



Hansard

LEGISLATIVE COUNCIL

60th Parliament

Wednesday 22 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

Evan Mulholland (from 31 August 2023)

Matthew Bach (to 31 August 2023)

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

¹ Lib until 27 March 2023

² LDP until 26 July 2023

Party abbreviations

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

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

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

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

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Wednesday 22 March 2023

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

Rulings from the Chair

Statements on tabled papers and petitions

The PRESIDENT (09:34): I remind members that statements on tabled papers and petitions are on papers tabled in the chamber during this session of Parliament. Please ensure you do not make a statement on anything other than what has been tabled in this session of Parliament, not in the previous session of Parliament. If anyone is concerned that they may have prepared to do a statement on a report and they are not sure if it was tabled this session, they can check with the clerks this morning. You might want to divert to a different one that you can talk on.

Petitions

Port Melbourne public housing

Katherine COPSEY (Southern Metropolitan) presented a petition bearing 654 signatures:

The Petition of certain citizens of the State of Victoria draws to the attention of the Legislative Council the cruel relocation of public housing tenants from the Barak Beacon public housing estate and the extreme duress they have been subjected too.

Tenants were notified 12 days before Christmas 2021 that the estate was to be demolished. From early January 2022, tenants have been subjected to a relentless campaign to relocate. Some tenants were picked off through preferential treatment, while others were pressured to accept whatever other housing was available.

The Government and Homes Victoria have not responded to tenant communications, instead referring them back to a relocation team. After outside pressure, consultation was arranged but was restricted in scope and did not include preserving the existing buildings.

Tenants consulted with not-for-profit architects, OFFICE, who carried out a feasibility study. OFFICE developed a report and plans that exceed the goals of Homes Victoria. Through renovation of existing buildings and infill, \$88 million would be saved.

The Government has not responded to these plans, instead they are relentlessly moving ahead to demolish these beautiful historic buildings, starting in mid-2023.

The petitioners therefore request that the Legislative Council call on the Government to consider, investigate and respond to the feasibility study, report and plans by OFFICE regarding the Barak Beacon public housing estate, stop demolition activities on the estate so that any tenderer can consider the options put forward by OFFICE and allow all tenants to remain in their homes while the report and options put forward by OFFICE are considered.

Sunshine super-hub

Maira DEEMING (Western Metropolitan) presented a petition bearing 366 signatures:

The Petition of certain citizens of the State of Victoria draws to the attention of the Legislative Council concerns about the Sunshine Station Masterplan, in particular the closure of the Hampshire Road overpass ramps to cars so that it can be used exclusively for active transport.

The ramp gradients are too steep, long and unsuitable for disabled users, elderly, parents with prams, children, and those carrying loads. The Australian standards for walkway gradients allow a maximum gradient of 1:14. Both ramps are non-compliant with the southern section being 1:12 and with landings, approximately 1:10.7.

The proposal will cater to the fittest few, to the detriment and exclusion of most community members. A compliant shared crossing providing access for all abilities is necessary to fill the missing connection between City Place, eastern Sunshine and the CBD.

The northbound ramp has approximately 600 vehicle movements per hour. This traffic being forced through a street network in the southern Sunshine CBD will cause major congestion and frustration. It is not practical, efficient or environmentally friendly. It will create a high stress and unsafe driving environment. The traffic changes are only considered because of the proposed northbound ramp closure.

This proposal will divide Sunshine further.

The petitioners therefore request that the Legislative Council call on the Government to withdraw the Sunshine Station Masterplan proposal and reopen the community consultation process to allow for consideration of alternative accessible means to facilitate active transport routes that are inclusive of all community members while maintaining the overpass' current utilisation.

Papers

Parliamentary departments

Reports 2021–22

Wendy LOVELL (Northern Victoria) (09:36): I move, by leave:

That the Department of the Legislative Council report 2021–22 and the Department of Parliamentary Services report 2021–22 be tabled.

Motion agreed to.

Papers

Tabled by Clerk:

Auditor-General – Fair Presentation of Service Delivery Performance 2022, March 2023 (*Ordered to be published*).

Members of Parliament (Standards) Act 1978 – Returns submitted by Members of the Legislative Council – Ordinary Returns, 28 February 2023 (*Ordered to be published*).

Subordinate Legislation Act 1994 – Documents under section 15 in respect of Statutory Rule No. 17.

Trust for Nature (Victoria) – Report, 2021–22.

Water Efficiency Labelling and Standards Act 2005 –

2020 Independent Review of the Water Efficiency Labelling and Standards Scheme and Intergovernmental Agreement.

Water Efficiency Labelling and Standards scheme, Report, 2021–22.

Committees

Integrity and Oversight Committee

Membership

Lizzie BLANDTHORN (Western Metropolitan – Minister for Disability, Ageing and Carers, Minister for Child Protection and Family Services) (09:38): I move, by leave:

That Ms Payne be a member of the Integrity and Oversight Committee.

David DAVIS (Southern Metropolitan) (09:38): The Integrity and Oversight Committee is a very important committee of this Parliament, and I think it is a good thing that an additional member goes onto that committee. The committee certainly needs significant work, and we know that the committee did not perform well in the last Parliament. We know that there was interference in the work of the committee. We know that the feed was cut. We know that the letter from Mr Redlich has not been circulated and should have been, and we know that he pointed directly to a series of very, very serious issues with the functioning of that committee. There is no question that that committee needs significant work. It needs to undertake its work in a way that is transparent and open. It needs to hold hearings, and it needs to get to the bottom of many of the issues that have been laid out.

Motion agreed to.

*Business of the house***General business**

Georgie CROZIER (Southern Metropolitan) (09:40): I move, by leave:

That the resumption of debate on the second reading of the Public Administration and Planning Legislation Amendment (Control of Lobbyists) Bill 2023 replace the current order of the day 1, general business.

Motion agreed to.

*Committees***Parliamentary committees***Membership*

Georgie CROZIER (Southern Metropolitan) (09:40): I move, by leave:

That:

- (1) Mr McGowan be a participating member of the Economy and Infrastructure Standing Committee;
- (2) Mrs Broad and Mr McCracken be participating members of the Environment and Planning Standing Committee; and
- (3) Ms Bath and Ms Lovell be participating members of the Legal and Social Issues Standing Committee.

Motion agreed to.

*Members statements***Western Victoria Region community members**

Gayle TIERNEY (Western Victoria – Minister for Training and Skills, Minister for Higher Education, Minister for Agriculture) (09:41): I rise today to congratulate a number of my constituents who are committed to community advocacy, education and engagement.

Chloe Brown, Lucy Collins, Renata Cumming and Jess Brown make up the organising committee of Cream of the Crop 2023, the second year of a conference in Koroit and Warrnambool that brings together women in dairy farming from across Victoria. It provides not just a forum for upskilling and promoting women in agriculture but a great opportunity for women in the dairy industry to connect and reflect.

Port Campbell's Marg O'Toole uses her love of ocean wildlife and extensive diving experience to encourage and educate many in the community about marine life, whether it be through Coastcare, rock pool walks, beachcombing or diving exploration in special places like the Arches Marine Sanctuary and the Twelve Apostles Marine National Park.

Josh Hose from Camperdown has been a powerful advocate for disability access on public transport over many years. I am so pleased to see that Josh has been added to the Victoria University hall of fame, having been an Olympian in the London, Rio de Janeiro and Tokyo games. His international sporting career includes track events and basketball, and his day job is ongoing evidence of his determination to educate and support people to live well with spinal injuries.

These are fantastic contributions, and I congratulate and thank all of them.

Lighthouse Christian College Cranbourne

Ann-Marie HERMANS (South-Eastern Metropolitan) (09:42): Last week I visited three schools in the south-east. I want to thank principal Mr Jacob Mathews, his deputy Mr Cicchiello, the board and the staff for their hospitality at Lighthouse Christian College in Cranbourne. Lighthouse Christian College in Cranbourne had the best primary results, better than any other school in southern Melbourne, and the best year 5 NAPLAN results last year, 2022. The year 9 NAPLAN results from

last year show it was the third-top-performing secondary school in Melbourne's southern suburbs, and the school was ranked 12th in the state of Victoria, although 93 per cent of its student body comes from non-English-speaking backgrounds. Last month the *Herald Sun* voted it as the best-value top-performing school in Victoria, although it was said to have some of the worst student-teacher ratios. Well done Lighthouse Christian College Cranbourne on your excellent results, and thank you for your time last week. I hope that your recent NAPLAN results will be just as impressive.

Clyde Secondary College

Ann-Marie HERMANS (South-Eastern Metropolitan) (09:43): Since I still have a little bit of time, I would also like to acknowledge Clyde Secondary College and the Teach for Australia program. It was wonderful to meet Josh and Cameron, teachers who are in this program, and their mentor Konnie. I also want to thank Jesse and Brianne from TFA and of course Deb Cole. Congratulations to TFA on its 14 years of providing innovative ways to develop excellent teachers and teacher training. They have – *(Time expired)*

Geelong Rainbow festival

Sarah MANSFIELD (Western Victoria) (09:44): This coming Saturday is the Geelong Rainbow festival. It begins with a Pride March in Johnstone Park at 10:00 am, and it continues for the day at West Park. This event is an opportunity to celebrate LGBTQIA+ people in the Greater Geelong region and for allies and the broader community to come out and show their support. It is also an occasion to reflect on the courage and leadership of those who fight for the rights of LGBTQIA+ people to be treated as equal human beings, valued and included in all areas of life.

The fight is not over. LGBTQIA+ people still face exclusion, lack of safety and poorer health and wellbeing outcomes, including significantly higher rates of mental illness and suicide. These disparities are the result of discrimination, both overt and insidious, through power structures and cultural attitudes. This is compounded when we see the bodies, identities and bedrooms of LGBTQIA+ people continue to be a political target for some, as the shameful acts outside this place on the weekend demonstrated. The trauma that results when one's life is up for debate is hard to imagine. It is a reminder for the need for LGBTQIA+ leaders to remain strong, however exhausting that may be, and for allies, particularly those in positions of power, to step up. We cannot assume that progress will occur by itself or that any gains made are irreversible. I ask all Greater Geelong residents to join us at the Geelong Pride March and Rainbow festival this weekend and show solidarity with our rainbow community.

Monash University medical research

John BERGER (Southern Metropolitan) (09:46): Southern Metro is very lucky. It is lucky for a number of reasons, but the one I want to talk about today is Monash University. Monash is vital to our region and vital to the country. I would know; my daughter Rachel is graduating from there soon. This university takes brave steps, like the one I had the privilege of seeing the other week: the Monash Smart Manufacturing Hub. Two things we have learned from the COVID-19 pandemic: we cannot rely on essential vaccines or medicines to be imported, and we need to manufacture products domestically if we hope to have a thriving economy. The \$13.8 million expansion of the Medicines Manufacturing Innovation Centre will mean that students at Monash will be instrumental in producing the first mRNA vaccines for clinical trial in this country. That is what the Andrews Labor government is about – long-term initiatives that help people in a meaningful way. The Monash Smart Manufacturing Hub affects not only education and the economy but also health, science and the industry. This is what matters here in Southern Metro, and that is why we are doing it.

Creative industries

David DAVIS (Southern Metropolitan) (09:47): I think we have all read with great concern the commentary in the *Herald Sun* flowing from leaked documents from the Victorian Arts Centre Trust. It is clear that there is a significant financial problem and that a number of our key arts companies and

the centre itself are in significant financial trouble. This flows in part no doubt from COVID, and we have seen the creative industries sector employment numbers fall from a very significant level previously and the really significant damage done through COVID. We all understand the impact of COVID, but in Victoria the public events framework and a number of the other restrictions were more sharp and more restrictive than in any other state in Australia. They were harsher, and the damage done to the arts and creative industries sector has been greater. The government needs to make sure that the sector is not left in a position where it is not viable. There needs to be significant budgetary support for the sector to make sure that our key companies and the arts centre trust are in a financial position to provide the support and the cultural nourishment that is needed in our state. But I hasten to add that the arts and creative industries sectors are also very significant economic drivers. They bring many tourists to Victoria, to Melbourne in particular in this case, and the tourism and cultural aspects are both important. The Andrews Labor government must fund them properly. They talk a big game but put cuts in. *(Time expired)*

Kangaroo protection

Georgie PURCELL (Northern Victoria) (09:48): Recently I joined volunteer kangaroo rescue groups and advocacy organisations on World Wildlife Day on the steps of the Premier's office to demand an end to the cruel and barbaric kangaroo slaughter industry in Victoria. Just days later Puma announced it would cease the use of kangaroo leather and switch to plant-based alternatives by the end of this year, and last week Nike, the largest global supplier of athletic shoes, announced they will also stop using kangaroo leather by the end of 2023. Can I just say I am now very much looking forward to running the Nike Melbourne half marathon again this year in celebration of this announcement. But we still have so much further to go. Australia is currently home to the largest land-based massacre of wildlife in the world, the kangaroo killing industry. Governments around the world are starting to see this for the cruel and destructive practice that it is and are completely banning the import of kangaroo products. Global organisations and governments refusing to participate in the kangaroo slaughter is a timely reminder of how people and organisations can create positive change for animals, and whilst I celebrate this win for each and every kangaroo, I am hopeful that our government is paying attention to the local and international communities standing up to governments to protect our native icons.

Horrie Poussard

Ingrid STITT (Western Metropolitan – Minister for Early Childhood and Pre-Prep, Minister for Environment) (09:50): I wish to remember and pay tribute to Horrie Poussard, a remarkable Victorian, environmentalist and conservationist. Like so many, I was very sad to hear of Horrie's passing. Horrie was instrumental in the foundation and establishment of Landcare in 1986 while working in the then Department of Conservation, Forests and Lands under the late minister Joan Kirner. Horrie played a key role in designing a new community-based program to address land degradation in Victoria across public and private land, which they named Landcare.

The first Landcare group was formed in November 1986 near St Arnaud. In less than four years there were around 70 Landcare groups. Today there are around 600 Landcare groups operating in Victoria and thousands across Australia and Landcare projects in more than 20 countries around the world. That is an incredible legacy. Horrie became the first secretary of Australian Landcare International when it was formed in 2008, which would then become Global Landcare. He also helped launch the Overseas Landcare Fund. In June 2021 Horrie was awarded an Order of Australia Medal for his service to conservation and the environment. Because of Landcare and the work of Horrie Poussard, more members of the community than ever before are being empowered to protect, enhance and restore our natural environment, and this work will live on for generations to come.

Teach for Australia

Melina BATH (Eastern Victoria) (09:51): My members statement today is about my visit, with my colleagues Ms Hermans and Dr Bach, to Clyde Secondary College. I acknowledge the amazing work of the principal there, Konnie Prades. The reason for our visit was to spend time with Teach for

Australia associates named Josh and Cameron. They have different life stories. Josh is fresh out of university and keen to take on a role in teaching but wanted to have that support of being able to work and do his masters. Cameron has had a number of careers, has a number of degrees and is also looking to use his life skills and his knowledge as a father to go into the teaching profession.

Deb Cole, Jesse and Brianne from Teach for Australia do an amazing job. Jesse is very much a mentor, a hands-on support for those teachers in the classroom – those brand new trainee associate teachers – and Deb Cole coordinates. Deb had the very important conversation with us about how Teach for Australia has been running for 14 years across Australia, with about 80 associates now. They have got an 85 per cent track record of people going through that program and staying in education or education-style roles. A fantastic outcome, and I congratulate them and the school.

Extremism

Michael GALEA (South-Eastern Metropolitan) (09:53): I condemn the gathering which took place on the steps of this building on Saturday, where a hateful, transphobic protest was joined by neo-Nazis. It was deeply hurtful to LGBTIQ+ communities, to victims and survivors of the Holocaust and to all decent Victorians. It was not random or unexpected that the Nazis were there, as they have sought to dehumanise, humiliate and vilify transgender people from the very beginning. It is not good enough that there are politicians who are embracing extremists and who have opened the doors of this Parliament to them. It is not good enough that in my region last year the Liberal Party preferenced an actual neo-Nazi in Narre Warren South. A man who performed a Nazi gesture outside Auschwitz was preferenced above Labor. When you lie down with bigots, you get fascist fleas.

To the members of the trans community who are feeling targeted, who are feeling like they do not have a place, I want to say this: you belong. You belong in our schools, in our workplaces, in our streets and in our sports clubs. You belong in our Parliament, and you have a government that stands by you and will continue to stand by you every single day.

Barry Berih

Sheena WATT (Northern Metropolitan) (09:54): I rise to give a special shout-out to North Melbourne resident Barry Berih. Born to Eritrean migrant parents and having grown up in the North Melbourne public housing estate, where he continues to reside, Barry is the founder of Young Australian People, a local community organisation of young people from public housing who are helping young people from public housing find meaningful employment and explore tangible pathways to a career that is right for them. It is tough enough as it is between overcoming language barriers and lack of academic qualifications, networks or work experience, not to mention social stigma, and the work YAP does, despite all that, is nothing short of inspiring. YAP is a real passion project for Barry, who is absolutely driven and passionate and committed to delivering a positive social impact for his community.

Barry's background is very, very much rooted in the community. He has been a youth worker in the City of Melbourne and Flemington. He works for Cohealth. He volunteers at the Centre for Multicultural Youth and is currently working for the YMCA as a customer service officer. Barry is also a peer advocate for the Flemington and Kensington Community Legal Centre, on top of wearing a peer support hat with Drummond Street Services for the Birdy program. You are an absolute superstar, Barry.

Food and Fibre Great South Coast

Jacinta ERMACORA (Western Victoria) (09:56): Food and Fibre Great South Coast hosted a sustainable water forum in Warnambool on Wednesday 15 February, where I was honoured to represent Minister Shing. Attendees included farmers, local government, Southern Rural Water, the Victorian Farmers Federation, Wannon Water and government representatives. We heard how the government is working with farmers and businesses to overcome barriers to growing their production through accessing more water. The can-do attitude displayed by Wayne and Tracey Schild of Grange

Garlic in Peshurst in solving their water access problems and dairy farmer Basil Ryan is commendable. We also heard from the Department of Energy, Environment and Climate Action on the work that they are doing in response to Food and Fibre Great South Coast's 18-point plan for water policy reform in Victoria. I congratulate the regional community and Food and Fibre Great South Coast. This is important work because chair Georgina Gubbins recently noted that the Great South Coast is now Australia's top agricultural region, with the ABS reporting that the region produced \$4.6 billion worth of food and fibre output in the year 2021. I thank Food and Fibre Great South Coast for their leadership.

Mornington Peninsula sports facilities

Tom McIntosh (Eastern Victoria) (09:57): Our local communities deserve high-quality, modern and accessible sports facilities that we can all be proud of, and with more than a million dollars of local investment opened just last week, that is what the Labor state government is delivering on the peninsula. I joined Mornington Peninsula shire mayor Steve Holland, staff and councillors, along with local sporting clubs, at three venues for official openings. We joined Greg and Dave at three new cricket nets for the Main Ridge Cricket Club – two for the club to be match ready and another for locals to roll the arm over and have a hit. The new sports oval at the Narambi Reserve in Mornington includes player shelters, scoreboards, fencing, sportsground lighting, paths and parking. This oval now provides a new home ground for nearly 600 players from the Mornington Junior Football Club, Mornington Cricket Club and Moorooduc Cricket Club. The football and cricket clubs based here at the reserve have a beautiful new oval they can rely on day and night, and this gives a huge capacity boost to the booming girls' and women's teams. At Mount Eliza, both Justins who joined us can look forward to kickstarting their 2023 season on a new soccer pitch at Emil Madsen Reserve, with 100-lux LED lighting. Importantly for the club and its hundreds of members, they will no longer have to travel to the local secondary college for more space.

The Mornington Peninsula Shire Council should also be acknowledged for their massive contribution of \$2.5 million towards the three projects. I am proud of our sporting clubs, which form so much of our local community on the peninsula and have brilliant facilities for locals to come together, get fit and be their best.

Katandra West Community Centre

Rikkie-Lee Tyrrell (Northern Victoria) (09:59): I am rising today to praise the efforts of the Katandra West Community Centre volunteers. This is a community organisation that pulls together every week at the facility and provides sports training for all ages and stages during all seasons. They also put on a feed and open the bar each Thursday night. This well-maintained facility is also available for functions, meetings and events, proving its vital necessity for the community. This community is a young community that volunteers all of their spare time to maintain and manage an active and supportive community environment for their families. This is a very healthy environment for youngsters and adults alike, and these rural community centres are an asset that we should continue to support.

Motions

Greyhound racing

Georgie Purcell (Northern Victoria) (10:00): I move:

That this house:

(1) notes that:

- (a) there is no digital whole-of-life tracking scheme for Victorian racing greyhounds;
- (b) the manual tracking of Victorian racing greyhounds increases the risk of greyhounds going missing, being illegally exported or illegally euthanised, and makes it more difficult to hold those responsible to account;

- (c) a whole-of-life digital tracking scheme will improve Victorian greyhound welfare and ensure community expectations are met;
- (2) calls on the government to implement a digital system to improve greyhound traceability through an automated whole-of-life tracking system that:
 - (a) tracks every individual racing greyhound pre and post registration for racing, including puppies born into the industry that are never registered to race;
 - (b) provides the industry with the ability to account for every greyhound registered in Victoria;
 - (c) streamlines transparency and industry processes by providing one system for all industry transactions;
 - (d) provides accurate euthanasia data for all greyhounds, including those in the industry rehoming program, the Greyhound Adoption Program;
 - (e) uses integrated scanning technology to enable Greyhound Racing Victoria to record and track the location of every registered greyhound in Victoria, in real time, at every stage of their life, including when retired; and
 - (f) is supported by Greyhound Racing Victoria rules, requiring owners of pre-racing, racing and retired greyhounds to regularly check-in every individual greyhound in their care via the digital tracking system.

As the old saying goes, dogs are our best friends, but here in Victoria the dogs in the greyhound-racing industry tell us a much different story, because to this day in Victoria greyhounds are not afforded the same protections as every other breed of domestic dog. This government invested \$6.2 million in the last financial year into an industry that is opposed by the majority of taxpayers, according to new research from the Australian advocacy group, the Coalition for the Protection of Greyhounds, and Grey2K USA. Regardless of which side of the fence you sit on, I assume that all corners of this house will want reform and transparency in an industry that is so heavily kept afloat by the government. However, to date there has been no parliamentary review of this self-regulated industry that has steadily decreased in both popularity and participation over the years.

The last review, in 2015, after the infamous live baiting scandal was an internal industry review – eight years ago. Yet we are led to believe that this is still sufficient, that all of the problems are cleaned up, that participants do not commit acts of cruelty and that dogs do not continue to die. Everything I am about to present to this house today has happened since the so-called clean-up of this industry and the new structure and powers given to the Greyhound Racing Victoria (GRV) integrity unit that replaced the RSPCA MOU. I want to make it clear that a line in the sand has been drawn and referring to the so-called review is simply not relevant to what I am calling for today.

While an electronic whole-of-life tracking system would be a small but welcome reform if passed, it is not groundbreaking. I have engaged at length with the industry, and they always summarise with the same thing – that they love the dogs. We have a different idea of what love and care is for animals, but if they are being honest, then they should want reform too – and whole-of-life tracking is a way to prove it. The whole world is starting to shut down and dismantle greyhound racing because it is cruel, it no longer has a social licence, it is incapable of complete reform and it has proven itself to be unsustainable. It is of course illegal in Australia's capital, the ACT. In fact commercial greyhound racing only exists in six countries across the world. Only two tracks remain in the United States and the pressure mounts daily across the United Kingdom. Still, this system is an overdue positive first step. Ultimately I, along with a committed group of stakeholders, will continue to advocate for a full inquiry into the industry as a whole, including the regulator. No Australian state or territory has truly implemented whole-of-life tracking. The closest is New South Wales, but their system is imperfect, and we must learn from that.

Canya Cruise, Turbo Tommy and Deliver are three Victorian greyhounds with the current status of 'retired'. 'Retired' or 'rehomed' in this industry can mean multiple things. It means a dog stops racing one day and is dumped at a pound for euthanasia the next. It means a dog stops racing one day and is bludgeoned to death by being hit on the head with a rock the next. It means a dog stops racing one day

and is left to languish and starve in a concrete kennel and die a drawn-out and painful death. It can mean a dog stops racing one day and is sent to China for breeding in the illegal greyhound-racing ring the next. Does that sound like the type of retirement Victorians would want for our companion animals? The industry therefore gets to report to the public an inflated figure of dogs that outwardly appear as rehomed when in fact they are killed in pounds; buried in shallow graves; starving, living in their own excrement and hoping to be rescued; or in concrete cells breeding hundreds and hundreds more greyhounds offshore.

Canya Cruise, Turbo Tommy and Deliver were sent undesexed to China in 2021 without the industry knowing. This occurred as a breach of GRV's own rules for mandatory desexing upon retirement and after the GRV integrity unit was given its supposed increased powers for inspection and monitoring. They have fathered hundreds of puppies now. How was the export of these dogs discovered? By voluntary advocacy organisations like Free the Hounds. All it takes is a simple check of the department of agriculture website and a freedom-of-information application to match microchip numbers. But the industry, with all of its resources, is apparently incapable of that – the same industry that confirmed to me just last week that their investigation into illegal exports of greyhounds to China was complete and that no further dogs had been sent. I know that this is incorrect because the data is publicly available on the federal department of agriculture's website. If I can find this and volunteers can find this, why can't the so-called investigative compliance experts?

On 7 December 2022 Aston Gigante, a Victorian and GRV-registered greyhound, was sent directly to China undesexed. His GRV status to this day is 'racing'. On 18 January 2023 Aston Lee, a Victorian and GRV-registered greyhound was sent directly to China undesexed. His GRV status to this day is 'racing'. Both these male dogs are confirmed to be racing and breeding in China. Through lack of tracking and oversight Victoria is growing the illegal Chinese greyhound industry, and it is being funded by the Victorian taxpayer. We saw the public outcry with Macau, which was subsequently shut down. Victoria, due to an inability to track greyhounds and a loose system of self-regulation, is now creating an even bigger problem, and the world is paying attention.

This government did not support my calls to bring Canya Cruise, Turbo Tommy and Deliver back home. It is Australian advocacy groups who work with offshore groups to arrange the surrender of Victorian greyhounds. I am elated to report that they have just yesterday secured the safety of a 10-year-old girl who was still breeding in China. Let that sink in. My own office is also cleaning up this mess by adopting rescued greyhounds. We always have at least two fosters on the couch at the office at any given time. Frankie, Slayer, Dot and George – they all have individual stories, and their safety is only a result of volunteers.

Currently the lack of a true whole-of-life tracking system means countless puppies and dogs are missing. As I mentioned in my inaugural speech to this Parliament, I do not know how many racing greyhounds are currently in this industry. The government and the industry themselves also do not know, because nobody knows, because it is not tracked. As I said, an electronic tracking system will not be perfect, but it will provide some additional requirements for breeders to at least register the 'industry wastage', as they call it, or greyhound puppies that never make it to registration for training and racing. Advocates estimate, based on the number of puppies bred per year, the average number of surplus puppies per litter to be 25 per cent. That is 1622 puppies in Victoria killed in secret because they are not deemed useful or able to make money. The breaking-in process for a greyhound happens over 18 months to two years, but only those deemed good enough will actually be registered to race. Each year thousands of dogs never make it to the track because they fail to chase or simply are not fast enough.

I spoke about the first greyhound I ever had the pleasure of meeting in my inaugural speech. His name is Blue. Blue broke his leg and was lucky to be rescued and live a long good-boy life before advocating for all of his friends that are not quite as lucky, and we all miss him so much. Greyhounds are quirky, gentle and intelligent and make great couch companions. I am so proud that the community-supported

rescue groups here in Victoria are larger and stronger than the community that supports their exploitation.

Because there is no cap on breeding, the industry itself knows that there is a rehoming crisis. Greyhounds who are still considered suitable and profitable are even being given away for free on Facebook as trainers make way for more and more puppies. They can currently do this without any consequence. In fact my office picked up two discarded greyhounds just last week, the trainer then offering us 25 more. Slayer, one of my office dogs, rescued at age 3, is a son of one of Victoria's most famous and prominent stud greyhounds. Banjo Boy raced for three years and upon retirement from racing continued life as a stud dog. Sperm is routinely collected from stud dogs, referred to as 'servicing', in order to be inserted into females while awake or in a painful surgery that removes their uterus, services it and then stuffs it back inside their bodies. I cannot tell you the amount of puppies that Banjo Boy has fathered. It is in the thousands, because although he is more than likely deceased now, his stored frozen semen continues to father puppies, available for purchase for thousands of dollars on frozen semen websites. We are talking about just one dog here, and he is responsible for thousands of puppies in his short life.

A robust electronic tracking system must be supported to give us better data on just how extensive this crisis is. The industry's own rehoming program, the Greyhound Adoption Program, waitlist to take dogs in has just increased from six months to nine months. GAP will euthanise greyhounds who are not deemed rehomeable, including for behavioural issues, where other rescues will take them on and pay in both time and their own money to rehabilitate them. So despite the fact that the industry rehoming program puts its own dogs to death they still have a waitlist. This means dogs wait longer with their trainers, race longer than was planned or meet a fate like Pacific Reef, Pacific Dreamer, Dark Stealth and Stealthy Flight of trainer Ian Anderson. Ian Anderson took to bludgeoning all four dogs to death with rocks and burying them in a shallow grave on his own property. To this day, despite being confirmed as dead, their status with GRV and the data reported publicly for them is 'retired'. They are not retired; they are dead. Ian Anderson was not charged with animal cruelty but merely banned from greyhound racing in Victoria, and we know that he could continue to participate if he wanted to given the many loopholes that exist.

I would like to tell you the story of Tommy, recently rescued by the dedicated team of volunteers at Amazing Greys. Tommy was retired by his trainer and owner on 14 October 2021. Over a year later he was dumped at the Ballarat pound in a completely emaciated condition, bones protruding through his skin and covered in sores. Tommy was collected by community rescue Amazing Greys from Ballarat on 25 November 2022, and the images of him would turn the stomach of even the most committed greyhound-racing supporter. What followed were months of veterinary visits, thousands of dollars of blood and tissue testing and rehabilitation. Finally today Tommy is available for adoption and ready to start the life that he deserves. If it were not for Amazing Greys saving Tommy, he would just be another retired dog that ended up neglected, dead and untraceable in Victoria.

Victorian taxpayers deserve to know just how many dogs out there are not as lucky as Tommy. Amazing Greys currently have over 50 dogs on their waitlist. They rely on hardworking Victorians to come forward and volunteer as foster carers to save these dogs and clean up this government-funded mess. They work full time in day jobs, they have families, yet day in and day out they use their own time before work, on lunchbreaks and after work to rescue greyhounds from every single corner of Victoria, direct from trainers, from pounds and from death row.

This industry likes to report the reduction in injuries over the past few years, especially since significant government investment in tracks, particularly at Traralgon. However, to advocates the data tells a very different story. Track deaths in 2020 to 2022 remain the same. So far this year, for the same period in 2022, there has been a 43 per cent increase in serious on-track injuries. Many of these will be retired and then euthanised at vet clinics, but I cannot tell you the number, and neither can the industry, until we have proper tracking. What happens off the track is what remains a mystery to us all, and it is what happens off the track that we all want and deserve to know.

I want to make it clear that I believe one day we will look back in disbelief that we allowed this industry that exploits such vulnerable, gentle animals to ever exist; that we turned away time and time again, scandal after scandal; that we thought reviews and self-regulation could fix the inherent systemic cruelty that comes with mixing animals and gambling; and that we separated greyhounds by law under a different piece of legislation to intentionally protect them less. But today we can commit to at least some form of accountability and some form of transparency to acknowledge that the industry has an obligation to these dogs that they bring into this world to make money from, and that is to ensure they live safe, happy and healthy lives and that they do not conveniently go missing or get exported to countries where their suffering will continue. We can say here today that these dogs – that belong on a couch, not on a racetrack – deserve to be protected their entire life, not just while they are profitable. I hope that the government can commit to implementing a fully automated, digital, whole-of-life tracking scheme to make our state a leader in this space, and I look forward to support from colleagues across the whole chamber today to do what is right by our greyhounds.

Harriet SHING (Eastern Victoria – Minister for Water, Minister for Regional Development, Minister for Commonwealth Games Legacy, Minister for Equality) (10:20): In my house I have 10 dog beds, and the reason that I have 10 dog beds along with two human-sized couches that I am not any longer in a position to use is because I have had a succession of greyhounds take over my home. For many, many years now I have, in a way that I have described myself on a number of occasions, become and remained a delighted and willing human slave to the pointy faces who call my home their own.

Firstly, thank you to Ms Purcell for moving this motion today and indeed for continuing to highlight the beauty, the gentleness, the vulnerability, the idiocy and the humour of our very, very pointy-nosed friends. I also want to acknowledge the work of a range of groups who continue to work tirelessly, including through the efforts of volunteers, to allow so many greyhounds to be rehomed, to be adopted, to be fostered and to adjust to domestic life after being on the racetrack or in proximity to it. In particular I do want to acknowledge the work of Greyt Greys, Gumtree Greys, Amazing Greys and Racing 2 Rehome amongst others. It is through organisations like these that I have found myself besieged by dogs over the years and will continue no doubt to be in such a position over the coming years and indeed hopefully for the rest of my life. So in that sense, Ms Purcell, we have a lot in common.

What I want to say today and to put on the record is that government will absolutely commit to the digital tracking system that you have put to us. This is important for a number of reasons. Firstly, we have achieved a volume of success around the way in which some tracking has occurred in Victoria, and I note Ms Purcell's reference to the New South Wales system, which whilst not perfect, to paraphrase what you have said, is indeed something. What this proposal of modifying FastTrack, the Victorian data system, will do is move from a manual processing component, which is therefore vulnerable to points of human error, through to a digitised process. It is also really important to put on the record that not only do we commit to this whole-of-life digital tracking system but, for avoidance of any doubt, it will and indeed is intended to operate from birth and not from the point of a pup being microchipped.

Animal welfare is something which I see as a personal responsibility and which this government takes really seriously. Is there more work to be done? Always. Is it important to make sure that we continue to assess the conditions in which greyhounds are trained, race, are rehomed, are adopted or are otherwise treated once their racing or indeed stud or breeding lives and usefulness come to an end? Absolutely. Do we need to make sure that we continue that work on top of the \$6.5 million in funding that has been allocated to greyhound welfare programs since 2014? Absolutely. Do we need to continue to make sure that rehoming rates increase? Absolutely. Do we need to make sure that indeed 'rehoming' means exactly what it says? Yes, we do.

What I also want to do, though, in my contribution today, beyond identifying those people who work so tirelessly to rehome dogs and to make sure that when they come to homes like mine and take up a

position on something soft and snuggly for the rest of their days and steal socks and eat vast volumes of cheese, is in fact also acknowledge that there are a number of people within the industry who do work really hard to identify areas for improvement in animal welfare and that it was in fact people from within the industry who called out some of the abhorrent practices that were taking place in the Macau Canidrome, for example, a canidrome which was world renowned for its disgraceful practices, animal welfare transgressions and cruelty to dogs before it was closed in 2018.

