, it has a profound positive impact on how children perform during those formative early years in primary school as well.

Tom McIntosh: Yet again we lead the nation.

Ingrid STITT: Yes, that is right. It is a no-brainer; it really is.

I do want to just take a moment to talk about our incredible workforce in this sector. As I mentioned earlier, none of these reforms would be at all possible without the incredible dedication and professionalism of our early childhood teachers and educators. I know that the last couple of years have not been easy for them, but I want to thank them for getting many, many families through that difficult time. I know that when my kids were young, there were a few key people in my life as a young parent – my maternal and child health nurse at the local council and my kids' kinder teachers.

Sheena Watt interjected.

Ingrid STITT: We met them, Sheena. I feel like I am repeating a previous contribution here, but Sheena has just reminded me that we went and opened a fabulous kindergarten in the City of Melbourne run by the council in North Melbourne. I bumped into my children's kindergarten teacher. My kids are 25 and 22 now –

A member: They're not!

Ingrid STITT: They are, and they still talk about Narelle the cook and her macaroni cheese, and they of course talk lovingly and adoringly about their kindergarten teacher from back in those years. So it was absolutely lovely to bump into Michele. She is still in this sector. She is now an educational leader at the service. Melbourne City Council run a few very high-quality services in inner Melbourne. We need about 11,000 more Micheles, and I reckon we are going to get there, because I tell you what, I think people will look at the investments and the reforms that are going on in Victoria and think seriously about a career in early childhood education and care, and why wouldn't they?

Look, it is not all about the dry stuff. There is some fun as well that one can have –

A member: Plenty.

Ingrid STITT: Yes. Lots of fun. I want to take a moment just to talk about the kinder kits, which are an absolutely magnificent initiative. Really what they are about is giving parents a bit of a package of tools, if you like, for their children to be able to pursue play-based learning at home. One of the things that we did when we were coming up with this idea of the kinder kits in celebration of three-year-old kinder – that is why we rolled them out – was that we thought, 'Well, if we're going to do this, we're going to do it properly.' The Department of Education got a panel of early childhood experts together who fine-tuned the contents of the kinder kits. They were vigorously assessed and tested. The kinder kits, of course, are a really great example of how you can combine government policy in these sorts of initiatives, because not only was it about a fantastic package of goodies for kindergarten children and their parents to take home, it was also an opportunity for Victorian businesses to tender to provide the contents of the kinder kit, and we have got some wonderful examples of that. We are in our second iteration of the kinder kit.

Ryan Batchelor: Made in Victoria.

Ingrid STITT: Made in Victoria. Of course there are a range of books contained in the kinder kit which are from Victorian authors, including *Birds in the Bush* by Aunty Fay Stewart-Muir and Jeannette Rowe; *Whose Animals? Australia*, written and illustrated by Jeannette Rowe in consultation with Boon Wurrung elder Aunty Fay Stewart-Muir; *Where is Galah?*, written by Sally Morgan; and *My Friend Fred*, written by Frances Watts and illustrated by A Yi. There are some examples of some really great Australian books with a very strong emphasis on First Nations and understanding the important role that our Indigenous traditional owners play in caring for our country.

I must say that every time I go to a kinder and we have a welcome to country from the kinder kids I think, 'Wow, the future is bright, because these children understand and respect the role of traditional owners in our country.' It is actually quite tangible when you go and listen to them do a welcome to country. I am really proud that our kinder kids have a really strong emphasis on that.

We have also got some great toys and other little bits and bobs in the kinder kit. There is the Little Green & Co threading friends kit – it is lovely; I am going to get you a kit, Mrs McArthur – the Tiger Tribe whiteboard markers and duster; the Tinta Crayons, a pack of three; and the Wild Dough playdough, which is one of my favourite stories. This is by a woman who had a catering business which was struggling during COVID. She diversified and got into playdough, so now she is the playdough queen. There are Tiger Tribe castanets, and I have had a few lovely little sessions with some of my little friends at kinders with the castanets. There is a Micador Early Start Developmental Activity Pad and also some Purebaby Story Cubes, which are beautiful, by local artist Nikita Rotumah. She is a traditional owner from the Gunditjmara tribe from the western districts of Victoria, and she

also has connections to the Bunitj tribe in the Northern Territory. There are also Seed Collection Grow Your Own Alfalfa Seeds to grow at home – this is just magic, right? – and Flip Make Play family cards developed by the Department of Education.

That is just a little taste of the joys of early childhood education and care in our state. I think with the kinder kids they have gone down really well. In fact I have had grandparents emailing me saying, ‘Where is my granddaughter’s kinder kit?’ and chasing me down the street wanting to know when they are going to be delivered to an area near them.

Matthew Bach: Well, that is a scandal if people are not getting them. We are going to put in an FOI request: how many people have not received their kinder kit?

Ingrid STITT: Go for it, Dr Bach. I can assure you they have all been fully rolled out now, so everybody is a winner.

We have got a lot of exciting things going on in kindergarten reform in Victoria, and we have some wonderful kindergartens that are doing amazing things. One of the things about kinder is that it is a fantastic educational experience for children that sets them up for life, but it also so much more than that. It is often where young parents build their community and their support networks. I have seen so many examples of kindergartens that go above and beyond just the basic delivery of their kindergarten programs. The model these days is just a game changer. I have been to a number of fantastic services that not only provide kinder but have all the wraparound services for the family and are co-located. The best examples of all of this are where we have our kinder on school sites program. There are some wonderful examples of kinders on school sites. They have got the maternal and child health people there. If not full time, they come through the service regularly – a few times a week. They have playgroups there, which is a great way to not only get young parents connected with other families but introduce them to the kindergarten offering in Victoria. We have had a lot of people enrol through that pathway. There is also support for families at those services.

The future is bright in early childhood education and care in Victoria, and our government could not be prouder to be delivering the \$14 billion of nation-leading reform in this policy area.

Matthew BACH (North-Eastern Metropolitan) (14:35): I am very pleased to follow my friend Minister Stitt in discussing Ms Watt’s motion, which says:

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.

It was very good to hear from the minister as she stepped through the details of this very significant reform agenda. As she said, there is a significant reform agenda in early childhood – there has been for some time now. It is a reform agenda of more long standing under Minister Tierney in higher education and training, particularly when it comes to our TAFEs. I will use appropriate opportunities as I move forward to talk about what we perhaps could learn from those reform agendas in the primary and secondary spaces. This motion is quite right to pick up on the need for fairness. It is noteworthy that when the government announced this reform agenda before the election we on this side of the house were very quick to echo our support.

I have heard the minister talk at length on other occasions – she ran out of time this time – about an issue that she touched upon in her contribution, and that is that over recent years we have learned so much about the minds of young children and how important it is to give our youngest children, our youngest learners, really rich learning experiences. I used to be a secondary teacher, and there is too much focus, quite frankly, on those of us who have taught years 10, 11 and 12. I am afraid there is still a hierarchy in education, but there should not be. There should be far more focus on what we do in the early years, and I know this is something that the minister is passionate about as well. Far too many of our kindergarten teachers and our other amazing early childhood educators consistently get the message – I do not think knowingly or willingly from people in this place, but sometimes from people

in the media, sometimes from elsewhere – that they are engaged in child care. I know that is an expression that the minister is very careful to use as little as possible. I do not criticise her for the comments she made about an ancillary benefit of really strong kindergarten being that in particular many Victorian women can use that opportunity to get back into the workforce. That is a great thing but, as the minister said, it is not the primary benefit and should not be the primary aim of these types of reforms. The primary aim should be to provide the best and strongest possible educational foundation for our young learners.

The minister said in her contribution, and I noted it, that because of these reforms we are going to need 11,000 more educators. The minister said, quite rightly, that this is a huge task, and she is really hopeful that we will be able to get there. Well, I am too, but I do think that that is something that we will all need to work together on, because that is a monumental task. I do not criticise the government for the scale of this reform – far from it. We join with the government in supporting very significant additional investment in our kindergartens and a very significant expansion of kindergarten programs and indeed of so-called free kinder, but that is a massive challenge.

There are huge workforce issues right across our education system. Right now across our primary and secondary schools just in the state system there are 1517 vacancies. That is today. That is new data from the Department of Education. I was at an education forum this morning with the Minister for Education, Minister Hutchins, and she was asked by the deputy editor of the *Age* newspaper if there was a strategy to deal with the crippling staff shortages that we are seeing not only in our state schools but also in our independent schools and across the Catholic sector. The deputy editor of the *Age* newspaper noted that he did not think he heard one from the minister. I have fully supported the government's attempts in our primary and secondary schools to recruit more teachers. I do not have a criticism. I have asked a whole series of questions on notice, which it may not surprise you to learn I am still waiting for a response on, but presently I do not have a criticism of the government's efforts to seek to recruit more teachers.

But we have got to have a thoroughgoing reform agenda across our schools to seek to retain the amazing teachers we have already got across primary and secondary schools, and this is relevant to the motion because, unless we have that reform agenda in place in our primary and secondary schools, we are going to lose the benefits of a reform agenda in kindergarten. So I would urge Minister Hutchins to do what I did today and have some very fruitful discussions with Meredith Peace, the head of the Australian Education Union here in Victoria, who has excellent ideas about what we can do better in our schools. I would urge the minister to note the outstanding ideas of the Grattan Institute, in particular regarding how we can honour our best, most expert educators, pay them more to carry out coordinating roles and mentoring roles in our schools as we seek to stop the bleed – stop so many of our teachers leaving.

The minister is right to note that we have got workforce challenges across various sectors of the economy, and I heard from her today an acknowledgement of the scale of the challenge. So I would urge the government to keep its eye firmly focused on that ball, because we need to get that right, and that is a massive challenge. The union has called it a crisis; the Early Learning Association Australia, the peak body, has called it a crisis – the workforce shortage we have got at the moment.

That will not fix itself just because there is significant investment in early childhood, which I welcome and support. I want to continue my highly collaborative relationship with Minister Stitt so that we on this side of the house do everything we can as well to do a series of things – certainly to continue to enhance the standing of the early childhood education and care workforce across the community. I noted the minister's comments and I echo them entirely. Our workforce in early childhood education is so expert, highly trained, highly professional and, quite frankly, has the ability to provide so much more benefit for young people than I ever could have done in my year 10, 11 or 12 classes. That is just the nature of the emerging brains of children. Yet still out there is a perception in some quarters, and it is not a malicious perception – I think it is largely an ill-informed perception – that we are talking about child care. I hear politicians from different political parties sometimes talk about child care. I

think together we can do better there. We can have a nuanced conversation about the importance of making sure that parents, in particular women, returning to work after having children have the options they need whilst also building up our amazing workforce. My hope is that through these reforms, working together, we will be able to see the participation rate of Victorian children in kinder increase.

It has been great to have a whole series of conversation recently with Ms Lovell, who was the early education minister under the Baillieu and Napthine governments. Under Ms Lovell's reforms Victoria's participation rate in kindergarten reached over 98 per cent – an astronomical rate. That dipped under COVID, quite understandably, but still it is much lower than that in Victoria. I think if we get these reforms right, we may be able to see an increase.

