

PARLIAMENT OF VICTORIA

**PARLIAMENTARY DEBATES
(HANSARD)**

LEGISLATIVE COUNCIL

FIFTY-NINTH PARLIAMENT

FIRST SESSION

TUESDAY, 7 JUNE 2022

hansard.parliament.vic.gov.au

By authority of the Victorian Government Printer

The Governor

The Honourable LINDA DESSAU AC

The Lieutenant-Governor

The Honourable JAMES ANGUS AO

The ministry

Premier.	The Hon. DM Andrews MP
Deputy Premier, Minister for Transport Infrastructure, Minister for the Suburban Rail Loop and Minister for Commonwealth Games Delivery	The Hon. JM Allan MP
Attorney-General and Minister for Emergency Services	The Hon. J Symes MLC
Minister for Training and Skills, Minister for Higher Education and Minister for Agriculture	The Hon. GA Tierney MLC
Treasurer, Minister for Economic Development, Minister for Industrial Relations and Minister for Trade	The Hon. TH Pallas MP
Minister for Planning.	The Hon. EA Blandthorn MP
Minister for Child Protection and Family Services and Minister for Disability, Ageing and Carers	The Hon. CW Brooks MP
Minister for Police, Minister for Crime Prevention and Minister for Racing.	The Hon. AR Carbines MP
Minister for Public Transport, Minister for Roads and Road Safety, Minister for Industry Support and Recovery and Minister for Business Precincts	The Hon. BA Carroll MP
Minister for Energy, Minister for Environment and Climate Action and Minister for Solar Homes	The Hon. L D'Ambrosio MP
Minister for Tourism, Sport and Major Events and Minister for Creative Industries	The Hon. S Dimopoulos MP
Minister for Ports and Freight, Minister for Consumer Affairs, Gaming and Liquor Regulation, Minister for Local Government and Minister for Suburban Development	The Hon. MM Horne MP
Minister for Education and Minister for Women.	The Hon. NM Hutchins MP
Minister for Corrections, Minister for Youth Justice, Minister for Victim Support and Minister for Fishing and Boating	The Hon. S Kilkenny MP
Minister for Commonwealth Games Legacy and Minister for Veterans .	The Hon. SL Leane MLC
Assistant Treasurer, Minister for Regulatory Reform, Minister for Government Services and Minister for Housing	The Hon. DJ Pearson MP
Minister for Employment, Minister for Innovation, Medical Research and the Digital Economy, Minister for Small Business and Minister for Resources	The Hon. JL Pulford MLC
Minister for Water, Minister for Regional Development and Minister for Equality	The Hon. H Shing MLC
Minister for Multicultural Affairs, Minister for Prevention of Family Violence, Minister for Community Sport and Minister for Youth. . . .	The Hon. RL Spence MP
Minister for Workplace Safety and Minister for Early Childhood and Pre-Prep	The Hon. I Stitt MLC
Minister for Health and Minister for Ambulance Services.	The Hon. M Thomas MP
Minister for Mental Health and Minister for Treaty and First Peoples. . .	The Hon. G Williams MP
Cabinet Secretary	Mr SJ McGhie MP

Legislative Council committees

Economy and Infrastructure Standing Committee

Mr Finn, Mr Gepp, Dr Kieu, Mrs McArthur, Mr Quilty and Mr Tarlamis.

Participating members: Dr Bach, Ms Bath, Dr Cumming, Mr Davis, Ms Lovell, Mr Meddick, Mr Ondarchie, Mr Rich-Phillips, Ms Vaghela and Ms Watt.

Environment and Planning Standing Committee

Dr Bach, Ms Bath, Dr Cumming, Mr Grimley, Mr Hayes, Mr Meddick, Mr Melhem, Dr Ratnam, Ms Terpstra and Ms Watt.

Participating members: Ms Burnett-Wake, Ms Crozier, Mr Davis, Dr Kieu, Mrs McArthur, Mr Quilty and Mr Rich-Phillips.

Legal and Social Issues Standing Committee

Ms Burnett-Wake, Mr Erdogan, Dr Kieu, Ms Maxwell, Mr Ondarchie, Ms Patten and Ms Taylor.

Participating members: Dr Bach, Ms Bath, Ms Crozier, Dr Cumming, Mr Gepp, Mr Grimley, Ms Lovell, Mr Quilty, Dr Ratnam, Mr Tarlamis, Ms Terpstra, Ms Vaghela and Ms Watt.

Privileges Committee

Mr Atkinson, Mr Bourman, Mr Davis, Mr Grimley, Mr Leane, Mr Rich-Phillips, Ms Shing, Ms Symes and Ms Tierney.

Procedure Committee

The President, the Deputy President, Ms Crozier, Mr Davis, Mr Grimley, Dr Kieu, Ms Patten, Ms Pulford and Ms Symes.

Joint committees

Dispute Resolution Committee

Council: Mr Bourman, Ms Crozier, Mr Davis, Ms Symes and Ms Tierney.

Assembly: Ms Allan, Ms Hennessy, Mr Merlino, Mr Pakula and Mr R Smith.

Electoral Matters Committee

Council: Mr Erdogan, Mrs McArthur, Mr Meddick, Mr Melhem, Ms Lovell, Mr Quilty and Mr Tarlamis.

Assembly: Ms Hall, Dr Read and Mr Rowswell.

House Committee

Council: The President (*ex officio*), Mr Bourman, Mr Davis, Mr Leane, Ms Lovell and Ms Stitt.

Assembly: The Speaker (*ex officio*), Mr T Bull, Ms Crugnale, Mr Fregon, Ms Sandell, Ms Staley and Ms Suleyman.

Integrity and Oversight Committee

Council: Mr Grimley.

Assembly: Mr Halse, Mr Maas, Mr Rowswell, Mr Taylor, Ms Ward and Mr Wells.

Pandemic Declaration Accountability and Oversight Committee

Council: Ms Crozier and Mr Erdogan.

Assembly: Mr J Bull, Mr Eren, Ms Kealy, Mr Sheed, Ms Ward and Mr Wells.

Public Accounts and Estimates Committee

Council: Mrs McArthur and Ms Taylor.

Assembly: Ms Connolly, Mr Hibbins, Mr Maas, Mr Newbury, Mr D O'Brien, Ms Richards and Mr Richardson.

Scrutiny of Acts and Regulations Committee

Council: Mr Gepp, Ms Patten, Ms Terpstra and Ms Watt.

Assembly: Mr Burgess, Ms Connolly and Mr Morris.

Heads of parliamentary departments

Assembly: Clerk of the Legislative Assembly: Ms B Noonan

Council: Clerk of the Parliaments and Clerk of the Legislative Council: Mr A Young

Parliamentary Services: Secretary: Ms T Burrows

MEMBERS OF THE LEGISLATIVE COUNCIL
FIFTY-NINTH PARLIAMENT—FIRST SESSION

President

The Hon. N ELASMAR (from 18 June 2020)

The Hon. SL LEANE (to 18 June 2020)

Deputy President

The Hon. WA LOVELL

Acting Presidents

Mr Bourman, Mr Gepp, Mr Melhem and Ms Patten

Leader of the Government

The Hon. J SYMES

Deputy Leader of the Government

The Hon. GA TIERNEY

Leader of the Opposition

The Hon. DM DAVIS

Deputy Leader of the Opposition

Ms G CROZIER

Member	Region	Party	Member	Region	Party
Atkinson, Mr Bruce Norman	Eastern Metropolitan	LP	McIntosh, Mr Thomas Andrew ⁹	Eastern Victoria	ALP
Bach, Dr Matthew ¹	Eastern Metropolitan	LP	Maxwell, Ms Tania Maree	Northern Victoria	DHJP
Barton, Mr Rodney Brian	Eastern Metropolitan	TMP	Meddick, Mr Andy	Western Victoria	AJP
Bath, Ms Melina Gaye	Eastern Victoria	Nats	Melhem, Mr Cesar	Western Metropolitan	ALP
Bourman, Mr Jeffrey	Eastern Victoria	SFFP	Mikakos, Ms Jenny ¹⁰	Northern Metropolitan	ALP
Burnett-Wake, Ms Cathrine ²	Eastern Victoria	LP	O'Donohue, Mr Edward John ¹¹	Eastern Victoria	LP
Crozier, Ms Georgina Mary	Southern Metropolitan	LP	Ondarchie, Mr Craig Philip	Northern Metropolitan	LP
Cumming, Dr Catherine Rebecca	Western Metropolitan	Ind	Patten, Ms Fiona Heather	Northern Metropolitan	FPRP
Dalidakis, Mr Philip ³	Southern Metropolitan	ALP	Pulford, Ms Jaala Lee	Western Victoria	ALP
Davis, Mr David McLean	Southern Metropolitan	LP	Quilty, Mr Timothy	Northern Victoria	LDP
Elasmar, Mr Nazih	Northern Metropolitan	ALP	Ratnam, Dr Samantha Shantini	Northern Metropolitan	Greens
Erdogan, Mr Enver ⁴	Southern Metropolitan	ALP	Rich-Phillips, Mr Gordon Kenneth	South Eastern Metropolitan	LP
Finn, Mr Bernard Thomas Christopher ⁵	Western Metropolitan	DLP	Shing, Ms Harriet	Eastern Victoria	ALP
Garrett, Ms Jane Furneaux ⁶	Eastern Victoria	ALP	Somyurek, Mr Adem ¹²	South Eastern Metropolitan	Ind
Gepp, Mr Mark	Northern Victoria	ALP	Stitt, Ms Ingrid	Western Metropolitan	ALP
Grimley, Mr Stuart James	Western Victoria	DHJP	Symes, Ms Jaclyn	Northern Victoria	ALP
Hayes, Mr Clifford	Southern Metropolitan	SAP	Tarlamis, Mr Lee ¹³	South Eastern Metropolitan	ALP
Jennings, Mr Gavin Wayne ⁷	South Eastern Metropolitan	ALP	Taylor, Ms Nina	Southern Metropolitan	ALP
Kieu, Dr Tien Dung	South Eastern Metropolitan	ALP	Terpstra, Ms Sonja	Eastern Metropolitan	ALP
Leane, Mr Shaun Leo	Eastern Metropolitan	ALP	Tierney, Ms Gayle Anne	Western Victoria	ALP
Limbrick, Mr David ⁸	South Eastern Metropolitan	LDP	Vaghela, Ms Kaushaliya Virjibhai ¹⁴	Western Metropolitan	Ind
Lovell, Ms Wendy Ann	Northern Victoria	LP	Watt, Ms Sheena ¹⁵	Northern Metropolitan	ALP
McArthur, Mrs Beverley	Western Victoria	LP	Wooldridge, Ms Mary Louise Newling ¹⁶	Eastern Metropolitan	LP

¹ Appointed 5 March 2020

² Appointed 2 December 2021

³ Resigned 17 June 2019

⁴ Appointed 15 August 2019

⁵ LP until 24 May 2022

Ind 24 May–2 June 2022

⁶ Died 2 July 2022

⁷ Resigned 23 March 2020

⁸ Resigned 11 April 2022

Appointed 23 June 2022

⁹ Appointed 18 August 2022

¹⁰ Resigned 26 September 2020

¹¹ Resigned 1 December 2021

¹² ALP until 15 June 2020

¹³ Appointed 23 April 2020

¹⁴ ALP until 7 March 2022

¹⁵ Appointed 13 October 2020

¹⁶ Resigned 28 February 2020

Party abbreviations

AJP—Animal Justice Party; ALP—Labor Party; DHJP—Derryn Hinch's Justice Party;

DLP—Democratic Labour Party; FPRP—Fiona Patten's Reason Party; Greens—Australian Greens;

Ind—Independent; LDP—Liberal Democratic Party; LP—Liberal Party; Nats—The Nationals;

SAP—Sustainable Australia Party; SFFP—Shooters, Fishers and Farmers Party; TMP—Transport Matters Party

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Tuesday, 7 June 2022

The DEPUTY PRESIDENT (Hon. WA Lovell) took the chair at 11.34 am and read the prayer.

Announcements

ACKNOWLEDGEMENT OF COUNTRY

The DEPUTY PRESIDENT (11:34): On behalf of the Victorian state Parliament I acknowledge the Aboriginal peoples, the traditional custodians of this land which has served as a significant meeting place of the First People of Victoria. I acknowledge and pay respect to the elders of the Aboriginal nations in Victoria past, present and emerging and welcome any elders and members of the Aboriginal communities who may visit or participate in the events or proceedings of the Parliament.

Bills

JUSTICE LEGISLATION AMENDMENT BILL 2022

Royal assent

The DEPUTY PRESIDENT (11:35): I have a message, dated 31 May:

The Governor informs the Legislative Council that she has, on this day, given the Royal Assent to the undermentioned Act of the present Session presented to her by the Clerk of the Parliaments:

20/2022 Justice Legislation Amendment Act 2022

VICTIMS OF CRIME (FINANCIAL ASSISTANCE SCHEME) BILL 2022

Royal assent

The DEPUTY PRESIDENT (11:35): I have another message, dated 7 June:

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

21/2022 Victims of Crime (Financial Assistance Scheme) Act 2022

Announcements

QUEEN ELIZABETH II PLATINUM JUBILEE

The DEPUTY PRESIDENT (11:36): On the occasion of the Queen's platinum jubilee, we congratulate Her Majesty Queen Elizabeth II on her lifetime of service. Throughout her reign Her Majesty has upheld her commitment to the people of the commonwealth, and she is greatly admired for that. Early in her reign Her Majesty opened a session of the Victorian Parliament, in 1954, and the warmth and gratitude shown by the people of Victoria on that occasion have endured to this day. On behalf of the Victorian Parliament, we pay tribute to Her Majesty and express our admiration and gratitude for her dedication throughout her reign.

Mr DAVIS (Southern Metropolitan—Leader of the Opposition) (11:36): I desire to move, by leave:

That the house take note of the statement.

Leave refused.

Members**ATTORNEY-GENERAL***Absence*

Ms TIERNEY (Western Victoria—Minister for Training and Skills, Minister for Higher Education) (11:37): I wish to advise the house that Ms Symes is unwell and will not be in the chamber today. As such, I will be representing Ms Symes's portfolios and her representing portfolios on her behalf while she is unwell.

Questions without notice and ministers statements**EAST WERRIBEE EMPLOYMENT PRECINCT**

Mr DAVIS (Southern Metropolitan—Leader of the Opposition) (11:37): My question is to the Minister for Local Government. Minister, in your meetings with the City of Wyndham have you discussed the East Werribee employment precinct and the Andrews Labor government's plans for the precinct? If so, what was the nature of those discussions? If not, will you meet them to discuss the East Werribee employment precinct?

Mr LEANE (Eastern Metropolitan—Minister for Local Government, Minister for Suburban Development, Minister for Veterans) (11:38): Mr Davis, I have had many conversations with many local governments about a lot of their aspirations and a lot of the good work they are doing in a number of areas, and Wyndham would be no different. I always invite councils to present their main priorities. This area of Wyndham may have been one of those priorities—

Mr Davis interjected.

Mr LEANE: I am getting there. You need to relax. I have still got 2 minutes. I have really enjoyed conversations that I have had with Wyndham and all the other councils that I have had an opportunity to meet in person or via electronic means in Teams. I am trying to get through all the questions. I know you have a right to ask only one, but, being the very generous person that I am, I am trying to accommodate every one of your questions, so you need to relax and I will get there.

In terms of any concerns and aspirations that any council has and their wanting to meet me, I am happy to meet them. Understanding that there are a lot of aspirations and issues that fall outside the portfolio of local government, I have always been available and always happy to hear, as I said, any aspiration. It may fall out of my portfolio, but I am happy to hear any aspiration, have conversations with my colleagues, pass on any ideas and get some great initiatives. A lot of councils have some great initiatives that may fall out of the portfolios that I represent, but I am always really keen and excited to share the information and advice that I get from the local government sector. As I said, they pretty much have done a fantastic job in the last few years. There are some issues in some areas, but as a rule the 50 000-plus workers that work in this sector do a fantastic job every day. So I welcome any invitation to—

Mr Davis: On a point of order, Deputy President, it was a highly specific question about one council and about one project in the council area and whether he had been briefed on it and, if so, what the nature of that briefing was.

Ms Pulford: On the point of order, Deputy President, Mr Davis has just added another question to the pile of questions he asked in the substantive through his point of order. He has no point of order. He has shot out a whole bunch of questions, and the minister is, according to our customs, practices and rules of this place, able to answer them as he sees best. I might add the minister is doing, I think, a very good job of this given that Mr Davis's question was all over the shop.

The DEPUTY PRESIDENT: As Mr Davis knows, I cannot direct the minister on how to respond, but the minister has 14 seconds in which to be relevant.

Mr LEANE: To try and answer your question, the nature of the conversation I imagine would have been cordial and professional, as is every interaction I have with local government. If that helps you with ‘nature’, I hope that I have helped you there.

Mr DAVIS (Southern Metropolitan—Leader of the Opposition) (11:42): It is clear that he has been briefed by the City of Wyndham, and it is inconceivable they did not raise their major project. I refer to the clear policy position of Wyndham that the East Werribee employment precinct be reserved for job-creating investments and a major employment hub around food research, innovation and manufacturing, and I ask: is it state government policy to support the development of the East Werribee employment precinct in line with current planning overlays and council policy, and will the minister indicate whether the policy of the Andrews Labor government is to sell some of the precinct for housing?

Mr LEANE (Eastern Metropolitan—Minister for Local Government, Minister for Suburban Development, Minister for Veterans) (11:43): Mr Davis is asking a question outside of my portfolio—many questions. Once again I can reiterate that I am more than happy to speak to any local government about any of their aspirations, ideas or initiatives. I more than welcome that.

WILD HORSE CONTROL

Mr MEDDICK (Western Victoria) (11:43): My question is for the minister for the environment and is in regard to the imminent slaughter of wild horses across Victoria. The Animal Justice Party is very concerned about the tender put out for shooters to kill brumbies in the Barmah state forest and Alpine National Park. Wild horses, like all horses, are smart and social. They depend greatly on their herd, forming strong bonds. It is hard to comprehend the fear and distress that ground and aerial shooting will cause them, particularly when it comes to mares with foals. As is the story with so many non-native species, they are where they are due to no fault of their own. It is humans who have caused this problem, yet we resort to the most extreme forms of violence as a proposed solution. Will the minister cancel this planned shooting due to widespread community opposition?

Mr LEANE (Eastern Metropolitan—Minister for Local Government, Minister for Suburban Development, Minister for Veterans) (11:44): Thank you, Mr Meddick, for your question. I will definitely make sure your question is passed on to the minister for environment and also your concerns and make sure that you get a response, as is indicated in the standing orders.

Mr MEDDICK (Western Victoria) (11:44): Thank you, Minister, for doing that. By way of supplementary, we acknowledge the impact that wild horses have on the environment and the need for a solution. There are many non-lethal alternatives to killing introduced species. For brumbies there are options like capture and rehoming, and immunocontraceptives. These alternatives allow for an effective reduction in population without harming the animals in the process. Has the government explored any of these alternatives?

Mr LEANE (Eastern Metropolitan—Minister for Local Government, Minister for Suburban Development, Minister for Veterans) (11:45): Thank you, Mr Meddick, for your supplementary question, and I will make sure the minister for environment gets that question and responds to you in line with what is prescribed in the standing orders.

MINISTERS STATEMENTS: SICK PAY GUARANTEE

Ms STITT (Western Metropolitan—Minister for Workplace Safety, Minister for Early Childhood) (11:45): Last Tuesday I had the pleasure of visiting Federation University in Ballarat with local members Michaela Settle and Juliana Addison—great local members they are—where I spoke with workers and students about the Victorian sick pay guarantee. Nearly one in five workers in the Ballarat region do not have access to sick or carers pay. That means when they are sick they face that impossible choice between going to work sick or staying home to recover and missing out on a day’s pay.

During my visit I spent time with Louis, a casual chef at Federation Uni. He has worked for many years in the hospitality industry. He is also a father of two. Louis's wife works as a nurse, which means that when their children are sick and they cannot go to child care Louis has to stay home, missing out on a day's pay. Now Louis is eligible for the Victorian sick pay guarantee, which provides up to 38 hours a year of sick and carers pay to eligible workers at the national minimum wage. In his words, that support will 'take the sting out of the whole situation', meaning he can stay home and look after his children without worrying about making ends meet.

I am proud that the Andrews Labor government is funding this \$245 million pilot scheme providing workers with the safety net they need to take time off when they are sick or need to care for a loved one. It is not just good for families, it is good for the Victorian economy, and I encourage all casual and contract workers, whether they are in Ballarat or other parts of the state, to check their eligibility and sign up for the scheme today.

EARLY CHILDHOOD SAFETY

Dr BACH (Eastern Metropolitan) (11:47): My question is also to the Minister for Early Childhood. Minister, on 17 May, as I am sure you are aware, a two-year-old escaped from the Nido Early School in Werribee just after 9.30 in the morning. This is the second time that a toddler has escaped from this facility in six months. Minister, when will the investigation be complete, and will the report be released to the public at that time?

Ms STITT (Western Metropolitan—Minister for Workplace Safety, Minister for Early Childhood) (11:47): I thank Dr Bach for his important question. The health and safety and wellbeing of children in early childhood education and care in Victoria are a top priority for me and for the government. The Department of Education and Training, as you would be aware, are the regulator when it comes to investigating any issue that is of a serious nature like this, where the health and safety and wellbeing of children have been in jeopardy. In terms of the particular circumstances that you have raised, the Secretary of the Department of Education and Training is the regulator under the national laws. It would not really be appropriate for me to comment on the specifics of this particular investigation, but what I can say is that the quality assessment and regulation division, which is the regulator within the Department of Education and Training, will not hesitate to take very strong action where there has been a breach of the national safety laws. That investigation is ongoing at the moment, Dr Bach, and in due course the outcome of that investigation will be made available publicly. I am absolutely confident that, as their track record shows, QARD will not hesitate to take very strong action, including sanctions against providers and, if necessary, penalties around their licence if that is warranted. But the actual investigation process is undertaken through that division of the department.

Dr BACH (Eastern Metropolitan) (11:49): Thank you, Minister, for your response. Following on from your most recent comments about, as you said, what may be the outcomes of this report, will you commit the government to implementing any recommendations from that investigation?

Ms STITT (Western Metropolitan—Minister for Workplace Safety, Minister for Early Childhood) (11:50): Perhaps I can try and be a little clearer, Dr Bach. QARD is the division within the department that are responsible for upholding the regulations and the national law in respect to child safety. Those decisions are made, as absolutely is appropriate, at arm's length from the government, so they will undertake an investigation and determine whether or not charges ought to be taken out. That will then be subject to the judicial process, which of course is not appropriate for me to comment on as the minister. But I can assure the house that QARD have got a very strong history of making sure that children in our state are safe and that any provider that is found wanting is dealt with appropriately under the legislation.

BULLA BYPASS

Dr CUMMING (Western Metropolitan) (11:51): I must thank the Liberals for bringing up two questions for the western suburbs. It is wonderful to hear that this morning. My question is to the Minister for Transport Infrastructure in the other place. Can the minister provide details of what funding, if any, has been included in the 2022–23 budget for the Bulla bypass? Population forecasts are predicting Sunbury's population will increase from 42 494 to over 86 000 in the next 20 years, which is a doubling. The Sunbury South and Lancefield Road precinct structure plans have been approved, enabling the development of more than 19 000 additional dwellings. The vehicle volumes along the Sunbury–Bulla road are in excess of 25 000 vehicles per day, which alone identifies the Sunbury–Bulla road as requiring duplication. While the government has funded the duplication of the Sunbury–Bulla road from Macedon Street, Sunbury, to Bulla, traffic comes to a standstill within the Bulla township.

Ms PULFORD (Western Victoria—Minister for Employment, Minister for Innovation, Medical Research and the Digital Economy, Minister for Small Business, Minister for Resources) (11:52): I thank Dr Cumming for her question, and I will seek a response in accordance with our standing orders from Minister Allan.

Dr CUMMING (Western Metropolitan) (11:52): It is more important now than ever that the Bulla bypass is funded, so I look forward to the minister's response. Will the minister please provide an update on the business case, including the date for its release? In October 2016 the Minister for Planning blocked VicRoads' plans for the Bulla bypass. He rejected the advice of a panel of planning experts that the land for the freeway should be reserved at that time for future compulsory acquisition. The minister said:

We know there is a need for the Bulla bypass as Melbourne's west continues to grow.

Yet here we are, 5½ years later, and still no bypass. I have been raising the issue of the Bulla bypass for over three years, and I keep being told that options are being investigated. Surely those investigations must be complete by now. We need the funding within the budget.

Ms PULFORD (Western Victoria—Minister for Employment, Minister for Innovation, Medical Research and the Digital Economy, Minister for Small Business, Minister for Resources) (11:53): Again I will seek a written response in accordance with our standing orders for Dr Cumming from Minister Allan.

MINISTERS STATEMENTS: NATIONAL RECONCILIATION WEEK

Mr LEANE (Eastern Metropolitan—Minister for Local Government, Minister for Suburban Development, Minister for Veterans) (11:53): I was pleased to attend two National Reconciliation Week events in my capacity as the Minister for Suburban Development and Minister for Veterans.

I was joined by Will Fowles MP at the launch of an event for reconciliation week hosted by the Mullum Mullum Indigenous Gathering Place and the Maroondah council. This event was to officially launch the *Dancing with Creation* series of Indigenous artwork, including a mural, a footpath and planter boxes which have been planted as part of the Ringwood East laneway park upgrade. The stunning Indigenous mural was created by artists Simone Thomson, Robert Young and Chris Hume and features Bunjil's wings protecting a dancer, a scar tree and the earth below. Maroondah council has delivered this project in partnership with the Andrews Labor government through the Neighbourhood Activity Centre Renewal Fund to transform this community place, and I really want to thank the Mullum Mullum Indigenous Gathering Place along with of course the Maroondah council for welcoming us to such an important and fantastic event.

Last Tuesday I felt very privileged to attend the Victorian Aboriginal Remembrance Service at the shrine. I was joined by the Minister for Aboriginal Affairs, Gabrielle Williams, and of course member of this chamber Sheena Watt at the service. They hold it annually in reconciliation week. The service

honours and remembers the contributions of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people, who have served in every conflict and every peacekeeping mission involving Australia for more than a century. Their contribution and sacrifice were for many years not adequately commemorated. I want to congratulate all the members of the Aboriginal remembrance committee for such a moving service and for the great work they do, and I encourage everyone next year that can to go along to this service. I think it is a very important thing that we support this event.

WOMEN IN PRISON

Ms PATTEN (Northern Metropolitan) (11:56): My question is for the Attorney-General. Back on 7 April 2022 I asked the Attorney a question on the subject of women on remand, and in her reply she stated:

... in relation to remand, there are too many women on remand. I completely agree with that.

As we know, remand numbers are directly related to bail laws. They are two sides of the same coin. Someone is only remanded in custody if they are refused bail. As this state's first law officer, the fact that there are too many women on remand is an issue that the government can correct via the reform of bail laws. So my question is: will you?

Ms TIERNEY (Western Victoria—Minister for Training and Skills, Minister for Higher Education) (11:56): I thank Ms Patten for her question and her ongoing interest in this area, particularly women who are incarcerated. I will refer the matter obviously to the Attorney-General for her response.

Ms PATTEN (Northern Metropolitan) (11:57): Thank you, Minister. I note that we have got section 3A of the Bail Act 1977, which sets out matters the court must take into account for a determination in relation to an Aboriginal person, and similarly section 3B, which sets out considerations for determination in relation to a child. Despite this, Aboriginal women are the fastest growing cohort of people going into our corrections facilities, and certainly many of us who are on the inquiry into this issue note that there are 23 000 children in Victoria affected by incarcerated parents. So by way of supplementary, given the Bail Act already distinguishes between different people in this way, has the Attorney considered new laws that would do the same for women?

Ms TIERNEY (Western Victoria—Minister for Training and Skills, Minister for Higher Education) (11:58): Thank you, Ms Patten, for your question. I think that you would appreciate that the Attorney-General does have a keen eye on these issues. I am not in a position to make any further statements at this point in time, but I will refer the supplementary to the Attorney-General.

BIODIVERSITY PROTECTION

Mr HAYES (Southern Metropolitan) (11:58): My question is to the minister representing the Minister for Energy, Environment and Climate Change. Minister, is it true that just one critical habitat determination and zero conservation orders have been made in the 34-year history of the Flora and Fauna Guarantee Act 1988?

Mr LEANE (Eastern Metropolitan—Minister for Local Government, Minister for Suburban Development, Minister for Veterans) (11:58): Thank you, Mr Hayes, for that question. I will ensure that the minister for energy responds to your question in line with the standing orders. Thank you again for your question.

Mr HAYES (Southern Metropolitan) (11:59): Thank you, Minister. My supplementary is: the Flora and Fauna Guarantee Act 1988 contains an obligation or a duty on public authorities and ministers to consider the potential biodiversity impacts when exercising their functions. What has the minister done to ensure that the FFG act has been incorporated into other relevant acts that contend with the decline of our precious biodiversity?

Mr LEANE (Eastern Metropolitan—Minister for Local Government, Minister for Suburban Development, Minister for Veterans) (11:59): Thank you, Mr Hayes, for your supplementary question. I will ensure that you get a response from the minister for energy within what is prescribed in the standing orders.

MINISTERS STATEMENTS: CHISHOLM INSTITUTE, DANDENONG CAMPUS

Ms TIERNEY (Western Victoria—Minister for Training and Skills, Minister for Higher Education) (11:59): Recently I visited the Chisholm TAFE campus in Dandenong, where I was joined by the great member for Dandenong and a great minister, Gabrielle Williams, to open the new trade centre and student support hub, thanks to a \$7.4 million investment by the Andrews Labor government. As we have done at so many TAFEs throughout the state, we have transformed tired and out-of-date facilities, which are now modern and fit for purpose and ready to deliver the most relevant, high-quality training that Victorian students should expect. The benefits are clear. This is not just about the student experience but the fact that employers will now have access to graduates who meet their needs.

The new Dandenong trade centre replaces facilities previously spread over five buildings and dating back to the 1980s. The centre provides new plumbing, carpentry and electrical training areas that simulate real-life scenarios for the best training experience. We have also updated the amenities to ensure that there are plenty of female toilets to cater for the increasing female enrolments in traditional trades, a trend which on this side of the house we are tremendously proud of. It was great to see the new facilities and meet apprentices who are really benefiting from this government's investment in their training and their future. I do wish to give a shout-out to the great trade teachers, trainers, students and apprentices at the Dandenong campus for their commitment and drive. I am proud that the Andrews Labor government is investing in TAFEs right across the state to ensure that Victorians have access to world-class facilities as they gain skills for not just a great job but a brilliant career.

WORKSAFE VICTORIA

Mr DAVIS (Southern Metropolitan—Leader of the Opposition) (12:01): My question is for the Minister for Workplace Safety. Minister, the minutes of the 27 April 2021 board meeting of WorkSafe Victoria show the board has a requirement to make a recommendation to government on the target rate for 2021–22, with the overarching aim of returning the scheme to being financially sustainable. Yet the minutes of the 27 May meeting of the board show that WorkSafe had been advised by your office that the Expenditure Review Committee of Cabinet had resolved to hold the premium rate at 1.272 per cent for the 2021–22 premium year. Minister, given your government rejected WorkSafe's premium recommendation for returning the scheme to a financially sustainable status and instead tipped into WorkSafe \$500 million of taxpayers money, what premium rate was recommended by WorkSafe for 2021–22?

Ms STITT (Western Metropolitan—Minister for Workplace Safety, Minister for Early Childhood) (12:02): I thank Mr Davis for his question. Of course we know that the WorkCover scheme has faced some significant pressures, not least of which is the COVID-19 global pandemic. But in addition to that we have seen the scheme under some pressure because of the number, the complexity and the nature of mental injuries in particular in our modern workplaces. I have been quite up-front about those challenges, and the government has taken a range of initiatives in order to address some of the challenges and the pressures on the scheme as a result of the significant increase in mental injury claims and the length of time which those injured workers are having to spend on the scheme.