As a government we take the matters of animal welfare raised in this particular motion really seriously. I want to make sure that it is beyond doubt today for anybody interested in this debate that this commitment is made in good faith and is intended to be developed through a process of careful implementation to a point where it achieves its objectives – that in fact we do have an evidence base for the volume of greyhounds at any one time, where they are in their stage of life at any one time and what the processes are by which they can interface with various rehoming and fostering arrangements into the future.

It is also really important that we continue to have conversations about how animal welfare can be improved in the process of engagement with tracks, training and racing. The track at Traralgon that Ms Purcell has referred to is one that was upgraded as a J-track to include additional drainage and to modify the camber of the way in which greyhounds would race. I attended the opening of that J-track, and it is an improvement. Is it perfect? Absolutely not. Is any racing environment where we are having animals or indeed people race at pace perfect in terms of being able to remove risk? No. What does it mean, however, to partner with industry to make sure that we are recognising best practice and we are recognising commitments to better practice in the way that we go about discussing our industry here in Victoria – what it means for the economy, what it means for jobs, what it means for animal welfare and what it means for, again, the movement away from the large-scale attendances at greyhound-racing events that we have seen globally.

It used to be the case that going to the dogs was a regular Saturday night experience for many, many families. It was a social occasion. That is still the case for many people, but not nearly as many people as used to attend. It is still the case that greyhound family days at various racetracks take place and are attended by large numbers of people, but they are not the same volumes of people as used to attend. It is important to note that there are many people, as I said earlier, in the industry who are working to lean into the challenges, the uncomfortable truths and the opportunities for improvements in animal welfare and animal safety as the industry moves into a better evidence base for the work that it does. I want to continue to work with Ms Purcell, and I want to continue to work with those groups who represent the interests of greyhounds and their welfare throughout their entire lives, including as they are working within the racing industry.

I also want to put on record my enduring love for the breed and my hope that in perhaps engaging with the debate we can continue to spread the word about this magnificent species. Ms Purcell has described them as really intelligent; in my experience it has not been the case that they are. In fact one of the things that I am also really keen to explain to people is they will sleep, as has been the case with the six or so that I have had, for up to 22 hours a day. And when in fact some of my greyhounds' intelligence has been questioned, I am only too pleased to say that they are not bothered by the minutia of everyday life or indeed deep thought. That is not to say, however, that they are not wonderful animals. They are pointy faced, they are gentle, they have velvety ears, they love things like cheese and toast and they have the most extraordinary characters and personalities. And for anybody who is thinking about adopting a greyhound or indeed having a trial, excuse the pun, in fostering a greyhound – which will invariably become a failed fostering arrangement because you keep them – I would encourage them to look at the dogs and to understand the joy that they can bring to our lives, the joy that they do bring to our lives. I do not want to sound evangelical about it, but I am. There are so many people who are, and there is a reason for that.

As this work continues, as we do commit to this whole-of-life system, moving to digital systems and platforms and making sure that we have good data and a good evidence base for where we go from

here, I want to thank Ms Purcell for bringing this particular motion. I thank those people in the industry who are working really hard to, as I said, identify areas for improvement. And I also thank those people who work so tirelessly to provide many, many beds in their own homes for greyhounds to live and to enjoy the very best that life can and indeed should offer to our canine friends.

Melina BATH (Eastern Victoria) (10:30): I am pleased to rise this morning to speak on motion 41 in the name of the Animal Justice Party. I would like in my contribution to have the chance to discuss some of the various issues within the racing industry, the welfare of greyhounds and the importance of greyhound racing in rural and regional Victoria – and in particular in Eastern Victoria Region, in my patch – but also to unpack some of the parts of that motion and to apprise the house about some misinformation or some inaccuracies in that motion. Without reading it entirely I just want to go to a couple of the parts of it. The first part reads:

That this house:

(1) notes that:

- (a) there is no digital whole-of-life tracking scheme for Victorian racing greyhounds;
- (b) the manual tracking of ... greyhounds increases the risk of greyhounds going missing, being illegally exported or illegally euthanised, and makes it more difficult to hold ... responsible –

entities –

to account ...

This suggests, though, that the current system – Greyhound Racing Victoria's greyhound microchip scanning and tracking – is ineffective, which is incorrect. GRV already scans at multiple stages. However, the key benefit of a fully integrated digital system is that it will certainly increase the frequency and range of opportunities for participants – people – to check in digitally with their greyhounds to demonstrate compliance with the code of practice, and I want to go into that in more detail, and to upload that real-time data. Real-time integration is also important. It just reduces that time burden of the manual follow-up when greyhounds become inactive and finish their sporting life.

The second part that I want to clarify is in terms of part (2):

calls on the government to implement a digital system to improve greyhound traceability through an automated ... system ...

I know that Ms Purcell did relay in her contribution that New South Wales implemented a traceability system. That has actually been brought in under a Liberal and National coalition government to improve the tracking and tracing system, so I compliment the current government for having the oversight to have a far more integrated system and, importantly, whole-of-life tracking. But at the end of the day, this is about animal welfare, so I appreciate the work that that government has done. I understand very much that GRV, Greyhound Racing Victoria, the statutory body that has a variety of functions, is also working on this now, and I think it has had discussions with the government, as it should, and the Minister for Racing, as it should. This is work that has been done in a different jurisdiction but also is being done by industry, which is much appreciated by all. I think the mover of this motion has at least identified that, which is good.

There is one point in part (2) that talks about streamlining transparency. It feels to me a bit more like a catchphrase than an actuality. It sounds good, but in reality what does it mean? It says:

streamlines transparency and industry processes by providing one system for all industry transactions ...

This is not entirely accurate, because indeed the intent of this motion is about a new e-tracking system, but there are current systems. There are FastTrack and MyFastTrack that GRV already have in operation. How is this integrated into a digital platform? It is not like there is not anything occurring at the moment, but how can a system actually be implemented through an e-system?

The other point I would like to raise is that this motion and the new system will provide accurate euthanasia data for all greyhounds, including those in the industry rehoming program, the Greyhound Adoption Program (GAP). I have been reading the greyhound welfare fact base – this is from GRV, the statutory body required to oversee the industry – and there are some significant stats that are on the table. The data is already there. It is really pleasing to see that since 2018–19 in real terms there has been a 50 per cent reduction in euthanasia and the incidence of euthanasia. In real terms, in 2018–19 there were 769 reported incidents and in 2021–22 – the last financial year – only 375, which includes at race meetings and also away from the track. As I said, I think it is important that there is transparency in the industry, but also it is really pleasing to see that those numbers have come down substantially.

In terms of some other points I would like to make about GRV, the regulatory body that operates the industry but also promotes it – it has a dual function – there are some important things that have been introduced since live baiting ended in 2015. I know the mover of the motion, Ms Purcell, talked about the scandal, and it certainly was that. In the end shocking incidents have brought about better outcomes for animals, which is of primary importance for all of us, but also the code of practice for keeping greyhounds has been really refined and improved for the benefit of all.

It is good to see that under the rules, under the code, greyhounds cannot be euthanised because they are too slow, and we have seen that in the facts and data. We can also see that rehoming – a really important part of the industry and the work that has been done by the industry – figures, by contrast, have gone up. Nearly 3000 greyhounds were rehomed in the last financial year at the end of their, we will call it, working lives, and not only by the GAP. My friend and colleague the member for Gippsland South has got Maisy, a GAP pet. I can confirm he often speaks about Maisy sleeping about 23 hours a day. There is a beloved Facebook accompaniment that we often see as well. The serious fact is that GAP and other rehoming organisations do a tremendous job to ensure that former racing greyhounds are rehomed into loving homes.

I also want to give a very brief shout-out to other rehoming agencies. We have a pet who has come through the Keysborough animal shelter. There are all of those people that take in animals and that acclimatise them and rehabilitate them where required and then they go out to the people who adopt them. These are important issues because we want the best outcomes for our animals, our pets and recycled pets as well.

The other point I would like to make is that the code provides that a registered person must not surrender a greyhound to a municipal council pound – they are not allowed to. If that does happen, there are charges, there are penalties. If there is unlawful euthanasia, the full force of the law does need to come down, and I appreciate that. That is a really important one. Like all things, people need to operate within the law, and that regulatory body is a really important one.

I am running out of time; I had much more to say. What I do want to do is give a shout-out to my former father-in-law, the most lovely person, Arthur O'Connor, who has lived in Jacana all his life. He was an owner and a trainer of greyhounds. When they finished working, the backyard just had to grow and grow. They became his pets. He was one of those people, like many in the industry, who was devoted to both the welfare of their animals and also their wellbeing at the end of their working lives.

Katherine COPSEY (Southern Metropolitan) (10:40): I want first to thank Ms Purcell for her tireless personal and political activism for animal rights and welfare and for bringing this motion today. Victoria is one of the only jurisdictions in the world where greyhound racing is still allowed; let us be up-front about that from the beginning. Propped up by the powerful gambling lobby and encouraged by both major parties, the cruelty inflicted on greyhounds from birth to death for the sake of entertainment is an undeniable source of shame for this state. Like all animals, greyhounds deserve our care and our respect, and this is something the Greens believe wholeheartedly. Multiple studies across Australia and Victoria over the past few decades have all concluded that most people want to

see the cruel racing of greyhounds banned everywhere, but we still have the biggest greyhound-racing industry in the world in our state.

Greyhound racing is inherently abusive and a practice founded on significant animal cruelty. Racing greyhounds frequently suffer painful injuries, including broken limbs, head trauma and cardiac arrest, and far too many die on the tracks or as a result of track injuries. And that is just while they are racing. Once a greyhound is no longer winning or paying its way in races, its future is very bleak. A natural life span for a greyhound is 12 to 14 years, but very few racing dogs actually live this long. Some may go on to be used for breeding, and even that will be short lived.

Now, while there are some measures that are being taken to ensure a better life for greyhounds after racing, they do not go nearly far enough. Despite government and industry claims, the Greyhound Adoption Program is not the answer to the inherent problems of wastage, injury and cruelty in the greyhound-racing industry. Data from the annual reporting of this Labor government funded adoption program shows that community rescue groups actually rehome more ex-racing greyhounds than this program does.

Intertwined with this animal cruelty is the pervasive, widespread and universally harmful gambling industry that works hand in hand with practices like greyhound racing. This Labor government has failed to introduce any significant gambling harm minimisation measures in Victoria, leaving more and more vulnerable members of our community at risk from financial, social and legal issues arising from gambling harm.

Ending greyhound racing will make dogs' lives better but it will make our lives better too. Phasing out greyhound racing is the longstanding Victorian Greens policy and one I am proud to continue advocating for. The only way – let us be clear – to end the cruelty and suffering of greyhounds at the hands of this industry is to end greyhound racing in Victoria and across Australia once and for all. The Greens are calling on the Victorian government to amend the Racing Act 1958 to ban greyhound racing as soon as possible, to create a welfare plan for the future of greyhounds currently housed in the industry and to implement a just plan for trainers and other workers in the industry to transition to other useful employment.

In regard to this motion, the Greens acknowledge that current record keeping within Greyhound Racing Victoria is not conducive to data accuracy and that there is a significant need to push for increased transparency, compliance and monitoring of the relevant rules and regulations. An electronic tracking system will go some way to tracking down those dogs that are going missing and ending up in unknown places, suffering further harm outside the industry. So an electronic tracking system will be a welcome reform to increase transparency and promote better animal welfare. Such a system will represent a healthy first step on the path to ending greyhound racing in Victoria entirely. But we need to remember that this cruelty is an issue that will only be resolved once it is done and dusted forever. The Greens are very pleased to support this motion. However, it will not put an end to the inherent cruelty of the industry. What this state ultimately needs is a ban on greyhound racing as soon as possible. Greyhounds belong on our couches, not on the tracks. This practice has no place in our state.

Michael GALEA (South-Eastern Metropolitan) (10:44): I also rise to speak on the motion as proposed by Ms Purcell, that being to establish whole-of-life digital tracking of greyhounds. I would like to thank Ms Purcell for bringing this debate before the house, allowing me to speak on animal welfare generally as well as the issue of greyhound welfare specifically, and I would also like to start by acknowledging Ms Purcell's heartfelt commitment to and advocacy for greyhound wellbeing. I also note her previous contributions on this matter, including her notices regarding the deaths of greyhounds on racetracks and regarding Aston Lee and Aston Gigante and her statement on Amazing Greys kennel.

Victoria is home to many dog owners and dog lovers, and I can safely assume that there are many of us in this chamber who would count themselves amongst that number. Most will have seen beloved

Frankie walking down the halls of the annexe on at least one or several occasions, and I know we all love stopping to have a pat with him as well. Many Victorians rightly consider the welfare of animals, particularly dogs, to be very important. The Andrews Labor government, I am very glad to say, has a strong record of prioritising and improving animal welfare. This commitment is ongoing and it continues into this, the 60th Parliament.

I would also like to take this opportunity to highlight the decision of the Andrews Labor government in 2018 to approve the Code of Practice for the Keeping of Racing Greyhounds in public. The code followed 1300 public submissions and the urging as well of Victoria's chief veterinary officer. A notable and welcome reform was that non-racing greyhounds no longer required muzzles in public. I can remember not so long ago when every time you would see a greyhound in the street – or wherever you were, at the local shops or in a park – you would see them muzzled. The evidence was clear that this blanket approach was not working. It was not beneficial. It did not improve or produce positive results, and that is why the Andrews Labor government moved to change the rules around muzzling, resulting in better animal welfare for all greyhounds.

Of course in any debate about the welfare of greyhounds it would be impossible to have earnest discourse on the matter without addressing racing, specifically the regrettable and indeed ongoing instances of greyhound-racing fatalities. Racing greyhound deaths are distressing. They are also distressing for the owners and trainers, in many ways no different from the loss of a family pet. The motion, I note, calls for the government to provide accurate euthanasia data for all greyhounds including those in the industry rehoming program, the Greyhound Adoption Program. It is an unfortunate fact that most incidences of greyhound euthanasia are the result of racetrack injuries. Greyhound Racing Victoria has introduced measures to reduce racing fatalities. The greyhound recovery initiative provides financial assistance to owners of injured dogs to help pay the costs of veterinary care for the injured dogs. This financial assistance provides for better treatment and encourages owners to undertake veterinary care procedures with the decision focused on the wellbeing of the greyhound rather than any financial implications. Addressing injuries and providing assistance to owners so that animal welfare and treatment are the overwhelming focus is one aspect of reducing fatalities and promoting better animal welfare.

Another aspect that Greyhound Racing Victoria has acted on is track safety, collaborating with experts to design tracks to make them as safe as possible and reduce the number of injuries both fatal and debilitating or otherwise injurious to the dogs. Greyhound Racing Victoria is continuing to investigate ways it can continue to improve conditions at racetracks and how to innovate to ensure that the safest possible racing surfaces and conditions are in place. This crucial implementation of minimum standards and pre-race inspections ensures that race meetings will not proceed without the safety of the track being determined as satisfactory by a qualified expert.

Greyhound-racing fatalities in the year 2021–22 were the same as in 2020–21, which was 48 fatalities in both of those years, which is far too many. However, I do note that since 2018–19 racing fatalities have fallen by over 40 per cent. There is still, as always, more work to be done. Similarly, the rates of injury also show a marked decrease, with 32.4 injuries per 1000 dogs in 2021–22, which is a reduction from 34.5 per 1000 in 2020–21. Overall, since 2015–16 the rates of injury have dropped by almost 20 per cent. The statistics on injury rates and fatalities show that improvements are still needed to get those rates down even lower. Those same statistics also, though, clearly show that under the Andrews Labor government animal welfare has improved considerably at our greyhound racetracks.

The motion's stated outcome from the implementation of a whole-of-life digital tracking scheme is that it will improve Victorian greyhound welfare and meet community expectations. With that in mind, I would like to discuss the prioritisation and the commitment of the Andrews Labor government. Since we formed government in 2014 there has been enormous progress towards improving animal welfare. This government has invested \$6.5 million towards improving animal welfare and boosting the integrity of the greyhound-racing sector. As I mentioned at the start of my contribution, the implementation of the Code of Practice for the Keeping of Racing Greyhounds has improved the

welfare of racing greyhounds at all stages of their lives; \$1 million was invested in supporting the implementation of this code.

The Victorian government also implemented various changes to the industry, particularly the governance structures and regulatory oversight. This followed a comprehensive consultation, including inquiries undertaken by the racing integrity commissioner and the chief veterinary officer. Two changes that resulted from these inquiries were the strengthening of inquiry powers held by the racing integrity commissioner, which worked in conjunction with the establishment of the Victorian Racing Integrity Board and the Victorian Racing Tribunal. Furthermore, structural changes alongside considered investment ensured that Greyhound Racing Victoria was made accountable for improving the welfare of racing greyhounds in Victoria, as is very appropriate.

I will also note the commitment of this government to rehoming greyhounds. Under this government there has been a 72 per cent increase in the annual number of greyhounds rehomed since 2015, which is something to celebrate. In part because of this significant improvement in rehoming rates, alongside the measures I have previously referred to, the number of greyhounds euthanised has fallen by 89 per cent.

Before the previous election, the Andrews Labor government also announced the continuation of the \$72 million Victorian Racing Industry Fund. The VRIF supports improvements to racing and training infrastructure to make Victorian racing safer for all participants, including, most importantly, the animals. The VRIF has committed \$6.5 million since 2014 to projects directly supporting integrity and animal welfare in the greyhound-racing sector. The government will continue to back strong animal welfare and robust integrity assurance in Victorian greyhound racing.

Moving directly to the main aspect of the motion, the whole-of-life digital tracking of greyhounds means pre racing, during a greyhound's racing career and into retirement. Such an expansion will provide Greyhound Racing Victoria with a crucial additional tool in its ongoing effort to enhance and preserve the welfare of our greyhounds. It further enables them to hold anyone acting wrongly to account. Currently Greyhound Racing Victoria has a tracking system implemented. The system uses the FastTrack system. Digital tracking removes the need for manual inputting of data. Tracking occurs at specific mandatory stages and interactions. These vary from microchipping and vaccinations to naming, changes in ownership and participation in races, to give several prominent examples.

The greyhound-racing integrity unit has a proactive follow-up procedure that deals with instances when a dog is deemed to be inactive for a period or when they trigger certain risk criteria. These systems are currently entered manually. Digitisation of these systems will allow for faster, more accurate and more effective operation of tracking greyhounds. I do also note that Greyhound Racing Victoria is fully supportive of adopting a digital tracking system. As a regulator, this measure would be consistent with its strong and unequivocal commitment to putting animal welfare at the centre of everything that it does.

I do also want to address that if it is suggested that large numbers of dogs are going missing or being illegally exported or killed, it is important to remember that digital tracking will enhance and not replace GRV's existing tracking system. There is no evidence of widespread missing greyhounds in the Victorian industry, and this can be seen from the number of greyhounds bred, racing, legally exported to other racing jurisdictions and rehomed. If anybody, though, does have evidence of greyhounds being dealt with in contravention of the rules of racing – the code of practice or the Prevention of Cruelty to Animals Act 1986 – they should absolutely immediately report what they do know to GRV's greyhound-racing integrity unit.

There is much around improving animal welfare that Victorians can be proud of. Under the Andrews Labor government significant progress has been made. That being said, I fully acknowledge that while significant work in greyhound welfare has been done, there is more that still can be done and must be done, and we will do it.

Rachel PAYNE (South-Eastern Metropolitan) (10:55): I rise today in support of this motion to implement an electronic whole-of-life tracking system for Victoria's racing greyhounds. I congratulate Ms Purcell on not only her passionate advocacy in this space but providing a voice for these beautiful animals. Since there is currently no whole-of-life tracking scheme for racing greyhounds, this system, if implemented sufficiently, will be a welcome Australian first. I applaud Minister Shing's contribution earlier and the government's commitment in principle to supporting this motion.

Greyhounds are gentle, docile couch potatoes. They have increased in popularity so dramatically that all of us would struggle to head out in our electorates without seeing multiple constituents walking their rescued friends. Yet greyhounds in the racing industry are not protected or afforded the same level of care or oversight as the dogs we deem companions. The New South Wales government funded and commenced implementation of eTrac in 2022, which aims to improve the ability of the monitoring body, the Greyhound Welfare and Integrity Commission, to protect the welfare and integrity of the New South Wales greyhound-racing industry. There are still flaws in this system that fail greyhounds, and the Victorian government needs to ensure that it works with advocacy stakeholders to close those loopholes.

In Victoria there is no cap on the number of greyhounds that can be bred into the racing industry. Current industry figures from 2021–22 show that participants are breeding almost four times as many dogs as the industry is rehoming. This is creating a welfare crisis, with the industry's own greyhound adoption program reporting a waiting list of nine months and community rescue groups reporting a waiting list of over six months. This has resulted in an increase in extreme cruelty, the killing of dogs and more recently illegal export to underground Chinese racing rings.

The greyhound industry in Victoria is partially funded through point-of-consumption tax charged by the Victorian government to wagering operators. Under the current POCT set-up, operators are liable for 10 per cent of net wagering revenue derived from customers located in Victoria. The government distributes 35 per cent of revenue collected under the POCT to the state's racing industry each year, including the greyhound industry. The total amount of POCT given to Racing Victoria in the 2020–21 financial year was \$25 million, of which \$6.2 million was passed on to Greyhound Racing Victoria. Taxpayers deserve transparency from an industry they, through the government, so heavily support. Where an industry is supported to such an extent by the government, it is prudent that transparency, compliance and monitoring of the relevant rules and regulations go along with that.

As the popularity of greyhounds as pets increases, the welfare of greyhounds within the industry has been a growing community issue, and it makes perfect sense that we address this. Due to a lack of any electronic tracking system, there are currently significant data gaps, including on breeding, off-track injury, death and euthanasia. Notably, the number of young adult greyhounds in Victoria is unknown. This motion calls for the government to fund and implement a digital system to improve greyhound traceability through an automated whole-of-life tracking system modelled on the New South Wales government's eTrac system, which requires participants to physically check in greyhounds via scanning technology periodically at particular milestones, such as birth, registration, vetting, races and retirement. An e-tracking system is the first step towards bringing Victoria into line with best practice, providing further transparency of greyhound welfare and taking action on illegal behaviour. I support this motion for better welfare outcomes for greyhounds, who are no different to any other dogs deemed companions.

Ryan BATCHELOR (Southern Metropolitan) (11:00): I am very pleased to speak on the motion that Ms Purcell has moved. I will not traverse some of the other material that my colleagues have mentioned in relation to what the government is doing; I think that is on the record. I am pleased, from Minister Shing's comments, about our support for the digital tracking system.

I want to spend a couple of minutes as a fellow greyhound evangelist talking about how wonderful they are as pets. We were very privileged I think to have a pet greyhound, retired – 'failed' racing greyhound is probably the appropriate term.

A member interjected.

Ryan BATCHELOR: Yes, very much so – who joined us in around 2009 and was with us for a decade. We had to put her down just before the pandemic, in late 2019, because her back legs had given out. She was an adorable, quirky dog. As someone who has always had a bit of a nervous relationship with dogs, having been at the receiving end of a nasty bite when I was out campaigning as a child in Melbourne's northern suburbs, it was a really nice way for me to get back into being comfortable around dogs again. She served as a constant companion in our household, particularly to my partner when I was away working in Canberra. Daisy was always there.

I just want to reflect a little bit on the quirks of their personalities and the comfort that they bring with a couple of stories, one of which is of when we were introducing her to my mum's backyard. She has got a nice quarter-acre block down in the bayside area, where Daisy liked to run around a bit. There was an unfortunate neighbourhood cat that liked to keep residence in Mum's otherwise quiet backyard, so when our dog went down and started sniffing around, the two of them got into a little bit of a racing match. Fortunately the cat escaped and survived, and Daisy ended up showing the signs of a limp that had ended her racing career. She was always a very good patroller for other animals that used to occupy our backyard and served a very important role in making sure the possums stayed out of our veggie patch over the course of our time.

She was also lovely around our kids. The other point I want to make is that for people who are interested in pets that become part of a family very easily and are soft and gentle, the greyhound is a wonderful addition to your family. Mr Galea mentioned the sort of striking symbolism of the muzzle that certainly was part of our childhood perceptions of what greyhounds were like, but once we got one, that quickly evaporated. As we had kids and they were added to our household, every night Daisy our greyhound would walk around the house and count everyone to make sure that everyone was there so that before she retired for the evening she knew that all members of her pack were being looked after, even as they increased over time. The only problem we really encountered with her was when she went up the stairs and could not get back down again, because she was pretty hopeless at that sort of thing, and it did not get easier as she became more unsteady on her feet and her eyes started going.

The message I want to give in this brief contribution is that they are amazing pets. We need to look after them. The government is taking action. I think this tracking system will be an incredibly important part of that. I commend Ms Purcell for her advocacy on the issue and also echo the words of Minister Shing. I certainly know that we have bonded over our shared love of these dogs over the years. If you want a great dog, get a greyhound.

Evan MULHOLLAND (Northern Metropolitan) (11:04): I would like to acknowledge the great contributions of some of my colleagues – Ms Purcell, Mr Galea, Mr Batchelor and Minister Shing. I do not own a greyhound, but I do empathise with a lot of you. I own perhaps a cousin of the greyhound in a little dachshund called Gavroche, named from my favourite musical, *Les Mis*. We adopted Gavroche from the RSPCA as a rescue. He seems to have nine lives. He has got a very cheeky personality and gets into everything, but he is a dachshund who has been hit by a car; he has eaten a tub of Mentos, which are poisonous for dogs; and he is now battling through intervertebral disc disease, which a lot of dogs go through, but he is on the mend. Dachshunds are similar to greyhounds; I think they are similar in nature. They just want to sit on your lap and watch TV and sleep and just be around the family, and having a very young family I can say they are very good with kids, like greyhounds are. I think improving traceability across the lives of greyhounds is a really good measure and a good way to improve animal welfare standards, so I think that does go in the right direction. I will note, like other colleagues have, that this is something that is being implemented in New South Wales, by the Perrottet government, as well. I think it is something that we can really all agree on, and it is great to see some action on this there.

Much of this motion is supported by the industry and is consistent with planning by the peak industry body, Greyhound Racing Victoria. The greyhound industry is a great industry here in Victoria that

makes an outstanding economic contribution to our suburbs and to the regions. I will note Minister Shing's contribution earlier and her suggestion that greyhound racing is not well attended. I would invite Minister Shing to come with me to the Meadows greyhound track in Broadmeadows, an area which I am proud to represent, and perhaps Minister Shing can bring along the member for Broadmeadows, Kathleen Matthews-Ward, in the other place, so she can see the thousands of smiling Victorians who come out to visit the greyhounds. They are their great community events. I would be delighted to show the minister around there.

I have the privilege of attending the Phoenix, which is the biggest greyhound race at the Meadows every year, but it is also the richest greyhound race in the world – right in the northern suburbs, right in the Northern Metropolitan Region. I would invite Ms Watt to come with me as well, with Minister Shing, so we can see how well attended the Meadows is. They also have really great family days, which is really great – they have jumping castles, they have kids face painting activities – where people come along. Particularly in Broadmeadows, a lot of our new migrant communities come along to the greyhounds because it really is a family festival fete-like event where everyone can get involved.

It is important to point out that while we support the principles of this motion, as mentioned by some earlier speakers – and I will note the contribution by Ms Bath on this motion – it does make some statements which I think are incorrect, flawed or exaggerated. This motion suggests that the current greyhound microchip and scanning process is ineffective. I think the system is effective, and greyhounds are at multiple stages across their lives. But it is right to say the recording of these instances currently is time consuming and could be improved, so there is, I acknowledge, work to do. A fully integrated digital system would greatly improve the frequency and range of opportunities for participants to check in digitally with their greyhounds to ensure compliance and demonstrate welfare standards. This data could be uploaded in real time and reduce the need for unnecessary manual follow-ups due to better data integration, particularly for lovingly homed retired greyhounds like the ones we have heard about today.

Sheena WATT (Northern Metropolitan) (11:09): Thank you very much for the opportunity today to continue the debate on behalf of this side and to speak on Ms Purcell's motion calling on this government to implement a digital system to improve greyhound traceability through an automated whole-of-life tracking system. There have been a number of contributions made already today, but I would like to reinforce and reiterate that the government is happy to support the development of a whole-of-life digital tracking system in Victoria's greyhound-racing industry.

There are remarkable statistics about what the industry does. It does contribute to the Victorian economy, including in the number of jobs – almost 5000 in fact. It is important for the government to continue to support Greyhound Racing Victoria (GRV), the racing integrity commissioner and the chief veterinary officer to constantly improve and monitor welfare standards throughout the industry to protect greyhounds at all stages of their life cycle, and truly we are doing all of that. Great progress has been made as the government looks to improve animal welfare in the racing industry, particularly greyhound racing. I would like to say that this in fact is a continued focus and priority for the Andrews Labor government.

The number of racing greyhounds bred in Victoria was cut by more than half following the racing integrity commissioner's and chief veterinary officer's inquiries. There have been incremental increases in breeding numbers since then, but the number of greyhounds bred for racing in 2021–22 was still 20 per cent below the numbers before the intervention of the industry back in 2016. It is also important to note that more than 20 per cent of greyhound pups bred in Victoria are exported to other jurisdictions, including interstate and New Zealand internationally.

Beyond this there are structural changes and meaningful investments that our government has made in Greyhound Racing Victoria, and they are fully accountable for improving the welfare of racing greyhounds in this state. We are seeing those tangible outcomes. Since 2015 the number of Victorian

racing greyhounds being rehomed annually has increased by 72 per cent, and in that time the number of racing greyhounds euthanised has fallen by 89 per cent.

There is a point that I would like to make, which is that Greyhound Racing Victoria already has a tracking system in place using its existing software system, FastTrack, and digital tracking would integrate microchip scanning and remove the need for details to be entered manually.

I know that many people in this place have had lots to say when it comes to their love and affection for greyhounds and greyhound racing, noting of course the comments made about the thriving industry of greyhound racing in the Northern Metropolitan Region by my colleague in this place Mr Mulholland; thank you for that. Further south from the Meadows is a great community of those that support the rehoming of greyhounds. Specifically I would like to say that right around the corner from my electorate office there is a great number of greyhounds. The people of Brunswick absolutely love greyhounds, not so much the racing as is loved a little bit further up in the seat of Broadmeadows. But I only have anecdotes to go off. I do not have a greyhound to love and give great affection to like some of my colleagues in here. I understand Ms Shing spoke at great length about her dear love of and devotion to greyhounds. I will say that the Greyhound Adoption Program has been an almighty success, and I would like to thank the good people of the inner north, not just in Brunswick but right across the inner north, for the support and the love they give to retired greyhounds.

I have many more things to say, There is more to say about the actual greyhound industry, and I will take a moment, if I can, to speak more to the greyhound industry in our state. There is the Victorian Racing Industry Fund, and it has made and supports improvements to racing and training infrastructure to make Victorian racing safer for all participants. This includes, importantly, the animals. As the regulator of greyhound racing in our state, Greyhound Racing Victoria is fully supportive of adopting a digital tracking system, and this is absolutely and unequivocally committed to through their centring of animal welfare in all that they do. The results of this commitment are very much clear.

There is an extraordinary commitment made through Greyhound Racing Victoria's Greyhound Adoption Program, which I understand rehomes around 1000 greyhounds each year and works in partnership with industry participants and rehoming agencies, providing a very, very good opportunity for greyhounds to find a life after racing. This is for retired but also non-racing greyhounds. It is important to know that not every greyhound becomes a racer. Not every single one of them is seen on the track, and we do need options for life after the considerations of the racing industry for a great number of greyhounds.

There is of a lot of work that is being done by GRV to implement the rules of racing that also prohibit the euthanasia of any greyhound on the basis that it cannot be rehomed. This is really huge progress and something that I think we should be mighty proud of. It is absolutely a key cornerstone for ensuring the welfare of greyhounds in the racing industry. The results of all of these efforts and programs and initiatives and this goodwill are very clear. There has been a massive reduction in the total number of dogs euthanised, from nearly 3500 to 372. That 3500 was in 2015, and it was right down to 372 in the financial year 2021–22. It is most unfortunate and never a good thing to hear that greyhounds have been euthanised, but some euthanisations relate to other conditions and other health conditions, just like any other pet. Some, sadly, are for temperamental reasons, where the dog is not safe or there is an injury or where it is just the humane and right thing to do and it is in the best interests of the dog. There are reviews that are conducted by Greyhound Racing Victoria when euthanisations happen to really ensure that if there is euthanasia or the fatality of a greyhound in our state, the owners have not been in breach or violation or infringement of the rules of racing, the code of conduct for the keeping of racing greyhounds or the Prevention of Cruelty to Animals Act 1986. Greyhound Racing Victoria has demonstrated that it is absolutely committed to detecting and robustly prosecuting any breaches of animal welfare rules or legislation as it applies.

With the last little moment of time that I do have, I would like to take a moment to recognise member for Northern Victoria Ms Purcell for her continued advocacy, passion and drive in animal welfare.

One day I will, I hope, get up and speak with the enormous passion with which you speak. The people of Northern Victoria truly are well served by your ideals and your enthusiasm for this work. You are following in the footsteps of a pretty extraordinary predecessor, Mr Andy Meddick. I will take a moment to acknowledge his leadership, which led to us being in this place continuing to debate animal welfare time and time again. Could you pass on my best wishes to the folks of the Animal Justice Party and thank them for their profound and extraordinary leadership on behalf of our racing community.

On behalf of my mum and some friends, I would like to just acknowledge a place that was fairly special to me a number of years ago, the Dapto dogs. A big credit to the folks involved in the greyhound-racing industry for being bold and brave enough to take some big steps in reform.

Nicholas McGOWAN (North-Eastern Metropolitan) (11:19): It is with some pleasure, I think I would describe it as, that I stand to support the motion before the chamber today – indeed to support the intent most importantly. I was fortunate not too long ago to spend almost a couple of years living in New South Wales, so these issues are not new to me in any way. In fact I saw the beginning of I suppose what you would call the reforms introduced by the Baird government. The Liberal government there took somewhat extraordinary measures at that time – in fact they took the measure of completely banning the sport. Obviously there was some feedback from the community and there was certainly some backlash, I think it would be accurate to say, in respect to the industry itself. I am pleased to observe that here in Victoria we continue to have cooperative coexistence of the public, dog lovers and the industry. I see that this motion is a step towards not only continually strengthening the oversight of the industry but also including them and making them responsible for the animals they love, just like we as humans love our own pets at home.

It is interesting; I was just recently looking in respect to New South Wales, and sadly, last winter, from my reading, was perhaps the worst they have now recorded in respect to animals that have suffered catastrophic and major injuries. That is a concerning trend. The only silver lining I took from that report was the fact that we are now reporting it, because previously it was not reported at all and there was very little transparency. The fact that this motion seeks to remedy that is a very positive sign. Between July and September 2022 some 19 dogs died in New South Wales; this is from the Greyhound Welfare and Integrity Commission report. Again, they have become not only industry leaders in respect to the sport, if we can describe it as such, but they have actually become world leaders. It would be a very welcome development here in Victoria if we did likewise.