As I said at the outset, I did want to touch upon fairness. When it comes to primary and secondary education I have a whole series of deep worries about where we are headed. Before COVID hit Victorian children completed the PISA – the Programme for International Student Assessment – test, and they received their worst ever learning outcomes. What we saw then and what we have seen through NAPLAN is that there is really significant educational inequality. We know kids in our regions do far worse than kids in the city. That is not because of a simplistic reason. We have so many brilliant teachers in our regions and there are so many bright kids in our regions, but nonetheless there is still significant educational inequality. When you look across different LGAs there is still very significant educational inequality. Minister Stitt says that in early childhood that is something she is focused on. I am very pleased. I worry, though, that across the education department there is a tendency to embrace educational fads that in actual fact make inequality worse.

I have heard the minister talk about so-called positive education before, and I have deep worries about so-called positive education. We have had a discussion recently, as there have been proposed changes to the national curriculum, about ideology entering the classroom, and I am worried about that. I do not want to see left-wing ideology in our classrooms. I also do not want to see failed right-wing ideology in our classrooms, and yet this is a government that has embraced entirely positive education.

If you read Professor Mick Power's outstanding book *Understanding Happiness*, you will note that positive education flows directly from the debunked positivity movement that started with Norman Vincent Peale's book *The Power of Positive Thinking*. Peale was lauded by politicians at the time, largely right-wing politicians. President Ronald Reagan, who I respect very much, gave him the Presidential Medal of Freedom, and Peale's great mentee was Donald J Trump. It is interesting that so-called positive education, which experts say flows directly from the failed positivity movement in America, is being relentlessly pushed in our schools by a Labor government dominated by the Socialist Left.

The founder of positive education is a man by the name of Martin Seligman, and he has previously advocated for no wealth distribution over a cap of \$8000. That is an utterly radical far-right view. No reasonable person would push a view like that. His view, and the view of positive education, erases structural factors for inequality – the fact that children live in our regions, the fact that children may come from a home where English is a second language, the fact that children may come from a home in a lower socio-economic area. There are structural factors that lead to inequality. I am all for individual responsibility – of course I am – but all of us on this side of the house would note that there are structural reasons for the deep educational inequality that we see, and yet, through its commitment to so-called positive education, this government is pushing a failed neoliberal agenda in our schools that says to children, 'Put aside your negativity bias; you too could be Prime Minister.' And yet we know that through that process we are simply likely to exacerbate educational inequality.

The Minister for Education, who I think probably should have been replaced by either Minister Stitt or Minister Tierney at the education forum run by the *Age* this morning, was talking again about her commitment to positive education. What those who are committed to positive education say is that it improves students' mental health. That is wrong. Again, I would urge Minister Hutchins and her staff to read *Understanding Happiness*, the outstanding book by Professor Mick Power – sadly deceased

now – formerly professor of psychology at Singapore University. In that book he makes the point that Americans are easily the happiest people in the world and the most positive people in the world. They are also the most anxious people in the world.

I am all for happiness, and yet it is no substitute in education for the pursuit of purpose and meaning, for ensuring that every single learner can locate their unique passion and purpose, and in that negative emotions have their place. We should not be telling teachers you cannot mark a paper in red pen because the poor little snowflake may think they have got something wrong – well, they probably got something wrong. We should not be encouraging schools to run races where everybody gets the same ribbon – there is not a winner or a loser. We should be teaching young people to understand and embrace failure, to learn from failure as an entirely normal part of life. That is what builds resilience, not this relentless focus on keeping young people happy at all costs. Not one of our education ministers in this place but the education minister in the other place this morning spoke about the importance of fostering happy minds. I would like young people to be happy, but for me that is a secondary consideration. I want each and every young Victorian to have the equality of opportunity that they need to find their unique passion and purpose. That is what I think a great education system is about.

Now, I do not want to score points on this motion. Overall, of course, we support these reforms. My friend Mr Davis is going to move a matter-of-fact amendment that I am sure the government will support. He is going to move an amendment that inserts the notion, quite correctly too, that there is a black hole in the funding arrangements for so-called free kinder, and he will speak to that.

There are some issues when it comes to sessional kinders. As Minister Stitt knows, because I have had many conversations with her about this, my daughter goes to the most fabulous sessional kinder. There are many sessional kinders who have been disadvantaged by these reforms, and I would urge the government, quite frankly, to do better and to listen to the presidents of those kindergartens: overwhelmingly young mums who have problems and have needed to make cuts to the programs on offer at those kindergartens.

It has been noted to me in some of my discussions with early childhood educators recently that many of the details of this reform agenda are still being worked through, that what happened before the election is that a major announcement was made and that only now we are trying to retrofit some of the important details. Now, I am not going to be overcritical of that sort of process, but I would say that Minister Stitt needs to do and continue to do what she says she is doing, and that is to really listen to the amazing educators across this sector and, if some changes need to be made even now, not to be too proud to make those changes, because we all share the same aim, and that is a fabulous system of early childhood education that does, as Ms Watt says in her motion, give every single Victorian child the best possible start in life. It sounds like something Mr Bracks used to say, doesn't it, but nonetheless it is a great sentiment.

Finally, as a perhaps second-order or third-order point, the minister referenced how fabulous kindergarten is for young parents, and again I would concur with her in that. It is one of the many reasons why I always encourage people to send their children to kindergarten to make the most of the opportunities on offer. First and foremost, it is fantastic for kids and for their learning, but it is also great for young parents, who sometimes can feel isolated.

My wife and I are part of the most amazing kindergarten community. As the minister was speaking I was thinking about the fact that it was my responsibility to deal, quite rightly and understandably, with my two girls this morning because my wife was off with some of the other kinder mums doing some yoga in a public place. She is part of a group. They have a name; they are called Femme Fitale. It is good, isn't it? On alternate mornings every weekday I do some circuit training, I think you would probably call it – although this sort of thing is not really my strong suit – with a group of the kinder dads, and we have a name as well. I do not know if it is entirely suitable for this place, but our name – and we have merchandise as well –

Ryan Batchelor: This could go anywhere.

Matthew BACH: No, we think it is very clever – it is not really. It is WTF, which stands for ‘witness the fitness’. So every morning of the week either my wife or I are out and about with fabulous people from our kinder community, and then that means that we socialise more, which means that our children get to spend more time together. So I agree with the minister on those points.

There are some problems with the government’s agenda in early childhood. Principally there is a massive workforce crisis, as our unions have rightly said. The minister says that she understands that. I take her at her word on that and that she will work assiduously to try to overcome those problems. They are very significant, and I want to work with her on that. There are problems with the funding model, and I would urge the minister to continue to talk to the leadership of our kindergartens, especially our sessional kindergartens, who have been disadvantaged through this reform. Nonetheless, I am pleased that this is one of many areas where, to the greatest possible extent, we can join hands together in an effort to get the best possible outcomes that we can, in this case for young Victorians.

Sheena WATT (Northern Metropolitan) (14:54): I do appreciate being called to speak today on what is my first motion. Of course I moved that very proudly on the first day of this, the 60th Parliament. It is truly an absolute pleasure to rise and speak proudly on a motion about the Andrews Labor government’s historic reforms and ambitious overhaul of early childhood education and care. We are investing some very big numbers, a massive \$9 billion over the next decade, to transform Victoria’s early childhood sector, and I know from the previous remarks of the minister that this is just so very, very significant.

This will absolutely give our Victorian kids the very best start in life and will make early education fairer for all Victorians, saving families all around our state thousands of dollars a year and, importantly, supporting Victorian women returning to the workforce. Our reforms are without a doubt bold and ambitious, and we are getting on with them now because that is what Labor governments do. Might I just acknowledge the contribution made by the Minister for Early Childhood and Pre-Prep in this place the Honourable Ingrid Stitt and acknowledge her incredible power of work and leadership, advocacy, compassion and courage to lead such significant reform in early childhood education and care. Indeed a great deal of what we do in government we should all be proud of – this side in particular – including the track record of achievements and wins we have delivered in early childhood education and care and are still to deliver in the next decade with Best Start, Best Life. Minister Stitt has been absolutely central to that.

May I just take a moment to say that our Best Start, Best Life reforms are proving extremely popular in my community of the Northern Metropolitan Region. I have heard from folks all around that childcare fees have been crippling family budgets, and indeed the figures show that the typical household is spending up to 20 per cent of its income to cover these ever-increasing costs of early childhood care and education. For far too long childcare fees and the childcare system have been set up against working families. While more and more dads may be staying home with kids than ever before, it is still predominantly mums who do most of the child care. Our reforms will give primary carers, predominantly women, this opportunity to get back into the workforce. The truth of the matter is that if the childcare system has been set up against working families, it is predominantly women that are most disadvantaged by this. Lack of access to child care and early childhood education takes almost 27,000 women across the state entirely out of the workforce. It is holding them back, and because federal subsidies go down as a family’s income goes up, many families work out that going back to work just does not add up. It is bad for primary caregivers. It is bad for our state’s economy too. These changes and reforms we are rolling out mean families can make the choice about what is best for them and what is best for their little ones, not just what is best for being able to pay the bills. These are indeed massive reforms. They are going to make a huge difference for family budgets, for parents, for our economy and most importantly for our littlest Victorians all across our state.

Of course I will join the remarks of the minister in giving an acknowledgement to the incredible work of our early childhood educators right around the state, who set up our kids for the very best start in life. I also want to take a moment to acknowledge the very good work of the United Workers Union, the union for early childhood educators, for all that they do campaigning for a better sector and better rights for early childhood workers and many other cohorts of the hardest working workers right across our state.

We already know that 90 per cent of a child's brain will have developed before the age of five, so it is absolutely critical that we get this right. Early childhood education and care has a life-changing impact on the development of Victorian kiddies. The Andrews Labor government's Best Start, Best Life agenda will absolutely deliver on that. From this year we have started rolling out free three- and four-year-old kinder across the state to ease the rising cost of living for Victorian families while also ensuring every Victorian child can access a high-quality early education for free. This is without exaggeration or hyperbole; honestly, it is so life changing that there are many big words required to describe the life-changing impact on Victorian kids and their families. This means that right now any family with a three- or four-year-old will not have to pay anything for kinder – a saving of up to \$2500 per child every year. Under this \$270 million program, up to 140,000 children will go to kindergarten for free this year in more than 2750 services across Victoria which are offering free kindergarten this year.

This is a 97 per cent coverage of services across the state. Pre-kinder is available at both long day care centres and in sessional kindergartens. Families do not have to be out of pocket, and they will not have to claim the savings back. Participating kindergarten programs will receive funding directly from the Labor government. We also know that families are struggling with the cost of living. Free kinder will make sure that no child misses out and save families thousands of dollars.