You would recall, Mr Davis, that following a successful trial with emergency services workers, who we know are at the front line and do experience some pretty horrendous things as a result of the work that they are sent out to do every day and have a high prevalence of mental injury—

Mr Leane: They do a fantastic job.

Ms STITT: They do an incredible job. As a result of that successful trial, the government legislated so that every Victorian worker suffering from a mental injury could get provisional payment support for the first 13 weeks to ensure that they get that early intervention. We know from all of the research here in Victoria, around the country and internationally that early intervention is the key to getting workers back to work successfully and safely, so that is an important initiative. We have also had the Rozen review into the management of complex claims. We have accepted the vast bulk of those recommendations, which will see us overhaul the way in which complex claims are managed in order to make sure that those workers have got every support that they need.

In terms of premium, you would know very well, Mr Davis, that there are a range of factors that are taken into consideration when arriving at a decision around premium. The government was never going to walk away from Victorian businesses at a time when they were trying to recover from the pandemic. So I absolutely stand by the decisions that were made around providing support for the WorkCover scheme so that the WorkCover scheme could do what it is intended to do, and that is to support injured workers to get back to work sooner and at the same time support business and the economy.

Mr Davis: On a point of order, Deputy President, the minister has certainly covered a lot of context, and that is of interest. But leaving that aside, the question was a very specific question: what premium rate was recommended by WorkSafe for 2021–22?

The DEPUTY PRESIDENT: Thank you, Mr Davis. As you know, I cannot direct the minister how to answer. She has 18 seconds to go, and perhaps you will hear what you are wanting to hear in those 18 seconds.

Ms STITT: Mr Davis will hear what he wants to hear as usual, but the reality is that there are a range of factors that are taken into consideration when considering premium each year, not least of which have been the impacts on the Victorian economy of the global pandemic. I stand by the decision that was made by the government to support Victorian businesses as they recover from the pandemic.

Mr DAVIS (Southern Metropolitan—Leader of the Opposition) (12:06): I note that the minister has not answered the very simple question about what was recommended by WorkSafe, and I therefore ask: Minister, given there has been no change to the WorkSafe Victoria premium in 2022–23 and your government is again tipping in taxpayers funds—this time \$300 million—what premium rate was recommended by WorkSafe for 2022–23?

Ms STITT (Western Metropolitan—Minister for Workplace Safety, Minister for Early Childhood) (12:07): I thank Mr Davis for his supplementary question, which is just a bit of a re-run really. I do not think he listened to the very comprehensive answer that I gave him about the balancing act that needs to be made each year and getting that balance right between supporting injured workers, particularly those that have suffered a mental injury in the course of their duties—our government will always stand by those workers and their rehabilitation back to safe employment—and doing what is the right thing to do in the economic circumstances that we find ourselves in. So he can play little gotcha moments all he likes and quote from purported board minutes that he seems to have, but the reality is that the government will always make those decisions based on the considerations that prevail at the time the decision is being made.

FAMILY VIOLENCE

Ms MAXWELL (Northern Victoria) (12:08): My question is to the Minister for Training and Skills, representing the Minister for Corrections in the other place, and it is regarding the \$20 million promised by the former Liberal federal government to launch pilot programs in states and territories for electronic monitoring of serious family violence perpetrators. This announcement followed the success of Tasmania's trial of electronic monitoring of family violence perpetrators, called Project Vigilance. The evaluation of the trial showed a substantial reduction in high-risk behaviours such as stalking, assault and making threats. With the change of government at a federal level and I imagine a

stronger level of cooperation that may result between Victoria and the federal government, will the minister advocate for a similar pilot for electronic monitoring of serious family violence perpetrators in Victoria?

Ms TIERNEY (Western Victoria—Minister for Training and Skills, Minister for Higher Education) (12:08): I thank Ms Maxwell for her question. I will seek a response from the Minister for Corrections in line with the standing orders.

Ms MAXWELL (Northern Victoria) (12:09): Thank you, Minister. The evaluation of the Tasmanian trial suggests its success over the longer term requires case-managed behaviour change programs for perpetrators alongside electronic monitoring. The Victorian family violence reform implementation monitor said demand for programs continues to be unmet and not enough is known about the effectiveness of the interventions. I therefore ask the minister to provide the available data on completion rates for behaviour change programs as a condition of a corrections order for 2021–22.

Ms TIERNEY (Western Victoria—Minister for Training and Skills, Minister for Higher Education) (12:09): I did not quite hear the last bit. Was that in terms of all people that have left incarceration or those that have been subject to family violence orders?

Ms Maxwell: Either, Minister—so completion rates for behaviour change programs.

Ms TIERNEY: Thank you. I will refer that to the Minister for Corrections.

MINISTERS STATEMENTS: TARNEIT BUSINESS ASSOCIATION

Ms PULFORD (Western Victoria—Minister for Employment, Minister for Innovation, Medical Research and the Digital Economy, Minister for Small Business, Minister for Resources) (12:10): I rise to advise the house of the creation of a new business association that has been formed in Melbourne's western suburbs. Business associations and traders groups provide small and family business owners the opportunity to experience the power of working together instead of going it alone. Five small business owners from the west have teamed up to form the Tarneit Business Association. The association launched on 15 March and has been working closely with their local member, Sarah Connolly. They were able to launch after receiving grant support from the Tarneit suburban revitalisation fund, an initiative administered by my colleague Minister Leane.

The Tarneit Business Association aims to provide a platform for businesses operating in the area to network and to help advocate for the needs of Tarneit small businesses. Their mission is to enhance the knowledge, skills, experience and success of their members and their local business community and to forge strong relationships between small businesses and the rest of the community. The association has formed to help make Tarneit a better place to live, visit and do business.

There are five small businesses involved in the association now. I am looking forward to seeing this association go from strength to strength as they open the doors to members. What today is five may well be 50 tomorrow given the growth of communities and indeed the growth of local and family businesses in the west of Melbourne. I would like to offer my congratulations to association president Rashi Dhagat and committee members Shivani Arora, Nihar Shah, Nimitt Shah and Sampann Agrawal for bringing the Tarneit Business Association to life. I wish every success to their current and future members in all of their endeavours.

WRITTEN RESPONSES

The DEPUTY PRESIDENT (12:12): I order a written response to Mr Davis's question to the Minister for Local Government, his substantive question only.

Mr Davis: On a point of order, Deputy President, he did not answer whether he had met with the council.

The DEPUTY PRESIDENT: Could we just get through the list of responses. I have ordered a written response to your substantive question, Mr Davis.

Mr Leane: On a point of order, Deputy President, I do not ask for an immediate response now, but can I ask you to review that at your leisure today, which has been the practice this term. I believe I did answer the question that Mr Davis posed, but I respect your immediate response.

The DEPUTY PRESIDENT: I am happy to review *Hansard* and come back later. I order a written response for Mr Meddick's question to the minister for environment, both his substantive and supplementary, two days; a written response for Dr Cumming's question to the Minister for Transport Infrastructure, both her question and supplementary, two days; a written response for Mr Hayes's question for the minister for energy, both question and supplementary, two days for both; a written response for Ms Patten's question to the Attorney-General, and as the Attorney-General is not here we will allow two days for that response for the question and the supplementary; and a written response from the Minister for Workplace Safety to Mr Davis's question and his supplementary.

Ms Stitt: On a point of order, Deputy President, I believe I gave a very fulsome response to Mr Davis's question in a very detailed way. Again, without flouting your ruling, I would ask that you have a look at *Hansard*.

The DEPUTY PRESIDENT: I am happy to review *Hansard* and come back.

Mr Davis: On a point of order, Deputy President, the question was what premium rate was recommended by WorkSafe in 2021–22 and an equivalent question for 2022–23. They were very specific questions.

Ms Stitt: Further to the point of order, Deputy President, that is not a point of order. But if that is going to be treated as a point of order, then I would ask that you look at *Hansard* for both the supplementary and the substantive question.

The DEPUTY PRESIDENT: I was not treating it as a point of order, and I have already agreed to do that for you, Minister. I order a written response to Ms Maxwell's question to the Minister for Corrections, both her question and her supplementary, two days.

Constituency questions

NORTHERN METROPOLITAN REGION

Mr ONDARCHIE (Northern Metropolitan) (12:15): (1815) My constituency question today is for the Minister for Roads and Road Safety. The residents of Dallas in my electorate of Northern Metropolitan Region are concerned about traffic congestion and the time it takes for them to get to work. Recently, as will come as a surprise to many members here, I conducted a community survey in the Dallas area, and I am very grateful to those residents who responded to that survey. Every morning the Dallas residents experience choked roads and frustration as the traffic is banked up along Barry Road and Pascoe Vale Road. Residents have told me that it is a nightmare to get to work on time in the morning peak hour, and similarly, especially, in the evening. My question for the minister is: will the government direct the Department of Transport to do an investigation into the traffic light sequencing at the intersections where Barry Road crosses King Street, Blair Street and Pascoe Vale Road so residents can spend more time with their families?

WESTERN VICTORIA REGION

Mr GRIMLEY (Western Victoria) (12:16): (1816) My question is to the Minister for Education. Primary schools are the beating heart of small regional towns. Often they are supported by the local community through fundraising events when something new is needed. However, from time to time they need assistance from the government. The Rupanyup Primary School is needing that now. They need new playground equipment. They applied for a government grant but were unsuccessful. The current equipment is extremely old and unsafe; in fact it has been condemned by a playground

inspector. The 'new' equipment was installed around 25 years ago, with the rest of the playground over 40 years old. It is rusted and has a long list of safety and injury risks, making it completely unsuitable for children. It is a blight on all governments when the community says, 'We're used to having to look after ourselves when no-one else will'. It is time the government helped Rupanyup Primary School. Minister, will you direct the Victorian School Building Authority to build and install new playground equipment for the Rupanyup Primary School?

EASTERN METROPOLITAN REGION

Dr BACH (Eastern Metropolitan) (12:17): (1817) My constituency question today is for the Minister for Transport Infrastructure. I was engaged in a media commitment yesterday when I took a call from a lady called Susannah from Mont Albert in my electorate. She asked me about the ongoing level crossing removal program in Surrey Hills and Mont Albert, which has bipartisan support. However, the manner in which the government is carrying out this project most certainly does not have that support. Susannah has informed me that she has been shown detailed plans for a new station that is to sit atop Lorne Parade Reserve, which was once saved by Joan Kirner, to her credit, and also by Rupert Hamer, to his credit, but is now to be destroyed as Labor breaks its election promise to keep stations at both Mont Albert and at Surrey Hills. Detailed plans for this station were shown by the Level Crossing Removal Project, but now the government is refusing to release those plans to residents. Minister, will you release these plans?

WESTERN METROPOLITAN REGION

Dr CUMMING (Western Metropolitan) (12:18): (1818) My question is for the Minister for Planning in the other place, and it is from Brimbank City Council. Will the minister immediately make public the state government's combined departmental response to the draft 2022 Melbourne Airport master plan and the preliminary draft major development plan for the third runway? Last week I met with the mayor and the chief executive officer of Brimbank council. At their last meeting council resolved that it did not support the 2022 draft Melbourne Airport master plan and the preliminary draft major development plan for the third runway. The council and the community need to understand the state government's position. They need to see the government's response and any issues that it raised with Melbourne Airport about its proposed development. Minister, could you please let the council know what the state government's combined departmental response was?

SOUTH EASTERN METROPOLITAN REGION

Mr RICH-PHILLIPS (South Eastern Metropolitan) (12:19): (1819) My constituency question is to the Minister for Ambulance Services. I refer to an incident which occurred at Village Cinemas in Fountain Gate shopping centre on 24 May where an elderly woman, who is nearly 80 years old, missed some steps going down the steps at the cinema and sustained a fracture to her cheek, a laceration to her eye socket and severe bruising to her clavicle, shoulder, femur and fibula. Despite Village Cinemas and her family calling an ambulance several times, the woman remained sitting at the base of the stairs for over 4 hours. Ultimately her family members decided to take her to hospital when an ambulance had not arrived after 4 hours. So my question to the Minister for Ambulance Services is: why was this elderly woman forced to wait more than 4 hours for an ambulance which never arrived?

NORTHERN METROPOLITAN REGION

Dr RATNAM (Northern Metropolitan) (12:20): (1820) My question is for the Minister for Transport Infrastructure and relates to the Bell station redevelopment. It has come to my attention that businesses along High Street between Bell Street and Dundas Street in Preston have not been informed of the impacts of the proposed car park entry and exit of the new Bell station on their businesses. Many of these businesses are struggling to survive due to the ongoing impact of COVID and fear the impact increased car traffic along streets surrounding their businesses will have on pedestrian and bike amenity, safety and thus patronage. Minister, will you stand up for the interests of these struggling

businesses and direct the level crossing removal authority to consult with these businesses and consider the alternative route to the station car park on the western side of the railway track?

SOUTHERN METROPOLITAN REGION

Ms CROZIER (Southern Metropolitan) (12:21): (1821) My question is to the Minister for Education, and it is in relation to St Kilda Park Primary School. There are plans from the Port Phillip council to build a new public toilet block which is right next to the entrance to this primary school. I have been contacted at my office by concerned parents and others about the location of this public toilet block, and the school community only found out when temporary fencing was put up. As we know, drug use and antisocial behaviour are rampant in St Kilda, and that is a great concern to many within that community, and many of these parents are very concerned that if a toilet block is constructed at such close proximity it will only attract some unsavoury behaviour that the children will be exposed to. So the question I ask the minister is: what advice has Department of Education and Training provided to the local council about the local school community's concerns in relation to this proposal?

NORTHERN VICTORIA REGION

Ms MAXWELL (Northern Victoria) (12:22): (1822) My constituency question is to the Minister for Transport Infrastructure on behalf of the Border Rail Action Group. The Rail Futures Institute recently reported that the failure to reinstate the former standard gauge platform as part of the forthcoming Sunshine station redevelopment will seriously disadvantage north-east Victorian and Riverina travellers. Many country people rely on trains to bring them to the city for essential medical services. Inability for regional passengers to access Metro 1 from the Sunshine station will effectively cut off access to the new Parkville station and the many major hospitals nearby, including the Peter MacCallum Cancer Centre and Royal Children's Hospital. This will create unnecessary indirect travel and multiple changes for people seeking medical attention, young people with disabilities, elderly people and parents with young children. So my question is to the minister: will the government commit to reinstating the former standard gauge platform at Sunshine station for better access to services for regional passengers, especially north-east Victorians who need to visit vital medical facilities?

EASTERN VICTORIA REGION

Ms BATH (Eastern Victoria) (12:23): (1823) My constituency question is to the Minister for Emergency Services. Friday marks the 12-month period from when floodwaters devastated the streets and homes of Traralgon. Many residents woke to floodwater actually in their homes. Once the responsibility for Emergency Management Victoria was under the Latrobe City Council, but the government now has responsibility for issuing those flood warnings and calling on people to be aware. Residents received their first notifications to evacuate their homes 4 hours after the floodwaters had peaked. The government had promised a flood review, which should have been presented months ago. The constituents want to know what is happening to improve this so that they will not be subject to these outrageous and dangerous occurrences again. What is the government doing to improve the emergency management service?

SOUTHERN METROPOLITAN REGION

Mr DAVIS (Southern Metropolitan—Leader of the Opposition) (12:24): (1824) My matter is for the Minister for Community Sport, and it relates to the Monash Villarreal Football Club and their request through Jim Grivas, a very well connected community person, and Angelo Zissis, the president of Monash Villarreal, for \$400 000 for additional lighting for its grounds at Caloola Reserve in Oakleigh. They need that \$400 000, and the state government ought to supply that money to enable them to proceed with this, to expand night-time practice for their growing junior teams, specifically on their second oval, helping junior teams, helping girls teams and helping a spread of teams to have the full local access that is required. Consultation has begun with the council. Residents should have

their say so there are clear times and protections, but I ask the minister: will you allocate the \$400 000 sought by Angelo Zissis, Jim Grivas and the Monash Villarreal Football Club?

NORTHERN VICTORIA REGION

Mr QUILTY (Northern Victoria) (12:25): (1825) My constituency question is for the Minister for Ambulance Services. In late 2020 Ambulance Victoria claimed my question about an 89-year-old woman waiting over 45 minutes for an ambulance to take her less than 2 kilometres to Wodonga hospital after a heart attack was inaccurate. Country ambulance wait times were the canary in the coalmine. The government ignored growing ambulance delays in Northern Victoria because of the contempt this Melbourne government has for the people of regional Victoria. Now the health system is collapsing across greater Melbourne and there is suddenly an urgency that something must be seen to be done. Slapping band-aids over festering wounds and hoping things hold together until after the next election clearly works in the short term, but when you are in government for a while eventually the wheels fall off. Recently this woman's family reached out to my office to ask what has been done. We have suggested CFA volunteers, community paramedics, increased resourcing and realistic wait-time information. All we have seen from the government is spin and no action. Minister, what have you actually done to improve ambulance response times in Northern Victoria?

Bills

FIREARMS AMENDMENT BILL 2022

Introduction and first reading

Mr BOURMAN (Eastern Victoria) (12:27): I move to introduce a bill for an act to amend the Firearms Act 1996 in relation to the chief commissioner's powers to categorise certain firearms and for other purposes, and I move:

That the bill be now read a first time.

Motion agreed to.

Read first time.

Mr BOURMAN: I move:

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

Motion agreed to.

INDEPENDENT BROAD-BASED ANTI-CORRUPTION COMMISSION AMENDMENT (FACILITATING TIMELY REPORTING) BILL 2022

Introduction and first reading

Mr DAVIS (Southern Metropolitan—Leader of the Opposition) (12:27): I move to introduce a bill for an act to amend the Independent Broad-based Anti-corruption Commission Act 2011 to facilitate timely reporting by the IBAC, and I move:

That the bill be now read a first time.

Motion agreed to.

Read first time.

Mr DAVIS: I move:

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

Motion agreed to.

Committees**SCRUTINY OF ACTS AND REGULATIONS COMMITTEE***Alert Digest No. 8*

Mr GEPP (Northern Victoria) (12:28): Pursuant to section 35 of the Parliamentary Committees Act 2003, I lay on the table *Alert Digest* No. 8 of 2022 from the Scrutiny of Acts and Regulations Committee, including appendices. I move:

That the report be published.

Motion agreed to.

ECONOMY AND INFRASTRUCTURE COMMITTEE*Inquiry into the Closure of the Hazelwood and Yallourn Power Stations*

Mr ERDOGAN (Southern Metropolitan) (12:28): Pursuant to standing order 23.29, I lay on the table a report from the Economy and Infrastructure Committee on the inquiry into the closure of the Hazelwood and Yallourn power stations, including appendices, extracts of proceedings and a minority report. I further present transcripts of evidence, and I move:

That the transcripts of evidence lie on the table and the report be published.

Motion agreed to.

Mr ERDOGAN: I move:

That the Council take note of the report.

I am pleased to present the Economy and Infrastructure Committee's report on the inquiry into the closure of the Hazelwood and Yallourn power stations. The announcement by Engie in November 2016 that production and operation would cease at the Hazelwood power station in mid 2017 was a blow to communities across the Latrobe Valley region. Coal-fired power generation has been an economic and social driver for generations of workers and communities across Gippsland and has shaped its history; skills profiles; economic, social and environmental priorities; and demographics. It has also defined the identity of workers, industry, related businesses and communities.

Last year's announcement by EnergyAustralia of the 2028 closure of the Yallourn power station, with a 350-megawatt utility-scale battery to be built by 2026, was further confirmation that global markets are increasingly moving away from investment in coal-fired power. Further, the exponential growth in renewable energy has been driven by downward pressure on the costs of production and management, the rapid pace of advances in renewable energy technology and increased consumer appetite. These changes have necessitated a comprehensive social and economic transition for the Latrobe Valley region, alongside investment in the development of existing communities and improvements in educational, health and other outcomes.

With such a short notice period provided by Engie, it was imperative that all levels of government worked together with a sense of urgency and collaboration. The Victorian government established the Latrobe Valley Authority, or LVA, with responsibility for business, community and worker support in the first instance, alongside program and service delivery and local projects to facilitate economic and social transition. The LVA is the first body of its kind in Australia. It is influenced by the approach taken in countries that have faced similar challenges following transition from coal-fired power generation, such as Germany and Spain.

The LVA's initial focus was mostly direct, helping affected workers find new jobs in the power sector through negotiation of worker transfer schemes with other operators or industries, and providing businesses with transition and development support or access to new infrastructure projects. The organisation's focus has since evolved to building capability, aiding long-term regional growth and

transformation. As the committee's report discusses, the LVA is the first to agree that it has more work to do in developing and maintaining community trust and awareness, communicating its services and measuring the financial and social benefits that it has delivered.

The LVA is adapting and improving as it grows and learns more about how it could best work with the community. Importantly, the LVA is staffed by Gippslanders working for Gippsland. It is of significant importance to a region that has been neglected by governments in times of great need and uncertainty, including following the privatisation of Victoria's power industry in the 1990s and the Hazelwood mine fire in 2014. As such, the importance of building trust and fostering optimism across businesses and communities should not be underestimated as transition and development continues over the coming years.

As this inquiry also found, a combination of regional assets and state government support has led directly to improved social and economic outcomes. New opportunities for long-term and sustainable growth are gathering momentum across Gippsland, whether in large energy projects or in other priority industries such as health and allied care, food and fibre, tourism and manufacturing. It is widely accepted that the notion of working for one large employer in a job for life is a thing of the past. Gippsland's economy is becoming a vibrant, modernised presence, characterised by an increasingly diverse variety of businesses and a highly skilled workforce.

For an increasing majority of the community, the shock, anger and frustration of 2016 is evolving into a shared determination to collaborate and succeed as global industries continue to change. The transition will take time. Investment and engagement from all levels of government will be required, as will social licence and preparedness of communities to move from describing the problems and losses of the past into opportunities that can, through the LVA, be identified and deployed to maximum effect.

The committee had the opportunity to tour the Hazelwood power plant site during early March, and seeing it up close gave us a real sense of the scale and complexity of this infrastructure. I would like to acknowledge the work of my fellow committee members throughout this inquiry: deputy chair Mr Finn, Ms Shing, Mr Barton, Mrs McArthur, Mr Quilty, Mr Tarlamis, Ms Bath, Mr Meddick and Mr Gepp. I would like to particularly acknowledge those committee members from Eastern Victoria, whose strong commitment to the communities of the Latrobe Valley and Gippsland was clear throughout this inquiry. Thank you also to our secretariat staff—Justine Donohue, Jessica Wescott, Sam Leahy, Kieran Crowe and Patrick O'Brien—for their assistance in producing this report. I would like to acknowledge my own staff, in particular Chris Jervis, who assisted throughout this inquiry. I commend this report to the Parliament.

Ms SHING (Eastern Victoria) (12:34): This is an inquiry which, I think, is an important contribution to the conversation about transition and about development. Across the Latrobe Valley region we have seen decades of transition and change occurring in a very specific way, moving from the development of coal-fired power stations in the Latrobe Valley—their construction, their operation and the concentration of jobs and economic growth into one sector in particular—through to privatisation in the 1990s and then, as is indicated in the report, the announcement by Engie and Mitsui in 2015 that production would cease at the Hazelwood power plant in 2016.

Following the extraordinary sense of grief, frustration, rage and indeed disappointment associated with Hazelwood's decision to exit coal-fired power generation, we want to make sure that we provide for the greatest possible length of notice, which has occurred with the Yallourn power station in its seven-year notice period—the longest in Australia—but also that we are providing localised support in order to effect long-term change. Transition and development will take many, many years. The Latrobe Valley Authority has been central to the work not just in allocating initial financial assistance, programs and support but also in developing a narrative around where we want to see the Latrobe Valley region in five, 10, 20 and 30 years. We want to make sure that the opportunities that exist for people in the valley now, for their families and indeed for people who will move to the area are

enhanced as a consequence of progressive government decisions, and the Latrobe Valley Authority's work has been central to creating this narrative. On that basis, I commend the report to the house.

Ms BATH (Eastern Victoria) (12:36): I would like to add my thanks to the secretarial staff—Patrick O'Brien, Kieran Crowe, Justine Donohue, Jessica Wescott and Sam Leahy—for their contributions and to Hansard for coming down and walking around and through the valley and into the coalmines. I would also like to acknowledge the chair, Mr Erdogan, for conducting the hearings in a respectful, responsible and professional manner, and the other committee members.

The people of the Latrobe Valley are and have been in a state of transition. For the past 100 years their ingenuity and hard work have kept the lights on in Victoria and powered the state. People cannot halt the transition, but they deserve a government that is responsive to and responsible for the needs now and future investment in the region. They deserve to be heard. The announcement of the closure of the power station at Yallourn was the impetus for my bringing this inquiry into Parliament. The Labor members across the bench and Mr Meddick voted against this inquiry. They voted against having locals have a voice in the valley. They voted against this inquiry.

What I want to also say is that we very much thank the people who put in submissions: people, industries and businesses who came and provided content and value. The Labor members and Mr Meddick blocked every single amendment that I tried to make to this report. But here is the thing: the deliberations happen to be in the report. Now, in the budget this year, \$7.5 million is available from the government for this year; \$5 million of that is going to go to bureaucrats' wages and \$2.5 million is going to fund recommendation 8. I ask and call and invite the rest of the committee to read the Liberals' and Nationals' minority report to give a voice to other people in that inquiry.

Motion agreed to.

Papers

OMBUDSMAN

Investigation into Environment Protection Authority Decisions on West Gate Tunnel Project Spoil Disposal

The Clerk: Pursuant to section 25AA(4)(c) of the Ombudsman Act 1973, and following the transmission of the report on 31 May 2022, I lay on the table a copy of the Ombudsman's report *Investigation into Environment Protection Authority Decisions on West Gate Tunnel Project Spoil Disposal*.

PAPERS

Tabled by Clerk:

Crown Land (Reserves) Act 1978—Minister's Order of 28 March 2022 giving approval to the granting of a lease at Mordialloc—Mentone Beach Park.

National Parks Act 1975—Minister's notice of consent of 29 May 2022, under section 40 of the Act, to Premium Limestone Victoria Pty Ltd to conduct operations within Tyers Park to search for stone, under the *Mineral Resources (Sustainable Development) Act 1990*.

Planning and Environment Act 1987—Notices of Approval of the following amendments to planning schemes—

Alpine Planning Scheme—Amendment C62.

Banyule Planning Scheme—Amendment C168.

Baw Baw Planning Scheme—Amendment C143.

Boroondara Planning Scheme—Amendments C354 and C379.

Central Goldfields Planning Scheme—Amendment C37.

Frankston Planning Scheme—Amendment C138.

Glen Eira Planning Scheme—Amendments C214 (Part 1), C214 (Part 2), C241 and C242.

Golden Plains and Surf Coast Planning Schemes—Amendment GC183.

Greater Dandenong Planning Scheme—Amendment C220.

Hume Planning Scheme—Amendments C243 and C261.

Loddon Planning Scheme—Amendment C46.

Manningham Planning Scheme—Amendment C134.

Maribyrnong Planning Scheme—Amendment C175.

Melbourne Planning Scheme—Amendment C361.

Mitchell and Whittlesea Planning Schemes—Amendment GC198.

Monash Planning Scheme—Amendment C163 (Part 2).

Moreland Planning Scheme—Amendment C220.

Mornington Peninsula Planning Scheme—Amendments C262 (Part 2) and C267.

Murrindindi Planning Scheme—Amendment C66.

Nillumbik Planning Scheme—Amendment C140.

Victoria Planning Provisions—Amendment VC220.

Wangaratta Planning Scheme—Amendments C82 and C87.

West Wimmera Planning Scheme—Amendment C35.

Yarra Planning Scheme—Amendments C231 (Part 2) and C302.

Yarra Ranges Planning Scheme—Amendment C196.

Statutory Rules under the following Acts of Parliament—

Conservation, Forests and Lands Act 1987—No. 36.

Magistrates' Court Act 1989—No 33.

Residential Tenancies Act 1997—No.35.

Road Safety Act 1986—No. 38.

Service Victoria Act 2018—No 32.

Supreme Court Act 1986—No. 34.

Victorian Energy Efficiency Target Act 2007—No 37.

Subordinate Legislation Act 1994—

Documents under section 15 in respect of Statutory Rule Nos. 25, 29, 32, 33, 34, 35 and 36.

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

Minister's Declaration of Excluded Zones under the Windfall Gains Tax and State Taxation and Other Acts Further Amendment Act 2021.

Minister's Order to amend the class of specified entities to exclude R&L Services Victoria Pty Ltd and CP Services Victoria Pty Ltd from that class under the Financial Management Act 1994.

Wildlife Act 1975—Wildlife (Prohibition of Game Hunting) Notice No. 3 (*Gazette No. S258, 26 May 2022*).

Proclamations of the Governor in Council fixing operative dates in respect of the following acts:

Assisted Reproductive Treatment Amendment Act 2021—Sections 4(3), 5, 6, 30, 39, 55, 56 and 57—24 June 2022 (*Gazette No. S267, 31 May 2022*).

Domestic Animals Amendment (Reuniting Pets and Other Matters) Act 2022—Parts 1 and 3, other than section 37—1 June 2022 (*Gazette No. S271, 1 June 2022*).

Business of the house

NOTICES

Notices of motion given.

Notices of intention to make a statement given.

GENERAL BUSINESS

Mr DAVIS (Southern Metropolitan—Leader of the Opposition) (12:47): I move, by leave:

That precedence be given to the following general business on Wednesday, 8 June 2022:

- (1) order of the day 14, second reading of the Meat Industry Amendment (Rabbit Farms) Bill 2021;
- (2) order of the day made this day by Mr Davis, second reading of the Independent Broad-based Anti-corruption Commission Amendment (Facilitating Timely Reporting) Bill 2022;
- (3) the notice of motion given this day by Mr Davis on the production of documents relating to InsightsVictoria;
- (4) the notice of motion given this day by Mr Davis on the production of documents relating to the interdepartmental WorkSafe steering committee;
- (5) notice of motion 729, standing in the name of Ms Maxwell on an inquiry into workplace behaviour in the Victorian Parliament;
- (6) order of the day 60, resumption of debate on a motion relating to Victorian Building Authority fee increases; and
- (7) the notice of motion given this day by Mr Davis on gas supply and prices.

Motion agreed to.

Members statements

QUEEN ELIZABETH II PLATINUM JUBILEE

Mr DAVIS (Southern Metropolitan—Leader of the Opposition) (12:48): I want to take this opportunity to note the great service that Queen Elizabeth II has given to this country and to the commonwealth. Seventy years, the platinum jubilee, is an appropriate achievement, an amazing achievement, done with dignity, with grace and with good common sense. I think Victorians can be very proud of the model of government we have here in Victoria. I think we can be very proud of the contribution that the Queen has made to Victoria. I note that earlier in the day a comment was made about the Queen opening the Parliament here in 1954. I think that that is an important recognition of our heritage as a Westminster parliament, a parliament that draws on the traditions and concepts that were built up over 1000 years of constitutional development and history in England. I do think that the monarchy is a significant buttress to our freedoms. It has been a successful model in Victoria that has provided a very strong form of government. I think over the weekend we all saw the concert, the trooping of the colour, the church service and many of the other recognitions of Queen Elizabeth II's remarkable service, and I say God save the Queen.

MALAYALEE DOCTORS OF VICTORIA INCORPORATED

Ms VAGHELA (Western Metropolitan) (12:49): I recently attended the inaugural gathering and celebrations by the organisation named Malayalee Doctors of Victoria—MDV—Incorporated. The Malayalee community comes from the southern state of India called Kerala. The Malayalee community is very learned and accomplished, and this association is a key example of their great work. Medical doctors hailing from Kerala were present on this special occasion to acknowledge and appreciate each other's work. The cultural entertainment was fantastic, particularly by Janaki Easwar, the youngest ever participant of TV show *The Voice*.

I was pleased to know that MDV was founded to extend social support, offer networking, undertake charitable activities, provide support to immigrant communities and conduct community activities in the state of Victoria. They have built a great system for the community to explore their roots, cultural values, ethics, health and wellbeing, as they all share a common cultural background and language. Such support is vitally important for doctors, as they experience anxiety, depression and burnout significantly more than the general population. The overwhelming pressures of health care often create mental health issues for many doctors. We all know that doctors, along with other healthcare staff,

have played the most crucial role in supporting us during the pandemic. I congratulate the committee and members of MDV and commend their efforts.