It was also interesting for me to read recently that they had a summit – one of the first of its kind that I am aware of in this country – on race injury reduction. That was held only last month, I think it was, at the end of February, in Bathurst. That brought everyone together – the industry, the owners, the public, interested groups in respect to animal welfare – with a view to continuing to explore how they might best not only protect the animals of course but also provide for their welfare in the long term. It has been much talked about today, so I do not intend to go over this ground, but being able to track the animals from birth to death is critical because it also provides much-needed accountability for and scrutiny of their welfare. I understand that there are systems in place, but New South Wales with eTrac has successfully implemented a world-first, best practice digital system of tracking these animals. That is critical.

It is important to note, as much as we can get carried away with the good sentiments and the stories we all share with each other, that as well intended as the motion is, if we are not prepared to spend money to give effect to it, then it is of little value. So the message I have today for the government and the crossbench and my own colleagues is unless we are prepared to put our money where our mouth is, the words simply do not have the actions that they require. In New South Wales this is absolutely true. You need to look at upgrading tracks, you need to look at investing in the system. From memory, the New South Wales government spent in the order of \$4 million to develop a tracking system. These are serious investments and you need that money. That money needs to come online soon, and sooner rather than later, because the welfare of animals is at risk.

In particular not only is money and upgrading the tracks the issue, but also then there are things that do not cost money. One of the things that stands out to me, particularly with this sport, is wet tracks. There has been lots of talk in the industry about the injuries occurring when there are wet tracks. We need to have serious debate in this state around the circumstances which are safe for the animals to race in, and when they are not safe we need to seriously consider whether it is appropriate to continue with races at the time.

I am excited to think that we can all work together in this space, that we can seek to have an outcome that preserves those who are interested and invested in this industry – invested not only in a monetary sense but more importantly in a welfare sense and with a love of animals and sport. There is little love, I put it to you, in any sport if that love equals the death of animals. So the closer we can get to striking that very delicate balance and protecting the animals to the absolute extent possible, I would welcome that, and I welcome the motion and congratulate all those involved.

Georgie PURCELL (Northern Victoria) (11:25): I want to thank my colleagues Ms Shing, Ms Copsey, Ms Bath, Mr Galea, Ms Payne, Mr Batchelor, Mr Mulholland, Ms Watt and Mr McGowan – I hope I did not forget anyone – for all being in agreement and for a commitment today in support of this motion to implement true whole-of-life tracking of greyhounds in Victoria. I want to particularly thank Ms Copsey and the Greens for their strong support and commitment on this issue as a whole and their knowledge and position on it and also their awareness raising for greyhounds and advocacy and rescue groups. I particularly loved hearing about Ms Shing's dedication and lack of couch space, which is something that I can absolutely relate to. I also have a dachshund, like Mr Mulholland has – in fact I have two – and two Cavaliers, so I have no room on my couch for a greyhound, but I hope that I will be able to one day. There are also four cats on that couch.

I really want to thank the government for their commitment today and acknowledge that this is the first time in this place that it has been acknowledged that the system is not working, which I think is a really important step in order to move forward. I think this industry is fraught with many holes and many problems, but we cannot solve those unless we work together to stop these dogs suffering. I commend the government for supporting this improvement and appreciate that the commitment is genuine today, which is very clear, and is aimed at achieving true whole-of-life tracking that works.

Reform like this is great, and having that commitment from the government, but I think it is really important to note that alongside the industry, which has been acknowledged here, we will also need input from expert stakeholders. They include groups like the Coalition for the Protection of Greyhounds, Free the Hounds, Amazing Greys and Gumtree Greys. They are the people that are dealing with the problems in this industry and are not involved in the industry, and they have a unique perspective to share that will help shape this system, close the loopholes and ensure monitoring and compliance no longer fall short of community expectations.

We spoke a little bit today about the New South Wales system and the implementation of that, which is still being rolled out. I think in order to have world's best practice, or at least nation-leading practice, we need to learn from the framework that they have implemented. While I thank the government for their commitment today, I just want to touch on four areas that I believe we need to focus on as we move forward in the implementation of this system.

The first one relates to puppies. I appreciate Ms Shing's acknowledgement in the debate and putting it on the record that this implementation and this commitment will include puppies from the moment they are born, which is so important – not the moment that they are microchipped and not the moment they are registered to be part of the industry – because right now that is not the case and it means that unraced and unregistered greyhounds are still at risk of disappearing. We will need mandatory inspections of breeders' facilities, just like we have under Victoria's puppy farm legislation, so that this data can be crosschecked with puppies that are born for the industry.

We need to remember greyhounds are exported interstate or overseas. The minute a greyhound is recorded as 'rehomed interstate' and crosses a border data will no longer be updated in the system, and we need to change that. A trainer recently told my office that they send dogs to Tasmania, where they are not trackable. Victoria currently has no ability to track these dogs, and this system will not fix that issue without the cooperation of all other states and territories. This government needs to advocate for the development and implementation of this system elsewhere.

Private rehoming – greyhounds are also at risk of retirement when industry participants can rehome them privately. At this point in New South Wales the greyhound is removed from the racing register, and there is no oversight of their whereabouts or welfare. Without the definition of 'greyhound' being revised to include 'all greyhounds which are or have ever been connected to greyhound racing' there can be no whole-of-life tracking.

Lastly, if pounds across Victoria are not equipped to collect breed data and scan greyhounds, they will continue to be lost and euthanised with the status of 'retired', as is the current practice.

In summary, in my last 25 seconds I just want to finish this debate by thanking the government, thanking my colleagues in this chamber today, but most importantly thanking every single greyhound that has survived this industry and has shown great resilience, trust and affection when they have finally been rescued. I will not stop at this; this is just the beginning. At the end of the day, as I said, I believe this industry has no place in Victoria.

Motion agreed to.

Bills

Health Legislation Amendment (Information Sharing) Bill 2023

Council's amendments

The PRESIDENT (11:30): I have a message from the Assembly:

The Legislative Assembly informs the Legislative Council that, in relation to 'A Bill for an Act to amend the **Health Services Act 1988** to establish a centralised electronic system to enable public hospitals and other specified health services to share specified patient health information, to make consequential amendments to the **Health Records Act 2001** and for other purposes' the amendments made by the Council have been agreed to.

Committees

Select committee

Establishment

Georgie CROZIER (Southern Metropolitan) (11:31): I move:

That:

- (1) a select committee of six members be appointed to inquire into, take public evidence as required, report, and make recommendations, by 28 November 2023, on:
 - (a) matters referred to in the letter, dated 15 December 2022, from the Commissioner of the Independent Broad-based Anti-corruption Commission (IBAC), the Honourable Robert Redlich AM KC, to the President of the Legislative Council and the Speaker of the Legislative Assembly, including but not limited to:
 - (i) appropriate protocols and procedures to ensure the independence of performance audits of integrity agencies by the Integrity and Oversight Committee (IOC) and safeguards to prevent potential improper interference by committee members;
 - (ii) the adequacy of the legislative framework for integrity agency performance audits under the Independent Broad-based Anti-corruption Commission Act 2011 and the Victorian Inspectorate Act 2011;

- (iii) protocols for the handling of correspondence and reports passing between integrity agencies and the IOC;
- (iv) whether it is appropriate for the IOC or an independent performance auditor to seek access to information relating to current IBAC operations;
- (v) whether procedural fairness should be afforded to integrity agencies by the IOC;
- (vi) the structure, composition and operation of the IOC;
- (b) the adequacy of IBAC's funding and its effect on IBAC's capacity to discharge its functions relating to serious police misconduct and public sector corruption;
- (c) the appropriateness of provisions in IBAC's legislation that limit the ability of IBAC to undertake public examinations;
- (d) options for improving arrangements for the oversight of IBAC's operations by Parliament, the determination of IBAC's budget and IBAC's legislative charter;
- (2) the committee will consist of two members from the government nominated by the Leader of the Government in the Council, two members from the opposition nominated by the Leader of the Opposition in the Council, and two members from among the remaining members in the Council as agreed to by these members;
- (3) the members will be appointed by lodgement of the names with the President no later than 4:00 pm two business days after the Council agrees to this resolution;
- (4) the first meeting of the committee must be held no later than 4:00 pm on the eighth business day after the Council agrees to this resolution;
- (5) the committee may proceed to the despatch of business notwithstanding that all members have not been appointed and notwithstanding any vacancy;
- (6) four members of the committee will constitute a quorum of the committee;
- (7) the chair of the committee will be a non-government member and the deputy chair will be a government member, and in the absence of any such nominations for the deputy chair, the position may be filled by another member of the committee;
- (8) the committee will advertise its terms of reference and call for submissions and all such submissions received by the committee will be treated as public documents unless the committee orders otherwise;
- (9) the committee may commission persons to investigate and report to the committee on any aspects of the inquiry;
- (10) the committee may commission persons to provide advice, including legal advice, to the committee on any aspects of the inquiry;
- (11) the presentation of a report or interim report of the committee will not be deemed to terminate the committee's appointment, powers or functions; and
- (12) the foregoing provisions of this resolution, so far as they are inconsistent with the standing orders and sessional orders or practices of the Council, will have effect notwithstanding anything contained in the standing or sessional orders or practices of the Council.

I am pleased to be able to rise and speak to my motion that is to be debated, because it is an incredibly important one and it goes to the heart of what is required in this state to get to the bottom of corruption in this government. The levels of corruption that have occurred are well documented, but what we do not know is the extent of that corruption. What we have seen over the last few years is a government that refuses to acknowledge the extent of it and will do anything to cover up corruption. We have seen that again today with the backflip and the deals done by the government with the Greens and the minor party Legalise Cannabis. This government will stop at nothing to cover up corruption in this state, and that is absolutely shameful.

This motion is to enable this Parliament, this house, to do its work on behalf of the people. It is to establish a select committee made up of members of the government, of the coalition and of the crossbench so that we can get to the bottom of what is occurring, so that we can clean up the corruption in this state. How do people have any faith in the administration if the government itself will not agree to those measures? I say that because what we know is there has been interference and there have been concerns raised – by the very body, the very agency, that is here to ensure that corruption does not

occur in this state – obviously in the letter provided to you, President, and the Speaker of the Legislative Assembly from the former commissioner of IBAC Robert Redlich, a man of very distinguished character and enormous experience with the judiciary. I think the shameful and appalling comments by the Premier about someone who has held this position within the Independent Broad-based Anti-corruption Commission –

Nicholas McGowan: His own appointment.

Georgie CROZIER: Exactly, his own appointment. But even more significant is the work he has done with the judiciary and to assist in enabling laws and good governance to occur in this state. There have been disgraceful comments by the Premier, who again confirmed today he has not even read the letter. Well, I guarantee somebody has read it to him. The guy has got a history of bending the truth, and I think we are a bit fed up with it. I certainly am. And if he has not read the letter, then that shows you a failure of duty as a leader of this state to understand exactly what the former commissioner is concerned about. Why hasn't he? Why hasn't he read the letter yet? I find the Premier's arrogance is just going to the next level. I do not know how he can walk the corridors here and think that this is okay. I honestly find it extraordinary.

The Honourable Robert Redlich AM KC said to you, because it was addressed to you, President:

If you wish to discuss these issues with IBAC, the incoming Acting Commissioner, Deputy Commissioners and Chief Executive Officer of IBAC would be pleased to meet with you.

I wonder if that will happen or if it has happened.

But let us return to the substance of the letter and why this motion that I have brought before the house is important. The matters raised in the letter go to the very heart, as I said, of what should be achieved. The letter looks at issues around protocols and procedures to ensure the independence of performance audits of integrity agencies by the Integrity and Oversight Committee and the safeguards to prevent potential improper interference by committee members. We know that interference happened. A now minister of the Crown, when the Commissioner was being interviewed, cut the feed. If that is not interference, what is? That is a deliberate attempt to interfere in the process.

The letter also raises concerns around the adequacy of the legislative framework for integrity agency performance audits under the Independent Broad-based Anti-corruption Commission Act 2011 and the Victorian Inspectorate Act 2011. It is very clear in this letter that there were concerns raised by the former Commissioner Robert Redlich. The letter says:

However, given its interactions with Callida Consulting throughout the audit, IBAC had significant concerns about the interference by the IOC's Audit Sub-committee in the work of the auditors. IBAC first became concerned at a meeting on 14 June 2022, when Callida provided IBAC with alarming advice that they had been directed by the IOC Audit Sub-committee to *'find dirt on IBAC and data that is not readily publicly available'*.

If that does not go to the heart of integrity and the level of corruption and interference by members of this government –

Nicholas McGowan: They make Nixon look good.

Georgie CROZIER: They make Nixon look good, yes, Mr McGowan. It just shows you the lengths that this government will go to to cover up corruption in this state.

Nicholas McGowan interjected.

Georgie CROZIER: The Premier's office are up to their necks in it, I have no doubt, Mr McGowan. I have no doubt. Callida Consulting also advised IBAC, according to Mr Redlich, that the IOC had given Callida a direction to remove certain parts of the report; for example, any references to IBAC funding or comments about IBAC's cooperation with the audit. Again I say: at what level of interference will this government stop? We know that IBAC needs additional funding. We have been

talking about the need for IBAC to have the funding that they need. They cannot do their work without that. The government has been arguing for years that that is not the case, but here it is in Mr Redlich's letter.

The other issue that Callida Consulting advised IBAC about is that the IOC advised Callida that if the directed changes were not made, the report would not be approved and released. It is just extraordinary that this government would go to those levels. I quote from the letter:

What is most concerning is that it appears that the Chair and majority of the IOC Audit Sub-Committee seemed intent on casting IBAC in a negative light for what we can only assume were political reasons relating to the work undertaken by IBAC.

Again, I say this is extraordinary. This is why a select committee is required to get to the bottom of these allegations.

Clearly Robert Redlich has no confidence – it is clear that the letter is about the stacking of the IOC, with government members chairing it. We saw the disgraceful behaviour by the former chair, who is now a minister, and what she did when he was providing evidence to this committee – ‘cut the feed.’ I think that will be a legacy that Ms Shing will have to live with, because that was an extraordinarily alarming level of interference just because she did not like what he was going to say.

The flaky excuses by the government today about their reasons for not enabling this also demonstrate their lack of willingness for this Parliament to do its job. And I say again, this Parliament has a duty to the citizens of Victoria to ensure that good government is carried out. Under this mob that is not occurring, and it was Robert Redlich in this letter that blew the whistle on that, because he laid it out. He has laid it all out. He went to points about the witness welfare inquiry. I note that there were certain recommendations in the minority report, conclusions that my colleagues Brad Rowswell as the deputy chair and the Honourable Kim Wells made, where they wanted:

... all evidence and achieved a balanced understanding from analysis and dialogue with both Victoria's integrity agencies and the witnesses that appeared before them. It is, sadly, a missed opportunity ...

And:

Throughout the course of this inquiry, Opposition members have become aware of Labor Government members being directed by operatives within the Premier's Private Office ... Opposition members of this Committee believe that the work of the IOC should be removed from party politics, as the work of this Committee is undertaken on behalf of the Victorian Parliament and people.

They have integrity in this report. The government has no integrity when it comes to corruption and the IBAC, and sadly we know that the welfare of witnesses was a massive concern for so many.

I note from Mr Redlich's letter as well that the IBAC complained to the then chair, but that seemed to fall on deaf ears. Well, no wonder why, because as I have just read out there was that very close association with the Premier's private office. Mr Redlich went on to say:

During the public hearing conducted by the IOC on 9 May 2022 the then Chair, over objection by some members of the IOC, refused to permit any questions or answers relating to any issues arising from the submissions concerning ongoing investigations and, at one stage, cut the live stream of the hearing.

That is what I am referring to: the chair interfering with the work of this committee and cutting the feed. That clearly is so concerning, as it should be, because it goes to the heart of what this government will do to cover up corruption. We need to get to the truth of what is going on.

Now, we know that the Premier himself has been involved – to what extent we do not know – with at least four investigations, I am told, but I have no proof that it is more than that. I would like the Premier to clarify that. I wish he would, because that is what we know. But that is pretty shameful too. The Premier of this state – at least four IBAC inquiries. He will do what it takes to cover up corruption in this state because it is a bit like follow the money. You follow the corruption, and you go to the head of the government. He will do anything to cover up corruption in this state.

If he really wanted to clean it up, if he really wanted to get to these issues, he would enable this important work of the Parliament, this select committee, to be formed. He would not do the grubby little deals to make them look good so they could save face – because the Greens know that there is a massive issue with integrity. They have got to save face on this too. So they are saying, ‘Well, the IOC will do this work.’ Well, we should be having both. The IOC should be doing their work and their reviews, and this select committee should be formed to enable the important work that needs to be done. Both processes can run in parallel.

But, oh no, the government, after just a couple of weeks ago saying there was no chance of having a non-government majority and chair, have done a deal with the Greens to keep them happy and to enable what we suggest in the motion – that the select committee be balanced: two members from the government, two members from the coalition and two members from the crossbench. Now we see in the IOC that the government does not have that chair or majority. That is a good thing, because, as Mr Redlich pointed out, it was stacked, and all of those issues that I have previously spoken about occurred.

There has got to be, I think, a very real look at this. President, you yourself are intrinsically involved because the letter was sent to you. You understood, I am sure, when you read this letter, the seriousness of what Mr Redlich was pointing to. I am not asking you to make comment of course, but I do say that any member who has read this letter would be incredibly concerned about what Mr Redlich has raised in his letter. Any reasonable person in the state who has read Mr Redlich’s letter would be incredibly concerned about what Mr Redlich has raised. Yet the leader of this state, the Premier, has not even bothered to read the letter. I say again: I just cannot understand how he thinks that is all right, how he thinks that he does not have to read the letter. As I say, I am sure the letter has been read to him, so he is being tricky with his words. But why go to that length? Why say again today, ‘I haven’t read the letter’? We all know why – because if he said, ‘Yes, I have read the letter’, then hopefully the media would do their job and then start asking him exactly about the claims in this letter.

Members interjecting.

Georgie CROZIER: He cannot recall, Mr Luu. And let us not forget that: ‘I can’t recall. I can’t remember.’ I mean, the farcical Coate inquiry that he set up with his terms of reference – again, I say that was a farce. The ministers, the bureaucrats that went before that committee – ‘I can’t remember. I can’t recall.’ People are sick of that. They hurt so desperately through the COVID period. They want a government to act on their behalf. You might say you have got a mandate. Well, yes, you do.

Nicholas McGowan: No, they don’t.

Georgie CROZIER: They won government, Mr McGowan, but they do not have a mandate for corrupt behaviour, cover-ups.

Members interjecting.

Georgie CROZIER: You do not have a mandate for corrupt behaviour and cover-ups. That is the point here, Mr Galea. This is a cover-up to get to the heart of – you nod no. You do not agree with Mr Redlich’s letter? You do not agree that what he is pointing out should be a huge concern? Have you read it?

Michael Galea: No.

Georgie CROZIER: Perhaps you should. How ignorant. You are about to speak on a motion that refers to the letter and you have not even read it – another one with their head in the sand, another one refusing to understand the level of corruption in this state driven by this Premier, driven by this government, who has no shame. They think they have got a mandate for corruption. You do not have a mandate for corruption. I just hope that common sense prevails and that that IOC committee does call Mr Redlich, does call Callida consulting and does undertake an inquiry because the government refuse to support this important inquiry.

With my concluding words, I am disappointed that the Greens and a number of the minor parties have done a deal with a cowardly government that will not do the right thing on behalf of the Victorian people. I say again this is an important inquiry that the people of Victoria needed to see in operation to understand the depth of what was going on and have this committee established. Let the Parliament do its work. Let the Parliament get to the bottom of the concerns raised by Mr Redlich. But, no, we have got a cowardly government that will do anything to cover up corruption in this state.

Michael GALEA (South-Eastern Metropolitan) (11:51): I do rise to speak on this motion. The proposal outlined in this motion is totally unprecedented. It flies in the face of Westminster parliamentary practice – a select committee of the Parliament looking into a joint committee of the Parliament. It absolutely flies in the face of hundreds of years of Westminster convention. This is demonstrated by the fact that it is contrary to this Council's – to this chamber's – own standing orders and our own committee practice. For this reason this proposal is unworkable. Evidence could not be received by the select committee because that evidence would already have been received by the joint committee the opposition wants to examine. It would be a farce.

Not only is this proposal against convention but it may also potentially lead individuals to breach the secrecy provisions in IBAC's legislation, which, like the Council's own processes, exists to protect confidential information. Those opposite know this. They should know this. Many of them have been in the chamber far longer than I have and they should know this. But they do know – they know that their idea of a select committee to scrutinise another joint committee is utterly abnormal. It is embarrassing. But the bottom line is they do not care, because for the opposition all this is politically driven. It is a cheap political stunt. For the opposition to be standing here trashing parliamentary convention with this motion and potentially breaching the law, it is apparently worth it. It is apparently worth it for them to score some political points. And don't we know how desperate they are to deflect anything away from themselves this week. There is no precedent that I know of – that we on this side know of – that involves a house select committee being established to review the actions of another committee. It is totally unheard of. Of course the exception is where the Privileges Committee is tasked with investigating a matter, such as leaks from another committee.

Nicholas McGowan interjected.

Michael GALEA: That is the whole point of the Privileges Committee, Mr McGowan. But this is permitted because the Privileges Committee would be investigating a breach of the Council's privileges, not another committee's processes, as this motion seeks to do. The proposal anticipated in this motion goes against, again, hundreds of years of Westminster tradition. It undermines fundamental privileges of parliamentary privilege.

Nicholas McGowan interjected.

Michael GALEA: I am surprised for you to be saying that, Mr McGowan, given I know you are a very renowned stickler for the conventions and traditions of this place. I would hope that you would be supporting me in this. I would hope that you would be supporting me. This is a very, very profound convention. These privileges exist to protect the vigorous debate and the contest of ideas that are necessary for this Council and our committees and our joint committees and our select committees to function.

Enver Erdogan: They don't have any idea.

Michael GALEA: They do not. Members will be unable to participate in those deliberations freely and openly. They do participate freely and openly, but they will not be able to in future because they will be concerned about future ad hoc, partisan, politically driven new select committees, such as the one being proposed by Ms Crozier today. The proposal in this motion would undermine the participation of Council and Assembly members in any future confidential parliamentary committee process. If the need for the committee envisaged in this motion were established, there would be

endless points of order to ensure that the processes of the other committees' scrutiny can be protected, which may be –

Members interjecting.

Michael GALEA: Maybe that is why Mr McGowan is supporting it. The Council's standing orders protect and preserve the important –

Members interjecting.

Michael GALEA: Write them out. The Council's standing orders protect and preserve the important privileges that this motion would so blatantly trash. Firstly, Council committees are restricted from receiving evidence from other committees. Committee and subcommittee meetings and minutes are private and are never publicly released unless by way of extracts of proceedings in a published committee report. I refer those opposite to Legislative Council standing order 23.12(2). Whilst the Integrity and Oversight Committee was a joint committee, these standing orders do still apply to the extent that they are not inconsistent with the Parliamentary Committees Act 2003 under which such joint committees are established.

Secondly, a committee can only consider unreported evidence – that is, evidence received by a previous committee which lapses or ceases to have legal existence before it can report to the Council – where the new committee is appointed in the same or next Parliament inquiring into the same subject matter, referring to standing order 23.18, any new select committee not inquiring into the same subject matter because the previous committee was a former joint investigatory committee with its own terms of reference.

Thirdly and finally, the unauthorised disclosure of any committee proceedings conducted in a private session or of any publication of documents not authorised for release by committee may be considered a contempt of Parliament – a contempt of Parliament. Any member discussing the deliberation of a former committee would be captured by this, and the unauthorised disclosure of any committee proceedings may need to be referred to the Privileges Committee for investigation and determination as to possible contempt.

A further fundamental problem with this deeply flawed motion is that there are important confidentiality provisions applying to former officers of IBAC. The Independent Broad-based Anti-corruption Commission Act 2011 provides that:

A person who is, or was, an IBAC Officer must not, directly or indirectly, provide or disclose any information acquired by the person or the IBAC by reason of, or in the course of, the performance of the duties and functions or the exercise of powers of the person or the IBAC under this Act or any other Act except –

- (a) for the performance of the duties and functions or the exercise of the powers of the person or the IBAC in accordance with this Act or any other Act ...

That is section 40(a) of the IBAC act. The maximum penalty for breaching that provision is 120 penalty units or imprisonment for 12 months or both.

This motion has stemmed from a letter sent to the Presiding Officers of Parliament that some now suggest should have been shared widely to members in this place. This is despite the correspondence being marked as 'Sensitive'.

Members interjecting.

Michael GALEA: It was not written to me; it was not written to you, Ms Crozier. It was not written to anyone else except the Presiding Officers, and it was marked as 'Sensitive'.

Members interjecting.

Michael GALEA: It was not written to me. The views of the former IBAC Commissioner are a matter for him, but any suggestion that anyone on this side has acted inappropriately is utterly rejected.

What I will say for those on that side is that we welcome the unanimous decision of this Council this morning to appoint Ms Payne, my colleague from South-Eastern Metropolitan Region, to the Integrity and Oversight Committee, and I look forward to Ms Payne's contributions to that committee.

This motion should be opposed for several reasons. It is completely contrary to parliamentary tradition, which in turn will mean it is unworkable because of the important privileges of this Council and its committees, which are protected by the standing orders. It may result in breaches of the IBAC act –

Business interrupted pursuant to sessional orders.

Questions without notice and ministers statements

Corrections system

Matthew BACH (North-Eastern Metropolitan) (12:00): (89) My question today is for the Minister for Corrections. Minister, Thomas Embling Hospital is home to some of Victoria's highest profile prisoners and houses dozens of serious criminals deemed unfit for mainstream prisons. Why then has your government let the staffing situation in corrections become so poor that one of its psychiatric units has been closed since January, with those who were housed there sent back to the mainstream system?

Enver Erdogan: Responsibility for Thomas Embling is actually a matter for the Minister for Mental Health. As Minister for Corrections I am not in charge of or responsible for that facility. It should be directed to the Minister for Mental Health.

The PRESIDENT: I ask the minister that represents the Minister for Mental Health to take the question.

Jaclyn SYMES (Northern Victoria – Attorney-General, Minister for Emergency Services) (12:01): Thank you, Dr Bach, for your interest in the Thomas Embling facility. I will pass your question on to Minister Williams, as the responsible minister, for an answer.

Matthew BACH (North-Eastern Metropolitan) (12:01): Fabulous, thank you. Can the minister, through you, Attorney, provide their assurance that this particularly vulnerable cohort are now being appropriately managed, as far as that is possible, within mainstream facilities and that the safety of staff is not at further risk?

Jaclyn Symes: On a point of order, President, I just seek your guidance. The substantive question was about the operation of Thomas Embling, and Dr Bach is now requesting that the Minister for Mental Health provide assurances about people within the mainstream prison system, which is not her responsibility. I recognise there is a significant crossover between Thomas Embling, which is the responsibility of the Minister for Mental Health, and the prison system, which is Minister Erdogan's responsibility. But your question crosses over two distinct responsibilities, and they are not compatible with each other for that purpose.

Matthew BACH: I accept the Attorney's point and in response would say that herein lies the problem – that we have this incredibly vulnerable cohort, who perhaps at the moment rightly sit under the purview of the Minister for Mental Health, who have now been moved into different facilities managed in a different way and sitting under a different minister. I accept the Attorney's point.

The PRESIDENT: You can only ask a question to one minister, so I have to rule that particular one out.

Water policy

Sarah MANSFIELD (Western Victoria) (12:02): (90) My question is to the Minister for Water. Concerns about the effects of open tender water purchases on water price led to a shift towards infrastructure-based recovery, like farm upgrades. Participants in these programs received funds to improve water efficiency in exchange for part of their water entitlements, but farms participating in

these programs tended to use savings to increase water use by an estimated 23 per cent across all farms. This rebound effect has meant that on-farm efficiency projects increase allocation prices more than buybacks. What is the government's rationale for advocating for efficiency projects over buybacks?

Harriet SHING (Eastern Victoria – Minister for Water, Minister for Regional Development, Minister for Commonwealth Games Legacy, Minister for Equality) (12:03): Thank you for that question, which provides me with an opportunity to talk about the way in which on-farm efficiencies operate in contradistinction to off-farm efficiency work. At the heart of water policy and the really complex, interlinking components of a system that, as I have indicated in this place before, operates across numerous jurisdictions and also involves federal regulation, it is important to set out some context about the Victorian position that we have taken over time as it relates to on-farm efficiencies, and then what I can do with the time we have available is take you to why it is that off-farm efficiency projects have actually delivered more water back into the system and deployed a range of innovations that get to the heart of the problem that we are trying to manage.

I do want to indicate, though, that it is pleasing that we have been able to provide you with information about the nature of the system further to your question about the water register and transparency and accountability and indeed enforcement of trading in the Victorian system, and I am looking forward to continuing with those conversations as you meet with people across the sector to understand better the way in which projects are being rolled out and implemented, the sorts of challenges and problems that we are looking to address and the way in which we are working with a range of jurisdictions.

In Victoria we have actually sought to attempt on-farm water recovery programs, and they are not the silver bullet that they have been made out to be. On-farm projects take water out of the consumptive pool and they actually push up water prices, which is also what I discussed last sitting week in relation to buybacks. They do not actually address the problem that we are seeking to lean into here, and we know that evidence from the Australian Bureau of Agricultural and Resource Economics and Sciences and the University of Adelaide has shown that on-farm programs negatively affect water users across the basin. They may provide short-term benefits but they are not enduring. We also know from the Frontier Economics report, which is a public document, that there have been a range of hardships experienced by primary producers and irrigators across the basin communities as they relate to the impact of buybacks, which I suppose feeds into the other part of your question. We have raised concerns about the validity of water savings from on-farm projects in other states.

With the remaining 22 seconds that I have I also want to confirm that we do support off-farm water infrastructure projects. These include the Lower Murray Water and Goulburn-Murray Water water efficiency programs. The WEP has indeed delivered over 17 gigalitres of water without negatively impacting upon communities. As I said, they are really complex interlinking projects, infrastructure and investments – *(Time expired)*

Sarah MANSFIELD (Western Victoria) (12:06): Thank you, Minister Shing, for your response, because from what you are saying it sounds like perhaps the government is not prioritising these on-farm efficiency projects to quite the extent that we understood they might have been. I would be interested in some clarity on that. I guess one of the other justifications that is sometimes used for these on-farm efficiency projects is that they create jobs. In fact every dollar spent on health, education and community care creates four times as many jobs as handouts for water infrastructure projects. So what is the government's justification for efficiency projects, given they are expensive for water recovery, contribute the most upward pressure on water prices and are ineffective at job creation?

Harriet SHING (Eastern Victoria – Minister for Water, Minister for Regional Development, Minister for Commonwealth Games Legacy, Minister for Equality) (12:07): Thank you for that question. There is a lot in that and a number of cascading supplementary questions. I have got 55 seconds. In the time that I have available, unless the house is prepared to indulge me until the end of the day, I am very happy to say that there are a range of consequences around the application of socio-economic criteria as they function within the 2018 agreement entered into by the states as part

of delivery of the objectives of the Murray-Darling Basin plan. This is intended to leave communities no worse off as a consequence of efficiency measures, and indeed it has been determined that buybacks and on-farm work do not deliver the outcomes that they intend to deliver. In fact off-farm work and efficiencies across irrigation systems, including through watering of flood plains, actually get the water to where we need it to be. This is why we are looking to deploy technology and innovation in delivering those benefits over time.

Ministers statements: kindergarten funding

Ingrid STITT (Western Metropolitan – Minister for Early Childhood and Pre-Prep, Minister for Environment) (12:08): I was very proud to recently join the member for Thomastown Bronwyn Halfpenny MP in opening the fabulous Lalor Primary School kinder on the school site recently. While there, I also announced the 2024 locations for our kinder on school sites program, and since 2021 the Labor government has delivered a kindergarten on site or next door to every new school that we have opened, ensuring families have better access to the services they need. But we are also delivering them on existing school sites where they are needed. Six new kinders will open at St Albans Meadows, Willmott Park, Roxburgh Park, Korumburra and Napoleons primary schools and at Kyabram P-12 College in 2024, creating an additional 495 kindergarten places for local children. The new kinders will be built with modular construction to expedite delivery and minimise disruption for the school and local community.

Kinders are an incredibly important part of a child's lifelong education. It is where children begin to learn the skills they need to succeed in life but also where parents can gather and become part of their communities. Kindergartens on school sites ensure kindergarten programs are easier to access and drop-off times are simpler and more convenient for parents, and they provide a smoother transition from kinder to school for local children. All those benefits will make a big difference to these communities, and I am proud that our government is delivering kinders that communities need.

Pig industry

Georgie PURCELL (Northern Victoria) (12:10): (91) My question is for the Minister for Agriculture, and it relates to the gassing of pigs in abattoirs across Victoria. CO₂ stunning is branded by the pork industry as humane. In fact it was introduced in a series of measures set to improve animal welfare. Instead, this horrific practice involves groups of pigs being stacked into chambers and lowered underground, where toxic fumes slowly and painfully suffocate them. Pigs struggle for minutes as they writhe around in agonising pain. Instead of improving poor welfare, the pork industry is simply hiding it underground, where painful screams and desperate attempts to escape can easily be ignored. Without enforcement or oversight, the pork industry has claimed so-called cruelty-free products without scrutiny. Can the minister advise how PrimeSafe assess whether to approve or deny a pig-gassing facility?

Gayle TIERNEY (Western Victoria – Minister for Training and Skills, Minister for Higher Education, Minister for Agriculture) (12:11): I thank Ms Purcell for her question and her ongoing commitment to raising animal welfare issues, which she has done so ably in the chamber this morning and indeed through a variety of questions to me and others over the course of her tenure in this place. Can I say that obviously animal welfare is a priority of this government, and that is demonstrated by the budget allocations that we have allocated over the last couple of budgets. We are always on the lookout to have an understanding of any of the technological advancements that are being made and the latest science so that we can inform ourselves as to what the continuous improvements can be in the field of animal welfare, in particular when it comes to abattoirs.

There are currently nationalised consistent regulations that I am aware of that are specific to pigs and the gassing or stunning of pigs prior to the slaughter. They are rendered unconscious prior to slaughter, and I am further advised that controlled atmospheric stunning using CO₂ gas is permitted under these nationally consistent regulations. It is my understanding that the department is currently working to a national approach, which is underway, and we do support the development of national standards for

pig welfare. We also of course, with lots of other animal areas, are looking for a nationally consistent approach, and that definitely is the case.

What I would say to you and to other members here and the public in general is that if there are livestock welfare concerns I would ask people to call the Agriculture Victoria hotline, which is 136 186. Of course people are more than encouraged to contact PrimeSafe directly to lodge their concerns, and I would appreciate people's confidence and ability to do so. Again, to reiterate, we are constantly on a search for new technologies to ensure that animal welfare conditions are appropriate, particularly in abattoirs, and we will continue to do that. Of course we are wanting the latest science to inform the approach of government now and into the future.