In addition to kinder across the state open to all Victorian families, four-year-old kindergarten will also be transitioning to pre-prep over the next decade, becoming a universal 30-hour-a-week program of play-based learning available to every child in Victoria over the next decade. Pre-prep will be rolled out progressively, starting in regional Victoria. From 2025 pre-prep will commence at Ararat rural city, Gannawarra shire, Hindmarsh shire, Murrindindi shire, Northern Grampians shire and Yarriambiack shire. More LGAs will roll out each year, with families in metro Melbourne to have 20 hours of pre-prep from 2030 before all children have access to 30 hours of pre-prep from 2034.

This pre-prep 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. Depending on whether rollout time allows, selected LGAs will at this stage grow the workforce and deliver the infrastructure required to deliver this life-changing program. Pre-prep will be delivered through kinders and long day care centres, creating a high-quality universal program to give four-year-old kids the opportunity to socialise and learn through play.

It is not just childcare costs that are holding back Victorian kiddies and women and their families. Child care is also notoriously difficult to access, with some women having to sign up to waitlists as soon as they find out they are pregnant. Some families are forced to travel well outside their suburb, adding time and stress to their daily commutes, or even enrol their kids in multiple centres to get the days they need.

In concert with all these reforms well underway, to truly give Victorian kids and families the best start for the best life and to help address the current shortage of available childcare places, the Andrews Labor government will establish 50 new government-owned and affordable integrated childcare centres which will deliver child care, kinder and pre-prep. 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. Where possible these centres will also 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.

Because not every parent works Monday to Friday, 9 to 5, where there is demand, and I believe there will be, centres will operate extended hours and on weekends so that parents working in industries like hospitality, events and health care have more support and more options. I will just add aged care to that list too, because aged care workers work all around the clock. These centres will make it easier for families to access child care and with low fees. They will also make it more affordable, meaning it will be easier for women to return to work when and however much they want to. This Best Start, Best Life investment is good for more than just play-based learning too. Let us not forget that building these 50 new kinders will support more than 8000 construction jobs for a growing, thriving Victoria.

I have gone at length over the ambitious and bold reforms under our Victorian government's Best Start, Best Life program. They will absolutely make a profound difference for a whole generation, and more, of Victorian children and women and their families. Let us not forget how good this is for other Victorians, not just young families. Independent analysis conducted by Deloitte shows that Best Start, Best Life will boost Victoria's workforce by about 25,000 full-time employees and increase the state's real gross state product by between \$1.9 billion and \$2.8 billion in 2032–33. For every dollar we are investing in a child's early childhood education and care, we will get back \$2 over their life through higher productivity and earning capacity as well as reduced government spending on health and welfare or crime. Investment in early childhood education is an investment in our littlest learners, in our Victorian families and in our whole state, and that is why I am so proud to be a member of the Andrews Labor government, which recognises this and is absolutely committed to bold action and courageous reform and so much important work in this space.

With that, I will take the time available to me to give some recognition to the early work of the Victorian pre-prep task force, which is bringing staff, unions, early childhood experts, local government, kinder and long day care providers and other stakeholders to the table to help design the pre-prep curriculum and inform the implementation of the program.

I will also take some time now, with the indulgence of those in the house, who I note are all men – very, very good to note your very profound interest in this topic; thanks for being here to hear me out – to say that we do need to pay recognition to some of the kinders, early childhood centres and childcare centres in our electorates. For me, in the area of Northern Metropolitan Region, I have visited a few in recent years. One that comes to mind is the Gowrie Victoria early learning centre in Docklands, to which I accompanied Minister Stitt to officially open their facilities. The state-of-the-art kinder facility offers two children's rooms and outdoor learning terraces on the first floor of the new vertical Docklands Primary School. Being co-located within the school grounds, it makes it easier for parents around the area to ditch that dreaded double drop-off.

The minister did speak earlier about the fantastic kinder kits. I particularly enjoyed the opportunity to go to Yappera Children's Service, where I joined the minister, the member for Northcote in the other place and AFL legend Eddie Betts –

Members interjecting.

Sheena WATT: You better not be saying anything about Eddie Betts. He is a legend of our game.

Members interjecting.

Sheena WATT: Oh, okay. I will take it back. My apologies. I am deeply passionate about Eddie Betts's book *My People*, which I had the great privilege of reading to three-year-olds at Yappera Children's Centre. It is a great book, and it is great to see this new life for Eddie as an author and the book getting out there in the kinder kits right across the state. It was a huge, huge hit. Big thanks to Yappera director Stacey for having us over at their beautiful centre.

We did also hear some remarks about Lady Huntingfield kinder – that is the one in North Melbourne. I also particularly enjoyed my visit to Raleigh Street Community Children's Centre. The Gowrie early learning centre in Carlton North has got some real innovation there that I think is worth everyone

learning a little bit more about. I have spoken a couple of times now about Powlett Reserve Children's Centre and kindergarten, which just earlier this year opened a new kids' kitchen, and it was absolutely marvellous to see how excited the kids were imagining what will be coming out of that kitchen.

On these visits one of my favourite things to do is to read to the little superstars in the kinders some passages from the picture book *Respect* by Aunty Fay Muir, Sue Lawson and Lisa Kennedy. This is one of my favourite passages from the book:

Our way is old, older than red earth, older than flickering stars. Our way is respect.

Thank you very, very much for the opportunity to talk about Labor and what we are doing for our youngest Victorians.

Jeff BOURMAN (Eastern Victoria) (15:09): I am not going to tell the government how great they are; they are good at doing that. I am not going to tell the government how bad they are; the opposition are good at that. What I am going to do is talk about the sector. As a later-in-life dad my experiences with this are, let us call it, current. Becky is three and has been going to day care now for just on a couple of years. That has been my introduction to the whole thing. To be frank, I did not know what to expect. I was quite dubious about the whole thing to begin with. Back when I was younger – I am not as old as some in here, but I am not as young as others – this sort of day care just did not exist. Day care was Mum, and if the mums were working it was usually someone else's mum. That was just the way it was. Things move on.

David Davis: Grandmas.

Jeff BOURMAN: And grandmas, yes. But as time moved on, the time came to decide whether to put Becky in day care or not. I thought, 'I'm not really comfortable with this, but we'll go with it. We'll see what happens; we'll give it a month or two.' Anyway, it has blown my mind what is going on. In fact I feel bad calling it day care. The level of education that they get when they are being cared for is astounding. She knows things that, in some cases, I do not know. She comes up with words that I have not taught her. I am starting to have a conversation with a three-year-old, and every once in a while she beats me in an argument, which is not good.

I think the people that are doing this and the sector are grossly underappreciated. I do not know what the \$9 billion will be for and all that sort of thing, but I think the amount of remuneration that the staff get is nowhere near what they deserve. They obviously do not need to do a full degree as you do to be a teacher, but they are teaching these children. They are teaching them life skills as well as how to reason and about their feelings. The sole feeling I had has been gone for so long it has taken me a little while to figure it all out. They are teaching them how to be little people but not teaching them what the parents should be teaching them. That was one of my worries. I was worried that one day I would come back and find that they had made a little human that was nothing like what I had expected or predicted.

I watch them coming along and I watch all the other little kids. Watching two three-year-olds have a conversation is probably one of the most heartwarming things I have ever seen, because they are talking with each other. It is amazing. There are a lot of reasons for which I wish I had been a dad when I was younger, but being older I appreciate it, I think, far more than a lot of people do. I do not take anything for granted. Every day when I wake up, whether she is having a good day or a bad day or whether I am having a good day or a bad day, it is plain awesome. I look upon the stages and I think, 'Wow, that was a better stage than this one,' but then when we get through the stage that we have just had, I look back at that stage and remember how good it was. Every stage is good. Every part of it is worthwhile. The people at the day cares and early learning centres and those sorts of institutions are a huge part of that.

That is really my whole thing. I just wanted to give a bit of recognition to them. They do struggle at times to keep staff. As good as that job would be, it does not pay enough. I do not know what the

government are going to do with their \$9 billion, but perhaps they should help with wages. On that note, I will zip it up. I do believe we are going off to Mr Davis. I look forward to that conversation.

Tom McINTOSH (Eastern Victoria) (15:14): I am very happy to follow on from Mr Bourman on this very important issue, Mr Bourman being another member from the Eastern Victoria Region like me. What I love about a conversation like this, for me as a proud member of the Labor Party and Labor movement, fundamentally is generational change. I have such a deep passion and interest in it. I have touched on it before, and I am sure I will touch on it again in many contributions in the future: generational change is what drives me to be in this place.

But before I go to that, there is an element of what Mr Bourman said which I think is beautiful. It is joy-filled and it is loving. Having been on construction sites for a lot of my life and living regionally, as Mr Bourman does, the joy, particularly for men – we talk a lot about the changes in society that we are making and those generational changes that are occurring – of having children and being engaged in that early educational time of a kid's life is profound and is life-changing. The way kids engage with each other and the level of intelligence they have at a young age, which many members are talking about and I will talk to as well – the emotional and intellectual advancement that occurs in the first five years of life – I think is a really good point. I think why this investment we are making is so popular – apart from being something that is crucial to the productivity of this state, crucial to the emotional wellbeing of individuals, crucial to academic outcomes for all the kids that are going to go through – is this very, very personal connection that all Victorians have to our most precious asset, and that is our kids.

I mentioned before the generational change element of this. Every child is going to have access to early education – play-based learning that we know benefits children. Before the age of five, 90 per cent of their brain development will occur. This is incredible for equality. We are setting up a level playing field for all kids in Victoria to have equal opportunity to a start in life when it comes to early education. Some of the contributors have talked about how things were or perhaps lack of access. It is just fantastic to think that over the next decade we are going to see four-year-olds get 30 hours of this fantastic play-based early education. You are going to hear me talk about early education in this place non-stop. The work that the minister has done is nothing short of commendable.

I have been out to Yarram and the early education centre. The town of Yarram is beautiful. It is thriving. It is growing. The government has announced \$2 million for them in their growing early education centre. Another two modular units will go in this year, which from memory will support another 66 kids being in the centre. The centre is doing great work, as are all our centres. I actually know a number of early education workers through different paths of my life. They really are such beautiful people, such patient people and people that are so interested in the wellbeing and growth – nurturing that development of our kids. It is fantastic.

Recently Minister Stitt announced that Korumburra Primary School will have co-located rooms. I am going to come back to co-location because I think that is just so beneficial to kids, to families, to community. In fact it makes community. Korumburra are looking at \$2 million. I believe it is another two co-located rooms for another 66 kids. This is a great thing for Korumburra, a beautiful town, a town with a growing number of kids.

Another story I want to highlight is that I recently attended the opening of The Herd, which is co-located with the Uniting AgeWell aged care centre. This is an incredibly beautiful story. You are talking about our aged care residents. I am sure many of us are now familiar with the program the ABC ran. Fiona and someone whose name I forget, but two sisters, four or five years ago saw the work that was going on in Seattle in the very early stages of bringing children and aged care residents together. They drummed this idea up. They shopped it around. The state government has invested. Uniting Care have invested. A whole lot of philanthropists have invested. It is fantastic. You are bringing together on one site two age groups of people that are incredibly – just coming back to that love and joy-filled aspect of it – important groups to our society, to all of us basically. We have all had

grandparents, grandparents that many of us cherish and love dearly, and we want to see them living in a really respectful and rich environment, and of course our kids.