QUEEN ELIZABETH II PLATINUM JUBILEE

Dr BACH (Eastern Metropolitan) (12:51): I also want to pay homage to the Queen today. It was wonderful to see over the weekend in Britain fantastic celebrations—fitting celebrations—for her platinum jubilee. It is amazing that Her Majesty the Queen has spent 70 years on the throne—70 years of quite extraordinary duty and application to her role as our head of state here in Australia. The question of our system of government is one which I feel different people of goodwill can have different views regarding. For mine, however, I sincerely hope that Her Majesty and Her Majesty's heirs and successors will forever reign over us here in Victoria. Based on recent information, any one of us could soon be joining the ranks of failed former politicians, and certainly my view is that it would be quite a chilling thing in future to see perhaps a President Kevin or a President Malcolm—heaven forbid a President Dan. Instead we should stay with what we have now, the outstanding system whereby the Queen has served us so brilliantly for such an extraordinary period of time, as I am sure her heirs and successors will also do. God save the Queen.

DEMOCRATIC LABOUR PARTY

Mr FINN (Western Metropolitan) (12:52): It is with enormous pride that I rise in this house for the first time representing the Democratic Labour Party. The DLP has a long and proud history of serving the people of Victoria, and it is my intention to uphold that tradition and indeed expand it. According to the Supreme Court of Victoria the DLP is really and legally the real labour party. The DLP in itself is a conservative labour party totally committed to working in the best interests of workers, small businesses, family farms and indeed families themselves. In my new role I will be adamant in my support for freedom for all, including those who cannot speak for themselves.

The Andrews government must return to Victorians all rights and freedoms that it has removed from the people of this state immediately, beginning with the total abolition of all mandates. The impending energy crisis is man-made. The government should immediately allow exploration for further gas supply and the use of existing coal supplies to ease the financial pain felt by families right across this state. I will continue to speak up for the people of Melbourne's west and fight for the fair go that they have long been denied by both ALP and Liberal governments. I will be telling them the DLP is on their side. Going on the reaction I have received in recent days, they already know it and are more than happy to embrace what the DLP has to offer.

JOHN GOMMANS

Ms BATH (Eastern Victoria) (12:54): I would like to rise to share the sad news with the house of the passing of John Gommans and put on record here my condolences to his wife, Penny, and his family. John Gommans was a man of high principles and integrity. He was a scientist, an innovator, a businessman, a farmer and a family man. When I first met John and Penny at the Gippy Goat farm in Yarragon, as well as recounting the horrendous experience of having their farm invaded by 70 activists, they outlined their vision about creating a full paddock-to-plate experience and sharing that with Victorian families. Through their much-loved interactive farms, first at the Gippy Goat farm and now Caldermeade, John and Penny created a special place to grow understanding of how farming and food production work—a real paddock-to-plate experience, and an interactive place for families to meet.

It was my honour to work beside John to achieve his combined goal of strengthening farm trespass laws in Victoria so that farmers, their families and livestock have stronger protection from illegal on-farm invasion. Unwavering in her support, Penny supported John to be the very public face of law-abiding farmers. John was a man of his word, and his calm positivity and willingness to stand up for his family's vision and all livestock farmers is nothing short of inspirational. I thank John for his work, and his legacy lives on in the terms of the livestock management bill, which has become an act now.

TIANANMEN SQUARE COMMEMORATION

Mr QUILTY (Northern Victoria) (12:56): June the 4th is a date stained with the blood of martyrs. It marks the anniversary of the Tiananmen Square massacre. Protests began in Tiananmen Square in mid-April 1989, challenging the legitimacy of China's one-party system. The protest was led by students, and more than a million people gathered to demand greater accountability, democracy and free speech. With protests spreading to hundreds of cities across the country the Chinese Communist Party panicked. On 20 May the state council declared martial law, with 300 000 troops being deployed to Beijing. On 4 June soldiers marched into the square and slaughtered the demonstrators. Those who were not murdered were arrested, foreign journalists were expelled and media coverage was strictly controlled. Even now the history of the incident is suppressed in China. We cannot know how many were massacred, but there were tens of thousands of people in the square when the shooting began. The party purged anyone sympathetic to freedom, and China sank deeper into authoritarianism.

1989 was a global turning point for the failed genocidal ideology of communism. Eastern European countries chose democracy and freedom, China instead lurched into national socialism. China's extremism continues, as displayed by the genocide in Xinjiang and their irrational, anti-human COVID response. In China freedom has no value. People are just something to be crushed if they get in the way of government objectives. What we learn from Tiananmen is that governments cannot be trusted to protect our rights, our liberties or our lives. Governments do not keep us safe; they are the thing that we need protection from.

WORLD ENVIRONMENT DAY

Dr RATNAM (Northern Metropolitan) (12:57): A belated but happy World Environment Day for Sunday, everyone. I hope you were able to mark the day in some way by taking some time to enjoy nature. I had the pleasure of spending it in the foothills of the Toolangi State Forest with our brave forest defenders at an event hosted by the Victorian Forest Alliance. It brought the community together to join the fight to save the Tanglefoot remnant forests from even more logging by VicForests. These native forests are the lungs that allow us to breathe fresh air and provide the water that we rely on. They are the habitat for critically endangered species such as the Leadbeater's possum—the wollert—and the myriad plant and animal life that need our forests to survive.

We have just had the most extensive parliamentary inquiry into the extinction crisis facing our state. Yet not only have we not seen a formal response to this inquiry by the government, let alone the urgent funding needed for our threatened species recovery, we have the government's own logging company, VicForests, threatening even more of the forest habitat that our biodiversity relies on to stay alive. This also puts into question the treaty negotiations with Victoria's First Peoples because this is happening without their consent on their country. To add even more insult to injury, the Victorian Labor government has announced new laws that will slap forest defenders with draconian fines and jail terms for trying to save our environment. Worse, these peaceful protesters are defending areas of forest where courts have found VicForests to be illegally logging. It is clear that the Labor government wants to remove this obstacle to VicForests rather than stand up for our environment. I urge the government to withdraw their anti-protest bill. This World Environment Day I thank the mighty work of our fierce environmental warriors fighting to save our forests, our ecosystems and our planet from destruction.

Business of the house**NOTICES OF MOTION**

Ms TAYLOR (Southern Metropolitan) (12:59): I move:

That the consideration of notices of motion, government business, 683 to 746, be postponed until later this day.

Motion agreed to.

Bills

STATE TAXATION AND TREASURY LEGISLATION AMENDMENT BILL 2022

*Second reading***Debate resumed on motion of Ms SYMES:**

That the bill be now read a second time.

Ms WATT (Northern Metropolitan) (13:00): I rise today to speak on the State Taxation and Treasury Legislation Amendment Bill 2022. I am pleased and truly delighted that this bill builds on the Andrews Labor government's record of implementing a progressive taxation system—across our term in government we have cut or abolished taxes or fees 57 times—but more than that, I am thrilled about a number of taxation changes contained in this bill that take steps to improve the lives of Victorians living with a disability.

One of those key measures is the introduction of exemptions for wheelchair-accessible commercial vehicles from motor vehicle duty. In line with the 2022–23 budget announcement, from 1 July 2022 an exemption from motor vehicle duty will apply to new or near-new wheelchair-accessible vehicles that will be registered as commercial passenger vehicles and meet the relevant requirements to provide unbooked services—that is, hail work or at a taxi rank. Currently an exemption from motor vehicle duty is available for a privately owned motor vehicle that has been or will be specially converted to provide wheelchair access to an owner or a family member, so this measure is an expansion of existing motor vehicle duty exemptions and concessions to help Victorians living with a disability, a handicap or an injury. It provides a new exemption for a vehicle that is covered for wheelchair access to be used to provide unbooked commercial passenger vehicle services. This new measure is directed at supporting more wheelchair-accessible taxis.

I know that for many it is not always easy getting around our state, and many constituents in the Northern Metropolitan Region have contacted me about this very issue right across the region. What I have heard plenty of times is that the wait time for wheelchair-accessible taxis continues to rise and it is getting harder and harder for Victorians with a disability to access these critical services. It is not cheap to keep a wheelchair-accessible taxi on the road. The inquiry into the multipurpose taxi program explored how, for many operators, it was unviable to keep a wheelchair-accessible taxi running. To keep the service running an operator needs to be able to cross-subsidise with something that is more profitable than normal taxi work. Many taxi operators simply cannot afford to keep running a wheelchair-accessible taxi, and in the end they take them off the road.

Through this bill the government is supporting the provision of wheelchair-accessible transport options and empowering wheelchair users to better access the transport method that best suits their needs and circumstances. The measure will save eligible wheelchair-accessible commercial passenger vehicles thousands of dollars in motor vehicle duty and help ensure better services are provided to wheelchair users, who make more than 1 million commercial passenger vehicle trips per year. An eligible commercial passenger vehicle owner that provides unbooked services will save \$2772 in motor vehicle duty on the purchase of a \$90 000 wheelchair-accessible commercial passenger vehicle, based on the 2021–22 rates. The above figure of \$2772 represents the concessional duty that currently applies to an application to register a commercial passenger vehicle that has been specifically converted for wheelchair access. The full duty payable on a \$90 000 vehicle is \$4680.

In 2021, 975 wheelchair-accessible vehicles were registered with Commercial Passenger Vehicles Victoria and met the requirements to provide unbooked commercial passenger vehicle services. That comes from the 2020–21 annual report for Commercial Passenger Vehicles Victoria. It is our hope that, through measures like this, this number will grow and give people with a disability greater transport options. This measure expands and complements the current suite of motor vehicle duty exemptions and concessions for the transport of people with a disability, handicap or injury and builds on the Andrews Labor government's body of work supporting Victorians with a disability.

There is an additional measure in this bill that builds on that work. This bill provides an exemption from land tax for land on which a specialist disability accommodation enrolled dwelling is being constructed. This construction-phase exemption will be available for a maximum of two years and will operate retrospectively from the 2020 land tax year onwards. A special disability accommodation, or SDA, enrolled dwelling has been specially designed to cater for the needs of people with sensory, intellectual, cognitive or physical impairment. An SDA resident is someone who is an NDIS participant residing in an NDIS-enrolled dwelling and who receives an SDA payment as part of their NDIS support plan.

Although a discrete exemption has been available since the 2020 land tax year for land that is occupied or available for occupation as an SDA-enrolled dwelling, this exemption did not extend to land in the construction phase. This is out of step with the treatment of other specialist accommodation types, including supported residential services, which are eligible for an exemption for up to two tax years whilst the accommodation facility is being constructed on the land or in the construction phase. The construction phase exemption for SDA-enrolled dwellings will operate retrospectively from the 2020 land tax year onwards to align with the discrete exemption for land that is occupied or available for occupation as an SDA-enrolled dwelling. Retrospectivity will not have an adverse impact on landowners as the exemption is beneficial in nature. Taxpayers who are eligible for this exemption and have paid tax for any of the 2020 and 2021 tax years will be entitled to claim a tax refund. By aligning with the timing of the introduction from the 2020 tax year of the discrete exemption for land that is occupied or available for occupation as an SDA-enrolled dwelling, retrospective operation of the exemption will ensure consistent treatment with other specialist accommodation types which are eligible for an exemption for up to two tax years whilst land is in the construction phase.

A similar measure operates in Queensland, but the remaining jurisdictions do not have specific or equivalent land tax exemptions for an SDA-enrolled dwelling whether under construction or otherwise. It is certainly good to hear that Victoria is moving ahead. This builds on the previous initiative on motor vehicle duty to ensure the tax system works in a way that supports Victorians living with a disability. These are important, meaningful steps to make some improvements for those living with a disability by pulling some of the levers available through our taxation system.

This bill also creates a windfall gains tax exemption for our state's universities. As was announced in the 2021–22 Victorian budget, the government is introducing a windfall gains tax on rezoning decisions that create a land value uplift of more than \$100 000. The windfall gains tax to come into effect on 1 July 2023 will ensure that the community receives a fair share of the value generated from government rezoning decisions. This is an important integrity measure that takes the sugar off the table and ensures proceeds are returned to the community and we avoid situations like we saw at Fishermans Bend when the Leader of the Opposition was the Minister for Planning; we certainly do not want a repeat of that.

Since the introduction of the windfall gains tax the government, led by the Parliamentary Secretary to the Treasurer, has consulted widely with industry ahead of its commencement. As part of this process the government has agreed to an up-front exemption for the windfall gains tax on land owned by an Australian university in certain circumstances. In order for an exemption to apply the university must satisfy the commissioner of state revenue that any revenue derived from the rezoned land will be used to further the university's charitable purposes—that is, by reinvesting the proceeds into their educational offerings—and I think that makes perfect sense.

There are a number of other changes contained in this bill. The bill replaces the current refund model for recently constructed or renovated principal places of residence—or PPRs as they are known—with an up-front exemption from land tax, including a clawback mechanism if the exemption's requirements are not fully met. The current refund model requires land tax to be paid up-front during the construction or renovation phase and it can only be refunded after landowners have moved into the finished residence. The new exemption does not require the land tax to be paid up-front and will reduce the financial burden and red tape for landowners. It will also be consistent with the rest of the

PPR exemption provisions, which provide an up-front exemption rather than a refund. The amendment will take effect from 1 July 2022. This means that if construction or renovation of a PPR is completed on or after 1 July 2022, the landowner may apply for an up-front exemption for the 2023 tax year onwards.

There is so much more in this bill, including confirmation that an exemption from payroll tax applies to certain wages paid under employment agency and other related arrangements. The amendment is intended to confirm the longstanding policy position in Victoria that an exemption from payroll tax is available for wages paid to service providers by an employment agent where the agent supplies their common-law employees to a client who is exempt from payroll tax. An example of that might be a charity or public hospital. A recent decision in Queensland, in their Court of Appeal, held that the equivalent payroll tax provisions in Queensland did not apply to common-law employees, casting doubt over the application of the exemption to common-law employees in Victoria as opposed to independent contractors. This initiative seeks to strengthen Victoria's existing law and bring it into line with our northern neighbours in New South Wales, who have a similar exemption in the provision of wages paid to service providers that are common-law employees of an employment agent.

The bill clarifies the time at which a deemed assessment of a dutiable transaction is made and served when the transaction is processed using the online duty payment system. The amendment clarifies the point in time at which a deemed assessment is taken to have been made and served if the person uses the online duty payment system—that is, the latter of the making of an irrevocable commitment to pay duty or to not pay duty, as the case requires, or the completion of the dutiable transaction. Now, there is a tongue twister. The amendment also confirms that an estimate of duty provided by an online duty payment system is not an assessment of tax, delivering further certainty to users and ensuring that revenue laws evolve to reflect the current operational environment.

Furthermore, the bill amends the Taxation Administration Act 1997 to permit the disclosure of protected information to certain specific commonwealth enforcement bodies and to enable further commonwealth enforcement bodies to be prescribed by regulation. These bodies include the Australian Financial Security Authority; the Australian Transaction Reports and Analysis Centre, known as AUSTRAC; and member bodies of the Phoenix Taskforce where the disclosure is in connection with their law enforcement or public revenue protection activities. This change seeks to authorise a secondary disclosure of protected information with the consent of the person to whom the information relates. Currently if a person receives protected information from a tax officer under a permitted disclosure, they are prohibited from making a secondary disclosure—or a non-disclosure, as it is also known—on that information to another party. The amendment only authorises secondary disclosure in one new situation: where the person to whom the information relates gives consent to a secondary disclosure by the recipient of the information from a tax officer. This amendment seeks to place a five-year limit on the ability for a taxpayer to lodge an objection out of time.

In this bill there are a number of important taxation reforms that build on the Andrews Labor government's record of implementing a progressive taxation system. Let us not forget that our government has cut or abolished taxes 57 times since coming to government. This includes increasing the payroll tax free threshold twice since coming to government so that fewer small to medium-sized businesses pay any payroll tax. Last July we cut the regional payroll tax rate to 1.2125 per cent—just one-quarter of the metropolitan rate and the lowest in the nation. It is interventions like these that have seen the regional unemployment rate fall to 3.2 per cent—the lowest in the nation and less than half of what it was when those opposite were voted out of office. So we have supported businesses through the worst of the pandemic with payroll tax cuts that have saved Victorian businesses about \$1.7 billion up to 2021–22 and will save them about \$4 billion over the forward estimates.

In addition—it bears repeating—this bill contains two very important measures that will support Victorians living with a disability. The introduction of exemptions for wheelchair-accessible commercial vehicles from motor vehicle duty will increase the number of wheelchair-accessible taxis on the road. This will make it easier to access these taxis and increase the accessible transport options

in our state. Further to that, we are providing an exemption from land tax for land on which a specialist disability accommodation enrolled dwelling is being constructed. That is really something to be proud of, and I hope that for people with a disability in our state that are looking to travel around and live their lives the changes in this bill before us today bring them some comfort in continuing to live an enriched and valued life here in our state.

Mr DAVIS (Southern Metropolitan—Leader of the Opposition) (13:14): I am pleased to rise and make a contribution to this State Taxation and Treasury Legislation Amendment Bill 2022. This bill stands in very stark contrast to recent state taxation bills over previous years. Each of those years has seen a huge surge in taxation, with a raft of new taxation measures introduced. This bill, by contrast—and the context is important here—cleans up the results of mistakes in previous years in a number of areas and indeed makes a number of modest changes. I will quickly cover some of those areas. The bill amends the Borrowing and Investment Powers Act 1987 and makes amendments to provide new regulation-making powers. This may impact on local government. We are cautious about what appears to be a modest change actually erecting a further barrier for local government, but that is not something we will oppose.

We support the removal of duty on wheelchair-accessible taxis. We support the land tax changes as sensible steps. We note that the payroll tax changes are modest, and we note that the clean-up act on the windfall gains tax is, I think, a first step in cleaning up a lot of problems with that windfall gains tax bill—a bill that we opposed strongly, a bill that imposed a big new tax on housing and a bill that is going to have a huge effect on housing affordability. We are conscious, let us be clear, of the issues here. The decision to exempt universities from some of the windfall gains tax provisions is not opposed by the opposition, but we note this is a first recognition by government of unintended effects of the nasty windfall gains tax that was passed a year ago.

We do have significant quibbles with a small clause in this, clause 34, which relates to objections lodged out of time. In itself it is a very modest change, but we think it will have a particularly harsh impact on a small number of taxpayers, and I want to put on record my concerns here. I thank the government for the information it has provided there. It relates, as we say, to a modest number—0.5 per cent—of objections received by the State Revenue Office. There were seven of these in 2017–18, 15 in 2018–19, 11 in 2019–20, 13 in 2020–21 and seven in the financial year 2021–22 that we are in. So we are talking about a very small number of people, often where particular circumstances apply and the State Revenue Office, the chief officer, has had capacity to allow objections at a later period beyond five years. These again are a very small number of objectors where discretion has been exercised by the SRO, which is not known for its love. There is not the milk of human kindness at the SRO, to be honest. You have got the SRO commissioner providing this latitude to a small number of taxpayers, and we think that it is harsh and cruel that the government is going to close down that opportunity for the SRO to exercise discretion.

It is important in this bill to get the context of where we are: the huge surge in taxation that has occurred under this government and the fact of the context in which these minor changes that are in this bill—relatively minor changes—are placed. I mean, this is the eighth budget of Daniel Andrews as Premier, and the current Treasurer. This will be Labor having been in power, by election day, for 19 of 23 years. It is a budget, a tax bill, that points to Labor's tax and deceit and debt, and it is the highest spending budget in the state's history. These tax revenues are part of that, and the previous raft of new taxes—42 new taxes brought in and a number sitting in the wings waiting to come forward, particularly the big new tax on housing that Labor proposed to put on every subdivision over three in the state. That would hit a metropolitan house at median price with about \$20 000 in extra tax, a huge hit for young families. In the country it is about \$12 000. Make no mistake, the government has that tax sitting in the wings. If it is re-elected, the tax will be brought back. It is hard to think of a worse government for tax in the state's history, but a Labor-Greens government could be elected depending on what happens in November. We will be seeking to be elected, but a Labor-Greens government would be beholden to the Greens plans on the big new housing tax, which would see a doubling of the collections. It would

see a \$40 000 hit on homes to collect more revenue for the projects that the Greens have outlined. They say that the government's proposal for the tax on new housing should be doubled—it should be \$40 000. That would be a huge hit on young families seeking to buy a new home.

As I said, this is the highest spending, highest taxing and biggest debt government in Victoria's history. Tax collections, it is important to note, have increased by 80 per cent, from \$16.9 billion in 2013–14 to a forecast \$30.5 billion in 2022–23. Land tax has gone up from \$1.7 billion in 2013–14 to a forecast \$4.8 billion in 2022–23—a 192 per cent increase in land tax, having risen from 10 per cent to 17 per cent of total state tax revenue. And land transfer duty, stamp duty, has increased from \$4.2 billion in 2013–14 to this year—2021–22—\$10.194 billion. That surely is a peak, and it is forecast to be \$8.2 billion in 2022–23—a 97.4 per cent increase, more if you take the \$10 billion figure of the current year. Payroll tax has increased from \$4.95 billion in 2013–14 to a forecast \$6.8 billion in 2022–23.

But it is important to compare this to what has actually happened to the economy. The gross state product is up from \$399 billion in 2013–14 to an estimated \$494 billion in 2021–22—a 23.7 per cent increase. So the increase in the GSP is far smaller than the huge surge in state taxation, and that is a burden on the Victorian economy, it is a burden on families and it feeds through directly into their cost of living. That is a huge, huge difference.

People will remember 2014 and they will remember the Premier looking down the barrel of the Channel 7 camera on the night before the 2014 election. He was asked about taxation, and he said he would not introduce new taxes. That is what Premier Andrews, then Leader of the Opposition, said:

I make that promise, Peter, to every single Victorian.

But now, since then, Labor has introduced more than 40 new taxes and, as I said, there are some waiting in the wings.

Why are these taxes needed? It is such a huge cost. Well, we know that there has been a huge surge in waste and mismanagement. We saw at the Public Accounts and Estimates Committee the other day the Minister for Transport Infrastructure refuse to rule out that the blowouts on projects were more than \$28 billion. She would not provide an alternate overall figure—she refused to do that—but would not rule out that there is much greater than \$28 billion in cost blowouts. This is waste on projects, over and above the amount.

Ms Taylor interjected.

Mr DAVIS: Ms Taylor, it may be inconvenient for you, but actually the revenue that comes in through the state taxation bill is a very important context here. As I have outlined, state taxes have increased across the period of this government, and this bill amends some of the mistakes that were made by this government in the previous years. For example, with the windfall gains tax, which is such a huge hit on housing affordability, they have had to make amendments in this budget to correct the problem in the previous budget by removing university projects from the windfall gains tax. We do not oppose that, but we recognise that that is just the first of a series of blunders that have been made in the windfall gains tax process.

There is waste and mismanagement—more than \$28 billion of project waste and blunders and cost blowouts—and this is a government that cannot control its costs. It cannot keep its costs under control. We see that wherever we look. There is increased debt, and I will have more to say about that later in the week. But the debt will get to \$167.5 billion by 2025–26. That is what is put in the budget this time. We think that that is conservative, and we know that Moody's and Standard & Poor's are very worried about the Victorian economy. They have singled out the Victorian budgetary position as distinct from those of the other states. Moody's has stated that Victoria is at risk of a credit downgrade, potentially forcing up the debt servicing costs as a share of state revenue. This is a very serious point. The huge revenue increase has been squandered on increased numbers of very senior executives in the state public service, a more than 100 per cent increase across the period of this government. We have

seen the huge waste and mismanagement across the period of this government, the huge cost blowouts. So huge tax taken in, but a failure to use it well.

As I say, the ratings agencies have been very clear about the position of Victoria, noting that Moody's said:

Despite the underlying strength of the Victorian and broader Australian economy, we expect Victoria's debt burden will not stabilise before the end of fiscal 2027, further increasing ... pressure on the state's rating.

Standard & Poor's global ratings agency analyst Rebecca Hrvatin warned of ongoing concerns about Victoria's finances. She said that, while the budget marked a strong recovery post COVID, after-capital account deficits and rising debt levels remained key downside risks. She said:

The state's debt levels are likely to soar past 200 per cent of operating revenues by fiscal 2024 due to historically high infrastructure spending, exacerbated by ... inflationary pressures and some project-related cost overruns.

I think that is the understatement of the year.

The ratings agencies are an interesting group. They look at all sorts of firms and jurisdictions closely and provide independent advice. It is interesting to hear what Tim Pallas said back in 2018. Off the back of the work that had been done in that period from 2010 to 2014, he crowed about Victoria being one of only two states with a prized AAA stable credit outlook from both Moody's and Standard & Poor's. He basked in the 'independent and international affirmation' of Standard & Poor's—those were his words. It is a different story now. He is at loggerheads with the agencies. He is becoming very dismissive of the ratings agencies and their successive downgrades. But of course they are downgrading Victoria because of the state government's mismanagement. The spending has not been controlled, the cost blowouts have not been controlled and the increases in tax have crimped the economy. The huge tax increases have pushed up the cost of living. As I have said, the 80 per cent increase in state tax take over the period of this government is a huge clobber on average, everyday Victorians and Victorian businesses. It makes us less competitive with other jurisdictions both in Australia and elsewhere.

We have said very clearly on a number of these state taxation matters that we will not bring in Labor's big new housing tax. We are fully opposed to Labor's big new housing tax. But the community should know that if Labor is re-elected they will get it, and if it is re-elected in partnership with the Greens they will get a double clobber. The Greens want to double the big new housing tax. That is the context we are facing with these tax bills that come to the chamber at the moment. We are in the context of massive tax increases and the uncompetitiveness of the Victorian economy.

We have said on that big new housing tax that we would introduce the planning reforms that the government sought to shackle with them. They are on the shelf. They are waiting to be done. We have said we would take them off the shelf and we have said that we will implement these reforms where Labor failed. We will, within three months of coming to office, after consultation with local government and while retaining more local control and protections over planning decisions, largely implement the proposed reforms. The reforms are the result of several years of expert evidence, advice and solutions provided to the government by the commissioner for better regulation, by the Urban Development Institute of Australia, by the Property Council of Australia and by others.

Sitting suspended 1.30 pm until 2.02 pm.

Mr DAVIS: As I resume, I make the point again of the context of this state taxation bill: the huge increase of 80 per cent in Labor taxation since 2013–14, the modest increase in the size of our GSP, the challenges that we face and the plans of the state government to increase new taxes. There is no question that if they are elected they will put in the big new housing tax, which will add \$20 000 to a median house in metropolitan Melbourne and \$12 000 in country Victoria. We know if they are in

coalition with the Greens that the Greens want double that tax on housing. They want a \$40 000 hit on a median Melbourne house price, and that is what the Greens have announced is their policy.

I think it is important in that context to see the challenges that the state faces. The context of the new taxes that Labor have introduced over the period of eight years of government, the more than 40 new taxes and the massive increases I outlined in stamp duty, land tax and payroll tax—the major taxes, but also the raft of new taxes introduced—is an important context. Daniel Andrews has said to get out of the mire that the state is currently in we need to grow the state, and of course we need to grow the state. But it is very hard to grow the state when you have had falls in GSP. Victoria's position has been worse than other states, with the 263 days of lockdowns, much more than other states and the longest in the world. Victoria is the only state to have a significant fall in GSP.

Victoria is the only state to see a massive fall in its population—44 700 over a year statewide and a fall in Melbourne's population of more than 60 000 in one year. That is a huge drift of population—a fleeing of population—from the state. Obviously that has got different components. It has got a natural component in it, it has got overseas migration and it has obviously got net interstate migration. And if you want to see a clear figure that is a marker to the state's position, the fall in the position of net interstate migration is the clearest one of the lot. You have to go back to 1997 to see a net outflow of people for the 30 years before that. After that it turned around and we had significant growth in population by movement from other states and territories. But this year we had a fall, and people more often left Victoria than came to Victoria from other states and territories. So it is very hard to see how the Premier plans growth when he has had a record of falling population and people fleeing the state. Obviously tax is not the way to make people come to the state; a raft of new taxes is not the way to do that. You cannot tax your way to prosperity. Victoria has become increasingly unattractive to inbound investors, and many who would have previously moved here will not. That is that clear marker that I have laid out and the clear position.

We have obviously said there needs to be a focus on recovering and rebuilding, and our commitment is to no new taxes. This state taxation bill, as I have outlined, is actually a modest bill in itself, but in the context of recent years of massive tax hikes and massive tax-take increases—an 80 per cent state tax increase across the period of this government—it is a huge hit on the living standards of Victorians and a huge hit that feeds directly through to the cost of living for everyday Victorians. I could use many, many examples. The land tax that is applied to powerlines on state land is fed directly through into the price of electricity. So we have seen in recent months an increase in electricity charges with a straight flow-through from the increased land tax that the state government has clobbered the electricity providers with. The state government are desperate for revenue—they will grab it anywhere they can—but that is a straight feed-through, a straight cost, that goes and touches everyday Victorian households and everyday Victorian businesses.

It is true that the growth also has to centre around productivity, and the productivity record in Victoria is shocking. We have seen productivity drift over the last eight years. In the period from 1995–96 to 1999–2000 productivity rose by 3.66 per cent. Between 2000–01 and 2009–10 labour productivity stalled at a third of that rate, 1.66 per cent, and over the period 2010–11 to 2019–20 labour productivity slipped even further to 0.9 per cent. You cannot actually get ahead if you have got declining productivity or static productivity, and that is a very bad outcome for Victoria. The latest ABS per capita data shows Victoria's flat economic performance. GSP in June 2014 was \$68 457 per person. Seven years later, GSP in June 2021 was \$70 292—a measly increase of \$1835 per person. This compares to the increase in GSP under the Kennett Liberal government of \$13 491 between 1992 and 1999. Relative to other states, Victoria's GSP per capita at \$70 292 is the third-lowest of all states and territories, well behind New South Wales at \$77 532 and well behind the national average of \$78 245. For Victoria's economy to improve it has got to get its GSP up and its GSP per capita.

It is important, I think, in this context to look at the impacts of state government regulations and controls that have often been counterproductive. The Victorian Chamber of Commerce and Industry (VCCI) had its cost and ease of doing business task force, and I pay tribute to the work that that task

force has done. They produced a critical paper laying out the productivity problem in Victoria, and they said:

Victoria has a productivity challenge that started well before the pandemic.

Note this: ‘well before the pandemic’. Labor likes to point at the pandemic; no, no, no—the debt was already up. We were already in deficit on 31 December 2019. The state was in deficit, the big project blowouts were locked and loaded and they were careering out of control. We already had the problems with the metro, we had the problems with the West Gate Tunnel—and I could go on. At that time it was very clear that Melbourne and Victoria were heading in the wrong direction.

The Committee for Melbourne, in its recent international benchmarking study, recognised the same problem, saying:

GDP per capita in Melbourne is now 20% below its peer group average, while household disposable income has also fallen relative to others.

That is an international benchmarking exercise by the Committee for Melbourne, and it is an important benchmarking exercise. I do not deny that Australia more generally has a productivity problem, but Victoria’s performance is not excused by that, and it is actually, as I have already outlined, a laggard performer in national productivity performance. Income per head has hardly moved. It is no wonder that Victorian families are actually worried about the cost of living, with rising prices and stagnant income under Daniel Andrews. They have every right to be angry. That is the achievement of Labor in Victoria.

The VCCI survey—and I again pay tribute to the detailed work that was done by VCCI—said:

Doing business in Victoria is harder than it needs to be—not just financially, but in terms of time demands and stress. Nearly 40 per cent of Victorian businesses say time is a bigger cost to doing business than money. This shows that some aspects of government regulations and approach to regulation are cumbersome and poorly administered. Pressures on business owners are particularly acute in parts of regional Victoria. Importantly, the most significant costs faced by Victorian businesses were present well before March 2020 and are likely to persist well beyond the COVID-19 recovery.

I make the point that the way to have greater tax revenue is to grow the economy. You have got to grow the economy. We do need some targeted population support to businesses in particular areas of high technical need and others, but we also do need to focus on actually lifting the productivity of the state rather than simply taxing our way out of these problems, because taxing is not the way to deal with these challenges that the state faces.