Georgie PURCELL (Northern Victoria) (12:14): Thank you to the minister for her response. I would like to note that it is very difficult to report incidents of poor welfare when that poor welfare is actually legal. However, the 2014 Rivalea exposé showing gas stunning of pigs brought welfare issues to the public's attention. It led to published scientific studies that affirmed more humane methods must be considered. Pigs are one of the most intelligent and emotional animals that we share this planet with, yet their level of suffering is immeasurable. Will the minister consider reform to improve gas-stunning welfare issues or consider alternatives?

Gayle TIERNEY (Western Victoria – Minister for Training and Skills, Minister for Higher Education, Minister for Agriculture) (12:15): I thank Ms Purcell for her supplementary question. Ms Purcell quite rightly knows that the government is very active in the space of animal welfare reform and legislation. There will be an exposure draft that will be developed. There has been a lot of discussion so far that is forming the basis of legislation that will come before this house next year, but there will be further consultations in relation to a whole range of animal welfare issues. I look forward not only to seeing what the drafts might look like but to the conversations, which are going to be very active conversations, I might say, among the groupings that perceive the rights of animals as being very high in the hierarchy of things and the lots of people in the primary producer area of farming animals that will be very vocal as well.

Corrections system

Matthew BACH (North-Eastern Metropolitan) (12:16): (92) I am going to have another go to the Minister for Corrections. Minister, during a briefing given to the shadow minister in the other place, staff from your department confirmed that some prison facilities have closed entire wings or units and dispersed the staff elsewhere. Minister, how many prison units have been closed in the last 12 months, and where are they located?

Enver ERDOGAN (Northern Metropolitan – Minister for Corrections, Minister for Youth Justice, Minister for Victim Support) (12:17): I thank Dr Bach for his question and interest in our corrections system. This is a question I guess along a similar line to some of the previous questions in terms of the way our corrections system is operating. Obviously –

Georgie Crozier interjected.

Enver ERDOGAN: Yes, it is an important question that talks about the settings in our prison system – the settings that are in place. I think Corrections Victoria works very closely with the staff to make sure that our facilities continue to operate safely and the programs in our system continue to be delivered. In terms of settings in our prison system, it has been quite publicly reported that there have been a number of changes at a few of our medium-security prisons. That was done together in partnership with the CPSU and the workforce there to make those temporary changes needed.

Matthew BACH (North-Eastern Metropolitan) (12:18): By way of supplementary: Minister, can you provide an assurance that vulnerable prisoner cohorts who were previously housed in specialist units, which I suspect have been closed, have not been displaced from closed units into the general prison population?

Enver ERDOGAN (Northern Metropolitan – Minister for Corrections, Minister for Youth Justice, Minister for Victim Support) (12:18): I kind of answered that question in my substantive. I said our programs are continuing to be delivered unaffected at those facilities. At a number of medium-security prisons there were adjustments made to rosters in line with the staff and the union to ensure the continued safe operation of those facilities, and the programs and rehabilitation programs continue to be delivered unaffected.

Ministers statements: Aboriginal Justice Forum

Jaclyn SYMES (Northern Victoria – Attorney-General, Minister for Emergency Services) (12:18): I would like to use the opportunity to update the house on my attendance at the Aboriginal Justice Forum held in Bendigo last Friday. Firstly I want to acknowledge the extraordinary strength and resilience of all Aboriginal people and communities across Victoria and note the importance of the Yoorrook Justice Commission truth-telling and justice hearings. The Aboriginal justice agreement is a 23-year partnership between the Victorian government and the Aboriginal community in the spirit of strengthening Aboriginal self-determination. The AJF brings Aboriginal voices together with the government and key operational and policy directors in the justice system, including police, courts and government departments.

I am pleased to report that last Friday was the 64th AJF. I briefed the forum on the government's priorities and commitment to bail reform, a matter that has of course been on the AJF agenda for some time. I acknowledged, as I have in this place, that Victoria's bail laws are disproportionately impacting vulnerable and disadvantaged groups in the community, including Aboriginal people, women and children. The recent coronial inquiry into the death of Veronica Nelson highlighted that what happened to her was unacceptable, and we are focused on getting these reforms developed as soon as we can for the Parliament. I made clear that we have been listening to their concerns related to raising the age of criminal responsibility, and I have said many times I do not want to see kids in custody. The government is currently considering this reform also. I also shared our progress on the decriminalisation of public drunkenness, with the new model shifting its focus onto the safety and wellbeing of those intoxicated in public; provided an update on the stolen generations reparations package; and reiterated our commitment to strengthening Aboriginal self-determination and working towards a fairer, just system for Aboriginal people, and this commitment remains strong.

They are a fantastic group to work with. I always get a lot out of these forums, and I do want to thank them for hosting the AJF and for their ongoing commitment to improving outcomes for Aboriginal people in Victoria, acknowledging that together we have much more work to do.

Corrections system

Evan MULHOLLAND (Northern Metropolitan) (12:20): (93) My question is to the Minister for Corrections. Today the *State of Incarceration* report from the Justice Reform Initiative has revealed some shocking failures in our criminal justice system that are putting people in prison that should not be there. It found that over the past decade, largely under this Labor government, Victoria's adult prison population has grown by 32 per cent. Has the minister received a briefing on the report, and if so, will the minister implement reform to our criminal justice system to arrest the growth in our prison system and support vulnerable Victorians impacted by the criminal justice system?

Enver ERDOGAN (Northern Metropolitan – Minister for Corrections, Minister for Youth Justice, Minister for Victim Support) (12:21): I did see the reports in the newspapers about the report this morning. It touches on a number of portfolio responsibilities, obviously some that fall to the Attorney-General – there was commentary about the bail system, there was commentary about corrections – so I will try to address the question insofar as it falls into my portfolio responsibilities, because I do welcome discussion on this topic. I think it is an important topic, and I am pleased to see that the opposition spokesperson for this matter has talked about working with the government on criminal justice reform, because I remember a time when the opposition spokesperson or Shadow Attorney-

General used to use the platform to vilify minorities in our state. I do remember that time, and my constituents in Northern Metropolitan remember that time very well; it was not that long ago, in fact.

I did read the articles, and I do note that it does recognise that in fact the incarceration rates in the prison population has actually decreased in recent years in this state. I am proud to say that since 2020 the population in prison in our state has decreased by 20 per cent. The recidivism rate has actually reduced as well; we are at a low point in the last 10 years. So they are important findings from that report.

But like I said, we want to continue to make improvements, and we are. That is why I was at Loddon Middleton on Monday talking about diversion programs, the training alternatives in place and the pathways and partnerships with educational institutions like Kangan Institute and with private sector construction companies and also about giving prisoners that employment pathway. So I welcome those reports, and I look forward to working with the opposition to bring in those criminal justice reforms needed.

Evan MULHOLLAND (Northern Metropolitan) (12:23): The report also finds that 53.1 per cent of people in Victorian prisons have been in prison before, 37 per cent of people exiting prison receive a prison sentence within two years of their release and Victorian taxpayers are spending \$1.5 million per day on prisoners that have been incarcerated before. What is the government doing to improve outcomes for those who interact with the criminal justice system, which in large part impacts vulnerable cohorts like our Indigenous community in far greater numbers?

Enver ERDOGAN (Northern Metropolitan – Minister for Corrections, Minister for Youth Justice, Minister for Victim Support) (12:23): I thank Mr Mulholland for his interest in the matter. His supplementary question is a very good question. It talks about what our government is doing. What we are doing is investing in programs that will reduce the recidivism rate, so that is diversion programs, that is housing programs – I know in the north of Melbourne there is the Maribyrnong community residential facility, which is up and running – providing pathways to housing and obviously partnerships with employment agencies to give people the best chance to turn their lives around. Obviously some of that work is being done even before they come in contact, because we all know the best outcome for people is to not have contact with the criminal justice system. But if they do make contact, then it is up to us to provide them with the best opportunities to turn their lives around. That is through training, skills development, employment opportunities and housing opportunities post release. So we are investing, like I said, real dollars, and it is costing hundreds of millions of dollars, but I view that as an investment. That is the investment in a safer Victoria for all of us.

Transport infrastructure

Jeff BOURMAN (Eastern Victoria) (12:24): (94) My question is to the Minister for Transport and Infrastructure in the other place. I believe it is to Minister Shing. This is an issue I have raised before, but it is still unattended to and the danger to drivers is still very real. The housing affordability crisis has seen a huge growth in western Gippsland, with a corresponding increase in traffic issues. Instead of a proper approach to fixing the traffic issues, they have been dealt with by just lowering the speed limits, which is not really a bandaid fix as it causes other issues, such as the compacting of traffic and speed differentials approaching 30 kilometres an hour. One of the biggest issues is the Princes Freeway between Nar Nar Goon and Bunyip, which includes the Gumbuya World entrance and exit. The multiple speed zones as well as variable speed zones create confusion and frustration amongst drivers. There is no plan to attend to this and people are becoming frustrated at the lack of hope for a solution. So my question is: will the government commit as a matter of urgency to funding the studies required to implement a proper fix with new infrastructure instead of continuing to endanger the lives of road users with the current piecemeal approach?

Harriet SHING (Eastern Victoria – Minister for Water, Minister for Regional Development, Minister for Commonwealth Games Legacy, Minister for Equality) (12:25): Thanks, Mr Bourman, for that question. I am just pondering – and, President, you might be able to assist with this – whether

this is appropriately a question for the Minister for Transport and Infrastructure or the Minister for Roads and Road Safety.

The PRESIDENT: I think Mr Bourman is happy for it to go to transport infrastructure.

Harriet SHING: Terrific. All right, Mr Bourman, on that basis I will seek an answer for you in accordance with the standing orders.

Ministers statements: TAFE funding

Gayle TIERNEY (Western Victoria – Minister for Training and Skills, Minister for Higher Education, Minister for Agriculture) (12:26): I am pleased to update the chamber on how the Andrews Labor government is growing TAFE to support local communities with the training and workforces they need for the future. Recently I was pleased to join Kathleen Matthews-Ward, member for Broadmeadows, and Maria Vamvakinou, member for Calwell, to turn the first sod for the construction of the \$60 million Kangan Institute Health and Community Centre of Excellence. This world-class facility will have cutting-edge technology and deliver courses in high-priority areas, including aged care, mental health, disability, pathology, allied health and early childhood education and care. The new building will have flexible learning spaces, state-of-the-art laboratories for health simulation and outdoor spaces. Construction is expected to create at least 300 jobs. Importantly, this centre will enable the culturally and linguistically diverse communities in the area to gain skills and training to provide the care and support needed for their aging, ill community members and for those with children. Also in attendance at the sod turning were a variety of partners, including the Northern Health and DPV Health communities. These partnerships are crucial, particularly when we need students in great places for their placements, so I thank them for their contribution into the future.

This centre will become a benchmark for future vocational health training delivery, ensuring that graduates of this facility will become sought after by industry. This is a perfect example of greater access for all in our communities to our TAFE system and to receive the training and skills that they need by joining the dots – local people getting the local skills and local jobs and benefiting the whole community and our local economy. ‘Connected relevance’ is our motto.

Bushfire preparedness

Ann-Marie HERMANS (South-Eastern Metropolitan) (12:28): (95) My question is to the Minister for Emergency Services. Minister, according to the *Armstrong Creek Times* on 10 March this year, deputy chief fire officer Andrew Morrow said the following:

The wetter and cooler conditions this summer will mean communities can expect to see firefighters conducting planned burns if the weather and forecast conditions are suitable and it is safe to do so.

Burning during extreme weather conditions with wind gusts of up to 90 kilometres an hour resulted in three out-of-control planned burns taking place around the Great Ocean Road. Why did the planned burns take place in the lead-up to a day forecast to be extreme weather conditions?

Harriet Shing: Stop spreading misinformation.

Jaclyn SYMES (Northern Victoria – Attorney-General, Minister for Emergency Services) (12:29): Just to pick up the interjection of my colleague to my left, Ms Hermans, there were errors in your question. To classify something as out of control when it is not out of control and has never been declared as that in any of the times you prefaced in your question is really damaging. Please make sure that the information that you use –

Members interjecting.

Jaclyn SYMES: You used the term ‘out of control’, and that is incorrect. First of all, coming back to the substance of your question that had some accuracies in it, I would say that you have probably directed your question to the wrong minister, because I am not the minister responsible for controlled

burns; that would be three down to my right. However, in relation to that incident, I obviously was in very close contact with Minister Stitt in relation to the controlled burns that were in that region.

First of all you mentioned volunteers at Armstrong Creek, and I do want to start by saying what a fantastic job our volunteers and personnel did in relation to dealing with the fires at Kennett River, Lorne and Eastern View. They were all held within their control lines. There was obviously some extreme weather on Saturday; I know many of us were updating our VicEmergency app quite regularly. But FFMVic – it does not roll off the tongue all that easily – followed standard operating procedures to categorise a number of planned burns as bushfires. But those bushfires, as I would repeat, were always at a contained status. The fire danger eased on Sunday with much cooler conditions, less wind, and that total fire ban was lifted. All evacuation notices were lifted. Thankfully residents were able to stay in their homes due to the reduced threat.

There was a considerable effort put into those fires when they were reclassified from controlled burns to bushfires. As I said, there were numerous volunteers. There were planes and helicopters dropping retardants and water on those fires as well, and they did a fantastic job to ensure that the community in that region remained safe.

Ann-Marie HERMANS (South-Eastern Metropolitan) (12:32): Thank you to the minister, but I think we have to take into account that there were evacuations. At an emergency services fire briefing that we had earlier this year, which unfortunately you were not able to be present at, government officials informed the briefing that the fire preventative back-burning was to be completed by the end of February. Given that last week three back-burns caused evacuations, suggesting that the fires had clearly gotten out of their original controls, they clearly did not meet the February deadline. How many planned back-burns remain outstanding?

Jaclyn SYMES (Northern Victoria – Attorney-General, Minister for Emergency Services) (12:32): I want longer than a minute for this one. When my office organise briefings for you guys, it does not mean that I do not get a briefing as well. I sort of have my own briefings, and then I open it up to make sure that everyone who is interested in fire management has that information available.

In relation to planned burns, they are an important component of fire mitigation. Again, you are asking me about processes that are actually not my responsibility; they are the responsibility of the Minister for Environment. However, I can provide you with a bit of an update on procedures. Forest Fire Management Victoria and CFA work closely with the Bureau of Meteorology to decide when to burn. Planned burns will always carry risk; however, due to careful planning and management, very few burns go beyond control lines, which happened here. No fire went beyond the control lines. I cannot stress that enough. You misinformed the house in your substantive question, and you did it again despite the fact that I begged you not to. Experienced firefighter patrols patrol planned burns in the days after the burns. They monitor for any hotspots and they make sure it is safe. As I said, there is always inherent risk in planned burning, but the benefits for prevention and protection of community are things that are foremost for experts.

Ann-Marie Hermans: On a point of order, President, the question was: how many planned back-burns remain outstanding?

The PRESIDENT: I think the minister was relevant, particularly when she indicated it does not come under her administration.

Cherry Creek Youth Justice Centre

Matthew BACH (North-Eastern Metropolitan) (12:34): (96) I have another question for the Minister for Corrections. However, on this occasion it is with his youth justice hat on. Minister, the Cherry Creek Youth Justice Centre was completed in June last year. However, I am advised that there is yet to be a single person housed in this 133-bed facility, yet taxpayers are forking out for

maintenance and security staff to monitor the site. Minister, how much are taxpayers spending each week on this empty facility?

Enver ERDOGAN (Northern Metropolitan – Minister for Corrections, Minister for Youth Justice, Minister for Victim Support) (12:34): I thank Dr Bach for his question about our Cherry Creek facility. It is an important facility that he would know was a strong recommendation from the Armytage-Ogloff report into our youth justice system. It recommended a standalone modern facility, a multidisciplinary facility, that brings together a number of areas from youth detention to health services to training and skills – and, yes, culturally appropriate spaces. I have been out at Cherry Creek, and the staff there are very keen to start. They are very hardworking and looking forward to bringing young people into their care in due course. Our government has actually outlined the time frame for Cherry Creek, if you read the press releases and the reporting, and I think the Premier was asked about this a few weeks ago. But nonetheless I will share that later this year there will be young people at Cherry Creek, and I look forward to them going there because a modern facility to house them is right.

In regard to the specific question, you asked about financials or, to be precise, about the cost et cetera. In terms of the costs of our youth justice system, all of this stuff will be reported in the usual way. We have a whole-of-government financial management framework, and it will be reported during that period as per normal.

Matthew BACH (North-Eastern Metropolitan) (12:36): All of this stuff will be reported in the normal way. All right. By way of supplementary – and it may be, based on the minister's response, that the Premier in one of his press conferences, which potentially I missed, has already answered this, and if that is the case, having it clarified by the minister now would be very helpful: when? Perhaps I could ask you to be a little bit more specific than 'later this year'. When will Cherry Creek house its first inmate?

Enver ERDOGAN (Northern Metropolitan – Minister for Corrections, Minister for Youth Justice, Minister for Victim Support) (12:36): Thank you, Dr Bach. I felt like in my substantive I answered; I said later this year. But I think it is an important point, because in your substantive preamble you went on about the time it takes to operationalise such a facility. Those opposite have probably been out of government for so long that they do not know how long it takes to actually operationalise such a major infrastructure project. It takes time. You have the physical construction, then you train people up and you hire people and then you operationalise it. So of course it is going to take time. We have hired a number of people already. The leadership is in place. We continue to hire more people, and it will be in operation later this year. I have given you a time frame. That is the announcement: later this year. In 2023 it will be up and running.

Ministers statements: Broadford manufacturing

Harriet SHING (Eastern Victoria – Minister for Water, Minister for Regional Development, Minister for Commonwealth Games Legacy, Minister for Equality) (12:37): Okay, I want to start with a question: what is the only thing that is better than a Mintie? The answer is a Mintie made in Victoria. Last week I was delighted to head to Broadford, the home of Allen's lollies, to celebrate the fact that Minties have now returned to Victoria from New Zealand. And what a welcome they have received.

We are delighted to have been able to invest through Regional Development Victoria to ensure that more than 200 employees at the Allen's factory, plus an additional 20 employees, including a fitter and turner, including quality assurance, including apprentices, will be able to call Broadford home. It was really wonderful to get a tour from factory manager Emily Bradbury, who is in fact a Broadford girl herself, who had gone to New Zealand as a food scientist and returned to run this operation. It is extraordinary. We have robotics that have been manufactured in Melbourne alongside pallets that have been manufactured in Melbourne, with a giant drum that in fact circulates mint nougat over a drum and then pumps out Minties at a rate of 1750 a minute. That is a lot of Minties. What we now see is that Minties are being produced at this particular facility alongside other delicious treats such as Snakes

Alive. We have got other chews on the chew line, which is what I now know the subject matter specific lingo to be.

I want to thank all of the workers who took the time to show me around the factory. Eating hot Minties as they are given to you by a factory staffer is one of the great experiences. I am looking forward to seeing Minties go from strength to strength. I did not bring enough for the class today, but I urge you all to head out and buy some.

Written responses

The PRESIDENT (12:39): Minister Shing will get Mr Bourman a response in line with the standing orders from the minister for roads; Minister Symes will get a response from the Minister for Mental Health for Dr Bach's first question; and Minister Erdogan, can I ask you to get a written response to Dr Bach's first question that was directed to you.

Constituency questions

Western Victoria Region

Joe McCracken (Western Victoria) (12:40): (95) My question is to the Minister for Education, and it relates to the Ballarat Specialist School. In 2018 the school was allocated \$200,000 under round 4 of the Inclusive Schools Fund for a new accessible sensory playground. According to the Victorian School Building Authority website, construction was supposed to have been completed by the end of 2022; however, the project is still in the design phase. As a former teacher I know how important it is to give students the best possible learning experience, with diversified experiences. My question to the minister is: can the minister release information and a time line on when this project will be completed?

Western Metropolitan Region

David ETTERSHANK (Western Metropolitan) (12:41): (96) My constituency question is for the Minister for Environment. My constituent is a resident of Yarraville and is concerned that just weeks ago Stony Creek inexplicably turned bright orange, resulting in a warning to residents from the EPA to steer clear. This problem was purportedly caused by a chemical spill, so constituents ask: what has the minister done to ascertain the cause of this pollution and prevent further damage to Stony Creek from occurring again?

Southern Metropolitan Region

John BERGER (Southern Metropolitan) (12:42): (97) Today I rise to ask a question for the Minister for Tourism, Sport and Major Events Steve Dimopoulos, and in doing so I pay tribute to the great men and women that ensure Victoria is the sporting capital of Australia, and I reckon it is the sporting capital of the world. Last Friday night I had the pleasure of attending the Collingwood v. Geelong round 1 game at the mighty MCG, and boy, it was a ripper. Darcy Moore is doing a fine job as the skipper, and I reckon this might be our year. How good was our biggest gig ever a couple of weeks ago, Ed Sheeran? That was great. But it is just not about that. Our government will always support sport: the Commonwealth Games in 2026 – secured; the AFL Grand Final at the MCG until 2059 – secured; the Australian Grand Prix at Albert Park until 2037 – secured, and I am looking forward to attending the Australian Grand Prix soon. And let me be clear, the Australian Open will not be moving to Sydney any time. The Andrews Labor government has boosted gender equality in sports with new grants and initiatives, and our 2022 Local Sports Infrastructure Fund has transformed local grounds, building much-needed overhead lights – (*Time expired*)

Northern Metropolitan Region

Evan MULHOLLAND (Northern Metropolitan) (12:43): (98) My question is to the Treasurer, and it is about the government taking the micky with its Mickleham Road duplication. Given that the Minister for Transport and Infrastructure has determined that \$222 million in state and federal funding

can only fund a measly 1.6-kilometre duplication of Mickleham Road from Somerton Road to Dellamore Boulevard – curiously, at the same time the government’s 6.6-kilometre duplication of Plenty Road in Mernda in mid 2021 cost over \$145 million and the current Craigieburn Road upgrade is costing \$300 million – will the Treasurer in the upcoming budget finally commit to funding the full Mickleham Road duplication to at least Craigieburn Road, which is desperately needed for residents in Melbourne’s north, and stop taking the micky with Mickleham Road?

Southern Metropolitan Region

Ryan BATCHELOR (Southern Metropolitan) (12:44): (99) My constituency question is to the Minister for Employment. Minister, how many Victorians working in casual or insecure jobs have applied for the sick pay guarantee in the Southern Metropolitan Region? A year ago, on Labour Day 2022, the Andrews Labor government introduced Australia’s first paid sick and carers leave for casual Victorian workers, providing vulnerable Victorians the dignity to not have to choose between the safety of their workmates and feeding their family. In its first year the nation-leading \$245 million scheme paid more than 1 million hours of sick and carers pay to casual and contract workers. Before coming to this place I completed a research paper – of course I did – which looked at the prevalence of insecure work and the weaknesses it causes in our community, including the spread of disease.

A member interjected.

Ryan BATCHELOR: Four days. The research synthesised international evidence showing that paid and sick carer leave schemes are a solution not only to protecting workers but to keeping the community safe and strong.

Northern Victoria Region

Wendy LOVELL (Northern Victoria) (12:45): (100) My question is for the Minister for Emergency Services, who is in the house. On 26 October 2022 I wrote to you on behalf of our shared constituent Mark Milroy of Undera seeking support for Mark and his family after their property was inundated during the October 2022 flood event. You are yet to respond to my letter on this important matter. Also, on 10 November 2022 I wrote to you on behalf of our shared constituent Robert Vigliaturo of Mooroopna seeking assistance after Robert’s claims that his property was damaged by an Australian Army vehicle as it drove through the flooded street. Again you are yet to respond my letter. On 14 March 2023 my office reforwarded both letters to you for attention. Yet again you have failed to provide any response to this correspondence. Minister, will you follow up these two outstanding matters as a matter of urgency and provide a written response to my office regarding both inquiries?

Eastern Victoria Region

Renee HEATH (Eastern Victoria) (12:46): (101) Businesses in the Eastern Victoria Region have suffered over the last few years due to fires, floods and COVID lockdowns, and now they are facing crippling energy costs. With rising interest rates that are skyrocketing due to government spending and debt, the cost of living is spiralling out of control and local small businesses are suffering. When small business suffers, families suffer. Kids may have to give up sports and after-school activities, and families may go without. When small businesses suffer, communities suffer. In order to reduce rising energy costs, will the Minister for Energy and Resources support unlocking Victoria’s natural gas reserves?

Northern Metropolitan Region

Samantha RATNAM (Northern Metropolitan) (12:47): (102) My constituency question is for the Minister for Transport and Infrastructure. Residents in Kalkallo, in my electorate, have been in contact about severe congestion caused by poor planning and a lack of transport infrastructure in their community. There is just one road connecting Cloverton estate in Kalkallo to the main Donnybrook Road, which means it can take residents over an hour at peak times to exit the estate. There is only one

bus, which comes once every half hour, and some residents have to walk for 40 minutes to reach the bus stop. There is no pedestrian access over the Merri Creek for residents to reach Donnybrook station, and on Donnybrook Road there are no footpaths or bike lanes. Poor planning means too often new communities in the outer suburbs are approved without proper public services and essential infrastructure like public transport connections. Communities like Kalkallo desperately need better planning outcomes to ensure the necessary transport infrastructure is in place from the beginning or as soon as possible. Minister, what future projects and planning are underway to ease congestion and provide more public and active transport infrastructure for Kalkallo residents?

North-Eastern Metropolitan Region

Nicholas McGOWAN (North-Eastern Metropolitan) (12:48): (103) I rise in respect to a Chinese aged care facility in my electorate. My matter is for the Minister for Disability, Ageing and Carers. Back on 8 May 2019 this state government committed \$7.25 million in the 2019–20 budget. Likewise the federal government matched that with another \$7.25 million. Not too long ago, on 8 July 2021, an expression of interest did go out in respect to the facility. That had a deadline for expressions of interest of 30 September 2021. I seek from the minister an update in respect to that facility. They had identified 227–229 Manningham Road as a potential site. It is important in my district in particular – we have a large proportion of Mandarin-speaking Victorians, including Cantonese-speaking persons. We would welcome that update.

Southern Metropolitan Region

Georgie CROZIER (Southern Metropolitan) (12:49): (104) My constituency question is directed to the minister for transport, and it is in relation to the graffiti that is along roadsides along a vast area in my electorate of Southern Metro. I have raised this before – the graffiti that is on rail bridges and along the sides of road barriers and the increase in graffiti that is occurring. I think it just shows that there is a real problem, when this graffiti continues to occur throughout our suburbs. It just makes our city look grubby. The request I have of the minister is that they get onto cleaning up this graffiti along the roadsides and rail precincts in my electorate of Southern Metro.

Western Victoria Region

Bev McARTHUR (Western Victoria) (12:50): (105) My constituency question is for the Minister for Energy and Resources and concerns the Western Renewables Link. I have frequently raised the environmental and ecological threat, the visual blight, the damage to farming, the disruption to firefighting and the constraint of development of Melbourne's western housing growth corridor in relation to this project. But there are immediate impacts too. The threat of the line is already overshadowing lives and damaging mental health. Those fighting the project face the arrogant dismissiveness of the Australian Energy Market Operator, AusNet and government ministers and MPs. Another immediate impact is economic damage. Domestic and agricultural property values are being reduced today. Those remortgaging or raising finance face already reduced valuations, constricting their ability to borrow. One agricultural business has been devalued by \$1 million. Minister, where in the cost-benefit analysis of this project have you accounted for losses like this, and what is the total cost to the communities affected?

Western Victoria Region

Sarah MANSFIELD (Western Victoria) (12:51): (106) My question is for the minister representing the Minister for Health Infrastructure. Melton residents in my electorate of Western Victoria have been calling for a hospital since 2018. Melton is one of the fastest growing municipalities in Australia. The population is expected to surge from 210,000 people this year to 315,000 people by 2036. Residents have no easy access to a major hospital. At present their closest service is a 42-bed regional facility in Bacchus Marsh. Last year the government finally committed to the project, which the community has welcomed, so it is disappointing for them to learn that from day one this new hospital, when it opens in 2029 – the proposed 274-bed facility – will already be stretched beyond

capacity. My question to the minister is: why have you not included the projected population growth of the Melton area in your planning for this new hospital?

South-Eastern Metropolitan Region

Ann-Marie HERMANS (South-Eastern Metropolitan) (12:52): (107) My constituency question is to the Minister for Transport and Infrastructure in the other place, and it is about providing better road access to a top-performing school in my region. Will the government commit to coming with me to meet with the school leadership to ensure a commitment to installing traffic signals at the South Gippsland Highway and Devon Road intersection, which is desperately needed for the safety of students, parents and staff at Lighthouse Christian College in Cranbourne? Recently I had the pleasure of visiting Lighthouse Christian College in Cranbourne. It has around 1000 students from prep to year 12, and 93 per cent are from culturally and linguistically diverse communities. The NAPLAN results show that it is the top-performing primary school in the southern suburbs, with the third best secondary school in the southern area, but the road access to Lighthouse Christian College is limiting the school's growth. There is only one entry and exit point onto the busy South Gippsland Highway intersection with Devon Road. It does not have traffic signals, making it dangerous for students and parents and staff. The school has suffered a fatality. I personally suffered – *(Time expired)*

Committees

Select committee

Establishment

Debate resumed.

Adem SOMYUREK (Northern Metropolitan) (12:54): When I speak on IBAC it can take a while. I spent four days in November 2021 speaking to IBAC. When the subject matter is IBAC, I can speak for four weeks straight on IBAC. We are told that there is dirt on IBAC and the Labor Party committee members have it. If they do, can I please have it? If anyone else in the community has dirt on IBAC and if anyone within the organisation of IBAC has dirt on IBAC, please give it to me.

Normally I have a very high bar in terms of raising matters. I certainly do not abuse parliamentary privilege. For the 21 years that I have been here my guiding principle has been never to say anything that I was not prepared to say outside. I have never abused parliamentary privilege. But after having read the IBAC report under privilege, because I would sue them if it was not under privilege, they gave space to tainted testimonies of witnesses with an axe to grind as if it were fact. Apparently they have no evidentiary bar that they have to get over; they can just present assertions as facts. If you have got dirt on IBAC – I appeal to the Labor Party committee members who have dirt on IBAC – please, please give it to me. I am prepared to use it.

Let us talk about Mr Redlich. Mr Redlich is a serial leaker. He leaked what he was investigating. I did not know what IBAC were investigating until I took the stand – well, until the public examinations started – but he leaked to the media what they were investigating. He leaked that there was a formal investigation to the media. He then leaked there was going to be a public examination to the media. See a pattern emerging here? He then leaked the draft report of the investigation. For good measure, he leaked the final report, 24 hours before it was due to be tabled, to the media. I had to wait until the report was tabled whereas the media had it 24 hours before me. I went out to do a press conference without having read the final report, but I had to do a press conference. There is a theme developing here. Now, because he was slighted on a parliamentary committee, he writes the Presiding Officers a private letter, thinking that it is going to get leaked. It did not get leaked, so he leaks the letter to the media himself.

This man is out of control. He is puerile. I have seen young Labor politicians at work, and even they would not do anything as shameless as this. He is absolutely drunk on power. The man is a narcissist. It is all about self-aggrandisement. It is all about self-promotion. The textbook definition of 'corruption' is the misuse of entrusted power for private gain. I contend that the former Commissioner,

Redlich, has been leaking to media in exchange for favourable media coverage. I contend that he has been acting corruptly.

Let us get to the substance of the issue in terms of the parliamentary oversight committee. This is not about Redlich's concern for parliamentary oversight of IBAC. It has got nothing to do with it. He was slighted. I contend that he was slighted; that is what this problem is. Sure, there are many problems with the accountability mechanisms of our Westminster system. The system was not designed with disciplined modern political parties in mind, so the accountability mechanisms do not work. It is a winner-takes-all system, and that needs to be reformed. We all know that. But Mr Redlich was not motivated by the high-minded pursuit of one of his oversight mechanisms not working how it should.

The man is drunk on power, and he was slighted because a group of MPs shut him down. That is what the problem here is. He was shut down by MPs, and he thinks that he ought to be able to bully MPs into submission. I think he comes pretty close because MPs are scared of IBAC as it is. There are two mechanisms for oversight of IBAC: one is the Victorian Inspectorate, which is a joke, which is an absolute joke. It is underfunded, it has no teeth. That needs to be bolstered. The other is the IBAC oversight committee, and MPs are shit-scared of IBAC because one mention of an MP's name in an IBAC report is terminal for their career. The former Commissioner knows this. He could not stand the fact that he was shut down, and now he is having a big dummy spit. That is what this is all about. I do not think Mr Redlich should be ever heard from again. He should exit stage left and nick off.

In terms of these Greens, I have made my views clear on this issue. I read in the papers yesterday that they are worried about damaging a Labor government. What is your job? You have got a contract.

Samantha Ratnam: Who said that?

Adem SOMYUREK: You probably said it off the record via an unnamed source.

The PRESIDENT: Through the Chair, please, Mr Somyurek.

Adem SOMYUREK: Your contract with the electorate is to hold the government to account irrespective of the ideological persuasion of that government. You cannot play ideological buddies. You have got to hold the government to account. It does not matter if they are Socialist Left in the government or whatever they are – you have got to hold the government of the day to account. That is your contract with the electorate. That is your job with the contract. I have got to tell you, Barber would not have done this. Barber did not care at all. Barber used to strike fear into Labor government ministers. He was forensic. He used to hold us – at that point, I was on that side – to account, and he did a good job.

I am still contemplating whether I bring to this place a motion referring Mr Redlich to the Privileges Committee on the grounds that he was trying to bully MPs and so was in contempt of Parliament. I will decide that over the next couple of weeks.

Lee TARLAMIS (South-Eastern Metropolitan) (13:01): I move:

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

Motion agreed to and debate adjourned until later this day.

Questions on notice

Answers

David DAVIS (Southern Metropolitan) (13:01): President, with questions on notice – I was too slow getting up the stairs – I have a list of 49 of them, which I might hand to the Leader of the Government.

The PRESIDENT: You can do that.

Sitting suspended 1:02 pm until 2:08 pm.

*Committees***Integrity and Oversight Committee***Membership*

The DEPUTY PRESIDENT (14:08): I advise the house that I have received a letter from Gary Maas, member for Narre Warren South, resigning from the Integrity and Oversight Committee, effective from today.

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

That the bill be now read a second time.

Jacinta ERMACORA (Western Victoria) (14:09): Once again we stand in this chamber debating a bill introduced by the opposition which is more focused on political pointscoreing than tangible improvement of integrity. It will come as no surprise to those present in this chamber that the government has already announced that it supports in principle the recommendations of IBAC's *Operation Clara* report. This bill purports to implement those recommendations. IBAC made four recommendations as part of the *Operation Clara* report, which include amendment of the remuneration guidelines, revision of the lobbyist code of conduct, revision of the code of conduct for directors and amendment of the Victorian Planning Authority Act 2017.