This centre actually has glass windows between the facilities so the aged-care residents can sit there and just watch the kids and observe and just take it all in. On the day it was fantastic. We had the two facilities come together, and there were animals: there were bunny rabbits, there were dogs, there were ducks, there was everything – baby goats – and I am sure I have missed a few of the animals that were there. But, my gosh, the joy that was in that area for the staff doing incredible work at both ends of the spectrum but also for all of those students and aged-care residents was just a fantastic thing. I wanted to touch on that because it was a beautiful moment, and it will be a beautiful ongoing project. I hope we do see more of those. It is \$9 billion over 10 years. As I have said, we do know it is going to result in healthier, happier – Dr Bach made some comments earlier about happiness, and I think one thing he missed was joy-filled children. I have touched on the fact that four-year-olds will have 30 hours of this learning. That is incredible. That is setting us up so, so well. And three-year-olds will have 15 hours by 2029.

I think the fact that we are also investing in the government-operated centres where they are needed most is really important. I talked about equality before, and I think making that investment where it is needed, where families are struggling to get access to early education and where families are having to travel further for work because of geographically where they live gives not only the kids the access to everything they need emotionally and academically but also the families. The co-location, again from a productivity perspective, is incredible and so valuable, whether it be the double drop-off or whether it is the maternal and child healthcare facilities being in the same place, or the primary school. It is that benefit not only to the families but also I think to that community-building element. I forget who it was earlier – it might have been Dr Bach, actually – who was talking about the relationships that he and his partner have made with other parents. I think that is something that cannot be missed. When we are doing this really well, which so many early education facilities are, that involvement of family, that involvement of parents, that involvement of friendships and that continuity right from the very start, at the age where kids are entering early education, through into primary school and through into high school, building that unbreakable mesh of community to wrap around the kids and the parents in what can be quite a difficult time – having kids is not always bubblegum and hula hoops; there is the odd day where they can be a little bit trying – is incredible. I do not think that we can underestimate the life-changing impact of all those elements.

I have touched briefly on productivity. We have the immediate productivity. Member for Northern Metro Ms Watt made some great points about how it is predominantly women who are at home, it is predominantly women that are caring for children and it is women who are out of the workplace and seeing potential opportunities in work go by or perhaps missing out on super. Historically that has absolutely been the case. To be able to enable parents but particularly women to get back to work is fantastic for productivity, and there are some stats there I might come to before I finish. But there is also the productivity that is inbuilt in an entire generation of kids coming through, in their academic endeavours throughout primary school and high school, whether they are going to train and work in a trade or a service or whether they are going to go on to university, get a degree and contribute in some academic way to our society. The inbuilt value, the inbuilt productivity gains are going to be there.

I love the saying – I do not know if I am going to get it right – ‘There’s nothing as good as an old man planting a tree, the shade of which he will never feel.’ Fortunately some of us here are young enough that we will see the gains of all this and see the value, but I think it speaks a lot to this government’s focus and interest that we are investing in a generation of kids and that the value, the benefit, will flow through not just for decades but for this entire century and gain momentum as it goes.

The other thing I should say is that for every kid that currently is using the system this year, the family are saving \$2500 per child. This is fantastic in that you will not see parents having to go out and find work just to pay the kinder bills. It means you can actually use that money to get ahead, not just to keep afloat or stay where you currently are.

I mentioned this briefly before about the educators, but I do not think it can be understated, and I think Dr Bach talked to it earlier: the talent and the skills that our early educators possess, and that is only going to grow over the next decade, is incredible. Thousands and thousands of early educators are going to join the workforce as thousands of kids have access to this early education. Something I am absolutely delighted about is that with these 50 new community-based education centres that the government is investing in, let alone all the other centres that are coming online, we have got a huge number of construction jobs – and we know that the economy thrives when construction is doing well – but also our early educators and, additionally to that, all the other staff that are around the centre: those working front of house, our cooks, our cleaners. It really is building a very, very big and very robust complete mesh of staff that are there supporting our kids all the way through.

I think I may have touched on but not mentioned the number before – 140,000 kids will attend kinder for free this year, which is –

A member: It is remarkable.

Tom McINTOSH: It is remarkable. It is absolutely fantastic. For those families that have found it historically difficult to find the care, to piece together the education, that is going to make a huge difference. We heard – I forget whose contribution it was earlier – of families worrying as they are having their kids about where they can get placement. All this investment, these co-located centres, these new 50 centres, are going to take that pressure off and make it easier for families. In that family planning, those conversations, that thinking, it just relieves that stress and that burden –

A member: Peace of mind.

Tom McINTOSH: yes, peace of mind – that just simply should not be there and will not be there.

I have just come across a stat in my notes: lack of access to child care and early childhood education takes almost 26,600 women entirely out of the workforce in Victoria. So to be addressing that is phenomenal. Independent analysis from Deloitte shows that Best Start, Best Life will boost Victoria's workforce by up to 24,800 full-time employees and increase the state's real gross state product by between \$1.9 billion and \$2.8 billion in 2032–33. I am so happy to have spoken. Thank you for allowing me to speak to this.

David DAVIS (Southern Metropolitan) (15:29): I am pleased to rise and make a contribution to this motion that is being debated today on child care and the overhaul of early childhood education. I make the point that the reason we are debating this is the government has run out of legislation, but nonetheless this is an important topic. I do agree with the government, but more broadly with other governments in this country, about the importance of early childhood education and the provision of accessible early childhood education and affordable early childhood education.

I pay particular heed and give great credit to Matt Kean in New South Wales, whose productivity commission has looked at early childhood, and I am hopeful that in New South Wales he and the government up there do well. They are actually a government that have performed very well. The focus on productivity up there has been in stark contrast to the focus down here in Victoria. But this motion does talk about the government's proposed investment in early childhood. A number of parts of that are in the budget, and it is very clear that that is the case, and we certainly supported that prior to the state election and have always supported expanded early childhood.

My colleague and I were talking earlier about Ms Lovell and the time she was Minister for Children and Early Childhood Development. She did a remarkable job in expanding early childhood education. One of the things that she impressed upon me and others was the international evidence about early childhood education and the long-term benefits that are delivered many, many decades into the future. The performance of people, their pay and their satisfaction in life at age 40 or 50 is closely linked to the quality of their early childhood education, so there are very strong studies internationally that

suggest that there is a long-term benefit for the community from investment in early childhood education. But it does have to be the right investment too, and I want to say something about that.

We support that early childhood investment. We support the provision of a greater expansion of kinder services across the state. There are some obvious areas where there are challenges. At the edge of the city, in particular in the growth areas, there has been a shortage of good quality early childhood services, and some country towns, with the growth in those towns, have been lagging significantly under this government. It is also true in electorates like mine that there are challenges in the provision of early childhood services, and indeed the government has lagged significantly there.

One of the problems with this government is it is addicted to the high-level rhetoric, but it is never very good at delivering the details and the actual service aspects that are associated with that high-level rhetoric. That is one of their great problems, and this is such a case. In this case they have made big announcements and talked a big cycle, but they have actually not got a lot of the deep work done. I am going to quote some work in my own electorate. A number of people in this chamber will be familiar with this work at the City of Monash, who are very supportive of the government's announcement and investment and their plans for increasing to 30 hours four-year-old kindergarten and also the introduction of three-year-old kindergarten broadly. They say that it will cost \$70 million in the City of Monash. It seems that that \$70 million for three-year-old kinder is not funded by the state government.

In terms of the broader approach, there are six lead sites in the City of Monash. This is a briefing provided to MPs of all political parties, and I am reading directly from some of the Monash work now. It is clear that in the six lead sites, of the \$24 million cost, only \$12 million will be provided by the state government. So there is a capital problem that has not been dealt with by this government, and that is what I want to call attention to today – great high-level objectives agreed by all, the funding agreed by all, but actually the government has not done a lot of the work to implement the key aspects of the program, and the program can get into significant trouble in that way. For that reason, I want to move an amendment to this motion, and I ask if that might be circulated. I move:

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.'

This is actually very serious. You cannot implement three-year-old kindergarten expanded in the way the government is talking about unless you have got the kinders built. The kids have got to go somewhere. The beautiful little mites have got to go somewhere. You have actually got to have the money, and you have actually got to make sure that the capital works are done. If the capital works are not done, the kid cannot go to kinder. That is the fact. If the new kinder is not built because there is not enough money to build the kinder, the kid will not be able to go to kinder. That is a very clear point, isn't it? People should understand that the state government has got to get in and do this with councils, negotiate it and actually provide proper funding. It is no use leaving a black hole of 50 per cent of the funding at a state government level and forcing the councils to pick up the tab.

This is a classic state government cost shift under this government. You have got rate capping over here, squeezing the councils here, making them pay for the extra capital works, and that is a straight hit on ratepayers. So people need to understand that they are great objectives, agreed objectives, to expand the provision of early childhood services and kinders and the full works, but you cannot do it without putting in a proper capital budget, and the state government has not put in a proper capital budget.

A member interjected.

David DAVIS: Well, no, they have not put it in. We are actually talking council by council. I am using Monash as an example, but this is true across almost every council in my electorate. The councils have got significant issues with how this is being implemented. They have not been given assurances about full funding of the capital cost, and that is a sleight of hand by the government. That is what it

is; it is a sleight of hand. They need to be honest. If they are not going to fund it properly, if they are not going to fund it fully, they need to come up and say that.

A member interjected.

David DAVIS: Well, you will be very happy to say that. I am sure you will be very happy to demand that the full capital cost is provided by the state government rather than being forced onto the local government and thereby onto ratepayers. That is actually what we are talking about; we are talking about ratepayers paying more in a surreptitious and sneaky way because the government is doing a cost shift onto local government. State government is responsible fundamentally for its policy here.

A member: Surreptitious?

David DAVIS: Well, it has not been honest, has it? You tell me where it is in the government documents. I asked the minister exactly this question just the other day: you point to the cost shift, you point to the black hole in the government's documents – where is the additional capital funding? The minister when asked in this chamber could not provide a satisfactory answer about, in this case, the City of Monash. I am using that because it is in my electorate. It is well understood by a number in this chamber who were actually at that briefing and know that what I am saying is fundamentally accurate: that there is a shortfall in the City of Monash in the capital funding for these projects. They are important projects. They are supported. The state government has talked a very big game but has not properly funded the big game, and that, I think, is a very, very, very big problem for the community. Kids will not be able to get into the kinders unless the capital funding is there, and hitherto it is not.

Michael GALEA (South-Eastern Metropolitan) (15:37): I rise to speak in favour of the motion. The motion that Ms Watt, my wonderful colleague from the Northern Metropolitan Region, has put forward is:

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.