I think Victoria does need to go forward with this way, and that is why we have outlined a Victorian productivity commission. We actually think that Victoria is remiss in not having a body of this nature—a body that is equivalent to the one in New South Wales or the national body or South Australia’s. The challenge is there for us to look at ways of growing the pie, growing the outcome for the whole community and doing that in a collaborative and thoughtful way, and a productivity commission in Victoria can be part of achieving that. Early reports of the productivity commission could begin to look at a number of really significant ways forward.

I want to return to some of the sharp tax points that we have made. Concurrently with this budget, on 2 May, the state government virtually doubled the charges on building firms, builders and building surveyors, and indeed there are a raft of others to be regulated and registered over the next period. We say that huge increase is unjustified. It is another new tax directly on builders. It is another new tax on the building and construction industry, and those taxes are obviously passed through to consumers in the end, pushing up housing prices and making houses much less affordable. The state government has done this by regulation. It is not something that we can easily stop, but we have certainly called for a return to the previous levels of charge. It is clear that that would be a significant help. Of course it is the wrong time to be putting additional charges on building and construction. I think the state government has not thought through what is happening in the sector at the moment with the increases

in prices of steel, wood and other inputs as well as the labour shortages that are significant points as well. So it is the wrong time to put on new, harsh regulations and new charges.

We have heard what VCCI has said about the challenge of regulation in the state. We need to be smarter in the way we do this. We cannot simply jack up tax. As I said, in the context of this bill, which is in itself a modest bill—and many of the measures in it, as I have indicated, are supported by the opposition—tax has been jacked up over the last eight years across a wide front, with huge increases in stamp duty, huge increases in land tax, huge increases in payroll tax and more than 40 new and expanded taxes put in place in direct breach of Daniel Andrews's promise in 2014 and indeed the Treasurer's promise. The Treasurer made a similar promise in 2014, which he too has breached, and that set of facts is an important set of facts. People need to understand the context of the state government's taxing policy. They need to understand the impact that it is having on the state's economy and the impact that it is having on the state's competitiveness.

So, yes, we need to grow the state. Absolutely we can grow it with targeted population growth. We need to turn around the population that has been fleeing the state—that is what has been actually happening over the last 18 months under this government. Unlike other states, Victoria's population has fled in big numbers. As I said before, 44 700 statewide was the fall to 30 June last year, and the fall in Melbourne's population was 60 500. These are significant markers to the failures by the state government—the failure in Victoria—and that stands in stark contrast to every other state and territory in the nation. You cannot expect an economy to grow, you cannot expect an economy to come out and get to a durable position where it can actually provide in the way it should for families and businesses, if you have got these very high taxes and very heavy regulations. That is why we need to think more carefully about the way we do these things. That is why we need to focus on lifting productivity in a collaborative way. That is why we need to focus on ensuring that the population that is fleeing the state is turned around, and that is why we need to focus on maintaining a low-tax state, a state that does not stand out for all the wrong reasons.

Mr BARTON (Eastern Metropolitan) (14:17): I rise to speak on the State Taxation and Treasury Legislation Amendment Bill 2022. This bill makes a number of administrative changes to taxation laws, but what I would like to discuss is the motor vehicle exemption for wheelchair-accessible commercial passenger vehicles. This will save operators nearly \$3000 off their next vehicle. This is a win for essential wheelchair-access taxi vehicles in Victoria. Our wheelchair-access taxis are the backbone of local communities and are relied upon by thousands of Victorians with a disability. Putting wheelchair-accessible taxis on the road is expensive and in many cases financially unviable. We also know this because taxi drivers and operators throughout Victoria have been begging for assistance to keep this essential service on the road. Those in the industry have long relied on cross-subsidisation. What this means is that a wheelchair-accessible taxi service can only be provided by an operator if they are subsidised by somewhat more profitable work than normal taxi sedan work.

Extending the multipurpose taxi program to 80 000 Uber drivers has significantly reduced business for taxi operators and reduced the safety for the travelling public. For the past year and a half I have had the industry telling me just how much harder it is to keep wheelchair-accessible vehicles on the road, with operators already removing their vehicles because they cannot continue running at a loss. This exemption acknowledges the importance of our wheelchair-accessible taxis and their essential role in our community. I hope that this small change can help alleviate some of the financial burden experienced by these operators. There are a couple of requirements for this exemption. The vehicles must meet the requirements to provide unbooked work and must be less than two years old. The exemption will be introduced from 1 July this year.

Changes like these make a difference to our industry, and I continue to fight on many fronts for a sustainable pathway forward. I am still fighting for further transition payments for licence-holders, an increase in taxi fares and regulations that will ensure a true level playing field within our industry. You may not be hearing about this every day, but I can assure you not a day goes by when I am not taking these issues to the government. I commend this bill to the house.

Mr RICH-PHILLIPS (South Eastern Metropolitan) (14:20): I am pleased to make some remarks this afternoon on the State Taxation and Treasury Legislation Amendment Bill 2022. This taxation amendment bill is unusual in its relative brevity and the few matters that it addresses. As members of the house know, following the introduction of the budget the appropriation bills are usually accompanied by a state taxation amendment bill which implements or gives effect to the government's revenue changes. We have seen over the course of the last eight years that where a state taxation amendment bill has come in following a budget it has generally been to increase the tax burden on Victorians. We have seen that over the course of the last eight years time and time again. Despite the commitment that Mr Davis referred to earlier that the Premier made prior to the 2014 election, we have seen time and time again an increase in the tax impost on the Victorian community.

This taxation amendment bill is slightly different in that for once we are not seeing a large increase in the tax impost. The taxation amendment bill is largely administrative in the sense of the amendments it makes to the suite of current taxation legislation. Some of those changes are worthwhile. Mr Barton spoke about the change to the Duties Act 2000 with respect to duty on wheelchair-accessible vehicles. Other speakers have talked about changing the model for land tax where properties are being constructed to make it an up-front model rather than a model where someone needs to seek a refund after the fact. Those are worthwhile amendments to our taxation legislation.

But what is absent in this bill and what is absent from the government's overall approach is any commitment to tax reform. We have seen over the life of the government the tax burden as a proportion of gross state product (GSP) in this state increase. When this government came to office in 2014, state taxation as a proportion of gross state product was just on 4.8 per cent. That burden is now up to nearly 5.6 per cent, so we have seen an increase in proportionate terms in the state's tax take as a share of the state's economy. We are no longer in a situation where Victoria's taxes are the most competitive in Australia. We are now trailing the pack on tax competitiveness. It is more expensive in a tax sense to do business in Victoria than it is in other states. What we do not see from the government is any plan to change that, any plan to reform the tax base in this state, any plan to make taxation administration simpler in this state. We have seen the tax burden rise by about 15 per cent in real terms over the life of the government and no plan to change that, no plan to restore Victoria's tax competitiveness.

In preparing for this bill I went back and had a look at the way in which taxation legislation has changed over the life of this government. We hear from the government, we hear from the Minister for Government Services, the Minister for Regulatory Reform, who is also the Assistant Treasurer, about the government's commitment to reducing the burden of red tape, about the government's commitment to making it easier for people to do business in this state. But we have not seen that in the field of taxation administration. Over the life of this government, taxation legislation in Victoria has increased by 240 pages—from roughly 970 pages of legislation when the government came to office to now more than 1200 pages of taxation legislation.

To give an example, the Duties Act has increased from 416 pages to now more than 506 pages, and it has been amended 25 times in the life of this government. We have seen the Land Tax Act 2005 increase from 160 pages to now more than 260 pages, with 21 amendments over the life of this government. The Payroll Tax Act 2007 has increased by more than 30 pages, and the Taxation Administration Act 1997, which sits over the top of them all, has increased from 129 pages to 149 pages, with 23 amendments over the life of the government. So we have not seen the regulatory burden reduce for businesses in terms of taxation administration, we have seen it grow substantially. Our taxation legislation is more complex. It is changing regularly. As I said, in some instances 25 times has the legislation changed over the life of this government. So it is not making it easier for businesses to operate in this state. It is not making it easier for businesses to understand their taxation obligations in this state. The legislation is becoming longer, it is becoming more complex and it is becoming harder for business to use.

When you look at the way in which taxation has changed over the life of this government and the new taxes which have been introduced—and Mr Davis has spoken about that—you really do wonder about

the motivating factor driving the government. Yes, all governments want additional revenue. All governments are of the view that they can spend taxpayers money better than taxpayers can. But the way in which we have seen the taxation burden increase and the breadth of the taxation burden increase has been interesting. There are now a number of taxes on the state books, and it is worth referring to table, I think it is, 4.2 in the budget papers, which sets out the full list of tax measures in the state, to understand how many different tax measures there are but also in some instances how insignificant they are to the tax base.

To give an example, the newly introduced windfall gains tax, which is to apply in the next year and then increase in the out years, is forecast in 2025–26 to generate revenue of \$81 million. That is less than one-quarter of 1 per cent of the state's total tax revenue. The metropolitan planning levy is forecast to generate 0.06 per cent of the state's total tax revenue in the 2025–26 year. These are minuscule contributions to the total tax base of the state, yet their impact on the areas of the economy they hit—being development and being the creation of residential property, and we obviously have a huge number of issues with housing in this state, with the development of new housing and with housing affordability—is immense. The tax measures hit the housing sector substantially, but they make minimal contribution to the state's tax base. They add enormous administrative burden and they add substantial cost to housing, but they make minimal contribution to the tax revenue of this state. The metropolitan improvement levy is another one, with 0.64 per cent of the total state tax base; I referred to the congestion levy, 0.31 per cent of the state's tax base; et cetera. So we have got a number of small taxes which make minimal contribution to the tax base, which are administratively burdensome on the sectors they hit—and again it is particularly in the housing sector where they have a disproportionate disincentive effect—yet provide minimal revenue to the state.

At the other end of the scale we have the taxes which make the largest contribution to the state's revenue base: the largest single tax in the tax base, stamp duty—land transfer duty—accounts for roughly 25 per cent in the 2025–26 forecast; payroll tax, just over 23.5 per cent; and land tax, around 17 per cent of the tax base. So we rely on three large taxes for the vast majority of the state's tax revenue, and as a consequence the tax burden is spread very narrowly. The people who pay land transfer duty, stamp duty, are the people who purchase property in any given year, which is a small proportion of the total Victorian population. The people who pay payroll tax in any given year are obviously employers—again, a small proportion of the population. And the people who pay land tax is a less clearly defined proportion, because the State Revenue Office is pretty limited in the statistics it publishes around the number of taxpayers in each category, but it can be assumed to be a relatively small proportion of Victoria's total population of 6.5 million.

So we are in a situation where we have at one end of the scale a number of taxes which contribute tiny amounts of revenue to the state but cause substantial burden on the particular areas they impact—and as I said, again, residential property in particular—and at the other end of the scale the state is heavily reliant on three large taxes whose base is quite narrow. New South Wales under its former Treasurer, now Premier, Dominic Perrottet, at least had a program to look at tax reform. This is something we are not seeing from this government, so the tax burden continues to be borne by a small number of taxpayers paying large amounts of revenue on a small number of taxes while, as I said, at the other end of the scale we have small taxes contributing minimal revenue but having a major impact on the sectors they hit. We see the growth of those taxes obviously being inconsistent across the scale. While the tax base is forecast to increase largely in line with nominal GSP over the forward estimates, some taxes are growing substantially: the growth areas infrastructure charge will grow at more than 30 per cent over the forward estimates; land tax will grow at 23 per cent over the forward estimates; insurance duty, 22 per cent over the estimates; and payroll tax, 21 per cent over the forward estimates—well ahead of nominal economic growth.

So our tax model is broken. The base is narrow, there are lots of small taxes that contribute nothing but do harm to the economy and we have no agenda for reform from this government. So what we see with the tax bill today is welcome in the sense that it is not, for once, increasing taxes in this state, with

one exception, but what we are not seeing from this government—what we have not seen after eight years and what we do not see anywhere in the budget papers—is any commitment to reform. The state’s tax base is crying out for reform. We are seeing leadership out of New South Wales; what we need is leadership out of Victoria.

Victoria’s economy is in a very difficult situation, and Mr Davis has spoken about that and we will hear more about that with the debate on appropriation bills later on this week. But our tax take is now higher than it was when this government came to office as a share of the economy. It is higher than other states that we compete with. It is higher than international jurisdictions we compete with. We need to address our tax base. We need to address the way we levy taxes, the breadth of those taxes and the minor taxes we levy, and we need leadership from this government to ensure that we can have that reform that has been missing over the last eight years.

Ms TAYLOR (Southern Metropolitan) (14:33): I would like to pick up some points raised by the opposition, and I note that my learned colleague Ms Watt has already presented some key elements of this bill to this moment in the debate. However, I would like to pick up, firstly, on the issue of the windfall gains tax. I guess something that becomes very apparent in these kinds of debates is the values base and the priorities on either side of the chamber. Sometimes we agree on certain elements; more often than not, I would say, we tend to disagree. That is okay—we have different values, and that is fine.

This is where I am going, if you stay with me, with regard to the issue of the windfall gains tax. It is now to come into effect on 1 July 2023. It will ensure the community receives a fair share of the value generated from government rezoning decisions. Now, there is a further limb to this that is really critical, and that is that it is an important integrity measure that takes sugar off the table and ensures proceeds are returned to the community and we avoid a situation like we saw at Fishermans Bend with the Leader of the Opposition when he was planning minister, when he said, ‘Hey, developers, here we go—bring it on, go hard, knock yourselves out!’. But unfortunately he forgot about that funny little element that makes a community function well: amenity. And what about public schools? Oh, no, do not worry about that. Just send a really strong signal to the developers: ‘Go hard, go hard, go hard. Don’t worry about amenity. Off you go!’.

Hence you can see why there is an imperative to have measures such as the windfall gains tax. There is a good rationale behind it. Instead of quibbling over what it will or will not deliver—and I dare say that we disagree on what it will actually deliver—maybe consider the purposive element, the rationale behind it, which is actually: for the benefit of the community. I am just putting it out there. Again, you can see the difference in the underlying values that drive taxation in this state. I should say that since its introduction, the government, led by the Parliamentary Secretary to the Treasurer, has been consulting widely with industry, ahead of its commencement. So rest assured no-one is concealing this in any way. We are being very up-front with industry and making sure that we take them on the journey.

As has been noted already in the chamber, as part of this process the government has agreed to an up-front exemption from the windfall gains tax on land owned by an Australian university, in certain circumstances. In order for this exemption to apply the university must satisfy the commissioner of state revenue that any revenue derived from the rezoned land will be used to further the university’s charitable purposes, and therefore the proceeds will be reinvested in their educational offerings. And I think that is fair enough. I think we can all understand the rationale behind that.

On one little note I would say to Mr Davis that at a certain point in his speech he was talking down Victoria and saying that perhaps—associated with taxation measures, or whatever; I did not fully understand his point—it might not be so attractive to business. I would just say he should take heed of the former Treasurer, Mr Frydenberg. It did not pay off for him at all, talking down Victoria. So I would take a big step back from doing that, because we have a wonderful state. Do not in any way put down our businesses and the wonderful and productive contributions from our community. I am just

putting that out there. I would be very cautious about that. I do not know—we have just had a federal election—but yes, there were some consequences from talking down the state. So maybe they should take heed of that as well.

I go to the point that I think the opposition have made a lot of hoo-ha—it was a lot of hoo-ha, I would say, a lot of hot air—with the accusation of increasing taxes 42 times. Now, I would like to put that to bed. Can I put that to bed. Well, can I say the Andrews Labor government has cut or abolished taxes and fees 57 times since coming to government. So it is important to look at the fine detail, not these big, broad brushstrokes or something that suits a political narrative. Let us drill down. Let us look at the facts, because we are talking about numbers here. I will just repeat that. The Andrews Labor government has cut or abolished taxes and fees 57 times since coming to government. Let us put that on record, a factual statement. Yes, everyone has heard it; I am very happy. This includes increasing the payroll tax free threshold twice since coming to government so that fewer small to medium-sized businesses pay any payroll tax. Who knew?

Mr Gepp: That's not the case in regional Victoria, is it? Surely not.

Ms TAYLOR: Well, yes—an excellent point that you raise there, Mr Gepp. And last July we cut the regional payroll tax rate to 1.2125 per cent.

Mr Gepp: You're kidding.

Ms TAYLOR: Yes. Who knew? They do not want to talk about that. They cannot talk about that. That would look like we are actually considering regional Victoria. Who knew? We actually have members in regional Victoria as well.

A member interjected.

Ms TAYLOR: A case in point. Yes. Who knew?

Mr Gepp: I am going to have to raise a point of order if you keep introducing facts into this debate!

Ms TAYLOR: Yes, I am going overboard. The rate is just one-quarter of the metropolitan rate, I should say, to continue that point, and the lowest in the nation. Did you hear that? The lowest in the nation. Gee, that contravenes some points. I say 'points' as opposed to 'facts', right? Some propositions, I should say, then facts—let us make sure that they are clear on the table as well. It is interventions like this that have seen the regional unemployment rate fall to 3.2 per cent—the lowest in the nation. Who knew? I repeat: the lowest in the nation and less than half what it was when those opposite were voted out of office. Well, okay, I am sorry. Too many facts? No, I am going to keep going. I am going to keep on this theme. It might irritate those opposite that I keep raising facts, but I feel more comfortable in that zone. We supported businesses through the worst of the pandemic with payroll tax cuts, which have saved Victorian businesses about \$1.7 billion up to 2021–22 and will save them about \$4 billion over the forward estimates—again, more facts. I know it can be irritating, but that is how we roll in our Andrews Labor government; we deal with facts.

There are a few further points that I want to raise with regard to the so-called 42 new or increased taxes. They include the mental health levy, which those opposite now apparently support. But that changes day to day. Today is it 'We support the levy' or not? Because they have included that in their 42 new or increased taxes. So I do not know; I am a bit confused. Maybe they support it, maybe they do not.

Mr Gepp: They don't know.

Ms TAYLOR: They do not know, and tomorrow it could change again. It depends on the media and where they are going and what narrative they want to run. So we will see. I do not know, we could throw the dice. That is probably just as reliable. Anyway, their list counts the foreign absentee landowner surcharges for foreign purchasers six times. Newsflash for those opposite: taxes on foreign purchasers are not taxes on Victorians.

Mr Gepp interjected.

Ms TAYLOR: I know! In fact it is an integral measure to unlock housing supply for Victorians, placing downward pressure on prices and creating a level playing field with foreign developers. That kind of seems like an equitable measure. That would seem like it would work in the best interests of Victorians. I mean, maybe I am confused. No, I think I am right with that. I think I am on it, and I think it is okay. I think we know what we are doing with that, and I think there is a really good, purposive element behind that. So let us continue with that, shall we?

You have got to really call into question this, can I say, dodgy list—I am being cheeky—of 42 so-called new or increased taxes, because when you dig down into it and you see things such as the mental health levy, you have got to question: what does this actually mean? What are their priorities and what do they truly believe? Or are they just flip-flopping day to day? Well, I am thinking there is a lot of flip-flopping, and I do not really know where they are headed. But, true to form, we know that we are solid in our values and that this bill reflects our will to do the right thing by the Victorian community.

Dr BACH (Eastern Metropolitan) (14:43): It is good to rise to also make a contribution on the State Taxation and Treasury Legislation Amendment Bill 2022. I will pick up some of the good points that Ms Taylor made and some good points that Mr Rich-Phillips made in his contribution as well. I am not sure, to be honest, that Mr Rich-Phillips was entirely fair. He talked about the fact that he would have liked to see more reform—indeed tax reduction—through this measure that lies on the table of the house today. Previously I have also spoken about my desire to see a lowering of the tax burden here in Victoria, which has of course increased so significantly over the life of the Andrews Labor government. But, to be fair to the government, that is very difficult indeed when you are in particular so bad at managing major projects.

Ms Taylor spoke about lists. I have a list of blowouts, a list that is not contested in any way, a list that has circulated publicly and in the media for many months and a list that is simply compiled based on what the Andrews Labor government told us major projects would cost and what their own budget papers now say they are costing. We should not be unfair to the Treasurer and to those opposite. It is very difficult to envisage significant reductions in taxation when you have wasted \$28.1 billion of Victorian taxpayers hard-earned money on blowouts on major projects. My number, like I say, is not contested by anybody except the Minister for Transport Infrastructure. She returned to Parliament yesterday, which was fantastic, and she was at the Public Accounts and Estimates Committee, where Liberal and National members of that committee asked her some questions. She wanted to take the opportunity to say that \$28.1 billion is not the figure. Then she was asked, ‘Is it higher?’. Pointedly, and quite remarkably, she refused to deny that the figure may be even higher than that. Undoubtedly it is, because my list, which is circulated in the media and is not contested in any way by anybody, is a conservative list. For example, the budget papers are silent on the additional blowouts on the North East Link. Every transport expert says that the North East Link has undoubtedly blown out significantly recently, but we do not have that figure yet so I have not added to the total. As soon as I have it, I will add it to the total and to my list. Ms Taylor wanted to talk about lists. We must be fair, I say to my colleagues on this side of the house, in our discussions on this measure.

We will continue to work on this side of the house to make sure that we have prudent measures that we take to the Victorian people in November to lower the tax burden. However, again to pick up some of the points that Ms Taylor made in her contribution, I would love it if we were to be in a position to be far more expansive with the tax reform and tax reduction measures that we are currently feverishly working on. But that will be very difficult. That will be very difficult given that the government has already wasted \$28.1 billion of Victorian taxpayers money and very difficult considering other major projects are already blowing out very significantly. For example, we heard yesterday from the Minister for Transport Infrastructure regarding the Suburban Rail Loop. I have not included any information about the extraordinary blowout on the Suburban Rail Loop in my list. That is not included, for the information of the house, in the \$28.1 billion figure for blowouts under the Andrews Labor government.

Initially the government said that the Suburban Rail Loop would cost \$50 billion. The government has budgeted \$34.5 billion for the first third, thus you do not need to be a Rhodes scholar to figure out that that project, even before a shovel had hit the ground or a digger had started to dig up sewers, as one did the other day, had blown out by a minimum of \$50 billion, probably \$70 billion. Maybe the minister would assert that she will be able to build the second and third thirds of the Suburban Rail Loop for \$15 billion when the first third costs \$34 billion. If she would like to make that argument, I would invite her to do so.

There has been discussion of flip-flopping. When it comes to the tax bill and opportunities to reform taxation here in Victoria and to lower the burden, I do agree with Ms Taylor: flip-flopping is not helpful. Just nine days before the election Ms Catherine King, then the federal Shadow Minister for Infrastructure, Transport and Regional Development, made a quite extraordinary drop to the *Herald Sun*. In what was written up in the media as a \$4 billion power play, she said that she was going to unlock \$4 billion in funding set aside by Mr Frydenberg for infrastructure in Victoria. She said that she would work with the Andrews Labor government, quite correctly, and that if there is a change of government in November, she will work with the coalition parties. At the time I applauded her. In fact on her very first day as minister, that morning, before she was sworn in, I wrote to Ms King to extend the hand of bipartisanship that she had extended to the coalition parties here in Victoria and to commence a dialogue with her. But on her second day as minister, shamefully she ripped away that \$4 billion that she had promised in a shoddy attempt, albeit a successful one, to win votes in eastern Melbourne. She promised \$4 billion to be unlocked for infrastructure, working with the Andrews Labor government and then with the coalition if we were successful. Then—surprise, surprise—on her second day she tore that away. She broke her promise.

And what have we heard—I would ask through you, Acting President—from the Premier and from the Minister for Transport Infrastructure on this extraordinary ‘flip-flop’, to use Ms Taylor’s expression? Well, not a peep. When Scott Morrison looked sideways he was ‘miserable’ Morrison—‘miserable’ Morrison on infrastructure. Well, it turns out that Ebenezer Albanese is the biggest Scrooge of all. To rip \$4 billion in infrastructure funding away from Victoria after having promised it makes the task of tax reform and tax reduction in this state very difficult. I look forward to the advocacy of the Minister for Transport Infrastructure and the Premier to their federal colleagues. I am sure that he did not just pick fights for political gain with the former Morrison government. I am sure he was always sincere and that Minister Allan was always sincere in their advocacy on behalf of Victoria. I have already said publicly that we will continue to fight on this side of the house for our fair share here in Victoria under the Albanese government, who lied to Victorians in a major strategic drop to the *Herald Sun* nine days before the election. In fact Ms King stated in that article that she knew—

Mr Gepp: On a point of order, Acting President, I understand that taxation and the like can be a free-ranging debate, but I think the member is drawing some pretty long bows in his last couple of minutes in his contribution, which has focused all around the new federal government. I am not even sure if the ink is dry on the paperwork up there yet, but to be blaming them for something that is happening here in Victoria—I think let us give them a couple of months to perhaps stuff things up. But in the meantime can I suggest that the member should come back to the bill before the house rather than this frolic that he is on.

The ACTING PRESIDENT (Mr Melhem): I think one thing that I should say about this issue is it is quite relevant about taxation. Whether it is true or not is a matter for members to justify; it is not for the Chair to determine the truthfulness of comments or numbers.

Dr BACH: Thank you very much, Acting President. And before I conclude, I would not mind taking up the point about values that was made by Ms Taylor.

Mr Gepp interjected.

Dr BACH: Well, it was a good point, Mr Gepp. It was a good point, and Ms Taylor talked about integrity, and to her immense credit she did so with a straight face. She also spoke in her contribution about Mr Frydenberg and was happy to give us some unsolicited political advice, which I take on board in the spirit of cooperation in which it was imparted to us. I would note, given that the debate took that odd turn, that undoubtedly all political parties received a message at the federal election that to so many voters integrity matters. And it should. Integrity should matter for its own sake. I so oftentimes in the past have bemoaned the fact that I have felt that issues of integrity may be big news inside the Spring Street bubble but perhaps do not percolate more broadly in the community. I am talking about the corrupt scheme of the Andrews Labor government to seek to steal the 2014 election, the red shirts scheme. But that did not really harm the Andrews Labor government. But now I think the mood has changed in the community regarding integrity, and that is a great thing.

So to pick up Ms Taylor's theme, I do think that we have lessons to learn—all of us around this house—regarding the outcomes of the federal election, and my hope certainly is that all those many people in my electorate, for example, where I live in Surrey Hills in the electorate of Kooyong, continue to vote for integrity and in November vote out a crooked government that has raised our taxes so often.

Mr GEPP (Northern Victoria) (14:55): It is with great pleasure that I rise to speak to the State Taxation and Treasury Legislation Amendment Bill 2022. Pleasingly, this bill builds on the Andrews Labor government's record of implementing a progressive tax system in this state. As was so eloquently put by Ms Taylor earlier in the debate, we have proudly cut or abolished taxes and fees 57 times across the budget—57 times. It is important that we understand and that we underline those numbers, because what we hear opposite on many occasions is something completely different. Ms Taylor, I think, again, very eloquently dismantled Mr Davis's assertions about new taxes and where they apply. I mean, fancy counting on six occasions a tax that applies to foreign ownership—six times. It does not affect one Victorian, yet this is the sort of stuff that we get built into this debate.

I am very happy if Dr Bach or anybody else on that side of the chamber wants to have a debate about integrity—integrity when it comes to managing the state, integrity when it comes to the taxation system and integrity when it comes to facts around a particular issue that is being debated in this chamber or anywhere else. We are very, very happy to have those debates, because I think the facts speak for themselves that on 57 occasions we have cut or abolished taxes and fees—57 times, on 57 occasions. And it is important that we introduce those facts and that we ensure that people do not twist and turn them and manufacture things for their own political objectives in the debate. So if we want to stray down the path of integrity, I am very happy to have that debate.

Dr Bach: Ms Taylor's at fault. She strayed; I followed her.

Mr GEPP: No, no. I understand Ms Taylor opened the door, and I understand that the opposition walked through it. I understand you meandered down that pathway. I am just saying let us continue down it—let us hold hands and walk down that path a little bit more—because I am happy to debate integrity. In fact why don't we turn wacky Wednesday into integrity debating day tomorrow? Let us have a whole day of debating about integrity instead of some of the more colourful and interesting things that we will be dealing with tomorrow that will not have any shred of impact on this state except to say that we can acquit another day in this place.

One of the things that Ms Watt and Ms Taylor both talked about—and I think this is a really important development under this bill—is the motor vehicle duty. I want to commend Mr Barton, who spoke earlier in this debate. He touched on one of the key measures in this bill, which is the introduction of the exemptions for wheelchair-accessible commercial vehicles from motor vehicle duty. I think it is some \$3000, and there is a whole range of criteria that spells out exactly what that means for certain categories of vehicles et cetera, depending on the age of the vehicle et cetera, but it is a really, really important feature of this legislation. It should not go unnoticed, and I am sure it will not. But it is a really important progressive change to our taxation. The measure alone will save eligible wheelchair-

accessible commercial passenger vehicles thousands of dollars in motor vehicle duty and will help ensure that we have better services provided to wheelchair users particularly, who make more than 1 million commercial passenger vehicle trips per year.

I want to congratulate Mr Barton. Mr Barton said in his contribution that we might not hear about his advocacy every day in this place. I am certain that we probably as a chamber do not hear from Mr Barton every day, but I know from talking to colleagues in government that Mr Barton is talking to somebody in government every single day about these measures. It is through that sort of advocacy that we see these sorts of changes introduced, so congratulations to Mr Barton and to the commercial passenger vehicle owners in terms of this very, very important reform.

Ms Taylor also spoke about the land tax for the specialist disability accommodation dwellings under construction. In building on taxation changes that we have already made to support Victorians with a disability, the bill provides an exemption from land tax for land on which a specialist disability accommodation enrolled dwelling is being constructed. This construction phase exemption will be available for a maximum two tax years and will operate retrospectively from the 2020 land tax year onwards.

An SDA-enrolled dwelling has been specially designed to cater for the needs of people with sensory, intellectual, cognitive or physical impairment, and an SDA resident is someone who is an NDIS participant residing in an SDA-enrolled dwelling and who receives an SDA payment as part of their plan. Although the exemption has been available since the 2020 tax year on land that is occupied or available for occupation as an SDA-enrolled dwelling, that exemption was not extended to land in the construction phase. That was particularly out of step, and that has been addressed.

Ms Taylor also talked about the windfall gains tax exemption for universities, and I will not go into all of those details again. I do want to, however, spend a little bit of time on payroll tax, because in my electorate of Northern Victoria we have had the Leader of the Opposition in particular running around all manner of different places. And we have had the Leader of The Nationals in the other place, the member for Murray Plains, out there in the public arena saying that we have done nothing for regional Victoria since we have been in government. It is simply not true. I talked at the start of my contribution about integrity. Let us be truthful. Let us be truthful in terms of the things that we are out there saying. We now have an unemployment rate in this state, in regional Victoria, with a 3 in front of it. You do not get there by accident. You get there through hard work, you get there through reform and you get there through investment, and that is exactly what we have done. The Minister for Small Business, who is in the chamber, is regularly seen in my electorate making all manner of different announcements—

Ms Pulford: Heading there on Friday.

Mr GEPP: Yes, you are, Minister, heading there on Friday. She is making all manner of announcements but importantly working closely with the small business community. We understand the contribution that small business makes to our economy, and working closely with those people to ensure that they are making the necessary investments to grow our economy in the regional space is so, so important because of the contribution that they make to local employment. We get it. We understand it. We are in there every single day talking and working with small businesses either individually or with their associations, as well as with local councils et cetera, and ensuring that we have got a pipeline of investment, a pipeline of support going to regional Victoria. That is how you get a 3 in front of unemployment in regional Victoria. So it is not true. I have heard the contributions that have been made here today by those opposite about us having left regional Victoria behind. It is rubbish. It is baloney. It is simply not true. It is not a fact. It is a figment of their imagination because it does not suit their narrative. Only a few weeks ago they were out there talking about this great, big campaign platform: 'We're going to reform regional roads. We're going to have this big emphasis on regional roads. Send us a message if your regional road is bad'. And what have they got on the picture? Where was the picture taken? It was a road in Ukraine. They just make it up.

Ms Pulford interjected.