This bill has been introduced prematurely. The government is already undertaking the important policy work for improving the framework under which lobbying occurs, and this is not something to be undertaken lightly or hastily. The government agrees that this is highly important work which should not be rushed in any way. To do so may risk unforeseen ramifications and consequences for unexpected targets that are not in the opposition's sights. It cannot be stressed enough the importance of getting the consultation right and ensuring that the concerns outlined in IBAC's report are properly addressed to prevent any future investigations and concerns.

According to the bill, its purpose is to:

... amend the **Public Administration Act 2004** and the **Victorian Planning Authority Act 2017** to provide more control over lobbyists.

This is a very odd purpose: no clear detail is provided on the effect of the bill. What is lobbying? The Victorian Government Professional Lobbyist Code of Conduct – that is, the lobbyist code of conduct – defines lobbying activity as:

... any contact (including telephone contact, electronic mail contact, written mail contact, or face to face meetings) with a Government Representative in an effort to influence Government decisionmaking, including the making or amendment of legislation, the development or amendment of a Government policy or program, the awarding of a Government contract or grant or the allocation of funding ...

The purpose of the code of conduct is to ensure that the contact between lobbyists and government representatives is conducted in accordance with public expectations of transparency, integrity and honesty. In his second-reading speech Mr Davis opined that some of the recommendations could be implemented administratively but the Andrews government cannot be trusted to implement the required reforms to entrench the required changes. Mr Davis has taken it upon himself as his personal challenge to legislate the recommendations and use his parliamentary position to once again take a shot at the government. One question that leaps off the page is: control by who? The bill fails to identify who is in control. Is the bill suggesting that it is in control itself, or is the identity of the controller the

opposition, as they are the ones introducing this bill and phrasing the clauses the way they have interpreted the recommendations of IBAC?

It should be raised in the chamber that in the *Operation Clara* report IBAC did not express any interest in controlling lobbyists. The overall tone of IBAC's findings addressed issues of transparency and integrity. This government has already announced that it was also extremely concerned with the issues raised in IBAC's findings. That is why the government announced that it supports the recommendations of Operation Clara in principle and that it stands ready to make any further necessary changes. I would be remiss if I failed to raise that in Operation Clara IBAC made no adverse findings against any current or past Andrews Labor government ministers or members of Parliament.

Based on the public position the opposition have taken surrounding the findings of this report, one would think that lobbying was an illegal activity. However, the IBAC itself stated in its *Operation Clara* report that lobbying is a legitimate activity. In fact it states:

Lobbying plays a legitimate role in helping to communicate the views of different sections of the community to decision makers in a democracy.

Of course lobbying must be done in accordance with the law and the code of conduct. We recognise that strict enforcement of policy and legislation is what upholds the reputation of the lobbying practice within community standards. Along with amending the Victorian planning act, this bill seeks to use the Parliament to amend several codes and guidelines. The bill provides for an amendment of the appointment and remuneration guidelines to make a lobbyist ineligible for appointment as a director of a public entity that has any functions that relate to any matter on which the lobbyist has conducted any lobbying activities in the previous 12 months and to require a person making a declaration of private interest under the guidelines to disclose whether they are on the lobbyist register and, if they are, to give details of their clients and the industries in which the person has conducted lobbying activity in the previous 12 months. The bill provides for amendment of the lobbyist code of conduct to prohibit a director of a public entity from conducting any lobbying activities on any matter that relates to the function of a public entity and to require a director of a public entity to comply with integrity requirements, including conflict of interest provisions in relation to any lobbying activities conducted by them or their appointment as a director. This bill also provides for the amendment of the directors code of conduct to prohibit a director of a public entity from conducting any lobbying activities on any matter that relates to the functions of the public entity. It requires a director of a public entity to comply with the integrity requirements, including conflict of interest provisions in relation to any lobbying activities conducted by them prior to their appointment as a director.

At present all members of government boards are required to declare any conflicts of interest and not use their board positions for personal advantage. It is not surprising that the vast majority of members of government boards hold integrity matters in the highest regard, as without the confidence of community we cannot successfully govern at all. The vast majority of members will act in the interests of organisations on whose board they serve and the broader Victorian community. This is just another vehicle for members to serve their constituency and the wider Victorian community.

It is ironic that the opposition seek to introduce a bill on integrity and transparency for political pointscoring. I am not sure they are in a position to be lecturing anybody on integrity. We cannot forget about the opposition's record when they governed. Several examples come to mind: during the four wasted years of the Baillieu-Napthine government former planning minister Matthew Guy attending \$10,000-a-head dinners with property developers, and Mr Davis having other entities pay his personal legal bills. These ultimately cost Victorian taxpayers millions in legal settlements.

Whilst we are on integrity, in the water industry I congratulate the former Minister for Water Lisa Neville for her very thorough reforms to the integrity of and accountability in the water industry as a result of the coalition's Office of Living Victoria debacle. As minister she instigated reforms of the gifts and hospitality system for directors and employees of water corporations and increased transparency by publishing reports on gifts, gift offers and hospitality on water corporation websites.

Any employee of a water corporation and any director of a water corporation, after the changes instituted by former minister Lisa Neville, had to report an offer of a gift and the value of the offer of that gift as well. This was a very, very important change in the integrity space, and it increased the community's confidence in the leadership of water corporations substantially. Minister Neville, at the time, picked up that portfolio at one of its lowest points after the OLV disaster.

The coalition might not know that water corporation directors are now required to list their interests and report on them twice a year, not dissimilar to this place. This prevents the activity we saw under the Baillieu-Napthine government. The Office of Living Victoria was plagued by scandal and was found to have a number of substantiated allegations of serious breaches of governance and procurement standards. The *Age* reported on 18 September 2014 on the activities of the Office of Living Victoria:

An Ombudsman's inquiry last month found the OLV had awarded millions of dollars in contracts – including to former National Party advisers and consultants – with no regard for the government's procurement rules, and to be rife with undeclared perceived conflicts of interest.

So what we can see here is that it is pretty rich to be pontificating about integrity with a long history – a long, long history. The litany of inappropriate conduct has continued uninterrupted since the opposition lost government: dinners with mobsters, which resulted in the former Leader of the Opposition sensationally referring himself to IBAC; and attempts by the former opposition leader's chief of staff to have Liberal donors top up his salary, another matter which resulted in the former opposition leader being referred to IBAC. This brief snapshot shows some of the problems, not to mention the irony, with Mr Davis and his colleagues bringing bills to this place on matters relating to integrity and propriety.

The bill should be opposed. It is rushed, it is sloppy and it is work the government has already said it supports but which will be done in the right way. As an outline, this bill seeks to prematurely implement the recommendations of the IBAC at the conclusion of Operation Clara. We have announced our in-principle support for these recommendations. We cannot stand here today and pretend that this is a matter the government is not pursuing methodically and in the appropriate way. This requires the important task of extensive consultation with the people who need to be consulted. We cannot rush legislation through to meet a political agenda. Any legislative reform we introduce to this chamber will be done properly to ensure practical and rigorous debate. We will seek to introduce bills and not play politics.

Samantha RATNAM (Northern Metropolitan) (14:24): I am happy to make a contribution to the Public Administration and Planning Legislation Amendment (Control of Lobbyists) Bill 2023, introduced by Mr Davis. We welcome the opportunity – any opportunity – to strengthen Victoria's integrity system, and we acknowledge the interests of the opposition as well as the engagement of the entire crossbench on these issues. Already we have seen this combined focus on integrity is bearing fruit. Even today significant improvements to Victoria's integrity and oversight regime, long called for by independent experts and resisted by the government, are finally occurring, and for this all non-government members from the crossbench and the opposition should take credit. We are doing our jobs to hold the government of the day to account. But as the almost constant stream of investigations and reports emanating from our integrity agencies illustrate, there is much, much more we need to do to improve integrity in Victoria, and we cannot as non-government members lose momentum to achieve more.

This bill seeks to act on the recommendations of Operation Clara, which found that former Victorian Labor minister Theo Theophanous misused his public position on the board of the Victorian Planning Authority, the VPA. The IBAC's findings were damning. They found that Mr Theophanous improperly lobbied in favour of the Australian Education City consortium's bid to build a project in East Werribee by failing to declare a conflict of interest or register the AEC as a client on the Victorian Register of Lobbyists. It found that Mr Theophanous tried to advance his private lobbying business by

telling clients he had access to staff and information within the VPA, that Mr Theophanous sought payments from the AEC and that Mr Theophanous in lieu of direct payments for his lobbying activities obtained other benefits from the AEC and as special adviser to the AEC, namely a \$10,000 political donation and other work carried out for his daughter Kat Theophanous's successful 2018 campaign as a Labor MP for the state electorate of Northcote. By any reasonable definition the actions of Mr Theophanous constituted corrupt conduct. He showed absolute disdain for the privilege of holding public office, working not for the public good and the public benefit but for his own personal benefit and the benefit of his family, and despite resigning from the board of the VPA he is unrepentant. His actions stank.

It is important to note that the IBAC found that there was no evidence that the current member for Northcote Kat Theophanous was aware of her father's actions and that she has since denied publicly having any knowledge. But it is also clear that the IBAC found that Kat Theophanous's 2018 election campaign directly benefited, both in substantial monetary terms and in other in-kind work, from the outcomes of blatant corruption. The Greens strongly believe that it is incumbent on any member who has benefited from corrupt conduct, knowingly or otherwise, once they become aware of such corruption, to publicly condemn it as well as to undertake genuine actions of restitution. This means that if an MP or their campaign receives monetary or in-kind benefits from corruption, at an absolute minimum they repay the value of any ill-gotten benefits. We genuinely expect that all MPs who care about political integrity would do this as a matter of course, but as it appears, it is not the case. We will consider if amendments to the bill today are possible to enforce this.

Moving to what is included in this bill, we agree with Mr Davis that the bill would ensure the four recommendations from Operation Clara are adopted in full. It will amend existing non-statutory codes of conduct to reduce conflicts of interest and prevent lobbyists from exploiting other government positions. I also agree with Mr Davis's point in his second-reading contribution, though, that implementing these recommendations by passing this bill really only goes to a modest area of what is needed to fix Victoria's integrity regime. In fact I would go even further and say it only really addresses a modest area of what is needed to fix Victoria's weak lobbying guidelines.

Last year the Greens introduced a bill to address the substantial problems in lobbying. Our bill goes further than the one that we are debating today and would legislate codes of conduct for lobbyists, ministers and parliamentary secretaries that are publicly available and would introduce penalties for breaches. It would mean that behaviour like Mr Theophanous's would result in a complete ban from lobbying activity or placement on a watchlist. Our bill would also create a new independent parliamentary integrity commissioner to oversee MP standards and the lobbyist register and require ministerial diaries to be made public. These are the kinds of major public integrity reforms we should be working towards. We will be progressing this bill shortly and will welcome support for our bill from the opposition and the crossbench, but we commend in this case the opposition for bringing this important bill before this chamber.

Matthew BACH (North-Eastern Metropolitan) (14:29): I am pleased to rise also in support of this important bill from Mr Davis, and it has been good to hear contributions from Dr Ratnam and also to hear the government's response, which is perplexing. Before coming up to the chamber I was watching question time in the other place. Down there I was listening to the Premier continue his appalling attacks upon Mr Redlich, who as you may know wrote a letter to the Presiding Officers whilst still the IBAC Commissioner, a scathing letter with more assertions – even from somebody as senior as that, who Mr Andrews described correctly in the most glowing terms when he was appointed as IBAC Commissioner – of serious corrupt behaviour. And yet Mr Andrews in the other place and Mr Andrews publicly has referred to Mr Redlich in the most derisive and dreadful way. At one point when asked if he had read the letter he said he would not engage –

David Davis: Robert Redlich AM KC, esteemed judge.

Matthew BACH: quite right – in a debate with some bloke who used to run an agency. And yet in this debate I have been gratified to hear that apparently the government has a deep reverence for IBAC, so much so that the changes recommended to legislation in Mr Davis’s bill, which simply will put into law the recommendations of IBAC, are premature. We need more time to ruminate on the excellent recommendations of IBAC, and to do anything but that is simply, to quote the government, ‘done for political pointscore’.

Given, as Dr Ratnam said, the seriousness of what was put forward in the report from Operation Clara, the allegation that any discussion of these matters is simply political pointscore does not stack up. We were told by the government that on this side of the house we are ‘not in a position to lecture anybody on matters regarding integrity’ because the member for Bulleen had dinner with somebody six years ago. To be honest, Joh Bjelke-Petersen would be in a position to lecture the government on integrity. Joh Bjelke-Petersen would be in a position to lecture the government on corrupt behaviour. So many members currently seated on the Treasury bench have been named in IBAC reports. The current Premier is the subject of no fewer than four IBAC investigations, and so to hear, delivered with a straight face, the notion that the government takes these matters very seriously and wants to work methodically and slowly through recommendations is, quite frankly, laughable.

It was noted by Mrs Ermacora that on this side of the house we have been in government very little in the last 20 years. Quite right. Sadly, we have only been in government for four years since 1999, but in those four years we put in place the Independent Broad-based Anti-corruption Commission, something Labor had never done in its long term of office after the Kennett government left in 1999, something the Labor government would never have done. It is only because of the excellent actions of Mr Baillieu as Premier and his team at that time that we even have an Independent Broad-based Anti-corruption Commission. The relevant member was the then member for Kew Mr McIntosh.

The content of this bill is incredibly straightforward. We had the report arising from Operation Clara, and what was found there was very serious. I will not quote it at length because we have already heard from Dr Ratnam and also my colleague Mr Davis did provide some brief quotations. Here is one section that jumped out to me regarding why it is so important that we put these changes into law and do not simply trust the government to continue apparently a process that we are told is underway, to move forward a lengthy and laborious process to perhaps one day do what the Independent Broad-based Anti-corruption Commission is asking. *Operation Clara* found:

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

Dr Ratnam is right. This is corruption. The member for Northcote in the other place has made her statements. Clearly her campaign benefited from corrupt behaviour. So the idea that we should not want to discuss this in this place, that to do so is simply an exhibition of political pointscore, I think is knowingly naive. We have four recommendations – just four – and Mr Davis in his contribution has stepped through them at some length. What Mr Davis has done has been to work with parliamentary counsel to shape a straightforward bill that would put those recommendations into law. He noted, and the government also has made this point correctly, that some of these recommendations could be implemented through administrative means. But we – and we know in this our views are shared by many members of the crossbench – do not trust the Andrews Labor government to do that. Who would?

This bill will achieve the task of enshrining IBAC’s four recommendations. What Mr Theophanous did was very serious, and that type of conduct should be stopped in future. I do not see the need, and I will be interested to hear from speakers on the other side of the house what their view is regarding the

need for a more lengthy process. If members opposite have had some Damascene conversion to a position of reverence and respect when it comes to IBAC, that is excellent.

Ingrid Stitt interjected.

Matthew BACH: Minister Stitt scoffs, and I will take up her interjection. The fact that –

Ingrid Stitt: On a point of order, Deputy President, I actually sneezed. Dr Bach, I did not scoff.

The DEPUTY PRESIDENT: I am not sure that is a point of order. I will take it as a point of clarification.

Matthew BACH: I will offer my fulsome apology to the minister. I know her to be a truthful person, so I am sure she was not scoffing at the notion that I am somewhat incredulous at the pleasing statements in this debate from those opposite regarding IBAC, an entity that was established of course by the coalition government – the short-lived coalition government, as we have heard. We were only in for four years. This was so important that we got it done. It was asserted by the last speaker for the government that we did not do anything in those four years and that we should have done more. One of the very good things we did was to establish the Independent Broad-based Anti-corruption Commission.

The government now says in this place that it has deep respect for IBAC. The Premier does not, because the former commissioner is ‘some bloke who used to run an agency’. However, if the government is being real with us rather than being disingenuous regarding its respect for IBAC, there is not a need so far as I can see and so far as Mr Davis can see for some lengthy process from a government that of course has the most appalling track record on issues of integrity but also on issues of outright corruption.

This is so important that members of the crossbench should join with us to put in place a straightforward bill that is not an expansive bill. Mr Davis made this plain in his second-reading speech, and Dr Ratnam picked up some of his points. We could go further. We need to go further in other ways to strengthen Victoria’s integrity infrastructure, as Dr Ratnam has said. But in this instance all Mr Davis has done, working with parliamentary counsel, has been to put forward an entirely straightforward bill mirroring the recommendations of IBAC. I commend him for the way that he has done that. I thank the crossbench for their collaborative approach to working with us, and I look forward to the bill’s speedy passage.

Michael GALEA (South-Eastern Metropolitan) (14:39): I do rise to speak against the Public Administration and Planning Legislation Amendment (Control of Lobbyists) Bill 2023. Indeed this is the second time today I am speaking on a Liberal motion or bill in relation to IBAC, although I think I probably will not get quite as big an audience as last time. I would like to think that my arguments were drawing people into the room. I am sure it was nothing to do with question time coming up.

A member: A great way to spend your day, though.

Michael GALEA: Absolutely. A great way to spend the day. I am sure it was all the persuasion of my arguments, never mind.

This is yet another bill from those opposite which demonstrates their overwhelming preoccupation with using this chamber as a forum for their political gamesmanship, for their cheap tricks. It is hard to see the merit in introducing this bill beyond the desire of those opposite to score yet more political points and try and throw up yet more distractions from the week that they are having. You cannot suggest with a straight face that this bill was drafted and introduced with the primary intent of producing positive change to either the Public Administration Act 2004 or the Victorian Planning Authority Act 2017. This is not a well considered bill. It is not designed with the intent of enacting a real, positive outcome for the Victorian people. Yet again the Liberals find themselves lacking a meaningful track record of delivering positive outcomes.

I will note that the government has provided in-principle support for the recommendations of the IBAC report on Operation Clara. The government is currently undertaking the policy work, something lacking in this bill, which is required to improve the framework under which lobbying occurs. I am also glad to see that this government, in contrast to the opposition, is not rushing this important work and is taking these recommendations seriously and not simply using them for political gain. I also, in echoing my colleague Ms Ermacora's comments before, do note our government's deep respect for IBAC – despite the scoffs or perhaps sneezes of Dr Bach to the contrary.

This government is committed to acting on the recommendations of the *Operation Clara* report. Whilst the government is doing serious work on this matter, what does this bill claim to do? Its stated purpose is to:

... amend the **Public Administration Act 2004** and the **Victorian Planning Authority Act 2017** to provide more control over lobbyists.

This is a particularly vague aim. It seems to be more concerned with having a catchy name to make it sound like it is taking meaningful action. In the report on Operation Clara IBAC did not claim to be concerned with controlling lobbyists; the matters of transparency and integrity were the focus of that commission. In line with these concerns of IBAC, the government has stated its concerns with the issues raised in the report, and that is why we are committed to making any and all appropriate and necessary changes. Whilst Labor is taking these recommendations seriously, the opposition is chasing its tail, introducing a bill with a stated aim that is not in line with what is called for in the *Operation Clara* report.

The Liberals established IBAC – and as I have mentioned in previous contributions, I commend them for doing that – in 2011, when they were last in government. Operation Clara made no adverse findings against any current or past Andrews Labor government ministers or MPs, so the Liberals have ignored the priorities of Operation Clara because IBAC has not done what the Liberals wanted to see it do. As IBAC has not made an adverse finding against the Premier, the Liberals have resolved to undermine IBAC both in the public arena and through bills they have introduced. It seems to me that this attitude towards integrity matters is at the heart of this bill.

In the *Operation Clara* report IBAC stated very clearly that lobbying is a legitimate activity. What is important of course is how lobbying is conducted and how lobbyists act. Any instance of lobbying must be conducted in accordance with the law and with the code of conduct. Ensuring that the law and the code of conduct promote transparency and integrity regarding lobbying is the primary concern.

What the bill does is allow the amendment of the appointment and remuneration guidelines to make a lobbyist ineligible for appointment as a director of a public entity that has any functions that relate to any matter in which the lobbyist has conducted any lobbying activity in the previous 12 months. It requires a person making a declaration of private interest under the guidelines to disclose whether they are on the lobbyist register and, if they are, to give details of the clients and industries the person has conducted lobbying activity for in the previous 12 months. The bill provides for amendment of the lobbyist code of conduct to prohibit a director of a public entity from conducting any lobbying activities on any matter that relates to the functions of the public entity, and it requires the director of a public entity to comply with integrity requirements, including conflict-of-interest provisions relating to any lobbying activities conducted by them prior to their appointment as a director.

The bill also provides for amendment of the directors code of conduct to:

prohibit a director of a public entity from conducting any lobbying activities on any matter –

on a function, that relates to their role in a public entity, and will:

require a director of a public entity to comply with integrity requirements, including conflict of interest provisions, in relation to any lobbying activities conducted by them prior to their appointment as director ...

As it stands, all members of government boards are required to declare conflicts of interest and not to use their board positions for personal advantage. There are already important safeguards and regulations within the code of conduct. Overwhelmingly members of government boards take integrity matters very seriously, as they all should. They take the code of conduct very seriously. They act in the interests of organisations on whose boards they serve and, by extension, the broader Victorian community. This bill does not engage in meaningful reforms that approach the recommendations of the *Operation Clara* report in a considered, effective or practical way.

I do not desire to repeat aspects of contributions that I have already made to numerous previous debates on bills previously submitted by the opposition. However, they are persistent in debating IBAC-related matters, and they do bear repeating. Considering the opposition's repeated or rather constant assertions that the government is not committed to supporting IBAC, it is again relevant to address these spurious claims and reiterate the government's demonstrable record of supporting and strengthening IBAC.

This government, the Victorian Andrews Labor government, has committed to acting on all 21 of the Operation Watt recommendations and implementing all of those sweeping recommendations, including establishing a parliamentary integrity commissioner to receive and investigate complaints about possible misconduct by MPs. The commissioner will be armed with robust powers and resources, including the power to recommend sanctions. It also includes work to establish a joint parliamentary ethics committee, comprised of equal numbers of members from the Legislative Assembly and the Legislative Council. It will ban MPs from employing close family members in their electorate offices, as is appropriate, and the ministerial code of conduct will be amended to clarify that ministers must ensure that the public resources made available to them to perform their public duties are not used for party-specific purposes, further to which electorate officer recruitment, management and supervision will be reviewed alongside grant administration to ensure greater transparency and better processes.

The Victorian Andrews Labor government introduced and legislated the Integrity and Accountability Legislation Amendment (Public Interest Disclosures, Oversight and Independence) Act 2019, which expanded and clarified the types of public sector improper conduct that a person can disclose. It also increased the pathways for making disclosures and simplified confidentiality obligations whilst protecting disclosures from legal costs and better enabling them to seek support services. The Victorian government also legislated the Integrity and Accountability Legislation Amendment (A Stronger System) Act 2016, which allowed IBAC to investigate misconduct in public office, lowered IBAC's investigation threshold, removed the requirement that IBAC has prima facie evidence of a relevant offence from IBAC's investigation threshold and provided the Auditor-General with follow-the-dollar powers.

In contrast, let us look at the record of those opposite when they have had the chance to govern or even show some leadership on appropriate behaviour. As I did say, the introduction of IBAC in 2011 was a very good thing. But beyond that, with the Baillieu and Napthine governments – outside of that – we had four wasted years, a period in which the then planning minister, Matthew Guy, attended \$10,000-a-head dinners with property developers. All the while his close relationship with these developers was almost as notable, almost as notorious, as his absolute abject failure in planning decisions. These were decisions that cost Victorian taxpayers millions of dollars in legal settlements – in Ventnor. It says a lot about the judgement of many in the opposition that they thought Mr Guy was a fit choice to be opposition leader again – and if things go certain ways in the next couple of weeks, maybe we will see him for a third run as well.

A member: Who knows?

Michael GALEA: Who knows. It is hard to say what is going to happen day to day, week to week with that lot. Notwithstanding that, they thought he was a suitable man to be Premier after that, let alone what my colleague Ms Ermacora referred to about other things that were cast aside as 'Oh, just

a dinner with someone.' Well, it is not just a dinner with someone when it is an alleged mafia figure that you are seeking donations from and having dinner with. That is not just another dinner.

Another former minister – I understand Mr Davis himself – when he was health minister had other entities pay his personal legal bills. This scarcely constitutes a model for appropriate behaviour in a minister or in any member of Parliament. The litany of inappropriate conduct has continued uninterrupted since the opposition lost government. As Ms Ermacora referred to, we have had a dinner with an alleged mobster that resulted in the former opposition leader having to refer himself to IBAC and attempts by the former opposition leader's chief of staff to have Liberal donors top up his salary, another matter which resulted in the former opposition leader being referred to IBAC. And he is still in this Parliament. These examples demonstrate some of the many, many problems with Mr Davis and his colleagues bringing bills to this place on matters relating to personal propriety.

The Public Administration and Planning Legislation Amendment (Control of Lobbyists) Bill 2023 seeks to implement IBAC's recommendations from Operation Clara. That is a very good purpose. But what it does not do is properly address several prominent parts of that report. It completely disregards the key recommendations, and it approaches those recommendations haphazardly, not in a way designed to improve public confidence or integrity but in a way that is designed to score cheap political points, to grandstand and to try and use IBAC as a political football to suit the needs of the opposition. This bill is rushed, and it fails to provide a considered implementation of those recommendations in the *Operation Clara* report.

I will reiterate that the Andrews Labor government has already announced its in-principle support for the recommendations. I will repeat, because it does bear repeating: we do, on this side of the chamber, have a deep respect for the Independent Broad-based Anti-corruption Commission and the work that it does. Despite what those opposite might claim, we do have that deep respect. We are currently pursuing the matter of how we implement those recommendations out of the *Operation Clara* report in a methodical, purposeful and considered manner. The government is consulting and will continue to consult with the appropriate people doing the actual work, which has been sorely lacking in this bill and is sorely lacking in most of the bills that the opposition have put forward to this house. The recommendations, as Ms Ermacora also said, have our in-principle support, and we will be continuing that work.

Legislation should not be rushed to score political points. Legislative reform has to be done right, and that is exactly what this government is doing. It has to be done with a focus on achieving the best outcome not for your side of politics but for the people of Victoria. That does not mean putting through a rushed bill that is only going to serve the political interests of one side of politics. It means doing the actual work, doing the grunt work and getting a bill in a proper condition worthy of serving the interests of all our Victorian citizens. This Public Administration and Planning Legislation Amendment (Control of Lobbyists) Bill 2023 does not meet those high standards, and for those reasons I do not commend this bill to the house.

Trung LUU (Western Metropolitan) (14:53): Today I rise to speak on the amendments put forward by my colleague David Davis to the Public Administration Act 2004 and the Victorian Planning Authority Act 2017 to guarantee greater oversight of lobbyists in Victoria. The *Operation Clara* report makes four clear recommendations regarding our currently undermined and corroded democracy. They illustrate the key vulnerabilities of the lobbyist register maintained by the Department of Premier and Cabinet in Victoria and the governance arrangements at the Victorian Planning Authority.

The recommendations in the *Operation Clara* report state that there were corrupt actions, and I will outline what the report found. The investigation, as we have clearly outlined, found a failure to register lobbyists, a failure to declare conflicts of interest, the use of one's position to gain advantage for oneself or another person and the seeking of payments. These sorts of actions are corrupt, and to say it is anything other than corruption is trying to –

David Davis: Cover it up.

Trung LUU: ‘Cover it up’ is another term, thank you, Mr Davis. Again and again the government – those who stand as our opposition – try to prolong things, put things behind firm doors, put up barriers and try to hide their actions.

The *Operation Clara* report found that former Victorian Labor government minister Theo Theophanous improperly lobbied in favour of the proposal on behalf of the Australian Education City, including by misusing his position as a member of the board of the Metropolitan Planning Authority. As I mentioned, again he used this position to benefit himself or another. He failed to declare his conflict of interest and comply with the requirement to register a lobbying client. Yet again he had clearly failed to register. In lieu of direct payment for his lobbying, he obtained benefit from the AEC and its associates in the form of donations to his daughter’s campaign for election to the Victorian Parliament. This is again obtaining benefits for another person.

These four recommendations in the *Operation Clara* report, if the bill is successful, will seek to increase the transparency and integrity which this government is lacking. For our democracy we need to have some transparency and integrity for people to have trust in government again. This Labor government has a track record of deception, and again here today it is trying to prolong things and put up barriers and obstacles against what we are trying to do to bring back integrity into the government. There is a lack of transparency and a conflict of interest with its ministers, both current and former. It was only a couple of weeks ago that the Assistant Treasurer was found to have a major conflict of interest in his portfolio. Again, what does the government try to do? They prolong things and put up barriers so that people will not pass judgement that what they are doing is corruption. This Labor government has a track record of attacking our impartial and key democratic institution of IBAC. This independent body has found conflicts of interest and the use of positions to get advantage and seek payment – corrupt actions.

We need to strengthen the trust in IBAC – an institution, I remind this chamber, that was created by this side of the chamber in 2010 by the Baillieu Liberal government. Why? To root out the corruption which was before them. The attacks on Robert Redlich in the past sitting week again was a clear picture of how this government conducts itself on accountability and transparency. And what does the Premier do? He ignores it, pushes it aside and says he does not know anything about it.

The Public Administration and Planning Legislation Amendment (Control of Lobbyists) Bill 2023 will, if passed, mean no individual will ever again be allowed to exploit their position on a board of governance, fail to declare conflicts of interest, fail to make proper lobbyist declarations or corruptly solicit donations through exploitation of a government-funded position. What it is is basically sorting out corruption of those on the opposite side, the government. The government needs to act on these recommendations and solidify them in law, instead of dragging its heels in bureaucracy and creating the illusion of democracy while serving to protect one another.

Again I will come back to the recommendations which this bill is all about. They are to ensure registrations are declared and that directors are not able to use their position or interest to obtain advantage for themselves or another person. Again and again the government, on the opposite side to me, try to say that it is not corruption, that they are not the recommendations and that they are acting in accordance with the law, but what we see from the investigations of IBAC is nothing but a true form of corruption.

In closing, I do strongly urge and encourage those sitting in this chamber to look deeply into this bill and how it will protect our democracy, how it will bring back transparency and how it will bring trust back for the people in this government. Adopting the four recommendations from IBAC will prevent the continuation and commission of corruption happening in this government. It is a simple bill. It is only four recommendations. So, again, I do urge especially the crossbenchers to support this so we can root out all the corruption which is brought upon us by this government.

Ryan BATCHELOR (Southern Metropolitan) (15:02): I am pleased to make another contribution on integrity matters on bills moved by Mr Davis – this time the Public Administration and Planning Legislation Amendment (Control of Lobbyists) Bill 2023, which seeks to do a number of things in relation to the purported implementation of IBAC’s report into Operation Clara, namely make some amendments to the Public Administration Act 2004, inserting a new subdivision to make some changes to the arrangements with respect to public sector boards and lobbyists and the register of lobbyists, and amendments to the Victorian Planning Authority Act 2017, purportedly to implement recommendation 4 from the *Operation Clara* report.

I will make just some broad comments initially about what things like Operation Clara in general terms are showing us about the operational effectiveness of our integrity system and why we as legislators have important and special responsibilities to ensure that that integrity system is operating effectively. They are going to echo some of the comments that I have made in previous contributions on bills that Mr Davis has moved in relation to amendments that he has sought to make to Victoria’s integrity framework and that we have debated in this chamber in the last few sitting weeks, because I am a very big supporter of having a very strong integrity system in the state of Victoria. I think that ensuring that our public administration is undertaken in a way that is free from serious and systemic corruption is a matter that should be of utmost importance to all who serve in this Parliament and all who believe that public administration must be done in the best interests of the public. The sorts of allegations and findings that have been made over a series of reports from the Independent Broad-based Anti-corruption Commission, I think, demonstrate that we have a system that is able to do its job effectively in weeding out, uncovering and making findings about specific conduct but also making policy-based recommendations about what action government and the Parliament could be taking to improve public administration in Victoria. *Operation Clara* is yet another one of those reports.

And what we have seen from the government in response to things like the report of Operation Watts and, in this time, Operation Clara is an acceptance of what IBAC has found and a very clear acknowledgement of the need to implement the recommendations of those reports, even when they may be uncovering matters that people find difficult to read about. But reading about that sort of conduct in a public report following thorough investigation from an appropriately empowered, independent integrity agency I think is a fundamental part of what makes our democracy strong, as does having a government that is willing to do the work to legislate to implement the recommendations. That is exactly what we have here in the state of Victoria. We have a government that has an integrity agency, independent of the government, able to investigate matters which may cause some people connected to public administration in Victoria – and we have seen this over the life of IBAC – feel very uncomfortable about the work that it is doing. But ultimately having those reports done, those findings made and those recommendations put into the public domain strengthens our democracy.

The challenge, then, as legislators is for us to consider bills that come before us and whether we think that they are the right things for us to be passing and whether they will support that integrity framework. If we believe it is important, we have an obligation to ensure that, when considering bills that are before us, we think they are the right thing at that particular point in time to be supporting. That brings me to this bill, because what we have seen, as I have demonstrated, is that the government does accept the recommendations of the *Operation Clara* report. We have publicly said that we will work in consultation with relevant groups to develop a response and ensure that the concerns outlined in IBAC’s report are properly addressed.

So the question before us is really not one of substance or intent as to the importance of responding to the recommendations but a question of manner or form and whether supporting this bill at this time is the right approach to dealing with these issues. We think it is not, because we think that there does need to be proper and due consideration given, in consultation with relevant parties, to ensure that those four recommendations of the *Operation Clara* report are adequately and properly implemented. I am certainly concerned that what we have seen from the opposition now over several attempts to

propose bills in relation to changes to Victoria's integrity framework is that they have again and again and again been more interested in creating a political sideshow than getting to the heart of making sure we have a strong integrity framework here in Victoria.

All I can do as a new legislator in this place is look at what we have seen in the last four sitting weeks on the matters in this broad area of the attempts to change Victoria's integrity framework proposed by those opposite and do an assessment as to whether I think that this one is any good this time round. Unfortunately, I do not think that is the case, because I am concerned that the approach that has been taken by the opposition on these matters is not one about fundamentally strengthening Victoria's integrity framework, which I think should be the test, but one that is about creating political sideshows. We saw on previous bills that have been produced and inserted into this chamber for debate that people's natural justice would be denied. Bills were brought forward under the name of strengthening the integrity framework that would have sought to undermine procedural fairness in the conduct of IBAC investigations.

We saw another bill brought forward by Mr Davis which attempted to undermine the role of the Supreme Court under the very important functions that it has in the Victorian constitution to have an unlimited jurisdiction with respect to the matters that come before it. We had in those bills attempts to change our integrity framework in a manner that was so sloppy that he had to move his own amendments to his own bill to clean up some of the mess that he had made. Then most recently attempts have been made to refer those bills off to a parliamentary committee for further investigation. That does not appear to be going particularly well either.