Frankly, Acting President Berger, as I am sure you can, I fully agree with Ms Watt in that assertion that it is a terrific announcement. It is a terrific set of packages, of policies, that we have put forward. I congratulate Minister Stitt for all her work. We have members opposite going on about black holes. There is \$9 billion of funding – \$9 billion of funding – over 10 years to transform Victoria's early childhood sector. I join Ms Watt and my other colleagues, including Mr McIntosh, who is in the chamber with us today, in commending the Andrews Labor government's ongoing commitment to improving our state's early childhood education system. This is just one part of it. It is not just early childhood; it is primary, it is secondary, it is all levels of education that this government is putting the work into to make Victoria the Education State, from tertiary right down to early childhood.

I had the privilege with you, Acting President, and in fact Mr Batchelor as well, of visiting Monash University several weeks ago, where we saw the amazing things that are being done there, the absolutely amazing research that is being undertaken by students. They are doing robotics trials in the United States, and they are winning those trials as well. It is absolutely fantastic to see what they do, right from that level through to the new secondary schools that we are building, the new primary schools that we are building. In my region alone, the South-Eastern Metropolitan Region, just this year Quarters Primary School in Cranbourne West opened. It is a fantastic new school for that growing community. A new primary school in the Berwick electorate will be opening in the coming years as well, which is absolutely wonderful. I look forward, as I do with my other colleague in the South-Eastern Metropolitan Region Lee Tarlamis, to that other primary school opening very shortly.

This is a government that backs itself and does the work in making this state the Education State, and we will continue to do that work. We will continue to do that work, as I said, in tertiary, as I said, in

secondary, as I said, in primary and in early childhood. This is a once-in-a-generation reform. It is committed to giving Victorian children the best start in life.

If I may also say, most relevant to this motion are the transformative reforms to early childhood education. The Andrews Labor government has announced, as I said, \$9 billion over 10 years to transform the sector. The changes that this commitment will implement include dramatically improving, firstly, access to three-year-old kinder. We are also the nation leaders in three-year-old kinder, with the program having started this year. It is going to ensure that no child misses out on a head start to their education.

The benefits of starting kindergarten earlier are clear. There are proven benefits to cognitive and social skills on average for children who attend two years of a kindergarten program as compared with those who attend just one year of a kindergarten program. These benefits extend to the development of language skills, early reading and number comprehension as well as non-verbal reasoning skills, concentration, independence and social skills – skills that no doubt come in very handy in this chamber for us all too. I applaud this policy of expanding kindergarten access and making kinder free, and perhaps some in the chamber do not concentrate as much as we would like. Someone opposite, I see, has already left the room. Not sure where he has gone off to, possibly a more entertaining place than this.

I do applaud this policy of expanding kindergarten access and making kinder free, rightfully ensuring the proven benefits of kinder are available to all families, saving thousands of dollars per child per year. This not only ensures that all children can get the best start to their education but also saves families thousands of dollars and allows parents, especially women who want to re-engage in the workforce, to do that sooner. The Best Start, Best Life reform is a once-in-a-generation reform that will enable up to 140,000 children and families in this state to benefit from free kinder this year, giving Victorian children the very best start in life.

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. It also includes four-year-old kindergarten students transitioning to pre-prep over the next decade, becoming a universal 30-hour-a-week program of play-based learning available to every four-year-old child in Victoria over the next decade, and establishing 50 new government-owned and affordable early learning centres. These centres will be built in locations across Victoria that have the greatest need and will make it easier for families to access their childhood education and care.

This \$270 million initiative means that children enrolled in three-year-old kinder will receive between 5 and 15 hours of funded learning each week, with children in four-year-old kindergarten receiving the maximum 15 hours per week. It is right that this program is called Best Start, Best Life. With 90 per cent of a child's brain developing before the age of five, having access to quality education in that age group – for those three-year-olds, for those four-year-olds – has a profound and positive impact on how they and their brains develop.

This benefit will be available to every family because of the reforms that are already being implemented by this government, and that is fantastic. We are leading the nation with regard to early childhood education and three-year-old kinder reforms because we are committed to boosting the educational outcomes for all Victorian children.

Best Start, Best Life investment is also supporting nearly 8000 construction jobs across the state as we build these new kindergartens to accommodate our growing state and our commitment to delivering three-year-old kindergarten for every child in this state by the year 2029. All up, the Andrews Labor government's investment has delivered a record \$14 billion into our early childhood sector. We are delivering to our youngest Victorians and their families every best possible option to make sure that their early childhood development goes as best it can.

What the Best Start, Best Life program means is that the Andrews Labor government is making kindergarten free. The \$270 million investment will save families up to \$2500 a year per child. I am sure you will be very excited about that, Mr McGowan – \$2500 a year per child.

Members interjecting.

Michael GALEA: And Dr Bach even more so.

Nicholas McGowan: I would have been more excited four years ago, but I am still excited.

Michael GALEA: Unfortunately, Mr McGowan, I do not think it will be made retrospective.

Matthew Bach: Perfect timing.

Michael GALEA: Perfect timing for Dr Bach, so we can all absolutely appreciate that. This will cover up to 140,000 –

Members interjecting.

Michael GALEA: I am glad we have that information. Thank you, Dr Bach. Up to 140,000 children will be going to kindergarten for free every year in this state. The benefits of free kindergarten for tens of thousands – more than 100,000 – children will be invaluable for the educational development of all children in this state. This also means that thousands of dollars in financial relief will apply to families at a time, as we know, when it is needed the most. This is a huge cost-of-living benefit.

To ensure that there is access to free kinder programs through early childhood education and other similar providers, I also note the government's efforts in achieving more than 2750 services across the state that offer free kindergarten this year. It is a credit to the government's important reforms that 97 per cent of all services in Victoria are offering free kindergarten already. The free kinder programs are being offered at both long day care centres and in sessional kindergartens.

Free kinder – what does that mean? It means families will not be out of pocket. It means not having to claim the savings back. It means not having to make a decision between sending your young child to kinder and giving them that educational support and having to put food on the table. That hurtful, painful decision will not apply to tens of thousands of Victorian families. Many families are struggling with rising cost-of-living pressures, but free kinder will make sure that no child misses out on early childhood education, no matter what, while saving families those thousands of dollars.

Another major change to early education that the Victorian government is bringing in is the transformational four-year-old kindergarten to pre-prep program. This change –

Ryan Batchelor interjected.

Michael GALEA: It is huge. It is absolutely huge, Mr Batchelor. This change will mean a universal 30-hour-a-week program of play-based learning being delivered through sessional kindergartens and long day care centres. Pre-prep will be another once-in-a-generation reform. This universal program will not only ensure that kids are given a quality education but will mean giving them the best start for their whole lives. It will be a high-quality program giving four-year-old children greater opportunities to socialise and to learn with their peers through play. Four-year-olds will have the great opportunities to develop the skill sets that will set them up for life, thanks to the transition to pre-prep.

Pre-prep will be rolled out from 2025, and it will start in regional Victoria. Pre-prep will start first in Ararat rural city, the Gannawarra shire, Hindmarsh shire, Murrindindi shire, Northern Grampians shire and Yarriambiack shire. More LGAs will see pre-prep rolled out each year to families in metropolitan Melbourne, and I will be very excited to see families in the South-Eastern Metropolitan Region, which I look after, receive this program too. They will be able to access up to 20 hours of pre-prep from 2030, with all children having full access to the full 30 hours from 2032.

Nicholas McGowan: It's a long way away.

Michael GALEA: It is important that we are doing the work. We are doing the work to make it happen. It does not happen overnight, and we are doing that work.

This government is rightfully giving early access to specific groups. Aboriginal and vulnerable children, regardless of where they live, will all be given access from 2026. Disadvantaged children – of those parents who hold a Commonwealth concession card – will have access from 2028. Having a transition to pre-prep with a staged rollout is an important measure to allow us to grow the workforce and deliver the necessary infrastructure for this life-changing program. This progressive rollout is similar to the staged rollout of three-year-old kinder. Both are monumental and transformative reforms that have been implemented by this Andrews Labor government. I commend the ongoing commitment to delivering nation-leading early childhood education reform by this state government.

The fact is that for many families, including migrant families and working families, child care has not been working for them. This reality has been felt in my region too, in the South-Eastern Metropolitan Region. Fees are high and many have had to decide between the financial cost of what programs are available and staying home to care for their children rather than returning to work – the cost of not working and the cost, through childcare fees, of returning to work. Some communities further face a shortage of places – a drought of access to child care. To address this, the Andrews Labor government is establishing 50 government-owned affordable childcare centres in areas with the greatest unmet demand. I note that the centres will as much as possible be co-located with schools and in conjunction with hospitals, TAFEs and other major employers. This will help families with drop-off and pick-up, particularly working parents.

On the subject of co-location, how wonderful it was to hear Mr McIntosh, a member for Eastern Victoria, talking about the new facility opened this year, with \$500,000 of funding from the Victorian government, in Mornington. You have a childcare centre right next door to an aged-care home. The most special part is there is a giant window between them. I am sure many of us in this chamber have seen the ABC TV series *Old People's Home for 4 Year Olds*.

Matthew Bach: Great series.

Michael GALEA: A great series, great idea, great concept. Congratulations to the owners of this centre in Mornington, who Mr McIntosh referred to – an absolutely fantastic way to do things. The sisters, Anna and Fiona Glumac, opened this centre with state government support, as I said, of half a million dollars. What a fantastic thing it is that elderly people and our youngest children get to play together, get to learn from each other, get to enjoy what they can learn and enrich themselves from each other. It is a truly, truly wonderful initiative.

Many of these things are happening as well. By 2028 all 50 government-owned early learning centres will be up and running. Those first four sites will be at Eaglehawk North, Moomba Park, Murtoa College and Sunshine Primary School, with 20 more locations soon to be selected, based on need. In conclusion, investment in early childhood education is an investment in our littlest learners and in our whole state.

Nicholas McGOWAN (North-Eastern Metropolitan) (15:53): It is with some pleasure that I rise to speak on this motion today. I have had the advantage of living not only in Victoria but also New South Wales, so it gives you that comparative difference.

Ryan Batchelor: We're always better than they are.

Nicholas McGOWAN: We are always better than they are. I might be inclined to agree with that. Certainly in this space I think we are; I think that is absolutely the truth. I have always appreciated kindergarten full stop, but when you start to look across Australia you realise just how fortunate every Victorian is for the efforts of very many governments – in fact every government, frankly speaking – since the time of Federation, because in Victoria we have in all persuasions invested in kindergarten.

In New South Wales there is a tendency and a predominance of child care. Here in Victoria we have a strong culture of investing in child care and in community-run and organised five-, four- and now three-year-old kindergarten.