Mr GEPP: They just make it up; that is exactly right. It is the central focus of war on the planet right now, and they use one of its roads as their centrepiece, as their image, as their graphic about regional roads. They will do and say anything in order to fit their political narrative. Be honest. That is all you have to do—just be honest; be factual and be honest.

On payroll tax both Mr Davis and Mr Rich-Phillips tried to compare different aspects of the Victorian economy with other parts of the nation and pointed out—when it suited them—where it is not favourable for the government. Well, what about payroll tax? They stand up in this place time and time again or they run around in regional Victoria, particularly in my electorate of Northern Victoria—they seem to spend a lot of time up there in Northern Victoria, and that is probably because they performed so badly and they neglected it for so long. When they had the chance to do something in Northern Victoria, they did not do anything—they just neglected it. The Leader of the National Party, whose own electorate is in Northern Victoria—what did he do when he was in the last government? He did nothing; he did absolutely nothing. We heard recently that—

Dr Bach: On a point of order, Acting President, previous occupants of the chair have regularly ruled that debates such as this are not opportunities to attack specific members. This has been, as you have said, a wideranging debate. Nonetheless, other members have not taken the opportunity to gratuitously attack other members of this place, so I would humbly submit to you, sir, that perhaps Mr Gepp could come back to the bill instead of attacking members.

The ACTING PRESIDENT (Mr Melhem): Thank you, Dr Bach. Mr Gepp, I am happy to hear you on the point of order. I was about to rule in your favour.

Mr GEPP: Further to the point of order, Acting President, Ms Taylor opened the door to talking about integrity and Dr Bach walked straight through it. I am just pointing out the lack of integrity in the debate around these particular matters out there in the electorate.

The ACTING PRESIDENT (Mr Melhem): I ruled earlier—actually when you were on your feet, Dr Bach, when Mr Gepp raised a point of order—that it is a wideranging debate and everybody has referred to various governments and prime ministers and opposition leaders.

Mr GEPP: Thank you, Acting President. The Leader of the Opposition just a few short weeks ago was up in Mildura holding hands with a fellow member from Northern Victoria, who probably would have needed to set her Navman—either that or I suspect she probably flew up there—and standing there out the front of Mildura hospital, beaming. ‘We will do this if we are elected’, they said. ‘We commit three quarters of a billion dollars to rebuild the Mildura hospital’. Do you think the local people up there have forgotten who privatised the thing in the first place, who sucked all of the money they could out of that place and sent services to the floor? It was the Liberals and Nationals. So if you want integrity in a debate, at least have a small whiff of integrity on your own side.

When it comes to payroll tax, we now have the lowest payroll tax in this country for regional Victoria—1.2125 per cent. It is a quarter of the metropolitan rate, it is the lowest in the nation and it underscores that this government is absolutely committed to regional Victoria. It is absolutely committed to northern Victoria in my electorate. We work hard every single day with businesses and with local communities to deliver quality projects, quality investment and growth in employment while reducing taxes, reducing fees and ensuring that livability standards are going north, not south. We are proud of that. I am proud of this bill. It is a very good bill. I commend the Treasurer, and I commend this bill to the house.

Mr QUILTY (Northern Victoria) (15:10): I will be brief. This bill is the government’s yearly tax bill. This year the bill is going to do very little. An astute observer would suspect that the bill is deliberately inoffensive because it is an election year. It is a way of playing the budget with a dead bat. Governments prefer to sneak in tax increases in the early years of their term and then ease off in an

election year. The effect is still like a ratchet, because taxes never decrease by as much as they increase. Victorian government spending has risen by more than 30 per cent from pre-COVID levels, and it is expected to increase in this budget. After years of a COVID nightmare and a shut-down economy this government is planning on maintaining its record spending, its record costs and expenses and its record taxes. What Victorians need is relief. They need a chance to breathe, to rebuild their savings, their businesses, their investments and their lives. We need significant tax cuts right now. We need cuts to payroll tax and stamp duty, and to get tax cuts we need cuts to expenditure. We need to end the tax on jobs to return those wages to working Australians and to revive business.

Housing in Victoria is a sinking ship, but all the government is talking about is how it is going to get more people onto the ship and how it needs more cash to fund the lifeboats. This is going to end in tears and in bailouts. The budget stamp duty revenue projections are built around constantly rising house prices; the government has an incentive not to solve our housing crisis. What we need to do is build more dwellings, enough so that the price of housing starts to fall, not to rise. We need to build 1 million extra new dwellings in Victoria over the next 10 years. We need to, as Ms Taylor would say, bring it on. We need to increase supply. Nothing else will work. We need to right this ship. We need to cut stamp duty, reduce the regulatory burden and allow more housing to be built. We need to throw the government overboard and let the ship right itself. The Liberal Democrats believe in tax cuts for working Victorians, and this bill does not do that.

Ms BATH (Eastern Victoria) (15:12): I am pleased to rise this afternoon to make a brief contribution on the State Taxation and Treasury Legislation Amendment Bill 2022, and I have to say that I have sat in the chamber and very much enjoyed the cut and thrust of various members of Parliament making their 40-love and deuce contributions. I would like to first of all pick up the contributions of Ms Taylor and Mr Gepp in their very excited, chest-pumping position on the rate of unemployment in regional Victoria. It feels like we have got the cone of silence here and the sole reason that that is at that point is Daniel Andrews and his troops. It had nothing to do with, during a very challenging time, a sturdy and stable federal government that invested in regional Victoria and kept the lights on and payments flowing.

To that point, in preparing for the debate on the Appropriation (2022–2023) Bill 2022, which is coming up later this week, the budget bill, I read the Treasurer's, the Honourable Tim Pallas's, speech on his appropriation bill, and he was spruiking the 4 per cent unemployment rate across the nation and 3.2 per cent in regional Victoria. Let me just contrast that, if we are interested in the facts, with one beloved area in my Eastern Victoria Region, and that happens to be the municipality of Latrobe city. Its current, as of December last year, which is the last labour force research from the Australian Bureau of Statistics, unemployment rate is at 7.8 per cent. If you think about averages, that must mean that there are certain areas in regional Victoria that have an even lower unemployment rate than 3.2 per cent in order for it to be that way. I am reflecting on the massive excitement and patting on the back here today that 'We care about regional Victoria'. Indeed I am told by bemused National members in the lower house that just about every minister that got up to make a ministers statement today spoke on regional Victoria, because I think they must have been a bit spooked by the fact that the budget was so neglectful of regional Victoria.

Getting back to Latrobe City Council, it is a wonderful area. My office is there, and I spend a lot of my time there. I am very proud that it is a place that has kept the lights on in this place, our hospitals going, schools running and the trams going down the tram tracks for 100 years. For people to belittle it and call it all sorts of names—I am not saying anyone has done that today—is absolutely appalling. This area is going through transformation and transition. It is going to happen whether people like it or not, but it needs to be forward planned. The government has spruiked how wonderful it is. The Latrobe Valley Authority has had six years and approximately \$292 million, and only now a government report—I call it a government report because it was back-ended by government members—says how wonderfully it is doing and that there are no problems, 'Nothing to see here'. Well, six years, no plan and a current budget of \$7.5 million, and of that \$7.5 million for the Latrobe

Valley Authority, \$5 million of it is for wages for 32 employees and \$2.5 million of it is for—what? It is for programs. Indeed one of the parts of the report—recommendation 8—actually says that the Latrobe Valley Authority should be looking at more promotion of what it does—not programs, not plans, but more promotion.

In going back to this area of the bill, I also reflect on what is the value of a promise by a Premier:

I make that promise, Peter, to every single Victorian ...

he said back on election eve 2014. He was asked:

... do you promise Victorians here tonight that you will not increase taxes or introduce any new taxes?

He said:

I make that promise, Peter, to every single Victorian.

We are the highest taxed state in Australia, and yes, there have been 40-plus taxes, and around 20 of them have been on property—taxes or increased taxes under Daniel Andrews. We, The Nationals and the Liberals, have a different view on taxation. We know that we need to tax. You have got to have tax in order to pay and keep the lights on and fund various services throughout the state.

Dr Bach: But debt?

Ms BATH: And debt—what is the debt on the blowout bill? What is the debt now? Is it somewhere around \$3 billion a year? Is that what it is going to extend to? Thank you, Dr Bach, and I take your point about debt. We are having to service these debts as well.

One of the things that the Andrews government should be looking at in this area is efficiencies. We saw somewhere in the paper the other day that we do not want any more career politicians. Well, I do not know about you, Dr Bach, but I was a teacher and a small business person before I came in here. I think you were the principal of a school. That is a real life to be had. Leaving aside other pathways, if you look at efficiencies and the need for efficiencies, there are some amazing blowouts that we see from the government. I happen to have some information, again, that I do not think is disputed. The Latrobe Valley GovHub was promised \$3 million. Well, in the budget of 2021–22 it was budgeted at \$8.8 million. That is almost a \$6 million blowout. Who lives there? At the moment Solar Victoria lives there. It is a reasonable place to put staff—government employees. We hope to grow, certainly, renewables right across regional Victoria in a very sensible and measured way. But those ads for Solar Victoria say staff could actually live in Melbourne or in the valley. You could work in Melbourne and live in Melbourne or you could work in the valley. So we have got budget blowouts—that is, not efficiencies—and we have also got, apparently, staff who live in Melbourne even though they should be living in regional Victoria.

There are various other elements of the bill I just want to cover off on. It does certainly cover off and amend a number of acts. In one way we have seen the growth of the 40-odd taxes and increased taxes over the last eight years. Well, it has now come around to election year, so the government is putting in a little sweetener. It is amending the Borrowing and Investment Powers Act 1987, the Duties Act 2000, the Essential Services Commission Act 2001, the Land Tax Act 2005, the Payroll Tax Act 2007, the Taxation Administration Act 1997 and the Windfall Gains Tax and State Taxation and Other Acts Further Amendment Act 2021.

We are certainly not going to oppose the bill, but we certainly have concerns around clause 34, which relates to the discretion of the commissioner of state revenue to be able to put a time limit of five years on whether or not he or she will accept any objection to a tax ruling. The concerns we have in relation to that include that there can be legitimate cases, such as complex wills or prolonged illnesses, where taxpayers may otherwise be able to convince the commissioner to review their situation past five years.

Another thing that I reflect on in speaking on this bill today is the windfall gains tax. I spoke to that in this house some few months ago and about the taxable uplift. It was very strongly opposed by the

Property Council of Australia, the Housing Industry Association and the Master Builders Association of Victoria. They felt that this was going to be a huge detriment to the affordability and supply of houses in Victoria when we can least afford to have another burden, and that goes double—it is acute—for regional Victoria.

We have seen total taxation go up by \$12.4 billion since the government came to power—an almost 70 per cent increase—and, as my colleague Dr Bach said in his contribution around waste, \$28 billion of blowouts on infrastructure. What could that have been spent on in that time? We could have fixed the healthcare system; we could have triaged and brought back to life the 000 system; we could have built various entities and places and important infrastructure in my Eastern Victoria Region; and we could have saved stress, lives and businesses. We will certainly not be opposing this bill. I hope the government is sensible and takes out clause 34.

Ms TIERNEY (Western Victoria—Minister for Training and Skills, Minister for Higher Education) (15:23): I move:

That debate be adjourned until later this day.

Motion agreed to and debate adjourned until later this day.

Business of the house

ORDERS OF THE DAY

Ms TAYLOR (Southern Metropolitan) (15:24): I move:

That the consideration of order of the day, government business, 2, be postponed until later this day.

Motion agreed to.

Bills

APPROPRIATION (2022–2023) BILL 2022

Second reading

Debate resumed on motion of Ms SYMES:

That the bill be now read a second time.

Mr DAVIS (Southern Metropolitan—Leader of the Opposition) (15:24): I am pleased to make a contribution to the Appropriation (2022–2023) Bill 2022 and in doing so to begin by making a few housekeeping comments. The opposition has communicated with the Leader of the Government and will, in the interests of expediting the committee of the bill—whenever that occurs; this week or next week—provide an early list of questions to assist in expediting the committee process. I just put that on the record for a starting point. The appropriation bill is an important bill for the state obviously because it ensures the payment of the public service and it ensures payment for all of our public activities. It provides, through the schedules attached to the bill, the allocation of precise resources to departments and agencies. I put on record a number of points that I want to make about the position the state finds itself in more broadly.

As I said when I talked about the state taxation bill just a few minutes ago, Victoria's state budget comes with Daniel Andrews in his eighth year as Premier. We are at a point where the Labor Party will have been in power in November, on election day, for 19 of the last 23 years, but this is a budget of tax, deficit and debt. It is a budget that shows Victoria's weak position. I have laid out some of the taxation issues, and I will repeat some of those because they are very important.

Tax collections have increased by 80 per cent from \$16.9 billion in 2013–14 to a forecast \$30.5 billion in 2022–23. Land tax has increased from \$1.7 billion in 2013–14 to a forecast \$4.8 billion in 2022–23—a 192 per cent increase—with land tax having risen from 10 per cent to 17 per cent of total state taxation revenue. It is no wonder the small businesses in the suburbs, where they own a property,

are squealing and they are feeling the state government tighten the screws on them with land tax. The land transfer duty is a duty that is felt by every family as it seeks to purchase a home, and the take from land transfer duty has increased from \$4.2 billion in 2013–14 to a forecast \$8.2 billion in 2022–23—a 97.4 per cent increase. It is forecast at \$8.2 billion, but in 2021–22 land transfer duty hit a record of \$10.194 billion: this financial year there will be a record take on land transfer duty.

Payroll tax has increased from \$4.95 billion in 2013–14 to a forecast \$6.8 billion in 2022–23, and we heard Mr Gepp and others talk a moment ago about payroll tax. They pointed to some areas of the state where payroll tax is lower than other areas of the state where it is higher, but the assured thing in Victoria under this government is that more tax in aggregate is taken, more tax than ever before, more tax year by year as it goes up and up and up, and as I say, in the case of payroll tax lifting from \$4.95 billion in 2013–14 to a forecast \$6.8 billion in 2022–23—a huge increase. Again it is important to put in place some comparison with the gross state product (GSP), which has lifted from \$399 billion in 2013–14 to an estimated \$494 billion in the financial year that we are in. That is a 23.7 per cent increase, and you can see the disparity between the size of the economy and the size of the tax take in that economy.

I made the point earlier about the 40-odd new taxes, the taxes waiting in the wings. Forty new taxes despite the promise made on election eve in 2014 when Daniel Andrews said to Channel 7, ‘I make that promise’ that there will be no increase or introduction of new taxes. ‘I make that promise, Peter, to every single Victorian’, said Daniel Andrews, and the Treasurer made a similar promise about no new taxes and no increased taxes. It is interesting that even the small taxes amongst Labor’s new taxes are impactful. When you look at the amount that is collected, people may not be aware but the more than 40 new taxes are collecting more than \$14 billion across the forward estimates period. That is a huge hit on the economy from these small in some cases and planned monster new taxes.

I have talked about Labor’s housing tax, their big new housing tax. I have talked about the waste and mismanagement, and many of the cost blowouts are BC, as I say, before COVID, and many of the cost blowouts have impacted on the more than \$28 billion worth of project waste and blowouts that have been the hallmark of this government. It is interesting that the Minister for Transport Infrastructure at the Public Accounts and Estimates Committee hearing yesterday would not rule out more than \$28 billion as the size of the cost blowouts on these projects, and indeed she would not take steps to provide an alternate figure for the whole period.

I think it is important to put the debt that we are about to enter into, with the growing debt under this government, in context. Daniel Andrews should be known as Captain Debt, I think, actually. The bald facts are this: Victoria’s net debt will rise to \$167 billion by 2025–26. The ratings agencies are pessimistic, singling Victoria out as having the weakest position of all states. The Moody’s summary from 9 February this year pointed to an alarming increase in the state’s net direct and indirect debt as a percentage of revenues. Moody’s has said publicly that Victoria is at risk of a credit downgrade, potentially forcing up the debt servicing costs as a share of state revenues. Even more alarming is the debt-to-GSP ratio. You see, what are seen as very arcane economic concepts actually do have a significant impact.

The consequence of Daniel Andrews’s incompetence is rising net debt, rising from \$22.3 billion in 2014–15 to a net debt of \$101.9 billion this year. That is more than \$100 billion this year, and as I said, rising to a staggering \$167.5 billion estimated by 2025–26. Victoria’s debt is growing faster than our comparator states. Victoria’s debt is now 75 per cent larger than the debt carried by the bigger New South Wales economy, whose net debt this year is estimated at \$58.1 billion. By June 2025, a date for which comparisons are available, Victoria’s debt is set to reach \$154.8 billion. New South Wales, whose debt is then projected to be \$103 billion, and Queensland, with a projected net debt of \$35.6 billion, will not face the same brake on growth caused by the dragnet of Victoria’s state debt.

If you look at this net debt per head of population, each Victorian currently bears a debt of about \$15 300, compared with a little over \$7000 for each person in New South Wales. Daniel Andrews and

Labor are steering our economy in a direction that will ramp each Victorian's debt up to over \$23 600 in just four years—an increase of 54 per cent. If you accept—and this requires you to accept—Labor's heroic population assumptions, it is a debt just shy of \$95 000 per family of four, more if Labor's dodgy population projections are not realised. In fact by 2024–25 Victoria's estimated state debt of \$154.8 billion will be very close to the combined debts of New South Wales, Queensland and South Australia. Even with the growth in the national economy and a 4 per cent unemployment rate—and indeed less than 4 per cent now, a welcome fall in the unemployment position—Victoria's position is far out of kilter with the other Australian states and our main competitor state, New South Wales. We are facing a net debt-to-GSP ratio. Victoria is projected at 26.5 per cent, but New South Wales is likely to be around half of that. The impact of Victoria's annual interest bill will be significant, with payments rising from just over \$2 billion in the early period of the Andrews Labor government to at least \$6.38 billion in 2025–26, and this is based on the figures at budget time. It is not clear what account the budget figures have taken of interest rate rises, and we are seeing a cascade of interest rate rises now.

One thing that is clear is that interest rate payments have trebled since Labor came to office. When you look at the sensitivity analysis in the budget, at the back of budget paper 2, you will see that a 1 per cent rise across the forward estimates period leads to a \$2.549 billion impact on the position. These are huge movements. The budget does have some things where it does come up front. Budget paper 5, at page 16, states:

Risks to Victoria's economic outlook remain greater than normal and the forecasts are subject to a higher degree of uncertainty

The population assumptions in the budget, I would argue, are highly doubtful. Few would believe the blithe statements in the budget such as on page 24 of budget paper 2 which say that with border restrictions now eased the flow of migrants and foreign students to Victoria is expected to gradually increase over the course of 2022, reaching around prepandemic levels by 2023–24. These are heroic assumptions. Nobody, as much as we may wish it, believes that those assumptions are likely to be met.

As I said earlier today, the ratings agencies have been very clear indeed. Moody's and Standard & Poor's have sounded the alarm. They have blown the whistle on Daniel Andrews and his government. Moody's said:

Despite the underlying strength of the Victorian and broader Australian economy, we expect Victoria's debt burden will not stabilise before the end of fiscal 2027, further increasing ... pressure on the state's rating.

Standard & Poor's said:

The state's debt levels are likely to soar past 200 per cent of operating revenues by fiscal 2024 due to historically high infrastructure spending, exacerbated by rising inflationary pressures and some project-related cost overruns

As I said earlier, Tim Pallas was crowing back in 2018 about the independent and international affirmation of Standard & Poor's. He was schmoozing up to the ratings agencies like a good Labor Treasurer does. But in this case it is clear that he has a different view now as the ratings agencies have made very different comments.

I have talked about the tax position, Labor's plan for the big new housing tax. I have talked about the need for planning reform and I have made the point about the Labor Party's refusal to contemplate the planning reform that they worked up—it is sitting there on the shelf and we have said it should be implemented with proper checks, proper balances, proper consultation with councils—there is \$7 billion worth of savings available there over 10 years. Why would you not, after that work has been done, implement some of those savings and make that flow through into lower housing costs for the community—cheaper, more affordable housing for the Victorian community? Why on earth would we not be using that work that has been put in place? There was a lot of contribution from the property

sector but the state government has done some of that work. We think if it is implemented sensitively, with proper consultation carefully with councils, carefully with communities, that the opportunity is there to realise a significant part of those gains and lower the cost of housing in the state. Seven billion dollars over 10 years is not to be sneezed at. Even if only half of that were realised, that is still a very significant contribution.

I also want to again return to my points about productivity. It is clear that the state has a productivity problem. Victoria, uniquely amongst all of the states, has performed very poorly here. There is a general Australian problem with productivity over a longer period, but Victoria is a laggard, a stand-out with poor performance on productivity. I laid out those figures earlier in the day at some length, and it is necessary to think about how we can lift the state's productivity. New taxes are not a good way to do it. New taxes will likely make us less competitive and less able to retain the population we need to drive growth. We need a growth agenda. We need to go forward. The Premier recognised that we need growth, and I agree, but at the same time he has not put in place the settings that will provide that growth long term.

We have seen the state fail to provide the competitive position that is needed, and that is what we have got to think about. We have got to have a productivity agenda. This is why the opposition has said if we are elected in November we will introduce a Victorian productivity commission, which will be an independent body that will have the job of advising government and putting forward proposals. The Australian Productivity Commission has provided great advice over many years. New South Wales has recently embarked on a similar agenda, and I do not think we should be afraid to take good ideas from other states where other states have put in place mechanisms that can improve the overall productivity of the state. The New South Wales productivity commission model is a good one, and we would use that as a base for how we would go forward.

Obviously Victoria is different, so some of our agenda would be quite distinct. But nonetheless that is the purpose of having such a Victorian productivity commission in place, so that we can actually focus on lifting living standards, lifting household incomes and lifting the position of individuals in the state over the longer haul and doing that in a sustainable way, without borrowing more and more and more, without taxing more and more. We need to have that focus on delivering productivity, and there are critical sectors that will need assistance there. As I said earlier, we do need to deal with some of the workforce shortages, and there are key sectors where there are shortages that will need to be attended to. I think that that is now becoming an accepted fact by many in the community, because they recognise that this can actually become a significant brake on economic growth longer term.

As I have said before, the Victorian Chamber of Commerce and Industry (VCCI) has put out its cost and ease of doing business in Victoria task force report, and it is worth quoting again:

Victoria has a productivity challenge that started well before the pandemic. Productivity growth measured in gross state product ... per hour worked has been slowing in Victoria over the last 10 years.

I also pointed out that the Committee for Melbourne, in its recent international benchmarking study, said:

GDP per capita in Melbourne is now 20% below its peer group average, while household disposable income has also fallen relative to others.

It should not be thought that Australia's more generally faced productivity challenges are an excuse for Victoria. Victoria is a laggard, in effect dragging down the national performance. The state's position has drifted under the period of the Andrews Labor government. Income per head has hardly moved. It is no wonder Victorian families are very worried about the cost of living, with rising prices and stagnant income under Daniel Andrews and more taxes. They are paying more taxes than ever before—sharply more taxes.

It is important, I think, to look at business because business has faced the new taxes and charges and the harsh new regulations. VCCI, in its study, said:

Doing business in Victoria is harder than it needs to be—not just financially, but in terms of time demands and stress. Nearly 40 per cent of Victorian businesses say time is a bigger cost to doing business than money. This shows that some aspects of government regulations and approach to regulation are cumbersome and poorly administered. Pressures on business owners are particularly acute in parts of regional Victoria. Importantly, the most significant costs faced by Victorian businesses were present well before March 2020 and are likely to persist well beyond the COVID-19 recovery.

Government can do a lot here. My colleague David Southwick has talked at some length about the need to use digital techniques to improve the position of interaction between the state government and businesses. New South Wales has led the way on this. There are so many other areas of this type in the country. New South Wales have innovated and led the way on a number of these key points, and we should not be afraid to pick up many of their ideas. The interaction with licences—I have seen this demonstrated. People from New South Wales have shown me the technique and shown me their ability to apply for licences online on their phone with simple procedures. This is an idea that we need to think more broadly about.

VCCI, the employers chamber of commerce, has said a lot about the need for a business concierge, and we agree with that. The shepherding of inbound investments through regulatory hoops and helping businesses and new startups through the regulatory hoops is part of the answer. Again, New South Wales has done better—much, much better—on this than Victoria. You can see why. I met with a group of very senior businessmen just a few weeks ago, and they related stories of the difficulty encountered talking to ministers and their departments here in Victoria. They counterposed that with the experience in New South Wales. These are national firms that deal with state governments across the country, and they singled Victoria out as the harder area to do business. Importantly, though, that can be dealt with. We can actually get those interactions with departments and ministers a lot sharper, a lot quicker and a lot more effective.

I want to also say something about the growth in the number of executives in the public sector. The share of senior executives in the Victorian public service has grown from 1.8 per cent in 2014–15—that is 647 executives—to 3.1 per cent in the most recent figures. That is 1759 executives—a surge of 1112 executives, or 172 per cent. This is despite Labor's election promise in 2014 to reduce the number of executive officers and save \$40 million. That was the promise in Labor's financial statement in 2014—that they would cut the number of executive officers and save \$40 million. Instead of that they have increased the number of executive officers by 172 per cent. People understand the importance of having more nurses, more teachers, more frontline workers across a whole series of different areas, but senior executives is a different matter—the question of whether we needed 1759 senior executives, up by 172 per cent across Labor's period, despite their election promise to cut the number of executives in 2014.

I also want to say something about the need to look at taxation. We have made a clear commitment about the Victorian Building Authority's new fee rise, the 2 May fee rise. It is not a budget measure, it is a separate measure, but it is a measure that has happened concurrently with the budget. Businesses, companies, building surveyors and others are all paying these huge increases—some 100 per cent, some 200 per cent, some more—in fees. These fees are a real slug to the building industry and a real hit onto the costs that are passed through into housing. This is one aspect of housing costs—it is only one—that we have said should be clearly reversed. We think that that is a sensible step. We think it is a step that is achievable, and we think that in fact there is every reason to believe that these costs should be taken out of the system and actually not fed through to young families.

I do want to return to the issue of some of these major projects, though, because we do need to get a grip on these major projects. What we have seen under this government is more than \$28 billion wasted through cost blowouts and squandering on projects where the government has not properly managed and constrained costs or has not properly scoped the projects at the start. Business cases look

very different when there is a huge shift in the cost. We have seen how the West Gate Tunnel, originally promised as a \$500 million project in opposition, became a \$5-odd billion project and is now up over \$10 billion. Well, whatever business case was in operation there has been blown out of the water by the mismanagement and the additional costs that the government has allowed to occur. Those costs are being paid for by taxpayers. They are also being paid for by toll payers. Every day they pay more and more and more as these costs are jacked up by the state government—these huge costs. We say that there need to be proper measures to constrain these costs. There needs to be a proper audit of these projects.

Why is it that the state government will not release the costs of the completed level crossing projects? I can understand when a project is in operation they might say it is commercial in confidence, but when a project is finished, done and dusted—there have now been more than 60 crossings removed, yet the government will not release the costs of those crossings. They know the costs. I will tell you why they will not release the costs: because the costs are hugely greater than they estimated. They have massively blown out, and taxpayers are paying for this in a whole range of ways. The same is true across a wide range of other projects like the metro, and we could go on—good projects that have been in some cases mismanaged, in other cases poorly scoped and in some cases both.

The opposition has called for a public works committee, the reinvigoration of the concept of a public works committee. This Parliament used to have a Public Works Committee back in the 1970s and into the 1980s. The large infrastructure projects that were done around the state—dams, trains, tunnels—were all heavily scrutinised by a powerful Public Works Committee that could get to the bottom of costs around these public projects, that could help constrain some of the costs on these projects, that could keep a rein on them. We say there should be a public works committee because money squandered through poor process, money squandered through cost overruns and money squandered through the poor scoping of major projects is money that is not available for other hospitals, other schools and other roads. It is money that is not available to be returned in tax cuts. All of this waste, all of the money that is squandered, all of the money that is spent on projects that ought to have been properly managed is money that is taken from Victorian taxpayers and not used wisely. We say a better process is better scoping at the start, better cost control and keeping those projects on track.

Nobody can excuse a doubling of the size of a project like the West Gate Tunnel. Nobody can excuse the huge surge and blowout in the Metro Tunnel. Nobody can excuse the failure to properly cost something. Let me pick a smaller but very significant project in country Victoria, the Murray Basin rail project. This was a coalition project. We funded half of it; the federal government funded half of it. The state government delayed and delayed its commencement, eventually got going, scoped it poorly and implemented poor contracts, and we saw all sorts of bizarre outcomes. They tore up old track, re-used old rails from 1913. You can see some of these small sections that were welded together as they re-used sections of rail metal from 1913. Yet after blowing out the project—it is now well over \$100 million over its original budget—it is only two-fifths complete and the rail speeds are slower than they were beforehand. You have got the worst of all worlds: you have got a partly completed project, you have got recycled steel on the rails in parts of it, you have got slower speeds and axle loads are not better. It is honestly a very, very poor outcome. I think the community is very, very much entitled to be angry about that outcome. I think the community is entitled to say, 'Enough is enough'. The community is entitled to say, 'We want proper controls on these services'.

I say this is a government of taxing, it is a government of poor spending and poorly targeted and controlled major projects, and it is a government that has—

Ms Shing interjected.

Mr DAVIS: Even the good projects, Ms Shing, have blown out on their budgets—many of the good projects. I have been talking about the Murray Basin project. Many of these projects are supported across the chamber, but they are not supported where they blow out and where incompetence, mismanagement and waste are the hallmark.

Mr ERDOGAN (Southern Metropolitan) (15:55): I am pleased to rise in support of the Appropriation (2022–2023) Bill 2022. It is important to understand that this will give effect to the upcoming budget for the year ahead, and it was interesting hearing the Leader of the Opposition. I felt it was—interesting is probably being kind to him; I found it quite incoherent, in fact. It went from different place to different place, but nonetheless I think it is important to correct the record for those who are in the chamber at the moment. Before the global pandemic and the financial year leading in—we all understand we have got to set the framework up—in 2018–19 we had a \$1.4 billion surplus in our state, so the state financially was travelling very well. But obviously we were affected in 2019 and 2020 by the global COVID-19 pandemic, as many other jurisdictions in our country and across the world were affected. Obviously in WA they have a mining boom from which they were able to supplement, but nonetheless for every other state and territory in our nation surpluses in that environment were not possible. The demand on essential services like health care, the transition to working from home and all the measures that needed to be taken by the states to respond—because we did not have a federal government that responded as it should have—have meant that there were expenses incurred which would not have been incurred, which obviously put strain on our budget. Nonetheless our government does get things done, and along the way there might be costs that increase.

When people talk about the Big Build, I am proud to talk about our record on the Big Build because of the amount of jobs it has created in the supply chain. We all know somebody that is working on a Big Build project, directly or indirectly, whether it be a tradesman on site, an electrician, a plumber or a boilermaker, all the way through to truck drivers and delivery drivers and warehouses. There is a complete supply chain of jobs there, and that is why the unemployment rate in our state is at historically low figures. It is because of projects like the Big Build. Even in domestic construction we are hearing of supply issues and cost pressures every day in the news. I turn on the news or read the daily papers and we are talking about domestic builds, so small-scale projects, where there have been \$60 000, \$70 000 or \$100 000 cost blowouts, and that is an effect of the COVID-19 pandemic together with the uncertain times we live in and the supply chain issues that have resulted in those price increases. So I am not surprised that the cost of construction has gone up, because that is not a phenomenon unique to our state, but it is having the same effect globally. Of course we should not be surprised that we are being impacted in the same way every other state and territory is being impacted. In fact there was an interesting statistic that I saw: construction costs are actually higher in New South Wales per square metre than they are in Victoria. So in fact we are not the most expensive state for construction. In fact New South Wales is. Nonetheless I think it is important to understand the supply chain issues in that process.