What that demonstrates to me is that there is serious and systemic sloppiness in the approach that Mr Davis is bringing to these matters. It does not fill me with confidence as a legislator who believes that we have a special responsibility with respect to these sorts of matters that supporting this bill at this time in this form is actually going to be the right thing to do in respect of Victoria's integrity framework, because there have just been too many examples of where it has not. Those examples are not historical examples. Those examples are not from 10 years ago, five years ago; they are from the last four sitting weeks. I have got to say that when this happens again and again and again there appears to be a bit of a pattern, and in that pattern of sloppiness we do not think is where the Parliament should be placing its trust and confidence in making the important changes to our integrity framework that we believe are required.

It has been very clear that the government takes the matters raised in the *Operation Clara* report very seriously. We are very concerned with the issues that have been raised, particularly with respect to the need to change guidelines with respect to the way lobbyists are regulated under the lobbyists code of conduct, changes that need to be made with respect to the role of public sector board directors engaging in lobbying activities and then commensurately the appointments process for anyone who is a registered lobbyist to those boards, and changes that might be required to the Victorian Planning Authority Act to detail that proceedings for a summary offence may be commenced within the period of three years after the alleged offence in accordance with recommendation 4 of the report.

We do think those are matters that do need to be addressed. The government is undertaking the sorts of consideration and consultation you would expect a government that takes integrity seriously to do and having the necessary members of our public service do that work in consultation as they deem appropriate and, when that work has been done properly, bringing it back to the Parliament for particular consideration and due consideration at that appropriate time so that we can progress these issues that are brought to our attention by the Independent Broad-based Anti-corruption Commission.

We will pursue these issues in a methodical and appropriate way. We will get the legislative reform right, and we will not use the integrity system as a way to score political points or change the fundamental nature of our integrity system from one that does do an important job in uncovering serious and systemic corruption in the state of Victoria and makes public its findings and recommendations. Those recommendations are acted upon by a government that takes these issues

seriously and are considered by us as legislators in determining whether we think that is the sort of legislative amendment that is required to take our integrity system forward.

The government has in the past demonstrated that it does have both the appetite and the wherewithal to make changes to our integrity system to strengthen the system and to make it work better. Dr Bach talked in his contribution about the role the Baillieu government played in establishing IBAC. He did neglect to go through in any detail the very, very serious amendments that were brought to this place by the former Special Minister of State in 2019, which made voluminous amendments to the integrity system to make sure that it worked properly. He made sure that it could work properly. The consequence of that serious and detailed consideration is a system of integrity in this state which is doing its job properly, free from political interference, free from the sorts of political sideshows that have bedevilled other jurisdictions and capable of producing the sorts of investigations that uncover things like those matters referred to in *Operation Clara* and providing sensible, concrete recommendations that the government can consider about how to improve the system going forward.

The government takes these matters seriously. It is committed to implementing the recommendations of the *Operation Clara* report. In doing so, though, we should not be distracted by the attempts to make it a political sideshow, and we should not, frankly, support the attempts – which on all track records in the past have been pretty sloppy – to make changes to the integrity framework in the last few sitting weeks here in the Parliament. We support our integrity system. We want to make it better. We are not sure this is the right way to go.

Lee TARLAMIS (South-Eastern Metropolitan) (15:17): I move:

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

Motion agreed to and debate adjourned until later this day.

Business of the house

Notices of motion

Lee TARLAMIS (South-Eastern Metropolitan) (15:17): I move:

That the consideration of notice of motion, general business, 16, be postponed until later this day.

Motion agreed to.

Production of documents

Hydrogen Energy Supply Chain

Sarah MANSFIELD (Western Victoria) (15:18): I move:

That this house:

- (1) notes the reports that the Minister for Trade and Investment was recently in Japan finalising funding for a coal-to-hydrogen project known as the Hydrogen Energy Supply Chain project;
- (2) requires the Leader of the Government, in accordance with standing order 10.01, to table in the Council, within three weeks of the house agreeing to this resolution:
 - (a) any and all briefings related to the Hydrogen Energy Supply Chain project provided by the Department of Jobs, Skills, Industry and Regions, the Department of Energy, Environment and Climate Action, and any other agency or public official, to the Minister for Trade and Investment and the Minister for Climate Action, and any former related portfolios, since January 2020; and
 - (b) all assessments, analyses, examinations, modelling and consultancy reports created since January 2020 relating to the Hydrogen Energy Supply Chain project.

We are living in a climate crisis. After decades of inertia from governments the window to take action is frighteningly narrow. The latest IPCC report, released just this week, paints a dire picture and represents what some have called a final warning to governments. We are currently at 1.1 degrees of warming above pre-industrial levels. If governments do not dramatically change course, we will lock

in 1.5 degrees of warming before the next IPCC report is due. Many think that 1.5 degrees in the next decade is inevitable; it is just a matter of whether we can stabilise there or whether we shoot past it.

These are not just abstract ideas. The consequences of this rise impact every aspect of our existence on earth. We are starting to see what that looks like: increasingly frequent and severe weather events, impacts on our ability to produce food and on access to water, rising sea levels, loss of entire ecosystems, conflicts and security threats. These are not just things that are happening elsewhere, allowing us to turn a blind eye. Victorian communities are being impacted and will continue to be.

The speed and scale of change required cannot be understated. Governments looking for steady change seem to be living in some parallel universe. Steady change might have been an option 30 to 40 years ago. The time lines are now not of our choosing. They are being dictated by science, and time is almost up. There is still hope, but it requires resolute leadership. António Guterres, the UN Secretary-General, said:

This report is a clarion call to massively fast-track climate efforts by every country and every sector and on every time frame. Our world needs climate action on all fronts: everything, everywhere, all at once.

It is in this context that we see the absurd prospect that the Labor government may be throwing a lifeline to brown coal in the form of the Hydrogen Energy Supply Chain project, otherwise known as HESC. Make no mistake, this is a new fossil fuel project. Brown coal produces more emissions than any other form of coal, and the market for it has rapidly dried up with global efforts to address climate change. It is difficult to export, and efforts to find new markets for it – for example, underground coal gasification or use as a fertiliser – have been dismal failures.

What is the HESC? The project aims to produce hydrogen, a fuel source, using brown coal. Hydrogen gas is made by splitting water and hydrogen in a process known as electrolysis. The power for this can come from renewable sources – so-called green hydrogen – or from fossil fuels; this is the so-called grey, black or brown hydrogen, or just fossil hydrogen. Green hydrogen projects are in development across the world and in Australia and are likely to form part of our renewable energy mix going forward, but we are not talking about green hydrogen with this project. This is a fossil hydrogen project made from dirty brown coal. It aims to export 225,000 tonnes of liquid hydrogen annually from a coal gasification plant located at AGL's Loy Yang coal power station in the Latrobe Valley to Kobe in Japan. The project is being developed by a consortium of some of Japan's biggest industrial conglomerates, and the Victorian Treasurer Tim Pallas recently visited Japan in relation to this project. While attempts are being made to sell this as some sort of clean energy, nothing could be further from the truth. Such descriptions are cynical greenwashing.

Let us look at some facts. It is actually more emissions intensive to use hydrogen produced by fossil fuels like brown coal than to just burn the fossil fuels themselves for energy. This is because fossil hydrogen is really inefficient, as so much energy is lost in the conversion process. To put this in context, this project will actually increase emissions by up to the equivalent of 735,000 new petrol cars on the road. So how can the proponents of the HESC claim that this project will actually reduce global emissions by 1.8 million tonnes per year? It turns out some very dodgy accounting and what I will generously call magical thinking are behind the claim. The case for the HESC relies on a Victorian government led carbon capture and storage project called CarbonNet. Carbon capture and storage has never been demonstrated to work at this scale anywhere in the world. Where it has been done it has either been woefully underwhelming or a total failure. Take, for example, the WA Gorgon project, which claimed to be able to capture 80 per cent of emissions but captured less than 30 per cent. Carbon capture and storage as a technology is a furphy. Moreover, CarbonNet will not exist until at least 2030, if ever, so the HESC's emissions claims rely on an entirely separate project that has nothing to do with the HESC. CarbonNet is based on failed and expensive technology, and the project does not even exist.

But let us put this inconvenient fact aside and assume that by some miracle CarbonNet eventuates and it works. The HESC is still not zero emissions. In a best-case scenario it is still going to increase

emissions. The HESC with a fully functional CarbonNet would just produce 1.8 million tonnes less carbon dioxide than a HESC without it, and even this fanciful best-case scenario is likely to be incorrect. There are questions about the data that has been used to make this calculation.

So, in short, it is hard to see how anyone could call the HESC ‘clean energy’ and keep a straight face. It is astounding to have read comments from some politicians and stories in the media that appear to just be parroting the marketing material of the HESC without question when there are so many obvious concerns about it. There was actually a pilot project for which Victorian taxpayers chipped in \$50 million, and a further \$57.5 million was paid for out of federal taxes. Despite being described as ‘clean’, the pilot did not even use carbon capture and storage, as it says it will do for the HESC. It simply offset emissions, a practice that is not considered clean under *Australia’s National Hydrogen Strategy*, because offsets have been shown to overwhelmingly lack efficacy and integrity.

The Victorian public deserve to know more. What were the results of this pilot project that Victorian taxpayers helped to fund? While the government has said it is not yet committed to the HESC, why go all the way to Japan and lend the weight of one of our most senior government ministers to this project? What taxpayer money or other support is being provided? How does the HESC stack up in the midst of the climate crisis? According to Tim Baxter, a senior researcher at the Climate Council, there is a school of thought that says that climate change is such an urgent problem that we need to throw every available option at it, including things like fossil-derived hydrogen. The counterpoint is that climate change is such an urgent problem that we cannot afford to waste time by beginning new fossil fuel industries. Fossil hydrogen is a whole new fossil fuel industry, regardless of whether carbon capture and storage is attached to it. It results in extraordinary greenhouse gas emissions. It is not a climate solution. Let us make no mistake: the HESC is an emissions-intensive fossil fuel project. The claims that it is clean energy are completely misleading, something even a superficial analysis reveals. We cannot afford any new coal and gas in Victoria, or anywhere. We must phase out our existing fossil fuels, like brown coal, not try to invent new uses for them. If the government decides to extend the life of the dirtiest brown coal in the world, it is effectively ignoring the latest IPCC report and putting the interests of the fossil fuel industry above those of people and our planet, now and in the future. We deserve to know what is going on with the HESC so we can hold the government to account. In a climate emergency every decision matters.

Sheena WATT (Northern Metropolitan) (15:28): It is my absolute pleasure to rise today and make my contribution on behalf of this side of the chamber and to speak on Dr Mansfield’s motion as a representative of the Greens party. Victoria is a global leader in climate action, with some of the world’s most ambitious emissions targets while transitioning Victoria to cleaner, renewable energy and creating thousands of jobs. The government has not just talked about climate action, we have gotten on with delivering it, and at the heart of this plan we are bringing back the SEC, turbocharging renewable energy production right here in Victoria and investing in clean energy skills to support jobs. Because, you see, there is climate action talk and there is climate action – climate change action. The work is never delivered by the questioning of some members of this chamber or the talking about how it can be done better, it is delivered by the action of Labor governments. Real action on climate change is what Labor offers, and that is what only Labor will deliver.

Victorians remember the SEC. It meant a fair deal for your power prices and good, stable jobs for Victorian workers. But 30 years ago Jeff Kennett and the Liberals sold off our energy networks to private multinationals, who increased prices and have pocketed billions on billions from Victorians, hurting Victorian families and businesses. Now we have told those big privately owned power companies that we are here, and the Andrews Labor government will not stop trying to get a better deal for Victorians. Backed by an initial investment of \$1 billion, we are bringing back the SEC to build back new renewable energy projects and bring back government-owned energy to drive down power bills and support thousands of jobs. Along with our other plans for renewables, we are making Victoria a powerhouse for cheap, renewable electricity because no Victorian should have to choose between a pain in the hip pocket from their power bills and staying warm or keeping their lights on.

Victoria is unequivocally and without doubt the country's leader in climate action, and indeed beyond that our targets make us one of the world's leaders – right up there. I think of our renewable energy targets of 65 per cent renewables by 2030 and 95 per cent by 2035 as globally leading, and we are proud of it. More than 32 per cent of Victoria's power came from renewables last year – already. We have world-leading emissions reduction targets of 75 per cent to 85 per cent by 2035 and net zero by 2045. With these targets Victoria's economy will be decarbonising at one of the fastest rates anywhere in the world. To my point, we are global leaders, and we are proud of it.

We will deliver 59,000 jobs on the way, of which at least 6000 will be apprentices and trainees, as part of our plan. I know that apprentices and trainees are a very important part of the future of renewable jobs, and the minister sitting here, Minister Tierney, is a big supporter of our apprenticeships right here in our state. We have set the nation's first offshore wind targets and will deliver the nation's first offshore wind industry within a decade. This will ensure that Victoria is the home of offshore wind, which has the potential to create thousands of jobs and drive billions of dollars of investment. Australia's first offshore wind zone has already been declared – off the coast of Gippsland – last year. To add to that, 100 per cent of government operations will be run on renewable electricity by 2025 – that is everything from government schools to police stations to hospitals, metro trains and trams. We are investing \$100 million to drive zero-emission vehicle uptake among Victorians. We have also released the nation's first *Gas Substitution Roadmap* to help our state navigate the path to net zero emissions while providing a greater choice and cutting energy bills. I was absolutely delighted to be a part of the release of that *Gas Substitution Roadmap*.

That is only the beginning, because the real work is in getting on with it – and only a Labor government gets on with it. Our \$1.3 billion Solar Homes program will deliver 770,000 rebates for solar panels, batteries and hot water to Victoria's teachers, nurses and emergency services workers. Through Solar Homes we have abated 1.7 million tonnes of emissions. That is the equivalent of hundreds of thousands of cars off the road. We have also had over 12,000 battery rebates. We are replacing old coalfield power stations with power stations on people's rooftops, and we will create 5500 new jobs as we go. What does that mean for Victorians? That means that the power station on their rooftop is slashing \$1073 a year off their power bills. That is an extraordinary number.

The Liberals have stood in the way of these new jobs and investments at every step. They voted against increasing the Victorian renewable energy target and also opposed our offshore wind target. They opposed our Climate Change Act 2017 and voted against legislation to deliver the transmission infrastructure our state needs. They could not even remember their own emissions target, and in fact I hear they lied about it on radio.

I have already gone on at great length in my adjournment yesterday, but I will reiterate that the Andrews Labor government is bringing back another round of the \$250 power saving bonus to Victorian households who seek out a better electricity deal on the Victorian Energy Compare website. That is opening this Friday. I cannot stress enough how exciting that is for Victorians.

A member: This Friday.

Sheena WATT: That is this Friday. Every Victorian will be able to check, once again, on the best available deal as we head into winter and claim a further \$250 to help contribute towards their energy bills. They will join nearly 1.8 million households who have claimed the payment this current round, amounting to over \$443.75 million in payments – that is an extraordinary amount – into the pockets of Victorian households. The power saving bonus does not only help out with the cost of living. It also means Victorians are keeping –

Samantha Ratnam: On a point of order, Acting President, respectfully, we are about 7 minutes into this contribution, and while the government is well within its rights to talk about its track record in terms of renewable energy – it is a point of order about relevance and asking the member to be drawn back to the relevance of the motion – this motion is specifically asking for documents relating

to the recent visit of the Minister for Trade and Investment to Japan to finalise a coal-to-hydrogen project, the Hydrogen Energy Supply Chain project, and any documents related to that. I ask that the debate please be focused on the matter before this chamber.

David Limbrick: On the point of order, Acting President, it is my belief that Dr Mansfield opened up this debate very widely in her opening contribution, and Ms Watt is entirely entitled to respond to that with the government's views.

The ACTING PRESIDENT (Bev McArthur): Thank you, Mr Limbrick. Ms Watt, you may continue, but maybe come back to the motion at hand.

Sheena WATT: Thank you, Acting President. Can I take a moment to thank Mr Limbrick for acknowledging that, yes, the remarks made by the mover of this motion were in fact very wideranging, and to that wideranging contribution by the mover of this motion I would like to respond equally with my final thoughts on our work in response to climate action needed for our state. I will say that climate action must not leave anyone behind, and that is why I am really proud of the work that we do in climate action that makes sure that vulnerable energy consumers – those with limited access to technology and other such challenges – are not left behind by initiatives to address climate action. It is true that the energy assistance program has in fact supported those that need it most. The expanded energy assistance program was launched in February 2022, and it reaches 10,000 households a year. There is no climate action if we leave people behind, and we absolutely will not do that. That is why I am really proud to get up here and talk about the 2020 energy assistance program, which supported more than 6000 vulnerable Victorian households to navigate the energy market, with an average saving of over \$500 a year.

We are also working closely with the Commonwealth to deliver additional power bill relief as soon as possible, and we know that it has been and will be felt this year, with winter only weeks away. There is of course more for me to say about our work, looking to our friends in Canberra and the work that we are doing in looking to the cap on prices of coal with the Commonwealth government. I know that other contributors to this will have more to say on the federal government, the federal government's action on climate and why only now we have got partners in Canberra that are very, very keen to move to action on climate change in Canberra to equal the enormous ambition of our Victorian state government when it comes to real action on climate change.

David DAVIS (Southern Metropolitan) (15:38): I am going to make a reasonably brief contribution on motion 42 from Dr Mansfield. It is a straightforward motion. It notes that the Minister for Trade and Investment, on one of his laps of honour around the world, went to Japan and began finalising funding for a coal-to-hydrogen project known as the Hydrogen Energy Supply Chain (HESC) project. Then it seeks via a normal standing order 10.01 documents motion a set of the briefings relating to the Hydrogen Energy Supply Chain project and the assessments, analyses, examinations, modelling and consultancy reports since January 2020 as they relate to that project. The opposition supports this motion. We support greater transparency. We see good sense in these documents being in the public domain, as we generally will with a documents motion of this type. So that is the first key point.

It is also true that Dr Mansfield opened up the debate very wide. I always counsel people to keep them narrow because these motions otherwise go on for an enormous period of time as people get into their ideological moments, with justification sometimes and other times not. The point here is that this is actually in essence a very simple document. The chamber has the power to call for documents, and the chamber has the power to demand those documents be brought to the chamber in a reasonable period of time. These are documents of public interest. The HESC project, which Ms Bath will have more to say about, I am sure, in light of the somewhat wider than normal debate, is an important project. It could potentially deliver significant outcomes for Victoria. Nonetheless it is important to look at the background of this and what assessments the government does have and how those matters are being financed. Is it Japanese money? Where is the money coming from? How does this apply?

And on what basis is the government proceeding? I know there is federal money in this project as well, and I am sure there will be commentary around that too, but in essence it is relatively simple.

I do note the IPCC report that has been referred to and that we have seen this week. It does make a series of significant statements that we all need to engage with, and I do not in any way resile from that. Do I think that hydrogen has an important role in us meeting the energy challenges into the future? Yes, I do. There are the different types of hydrogen. I understand that fully, but it might be that more than one type of hydrogen has a significant role in our energy future. I make that point on the way through.

I do feel duty bound in this circumstance to respond to Ms Watt on a number of points about energy costs. The costing of the Hydrogen Energy Supply Chain project and what it would deliver is unknown, and one of the purposes of this motion is to understand that better. But in terms of energy costs, this government has dropped the ball and consumers are being thumped and are going to be thumped even harder. This reflects the failure of the Andrews Labor government over nine years now to put in place a proper system that deals with energy transition. They have failed on this score, and Victorians will now pay a huge price in terms of reliability of energy supply and a huge price in the literal sense of that word as they go to pay their bills every week, every month. Households can feel this. Not only are they facing the surging interest rates but they know that energy costs with respect to gas have surged and now we know the electricity costs are going up by a minimum 31 per cent in Victoria. That is a huge slug on everyday families.

Ms Watt opened up this discussion point. She wanted to talk about the government's rebate. The government's rebate will be a very modest contribution to the clobber that most families are going to feel and are already feeling as these prices surge upwards, hitting family budgets and making it hard for people as they struggle to meet those increased living costs – inflation, interest rates and gas. We have been very clear about our view that gas is an important transition fuel. It is a fuel that we should have proper work done on on land to bring forward non-fracked gas, conventional gas, to manage the costs not just of energy provision but also of the feedstocks. Gas is an important feedstock for so much industry.

The role of hydrogen going forward in being put into our gas lines is also a significant point here. Hydrogen gas is available. We know 5 to 10 per cent can be put down the lines now. It is very clear that a number of the suppliers can, through their normal maintenance schedule, upgrade piping to see hydrogen gas carried to households and to industry in a constructive way as an energy source. That is one option that exists into the future, and we ought not to close that off in an unsophisticated and thoughtless way. It is clear, I might say, that the source of the hydrogen is an important aspect in all of this, and I do not resile from that. I do not count out options in the Latrobe Valley. Ms Bath will have more to say about that, but I do not count out the fact that hydrogen can also come from green sources and a range of other sources that may well provide options for not just mobile energy but fixed energy needs and hydrogen delivered via pipes that could provide an option for people.

We have got to be somewhat open about this, but what is severely lacking in this area is sensible leadership from the Andrews Labor government. We have seen prices go up and up and up, and we are about to see a much greater surge. So it is all very well for Ms Watt to talk about rebates, but they are rebates from a massively increased payment that households in particular are being forced to pay – and small businesses, the small businesses that are being clobbered with these energy costs. It is very, very significant in the impact it is having. In any event, we support the provision of these documents.

David LIMBRICK (South-Eastern Metropolitan) (15:45): I would urge you, Acting President, to prepare yourself, because I am about to say something nice about the government.

The ACTING PRESIDENT (Bev McArthur): I will try.

David LIMBRICK: Yes. Thank you, Acting President. This project is a fantastic achievement, and I am going to support this documents motion, because I think we need to understand exactly the

process that the government went through to get to this great outcome. Here we have over \$2 billion of investment from Japan that is going to go into an area that is going to be suffering job losses around about that time. This is a great achievement.

Japan understands that they need to scale up their hydrogen industry. They are very big on hydrogen. I actually went to Toyota's hydrogen energy centre in Japan a few years ago, and it was fascinating. They were saying there that they want to use it for things like heavy industry to replace things, like for steel smelting. At the moment there are currently no real good options for replacing coking coal in steel smelting. Japan wants to use hydrogen to do that. Other systems such as heavy vehicles, like buses and things like that – they want to use hydrogen in that. They are even experimenting in personal automobiles, but I am a bit sceptical as to how big that will be.

The other thing that we are going to do here is build a new technology system around carbon capture and storage. The Greens are sceptical about this. They do not like it. Well, let the Japanese pay for it. I mean, we are not paying for this. I know there is going to be some federal money here, but we have got massive foreign investment that is going into this to utilise a massive resource, and we are in the amazing position where we have got a reservoir we can pump the carbon dioxide into. So if foreign companies want to try and reduce emissions and produce hydrogen to get it up to scale – my understanding is that Japan do not see producing hydrogen from brown coal as an extremely long term thing. Longer term of course they want to use nuclear – of course using hydrolysis, like the Greens were saying before, but they are going to use nuclear to do it.

This brings me back to the Greens talking about the climate emergency. I feel like they like the emergency more than they like the solutions –

A member interjected.

David LIMBRICK: Yes. I mean, the Greens' track record on low-carbon energy is appalling. You have got to think of their origins. Their origins were in opposing hydro energy in Tasmania. Then in 1998 they outlawed, through an amendment – collaborating with the Democrats and, I think, the Liberal Party – new nuclear reactors. They still oppose these technologies, because this is like a religious belief for them, that we cannot use fossil fuels and we cannot use nuclear for some reason. They have even started with their language manipulation, like they do with these other things. They are calling it brown hydrogen and black hydrogen and green hydrogen. This is all manipulation of the public mindset because it does not fit into their cult-like beliefs about this. If we want to go forward – and we are going to have an energy-hungry future; we know that energy prices are rising – we need every technology on the table, and this is what Victoria is doing in this case. We are letting these Japanese companies develop this technology. It is going to create thousands of jobs for Australians, for Victorians. I think it is a fantastic project, and I urge the government to stand up to these extremists and not let them get in the way of this project and make sure it goes ahead as soon as possible.

Ryan BATCHELOR (Southern Metropolitan) (15:49): I rise to speak on Dr Mansfield's motion seeking the production of documents under standing order 10.01 in relation to the Hydrogen Energy Supply Chain project – obviously an expansive debate. I might come to some of the comments that were just made in a moment, because there are a few things Mr Limbrick has said that I take particular umbrage with, not least of which who was responsible for stopping the damming of the Franklin River. But I do not want to get distracted from the important task of talking about why it is important for the chamber to debate whether this is a motion requiring the production of documents, because I do know that it is important for us to consider the terms of the motion and speak to them.

There have been some more expansive contributions made, and I for one was glad to hear about the amazing work that the Andrews Labor government is doing in relation to climate action, which Ms Watt spent a very long time talking about, because frankly there is a lot to talk about. So I will get to that in a bit of detail shortly, but I will say the government obviously takes requests such as this very seriously and consistently upholds the obligations placed upon it when the Parliament passes motions

like this requesting documents. I am sure, should this motion pass, due consideration will be given to the production of the documents requested, subject to the normal considerations regarding legal advice on executive privilege and the form and content of those matters so that the integrity of our document production and management system can be upheld.

Also, the other point to make is that the hardworking and diligent public servants who will be undertaking the task shortly, one suspects, of finding these documents, doing thorough searches for them, are the very same public servants who we know are working hard delivering the Andrews Labor government's strong action on climate, our strong action on renewables and undertaking all of the various good work – hard work – that previous speakers have articulated.

Obviously there has been a bit of debate here about the particulars of the Hydrogen Energy Supply Chain project, and whilst I cannot profess to be an expert in the various technical elements of projects such as these, it is safe to say that the government is working through this proposal and conducting due diligence to determine whether there is any support for it to proceed beyond the pilot phase.

The contributions that have been made previously do, in terms of both the motion itself and the manner in which the debate in the chamber today has unfolded, give us the opportunity to talk about exactly how much this government is doing on climate action. I do not think we should ever, ever stop talking about just how ambitious and successful Victoria is being as a global leader in climate action. We have some of the world's most ambitious emissions reductions targets. While we are transitioning Victoria to cleaner, cheaper and renewable electricity, we are creating, as we do that, thousands of jobs across the state and also, in particular, in my colleague Mr McIntosh's Eastern Victoria Region with the commitment we have got to creating jobs in and around the Latrobe Valley and the broader Gippsland region. We know it is really important that we take climate action, build renewable energy and create jobs right across this state. It is what this government has been about for the last eight years, and I think you are only seeing an acceleration of action on climate and renewable energy under this government as we do things like bringing back the State Electricity Commission – 100 per cent government-owned renewable energy – delivering the sort of future that Victoria wants and escaping the privatisation past imposed on our state by the Liberal Party. So when we see talk about climate action and climate change, what you see from this government is action to try and address the harmful effects of climate change and build Victoria with a renewable energy future. We are doing a lot. I am keen to talk about it. I hope that is okay with other people.

Melina Bath: The horse has left the stable.

Ryan BATCHELOR: Really? That's outrageous. Let us get into the detail. We have heard – and I am talking in broad terms – about how much of a leader we are in climate action in Victoria and how ambitious our renewable energy targets are: 65 per cent renewables by 2030 and 95 per cent by 2035. We have already smashed our first target. We wanted to get to 25 per cent by 2020; we got 32 per cent of our power from renewables last year. We wanted to be at 25 per cent, and we were at 32 per cent last year.

Tom McIntosh: It wasn't a ceiling.

Ryan BATCHELOR: It was not a ceiling, no way. I think that gives everyone confidence that the policy agenda that the state government has been prioritising as part of its energy framework for the last eight years is delivering the kind of emissions reduction in our energy sector that we need to see.

While we are decarbonising at one of the fastest rates of anywhere in the world, we are also creating jobs. At the same time as we are taking carbon out of our electricity by creating cleaner, renewable electricity, we are creating tens of thousands of jobs. We estimate around 59,000 new jobs will be created as part of this transition. One of the areas where I think we are making very significant leads – taking leaps and bounds, being a leader in this nation – right off the coast of Gippsland is in offshore wind, because we know that our clean energy transition is in large part going to be powered not only by the sun and the enormous conversion of the rooftops of largely our homes into their own kind of

power stations but by changing our renewable energy mix and using offshore wind to generate significant new capacity into our energy market. Our offshore wind targets will bring online 2 gigawatts of new capacity by 2032 – that is enough to power 1.5 million homes – 4 gigawatts by 2035 and 9 gigawatts by 2040. They will ensure that Victoria is home to offshore wind, which has the potential to create thousands of jobs and drive billions of dollars of investment. At the end of last year our first offshore wind zone was declared off the coast of Gippsland, and I think you can see that this agenda is powering on.

We have also announced new solar projects that are going to help power 100 per cent of the government's operations from renewable electricity for our police stations right to our hospitals and our trains and trams. We are taking action on our *Gas Substitution Roadmap* to help our state navigate the path to net zero by providing greater choice for consumers and also options for households to figure out how they are going to change their energy mix and cut their energy bills. We believe that our future relies on a range of actions on climate across the energy sector, across households and using a range of technologies to help drive our emissions reductions target.

But I want to spend the last part of my speech just reflecting on and echoing some of the comments an earlier speaker made about not only the work we are putting into generating renewable energy but the assistance that we are providing to households with the power saving bonus. Friday of this week marks the next round of the \$250 power saving bonus. We are giving \$250 to Victorian households who take the easy step of seeking out a better electricity deal on Victoria's Energy Compare website, which in addition to getting the \$250 potentially saves them hundreds of dollars extra every year. We are providing the kind of relief to the hip pockets of people who are dealing with the consequences of power prices going up, but we are also setting up our energy system for a cleaner future that is creating jobs. That is our commitment to clean energy action in this state.

Melina BATH (Eastern Victoria) (15:59): I am pleased to rise to support the documents motion moved by the Greens' Ms Mansfield, 42 on the notice paper, and on principle the Nationals do support documents motions because they provide additional transparency to drill into the closed doors of what the government does with a whole variety of entities. In this case it is to do with the Department of Jobs, Skills, Industry and Regions to do with the Hydrogen Energy Supply Chain (HESC) project. That being said – and I support the documents motion – this motion really became, from the very outset, a proxy for a substantive motion to have a debate on hydrogen and on, as the Greens put it, 'dirty coal'. The clarity around this is coal is just coal. Latrobe Valley coal happens to be full of water. Water needs to be removed for it to produce electricity, and that has been done for almost 100 years, so I reject 'dirty coal'. It is just the way the Greens often phrase those terms.

The HESC project was supported and initially funded with the support of the previous Ryan and Baillieu government, and indeed it was the Honourable Peter Ryan and the Nationals who were very instrumental in putting up that \$50 million from the state government back then. It had matching funding of around \$50 million from the federal government and a consortium of Japanese government and some very important – particularly in Japan – heavy industry components, Kawasaki and others, to produce a HESC, a supply chain, to see whether or not this could be produced. As the Greens have outlined, it was stationed in Loy Yang A power station. I was actually there at the opening, and it had huge interest, support, passion and enthusiasm from the Japanese contingency who came over. Indeed the Treasurer Mr Pallas was there and spoke in favour of this Hydrogen Energy Supply Chain, and we saw the turning of the sod. I speak often in this place – when I get the chance – about how in doing that we were creating jobs from locally grown engineers, one of whom I happened to teach. So you have got local students going through university and coming back and working in the Latrobe Valley on that particular project. I will say that the government, I think, is under a great sense of tension right now because you have got the Honourable Tim Pallas saying behind closed doors, 'I think this is a goer, and I will expand a little bit more,' and then you have got Lily D'Ambrosio saying, 'No, pull back.' There is a vacuum of support here from the Andrews government. You see, they talked about

everything else but their support for a \$2 billion project that the Japanese government and consortium is prepared to put on the table to fund.

The Greens are right to say that the HESC project was never destined to capture that carbon dioxide produced in the relatively small amount of hydrogen that was produced. It was contained, transported to Hastings and then it was put on a specially designed ship and shipped to Japan. The supply chain worked. The next part to this is of course the large-scale manufacturing of hydrogen – and yes, it is gasification of coal. The key element in this is the capturing of the CO₂ emissions and the sequestering of them, whether it be carbon capture and storage or carbon capture utilisation and storage. We hear the Greens saying it has never been done, it is all dodgy carbon capture and storage. Well, that is incorrect. It has been emerging and in facilitation for the last 45 years. There are 32 projects built around the world that capture carbon and store it, and indeed there are about 200 new projects that are underway. In our own Otway Basin, carbon capture and storage organisation CO2CRC has been sequestering that carbon as an inert substance underground for almost the last 20 years and has been looking at about 100 million tonnes of that carbon dioxide sequestering.

When the Greens talk about CO₂ – it is important that we are good global citizens. It is important that we do take climate action. It is important that we work towards reducing any warming and our CO₂ emissions, without a doubt. But to point the finger at this way of producing energy – when that carbon dioxide is sequestered, the by-product of hydrogen happens to be water, H₂O. The other point is that along the way hydrogen produced from splitting water through the electricity raised from renewable energy – whether that be solar panels, solar plants rather than farms, or whether that be through wind turbines – is a very sensible and important way to transition. It certainly can be part of a very good way of reducing those CO₂ emissions. But what the Greens always leave out – they forget this, and I think it is disingenuous – is the fact that when you produce energy from a solar panel, from a solar plant or from a wind turbine, there has been a pathway of CO₂ emissions to get to that point. There is the mining of minerals required to produce the wind turbines and the solar panels. There has been manufacturing, and on an industrial scale, to produce wind turbines and photovoltaic cells, solar cells. There is also the transportation, because we are not manufacturing that here. Only 11 per cent of renewable energy components are manufactured in Australia. Then you have transportation, using large diesel ships, and then you have the installation. That all needs to be factored into the whole carbon dioxide discussion and debate, and I think is appropriate to do that and have that discussion. Then there is the decommissioning, the decomposition and the recycling of those particular forms. There is that in all cases, and I put that on the table. We have seen Hazelwood decommissioned, and the land is being restored back to flat earth now and potentially a lake into the future. So I put that on the table.

We also see the Andrews government talk about the SEC – 100 per cent government-owned. Well, we have just seen recently where the government has gone cap in hand to the federal government saying, ‘Listen, I think we’re going to be a bit short of funds because we have got the Commonwealth Games. We’re not sure. Our budget has blown out astronomically’ – \$10 million a day in interest repayments on our debt alone in Victoria under Daniel Andrews – ‘so can you stump up some cash for the SEC?’. So it is disingenuous of the government to talk about ‘wholly government owned’ and ‘they are going out to tender – please support us.’ We in the Latrobe Valley understand. It was laughable during the election when people would come up and say, ‘Oh, SEC, SEC.’ Many, many people just looked at it for what it was: a Labor plug to get re-elected. Labor won 31 per cent of the vote in the valley. So if it was supposed to be resounding, it did not work.

Members interjecting.

Melina BATH: In the Latrobe Valley – 31 per cent of the vote.

All of this should be part of the discussion. I go back to the point: hydrogen energy should be looked at in terms of a holistic view of energy produced with low to no carbon emissions. That is where we all need to have our focus, whether it be in renewables or hydrogen. There is a vacuum in support for

anything that the Japanese government is prepared to spend \$2 billion on, so I call for a bit of sense in this debate. I support the motion in terms of transparency and documents, but I am calling out both the government and the Greens for being disingenuous.