Today's motion and the debate in this house would be incomplete were it not for mention of my colleague but also the former minister in this space Wendy Lovell. Wendy Lovell was the minister from 2010 to 2014. I had the great pleasure throughout that period of having a number of dealings with the minister. Wendy was not only a tireless advocate for kindergarten and the other portfolios she held but she genuinely continued to push the envelope in terms of funding and to ensure that we were not simply doing that in a mindless fashion – that it was accompanied with a real quality framework, and Victoria yet again can be proud of what it has done in that regard.

In fact, as the minister, Wendy Lovell committed to and pushed for a national quality framework, and Victoria was very much central to this. It followed up on work by the Productivity Commission report, which made a number of recommendations about early childhood education. Throughout the period it is fair to say that Wendy, who was the minister, had to contest with at that point not only limited revenue opportunities but also a federal government that committed to funding 15-hour child care – and that was not too long ago – and through her work with her federal colleagues on both sides of the aisle she managed to actually pave a way to see that happen here in Victoria. Wendy and the former Liberal government also supported small rural kindergartens, making them more affordable and accessible for the families, and that was critical in small rural communities. It also helped of course to relieve for many of those kinders the sometimes onerous but constant fundraising burden that is placed on those communities, and that is critical because it helps the parents of those children and the communities themselves. Wendy was also instrumental in making sure to provide within the budgets of those governments support to the leading organisations at the time who provided support with respect to both governance and service management.

I think it is interesting to look at some of the facts of that period, particularly in respect to the 15-hour programs. In 2014, 99.5 per cent of services in Victoria delivered a 15-hour kindergarten program. That was no small achievement. It was particularly amazing considering when Wendy Lovell came to be the minister the first time around she was told that the move to the 15-hour kindergarten simply could not happen until possibly 2016–20, and that depended on who the minister spoke with at the time. Of course Wendy was not content with that and as minister forged ahead to make sure that actually we delivered that well in advance of when they predicted we might have. But we have not done it without making sure that we also have progression in the quality of the services in Victoria. This is reflected in the assessments and the ratings that were undertaken at the time, with 78 per cent of services assessed during Wendy's period to be meeting or exceeding the national quality framework standards compared to 62 per cent nationally. That is a figure that we can all take pride in, because what it means is that the level of support and the level of education our children are receiving at those tender ages, at those most important ages, were absolutely critical.

Again during the period 2011–12 and in the budget Wendy was instrumental in ensuring that \$14.2 million over those four years both sustained and expanded kindergarten cluster management. That kind of management was critical to ensuring that not only were there appropriate startup grants but there was actually a transitional grant to provide additional resources when services had more complex issues. Wendy was also instrumental in making sure and assisting in the growth of the number of Aboriginal children – that is, for four-year-olds – who attended kinder. When she came to that position, we had in the order of 57 per cent of Aboriginal children attending four-year-old kinder. Working with the community, working with parents, working right across the sector, that figure went from 57 to 95. As previous minister, Wendy should be very proud of that. She is in the chamber now – so, Wendy, you know that figure better than most. You should take great pride in that work. It is a significant figure not because of the figure itself but because of what it actually meant to the lives of those children – young boys and girls – who I hope today are not only continuing their educational journey but doing so all the richer for your services and your dedication to this portfolio.

Ladies and gentlemen, I did, as Mr Davis has said in this place, have the opportunity recently to meet with Monash council. I did sit there and I was briefed with them, and while I welcome the investment the government is making in this space, and we too support that, I would caution and add that it is important that we ensure that when kindergartens are expanding the programs we properly and adequately fund them.

This is not a political point; it is simply a logistical and a financial point. I hope that those opposite but also on the crossbenches understand that and that every effort is made to ensure that the goodwill that is present here today and the intention for every child to receive the kind of early preschool education that we would hope for for them is achieved as stated.

Lee TARLAMIS (South-Eastern Metropolitan) (16:00): I move:

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

Motion agreed to and debate adjourned until later this day.

Bills

Heritage Amendment Bill 2023

Second reading

Debate resumed on motion of Lizzie Blandthorn:

That the bill be now read a second time.

Motion agreed to.

Read second time.

Third reading

Harriet SHING (Eastern Victoria – Minister for Water, Minister for Regional Development, Minister for Commonwealth Games Legacy, Minister for Equality) (16:01): I move, by leave:

That the bill be now read a third time.

Motion agreed to.

Read third time.

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

Adjournment

Harriet SHING (Eastern Victoria – Minister for Water, Minister for Regional Development, Minister for Commonwealth Games Legacy, Minister for Equality) (16:01): After a very long week, I move:

That the house do now adjourn.

Goulburn Valley Health

Wendy LOVELL (Northern Victoria) (16:01): (138) My adjournment matter is directed to the Minister for Health, and the action that I seek is for the minister to ensure that the 2023–24 state budget includes a funding commitment that fully completes the redevelopment of Goulburn Valley Health (GV Health) as well as a funding commitment of around \$25 million to establish a clinical health school in Shepparton to address a significant shortage of health workers in the region. Since being elected to office in 2014 the Andrews Labor government has overpromised and underdelivered on many infrastructure projects throughout Victoria. Projects that have been delivered are always well over budget, and nearly all have been completed well past their original completion date. As this

government is known more for its spin than its substance, each project is accompanied with a media release raining praise on the government.

This situation occurred last Thursday in Shepparton when the health minister toured stage 1 works of hospital's redevelopment. Disturbingly, the media release issued by the health minister Mary-Anne Thomas announcing the completion of the stage 1 works referred to the works as the 'final stage' of the redevelopment. This statement is incorrect. The minister knows that the current work is just stage 1 of the hospital's redevelopment, evidenced by the government commitment of \$2 million in the 2019 state budget to develop a business case for the completion of the redevelopment. Some of the vital components that still need to be funded to complete the redevelopment include increased acute and subacute inpatient capacity, additional places for ambulatory care services for clinics, community health, chronic disease management and allied health, the integrated cancer centre, additional car parking and a helipad. Also, for GV Health to deliver the best possible health outcomes for our community, Labor must commit significant funding to establish a clinical health school on the Graham Street site. La Trobe University studies show that people who train in regional areas are more likely to stay there, and a clinical school will help address the shortage of local nurses, midwives and allied health workers in the region.

This Labor government is also going to great lengths to prevent the release of the business case, which I first FOIed in 2021. This FOI has been subject to delay after delay, and when the Office of the Victorian Information Commissioner ruled last month that the government should release parts of it and a PowerPoint presentation, the government referred the matter to VCAT, probably because the business case reinforces the dire need for the redevelopment of GV Health to be completed.

Kindergarten attendance

Matthew BACH (North-Eastern Metropolitan) (16:04): (139) My adjournment matter tonight is for the Minister for Early Childhood and Pre-Prep. I was hanging out in Berwick last week with Brad Battin, and he took me to one of his favourite haunts, and that is the Berwick neighbourhood house kindergarten and early learning centre. Look, there is bipartisan – multipartisan – support for our amazing neighbourhood houses, and the staff there were just fabulous. They had an idea, and Mr Battin and I were so struck by their idea that I wanted to come here and put it to the minister for early childhood.

What the fabulous staff there said to me is that they have a system to make sure that if one of the children in their program is late – is not present, say, 20 minutes or half an hour after the start of the day – they make sure that they call through to parents. They informed me of something that I was not aware of, and that is that there were a couple of really troubling examples recently of parents just forgetting – now, this sounds silly, doesn't it, but just forgetting – that they have headed off in the morning with one of their kids in the back seat. But quite frankly, given that at the moment I have got an 11-month-old and a four-year-old, I do understand that if you are deeply sleep deprived, then it would be possible to drop one child off somewhere – at school or elsewhere – and then completely forget about the other one.

In my career in secondary education, especially in wellbeing roles, we always placed the highest importance on attendance data. It tells you so much information about, especially, the mental health and wellbeing of the kids in your care. The government, to its credit, carried on processes and procedures put in place under the Baillieu and Napthine governments to ensure that, in primary and secondary schools, parents were called if the child did not turn up to school, but we do not have the same processes in our kindergartens. So the action that I seek from the minister is to review, please, the processes currently used in state schools whereby parents are called if a child does not come – with a view to emulate, if that is feasible. I cannot see why we should move ahead with policies like this in our primary schools and secondary schools but not in our kindergartens and other early learning settings.

Inclusive schools

John BERGER (Southern Metropolitan) (16:06): (140) My adjournment is for the Minister for Education, and the action I seek is for the minister to provide an update on funding to special schools. More than 100,000 students have a disability in independent schools. These numbers have grown over the past decade and continue to grow. Our government is committed to giving these students the same opportunities as everybody else.

Research shows that inclusive schools provide substantial benefits, and that is why the 2022–23 budget allocates \$326 million to upgrade 36 special schools with world-class classrooms and learning facilities. It means that all special schools will have received an upgrade since our election in 2014. And it gets better: \$247.3 million for essential maintenance, another \$10 million for accessible building programs to make it easier for access and \$1.6 billion – that is billion – for world-leading reforms for disability inclusion. It will mean students with a disability are supported in government schools to excel.

To achieve this we will invest in the skills needed for teachers to help identify students' strengths and needs so the educational adjustments to schools can be made. These investments will increase access to specialist expertise coaching, professional learning, evidence-based guidance, resources and scholarships for school staff. It is brilliant to see that disability inclusion is being introduced over five years, starting from term 4, 2021, and we are already in year 3 of the rollout. These investments are key to schools in my community of southern metropolitan Melbourne in Glen Eira, in Kingston, in Port Phillip and in Stonnington. Schools in these councils are already delivering disability inclusion plans, and I congratulate them.

This week I was grateful to visit Andale School and speak with principal Justin Walsh, staff and students. Andale is an illustration of a special school, giving students with special needs the same opportunities as other students. The school is inclusive, collaborative and nurturing for primary school students experiencing language and learning difficulties. Mr Walsh is proud of his students and staff, and rightly so. The teaching that happens at this school and the opportunities this offers the students are of great importance. As we heard in the kindy motion, a dollar invested in education returns \$2 over the life of a child.

I was inspired by the children who are unable to attend a mainstream school yet found a home at Andale, and they are thriving. It is clear to me that Andale School offers something more than what mainstream school can offer, opening opportunities for all students to excel. It is a really small school with a big heart. I am proud to see what the school does for special students within the area, and I am proud to be part of a government that values all Victorian students. I look forward to receiving an update from the Minister for Education on funding for these vital schools.

Homelessness

Sarah MANSFIELD (Western Victoria) (16:09): (141) My adjournment matter this evening is for the Minister for Housing. The Greater Geelong region is experiencing a housing and rental crisis. The latest figures from 2021 show almost 4000 people on the Victorian Housing Register waiting for public and community housing. The City of Greater Geelong's rental affordability rate fell to a record low of 6.8 per cent in the most recent data. People who cannot find housing risk having to move away from their communities, where they have connections, where they might have jobs or their kids might have school, where they might have links to local services and where they have friends and family. They also risk becoming homeless. There are almost 300 people who are known to be homeless – a likely underestimate, as many may not be reported or seek formal housing assistance in Geelong. There is a higher rate of homelessness in Geelong among young people compared to the state average.