Obviously our budget is about pandemic repair, and we are getting on with the job. We are creating meaningful jobs, permanent jobs, and we are building a world-class education system. I think in my first speech in this place I talked about the importance of education being the great leveller, and aren't I proud to be part of a government that delivers on our motto, being the Education State. The record of investment in our schools—over 1000 schools have been upgraded since the Andrews Labor government was elected in 2014, over 100 new schools have been built and we are building another 50 or 60 that are in the pipeline. Everywhere I go everyone is amazed with the new, modern working environments that students and teachers have. We want to have a modern curriculum, but obviously that is backed up with modern environments that allow the students to make the most of their time at school and with their peers. In my electorate last week I was with James Merlino, the Minister for Education, at Sandringham East in their fantastic new facilities. We built a brand new gymnasium there, and now we are building new office spaces for the historic building. The school celebrated its 91st year recently, a historic school and one that has a beautiful heritage street-facing frontage and a great school community. But like I said, that is just one example. Obviously there is Beaumaris Secondary. The opposition wanted to close it down. They gutted our public school education system across our state, not just in Southern Metropolitan but across our state. It does not matter where you go, you will not see—

Mr Davis interjected.

Mr ERDOGAN: Mr Davis, I think you were in government at the time when those schools closed down and those buildings and those lands were sold off to developers, so I think I would not be talking about public education in Southern Metro too much, because I think people remember. People have long memories, and they do not forget what happened to the public school system during the time when the opposition had say over our state schools. But obviously we are reinvesting, we are rebuilding and parents are returning in record numbers. If you see enrolment figures across our state, the return is amazing. The public school education system is thriving under our government, and that is because of the investment and the correct decisions we have made. The foresight we had was understanding that that was a key point—that to ease the cost-of-living pressure on families, education was a big factor. We invested, and now we are getting the return. Obviously there is a lot more to do. I am the first one to say that. More investment in education; let us do it. I think this budget does a bit of that, but there is obviously more to be done. That is why I am proud to be here and serving in this government. In education I could still speak at length about the contributions we could make, but I do note that we are due for the cleaning break. I will step down.

Sitting suspended 4.01 pm until 4.24 pm.

Mr GRIMLEY (Western Victoria) (16:24): I rise to speak on the Appropriation (2022–2023) Bill 2022. It was pleasing to see that the advocacy from Derryn Hinch's Justice Party has met with some success in the budget. We were very glad to see funding for cyber safety for children in school, with \$3.7 million to be provided next financial year to the initiative, and this was a recommendation from the management of sex offender information inquiry, which we initiated. More police and protective service officers are funded. I am hoping that they make their way to regional and rural Victoria. There is \$215 million for the rollout of tasers to all frontline police and PSOs. There is funding for the development of an alternative reporting option for sexual assault, which we were able to obtain government support for last month. There is extensive funding for mental health beds, including across regional Victoria. Expansion of the assessment and referral court to Geelong and Ballarat will support people with mental illness and/or cognitive impairment to address causes of offending before they are sentenced.

A share in \$4.5 million for the Geelong Project, an excellent early intervention initiative, will keep kids in school. The Melton hospital and the Geelong women and children's hospital I will have more to say about later. Six million dollars to speed up the precinct planning and approvals for 44 000 lots in regional Victoria I know will be very welcome in my rural communities. There are 12 new VLocity trains for regional services, and there is new perpetrator intervention funding. I am grateful that the government has paid attention to our advocacy, and it is rewarding when the work we do gets traction and results like this. However, there are several issues that we put to the Treasurer which were overlooked. These are important things, such as the funding for the Defence Community Dogs program and for members of the community seeking alcohol and other drug rehabilitation services. This was disappointing, and I will talk in more detail to this later on.

In relation to alcohol and other drug funding, anyone battling an addiction should be able to get the help they need without delay. This includes the ability to access treatments in their own community with support from loved ones. There is often a small window between the time someone says, 'I want help' and the time they potentially relapse and refuse help for their addiction. The availability of services, including detox, is so important and why we cannot accept six-month or six-week waits. These lengthy waits can potentially kill people. In the least, they can send people in the other direction, away from help, if it is not readily available. The number of people seeking AOD treatment was up from 2385 to 3599 between September 2020 and September 2021. This is a 51 per cent increase in a single year. On the latest figures: in December 2021 the Victorian alcohol and other drug agencies surveyed had 4088 people on their waiting lists. This represents a 72 per cent increase since September 2020, just five quarters later.

These are more than alarming figures; they are actual people seeking help. Yet despite this very clear picture being painted, the budget withdraws funding for increasing and training the AOD workforce. The total reduction in funding is to the tune of an incredible \$39 million. This includes the discontinuation of the \$25.6 million alcohol and other drugs COVID-19 workforce initiative. This provides for an additional 100 AOD treatment workers across Victoria as well as training and upskilling. It is being cut at a time when demand for AOD treatment is soaring. At a time when COVID raised the number of mental health economic strains for Victorians, we should have been armed and ready to fight this battle. There was an inevitable resurgence of addiction, not just to ice or heroin but to prescription medications and alcohol as well, yet the only thing the government did during COVID with respect to alcohol was to make it available through all lockdowns and make it legal to have it delivered to your home without, virtually, any safeguards or record keeping.

I have spoken with parents and families who have described the difficulties they have experienced in trying to access a rehabilitation bed for a loved one. The difficulties are exacerbated for Victorians who live in the country. Victoria has the second-lowest number of detox and residential beds for AOD treatment per capita in the whole country. There is a clear need for more AOD beds to meet the current demand. I welcome the \$36 million of funding to construct a 30-bed alcohol and other drugs residential rehabilitation facility, including a withdrawal unit, in Mildura that will service the Loddon Mallee region, and I note this money will be delivered over the next three years, so we could expect the facility to be ready sometime in 2025 at the earliest.

I was bitterly disappointed, though, to see that the western region alcohol and drug facility planned for Warrnambool, the Lookout, missed out on funding. Warrnambool is an area that is desperate for a dedicated AOD rehabilitation facility. Despite us making a submission to the Treasurer to include the facility in the budget and the project having strong local support, with \$1.2 million already raised, the project was overlooked. The Premier had planned on and committed to visiting Mildura, but he did not respond to my request to meet with the Western Region Alcohol and Drug Centre down in the south-west, and I suspect this is because he knew the funding would not be forthcoming. The good news is that Geoff Soma, the CEO of WRAD, the steering committee and other local stakeholders are not giving up the fight for this facility, and I will continue to advocate for them in Parliament to ensure they secure this important project. As a development, I am aware that the Department of Premier and Cabinet have since made contact with the health service to obtain more information on the project, which has made me optimistic for an announcement in the upcoming election. So my fingers are crossed whilst I am still awaiting a response to my adjournment request for a meeting between the Premier, the health minister and the stakeholders in Warrnambool.

In relation to the defence dogs veterans assistance program, it selects suitable rescue dogs and trains them specifically to become assistance dogs to support veterans suffering from post-traumatic stress injuries. Each dog is allocated to an inmate in a correctional service centre. That inmate is responsible for the care of the dog 24 hours a day and for training the dog under the guidance of a professional dog trainer. Once a dog has completed the training and passed a strict assessment, it is matched with a suitable veteran at no cost. The program is a unique win-win-win situation: the dogs are safe from animal shelters and other rescue programs, inmates participate in a rehabilitation program and give back to their community and veterans are provided with life-saving assistance dogs. The program is unique, being focused on helping veterans who suffer from a PTSI and who are not capable of completing the hundreds of hours required to train a dog to assistance dog level. Many vets also cannot access funding for a dog through Assistance Dogs Australia, which costs around \$40 000. Many veterans suffer from anxiety and depression and have become socially withdrawn because of their illness and injuries. The dogs give them purpose, reduce reliance on medication and help reduce the feelings of isolation that many PTSI sufferers experience. Recipients report re-engagement with their community and families, less reliance on medications and better engagement with professionals. Some have even been able to obtain gainful employment after years of isolation due to their condition.

The Defence Community Dogs program is currently funded and run by the Defence Bank Foundation at a Bathurst correctional facility in New South Wales and the Numinbah Correctional Centre in Queensland. I advocated for this program to be rolled out in a Victorian prison as a pilot. I submitted a proposal for \$1.9 million to the Treasurer for the pilot as costed by the Parliamentary Budget Office, but Defence Bank's costings are much cheaper, so we are really not asking for a lot. Despite positive engagement from the Minister for Corrections and the Minister for Veterans, this money was not allocated in the budget. We have missed out on an opportunity to put in place a program that delivers multiple benefits at a relatively low cost. I have been a strong advocate for assistance dogs in this place and will continue to be for this program until it is funded. If we are serious about helping those who put their lives on the line to help us, then this is one way in which the government can show that commitment.

We do welcome the commitment in the 2022–23 budget to provide additional funds over the next four years to address the serious court backlog that we have in Victoria. I am concerned, however, this will not be enough to truly fix the problem. In 2021 the Attorney-General reported the court case backlog being more than 200 000 across all courts. Recent reports in the media point to the backlog taking 10 years to clear. Victims of crime are waiting too long for justice, and, as I say all too often in this place, justice delayed is justice denied. Imagine waiting four years to have a rape case finalised. It is unbelievable. Only a handful of the case clearance targets in the 2022–23 budget exceed 100 per cent, and those that do only aim for 104 per cent. It is difficult to see how this will make any significant impact on the backlog. It may be that 10 years is optimistic. New magistrates and judges are needed, and they are needed quickly. They also need additional court facilities to deliver their services, as we saw from a recent Court Services Victoria report and from insiders speaking to the media. We need to see some more comprehensive plans from the government about their targets for reducing the backlog, what they will need to do to achieve this and how much it will cost. We need KPIs and benchmarks. If we do not have these things, we are flying blind. I will continue to hold the government to account for this.

I was pleased to see up to \$1 billion allocated for the new Melton hospital and up to \$525 million for the new Barwon women's and children's hospital in Geelong, which has been jointly funded with the federal government. Both are much-needed developments. Melton is one of the fastest growing areas in Melbourne, and a new hospital has been a key priority for the local community. The new facility in Geelong will expand existing facilities and ensure the surrounding communities can source essential health services within the region. I am concerned, however, about the time lines for both of these projects. I have spoken about these concerns publicly. Both have project plans that are yet to be confirmed, so we have no idea when these much-needed facilities will be delivered. I may be being a bit cynical, but it seems a bit disingenuous to have budgeted commitments for two major projects without any money committed in forward estimates. It could be an election year.

In the case of the Melton hospital, despite \$70 million being previously allocated to get the project up and running, the budget papers indicate a four-year build not commencing until 2024–25, so we will not see the hospital open until 2029 at the earliest. Given the government's record on recent major infrastructure projects being on time and on budget, our concern is that it could be much later. There is even less information in the budget papers about the Geelong hospital. We certainly do not know when it will be completed, and unfortunately this was made less clear through answers at the Public Accounts and Estimates Committee by the Premier. By 2030 the need for these facilities will be far greater than it is today, and I expect that the local communities will be at that time experiencing difficulties accessing the health services that they deserve. I urge the government to work harder to get these projects up and running and delivered to the communities. We need a solid plan, not just an empty budget announcement.

In relation to crisis accommodation, there is not enough crisis accommodation in Victoria for victims of family violence. For a number of years the demand for housing support for such victims has grown at a far greater rate than available housing. The situation is exacerbated by the broader housing crisis

in Victoria, especially in regional areas. How can victims transition from crisis accommodation when there is limited availability in social housing as well as the private market? Victims often face a stark choice: face homelessness or return to live with a violent partner. Too many victims are choosing the latter. The budget provides funding to purchase only six new crisis accommodation properties for victim-survivors of family violence and just two new family violence refuges. This is great to acknowledge the need for these facilities, but single digits are nowhere near what we need. This is not going to scratch the surface of the very real problem we are facing right now, and much more needs to be done. With all the millions if not billions of dollars being spent on family violence, where is all the money going? It needs to be spent on tangible projects like housing and proven programs that deliver perpetrator rehabilitation and support for victims. At the moment there are too many great opportunities to seriously address family violence that are going to waste. In the meantime, there are more victims of crime.

In terms of the additional police budgeted for, this has been something that I have been very supportive of as a former Victoria Police member. I would like to echo the sentiments of ex-member Brad Battin in the other place in noting that this is only one-third of the allocation that the union asked for. The government media release said, and I quote:

The Staffing Allocation Model (SAM), designed by Victoria Police in consultation with the Police Association of Victoria (TPAV), guided the investment of \$342 million for the additional police and PSOs needed to meet Victoria's policing requirements over the next two years while we assess our state's changed needs post-pandemic.

I query that. If the SAM guided this investment, there would actually be an additional 1000 police budgeted for. Nonetheless, I am happy to see the new 502 officers budgeted for and committed to, which will relieve stress on the members and better serve the community. Unsurprisingly, I am hoping that we will see regional and rural areas get their fair share of these uniformed police.

Whilst I am here, as I know it has been a point of contention in the house as recently as a motion in this place in the last sitting week, I would like to refer to the integrity agency funding. The Ombudsman and IBAC have been outspoken since late 2020, ensuring they have adequate funding to carry out all the inquiries and investigations that they have been tasked with completing. They do not do their job by halves, so adequate funding is absolutely integral to government accountability. Just look at what is happening federally with the proposed independent commission against corruption. It is a no-brainer. Derryn Hinch's Justice Party, just for the record, absolutely supports a federal ICAC and it absolutely supports integrity agencies being able to do their job in a non-partisan independent manner, as is their imperative. In this budget I have queried their funding directly with the Treasurer's office because I wanted to make sure the agencies were satisfied. I have been informed that IBAC has received a 3.6 per cent increase in funding in this budget before factoring in the additional \$7 million funding held in contingency. Following last year's budget, which provided IBAC additional funding for several initiatives, IBAC and Treasury discussed options to provide more certainty of funding for IBAC in response to new and increasing demands. IBAC agreed to a base review process to understand its capability and capacity needs and an operating model to ensure that it had the funding and structure to perform as the leading integrity agency.

In respect of the Ombudsman, base funding for the Victorian Ombudsman will increase by 3.2 per cent in this budget. The Victorian Ombudsman did not submit a budget bid for additional funding in this budget, and after budget decisions had been finalised the Ombudsman requested a Treasurer's advance of \$700 000 for any urgent and unforeseen activities of the Ombudsman, which the government accepted. Whilst it may be purported by some members of the opposition that Derryn Hinch's Justice Party are opposing additional funding to integrity agencies, this is smoke and mirrors. All the evidence we have been given points towards the agencies being funded adequately.

In summary, Derryn Hinch's Justice Party had some fantastic wins in this budget with respect to some of our core priorities and policies, such as law and order, victims of crime and cyber safety. Rest

assured, we will keep fighting for these important projects, and being an election year, we will make sure that our voices are loud and they are heard. I commend the bill to the house.

Mr ONDARCHIE (Northern Metropolitan) (16:41): I rise today to speak to the Appropriation (2022–2023) Bill 2022, a bill that is designed to essentially pay the bills of Victoria, to meet the requirements in the budget papers and to make sure that Victorians are getting their fair share of what is required. Whilst this is called the Appropriation (2022–2023) Bill, I think it would be much better couched as the bill that provides not much for Melbourne's north.

Ms Shing interjected.

Mr ONDARCHIE: A few seconds in and an interjection, Ms Shing. This bill, which does not provide much for Melbourne's north, surprisingly, once again has delivered very little for my community. We have been campaigning for some time with the community for an upgrade for Merri Creek Primary School, for more open space and more building works in Fitzroy North to support the great work of principal Kerri Gibson. There is some money in this budget to support Merri Creek, but I think it only happened because the local community, who gave me the privilege to campaign on their behalf, got the opportunity to make lots of noise about it and finally the government relented and gave some money to Merri Creek Primary School for some upgrade works. Proudly, or sadly in a way, I was the only member of this place who called for it, but we got there.

But I also want to talk about some other things. We have been campaigning for a long, long time about the growth in Melbourne's outer north, particularly in the Craigieburn-Greenvale area where we wanted some funding for Mickleham Road. The then Morrison government came to the party with \$109.5 million for the upgrade to Mickleham Road—I am hopeful that the current federal government will support this—and the state government was dragged kicking and screaming to do something about it as well and put a little bit of money, not the total amount of money required, into the budget to support the duplication of Mickleham Road. It is not going to go the whole distance, it is only going a little of the way, but because of the great work of the Greenvale Residents Association, the local schools and the local community, who offered me the opportunity to campaign on their behalf on this matter, there is some money for Mickleham Road.

But generally speaking Melbourne's north has missed out. Coburg High School, which was reopened under the Napthine government, is at capacity. It needs more funding for extra buildings. What did they ask for? Through me they asked for some money for a master plan so they can plan out the future of Coburg High School. What appeared in the line items in the budget for Coburg High School? Not a cracker of money. They will feed some money through as part of an overall bucket, but specifically there was no money allocated for Coburg High School's master plan.

People have a bit of a laugh about me every now and again when I talk about the surveys I am doing in the local community. I have done a lot of work up in Kalkallo, where traffic congestion, because of all the new development, is just out of touch with reality. People are taking half an hour to get out of their estate so they can drive to work. We wanted money for the traffic congestion around Kalkallo, and what appeared in this budget for the people of Kalkallo in Melbourne's outer north? Zero, not a cent.

For a long time we have been talking about the intersection of Settlement Road and Dalton Road in Thomastown, a roundabout where there is a homemaker centre and a number of retailers, and it is really, really dangerous to get through that intersection. In fact I recall, very late to the party, the member for Thomastown went out there and did a little bit of a video following the work that we have been doing over a number of years about fixing up that roundabout just pre the budget, and I thought to myself, 'Hello, she's doing a video just before the budget about this roundabout. Maybe something is going to happen in the budget'. Well, she got sucked in by her own people because there is nothing in the budget for that roundabout—nothing for that very dangerous intersection. Somerton Road, which abuts Roxburgh Park and Meadow Heights and leads into places like Greenvale and

Craigieburn and Somerton, got no money. There was no money for Somerton Road support—once again Melbourne’s north being taken for granted.

I touched on Mickleham Road a little earlier. What has happened is there is a school, Greenvale Secondary College, and a wider estate, and the kids and mums and dads—you have heard me use this expression in this house before—almost have to play that old game *Frogger* to get across the road so they can get their kids to and from school. We have been calling out for a pedestrian crossing for that area for a long time, and we even said, ‘If you’re not at the point of being able to formally put a pedestrian crossing in, put in some of those temporary lights they use when they’re doing road upgrades so that people can cross the road at some point’. And what was in the budget? What was in the budget for the safety of the parents and the children of the school that abuts Mickleham Road? Nothing—not a cent for them and their safety.

The AAMI crash index analyses roads run across this country, and in Melbourne’s north the three hotspots identified were Plenty Road in Bundoora—interestingly enough, right outside the member for Bundoora’s office; Cooper Street, through the major activity centre of Epping; and Bell Street. They were identified as bad hotspots in this country, and I think Plenty Road in fact was number one for traffic incidents and accidents. We were looking for things like smart upgrades to the traffic lights, some support for those roads to prevent Victorians having accidents or getting injured, and in this budget—and no doubt members on the other side will talk about how great it is—there was nothing for those major traffic hotspots.

Many years ago a previous Labor government outlined the new estate of Aurora and promised them a whole lot of stuff in Epping North. You were going to get a train line, you were going to get all those great services in Epping North, you were going to get these wonderful internet connections. There is nothing that has occurred for Aurora, and it goes all the way to Wollert. So we have been asking, as have the community, as have the local municipality, as have the local emergency services: can we get a feasibility study done on extending that train line you promised all those years ago from Epping to Wollert? In the budget, for a feasibility study for that train line, there is not a cracker—not a cent.

When I look at places like Broadmeadows, that intersection of Johnstone Street and Mickleham Road with the large roundabout that has been there for a long time is really a bit of a challenge for professional drivers in transport, for couriers, for taxis and for passenger vehicles to get through there. It has been difficult. Prior to this budget the people in my community in that area had one wish—one wish only—as they contacted me many times about this: could you at least investigate the traffic flow and do something about fixing up this very unsafe and congested roundabout? Disappointingly in the budget there is nothing—not a cent—for that roundabout.

One of the challenges we have had in Melbourne’s north since the closure of the Ford assembly plant and the downstream supply chain is jobs. Jobs have been a big issue for a long time in Melbourne’s north. One of the things that we have been talking about and we have been talking to the federal government about for a long time—because we have the Hume Highway, we have the rail corridor, we have all that stuff coming into the port of Melbourne—is a multimodal freight interchange in Beveridge. A freight interchange would provide 20 000 jobs—a freight interchange that the Morrison federal government had committed to supporting—to support the people of Mitchell shire, of Hume City Council, of Whittlesea and beyond, as well as taking trucks off that very dangerous road 5 kilometres back into the port of Melbourne and using that multimodal freight interchange to be able to move our goods around Victoria safely. In this budget, which is sometimes lauded by this government, there is not a cent for 20 000 jobs in Melbourne’s north—not a cent.

I recall during the 2018 state election campaign standing at a polling booth in Craigieburn, and across from me was the member for Yuroke. She was talking to the people waiting in the line about her view and the government’s commitment to build the Craigieburn community hospital. I said to somebody standing in the line, ‘I’m not sure you should accept this. They’re not going to do it’. She looked

straight across at me and said, 'We are going to do it. We're going to build the Craigieburn community hospital'. That was prior to the election in 2018.

That Craigieburn community hospital is much needed. If you go to the west of Melbourne, there are hospitals. If you go to the south-east of Melbourne, there are hospitals. If you go to the east of Melbourne, there are hospitals. If you go to the north of Melbourne, there is one hospital—the Northern Hospital—and it is packed. The emergency department waiting times are long and ambulance ramping happens because there are just not enough facilities in a hospital that is serving such a great variety of communities. In fact on Australia Day the year before last I went to the hospital to try and welcome Australia's newest person. I said to the nurse at the time, 'Show me the newest baby of the day', and she said, 'Pick one of 20'—20 babies born in that 24-hour period, such is the growth in Melbourne's north.

We thought a community hospital in Craigieburn might help with some of the burden. What has happened since 2018, when I challenged the member for Yuroke about not building the Craigieburn hospital? They have had some community meetings since 2018. Four years on they have had some community meetings. Where is this Craigieburn community hospital they promised? I tell you what, it is still a fair way away because there is no money in the budget for it. The people in the community have been conned with things like Craigieburn Road, Somerton Road, Mickleham Road, the community hospital, health services and education services. This budget does nothing for Melbourne's north. They continue to ignore Melbourne's north.

With the work that is being done around the Epping hospital at the moment, there has been a significant budget blowout. On O'Herns Road, which has just been finished—a budget blowout. Looking across this total budget, the West Gate Tunnel project, \$4.7 billion over budget; the Metro Tunnel is now between \$3 billion and \$4 billion over budget; the Mordialloc bypass in the south-east, \$148 million, 40 per cent, over budget; your much-lauded Melbourne heart hospital, which was announced at \$150 million, is now \$400 million over budget, and it is late.

Net debt is rising significantly in this state. By June 2025 Victoria's net debt will be worse than that of New South Wales, Queensland and South Australia put together. This is a government that thinks the only way it can deal with this is to tax its way out of trouble. Most businesses—and let us face it, Dan is running Victoria's biggest business—would look at the cost line—

The ACTING PRESIDENT (Mr Bourman): Order! Mr Ondarchie, appropriate parliamentary names would be more suitable than the Christian name of the Premier, thanks, such as 'the Premier', 'Mr Andrews' or 'the member for Mulgrave'.

Mr ONDARCHIE: Okay. Thanks, Acting President. I will remember to do that in future and call him the Premier. When those opposite call it 'the Andrews Labor government', should they be calling it the Premier Labor government' rather than using the term 'Andrews'? But I will pick up your point.

In terms of taxes from the Premier of this state—the Premier's taxes—\$15 billion has been raised from land tax and stamp duty affecting property buyers, an extra \$58 million a year from July 2020 as windfall gains hit developers and landowners. Businesses have been required to pay a billion dollars a year for a mental health levy to support a \$246 million package. Future taxpayers are facing over \$167 billion in debt. The Treasury expects petrol prices to remain elevated, and there also remains some uncertainty about this VicRoads privatisation—this from a government that opposed privatisation but is now looking to privatise parts of VicRoads. They will say it is not that. They will say it is not privatisation; it is outsourcing or it is something different—it is consulting—but we all know what it is.

They announced an additional 502 police and 50 PSOs in the next two years as part of an investment, but the Police Association Victoria has previously called for 1500 more officers to be introduced. They are not catching up. They talk about additional police, but we are not adding up the police who are leaving, who are retiring and who are taking long-term PTSD leave. They are not backfilling them, so

to claim there are extra police in this state is a total furphy. I know in my own electorate there are nights the van does not go out because they have got no-one to drive it.

This government has ignored Melbourne's outer north. It has ignored the people of Melbourne's north in this budget. They owe those people the respect they deserve. They get it from me, but they do not get it from the Labor members in Melbourne's north and they do not get it from this government. This bill is about servicing the needs of all Victorians, but what they have done through this bill is ignore the people of Melbourne's north.

Ms SHING (Eastern Victoria) (16:56): Well, talk is cheap from those opposite—it is very, very cheap. And what we have heard today—

Dr Bach: Debt is not.

Ms SHING: Actually I am going to pick you up on that, Dr Bach, because what you would know if you had a granular sense of economic development over the course of recent years is that debt is a prudent way to aggregate expenditure and opportunity for the state and that in fact we have been able to borrow against record low interest rates in order to fund a record investment in infrastructure. So, Dr Bach, I would suggest that perhaps you would be well informed to go back to what it is that the Reserve Bank has said, go back to what it is that the Productivity Commission has said and go back to economic theory 101 in order to understand that debt has been very, very cheap and that in fact has informed a fiscal strategy that has enabled Victoria to invest record amounts in infrastructure and record amounts in evolving the opportunities that exist for Victorians right across the state, making sure that we have been able to invest across the board in programs, services, job creation opportunities and indeed a better, brighter future for the state as a consequence.

What I want to do with the time that I have available to me today is talk about the budget and what it means for Victoria but also to have a focus on Eastern Victoria and in particular regional Victoria. There is a lot of hot air that comes from across the chamber and that floats its way over from the other place claiming that in fact this is—what is the phrase?—a Melbourne-centric government. What I did when I heard those claims most recently against this year's budget is I went back and had a look. I had a look at the averages between 2010 and 2014 and between 2015 and 2022. And what I have seen very clearly, and it is there in the budget papers for all to see, is that between 2010 and 2014—it was a coalition government then—there was an average spend of \$1.8 billion in regional Victoria. \$1.8 billion—it does not sound like a bad amount until you turn your mind to the size and the challenges and the diversity and the opportunities that exist throughout rural and regional Victoria. And then you counter that \$1.8 billion under a coalition government in average expenditure across regional Victoria per annum with \$4.5 billion, which is the average that the Andrews Labor government has spent in regional Victoria—\$36 billion of funding for regional Victoria since we were elected in 2014. These are important figures, and they are important figures because we hear a lot of hyperbole—a word that Mr Davis has only recently learned how to pronounce—which relates to claims from those opposite that we are not providing—

Members interjecting.

Ms SHING: It is nice to get a laugh from those opposite. It is nice to get a laugh, because otherwise you would think that their faces of grief and sadness and extravagant melodramatic dismay were immovable, when we know they are not. We know they are not because they are also very happy to celebrate the gains that have been delivered to their communities. The reason for that is that the Premier committed, when he was elected, to govern for all Victorians, and that is precisely what has occurred.

When I look at the expenditure that has been issued throughout Victoria—throughout our metropolitan areas, our suburban areas, the peri-urban areas and the interface regional and rural areas—there is very clearly a historic investment in the growth, in the support, in the recovery and in the opportunity for an enormously diverse range of sectors, of businesses, of families, of communities and of infrastructure. And when I think about fiscal management, when I think about the way in which

responsible financial decision-making has occurred under this government, I think about the way in which prudent debt has been part of this strategy and I think also about the Treasurer's speech and the contributions that he has made over the years. Dr Bach, you would be well informed to go back and read the Treasurer's speeches in this regard. I look at the process of pandemic recovery and of response and return to surplus, which has been a big commitment that has been put in black and white, which we are well on track to achieve. I think about the fact that in this budget, now that we have delivered on the first step of creating jobs, reducing unemployment and restoring economic growth and then returning to an operating cash surplus, we are in a position to return to operating surplus under step 3 of our fiscal plan in 2025–26 with that operating surplus of \$650 million.

Those opposite cannot have it both ways. You cannot on the one hand say that we have incurred a record level of debt whilst also ignoring on the other hand the fact that it is precisely investments in areas such as large-scale infrastructure which have delivered a record number of jobs; that in fact Victoria has been the engine room of jobs creation between the two waves of the pandemic and now is again; that it is precisely because of investments in health, investments in rail, investments in road, investments in infrastructure—including the Big Build, including \$5.2 billion in public and social housing, including a record investment that has made sure that over the course of our commitment to education we have either rebuilt entirely or upgraded every single special development school across Victoria—that we have delivered those jobs; and that we are making sure that in this year's budget there is \$2.9 billion in health infrastructure and a record continuing investment in mental health to implement every single one of the recommendations of the royal commission. It is easy to see that the priorities of this government extend to people first: people first through job creation, through recovery, through the importance of providing stability, through making sure that every family can provide their children with an equity of opportunity in education and in training. We have seen the continuity of free TAFE. We have seen the upgrade of TAFE campuses and facilities, which continues apace throughout the state. We have seen schools reopened. We have seen new schools being built.

One of the things that I was pleased to be able to celebrate in the lead-up to budget day in Eastern Victoria was that a range of schools that have needed investment for a really long time have been effectively prioritised in this year's budget, following record investment across the state in previous years. I think about \$6.6 million for Warragul and District Specialist School, I think about \$3.7 million for Officer Specialist School and I think about land being purchased for Pakenham north west primary and for a new Officer Brunt Road school. I think about \$2.4 million for Coldstream Primary School. I think about \$4.75 million for Traralgon Recreation Reserve, something which my Nationals colleague across the way conveniently neglected to mention in any of her commentary around how the government needed to come to the party—a blooper on her end, indicating she could not read the budget papers when in fact the only thing missing was the commonwealth government coming to the party to fund the balance.

Ms Bath: Or a bit of selective quoting from the government.

Ms SHING: 'Selective quoting'? We would never hear selective quoting from those opposite, would we, Minister Pulford? There is a first time for everything. I think of \$7.5 million to continue the work of the Latrobe Valley Authority and to continue the work of the Ladder Step Up program, which to date has facilitated 19 programs for at-risk young people who are vulnerable for a range of reasons to complete a program of wraparound care, mentoring and positive role modelling. And I think about the fact that of the 178 graduates of those 19 programs, more than 85 per cent have either returned to education or training or indeed are in employment. These are the sorts of measures that involve investing in people.

When I think about what it is that Mr Davis loves to go on about when he is on his feet—more adjectives than a bookstore on a good day—he very, very conveniently talks about the range of costs associated with public sector employment. One of the things that Mr Davis loves to talk about is the numbers of people in the Victorian public service, and he loves to talk about the numbers of people in the various higher grade levels of the VPS. When I heard Mr Davis talk about this, what it reminded

me of was a report from the Ombudsman, I think in 2015, that criticised the government, of which Mr Davis was a part, for potential breaches of the fair work laws investigated by the Fair Work ombudsman following—get this, right; this one is good so you should probably remember this—cutting 4000 jobs from the public service and then spending \$1 billion, billion with a ‘b’, on consultants.

So before those opposite get it in their heads that they can pop their halos on and walk around on the high ground as it relates to management of the public sector, let us not forget that when they were in government they paid lip-service to public service and public sector service delivery and program delivery—the sorts of things that result in initiatives like the Royal Commission into Victoria’s Mental Health System or the implementation of the 227 recommendations from the Royal Commission into Family Violence. Let us not forget it was those opposite who closed schools, who closed TAFEs, who slashed public service numbers and who made it nigh impossible for people to actually get a go with education unless they were prepared to spend tens of thousands of dollars every year on selective and private schools. Let us not forget the sense of privilege that seeps into every single sentence that those opposite ever utter. Let us not forget the idea of ‘getting a go’ when you have already got privilege on your side. Let us not forget that those opposite have steadfastly refused to support progressive initiatives that have helped to provide opportunities for Victorians who have needed them and have deserved them. Let us not forget that the sick pay guarantee was opposed by those opposite. Let us not forget that a range of initiatives that are extended to provide healthy and safe workplaces have been opposed by those opposite: nurse-to-patient ratios, industrial manslaughter and long service leave across different sectors within the community. Let us not forget that it is moral high ground, some sort of pious commitment to trickle-down economics, which leads those opposite to say, ‘We support what you are doing, but—’. And again, as I have said in this place before, with the coalition there is always a ‘but’ and with the coalition there is never any commitment to actually invest in people. It always comes down to a cheap line, to a throwaway slogan or to some self-aggrandizing idea that only in fact the coalition can provide a meaningful way through the pandemic.