Harriet Shing: Why don't you tell everyone how we all suck, Mr Galea?

Michael GALEA (South-Eastern Metropolitan) (16:10): Apparently we do all suck on this side of the chamber! What an introduction. I am glad I have two fabulous members from Eastern Victoria on this side of the chamber with me to talk about all the wonderful things that we are doing in this area.

I rise to speak on Dr Mansfield's motion. Let us start with a simple fact: Victoria is a leader in climate action – a leader in Australia and a leader on the global stage. We have some of the world's most ambitious energy and emissions targets. Victoria is transitioning to cleaner, cheaper, renewable electricity. We are creating thousands of jobs – many in the Eastern Victoria Region in the Latrobe Valley as well – in the renewables sector. Labor is the only party of government that is willing and able to deliver the ambitious climate action that we need and that Victorians rightly expect. While some parties have talked about climate action and others have denied its necessity, this government has gotten on with delivering.

At the heart of this plan, we are bringing back the State Electricity Commission, the SEC, turbocharging renewable energy production right here in Victoria and investing in clean energy skills to support jobs. Action on climate change is not being delivered by the questioning and pontificating of the Greens nor by the roadblocking of the Liberals but by a Labor government that is getting on with the job. People want the SEC back. They want a fair deal on power prices and good, stable jobs for Victorian workers. They want an SEC like the old SEC and what it used to deliver. Thirty years ago Kennett and the Liberals sold our energy network. The privatisation led to multinationals increasing prices, costing Victoria's economy and Victorian households billions of dollars. Kennett's and the Liberals' privatisation hurt families, it hurt businesses and it hurt Victoria. Now those multinationals are set on leaving the market. While the Liberals look back fondly on Kennett-style privatisation, the Andrews Labor government is taking decisive action to deliver a better outcome for all Victorians.

With an initial \$1 billion investment, the Andrews Labor government is bringing back the SEC to build new renewable energy projects and bring back government-owned energy to drive down power bills and support thousands of jobs. An expert advisory panel has been set up, encompassing some of the best minds across the energy and service delivery sectors. Working with the panel to deliver a 10-year strategy prioritising 4.5 gigawatts of government-owned renewable energy, this renewable supply will be the equivalent in replacement capacity of Loy Yang A. This large capacity of state-owned renewable and reliable power will slash energy bills and further enable us to meet our renewable energy target of 65 per cent by 2030.

We will also work with like-minded entities such as industry super funds and others who are focused on a fair deal for Victorians, not just on their profits. The state will have a controlling interest, but we will enable the balance of investment to come from these other entities. We will invest at least \$20 million to prepare the SEC for its new role in our energy market, including by setting up an office and headquarters in Morwell. With the SEC and our myriad of sector-leading investment and policy stances, we are making Victoria a powerhouse for cheap, renewable electricity. Victorian households and businesses will not pay any more than they should to stay warm and to keep the lights on. That is what decisive and effective climate action means and what Labor is delivering.

Our renewable energy target of 65 per cent by 2030 and 95 per cent by 2035 makes us nation leaders. Our 2020 target of 25 per cent was achieved and surpassed. Thirty-two per cent of power in this state came from renewables in the year 2022. We do not just have ambitious targets that look good on paper, we have the track record and the policies to achieve and deliver them. Our emissions reductions target is world leading: 75 to 85 per cent by 2035 and net zero by 2045. Our targets put Victoria in line to

limit global warming by 1.5 degrees Celsius, meaning Victoria's economy will be decarbonising at one of the fastest rates in the world.

Our policies will also deliver 59,000 estimated jobs along the way. We are delivering the nation's first offshore wind targets, bringing 2 gigawatts of capacity online by 2032, which means power for 1.5 million homes. This will expand to 4 gigawatts by 2035 and 9 gigawatts by 2040. Victoria will be the home of offshore wind, driving investment and creating thousands more jobs. Six new solar projects will help us power 100 per cent of government operations on renewable energy, from police stations to hospitals, metro trains to trams. I do wish that the other member for Western Victoria was in the room right now; we would be talking about the tram tracks.

Harriet Shing: She loves the tram tracks.

Michael GALEA: I also see Ms Ermacora in the corner. She loves the tram tracks, Mrs McArthur. I am sure she would be delighted to hear that we are going to have 100 per cent of our tram services powered by renewable energy.

Harriet Shing: Bev wants trams to the Wimmera.

Michael GALEA: Well, trams to the Wimmera might be another project. It is slightly outside of –

Harriet Shing: Nice and flat. Go for days.

Michael GALEA: Go for days. We are leading the way in the uptake of zero-emission vehicles with our \$100 million investment. Our target of 50 per cent zero-emission vehicles by 2030 includes all new electric buses by 2025 and 400 low-emission vehicles in our government fleet. To help achieve our target, we have been working with other states in developing vehicle emission standards, taking the initiative to overcome the failure of the previous federal Liberal government. We are delivering \$46 million in grants to encourage people to purchase low-emission electric vehicles, \$19 million to accelerate the rollout of electric vehicle charging infrastructure across the state, \$20 million to green our bus fleet and \$15 million to green government and commercial vehicle fleets.

Again we lead the nation with our \$1.3 billion Solar Homes program, delivering 770,000 rebates for solar panels, batteries and hot water for Victoria's teachers, nurses and police. Already almost 240,000 rebates have been delivered across the state, with 215,000 panels going onto rooftops owing to the policies of the Andrews Labor government. Solar Homes is saving people approximately \$1070 a year, creating 5500 new jobs and abating 1.7 million tonnes of emissions. We have policies for state-owned energy, offshore wind, solar, batteries, electric vehicles, home solar, a gas substitute road map, ambitious emissions reductions and renewable targets. That is what climate action looks like. That is what leadership is.

The Liberals have stood in the way of jobs and investment at every step. They have demonstrated their commitment to inaction. I do note that there is actually not a single Liberal in the chamber at the moment. I am not sure who their whip is at the moment, but if they were here, I would be looking forward to hearing back from them. Climate action does not look like voting against Victorian renewable energy targets and opposing our offshore wind targets. Climate leadership is not opposing the Climate Change Act 2017 or voting against legislation to deliver critical transmission infrastructure. The Liberals did all of that. At the same time, what was their alternative? A target they could not even be bothered to remember.

How could I talk about the Andrews Labor government's successful policies in this area without mentioning the power saver bonus. This incredibly successful program is giving \$250 to Victorian households who seek out better electricity deals on the Victorian Energy Compare website, potentially leading them to save hundreds of dollars more. The new round of the program, which initially started in July 2022, will be opening this Friday 24 March, in two days time. Every Victorian will be able to check that they are once again on the best available deal as we head into winter and claim a further \$250 to help contribute towards their energy bill. 1.8 million households have claimed the payment

during the current round, amounting to over \$443.75 million in payments. The power saving bonus means that more Victorians will be comparing the market for the best deal, with the compare website helping them to manage the confusing nature of the retail energy market. This will encourage competition from retailers as Victorians shop around for the best deal, helping to keep power prices in check. I look forward to assisting my constituents in the South-Eastern Metropolitan Region to claim the power saving bonus. In particular I am looking forward to joining my colleague in the other place the member for Frankston at a shopping centre stall we will be doing very soon.

Harriet Shing: Great member.

Michael GALEA: Great member. We will be helping the good people of Frankston to claim the \$250 bonus and get the best value possible on their energy bills. To assist vulnerable people and those with limited access to technology, we have developed the energy assistance program, supporting those that need it most and helping vulnerable Victorians find the best deal. The EAP gives one-on-one assistance to navigate the market – *(Time expired)*

Jacinta ERMACORA (Western Victoria) (16:20): I stand here. I would like to show respect for the mover of the motion and for the intent of the motion, and I think the more that we can learn in some regard about all the different approaches to energy production, the better for all of us, and that is a universal statement, really. But in case this chamber missed what was said earlier, Victoria is a global leader in climate action, with some of the world's most ambitious emissions targets, and I will talk about some examples shortly.

We are heading towards not only cleaner energy but cheaper energy, and only Labor can do that – the commitment to looking after working people and those that need financial support, a fair chance, in this community. The government have not just talked about climate action, we have also gotten on with delivering it. At the heart of this plan we are bringing back the SEC, and that was the primary initiative that really I believe substantially resulted in the 56-seat outcome at the election – renewable, cheaper energy via a new SEC. The work is never delivered by just talking about climate change. It is never delivered by just saying, 'Do you realise climate change is an issue? Do you realise that there's a problem and nothing is being done? Do you realise there's a problem and not enough is being done?' Real action on climate change is what Labor offers, and as I said, only Labor can deliver the practical outcomes that climate change requires of us.

Victorians remember the SEC. It meant a fair deal on our power prices and good, stable jobs for Victorian workers. So it was not just a powerhouse producing the energy for our state, it was a powerhouse for the economy of our state and for jobs and families. But I really do have to remind everyone of what it was like 30 years ago when Jeff Kennett and the Liberals sold off our energy networks – sold off the crown jewels, so to speak – to multinationals and thereby gave permission to make profit out of our energy production in a state where that was not the case before or where the profits were reinvested into our state. So it is a little bit rich for the opposition to accuse the government of dropping the ball on energy prices when it was their ideological obsession with selling off our state assets to the private sector that caused a steady increase in energy prices in the first place. There is one thing that Victorian households know about energy prices and that is that privatisation equals higher energy prices. When the Liberals were last in power, power prices increased by over 34 per cent, and they did absolutely nothing about it. So they did not drop the ball, they absolutely smashed power prices and the power industry in this state.

Those companies have said to us they are leaving now. They have seen the writing on the wall. And who is going to pick up that ball that has been kicked down the street? It is Labor. The Labor government is going to do that. Backed by an initial investment of \$1 billion, we are bringing back the SEC to build new renewable energy projects and bring back government-owned energy to drive down power bills and support thousands of jobs. It is not just the old SEC that is coming back, it is going to be a new SEC.

Michael Galea: Sounds like a better one.

Jacinta ERMACORA: It is going to be new and better. It is going to be a renewable SEC, and this is where the state government will play a role in looking at and addressing affordability of energy prices but also renewable transition. That renewable transition may be a little bumpy along the way, and only a government leading the way through a renewable, government-owned corporation can help to smooth those bumps as we get through to 2030 and 2040.

We have set up an expert advisory panel with some of the best minds from across the energy and service delivery sectors, and we will work with the panel to develop a 10-year strategy prioritising 4.5 gigawatts of government-owned renewable energy – the equivalent replacement of Loy Yang A – slashing energy bills and helping us to meet our renewable energy target of 65 per cent by 2030. We will ensure that the state has a controlling interest, with the balance of funding invested from like-minded entities. This is the brilliance of the structure that is being established – it is a combination of government and private sector investment and enough government investment to ensure control over the policy levers and the settings to use the SEC for what it needs to be used for, and that is to essentially clean up the mess after Jeff Kennett, all these years later.

Along with our other plans for renewables –

Members interjecting.

The ACTING PRESIDENT (John Berger): Ms Ermacora, take a seat for a minute, please. There is far too much noise in the chamber. Can we have some order, please.

Jacinta ERMACORA: Thank you, Acting President. What a rabble. In addition to our other plans for renewables, we are making Victoria a powerhouse for cheap, renewable electricity so Victorian households and businesses do not pay any more than they should to stay warm and keep the lights on. Our government does not just talk about climate action, we get on with delivering it. Victoria is unequivocally the country's leader in climate action with our ambitious renewable energy targets of 65 per cent renewables by 2030 and 95 per cent by 2035. We have already smashed those energy targets, as was mentioned by my colleague Mr Batchelor earlier, well ahead of schedule.

Harriet Shing: The water sector is extraordinary, Ms Ermacora. You would know this.

Jacinta ERMACORA: Since you mentioned that, I am about to go on, predictably, and use a water example. Our world-leading emissions reduction targets are 75 per cent to 85 per cent by 2035 and net zero by 2045, aligning Victoria with the Paris goals of limiting global warming to 1.5 degrees Celsius. Victoria made this commitment to the Paris goals before the previous federal government, who did not make that commitment. We made that commitment, and we have got on with making the settings, structuring the settings, to do that.

So you can see that we are ahead of schedule. A good example of this goal in the south-west region is Wannon Region Water Corporation. Some years ago the Minister for Water at the time requested all water corporations make a pledge on how far they would be on the journey to carbon neutrality by 2025, and Wannon Water committed to 40 per cent. This would have been in around about 2018 – 2025 seemed like a long way away – ‘How far will we be along the journey of carbon neutrality by 2025?’ With a calculation of about 12 to 14 different specific projects, Wannon Water estimated 40 per cent. A recent review of the progress against that goal showed that Wannon Water was smashing that target and ahead of schedule, just like the state. They have now committed to carbon neutrality completely by 2030. I rest my case.

Sarah MANSFIELD (Western Victoria) (16:31): Thank you to all the members who made a contribution to this important debate this afternoon. This is not about ideology; this is about science, and it is about the public's right to know about the HESC. It is curious that government members essentially did not address the motion and barely mentioned the Hydrogen Energy Supply Chain project at all. As Ms Bath astutely observed, it appears there may be a tension in the government about

this project, with some members ready to back the project and others being more cautious. While government members went to great lengths to tell us about some of the laudable things that are being done with respect to renewable energy and targets, and the Greens are proud of having pushed the government to go further and faster with renewables and targets, the HESC has nothing to do with that.

This is about a new fossil fuel project – fossil hydrogen produced using brown coal for export to Japan. We heard from government members that some like to talk climate action while others actually take it, and we agree. Targets and renewables are an important part of climate action but so is ending fossil fuel dependence. Climate action means everything everywhere all at once. The government talked about being a world leader in climate action, but with the HESC we will potentially see them backing a new emissions-intensive dirty brown coal project. Supporting new fossil fuel projects like the HESC is not delivering climate action. Climate action means addressing it on all fronts – investing in renewables but also ending new coal and gas and phasing out fossil fuels.

Government members were at pains to tell us the importance of keeping energy affordable for all Victorians. We do not dispute this. However, hydrogen produced by the HESC is not necessarily cheap, and it is destined for Japan, not for Victorians. There were comments made by Mr Limbrick that we are not paying for this – Japan is. Part of the reason for this motion is to discover if that is the case. We know that Victorians chipped in \$50 million to the pilot project. What other taxpayer funding or other resources are being provided to it? And even if we are not paying for it with taxpayer funds, we will all end up paying for it if it is allowed to proceed. Further emissions worsen the climate crisis and just make the task of keeping global warming to less than 1.5 degrees that much harder and that much more expensive. There are many other points I could address. However, I think what this debate has really highlighted is the importance of transparency around the HESC, and it really justifies our motion to produce all relevant documents.

Motion agreed to.

Bills

Children, Youth and Families Amendment (Raise the Age) Bill 2022

Second reading

Debate resumed on motion of Samantha Ratnam:

That the bill be now read a second time.

Sheena WATT (Northern Metropolitan) (16:34): I rise today to contribute to the debate on the Children, Youth and Families Amendment (Raise the Age) Bill 2022 before this chamber. Some of the remarks that I will make today will be incredibly personal and very, very challenging. I will do my best to keep it together as I think to reflect on particularly Aboriginal young people. Other members of our chamber have spoken already on this bill, and I will say first and foremost that none of us ever want to see a child in custody. Absolutely this should only ever be a last resort and only inside a system that protects and supports young people in custodial settings.

We do not take this issue lightly; we take this issue so very, very seriously on this side of the chamber. It is something that will not be quickly fixed with a few simple changes and tinkers to existing legislation. This is significant. Any and all changes to the minimum age of criminal responsibility require careful planning and consultation with stakeholders, with community partners, with experts, to determine the most appropriate, the most respectful and the best way of achieving these reforms. Changes have to serve a dual purpose of achieving the best outcomes for children and their families and ensuring the safety of all Victorians.

We already know that the most effective way of keeping our young people out of the criminal justice system and out of custody is to ensure there are effective diversion programs and pathways for young offenders to give them the support they need and the chances to address offending behaviour. Our

government's diversion statement released in April 2022, *Diversion: Keeping Young People Out of Youth Justice to Lead Successful Lives*, further supports this commitment to early intervention. The statement is underpinned by a fundamental understanding that diversion and early intervention are the most effective and fiscally responsible ways of reducing youth crime. That is why our government has continually invested in successful diversion programs within the youth justice system. That is why the last Victorian budget included more than \$600 million as part of a package of investments that focus on the justice system, including youth diversion, reducing reoffending, increasing mental health support and providing financial assistance to victims of crime. I note that this is building on investments that are already seeing young people successfully diverted from the youth justice system, including more than \$15.5 million which has been provided to a range of programs to prevent more young people entering the system and ensuring that those who do have the best chances of rehabilitation.

We are also continuing to implement the *Youth Justice Strategic Plan 2020–2030*. I did take the time out to read that and noted that upon the release of this plan in 2022 it committed to age-appropriate responses for 10- to 14-year-olds to keep them out of the youth justice system. This youth justice strategy also sets out a framework to address and take action on reducing the overrepresentation of Aboriginal children in our youth justice system. It is something that so very many of us take so very, very seriously. We are committed to addressing the overrepresentation of Aboriginal children and young people in youth justice outlined in the first ever Aboriginal youth justice strategy, which launched just last year.

I will also take a moment to acknowledge and thank the members of the Aboriginal Justice Forum, who were acknowledged in the ministers statement during question time today by the Attorney-General. I previously have sat on the Aboriginal Justice Forum and know just what a powerhouse of reform that group is. So to you for all the work that you do, can I give you and send to you my acknowledgement and my deepest thanks. Of course you are tackling some of the biggest, most wicked challenging problems in our state, and you have been doing it in partnership with the Victorian government for 23 years. For some of them I was sitting side by side as a member of the Aboriginal community controlled sector, and now I am proud to be part of a government taking it so very seriously.

In fact when it comes to Aboriginal youth justice we saw that strategy launched last year with a \$55 million investment. Of course at about this time last year, in February in fact, the government launched Victoria's first Aboriginal youth justice strategy, *Wirkara Kulpa*, which focuses on diverting young people from the youth justice system and addressing overrepresentation. Can I take a moment just to acknowledge the Koorie Youth Council for their leadership and role in that. I have met with them around a range of issues, and as a previous member of the Koorie Youth Council it brings me great pride to see that organisation stepping up in a really significant way, driving some really significant reform in our state. To the members of the Koorie Youth Council, to our Koori leaders that have stepped up for our community and for their peers, for their families and for the future generations of young people, thank you. Thank you very much.

Of course, as I said, this is all part of our work with the Aboriginal communities to improve outcomes for Aboriginal youth, including the Aboriginal justice agreement and the youth justice strategy. Our strong focus on investing and diversion and addressing overrepresentation has in fact yielded some positive results, and I just want to take a moment to speak to them now. For the 2018–19, 2019–20 and 2020–21 year periods there were no children aged 10 to 13 years old in youth justice custody serving a custodial sentence. In 2021 Victoria had the lowest rate of Aboriginal young people aged 10 to 17 in detention, around a third lower than the national average. That is not to say, not for a single moment, that there is not more work to do to drive these numbers down, and this is work our government has made clear it will be progressing and is absolutely committed to. That could not be any more clear than it was in the remarks made by the Attorney-General during her ministers statement during question time today.

Further to that of course is the investment of more than \$2 billion into the justice system since 2014 to rebuild and strengthen the justice system. Last year's state budget provided over \$400 million in funding over four years to improve youth justice services, including Cherry Creek but also including some diversion programs, to ensure that young people have the best chances at rehabilitation – and there was a very significant \$11 million investment.

Look, there is of course more to be done, but for the small proportion of young people who end up in youth justice custody we are focused on providing a safe and stable environment in our youth justice custodial facilities. We have introduced targeted behavioural programs and an intensive intervention unit for the most high-risk young people in custody, including behaviour support specialists to support custodial staff to address challenging behaviours amongst young people and dynamic risk assessment. Further to that I will just take a moment to acknowledge Tiana – you know who you are – and her work with young people over now almost the entirety of her career. It is not lost on me the enormous challenge that you have taken on, and to you and your colleagues, thank you. Thank you for doing what you do for our community. I am constantly in awe of your resilience and strength to stand up for the next generation of Aboriginal young people.

Of course I want to talk about funding for the Aboriginal youth justice hubs, which are something that I know to be a very significant thing to come to our justice system – really a system that is embedding Aboriginal self-determination in service delivery – and we know that these improvements are working. We do not want to see that children and young people are unnecessarily remanded over weekends because there is no available court to hear bail applications. So the \$11 million budget commitment towards the central after hours assessment and bail placement service and fund for the weekend online remand Children's Court commenced operation in September of last year and has had a really remarkable result. These results are leading the nation, and we should take stock of that.

Of course there is a lot more to be said, and I will of course acknowledge that the Premier made clear less than a week ago that this is a process that deserves a reasonable and fair chance of being part of a national approach on the issue. There are key benefits in a national approach on this issue. For example, a nationally consistent approach means greater consistency in our laws with our border states – we know just how much border issues do affect the Victorian community – and more uniform approaches to the application of these laws by our judges. A national approach on the age of criminal responsibility was a key discussion at the most recent meeting of the Standing Committee of Attorneys-General in December last year. An outcome from that meeting, as I understand it, was for the national age of criminal responsibility working group to undertake further work to consider the need for adequate supports and services for children who are exhibiting offending behaviour, which again reflects on the need to ensure support for young offenders, which really is at the very crux of the issue that we are debating in this bill before us.

The Premier has, however, made clear that we will not hesitate to take our own approach, and that is very important – that we will not hesitate for a moment to take our own approach if a nationally consistent approach cannot be implemented. This will not, however, be done without ensuring we closely consult with expert stakeholders and partners in the youth justice system who are at the very front line of this issue. Again, whilst I acknowledged Tiana, I will say that there are so very many more that are doing just such exceptional work on behalf of the community at large but also the future generations of young people, who deserve nothing short of our absolute commitment to this issue.

Aiv PUGLIELLI (North-Eastern Metropolitan) (16:45): I would like to thank Ms Watt for her contribution. It is really important that across this chamber we collaborate to truly address this issue. I am speaking today in support of the Children, Youth and Families Amendment (Raise the Age) Bill 2022. First Nations organisations and medical, legal and human rights bodies are calling on the government to raise the age of criminal responsibility from 10 to at least 14 years old. Change the Record, the National Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Legal Services, Amnesty Australia, the Law Council of Australia, the Australian Medical Association and the UN are all calling for this change.

I spoke last month about the profound injustice that is the incarceration of children in Victoria. The imprisonment of children is not only in conflict with the best available evidence from experts but it flies in the face, frankly, of everyday morality. As a community we have a duty to listen to First Nations people who are crying out for justice reform, including raising the age of criminal responsibility. Youth incarceration affects First Nations children and communities more acutely than any others. Aboriginal people aged 10 to 17 are only 5.8 per cent of their cohort in the population, yet they represent 49 per cent of children in prison. They are jailed at almost 22 times the rate of non-Indigenous young people. We have an opportunity now to try and undo this harm. Raising the age to 14 is one of the most direct and straightforward tools that we have to reduce the number of Aboriginal children in prison.

Our youth correctional system is far from rehabilitative. We know that children are regularly subject to, for example, solitary confinement. This is a barbaric practice that has been condemned by international human rights groups. A report by the Victorian Ombudsman found that:

Young people were often separated for weeks in circumstances where there appeared to be little or no ongoing risk of harm to others; victims were separated for the same time as perpetrators, sometimes for months; and good behaviour did not appear to result in less separation.

There is no logic to this. This is institutional cruelty, plain and simple. We have known for decades that during childhood children's brains are still developing and are thus vulnerable to developmental delay. Solitary confinement has devastating impacts on neurological development. It triggers cognitive deficits, even hallucinations, and stunts the growth of the frontal lobes of the brain. Just the experience of being alone in a room for 22 hours a day is terrifying for these children. A whistleblower at the Parkville youth justice centre revealed that boys in solitary confinement were threatening to kill themselves just in order to be put on surveillance so they would have someone to talk to. I think we should all collectively be ashamed that this is happening in Victoria.

According to the Victorian Sentencing Advisory Council's 2016 report, 94 per cent of children in detention aged 10 to 12 returned to prison before they were 18. Again, the incarceration of children does nothing to rehabilitate people. It is a system of punishment. If we want young people to be set on a path to learn and to grow from their mistakes, it is in their best interests that they are kept as far away from this system as possible. They need to be with their families in their communities. There is overwhelming community support to raise the age to at least 14 – that is the international, UN-endorsed standard. It is what First Nations people have been crying out for. We cannot let politics get in the way of children's welfare. We need to have the courage to listen to the experts. It is time to raise the age to 14.

Tom McINTOSH (Eastern Victoria) (16:49): I appreciate the opportunity to speak to this. I rise to contribute to the debate on the Children, Youth and Families Amendment (Raise the Age) Bill 2022. The purpose of the bill is to raise the minimum age of criminal responsibility in Victoria from 10 to 14 years old by amending section 344 of the Children, Youth and Families Act 2005. Children in custody should be an absolute last resort. I think everyone in this chamber agrees with that sentiment, and this is an issue that the government takes very seriously. There is broad agreement in the direction towards raising the age of criminal responsibility, but there are several options, including safeguards, that are crucially important for the reforms to succeed. The criminal justice system is a last resort in a long line of features of the safety net in our community for all people, including young people and children. No-one, especially young people and children, should be incarcerated in our state unless there is overwhelming evidence that they must be in order to preserve the safety of all Victorians.

Part of why I am interested in this job and being in here – I am a big believer of better outcomes for our community, for individuals and for families – is obviously to see each generation have a better quality of life than the one before it, and I think if we look over time that is occurring. But when it comes to individuals having healthier, happier, better quality lives, for me removing trauma is a massive part of that. We have seen for so long – it is not always the case but it is very often the case, and our Indigenous peoples, our First Nations people, are a very good example of this – that people

who have suffered through so much, from removal from their lands, loss of culture, racism and outright atrocious things that happened, have this built-in, locked-in trauma and inequality. We see things like a lack of equity around housing. Around Australia 70 per cent of the general population own their own home or are paying it off. Yet it is the flip side for our Indigenous people: we are looking at 70 per cent who do not own their own home or are not paying it off. So I will just take this opportunity to touch on the fact that this year as we get ready to vote on the Voice, I will absolutely be voting yes and campaigning for a yes vote. I just think, as we have this conversation – and obviously so many, particularly Indigenous kids, are part of this conversation – I just wanted to touch on that.

That equity point is a real thing for me, because it is that equity of a home in a family – I will shortly talk more about the journey of life that we all have – that sets up the family, the generations coming through and future generations for success. That home is where so much can be built from. I think that equity is a real point because then you can support future generations to have their own homes, which takes stress off. If they look to have families of their own, there is a family home to come back to that allows them to purchase their own home and so on.

But just coming back to the trauma side of things, this is a pretty important one to me. I come from Ballarat. We have seen a lot of trauma occur there over the last 50 to 70-plus years, and you see it embedded into generations. That is so much of the work that the Andrews Labor government of Victoria has committed to and is well on the way to doing – to try and remove that generational trauma. I think as part of this conversation for me it is really important to reflect upon what leads to some of the outcomes that we are talking about. I know myself sometimes the situation that a lot of kids are born into is incredibly hard for them to get out of. I have been a foster carer myself as part of my belief in that generational change, and through that experience I have seen just amazing, amazing kids – some in more challenging circumstances than others but all good kids, with some ending up down different paths to others.

So I think the support that we can put around families and parents and children that are particularly challenged – and again, I will come back to and talk about the investment we are making to do that – is just so important. Coming back to the Ballarat example that I spoke about in my first speech in here, having lost half a dozen good mates to suicide, you look at that family trauma that is just so embedded and so difficult to remove and whether there are mental health issues that flow through the family or from events or from drug and alcohol dependencies that are within the family and flow through and eventually play out if an intervention or if support is not received. I think one of the great things we are doing as a community, as a government, is to be breaking the stigma around mental health issues and to be having those conversations. I am particularly passionate about men's mental health for the reasons I have just described. That is six good mates; it does not even include others I played footy with or worked with or whatever. There are another half a dozen there. It is those conversations that then enable people to access the support and the services that the investment of government allows. But within community the values that we have, the ways we talk to each other, the ways we love each other, our families, friends, whatever those networks are that create that community – which should be, at its best, an unbreakable mesh of community to support each other – then allow people to reach out to the services of government, which hopefully, in an ideal world, people will less and less need to access.

From the point of a child being born into a family, the support that is offered through our brilliant maternal childcare support into early education – you have all heard me stand up a number of times and speak about early education. I am really passionate about it because, as we know, the huge amount of development that is happening in a child's brain in those first five, six, seven years of life is just so fundamental to not only their academic but, to me, more importantly, emotional wellbeing throughout their life. That is why you will hear me get up and talk again and again about that. From early education into our school system, I think more and more we are viewing primary school – again, like we have just talked about with early education – as increasingly aware of that emotional side of things, setting people up with those emotional skill sets to thrive and do well in life. But then I think, as we go through

that really tumultuous time – and particularly I will speak a bit more from seeing young men around me, who I was friends with at the time, going through that age of teenagers into an early working life – I think it is for us to acknowledge that we need a lot of different models to suit a lot of different people.

That is why I am delighted that our government has invested so heavily in TAFE. If we think about people that are coming out of situations that are extremely challenging and who perhaps had a far more complex start to life than others, university may not be where they are going to end up. I worked in construction for 10 years, and I am very proud that in Australia we have construction and trades – manufacturing, other jobs and a whole lot of jobs in the service industry as well – where people can be paid well, and it does not depend on the start they have had in life or their academic capacity. Where they find themselves, they can still be active in our society and build their own family but be paid well enough to buy a home, whatever challenges they have had – to take the step. If they want to have a family, do that, and then have the government supports around for them and their children to go on and hopefully have a more fulfilling life, which comes back to where I started this: about reducing those levels of trauma. Sometimes people might look at construction workers and think, ‘Oh, they’re a bit of a smelly lot. They’re not clean and they’re not washed and whatnot.’

I am incredibly proud; I will give you an example. I mentioned in my first speech a young Colombian woman I was speaking to. She and her husband were out from Columbia. She was just so delighted that someone without a degree could earn good money and fully participate, from an economic perspective, in our society. And that says it all for me about the benefit of transitioning from the family unit into early education and continuing our education and training and skills to then be able to go into jobs that are going to pay someone well, set them up, set their family up and set their kids up for a better life than what they have had. We see particularly in recent decades, maybe the last 50 years, migrant families and the incredible work they have done to set up the next generation of their family, absolutely working day and night to ensure their family have a better go of things. I just wanted to touch on all those things because it is a very fundamental reason as to why I am in this role and why I want to be here.

I suppose of the things I have not really touched on that also make up everything else that contributes to a person’s life a big one is community sport and hobbies. I think it can be easy to not take seriously enough the value of those things. Most understand, but a small percentage of people question why we would invest in community sport and community activities. I think it is very, very simple because, as I was speaking about earlier, community is that mesh that supports us all, through sport and through activity, and helps with not only physical health but mental health. Those community bonds are just absolutely crucial to a person’s wellbeing.

The other thing I should touch on, which would be remiss of me not to mention, is the work that is going on in our mental health sector. There are incredible people doing incredible work, and it is really tough. I think a benefit of us being able to have the conversations and break through the stigma is people reaching out, because we obviously have this demand that is growing for people to be able to understand and deal with whatever emotional or mental issues they may have. But by doing this, not only are we potentially, or very likely, saving their lives but we are removing the potential for trauma to be passed on to the next generation. I take this opportunity to thank everyone that works particularly anywhere in the mental health or family services and supports area, because it is incredibly, incredibly difficult work. It is one thing for us to stand here and fight for the funding for those positions to exist but another to get up every morning and go and do that work and make the lives of Victorian children, parents and families – whatever it might be – better to try and prevent the outcomes that we are talking about here today.

They are the outcomes that we do not want to see – that is, anyone being incarcerated. We do not want anyone’s (a) actions or (b) outcome to result in that, because we are just talking about going back into that cycle again. I am proud the government has done so much good work. The minister was talking this morning during question time about the work the government is successfully doing to break that cycle.

Lee TARLAMIS (South-Eastern Metropolitan) (17:05): I move:

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

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

Business of the house

Notices of motion and orders of the day

Lee TARLAMIS (South-Eastern Metropolitan) (17:05): I move:

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

Motion agreed to.

Statements on tabled papers and petitions

Sunshine super-hub

Petition

Moira DEEMING (Western Metropolitan) (17:05): This morning I tabled a petition with 366 signatures of local residents who use Sunshine station and drive on the surrounding roads and who will be affected by the government's plan to build a super-hub at that station. I would like to acknowledge and thank a local resident who was concerned and who started this petition on his own initiative and spent countless hours outdoors talking to people at the train station and in the shops in the surrounding areas.

Let me give some background to this project. Everybody knows that the west is expanding. New suburbs and housing estates spring up every year. Demand for public transport is set to continue increasing and outstrip our ability to service it. The government has therefore planned for the Suburban Rail Loop to pass through the west and go through Sunshine station. They have also finally planned to have a train going from the CBD out to the airport, and that train will also go via Sunshine station. We will be having lots of trains going through Sunshine, so the government has decided to call it a super-hub. We have been told that the station will double in size. To go with the super-hub they have come up with a master plan. The government claims that this master plan was informed by community and stakeholder engagement from August 2021 to April 2022, but unfortunately much of this consultation missed out on talking to actual residents who use the station and drive in the surrounding areas on a daily basis.

The government's plan puts ideals before reality. They have imagined a fantasy where everyone is riding a bicycle or catching a bus and there are trees everywhere and people walking all around all the time. It is a very nice idea, but is it realistic? They want people to use the train station, but they are removing the station car park. Will everyone be riding their bikes to the train even when it is raining in winter? What about mothers with children in prams?

Now I come to the real problem that is the basis of the petition. They are trying to force people into using bicycles by closing the northbound ramp of Hampshire Road in order to turn it into a cycling and walking path. This is a terrible idea. The northbound ramp of Hampshire Road has a specific purpose. Hampshire Road splits into two. The southern ramp leads into the Sunshine commercial centre and the northbound ramp alleviates congestion by directing traffic away from the commercial centre and up to Harvester Road. But the government wants to close the northbound ramp and turn it into a bicycle and walking path. The pictures in the brochure do look nice, but the reality for residents is not nice at all. If this ramp is closed to cars, traffic will have to go back along the southern road and into the commercial centre, causing increased congestion in an already congested area.

There is another problem. The purpose of closing this ramp to cars is to turn it into a cycling and walking path, but it is not compliant with disability access requirements because the gradient is simply

too steep. The Australian standards for walkway gradients allow a maximum gradient of 1:14. Both ramps are non-compliant, with the southern section being 1:12 and landings approximately 1:10. Mothers with prams, elderly people or those carrying shopping loads will struggle to go up the ramp because of how steep it is. Closing the ramp to cars will only make traffic worse elsewhere in the area, and it will not be accessible to many people in the community because of that gradient.