The From Homelessness to a Home program was implemented by the Labor government in 2020 to facilitate people who were temporarily provided with hotel or motel accommodation during COVID restrictions to find stable housing. The program has been life-changing for those who have been able

to access it, adopting a Housing First approach. It provides a holistic approach to supporting people with housing, including linking them with additional services like mental health, social work and drug and alcohol counselling. The program has assisted hundreds of people in Geelong, and there are currently 131 From Homelessness to a Home packages for the region.

It is extraordinary then, in the midst of the housing crisis and given the success of the From Homelessness to a Home program, that the government will be cutting back the program at the end of June. Those working in the sector have actually been calling on the government to expand funding rather than cut it, as they want to see more people benefit from it. The action I am seeking from the Minister for Housing is to expand rather than cut funding for the From Homelessness to a Home program from 30 June 2023.

Western Metropolitan Region bus services

Trung LUU (Western Metropolitan) (16:11): (142) My adjournment matter today is for the Minister for Transport and Infrastructure. The action I seek is for the Andrews Labor government to increase bus services by means of volume and frequency with buses that cater for the expanding population in my electorate, the Western Metropolitan Region. Minister, please tell me: how do you expect people in the west of Melbourne to continue waiting 40 minutes between bus services while people living in the inner suburbs of Melbourne have the luxury of using trains, trams and buses – and multiple services of buses. The population in the west is at the point of explosion, yet the Labor government continues to turn a blind eye to the everyday struggles of my constituents. I am asking for an indication as to when this major infrastructure debacle will be fixed. No more bandaids but solutions, please.

Data from a research report at Melbourne University, *Better Buses for Melbourne's West*, confirms that across Melbourne's west, my electorate, the average public transport travel times are significantly higher than the metropolitan average, particularly in the greater local government areas of Melton and Wyndham Vale. In the Melton and Wyndham Vale areas the forecast is for population growth to hit 380,000 new residents by the year 2036, and in the Brimbank and Maribyrnong areas forecasts indicate that population growth will be a significant 90,000. Once again the neglect of the west is unmistakable. Does it not worry you that when young people rely on buses to attend school or part-time jobs they sometimes wait 40 minutes for a bus to attend, and feel unsafe while doing so? Not to mention the more mature and disadvantaged and those with special needs who rely on the buses to conduct their daily activities. What happens to them if they miss the bus, or alternatively will they wait in the rain, the hail and the winds? Does this Labor government really care? Well, the lack of action certainly paints a very different picture.

Can the minister please inform me how and when the number of buses will be increased? The average trip on public transport in my constituency – that is, in Brimbank – is 62 minutes, in Hobsons Bay it is 55 minutes, in Maribyrnong it is 52 minutes, in Melton it is 71 minutes and in Wyndham Vale it is 71.4 minutes. So my question is: please, can the minister inform me as to what number of buses the Labor government will provide to eliminate the problem, as a proper service of buses is essential to my constituents?

Victoria Police

Rachel PAYNE (South-Eastern Metropolitan) (16:14): (143) My adjournment matter is for the Minister for Police, and the action I seek relates to the LGBTIQ+ community. Like so many in the community I was disturbed and distressed to see the confronting footage of the protest outside on the steps of this Parliament last Saturday when anti-trans protestors and neo-Nazis were seamlessly being offered protection by Victoria Police while opposing activists were reportedly pushed away, tackled, trampled upon and injured.

The community is right to express concerns and to question if Victoria Police are sympathetic in enforcing equitable treatment and protection of LGBTIQ+ Victorians. The widespread footage

circulated in the media from Saturday's protest is triggering for many in the LGBTIQ+ community. We have not been able to forget the long, dark history of police brutality and the homophobic and transphobic treatment of the community in Victoria. And we fear, whether rightly or wrongly, that the attitudes of the police have not changed, even 28 years after the infamous Tasty nightclub raid.

Next Friday 31 March is the International Transgender Day of Visibility, and the action I seek is that the police minister commit to meeting with organisations such as Transgender Victoria, Transcend Australia, Switchboard Victoria, Queerspace, Minus18, the Victorian Pride Lobby and the Zoe Belle Gender Collective to explain the police actions on Saturday 18 March 2023. Victoria Police must be seen to protect some of the most marginalised, vulnerable and continuously attacked people within our community.

Timber industry

Renee HEATH (Eastern Victoria) (16:16): (144) My adjournment matter is for the Minister for Agriculture, and the action that I seek is that the minister reverses the decision to close the native timber industry by 2030. The native timber industry has some of Australia's most dedicated and hard workers. More often than not they work long hours and irregular hours, sacrificing time with their family and friends and a good night's sleep.

We recently heard from Adam. Adam has been in the native timber logging industry for around 15 years. He and his wife have two children. Because of the Labor government's war on the native timber industry, he has lost his job. Adam feels that the families involved in native timber harvesting have been unfairly portrayed as evil and haters of the environment. This is despite the industry being highly regulated and sustainable. A government representative told him to just sell his equipment, but how do you sell specialised equipment that is designed for an industry that is now banned? The equipment can cost over \$1 million, and it can take years and years to pay off. This is his quote:

The government told me that there were ... mechanisms in place to ensure the transition out of the industry was positive for workers ... In reality, most workers have received nothing. The offer of stand down payments failed to reach those who didn't work on contracts. Those workers have been left in the dark and neglected for months.

Their families have been neglected. They have fundamentally been told they don't matter. He also said the following:

It's clear that Wangaratta-bred Daniel Andrews is more worried about pleasing the inner-city elite in Toorak and Hawthorn than protecting the hard-working Australians in the native timber industry who for generations have sustainably logged native timber.

He said:

The fact that he's banning a sustainable industry so that Victorians have to import unethically sourced foreign timber from forests that are being wiped with animals being massacred, tells you everything you need to know.

He left me with this final note:

I hope Daniel Andrews is happy with himself, because my family's lost everything.

Victorian Equal Opportunity and Human Rights Commission

Katherine COPSEY (Southern Metropolitan) (16:18): (145) Today I would like to raise the reported issue of cutbacks to the Victorian Equal Opportunity and Human Rights Commission with the Attorney-General, and I ask her to ensure that this cutback is reviewed and to restore or increase the funding allocation to guarantee that no frontline services provided by the commission are cut back. Last week the *Age* reported that due to budget cuts staff at the commission were informed of a

restructure due to a 'significantly smaller budget for the foreseeable future.' The *Age* also quoted from a leaked email from the human rights commissioner to staff that said:

I want to be clear that I am not expecting that we continue to deliver the same volume of work with fewer team members. We will be doing less with less funding – not doing the same. And I will be working closely with the [justice] department to make sure they understand these implications too.

The article also reports that staff were shown a presentation saying cutbacks would affect the availability of phone services that assist people making complaints relating to rights of women, Indigenous Victorians, LGBTIQ+ persons and those with an experience of disability in the workplace. Education workshops are also on the chopping block. To read this article last week on National Close the Gap Day was particularly disheartening.

To see vital services that protect vulnerable Victorians being cut is so disappointing. To see a move to effect cuts to the commission, given the appalling events on the steps of this Parliament last weekend and the echoes of those abhorrent views that have reverberated in this very chamber, is unacceptable. It is particularly galling considering the other funding that the government chooses to prioritise. For instance, as I mentioned today, this government has spent over \$80 million in just the last year funding the grand prix. Budgets are a question of priorities, and it is clear that this government does not yet place enough value on the work of the commission that protects the rights of us all.

The government's track record is patchy on human rights. From the targeted and restrictive treatment of people in public housing towers during the lockdowns to criminalising peaceful protest, this government has shown an indication that sometimes human rights are negotiable or nice to have. I think we can do better. I want to see this government ensure that bodies like the Victorian Equal Opportunity and Human Rights Commission are fully funded, and now that this matter has been brought to the public's attention, I hope that we can resource this important commission to serve our most vulnerable Victorians.

Australian–Filipino Community Services

Ann-Marie HERMANS (South-Eastern Metropolitan) (16:21): (146) The action I seek is from the Minister for Multicultural Affairs in the other place. I would like the minister to please meet with me and the leadership of the Australian–Filipino Community Services based in Doveton, known as AFCS. The government has provided them with a social worker to assist in their mission to ensure the wellbeing of Filipino migrants. However, this funding expires in June, and the government has not undertaken to continue it.

At the multicultural gala dinner and at the Casey city awards I had the wonderful opportunity to meet with the managing director and the chair of AFCS along with members of the organisation, who told me about the wonderful work that AFCS does. In particular it was heartwarming to hear how AFCS had made use of their funding to reach out to many young people who developed mental health issues during the lockdown periods of the pandemic and isolated elderly Filipino people who do not have the language skills or capacity to access services in the community.

I completely commend these people and this community organisation to the house because they have been doing wonderful work with their social worker, using someone that has the ability to understand the culture and the language to go out and facilitate and change the lives of many people. They have found Filipino people who cannot speak a lot of English, who are elderly, whose partners that were Australian have died, and they have been able to reach out to them and to help them to access services that they did not know existed in this country. It is incredibly important that we continue this good work and that this social worker can continue to be funded.

In fact this social worker, because she has been a social worker, has been able to have students that are social workers come under her for placement, and through that they have been able to extend the work that they are doing. To lose the only social worker that they have in this organisation would be absolutely detrimental. It goes beyond the south-east. They have been working beyond that area into

regional areas because the Filipino community live in many different parts of Victoria now. I do commend this organisation to the house, and I do request the minister to please look into the funding for this social worker so they can continue the good work.

Quail hunting

Jeff BOURMAN (Eastern Victoria) (16:23): (147) My adjournment matter is for the Minister for Outdoor Recreation in the other place. The action I seek is for her to start treating her stakeholders like they matter. That includes me. We pay for game licences to hunt animals. For those that do not like hunting animals, this should ring alarm bells. Today, with no warning at all, with no notice and against the advice, the government basically shortened the quail-hunting season by two-thirds – no notice, no heads-up, no nothing. With this coming after the duck season, maybe the change is not unexpected. But honestly, I think when it comes down to the process of government, if you have stakeholders, particularly ones that pay game licence fees, that means the government at least has a duty of care, as far as I am concerned, to tell them what is going on. Just before Parliament rises this goes up on a website and I have to find out via a stakeholder. This is almost an abuse of power. There is just no reason why this should happen, at least not without following a process. I am completely disappointed.

The amount of quail hunters is small – I understand that – but it has got nothing to do with hunting. You have stakeholders; they have an interest in this. They pay their licence fees, which not every stakeholder does. At the very least you could expect consultation and, if not a heads-up, at least an explanation. We got none of that, and I think it is just appalling.