Well, here is the news: the way through a pandemic is to invest in people, to invest in growth, to invest in job opportunities and, as a corollary to that, to invest in education and training pathways. These are the things that will see us in a position to flourish. These are the things that will increase and improve our resilience in relation to further challenges of a public health nature into the future. It is not the carping of those opposite that will deliver these sorts of investments in infrastructure. It is not, in fact, if we were going to be specific about it, the verbiage of people like Mr Davis in this place that is going to make a difference to the cost of living for people who cannot afford to choose between their heating on the one hand, their grocery bills on the other and the cost of their mortgages on the other. That is three hands, but you know what I mean.

The bottom line is we need to make sure that as a government we are taking steps to reduce the cost of living; to reduce energy bills, and the energy saving power bonus is a really, really important example of this; and to assist people with adapting to climate change. It is a dirty phrase when you are listening to those opposite, because until very recently they did not actually believe in it, and until very recently they thought that you did not need to talk about it. Climate change is in fact an important part of the conversation that is guiding our encouragement and incentives toward uptake of renewable energy. It is these sorts of discussions that we are having with communities, with constituents, with stakeholders and with various industries, businesses and geographic parts of the state that are guiding the development of policy which is setting us up for long-term recovery and indeed prosperity. What we do know is that unemployment in this state, in regional Victoria—save for a couple of areas, particularly around youth unemployment—is at record low levels. What we do know is that employment opportunities are at record high levels, that skills shortages can be met by appropriate pathways to education and training and partnerships with industry and that we are leaving no part of the state behind. It would do those opposite well to consider, in the event that they do ever wish to be a viable government—a viable alternative government—turning their minds to ways in which they too could put people first.

Mr HAYES (Southern Metropolitan) (17:11): Last year during hearings on biodiversity and ecosystem decline we heard many witnesses call for this state to declare a biodiversity and ecosystem emergency. Our ecosystem decline is of great concern to me and the Sustainable Australia Party and, I hope, of great concern to the government, so I will begin my look at the 2022–23 budget with this emergency in mind.

With our precious ecology and our future in mind, I welcome the government's \$16.9 million in funding to improve our marine and coastal ecosystems. But is this commitment to the environment enough? One of the witnesses to the inquiry by the committee of which I am deputy chair, the Environment and Planning Committee, into ecosystem decline was a marine biologist, Dr Matthew Edmunds of Australian Marine Ecology. He told the inquiry:

The communities all through the marine environments provide really important ecosystem services to our society, not just in terms of their intrinsic values but in terms of processing nutrients for us, providing habitat and production for fisheries and aquaculture, waterways for shipping and all sorts of other services.

Unfortunately there have been some ecosystem declines all through the state in all of the types of habitats that we know of. And a lot of those, or nearly all of those, are human related and usually a compounding of the pressures that we are putting on them.

Dr Edmunds spoke of the poor quality of scientific processes in Victoria in the marine field, low standards and the absence of checking of these standards and their review. To quote Dr Edmunds again:

... scientific standards are a way of trying to provide factual, reliable evidence that you can make decisions on, as opposed to advocacy, marketing or just straight-up corruption.

When one considers evidence like this, one wonders if \$16.9 million is enough to make a big difference in this vital sector. But let us call it a start anyway.

Last year during the ecosystem and biodiversity decline inquiry a number of expert witnesses said that given the extent of our environmental damage and challenges the budget for the Department of Environment, Land, Water and Planning should be set at at least 1 per cent of state budget spending. This 1 per cent is a drop in the ocean compared to other budget commitments. With DELWP spending at \$780 million and the total budget spend at \$99.3 billion, spending on the environment is around \$200 million short of even this modest 1 per cent goal. I stress we are in a climate and biodiversity emergency, and I call on the government to urgently increase spending on the environment.

There is also \$7 million to deal with coastal erosion. I feel this is going to be an area of increasing concern as global warming causes sea levels to rise. I hope valuable lessons are learned through this \$7 million of funding because in future budgets much more money is going to be needed. The Environment and Planning Committee last year also heard about the poor state of facilities in our national parks, so the \$9.5 million allocated to improve and maintain these facilities is sorely needed. Once again this funding is welcome, but it is just the start of what is needed. I also note the \$2.5 million allocated to the bushfire safety program. This is an important program that protects regional and rural communities from bushfires caused by fallen powerlines. We have got to find a better way of moving high-voltage transmissions around the state, and I think microgrids and things like that might be a way to look at safer electricity transmission.

I welcome the government's \$16 million in spending on preserving the state's heritage icons such as Werribee Mansion and the Point Nepean forts. Many people believe there is a lot more that needs doing to protect heritage in this state. Here I will mention a couple of spending allocations which are welcome in Southern Metro Region, some of which I advocated for at the behest of local councils who also pushed for all of these. I am very pleased to see the \$18 million allocation to deliver critical works on local piers and jetties, including Hampton Pier. I have advocated for this vital spending and also for the Middle Brighton Pier, where work has been continually going on, but much is needed to be done. We really need an urgent rebuild of this pier. We cannot keep patching it up. Also, there is \$12.9 million for Berendale and Katandra special schools, \$3.8 million for Sandringham East Primary

School, \$10.6 million for the bus network reform in Oakleigh and Southland, \$2 million for the Shipston Reserve and \$1 million for Elsternwick Park lighting and pavilion upgrades.

The \$27.8 million in the budget to improve the state's building sector is also very welcome but again urgently needed. Recently I hosted a round table of mayors and councillors from councils in my electorate. One of the main topics of conversation was the state of building standards in the apartment sector and the heartbreak of people who had invested their life savings in these failed constructions. The large number of apartments suffering severe building defects is a massive problem in this state, and I do not believe the \$27.8 million in spending in this budget will be the end of it. What we see here is corner cutting by private sector developers, the effects of deregulation of the planning and building supervision duties, which used to be in the hands of councils, and now the Victorian taxpayer is being asked to foot the bill caused by a developer-driven system. It is a product of deregulation gone wild. Will the government find the guts to take the power of oversight back into public hands? The Sustainable Australia Party is firmly of the view that supervision of building surveyors should be returned to the hands of local councils, with appropriate funding to provide a high-quality supervision and inspection service in the interests of the public and not those who are primarily seeking super profits.

This budget also contains some welcome funding for sustainable water and recycling investments. But make no mistake, the government plans to have 10 million people in Victoria by 2050. That is the agenda behind a good deal of water spending—to try and accommodate many, many more people living in this state despite the widespread and deep unpopularity of this policy. A shortage of water is going to be an issue. This is an arid country. It is not Europe, but the government's property developer friendly population policies pretend that it is, so water will be in shorter and shorter supply. Money needs to be spent on water. The \$4 million funding for water access for Victoria's traditional owners is especially welcome.

I thought this budget contained some good initiatives for renewable energy and for helping Victorians deal with surging energy costs. Much like the 1973 war in the Middle East caused a surge in energy prices, the current one in the Ukraine is doing the same. While the opposition, representing the big donors from the fossil fuel industry, will claim energy price increases were caused by too much reliance on renewables, the real culprits are gas and coal producers profiteering from the war in Ukraine. They are enjoying an export bonanza. If there were more renewables and battery storages in the system, energy costs would be less, not more. Many of these companies do not pay tax in Australia, and they are making huge profits from now cheap gas at the expense of the Victorian taxpayers. What we urgently need here is a domestic gas reservation scheme like sensible Western Australia has put in place. Once again, will the government find the guts to upset a powerful and rich industry like the gas and coal producers? I do have great concerns about the massive rise in electricity and gas prices, and while measures in this budget are there to assist, I call on the government to listen to bodies like the Australian Council of Social Service that represent people on fixed incomes and low incomes. It is these people who are going to be most hurt by these increases. If further measures are needed after this budget, then the government must stand ready to act, but in no way can this be a permanent solution.

I now turn to social spending in the budget. Last sitting week my colleague in this place Dr Catherine Cumming made a pithy remark about the government's poor record on health and social services, especially on the failure to keep the promise from the 2018 election to build or upgrade 10 community hospitals. This is a failure I have recently asked a question about myself. Dr Cumming rightly asked for more money for the ambulance system, for hospitals and for more money for building these community hospitals. If Dr Cumming does not mind, I wish to quote her:

Hurry up. Throw the money there. Get them built immediately. Pretend it is a tunnel or a level crossing. Just pretend for a little moment that a hospital is more important than a level crossing or a tunnel.

That was rather funny at the time, but just there I believe she hit the nail on the head. This government is very focused on big projects, those ones where their top people can don a hard hat and an orange

vest, get all that media attention—‘Getting things done’, all that sort of thing. There is nothing wrong with that, but what is not getting done is maintaining the social fabric of this state. We saw out the front of Parliament late last year how frayed that social fabric is. I know Labor has a proud tradition of funding social services, but currently I believe they are dropping the ball. All those tunnels and level crossings are very expensive. The cost blowouts on these projects are astronomical.

Public housing is also an area that is important to our social fabric and needs more funding. The government is playing an enormous game of catch-up here. For its first term and part of its second term its record of provision has been very poor. At the same time it has failed to mandate a minimum amount of affordable housing for big developments. Many councils in my electorate are calling for mandated inclusionary zoning to be inserted into the planning scheme, but even more important to our party is to see government directly intervene in the housing market and build public housing for the public—not investors—on publicly owned land.

The lack of a real vacancy tax is also contributing to our housing crisis. Let us call it what it is—it is a housing crisis. We have a huge public housing waiting list, yet the think tank Prosper has said that there are 70 000 properties sitting empty in Melbourne, presumably investment properties. Prosper Australia has said the vacant residential land tax is ineffective in curtailing property vacancies in Melbourne and that housing policy must prioritise housing as a human right, not just a profit-generating tool. Maybe if we banned donations from property developers such a focus on housing as a human right would significantly increase affordable housing. At the end of 2020 Prosper director Karl Fitzgerald said:

... it appears the Vacant Residential Land Tax was built to fail, with no oversight and no fines issued for failure to self-report. Vacancies have increased by 13.3% since the tax was introduced.

Mr Fitzgerald said if there was a proper residential vacancy tax, the government would have raised \$150 million to \$500 million instead of the \$6 million it has raised. The government is running a huge deficit, so why isn’t this revenue-raising measure being introduced? It would have a positive financial and social benefit, so the absence of an effective vacancy tax is something I find rather baffling.

At the same time we are seeing cost-cutting in our social services. They are clearly not meeting demand. The Victorian Alcohol and Drug Association, the peak body for treatment and rehab services in Victoria, expressed alarm at the budget cut of \$39 million in service funding for alcohol and other drug treatment and prevention. Alcohol and drug use soared through the lockdowns. The government has not only tolerated but encouraged home delivery of alcohol. This is very disappointing. VAADA said there was an 11.2 per cent cut from the budget for alcohol and drug treatment. The CEO of VAADA, Sam Biondo, said:

People experiencing alcohol and other drug dependency have been forgotten over the pandemic. With sales for alcohol increasing by 29 per cent over the pandemic, it is not surprising that 70 per cent of Victorian agencies have seen an increase in the prevalence and severity of alcohol presentations.

We saw in the recent federal election that trust in governments and politicians is at a low ebb. That explains the fact that the two major parties registered less than 70 per cent of the primary vote, a stark decline from the heyday of the fabled two-party system. Listening to donors, not the people, is at the heart of this move away from the Lib-Lab duopoly. Given this decline in the relationship between the people and their elected representatives, the role of the corruption commission in Victoria is vital. Victorian IBAC Commissioner, Mr Redlich, said in 2021:

As Commissioner, one of my most important roles is to ensure IBAC has the powers and resources required to fulfil its legislative obligations. As calls on the organisation to do more to expose and prevent corruption and police misconduct continue to grow, additional funding will be required in coming years.

If the government believes there is such a thing as society, then it needs to look closely at how to heal divisions and pain from man-made natural disasters, including the pandemic, and that means more

money for social spending, including mental and physical health, as well as on the environment, and less on major project cost blowouts.

Dr BACH (Eastern Metropolitan) (17:27): It is good to rise to also make a contribution on this important bill. Whether it is the escalating cost-of-living pressures or fixing the health crisis, the Andrews Labor government has failed to address the needs of people across Melbourne's east and north-east, the people who I represent. There are a range of things that I would like to briefly touch upon in the time that I have allocated to me this afternoon on this bill. I would like to talk about a few local measures and a few measures that sit within my shadow portfolios and then to make some holistic comments.

'Talk is cheap', said Ms Shing, and she was quite right when she said that. When I quipped back, 'Debt isn't cheap', Ms Shing took exception to that. Debt is of course historically cheap, but it is becoming more expensive. Indeed it became more expensive to service debt just today when the Reserve Bank decided to raise interest rates by a significant half a percentage point to 0.85 per cent. Most economists—indeed all economists—are predicting further interest rate rises over the course of the year as inflation continues to rise, so in a respectful way I would take issue with Ms Shing's characterisation of the government's strategy. She said it is a strategy that we move towards \$170 billion in debt, and she called that debt 'prudent debt'. Again, respectfully I would disagree. As we move towards \$170 billion in debt, as is made plain through this bill, we will have debt here in Victoria that is greater than the debt of New South Wales, Queensland and South Australia combined.

To take on some debt in order, for example, to invest in infrastructure that stacks up is something that I would support. However, I will not be lectured on economics 101 by a member of a government that has put \$28.1 billion of waste on the credit card. \$28.1 billion in blowouts are made plain through the budget papers. Debt to service spending on infrastructure, debt for productive spending, I understand at prudent levels can be a good thing at a time when interest rates are historically low. But I would argue that it is never a prudent strategy to increase debt levels simply to fund waste, and we see so much waste in these budget papers.

For example, the blowout on the North East Link, which the Minister for Transport Infrastructure visited in her high-vis and hard hat—to come back to some comments of Mr Hayes just the other day—has increased now to \$10.4 billion. That is simply the waste—the difference between what the Labor government said this project would cost and now the Labor government's own budgeted figures. The West Gate Tunnel really does not need any further commentary from me about how badly that has been managed by this government. The blowout there is very significant: \$4.7 billion. That is a vast sum. Ms Shing understandably took the opportunity to criticise the former Liberal and National Party government for what she said was the waste of \$1 billion. Well, I agree with her broad proposition that \$1 billion is a vast amount to waste. \$28.4 billion is of course much, much worse.

Now, just briefly continuing on Ms Shing's contribution before I move on, I was interested that she took the opportunity again to have a whack at the opposition over what she called selective quoting, and then true to form she criticised the former Morrison government for, she said, not partnering with the government. Look, it has been entirely legitimate over time for the government to want to take issue with some of the decisions of the Morrison government. That is fine. However, now there is a test: was that simply partisan politicking, another opportunity to bash up a Liberal government? Because if it was not, let us see the same fervour now that we have a Labor government in Canberra.

Selective quoting is something we were accused of on this side of the house. Ms Shing was deeply selective when she wanted to criticise the Morrison government that is not the government anymore. As I said earlier today, the budgetary position of Victoria would be better if the new Albanese government had not broken its promise to give \$4 billion in infrastructure funding—Ms Shing talked a lot about infrastructure—to Victoria. Nine days before the election, in a strategic drop to the *Herald Sun*, Ms King, the then Shadow Minister for Infrastructure, said that she would unlock \$4 billion of funding for Victoria. That funding had been set aside by Mr Frydenberg and Mr Morrison. She

promised that, of course, to win votes in Melbourne's east. Undoubtedly she was successful. It was described in the media as a \$4 billion power play, unlocking money to partner with the Andrews Labor government—quite right—and she made the point in the media that should the opposition be successful in November, well then, she would want to work with us on projects that we thought were meritorious. However, on her second day as a minister she ripped away that funding from Victoria. And yet even though we still hear criticisms of the Morrison government from those opposite—a government that is no longer the government—we have heard not a peep about \$4 billion being ripped away.

Ms Taylor interjected.

Dr BACH: The \$4 billion was ripped away on the second day after the government was sworn in, to take up Ms Taylor's point. So to take up Ms Taylor's point, maybe another member in this debate would like to tell me at what time they will criticise the Albanese government for ripping away \$4 billion dollars that they promised. Ms Taylor said it has been two weeks. Okay, fine. I will wait patiently. I do not ever recall that members opposite waited to criticise the Morrison government. I do not ever recall that happening, but if the proposition is that we should wait before sticking up for Victorians, I do not accept that. But if that is the government's position, let us get a time line. When will members of the government come out, fly the flag for Victoria, stick up for Victoria and fight for that \$4 billion of funding that the Albanese government when in opposition promised? When will we see that?

In my electorate of Eastern Metropolitan Region I was disappointed to see that there was no funding in the budget to deal with the Box Hill interchange. The Box Hill interchange in my electorate is such an important transport hub. For many years I caught the train to the Box Hill interchange and then the bus out to Doncaster, but it has fallen to rack and ruin, and when in opposition the Labor Party promised to fix it up. I would like to start a dialogue with the Minister for Public Transport and the Minister for Transport Infrastructure regarding when and how we will see funding and a plan to fix the Box Hill interchange.

I was also surprised that we did not see any targeted allocations for Box Hill Hospital and Eastern Health more broadly. I do not doubt that every other member of this place is in the same boat as me regarding the amount of correspondence that we receive from our constituents about health at the moment. In my neck of the woods we are deeply proud of Box Hill Hospital and deeply proud of the doctors and nurses, allied health staff and other support staff who work at Eastern Health. Nonetheless, they are being let down by the Andrews Labor government. In particular what we have seen is so many examples of ramping, and that means that deeply sick people, people in a crisis situation, are not able to get the care that they need and quite frankly that they deserve from the state health system, so I was surprised by that.

On infrastructure, once more we did see an ongoing allocation of some funding for the Suburban Rail Loop, but I am keen to understand the figures somewhat better than I do. In budget paper 4 it is noted that there has been an announcement—that was the language of budget paper 4—of \$11.8 billion for the Suburban Rail Loop, and yet when I interrogated the budget papers I could only see an allocation of \$2.359 billion. There is a gap there of almost \$9.5 billion. Some members of the Public Accounts and Estimates Committee recently sought to ask questions about this of the minister, and still I am not entirely sure whether that money has been allocated. It is not a criticism. I am simply seeking to understand the situation with that project, the first stage of which the government says will cost somewhere between \$30 billion and \$34.5 billion. I do not understand whether over \$11 billion has actually been allocated in the budget or whether it has simply been announced.

That is important because I will always give the federal Labor government credit where credit is due. Ms King has said a whole series of very sensible things about the Suburban Rail Loop that will cut through my electorate. She has said that the reason that she has offered the Andrews Labor government so much less than the previous federal Labor pledge is because she is not sure that the whole loop

'stacks up'. Those were her exact words. There is not a business case for the whole loop. There are no costings. There is no designated funding stream, and of course the project has not been ticked off by Infrastructure Australia. When Mr Albanese was infrastructure minister, he set up Infrastructure Australia, and again credit where credit is due. That was never a principle that was adopted by those opposite to the previous government, but credit where credit is due: it was a good thing that Mr Albanese set up Infrastructure Australia. Infrastructure Australia, for example, continues to say that the east-west link is a high priority. Well, they have not carried out an assessment of the Suburban Rail Loop, so again credit on this occasion to Minister King for holding the line against the Andrews Labor government and for saying, no, there must be a proper process.

One of the reasons why we have seen such extraordinary blowouts that are all now on the state's credit card—\$28.1 billion—is because at the outset of so many of the Andrews Labor government's big projects, so-called Big Build projects, there has not been a proper process. Those were the findings of the Auditor-General in two significant reports last year, so I do think it is very important that expert bodies like Infrastructure Australia are engaged early and carry out proper assessments to then ensure that projects stack up before significant funding is allocated and before work commences.

Overall, given the fact that in my electorate I hear on a daily basis that so many people are struggling with the cost of living and that our state's health crisis, whether it be ongoing ramping or whether it be a vast elective surgery waiting list, is detrimentally impacting so many people, I was disappointed with this budget. In particular I was disappointed to see such additional blowouts on major projects that will now make it so much harder to engage in tax reform, to engage in tax relief and to finally fix the problems that have beset our health system in particular for such a long period of time.

Ms TERPSTRA (Eastern Metropolitan) (17:40): I am pleased to rise to make a contribution on the Appropriation (2022–2023) Bill 2022. In researching this and listening to others in the chamber, I want to make my contribution with a sense of optimism, because following that you would think that everything was terrible and bad and that the sky was falling. I do not know—maybe they were reading from different notes than what I have got. Wow! It seems to be such a dark and bleak picture that has been painted by those opposite, but what I can say is that it is possible to have a budget that puts people at the centre. The investment, in broad brushstrokes, around this budget has at the heart of it delivering our pandemic repair plan, creating meaningful jobs, continuing to build on a world-class education system, getting Victorians home sooner and safer, helping families, making Victoria fairer and building strong communities. Having just heard Dr Bach's speech, you would think that all of those things that I just mentioned were bad things. I think Dr Bach's contribution heavily focused on criticising this government's Big Build program and a range of other things. But the fact remains that those opposite built nothing. They did nothing and built nothing.

Ms Pulford: They put tiles in a room at Ballarat train station. Just a room.

Ms TERPSTRA: That is it. Yes, just a room. This government is serious about getting on with building things. Part of the central core of the Big Build program is, as I mentioned before, getting Victorians home sooner and safer. That is why we invest in public transport. In my region, in the Eastern Metropolitan Region—Dr Bach talked about this; he talked about the Suburban Rail Loop—is the North East Link, building that missing link. I will touch on that for a moment. The North East Link will remove 15 000 trucks from roads. I live in the footprint of the North East Link project. This is my local community that is being affected by the trucks that are on the roads. Rosanna Road is being used by trucks. As I said, 15 000 trucks will be removed from the road. I am very happy about that. I would like to not be stuck in traffic jams where there are multiple trucks on the road, and this is what the North East Link is going to do: take 15 000 trucks off local roads. It will slash travel times by 35 minutes.

The first dedicated busway down the Eastern Freeway—I was out with Minister Jacinta Allan just yesterday and we attended the Bulleen park-and-ride. That is going to be completed four years early. Who does not want to have better public transport and more accessible public transport right in the

suburbs, right on your doorstep—delivering 34 kilometres of walking and cycling paths, planting 30 000 trees and delivering 10 000 jobs? That is all just a part of the North East Link project.

The contributions of those opposite, and Dr Bach's contribution as well, were very heavy on mythologising the fact that there are blowouts with all of these projects and mythologising around blowouts. But the fact remains that if we want to talk about mythology, look at what happened just recently as soon as Catherine King became the Minister for Infrastructure, Transport, Regional Development and Local Government in the federal government. She has come out and said the \$4 billion that the federal government talked about—

Members interjecting.

The ACTING PRESIDENT (Mr Gepp): Order in the chamber, please. I would like the member to be heard in silence.

Ms TERPSTRA: Thank you. There are 10 conversations happening here at once. Anyway, the \$4 billion was promised by the federal government. I noted that there were billboards put up by Michael Sukkar in his electorate of Deakin saying that he promised \$4 billion for the east–west link, and the federal minister for infrastructure has now said that that simply did not exist. It is a myth. 'It's a ... fraud' were her exact words, so it is really a little bit rich to be lectured by those opposite today about these mythologised blowouts on projects. I mean, we are building things. We are getting on with projects that Victorians back and that they voted for. The North East Link project was a project we took to the 2018 state election, so Victorians back these projects. Whether it is a large project like the North East Link—as I said, it is in my region, the Eastern Metropolitan Region—there are a range of other things that are going to benefit people in my region.

Recently I also attended the opening of the Doncaster ambulance station, otherwise known as the Templestowe ambulance branch, with Minister Martin Foley. We need to reflect on the fact that it was the previous Liberal government that closed the Doncaster ambulance branch, and we are now proudly reopening that so people in my electorate and certainly people who live in the Manningham area and surrounds will have greater access and better access to ambulance services should they need it. Again, those opposite can talk about cost blowouts, but their whole schtick is that they want small government and less services so that their rich mates can profit from it when they run businesses for profit. We get on with supporting communities by building important infrastructure projects and investing so that people can get to local jobs and go to TAFE and those kinds of things. That is what our government does.

Again, locally, I will talk about our commitment to public education. I could not have been prouder to be part of a government that made a commitment to rebuilding our special development schools. There are 36 special development schools, and I was very proud to visit with the Minister for Education, James Merlino, the other day the Croydon Special Developmental School. In fact that school was opened by Joan Kirner in 1992. It was an amazing thing to see, and I hope we can preserve that plaque on the wall so it does not get lost in the rebuild of the school, because it is very important. But as I said, that school was opened by Joan Kirner in 1992, so it has been a long time between drinks—or money—for that school. I was really pleased to be able to attend with the Minister for Education, James Merlino, and talk about the \$11 million investment that will be given to that school to upgrade it and to rebuild it. Kids who attend that school have moderate to severe disabilities, whether they be intellectual or physical disabilities. Like I said, that is actually putting heart in our budget. We talk about infrastructure, but we need to also connect these commitments that government has made to people and understand what a difference they can make to people's lives. The teachers at the Croydon Special Developmental School are amazing teachers and such dedicated teachers. I have visited that school on a number of occasions, and I have been very fortunate to also sit in a classroom and watch the teachers educating children with these severe intellectual or physical disabilities or challenges. It is amazing to see the joy on the children's faces as they are learning and having access to a world-

class education right here in Victoria. The money that is going to be invested in Croydon Special Developmental School will be amazing, and I cannot wait to see the outcomes for those children.

But another really good news story for people in my region, the Eastern Metropolitan Region, is Croydon Community School—what an amazing school—with \$18 million to actually rebuild that school on a different site. Again I visited that school with the Minister for Education, James Merlino, the other day, and what was really great to see was that the Croydon Community School takes students from all over nearby areas; it is not just for Eastern Metropolitan Region and not just Croydon. But these are kids who have either lived in residential care or lived in out-of-home care and have come from very challenging circumstances. Perhaps family life has not been the best for those children. They are disadvantaged. They may not receive funding that they might have ordinarily got. They may not fit criteria that gives them funding. But this school turns lives around.

If I can just talk about Marcus, one of the students who we met with the other day, Marcus is a student who had been out of school for quite a number of years. He was enrolled at Croydon Community School, and after not attending school for a couple of years he has now been reintegrated into Croydon Community School. He is now in year 12. Marcus was successful in securing an apprenticeship as a landscaper, and he is now working as an apprentice landscaper at Croydon Community School, planting the new plants for the new school, which is an amazing story. It is a lovely story; it is a success story. Again, it connects real people with the story of this budget, which is investing in people and giving people opportunities.

Marcus will be able to attend TAFE and obtain his apprenticeship. Another signature commitment of this government is the massive investment that we have made in TAFE and in our skills and training system just in this budget alone—\$103.1 million in our skills and training framework. People like Marcus are able to not only finish their secondary education but come out of school with an apprenticeship. Marcus's employer, who has got the contract for the planting at the school, is so happy with what Marcus has been able to achieve but loves him as an employee as well. What another great news story, for him to be able to complete that apprenticeship and walk away as a skilled tradesperson. So these are the things this government does and invests in.

Another really good news story in the skills and training space is the \$12 million of targeted support for the apprenticeship support officer program, which will help more apprentices complete their apprenticeships—again, putting real stories and faces on the investment in this budget; \$2.8 million for certificate IV in teaching an Australian First Nations language to increase the number of Aboriginal language teachers in Victorian kinders and schools, making sure that our First Nations students and children can have education delivered by teachers in First Nations languages; and \$4.8 million for the diploma in Auslan to be added to the free TAFE list and to review TAFE campuses to ensure that they are accessible for students with disability. Auslan is added to the free TAFE list so more and more students can have education delivered to them in a way that is meaningful for them and to remove barriers, so that increases equity and accessibility of education.

The budget goes from the large projects that I have talked about in terms of the North East Link even down to what is still a large investment by this government but at a local level more meaningful to people who might be struggling: the energy saver bonus. I know other people have talked about that in the chamber today, but what a great help that is with the cost of living. If you were eligible for the last one, you can access that bonus up until 30 June; I think it was \$250. But we are opening up a new round on 1 July, so you can access it under the previous scheme and then access it again after 1 July. That could be an amount of up to \$500 off just your electricity bill in one calendar year. That is a significant assistance to those who might be struggling with the cost of living. As we know, electricity prices are going up and up, and it is critically important that these investments are made. It is winter, and obviously during winter people need to access more heating to keep warm and to be comfortable in their own homes, so we are very pleased and proud to be able to make that investment for people to assist with the cost of living.

We heard Dr Bach talk about how terrible our government is and how terrible our infrastructure projects are, but again, in putting a face on and heart into this budget I must make mention of the government's previous commitment to the Royal Commission into Victoria's Mental Health System. In the 2020–21 budget we invested \$869 million to lay the foundation for the new mental health and wellbeing system, and this was followed by a record investment of \$3.8 billion in last year's budget to support Victorians and speed up the nation-leading and life-saving reforms.

I could go on and on and talk so much more about all the investments and what they mean to people in my region of the Eastern Metropolitan Region, but you can see this government has laid the foundations to make sure, as I said earlier, people can get to where they need to be sooner. We are implementing our pandemic repair plan through the investment in this budget. We are creating those meaningful jobs. We are supporting and building our world-class education system, making Victoria fairer and building stronger communities. As I said earlier, the investments that we are rolling out in this budget continue to build on previous budgets. Those opposite can criticise all they like, but they built nothing, they invested in nothing. With the new, incoming federal government, as I said, the federal infrastructure minister has criticised the mythologised \$4 billion for the east–west link that was never there. It was a dud project; it never stacked up. Again, I commend the bill to the house.

Ms MAXWELL (Northern Victoria) (17:55): I rise to speak on the Appropriation (2022–2023) Bill 2022. I spoke in the last week about the wins for my electorate of Northern Victoria and particular projects I have advocated for and those that are still on my wish list—those that I hope will be election commitments, from both sides, before November. As does Dr Bach, I also like to give credit where credit is due, and we are very appreciative of some of the funding that was committed to my electorate of Northern Victoria in the budget.

This budget I feel is pitched mainly around health—entirely appropriate, given the time, as never has good health been so important and perhaps so elusive as right now. I feel disheartened for the thousands of healthcare workers who continue to operate in very stressful conditions. The pandemic has certainly been a once-in-a-century challenge, but I hope it provides a strong lesson in knowing that we have to build and maintain systems that can endure strain. The economies of scale are harder to prosecute in regional areas, but our regions deserve a much stronger healthcare system than we have right now. This is not a reflection on the people that work within the system, for we know they give it their all and they do it with great compassion and care each and every day. But we do have shortages right across the board—and it is not a new story; however, it is one that is getting more pronounced—from GPs to allied and community health, ambulances, hospitals, mental health support and aged care. The future design of our system and recurring investment in it must include building a workforce as strong in numbers as it is in capability and care—one that can sustain challenges and pivot to avoid a crisis situation, as we currently see. If the budget is about health, I think the next one and the one after that will need to be as well, until our system is back on better footings with delivery of early intervention and increased home-care programs.

Our smaller regional areas need continued investment and services, and the process of master planning and approval for hospital upgrades needs to be clear and collaborative with communities. Not another hospital should endure what Swan Hill hospital has. For years their emergency department staff's only available break area was a plastic chair outside next to the bins. There was little room to move equipment, and their waiting room was completely unsafe, yet it took four iterations of a master plan for them to get the starter funding towards a new hospital. It is hoped that only one master plan will be enough to secure a new hospital in Mildura. The same applies for Albury-Wodonga, where we seem to have a conflict between the local certainty that a master plan has been submitted and the government, which is adamant that it is not finalised. Both cannot be correct, but what is certain is that a new hospital is desperately needed, and a single site is what the community healthcare workers want.