The petitioners therefore request that the Legislative Council call on the government to withdraw the Sunshine station master plan proposal and reopen the community consultation process to allow for genuine consideration of alternate, accessible means to facilitate active transport routes that are inclusive of all community members whilst maintaining the overpass's current utilisation.

Victorian Auditor-General's Office

Regulating Private Pool and Spa Safety

John BERGER (Southern Metropolitan) (17:09): I rise to commend the *Regulating Private Pool and Spa Safety: February 2023* report and in doing so say that I know how important pool safety is. This report was produced by the Victorian Auditor-General's Office and examines council's ability to implement private pool and spa safety barrier regulations. They specifically looked at the City of Greater Bendigo, Frankston City Council, Melton City Council, Mornington Peninsula Shire Council and the Surf Coast Shire Council. They also surveyed all 79 Victorian councils. This report considers pool regulations and identifies the issues as well as providing recommendations to prevent young people from drowning.

I know how important pool safety is. Between January 2000 and May 2019, 27 young children lost their lives – tragically cut short in private pools and spas. In 20 of these cases the barrier did not meet the safety standards. As a former union official, I know the importance of OH&S, and as a dad, a father, I know this even more. Councils are responsible for implementing regulations to reduce the risk of this happening. At present safety barriers are the key to saving lives. Current regulations require pool owners in Victoria to have barriers that meet all the safety standards. The date of the pool's construction determines which safety standard applies. Owners are expected to organise for an inspector to check if their barriers meet the safety standards every four years. When barriers meet safety standards, an inspector will issue a certificate for the owner to submit to council. For those who have barriers that do not meet the standard, an inspector can issue a non-compliance certificate to the council and give the owner a written notice to fix it.

The registration of pools is the Andrews government's reform, so it is great to know that the government takes these matters seriously. The challenge for any new reform is not just creating the laws but getting everyone involved to recognise how important they are, to take them seriously and to do their part. And this is the challenge. This starts with pool owners: make sure you take the right steps to register your pool. Currently 13 per cent of pools, which equates to 26,068 pools, are unregistered. If you own a pool, there is no excuse for this. Get your pool registered. If you do not, then you risk a fine and you would only have yourself to blame.

This report also highlights that councils do not know if all pool barriers meet the safety standards, as there is a backlog of registrations and certifications and some councils are struggling to respond in a timely way. Some of these problems arise from councils not being provided with the correct information around construction dates or because the compliance certificate is incomplete. This backlog is easier to manage when councils are provided with the right documentation, so pool owners should make sure to take the extra time to provide the correct information when registering their pools.

Pool builders and building surveyors need to help their customers by explaining the requirements and making sure they provide the documentation required in a form that enables easy registration. Pool builders: where a previous customer is chasing you to get the information so they can register their pool, be helpful, because this is about saving lives. Any new program is challenging, and with pool registrations there are different challenges for existing pools and new pools, for which it is a more

straightforward process. No doubt there may need to be some refinements in the program around registration, compliance and enforcement, which is why reports such as this one are so helpful in identifying the challenges and implementing an improved process.

But we cannot lose sight of what is at stake here – that is, saving lives. Twenty-seven young children drowning in 18 years is astounding, so it is now incumbent on everyone – the government, councils, pool owners and pool builders – to take note of the challenges in this report and work together to improve the process. I commend the work that our government has done to reduce drownings across the state, including the Unsinkable Guy campaign, which featured on TV, radio and digital and social media platforms to highlight several dangers that have led to drownings. I commend the work of the Minister for Emergency Services Jaclyn Symes, who has launched a new *Victorian Water Safety Strategy*, which aims to encourage people to safely enjoy activities in and around the water and to drive drownings down to zero. I thank the Victorian Auditor-General's Office for their work.

Port Melbourne public housing

Petition

Katherine COPSEY (Southern Metropolitan) (17:14): I rise to speak on a petition regarding the demolition of the Barak Beacon public housing estate. I tabled petition 470 this morning on behalf of Margaret, Kerrie and the more than 650 other tireless community campaigners and supporters fighting to protect public housing in this state. Twelve days before Christmas in 2021 the residents at Barak Beacon were told that their homes were to be demolished, and a mere three weeks later people began to be pressured into moving out. This government have said that they delivered consultation to the community there. Residents, however, tell me that that consultation was only arranged after outside pressure, was restricted in scope and did not include preserving the existing buildings. This government has said that social workers have sufficiently supported residents to relocate. However, residents have told me that they were approached by housing services officers, not social workers, who seemed under-resourced and underprepared to guide residents through this process, particularly so, as there are a high number of residents in public housing who have trauma from past homelessness and insecure housing and are burdened by a higher incidence of health issues, requiring a skilled approach to this support. This government stated in 2018:

Public housing waiting lists were left to blow out under the former Liberal-Nationals Government, with more than 36,000 Victorians now on the Victorian Housing Register.

Yet now, in 2023, the public housing waiting list is over 120,000 people. This government proclaimed that their Social Housing Growth Fund, Homes for Victorians and the Big Housing Build projects will give more Victorians a roof over their head. However, we now know that Victoria's social housing stock has only grown by 74 dwellings in the past four years. It is clear that the current approach to providing more homes for Victorians is not keeping pace with the crisis of need in this state, and it is costing us public housing sites as they are privatised. The *Retain, Repair, Reinvest* report by Office offers an alternative that is more economically, socially and environmentally efficient. I stand by petitioners in calling on the government to consider this report, and I do commend the Minister for Housing for recently arranging to attend a meeting with their representatives. The petitioners request:

... that the Legislative Council call on the Government to consider, investigate and respond to the feasibility study, report and plans by OFFICE regarding the Barak Beacon public housing estate, stop demolition activities on the estate so that any tenderer can consider the options put forward by OFFICE and allow all tenants to remain in their homes while the report and options put forward by OFFICE are considered.

I really urge the government to respond positively to this very reasonable request.

Department of Treasury and Finance*2022–23 Mid-Year Financial Report*

Georgie CROZIER (Southern Metropolitan) (17:17): I rise to speak to the mid-year financial report that was handed down and released last Wednesday by the government. It shows a very concerning and sobering set of figures. It shows a government that is just hooked on spending, but the really concerning thing is the amount of wastage. Now Victoria's interest bill is costing taxpayers over \$10 million each day. Every single day we are paying over \$10 million in interest. This is just a culture of gross waste and mismanagement. We know – and we have been saying this on this side of the house for many years – about the Andrews government's inability to manage money. They do not think there is anything wrong with massive overruns, and they do not have any regard for whose money it is. It is taxpayers money. When there is such a shortage of health services around the state, and I am speaking of obviously hospitals – I know it was mentioned in the house earlier today about the Melton hospital; well, we have been talking about rebuilding the Melton hospital for years – the government has done nothing.

Evan Mulholland: Put up a fence, Georgie.

Georgie CROZIER: Put up a fence – that's right, Mr Mulholland. That is all they have done in five years, six years. It is not good enough for those communities in the western suburbs that this government keeps taking them for granted. If I look around the state in these same areas, children cannot get access to the most basic and vital services because there are not enough maternal and child health nurses in places like Wyndham, Melton, Casey and these growth areas. There is a lack of planning, yet the government are happy to waste money on projects, because they do not do project management very well – in fact they do it incredibly poorly.

As a result of the government's mismanagement, it is taxpayers and the services that are the losers, whether it is health, whether it is a lack of education and schools or whether it is lack of other services like policing – all these services that state governments provide. This is who is at a loss here. Then of course you have got the Victorian taxpayers, who are working so hard, dealing with rising interest rates and the issues that are coming down from a national level. The cost of living is so incredibly high at the moment. When you have got all of those issues combined, our standard of living is falling, because when you cannot get access to a hospital bed, when you cannot get access to an ambulance, they are the standards that are falling in this state. And that is happening. That is what I am talking about with the delivery of services, and that is because of years of mismanagement and lack of investment, particularly in health.

I have said it in this place many times: that the lack of planning and lack of investment over many years prior to COVID made the situation because of COVID just so much worse. That is why we have got this critical shortage. We have got a workforce shortage and we have got infrastructure right around the state in health services that is vitally needed. I was with Ms Lovell earlier with representatives from the city of Shepparton talking about that very vital health service that needs to be done. Now, the government goes out and says, 'Oh, well, we've finished stage 1,' but there are so many other areas. Where is that clinical school that will help with the workforce problem in this state? Where is it?

Wendy Lovell interjected.

Georgie CROZIER: The cancer services. There are all of these vital pieces of infrastructure that could be built if this government did not waste so much money.

What is so alarming is it follows the record debt level that Victoria will have by 2025–26, \$165.4 billion, and that will have an interest bill that will be more than \$7.4 billion. This is an absolute indictment of the management by the Andrews government of taxpayers money. They are addicted to raising taxes and taxing mums and dads, businesses and Victorians. They are addicted to spending without reining in and being responsible, and as a result the services in this state are declining. As a

result of the services declining, our standards of living are declining, and that is a direct result of policy decisions, mismanagement of budget and fiscal management and just hopeless disregard for taxpayers money.

Adjournment

Enver ERDOGAN (Northern Metropolitan – Minister for Corrections, Minister for Youth Justice, Minister for Victim Support) (17:23): I move:

That the house do now adjourn.

Agriculture

John BERGER (Southern Metropolitan) (17:23): (124) I rise today to speak on the Andrews Labor government's actions to support our crucial agricultural sector. Agriculture is an essential industry to all Victorians. Not only is it a major industry for the export market that it creates for our farmers, where our products are considered to be some of the best in the world, and the internal market for consumption at home, but the agricultural industry is incredibly important for the livelihoods of many Victorians, for those not just in the industry but in the many industries which rely on it, such as tourism. To protect these industries is to protect the jobs of hundreds of thousands of people right across the country.

Over the past year the Andrews Labor government has created grants to support small-scale agribusinesses to adapt to new markets, encourage tourism and integrate new technology. This will ensure businesses can come out of the pandemic stronger than before. These grants provide essential disaster recovery – support for farmers impacted by last year's devastating floods and storms. The Andrews Labor government has also supported developing industries in Victoria such as the distilling industry, which has allowed our great state to support a world-class gin industry and to fortify our existing wine industry.

The Andrews Labor government also works hard to protect our vital biosecurity by managing diseases and pests within Australia. Funding for our biosecurity has ensured that Victoria has the tools and the plans in place to help prevent pests and diseases from ever entering Victoria and to manage them if they do. Biosecurity grants have also been provided for farms to ensure Victorian farmers have the tools to protect their businesses and to be able to work with the biosecurity department.

The Labor Andrews government will also be leading the way with its on-farm emission action program. The program will ensure that farmers are supported to know their farm emissions number and understand how it can be reduced. These programs are ensuring that industries can operate meaningfully and make a profit while also considering and protecting our beautiful environment. While these industries are having some of the best harvests in years, the Andrews government is working hard to ensure agriculture can continue to bring business and jobs to Victoria, many of which will go to rural Victorians well into the future. So my adjournment question is for the Minister for Agriculture, Minister Tierney. Minister, while the current government has done great work to support agricultural businesses in Victoria throughout the disasters, what more is being done to support the sector through climate change and drive climate action, in particular in my own community of Southern Metropolitan Melbourne?

Ballarat crime

Joe McCracken (Western Victoria) (17:26): (125) My adjournment matter is for the Minister for Police, and it relates to the recently released crime statistics in Ballarat. The action that I seek is for the minister to increase resources for Victoria Police so that we can reduce crime and keep our communities in and around Ballarat safe. The top five areas in Ballarat for crime activity were: Ballarat Central on 1664 incidents – slightly up; Wendouree on 1224 – slightly up; Sebastopol on 805 incidents – slightly up; Alfredton on 463 – again slightly up; and Ballarat East, which recorded an ever so slight decrease. Unsolved crimes account for 52 per cent of incidents, which is up from 48 per

cent. There were 670 breaches of family violence orders, the third most common criminal incident in the Ballarat area. The central Ballarat area, where the highest proportion of crime is experienced, is where the troubled Bridge Mall is located. Two police officers were assaulted at the bus interchange near Bridge Mall this week.

The Premier visited Ballarat on 4 March this year. He was asked about antisocial and violent behaviour in the Bridge Mall area. His response was:

I've seen a bit of commentary from the newly elected upper house Liberal member and you know at the end of the day you can play politics with these things or you can be focused on supporting community to be safe.

And the way you do that is to support Victoria Police and we've provided Victoria Police with record funding, they've got record recruits, the best of new equipment, and no one should – least of all very newly elected Liberal MPs – no one should doubt the resolve of Victoria Police to keep the community safe.

I did not think the Premier's words would come back to bite him that quickly, because nothing seems to be happening – absolutely nothing. So I do hope the Premier's words are actually genuine, and I hope that in this next state budget we will see the police minister announce increased resources so that police in Ballarat have the tools to actually fight crime and make sure the community is safe.

Northern Victoria Region water

Rikkie-Lee TYRRELL (Northern Victoria) (17:28): (126) The adjournment matter I would like to raise is for the Minister for Water. I would like to extend an open invitation for the minister to join me on a day trip to the Murray region. After spending the whole day on a tour of the Cohuna, Gunbower and Koondrook areas with the Central Murray Environmental Floodplains Group, visiting key areas that have seen the worst impacts of environmental damage due to mismanagement, it has become even more clear to me that much more work in this area is still to be done. The 'bush tea', as it is locally referred to, is stagnating the system. This problem not only decimates the freshwater habitat, killing numerous species of both native fish and turtles as the water recedes, but also poisons the waterways as water levels rise, picking up the stagnation and rotting flesh carcasses and floating them downstream in the public waterways. Just yesterday I received footage of another large-scale fish die-off upstream near Kangaroo Lake. If left unattended, it is only a matter of time until this reaches Lake Boga.

The last time this occurred, over 10 years ago, it decimated the town socially and economically. The Central Murray Environmental Floodplains Group is a fantastic example of a compassionate, non-profit community group that wishes to preserve the natural ecology and biodiversity of the northern rivers system without decimating the industries that it sustains. The members who I had the pleasure of meeting have a combined 300 years of flood plain observation and management experience. These subject matter experts have viable solutions and would like the opportunity to show the minister firsthand how they can be implemented.

Early childhood education

Ryan BATCHELOR (Southern Metropolitan) (17:30): (127) My adjournment matter is for the Minister for Early Childhood and Pre-Prep and concerns early childhood education. The action that I seek is an update on how the Andrews Labor government's Best Start, Best Life program is supporting our children and families in Southern Metropolitan Region. We all know how early education can transform each and every individual child's life. With 90 per cent of a child's brain developing before the age of five, it is reason enough to care deeply about and, importantly, to commit resources to. That is exactly what the Andrews Labor government has done. We have committed \$9 billion to transforming Victoria's early childhood sector, committed to the life-changing transformations of kinder for three-year-olds and four-year-olds and committed to giving all Victorian children the best start in life.

I mentioned in my inaugural speech the privilege I had working with the then federal Labor opposition's first policy document back in 2006 to deliver 15 hours of universal preschool for four-

year-olds. When we came to government in 2007, we began delivery across the country, but I think what Victoria today shows is that that program, while ambitious at the time, was nowhere near ambitious enough. There is so much more that we can do, and that is exactly what this government's Best Start, Best Life reforms are all about. They are about providing 140,000 children and families with free kinder this year. Those families will not go out of pocket in trying to give their kids the best start in life, because they will be saving \$2500 in kinder fees each year per child under this \$270 million program. And they will not have to, in the way that we are setting up to administer this program, worry about claiming things back from the government. Participating kinder programs will receive funding directly and pass that on to families as fee relief. With more than 2750 services across Victoria offering free kindergarten this year, there are certainly many in the Southern Metropolitan Region who stand to benefit.

The Andrews Labor government's commitment to making kindergarten easier, cheaper and more accessible is to make sure that each and every young child has the chance to have the very best start in life. That is why we are committed to this overhaul of early childhood education and care and why we are leading the nation. It is an unprecedented investment in making sure that all of Victoria's little learners can get their very best start in life. By removing the cost barrier to early education, we are also supporting primary carers, predominantly women, to make the choice to return to the workforce if they wish. I would appreciate any further information the minister can provide on how the Andrews Labor government is supporting early childhood learning right across the Southern Metropolitan Region.

Local government accountability

Evan MULHOLLAND (Northern Metropolitan) (17:33): (128) In this adjournment I am seeking the action of the Minister for Local Government regarding the decommissioning of the council accountability website Know Your Council. knowyourcouncil.vic.gov.au was launched in 2015 by the Andrews Labor government with a supposedly strong commitment to improving openness and accountability across Victorian councils, yet seven years later we have seen the same government quietly axe this particularly important avenue of public accountability. Dean Hurlston, vice-president of Ratepayers Victoria, highlighted the importance of having a website like Know Your Council, as it provided Victorians with an apples-versus-apples comparison of 79 LGAs on essential services such as waste management, animal management, maternal and child health and – perhaps the biggest cause of frustration to residents – their council rates. The Department of Jobs, Skills, Industry and Regions has come up with a very interesting way to replace this information and navigate without this website. They have decided to publish a complicated web of Excel spreadsheets that presents us with no less than 24,000 rows of data to sift through.

What a way of visualising that. Chief executive of Transparency International Australia Clancy Moore likened being able to find any piece of information in this MCG-sized Excel sheet to finding a needle in a haystack. Funny that – it is almost like the government does not want you to know these things about your local councils. Whilst the department website says a transition to a new site with improved navigation and functionality is underway, this website was shut down back in December and we are yet to hear from the minister any further updates.

This is happening at a time when local councils are in the headlines for all the wrong reasons, with repeated failures to carry out their basic duty. I am glad another member for Northern Metropolitan is in the chamber, because he will know about Merri-bek not collecting their rubbish on time and he will know about Yarra City Council's move to bypass residents and community consultation and ram through a bin tax which was opposed by local residents. We want residents to have more accountability from their local government and to be able to see how their local government compares with other local governments. I call on Minister Horne to provide us with an update on how and when the Know Your Council website will be replaced with a much more open and easily accessible alternative, and I ask her to take action to ensure this is achieved with great urgency.

Medicinal cannabis

David ETTERSHANK (Western Metropolitan) (17:36): (129) My adjournment matter is for the Minister for Health and relates to medicinal cannabis accessibility. As the minister is aware, medicinal cannabis products must be prescribed by a doctor and can provide life-changing relief for people suffering severe muscle spasms or severe pain resulting from multiple sclerosis; for people with severe pain, nausea, vomiting or wasting arising from cancer or HIV/AIDS; for people suffering from severe seizures resulting from epileptic conditions; and for people with severe chronic pain and a range of other serious health conditions. Medicinal cannabis products can be accessed only via prescription with Commonwealth and/or state approvals, but as medicinal cannabis products are not currently subsidised by the pharmaceutical benefits scheme the cost can be hugely prohibitive for some patients, varying substantially between \$500 and \$1000 per patient per week depending on the nature of the condition being treated, the particular product required and the prescribed dose. Where the medical condition being treated renders a person unable to work, the significant cost I have just highlighted means that patients simply cannot access the medication they need to function. The action I seek is that the minister consider introducing a low-income medicinal cannabis subsidy for the most vulnerable medicinal cannabis patients in the state.

Mildura Base Public Hospital

Wendy LOVELL (Northern Victoria) (17:38): (130) My adjournment matter is directed to the Minister for Health and concerns the current financial position of the Mildura Base Public Hospital. The action that I seek is for the minister to explain why the Mildura Base Public Hospital has not been adequately funded and for her to increase recurrent funding to the Mildura Base Public Hospital to ensure it has adequate funds to deliver the best possible health care to the people of the north-west.

In September 2020 the Andrews Labor government returned the Mildura base hospital to public management, with much fanfare that the move would improve health services in the region. The government's rationale for returning the hospital to the public system was that public management would result in the delivery of better health services to the community. At the time of the announcement of the return of the Mildura base hospital to the state, the then manager of Ramsay Health had announced a \$13 million investment in the hospital, delivering a new 16-bed ward, theatre equipment, sterilisation upgrades and clinical training.

I was concerned at the time that the return to public management would make for a good media release for the government but would result in the hospital being underfunded and ignored by Labor. I raised these concerns in this place both before and after the change of management. These concerns have become a reality with the refusal of the Andrews Labor government to progress and release the Mallee health plan and even acknowledge the obvious need for a new hospital. Even worse, the latest financial statement for the Mildura Base Public Hospital, for the year ended 30 June 2022, shows that the Andrews Labor government has failed to provide sufficient operating funding to cover the operating costs of the hospital.

In the 2021–22 financial year the hospital recorded an operating loss of \$2.337 million. The net financial result for the period saw the hospital record a net loss of \$3.743 million. This is not a financial result a public hospital or health service would incur if the government provided sufficient and adequate recurrent funding, and the concerns held at the time of the change of management have now become the reality. Labor spruik a good game about their commitment to the Victorian health system, but the system is broken due to a systemic lack of investment by this government, and the Mildura Base Public Hospital is a prime example of this. The minister needs to explain why the Mildura Base Public Hospital has not been funded adequately and ensure the hospital will now receive the funding required to deliver the health care that Sunraysia people deserve.

Ballarat Road, Braybrook

Trung LUU (Western Metropolitan) (17:41): (131) My adjournment matter is for the Minister for Roads and Road Safety. Ballarat Road is a horrendous road in my region with high accidents and fatalities, yet it sits neglected by the Andrews Labor government in terms of actions. The action I seek is the installation of safety barriers along the median strip on Ballarat Road in Braybrook; the installation of a pedestrian crossing near the intersection of Ballarat Road and Melon Street, Braybrook; and the reduction of the speed limit along this horrendous road as soon as possible to curb the tragic deaths on this road.

As reported in the *Age* on 13 March, 10 years of road fatality data revealed that Ballarat Road is now classified as the deadliest road in Melbourne for pedestrians. Eleven people have tragically lost their lives on this road since 2013. I would like to particularly focus on a section along Ballarat Road in Braybrook where there is a high amount of foot traffic in terms of pedestrians crossing to get over six lanes of traffic to visit a bus stop, the neighbourhood house, the library and nearby schools. There should be more traffic lights installed to make accommodations to increase the safety for pedestrians. So I ask the Andrews Labor government to stop neglecting the west and reduce the speed limit along Ballarat Road, install safety barriers or alternative safety measures along the median strip and install a pedestrian crossing as soon as possible, as this has been a concerning issue for a decade with no action. So I plead for the Andrews government again to install safety barriers along this section of Ballarat Road to reduce the tragic deaths.

Progress Street, Dandenong South, level crossing

Ann-Marie HERMANS (South-Eastern Metropolitan) (17:43): (132) My adjournment matter is for the Minister for Transport and Infrastructure in the other place and relates to level crossing removals. 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. The only way in and out is via the Progress Street level crossing. On the cul-de-sac side of the crossing there are several properties, all of them industrial manufacturing businesses. The roads are wide and well suited to the large trucks which need access to these businesses, and there is easy access to the freeway. The owners of these businesses specifically chose Progress Street and Nathan Road because of this road access, and the government is now taking it away from them with their level crossing removal so-called solution.

The government solution is not to remove the level crossing at all; instead they are just closing it and permanently splitting Progress Street in two. Then the government is proposing building a connecting road over Eumemmerring Creek to join Progress Street to the much narrower, windier and more congested Fowler Road. Fowler Road is not suited to the large trucks that use Progress Street, some of which carry single-span cranes which are up to 35 metres long, and it forces more traffic onto the already congested South Gippsland Highway. Every single business on the other side of the Progress Street level crossing would prefer that the level crossing remain in place than traffic be diverted onto Fowler Road.

There is very little congestion currently at the Progress Street level crossing. It is only used to access industrial manufacturing businesses. The Level Crossing Removal Project is supposed to be about decreasing congestion, not increasing it. So the action I seek is for the minister to save the government's money by not removing the level crossing and not constructing a connecting road over Eumemmerring Creek, and I request in this action that the minister actually considers the impact that this will have on the businesses and meets with the people, along with me.

Medically supervised injecting facilities

Renee HEATH (Eastern Victoria) (17:45): (133) My adjournment matter is for the Minister for Mental Health, and the action that I seek is that the minister release the full Ryan review, not just the 25-page summary. This report claims 21 lives were saved as a result of the injecting room, but the

coroner's report suggests one extra person actually died, so the overdose deaths actually went up. The Ryan review reported that the Yarra council found an increase in inappropriately discarded needles, from 20 per cent of needles in July 2018 when the injecting room was first opened to 79 per cent of all discarded needles in June 2022, just four years after it began operation. The review reported that Yarra council was finding 12,000 to 18,000 needles a month – that is up to 14,000 inappropriately discarded needles a month in public places compared to just 3000 before the injecting site was installed. That does not seem like a win to me.

In June 2020 the Victorian government medically supervised injecting room review panel published the Hamilton review. Figure 15 reveals heroin deaths increased from 23 in the 15 months before the injecting room was opened to 25 in the 15 months after the injecting room was opened. Figure 17 shows heroin deaths within 1 kilometre of the injecting room increased from 15 to 16. Figure 64 shows ambulance attendances for heroin overdoses in the Yarra council area increased from 245 to 249.

Concerningly, the report reveals that of the overdoses occurring at the site in the first 12 months, 13.5 per cent had no access to oxygen for 5 minutes. What happened to these individuals? Are they still alive? What kind of recovery did they make, and what kind of care are they currently receiving? A simple Google search reveals that after between 30 seconds and 180 seconds of oxygen deprivation you may lose consciousness, but after 1 minute brain cells begin dying. After 3 minutes neurons suffer more extensive damage and lasting brain damage becomes very likely, and after 5 minutes you die. I seek clarification to be given around the 13.5 per cent of individuals that overdosed who went without breathing for at least 5 minutes, which was reported on pages 39 and 40 of the Hamilton review. Why are we keeping these injecting rooms open when health outcomes seem to be worse, community safety seems to be worse and deaths seem to be increasing?

Secondary dwellings

Gaelle BROAD (Northern Victoria) (17:48): (134) My request is for the Minister for Planning to introduce an efficient application process for secondary dwellings in Victoria to make it easier for people to construct smaller dwellings on the same lot as existing dwellings in specific residential areas. A pilot program to fast-track secondary dwellings was conducted by the department two years ago. If an application met the program conditions, it was assessed under the VicSmart pathway at a reduced time frame of 10 working days at a reduced fee. The City of Greater Bendigo provided feedback on the program to the department two years ago with the understanding that the results of the pilot would be analysed, but they are yet to receive feedback from the government, and no changes have been made to the planning scheme.

Regional Victoria is experiencing a housing crisis, with shortages across Northern Victoria, including Bendigo, Shepparton, Mildura and Benalla. Regional Victoria's population is growing rapidly, in part because of the COVID-19 lockdowns, which saw many people moving to the regions, and because regional Victoria is simply the best place to live. In Greater Bendigo alone the population is around 126,000 and it is forecast to exceed 155,000 people by 2036. At average occupancy rates the region will need over 13,000 additional homes to meet the demand. In Bendigo over 3000 people are on the social housing waitlist, and Seymour also has over 580 people in need of a home.

Across Northern Victoria people are being offered great jobs only to turn them down because they cannot find a place to live. Rental prices in regional Victoria have skyrocketed. According to the Grattan Institute, vacancy rates are at record lows and rents have risen over 12.5 per cent in the past year. People are living in caravans, tents and cars because they cannot find a home they can afford. The floods have caused further devastation in places like Rochester, with people whose homes were flooded now living at relief centres.

Looking ahead, the Commonwealth Games are just three years away, in March 2026. Bendigo and Shepparton are hosting events, and thousands of people will be looking for a place to stay. Federal Treasury has also predicted a migration boom in the next two years, which will place further pressure on regional housing. It can take months for housing applications to get through council, and it is an

expensive and time-consuming process. It has now been two years since the secondary dwellings pilot program finished. The government needs to take action to implement an efficient application process for secondary dwellings in Victoria to help address the current crisis and provide more housing in regional areas.

Lake Wendouree lighting project

Bev McARTHUR (Western Victoria) (17:51): (135) My adjournment matter is for the Minister for Planning and relates to the ongoing works to put 225 tall lights around Ballarat's Lake Wendouree. There is significant angst within the Ballarat community that current drilling works do not comply with permit conditions laid out by Heritage Victoria. Lake Wendouree is listed on the state heritage register. Documented and photographic evidence clearly shows multiple breaches within tree protection zones specified within Australian standards and within the Ballarat council's construction and tree management plan. The breaches within the zones include machinery excavation, parking of vehicles and plant, a failure to meet protective fencing standards and a failure to meet ground protection measures. There is no evidence of hand boring, also required in the permits.

I am advised by members of the Get our Lake Wendouree lighting right! group, who spoke to drilling contractors at the lake on Friday 10 March, two weeks after the start of work, that the project arborist had not been on site but that they thought his name was Tony – again, another permit breach. The lighting group has relayed these concerns to Heritage Victoria, who last week responded in writing via a senior heritage officer. She advised she had been in touch with the City of Ballarat and the arborist and she is satisfied – from their word only – that everything is fine. She continues to refuse their request for an on-site visit to inspect the works, writing:

Heritage Victoria will continue to monitor works ...

More colloquially, others have been told in phone calls to Heritage Victoria, 'The lights are going ahead regardless of the breaches.' In this instance one might liken Heritage Victoria's Melbourne-based reliance on the word of a Labor-led regional council as trusting a fox in a henhouse. One should remember this project is a Labor election promise to a Labor-held electorate pushed through by Labor-endorsed mayors. It is all red Labor in this project. I recall the words of our colleague in this house last year, Mr Somyurek, when he described walking into a government department as akin to walking into an ALP state conference and 'looking at a Labor Party branch list.' My action for the minister is to advise whether she is confident that Heritage Victoria's 'monitoring' of such projects is good enough for an authority in which Victorians place great trust.

Surgical robot funding

Georgie CROZIER (Southern Metropolitan) (17:54): (136) My adjournment matter this evening is for the attention of the Minister for Health, and it is in relation to funding of urgent and necessary robotic technology in public hospitals. At the moment there are 16 or 17 private hospitals that have got robots in them who are assisting in the fantastic work that they do in getting patients treatment –

David Davis interjected.

Georgie CROZIER: Very good clinical outcomes, Mr Davis, because often the length of stay is reduced from five days to one day. There are less invasive treatments. There is less blood loss. The recovery is much quicker. Of course what we have got in the public system is an ideological block from this Labor government and the Department of Health to put robots in our public health services. We have got a couple. We have got one in Peter Mac and the Royal Melbourne and one in Barwon Health. There is one in Ballarat, but I do not think it is being used, because no-one has been trained to use it, so I do not know how well it is going. But I do notice that St John of God in Bendigo last week were making a great fanfare about the fact that they have put a robot in there, and they are looking forward to starting orthopaedic surgery up in Bendigo and having great ability to service that community with robotic surgery and using the technology.

I have talked about this at length. We had a policy that we took to the electorate last year. The Minister for Health ridiculed it and said we were going to knock off staff and put in robots. I mean, it was the most ludicrous and ridiculous statement she made. She just looked an absolute idiot.

A member: A fool.

Georgie CROZIER: A fool, with a silly statement like that. Surgeons who I have met with right around the state say it has to happen. There is an inequity of access for public patients, particularly in women's health. President, you will be interested in this. The Austin and the Olivia Newton-John centre need robotic technology to assist with cancer surgeries, particularly in women's health around gynaecological cancers and men's health with prostatic cancers. It has tremendous outcomes, as has been previously said. So the action I seek is for the Andrews government to prioritise in this upcoming budget robotic technology and surgery and resourcing for training or to commit to it and prioritise this as an urgent need that will assist with reducing waitlist numbers and will have better outcomes for Victorian patients, and there will be a greater equity of access to this new technology that is used right around the world.

Economy

David DAVIS (Southern Metropolitan) (17:57): (137) My matter also relates to the Treasurer's area of responsibility. We have seen state debt increase massively under this government. The government took a deliberate decision in 2018, and just days before the 2018 election the Treasurer and Premier went out and said, 'We're going to lift state debt from 6 per cent of gross state product to 12 per cent of GSP.' That proved very much an underestimate, because state debt grew much more than that and is growing much further. The recent budget update makes it clear that state debt is now well over \$100 billion and climbing towards \$165 billion or \$170 billion by the end of the forward estimates period, when state debt in Victoria will be greater than New South Wales, Queensland and Tasmania combined.

This is a huge amount of cost to the budget because interest rates are now rising very significantly. The state is caught with the rising debt mainly due to the mismanagement of major projects. It is important to record that a lot of the debt occurred before COVID, and the debt situation was well committed through the major projects and the big cost overruns on a series of major projects. Whether it be the Metro, whether it be level crossings – you name it – all of the projects have blown out massively. The state was in deficit on 31 December 2019 – that is, before COVID. So the debt is there and it is climbing.

What I am seeking for the Treasurer to do in the upcoming state budget is to publish a special table that will outline how much debt each and every Victorian will need to carry and how much an average family will be carrying. That table should have a long tail on it backwards so that we can see back to the 1970s, the 80s, the 90s and forward how much debt was carried by each Victorian family. We should also on that table project forward the likely debt per family, per individual, per person in the state of Victoria into the future, in particular over the forward estimates period. It is going to be a very significant debt per person, and I think the Treasurer should be transparent about how much debt is being carried.

It is interesting that New South Wales has significant debt but its debt is not as great per person. Its debt overall compared to the size of the state economy is much less significant. The ratings agencies have recognised that. In New South Wales both the major ratings agencies have given a much stronger rating performance for New South Wales than Victoria and have singled out Victoria as the mendicant state, the state that is at risk.

Responses

Enver ERDOGAN (Northern Metropolitan – Minister for Corrections, Minister for Youth Justice, Minister for Victim Support) (18:00): There were 14 matters raised today: Mr Berger to the Minister for Agriculture on climate action, Mr McCracken for the Minister for Police on crime statistics in Ballarat, Ms Tyrrell to the Minister for Water about the Murray region, Mr Batchelor to the Minister for Early Childhood and Pre-Prep about the Best Start, Best Life program, Mr Mulholland to the Minister for Local Government about the Know Your Council website, Mr Ettershank to the Minister for Health about medicinal cannabis access, Ms Lovell to the Minister for Health about the Mildura Base Public Hospital, Mr Luu to the Minister for Roads and Road Safety about a local road, Mrs Hermans to the Minister for Transport and Infrastructure about a local level crossing removal, Dr Heath to the Minister for Mental Health about the supervised injecting room and the Ryan review, Ms Broad to the Minister for Planning about a secondary dwelling process, Ms McArthur to the Minister for Planning about Lake Wendouree lights, Ms Crozier to the Minister for Health about robotic technology in hospitals and Mr Davis to the Treasurer about state debt. I will make sure that all those matters raised are referred to the relevant ministers for appropriate response.

The PRESIDENT: The house stands adjourned.

House adjourned 6:01 pm.