E-cigarettes

Georgie CROZIER (Southern Metropolitan) (16:25): (148) My adjournment matter this evening is for the attention of the Minister for Health. It is on a serious matter around e-cigarettes and exposure to children. Today VicHealth were in Queen's Hall, and they had a Future Healthy stall where they were promoting some initiatives that are going out into the Victorian community. I was very pleased to speak to a number of people – Dr Sandro Demaio, who is the CEO, and some wonderful community ambassadors. In particular I would like to mention Zahra and Khalid, the youth advocates, who have been working on campaigns in communities with young people and going into schools and looking at this very serious issue around vaping. I note that Minister Butler today told *ABC News Breakfast*:

At the moment, I feel we're losing the battle. And it's not just high school students, it's primary school students as well. These vapes are deliberately and cynically marketed to children and teenagers.

So we have got a very big problem. I know that the former federal minister for health Greg Hunt was working with border control and the TGA and doing a huge amount of work in relation to putting regulations in place around the importing of e-cigarettes. The federal government is continuing on with that work. But what needs to happen here now at a state level is that the state government needs to take action. When I was talking to Khalid, who as I said is doing some terrific work in this area with community groups and schoolchildren, he was telling me the age of kids that are accessing these vapes and just how dangerous it is.

We cannot wait. The government needs to get on with this. This was a commitment that I took to the election last year, and I really am concerned about the impacts. VicHealth is asking the government to institute a retail licensing scheme, implement a social marketing campaign and provide extra support for children and parents to raise awareness of the harms of e-cigarettes. That is what they are asking. It is very similar to the policy that I took to the election last year. So the action I am seeking is for the minister to outline what the government's plan is in how they are going to address this very serious and emerging health issue for schoolchildren and young people.

Mobile phone and internet coverage

Gaelle BROAD (Northern Victoria) (16:28): (149) My adjournment matter relates to better mobile coverage and broadband services for regional and rural areas and is to the Minister for Industry and Innovation, who is responsible for telecommunications and the digital economy. Minister Ben Carroll is the member for Niddrie, where good mobile coverage and fast and reliable internet can easily be taken for granted. I invite the minister to speak with locals and visit towns in regional Victoria where that is not always the case. Our regions are riddled with black spots and deprived of choice.

In this day and age we rely on mobile coverage for everything, and poor mobile connection and internet coverage is holding our regions back. We rely on it for education, for health care, for banking, for emergency information, to conduct business and to work from home. Tourism and hospitality operators need it, our community centres rely on it and we need it to stay connected with family and friends. Banks have closed in some regional areas and many government services are moving online. People who cannot get a signal are being left behind.

The Yarra Ranges Shire Council completed a study on mobile and broadband connectivity and tested close to 25,000 sites, including schools, community centres, CFA stations, bus stops and aged care facilities. Twenty-five per cent of locations tested had unusable network quality, especially Hoddles Creek, Steels Creek, Fernshaw and East Warburton. I visited Warburton with the local member Cindy McLeish last week. It is a popular spot for tourists, with a fast-growing population, and it is an area of high bushfire risk. Being able to use your phone is not just a matter of convenience, it is a safety issue. Mobile black spots continue to be a concern for the CFA, especially in places like Strathbogie, Licola and Upton Hill. The Murray River group of councils, covering the towns of Mildura, Swan Hill, Kerang, Echuca and Cobram, identified digital connectivity as a key priority, as many black spots remain, and they want to see an end to the digital divide between rural and metropolitan areas.

While we still have many areas in regional Victoria without mobile service, the government's Connecting Victoria program has 28 of 88 projects based in metropolitan Melbourne. Mobile service and internet connection is critical, and families, students and businesses in regional areas are tired of living with second-class coverage. We need Victoria to become a state of cities, not a city-state. But to live and do business in rural and regional Victoria we need reliable telecommunications services. I ask this government to make it a priority to connect regional areas in Northern Victoria that are currently without consistent mobile coverage and that need fast and reliable broadband.

Vocational education and training

Joe McCracken (Western Victoria) (16:31): (150) My adjournment matter is for the Minister for Higher Education and Minister for Training and Skills, and it relates to the matter of free TAFE provision or, perhaps more accurately, subsidised TAFE. The action that I seek is for the minister to review the way additional costs are communicated to potential students so that they have full transparency about the expenses they are likely to incur. The reason I raise this is that I had former students of mine actually visit me this week who also study in my electorate. I understand and acknowledge that course fees are free or, in effect, subsidised by the government. But other costs that students commonly incur include books, which one student quoted was up to \$400; police checks; insurance; working with children checks; materials; and sometimes even accommodation for those that have to travel a significant way from home. All those costs could potentially add up to thousands of dollars. But when TAFE programs are advertised as free, it could cause confusion and it could facilitate people making decisions without clear and full information.

When I checked the Victorian government's free TAFE website I did not find any information about any additional on-costs or even a disclaimer clearly saying that only course fees are subsidised, not additional costs. I encourage the minister to consider having more transparency around the costs associated with studying at TAFE so that people can make an informed decision. Quite often TAFE students do struggle because they are younger people that have financial difficulties, and having full information and being able to compare additional course costs might help them make better decisions.

I say this as a former teacher who has had many students take a TAFE pathway as their preferred pathway, and it has been the right pathway for them. I just want to make sure that when people go to make these decisions they do have the full information, which would include the additional costs that might be associated with the course, not just the course fees themselves that are put out there to be 'free'.

Latrobe Valley child care services

Melina BATH (Eastern Victoria) (16:34): (151) My adjournment matter this evening is for the Minister for Early Childhood and Pre-Prep the Honourable Ingrid Stitt. It relates to the lack of childcare places in the Latrobe Valley. The action I seek from the minister is for her to expedite the childcare reforms that she has been spruiking this afternoon into the Latrobe Valley. Let me give you an example of why this is such an extreme necessity. With her youngest son at eight months old, Kate Taylor wants to return to the workforce in May this year, but her hopes are being dashed because she cannot access child care for her son. Her son has been on the waitlist with six different childcare centres since he was born. He has been turned away with 'No openings yet' eight months later. Indeed Kate has been advised that she needs to actually put her children on a waitlist before they are born. If you wanted to join the Melbourne Cricket Club, you would get an MCC membership quicker than you would get into a childcare place in the Latrobe Valley.

There is a very good report that was recently released. It is a Victoria University Mitchell Institute report from 2022, which examined child care in over 50,000 neighbourhoods across the nation. The report is designated *Deserts and Oases: How Accessible is Childcare in Australia?*. It describes the Latrobe Valley as being an area where there are more than three children per one place – three children to one offering – a dearth of places by any measure. The report goes on to say that 76.2 per cent of the region is in the desert category – so not the oasis but the desert category. My constituent Ms Taylor certainly is experiencing that.

We know that the government is spruiking that in November all will be wonderful in the childcare world, but we can see that there will only be four centres by 2025 and the next 26 centres will not be up and running until 2028. These include Glengarry, Yallourn North et cetera in the Latrobe Valley. So this child will now be in primary school by the time there is a centre available. I call on the minister to fast-track these into the Latrobe Valley. Fast-track these. They are absolutely needed.

Women's rights

Bev McARTHUR (Western Victoria) (16:37): (152) My adjournment matter is for the Minister for Women, and it concerns the current sad state of public discourse on women's rights. When I came into this Parliament in 2018 the last thing I thought I would have to defend was women's rights. Those hard-fought battles for recognition were I thought largely won. But we have gone backwards, and now even making the same arguments is seen by some as prejudiced, hateful and an attack on other groups. This is absurd. I am a Liberal, and I believe that people can do, be, act, believe and speak however they want. That is their business, right up until they infringe the rights of others. Even for non-Liberals, I do not believe it is controversial. Women should have the right to play single-sex sport, to play safely and to compete fairly with other women. They should have the right to use toilets without people with penises. They should have the right to serve jail sentences without men who have committed violent offences against women. They should have the right to privacy, safety and dignity, especially those who have suffered trauma and abuse, largely by men, when they need refuges and shelters. This is fair, it is basic, it is just common sense. How did we ever move away from this? In part it is the debasement of language – the advent of 'chest feeders' and 'people with cervixes'.

None of what I have said is aggressive or anti-trans. I restate my view that essentially people should be able to be and act as they wish as long as they respect the rights of others. Making rules and laws which protect those rights is not somehow discriminating against a whole group or somehow singling them out as potential offenders. Making rules to stop the bad behaviour of individuals does not stigmatise whole groups. Almost our entire legal system is based on this. Offenders are targeted, but

we do not extend the absurdity of identity politics to make whole groups guilty. This is the logical conclusion of identity politics, and it is insidious. The worst irony, so horribly illustrated last weekend, is that even protest against this crazy situation is now labelled as antagonistic, aggressive prejudice. It is not just sports, shelters, toilets or jails. Women cannot now even have their own protest without that space being invaded and their safety, and in some cases their reputation, compromised. So the action I seek from the minister is a wholehearted endorsement of women's right to protest and to have the opportunity to make their arguments against the appalling trends which have set back women's rights so badly.

Cybersecurity

David DAVIS (Southern Metropolitan) (16:40): (153) My matter is for the attention of the Premier, and it concerns TikTok and the use of TikTok on government devices. It is clear from the FOI that we ventilated in this chamber earlier in the week and also in the media that the government overruled the Department of Energy, Environment and Climate Action on its clear, evidence-based decision to remove TikTok from those devices. It is also true that a number of American states and other jurisdictions around the world have said having TikTok on government devices is not safe. It is clear that the information on those devices is accessible in other jurisdictions overseas, and that is a genuine security risk. The Premier, I see, has this week said that he will make a whole-of-government decision, but only after a national decision is made. I would ask him to review that decision, to look closely at the evidence that has been presented by his own bureaucrats in at least one department, and almost certainly in other departments too, and to make a decision that is about the safety and the security of government information and is founded on the best IT evidence available.

This is not a matter of ideology. It is not a matter of anything but the very best science and the best information on which we should base these decisions. It is in the state's interest that information that is held by government – that is, either personal information or highly sensitive information – is able to be protected properly. Clearly the department of environment did not believe that was the case. The key experts in that department did not believe that was the case. In regard to the pre-emptory overruling of them by the secretary of that department John Bradley, the FOI makes it clear that the decision that was made was fundamentally a political decision and not an evidence-based decision, not a decision that was based on alternate or superior technical information being presented. It was just a political decision to overrule the earlier evidence- and technical-based decision that had been made. I would ask the Premier to review this matter across government, to do so with the best available technical advice and to do so swiftly. We are a separate jurisdiction – we are not slavishly held to the national level – and we can make our own decisions.

Responses

Harriet SHING (Eastern Victoria – Minister for Water, Minister for Regional Development, Minister for Commonwealth Games Legacy, Minister for Equality) (16:43): What a wealth of adjournment content we have been through tonight – a total of 16 adjournments to just about every minister you can imagine, save for me. I have got to say I was ready, willing and able to answer any and all adjournment matters that may have come in my direction. But that being the case, I will refer those relevant matters to the appropriate ministers for responses in accordance with the standing orders.

The PRESIDENT: The house stands adjourned.

House adjourned 4:44 pm.