I hope the change in federal government will allow the state to collaborate on a strategy to address the critical shortage of GPs in regional areas. Some towns in my electorate have no GP, and families moving into a new region are resorting to telehealth with their metropolitan doctor because they cannot

get into the books of a local clinic. If someone rings Nurse-on-Call for their child, the likely advice they are given is that their child needs to see a doctor, but that is pointless when you cannot get in to one. Recruitment of healthcare workers is also diabolical, due to housing shortages. We all remember Maslow's hierarchy of needs—that begins with housing, and we do not have anywhere near enough in regional areas. To be honest, housing all of the workers that are in short supply across industries in regional areas is a big and ongoing challenge. Families escaping family violence are increasingly unable to source crisis accommodation. Only this week Wangaratta reported a 14.3 per cent increase in the number of households seeking assistance to find or sustain private rental housing. Half of them had never needed support before.

A lot will be riding on the big numbers that were released in this budget to support our healthcare system, including up to 7000 health workers, more paramedics, more ESTA call takers, 40 000 extra surgeries to reduce the waitlists and \$1.3 billion to deliver mental health reforms. Funding for 82 new mental health beds includes additional beds at Northeast Health Wangaratta and Goulburn Valley Health, and that is incredibly welcome news. I raised in March the need for an acute mental health service for the 12- to 15-year-old cohort, and I hope the rollout of the mental health reforms will address that critical need, particularly in our regional areas. I am hearing many stories of people needing to attend a mental health facility to be triaged only to be sent home with no health plan or alternative supports. They go home and then are taken again the next day by an ambulance or police vehicle to that same facility. It is a revolving door. People are feeling the impacts of COVID, and our young people are particularly susceptible to anxiety and depression in numbers not seen before.

Mildura has welcomed an investment of \$36 million to deliver a 30-bed residential alcohol and other drug rehabilitation unit. I am concerned that the overall spend on AOD rehabilitation services seems to have been cut. When our courts are littered with accounts of crime linked to substance abuse, it makes a mockery of community correction orders that mandate drug treatment. If those services are not readily available, where do they go? More importantly, it does nothing to properly intervene and assist people to improve their lives and to improve their health.

We are now a couple of years into the reform of our fire services, and it is disappointing that the CFA is being squeezed out of funding to upgrade and build stations. There are 1200 CFA stations to share only \$49.6 million of funding in this budget, yet Fire Rescue Victoria has been allocated \$120.6 million across 80 fire stations. This contrast is quite clear when you consider the brand new \$12 million Derrimut FRV station compared to Rochester's CFA station that was built in 1963. It has no change rooms and no shower. The brigade has to run their own fundraisers to buy all their training equipment, yet the income the state collects from the fire service levy continues to increase—\$800 million in this budget. I recognise that the Treasurer has slightly reduced the rate for primary producers, and that is greatly appreciated, yet the offset reality for most farmers is that they will still pay more. I note that the Victorian Farmers Federation has called for a review into the fire services levy, and this is something we support and hope the government will give further consideration to.

While I am on the topic of parity, my colleague, Stuart Grimley, requested the Parliamentary Budget Office last year investigate the split of assets between regional and metropolitan areas. This revealed that regional Victorians were at least 11 per cent worse off than their metropolitan counterparts when it comes to asset investment. There can be quite a bit of smoke and mirrors in all politics. It is what some say the masters do well, but frankly it is what the public despises. There seems to be a bit of smoke and mirrors in this budget with some big figures touted, but the fine detail raises questions about what has already been expended or represents co-funding which has been listed in one area but cut from another. The opposition has indicated that this budget delivers half of the investment into regional areas compared to the investment per person for people residing in metropolitan Melbourne. I would like the government to respond directly to this claim. If the figure of \$7142 for every person residing in regional Victoria is not correct, then what is the figure? The budget papers each year provide a regional summary of announcements, but I think our communities would benefit from the government issuing a detailed regional impact statement, one which gives some real comparisons and

quantifies the parity of spending proportionate to population for both assets and services, because there is no doubt that the nature of geography and topography often makes the claim for us needing more and not less.

With respect to funding related to the justice and child protection systems, which of course our party is always very interested in, we are pleased to see funding for more police and PSOs and the rollout of tasers to frontline police officers. I raised police resourcing in question time last sitting week, and while I finally received a response to that question earlier this week, I did not really get an answer on how many of the 500 police announced in the budget would be allocated to Northern Victoria. My colleague, Mr Grimley, also noted that we are pleased to see funding for cyber safety for children in school, which was a recommendation from the sex offender inquiry that Mr Grimley initiated.

Funding has been allocated to developing an alternate reporting option for sexual assault, which we obtained government support for last month. There is funding for new perpetrator interventions and the continuation of therapeutic court programs, including the Shepparton Drug Court and a Specialist Family Violence Court in Bendigo. This is something I believe would be of great benefit in Mildura, and I hope a drug court for the Mallee will be committed to before the next election. As Mr Grimley said during his contribution, we are concerned that funds to address the court backlog simply will not be enough, and we need to see a comprehensive plan.

In the portfolio of child protection, I am confused by the report from the Public Accounts and Estimates Committee that since 2014 an additional 1180 child protection practitioners have been funded and the minister says that the government has continued to deliver on its promise to protect Victorian children in the last 12 months, yet the commissioner for children and young people, while noting that there is considerable investment now, says the system is still not fit for purpose and the wraparound supports needed for complex care are simply not there. More than 2500 children in March were waiting to be allocated a caseworker, a 10 per cent increase on the previous year. The department spokesperson tried to justify this with a response that just because they are not allocated does not mean they are not being assessed, but a week later a former child protection worker revealed the reality that even if a child does have a caseworker, that does not mean they are being given much face-to-face time. These children cannot continue to be lost in our system as they have previously been.

I must say that personally I would prefer to see a hold on the Suburban Rail Loop and those funds go to addressing what the commissioner noted as probably decades of underfunding. Maybe we should hold that infrastructure for at least another term of government until our health and child protection systems are functioning properly. Ms Terpstra raved about taking 15 000 trucks off the roads and conveyed the safety and time savings for drivers. Perhaps the Murray Basin rail could be completed and there would be significant savings to be made from the reduction in the number of trucks carrying heavy loads on our rural roads. That would certainly address safety and reduce time frames for travel.

I could go on. However, in closing I would like to make a comment on the extension of the Navigator program and the new intended pilot program. Navigator is clearly not an early intervention program. The criteria to participate require a high rate of absenteeism and disengagement from school over many terms, so I ask: why is this being piloted for 10- to 11-year-olds? That is an age where early intervention must be provided to ensure continued school engagement, not grappling to catch them long after the horse has bolted, so to speak.

Ms BATH (Eastern Victoria) (18:09): I rise this afternoon to make my contribution on the Appropriation (2022–23) Bill 2022. I have been very interested to listen to various members' speeches, noting the different flavours and the different perspectives that people have. One of my thoughts on this budget, and I go to it all the time, is about being a steward of the state and that government should be a good steward of this state. The Andrews government should—any government should—provide fairly and equitably for all Victorians. But this budget does not do that. I would like to, in reading the Treasurer's speech, pull apart some of his second-reading speech in the lower house and see what that means for rural and regional Victorians in the context of his comments. One of the first comments of

his that piqued my interest was him spruiking the 4 per cent statewide unemployment rate, which he said was:

... at its lowest since ... records began.

The regional unemployment rate is even lower at 3.2 per cent.

Now, that is great. It is great, without a doubt. In my electorate of Eastern Victoria Region, Wellington has an unemployment rate of 5.1 per cent, Bass Coast 5.7 per cent and East Gippsland 6.4 per cent and the Latrobe Valley LGA 7.8 per cent. That is over twice the unemployment rate of other regional centres such as Ballarat, Bendigo, Geelong, Mildura, Shepparton and Wodonga. He also went on to say:

Workforce participation is now near an all-time high.

But over the past 10 years—and I am being fair, 10 years—the Latrobe City Council LGA has lost over 4350 jobs, while on average those other six regional centres that I have just spoken about have gained approximately 10 000 jobs each. Labor has failed to keep its objective of growing jobs in the Latrobe municipality, and it is at the epicentre of what we have seen in transition from the forced and rapid closure of Hazelwood: the fallout of those jobs that were lost—these are people at the end of those jobs that were lost—and then the reverberations both socially and economically. It is absolutely imperative that all sides of government—all levels of government—work to address this challenging situation. The transition that Latrobe Valley is going through cannot be put to the side and just propagandised. Let me look at one area that I feel that the government continues to propagandise. Unfortunately—and it brings me no joy—the Latrobe Valley Authority has not kept its mandate to grow jobs and sandbag this region. Indeed in this budget, the 2022–23 budget, \$7.5 million has been allocated. Over the time about \$290 million has been allocated. In the report tabled today in Parliament, the Labor and independent committee report—and I will say that because I did not vote for this recommendation—recommended:

That the Latrobe Valley Authority identify gaps in community awareness of its work and continue to address these gaps or misunderstandings by promoting its work, including as it relates to the 2022–23 Victorian State Budget's allocation of \$7.5 million ...

Well, the Public Accounts and Estimates Committee tells us \$5 million of that \$7.5 million is going to wages and staff. So that is \$2.5 million left over in this year's budget, and what this report is recommending is that we have self-promotional activities. Well, this area deserves more. It is a disgrace.

What we also know, looking at the budget, is that there is a fairly large, gaping hole where regional Victoria should be, and I state to the chagrin—or entertainment—of my Nationals colleagues that every one of the ministers in the lower house got up today and spoke about regional development and regional Victoria as if it was an afterthought and had to be then shunted into the Parliament. Now, over the last two years Regional Development Victoria has had budget cuts of 68 per cent—indeed this year, 32 per cent and \$8 million have been cut from the budget.

Our regions—food and fibre—are the powerhouse. We feed and clothe people, and we are happy to do it. They actually did a survey recently, and regional people are far and away the most content people or happy people. And we understand why: because we live in a great region wherever we are in country Victoria. And we love Melbourne. Melbourne is a great city and we love our Melbourne cousins, but we have done the heavy lifting over the time. Indeed Victoria has about \$18 billion in gross value of agricultural production; that is about a third of Australia overall. We see the cuts to the budget, and indeed Agriculture Victoria is not even a department now, it is a statement. It is a part thereof in a megadepartment. Agriculture Victoria has had its budget slashed, and they are chopping people out of this AgVic department. Now, there are bills coming through this house. We see them; we debate them all the time. There is actually important work that authorised officers are doing et cetera. There is important work about biosecurity, yet there has been a slashing of these people. Indeed I know my

colleague the Leader of The Nationals, Peter Walsh, made reference in his contribution to how the Department of Premier and Cabinet almost has more staff and spin doctors than the entire realm of Agriculture Victoria. Now, what does that tell you about priorities?

Also in this budget climate change has been cut—\$19 million. Environment and biodiversity has been cut. We have just completed in this upper house an inquiry into the decline in ecosystems in Victoria, and some of those key recommendations I agree with; I disagree with others. But I note the importance of ensuring that our vulnerable species are not continually exacerbated and moved to more threats and extinction, and yet we see budget cuts in this realm. Also if we look at that, the Andrews government again is taking away the very foundations around how we protect the regions in terms of public land management. I think there are also budget cuts in the public land management space, around \$64 million. Now, if you ask anybody in regional Victoria, in Gippsland in my patch, they will say there are not enough boots on the ground. There are far too many people working out of the Department of Environment, Land, Water and Planning based in the city. We need more field officers doing more work keeping weeds and pests down. It is a rhetorical comment for The Nationals, but it is a very important comment that we cannot have our public land space being choked by these pests and weeds. They only exacerbate the ongoing threats to our vulnerable species. Solar Victoria had its budget cut. I have made reference to Solar Victoria and how the GovHub in the Latrobe Valley was supposed to be staffed by Solar Victoria and you can also work in Melbourne and live in Melbourne if you are in that space.

The Treasurer also went on to sort of cite and cringe and lament about what the federal government was and was not doing in terms of infrastructure, and he said ‘despite us having 26 per cent of the nation’s population’ in relation to that. Well, let us have a look at what is happening in Victoria. We, regional Victoria, constitute 25 per cent of the population; 75 per cent are in the larger environments of Melbourne. But the capital spend of this government on Melburnians is \$15 000 per person in round figures, and the capital spend for regional Victorians, that 25 per cent, is \$7000 per capita. These figures are coming out of independent Parliamentary Budget Office figures. These figures are not mine. They have not been workshopped, these have come directly from the PBO. In 2021–22 only 11 per cent of the capital spend of this Andrews government actually went to regional Victoria. In this year’s budget it is 13 per cent of the capital spend. So the Treasurer is lamenting on one hand—he is using that as an argument—yet his own budget short-changes regional Victoria. If we look at our—The Nationals’ and the Liberals’—regional infrastructure guarantee, we will guarantee that 25 per cent of government capital investment will be on infrastructure projects in regional Victoria. This is our commitment for when we are elected in November 2022. We make that commitment, and it will be held.

The Honourable Mr Pallas said, ‘We have always believed in putting patients first’—indeed that is the whole frame of this budget this year. So what have we got? Non-admitted services have had a \$160 million cut; emergency services, \$25 million cut; aged care support services in our society, \$35 million cut; drug and alcohol rehabilitation has had a \$36 million cut; and mental health community support services has had an \$18 million cut. Indeed one of the things I have raised in this house before is that—and this is not a word of a lie—my Moe constituent said to me that when she rang up to get a community health service appointment for her son, the very hardworking person at the other end of the line at the children and youth community health service said, ‘Your next available booking is 2025’. Now, I just do not know how either of those people can cope—the son and also that person who was at the end of the line trying to provide a service in very, very challenging situations. Also Lifeline Gippsland is a very, very important support system, and I know the wonderful people there do an amazing job. They have some funding, but by comparison it is certainly not enough. I know Mr Merlino, the Minister for Mental Health, the other day spoke at a Public Accounts and Estimates Committee hearing and said that \$59.4 million is no longer needed for the pandemic. Well, I know many people are still suffering the results of that pandemic.

There are other things. In terms of the road maintenance budget, it has had a \$240 million cut over the past two years, and you only have to drive around Gippsland and up the Great Alpine Road to see how bad that is. There are many things. The other thing that the Treasurer came to was that by the year 2026 the state budget will be back in surplus. Now, I am not sure which sort of fairyland Mr Pallas was in, but nobody believes that. We have got massive blowouts—we have got \$28 billion now in blowouts. We want to see more investment in our CFAs. We have seen \$800 million in fire services levy accepted into the coffers of the Victorian government and only \$7.16 million in capital spend for the CFA. We in the country know how very important our CFA volunteers are at the forefront. Our emergency services do the most amazing job. I think it is offensive to them in absolute terms. They need to see more. We could list off a whole raft of infrastructure that could be built around the state for our fabulous CFA. Just finally, on Ms Shing, she talked about \$4.5 million for the Traralgon Recreation Reserve and Glenview Park—it needs \$10 million. You cannot give somebody half a renovation. It needs \$10 million, and the government has only put in \$4.5 million.

Business interrupted pursuant to sessional orders.

Ms TAYLOR: I move:

That the meal break scheduled for this day be suspended.

Motion agreed to.

Mr MELHEM (Western Metropolitan) (18:25): I also rise to speak on the Appropriation (2022–2023) Bill 2022. This budget is about doing a few things; one is getting us out of the pandemic. We are trying to get out of the pandemic. We still have a lot of people dying in Victoria and a lot of infection in a lot of people, and not just from COVID-19—there is the flu on top of that. So we have got a difficult time in the next few months, during this winter, to get through. But this budget is about—

A member interjected.

Mr MELHEM: I am in good time. It is okay. We just dismissed the dinner break, and we dismissed the clock. This budget is about creating jobs, keeping existing jobs, reducing unemployment and restoring economic growth. This budget also has a plan to have an operating surplus, and I think it is important to set a target for when you are going to have an operating surplus. It is about returning to an operating surplus, which the budget outlines—I am not going to go through that—and stabilising debt levels.

I want to talk about a number of things in the budget which are part of the repair plan. I want to spend a bit of time talking about health, because health, education and employment are very important for us to make sure we are looking after our people. That is what this budget is about: making sure we are putting an end to the war that has been waged on paramedics and ambulance response times from the worst pandemic in our history. I just want to take the opportunity to thank our nurses, doctors and paramedics for the great work that they have done. That is why we are investing heavily in the health sector. An additional \$12 billion has been invested to make sure we have got a decent health sector, and we know the health sector is struggling. It is struggling for the reasons I outlined earlier. People just forget we are coming out of a pandemic; in fact we are still in a pandemic situation. Whilst we do not have restrictions, we are still in the middle of it. Other speakers spoke about mental health issues.

For probably the next 10 minutes I will focus on my electorate. For example, as part of the health investment, the Melton hospital will be built. We committed to starting the process in this term of Parliament to build a hospital in Melton, in my electorate, and we are now delivering that. We have got the planning going, we have got the land identified, we are working with the Melton City Council and stakeholders and now we have got \$950 million locked in to make sure we construct a state-of-the-art hospital to service the region of Melton, Caroline Springs and Wyndham. That is to complement the service that is currently provided by the Mercy Hospital in Werribee and by Sunshine Hospital.

I am looking forward to the completion of the new Footscray Hospital—\$1.5 billion. We are going to have four teaching hospitals in the western suburbs of Melbourne. I am very proud of what this government has done and delivered in the west, particularly in relation to health. We do need it because we have got significant population growth in the western suburbs of Melbourne. I hear a lot of people asking about what we are doing in the west. These are the things we are doing in the west. We are going to get everyone covered in the west as far as health goes. We are going to have major hospitals that people can access without necessarily having to travel to the city or the other side of town. That is a very welcome investment, and I want to congratulate the member for Melton, Steve McGhie, for his advocacy and good work to make sure we locked that in, and now we are getting on with it.

The other one is the cost of living. It is a big issue, and today there was another reminder. Interest rates—mortgages—are going to go up by 0.5 per cent. We are doing some of the things we can control, like the \$250 one-off payment, for example, to alleviate the pressure on Victorians' cost of electricity. That is something we are working towards.

I just want to go to specific investments in this budget in my own electorate. I can talk generally about the whole budget, but I will leave that to other people. I just want to talk about some of the benefits that my electorate will get out of this budget. For example, the Footscray Community Arts centre will receive \$8.7 million. I want to acknowledge the work of Katie Hall, the local member for Footscray. She has been working on that, and I worked with her to make sure we got that in the budget. She has done a great job, and so that is there.

I want to talk about education. A lot of schools are going to be built or land is going to be purchased or schools are going to be refurbished as part of the heavy investment by the Andrews Labor government in the west. I am going to name some of the schools which are going to receive money, and I am going to go to some of the new schools. Aintree secondary school, for example, will receive part of the \$527 million investment in new schools, as will the Aintree specialist school, which will also receive a share to build a new school. Other new schools are Black Forest East primary school and the Lollypop Creek secondary school. There is another special school, which is the Lollypop Creek specialist school. The Riverdale secondary school, the Tarneit North primary school and the Truganina North primary school are all new schools to be built in the western suburbs of Melbourne, because we have got the fastest growing population in the state. It is important that we are investing in education and making sure our citizens in the west are able to send their kids to school to learn.

There are a number of places where we are actually purchasing land. Plumpton primary school and the Riverdale North primary school land acquisitions will take place as part of this budget. In Tarneit Plains we are going to purchase land for a primary school there as well. Truganina North secondary school, which is an interim name, will receive an additional stage to the construction that has already commenced. The list goes on and on of the many schools in the west. Jennings Street School and the Western Autistic School will get \$6.83 million as well. Diggers Rest Primary School—the list goes on. I will not go through them all, but I just wanted to give an idea about the investment the Andrews Labor government is actually putting into the west in my electorate. That is in addition to other projects we have that were part of previous budgets but for which ongoing construction is taking place.

The West Gate Tunnel Project is taking shape. If you drive along Footscray Road, you can see the new elevated road. It is coming together. It is going to connect to CityLink. The two tunnel boring machines are now digging the tunnels for the West Gate tunnel, and there is the expansion of the West Gate Freeway to six lanes each way. This week they finalised the strengthening of the Millers Road bridge and Williamstown Road bridge as well. So it is a whole west–east transformation. This budget has picked up on a number of roads which need either new intersections or duplications, and I will go through the list. A number of roads have been earmarked for redevelopment, I suppose.

The investment by this government is basically ongoing. How can I describe it? There has been a lot of criticism by the other side about what this government has done and what the government is doing. We have not stopped, since we came into office in November 2014, investing in things that actually

matter to Victorians—whether it is public transport, whether it is education, whether it is health. In fact we just launched new zero-emission electric buses in the western suburbs of Melbourne, by Minister Carroll, only last week. So we will continue our program.

I think there have been some discussions about waste, about debt et cetera. Unlike the federal level of government, we are actually investing in the things we need now and for tomorrow. We did not give \$20 billion, for example, to companies which did not need any help during COVID because they were making heaps of money but nonetheless were just dished out \$20 billion by their mates. This government is about investing now and in the future in the four areas I have talked about, and it will continue doing that.

Again I cannot wait to see the conclusion of the last of three level crossings which are being worked on at Fitzgerald Road and Robinson Road in Deer Park and Ravenhall. They are long overdue, but construction is progressing really well. The Sunbury line upgrade, which is another example which is taking shape, when the Metro Tunnel is completed will give additional timetables and resources, and people will be able to travel more often on better timetables with more trains when they need them.

I will finish off by saying this budget is about making sure we continue the process we started eight years ago. We will continue building on what we did during COVID. The only reason we were able to invest heavily and make sure we softened the impact on businesses, workers and people in Victoria during the pandemic is that we are good managers. We manage a good budget. In fact I go back as far as a Labor government led by Steve Bracks in 1999. We had a surplus year in, year out. Mr Davis, in trying to be the new Treasurer, was just talking about how we cannot manage money and how in 2019 the budget was not in surplus. I am not sure what planet he is on, and I am not sure which book he was reading or what spreadsheet he was looking at. But the facts are that we had a surplus budget year in, year out, since 1999, and certainly under the Andrews Labor government and Treasurer Pallas we have had a surplus budget every year since 2014. That is on top of a significant investment in infrastructure. You can have a surplus budget by not spending any money. We were spending big, yet we maintained a surplus. I remember the last time this lot were in government. For four years they sat there and did nothing. They did nothing for four years, and suddenly they woke up and thought, ‘Oh, we’d better do something. Let’s come up with the east–west link’—no assessment, no business plan. Basically I think our record speaks for itself.

I am pleased this budget has invested heavily in my electorate of Western Metro, and I commend the Treasurer and the Premier on the good job they have done so far.

Ms PATTEN (Northern Metropolitan) (18:39): I rise to speak to this cognate debate and in doing so respond to the state budget, and I think it is not surprising that the headline issue on this budget is the state’s health system. We know that this budget does go to trying to ease some of those pressure points that the pandemic really brought to the front, but we know that the health system has had those pressure points for a number of years and certainly COVID and this pandemic have exacerbated that. Our healthcare professionals have worked tirelessly through this pandemic—tirelessly—but as we all know and as our constituents tell us day by day, our hospitals are stretched and our staff are absolutely exhausted. Let us not forget the allied health workforce as well. They are working just as hard with the same patients, with the same conditions and with the same PPE, and their contributions are significant. The \$2.9 billion in health infrastructure, the \$2.4 billion for emergency staff and new wards, the 7000 healthcare workers, including 5000 nurses, are really good for Victoria. It is probably what the community expected. When I was out there asking people about the budget I do not think anyone was surprised by it. I do not think anyone was terribly excited, but I do not think anyone was surprised that the budget had a health focus. I think given the last two or three years we have had that is not surprising.

But what was surprising were the cuts in alcohol and other drug services, to the extent of \$40 million. We know that during COVID people’s alcohol consumption increased. We know that during COVID people’s drug issues were exacerbated, alongside their mental health issues. We know this, but we saw

cuts in this area. I think this is a kind of short-sightedness or—I probably should not mention this—the ambulance being at the bottom of the cliff rather than there being a fence at the top. The alcohol and other drugs sector has been starved of resources. We know the waiting times for people trying to get into treatment. When someone decides that they need help, being told that they have to wait six months for that help is not acceptable. I cannot tell you how disappointed I am and how disappointed the really hardworking, dedicated alcohol and other drug workers are. We do not have enough rehab beds. We do not have enough treatment. We do not have enough counselling.

The killer in this is that when you cut those services, when you cut alcohol and other drug treatment, you exacerbate the problems in our emergency rooms and you exacerbate the problems in our courts and in our mental health facilities. When you cut alcohol and other drug services you send those people back into our mainstream health system. Frankly it lacks reason, and I would really urge the Treasurer to reconsider this and to look at the benefits. We know that when we spend money on harm reduction, harm minimisation, for every \$1 we spend we save \$27—and that is because we avoid someone needing an ambulance, that is because we avoid someone ending up in an emergency department and that is because we avoid someone ending up in our prisons. Please, Treasurer, these are short-sighted cuts to this budget, and they are things that we need to remedy.

In November I moved a motion in this chamber that called on this government to introduce a dedicated portfolio for loneliness, and that was passed with the government's support. I am sure that many of you are conscious that loneliness has emerged as one of the most serious public health challenges being faced around the world. Loneliness is a better predictor of premature death than physical inactivity, obesity or smoking 15 cigarettes a day; loneliness is a better predictor than those conditions or activities. Lonely Australians have a significantly worse health status than Australians who do not experience loneliness. So I have to say I was really pleased to see the government quite literally put its money where its mouth is and invest directly in loneliness by way of \$9 million to establish 10 new social inclusion action groups in local government areas. This will foster connection and reduce social isolation in vulnerable groups. I am really pleased that this is a win for a Reason policy.

The budget has allocated significant resources—\$1.8 billion—to building new schools and upgrading existing ones. But again schools in my electorate of Northern Metropolitan have missed out. Coburg High School—this school has grown exponentially. I remember being there back in 2016 when it was just a newly opened school that was accepting maybe two or three grades. It has now got a population in excess of 1250 students. It is lacking science rooms. Students are now having to take their music lessons in a storeroom. It desperately needs funds, and the picture is no better for nearby schools like Glenroy College and John Fawcner College. If we wanted to tell some of our most disadvantaged communities that we really did not care a fig about them, we would send them to some of those schools. It is reprehensible that we have not invested in those schools but we have invested in far wealthier schools. These deserve funding, and I would urge the Minister for Education to keep this front of mind.

Not only are we seeing these schools being decimated through the lack of funding—literally falling apart around the students' ears. But you look at the results in our primary schools in those areas that feed into those high schools and their results are well above average—these are smart kids—and then, if you look at the results at John Fawcner or Glenroy, those results drop down. Not surprisingly, parents do not want to send their children to those schools, so we are seeing overcrowding in other schools. We have these schools, we have these growing areas and we need to address this. I implore the government to invest in the north. It has been neglected.

I was in Broadmeadows on the weekend, and you only have to look at Broadmeadows station to see the neglect of the north. I was assured, at a function I was at to celebrate the work of volunteers in the north, that the government had earmarked an upgrade to Broadmeadows station by 2050—2050. Now, this is a place where you do not actually want to walk through that station's underpasses in daylight, let alone on a winter's evening. It is absolutely frightful, and it sends a message to my constituents in

the north that we just do not care. This is a postcode with some of the most disadvantaged people. This is where we should be investing.

I continue to promote small business and innovation. We know those are the drivers to the future economy. We must be responsive to the start-up sector and emerging industries and nurture those bright new ideas capable of catapulting our economy. We have seen this in Victoria. We are actually responsible for a number of unicorns, and I think we should be proud of that. I have to say that I think the government's approach to attracting international businesses has been well funded, particularly in the medical research area, and that is in my electorate around Parkville. We have seen some great work in that area. What I particularly endorse is the equity investment pilot fund. This is about providing equity funding to those startups. This is really welcome out there in the startup industry.

Also providing grants to small businesses looking at low-carbon manufacturing—this is something that we in the north used to be very good at. We used to be manufacturers in the north. But we have these opportunities, and I welcome the government's investment there. I look at things like mineral sands and the opportunities there. I for one drive an electric vehicle. I know that the minerals that made that vehicle are rare and precious, and we have great reserves in Victoria. A shout-out to Manangatang—that is an area where we have some mineral sands. So I look forward to seeing governments invest in those areas, help us and keep that in Australia. Do not allow those big multinationals to come in, reap what they need and then leave—well, for mineral sands—a fairly shallow hole but a hole nonetheless. There is more we could say about this. I think the other missed opportunity was an investment in hemp. I spoke at length about this last sitting week, so I will not do it again, but we certainly need to invest in areas like hemp. We need to make it easier for hemp growers. We know that these are the types of new crops that will enable new and innovative and low-carbon manufacturing to occur in Australia.

Let us also not forget women's health. We certainly saw some investment into women's health; we did not see enough. I think something that I have been trying to highlight in this place has been the issue of endometriosis. We have heard a lot of talk but we have not seen the investment come into play. I thank the government for committing to an endometriosis centre, but we did not see any money for it, so I am hopeful that we will see some announcements and some commitments to that. I hope both sides of this chamber commit to really funding endometriosis research, endometriosis treatment and, most importantly, a cure for endometriosis. It is debilitating. It affects one in nine women, yet we spend more money on snoring than we do on endometriosis. We spend more money on sleep apnoea than we do on endometriosis, by a considerable amount. So again it is a call-out that the government commit to significant funding to the various really innovative organisations operating here, whether they are operating out of the Epworth, whether they are operating under Hudson, Monash, the women's hospital. There are really great, dedicated researchers that just need a little bit of love from the government.

Removing the current land transfer duty exemption applying to the transfer of dutiable properties to an institution with a religious purpose—this is another great way of bringing in some much-needed funds. We understand, and this is through the Parliamentary Budget Office and through other research, this would bring in another \$13 million over the next couple of years. We pay transfer duty when we buy and sell our homes, so why shouldn't religious organisations? It was just a few years ago now that Fairfax revealed that the Catholic Church holds assets in Victoria valued at more than \$9 billion, including banks, a superannuation fund, an insurance company, a news service and a telecommunications provider. Properties reportedly include offices, residences, car parks, conference centres, tennis courts, mobile phone towers and a restaurant. They are the largest non-government landholder in the state, so why should that wealth be duty free?

Of course I cannot contribute to a budget debate without mentioning the regulation of cannabis. We spend billions of dollars in prohibiting cannabis.

Mr Finn interjected.

Ms PATTEN: Welcome, Mr Finn. Glad you came in at just the right moment.

Mr Finn: Beautifully timed, wasn't it?

Ms PATTEN: Perfect timing. We know we could actually earn about \$200 million if we regulated cannabis, let alone the savings we could make if we regulated cannabis. You never know, even Mr Finn might investigate that proposition.

Mr Finn: I doubt that very much.

Ms PATTEN: It is not a radical policy, Mr Finn; it is happening all over the world. We are seeing it in Canada, France, Germany, Mexico and, more recently, Malta. We are up to nearly 50 per cent of the states in the United States now regulating the sale of cannabis rather than prohibiting it. The outcomes, shock horror, have been positive.

The other thing I want to quickly touch on is around the money that we spend on justice issues. We are not spending enough around the causes of crime. Again, we are spending on the ambulance, not on the fence. Let me give you some examples. Take the capital works: we are spending in this budget \$111 million on new justice projects but only \$80 million on housing projects. We are spending \$27 million on refuge and crisis accommodation. In fact, that is slightly less than what we are spending on the Fawkner cemetery. Now, I am pleased that the Fawkner cemetery got some expansion money; it is needed. However—

Mr Finn interjected.

Ms PATTEN: It is needed. It is still the last tram stop on the line, but really, to be spending more on a cemetery than on refuge and crisis accommodation means that we really do need to have a rethink about that.

Our spend on acute mental health beds is about half of what we spend on prison beds. As some of the people in this chamber know, we did a homelessness report. We understand that preventing homelessness prevents crime. In the homelessness inquiry we saw this; in the justice inquiry we saw this. I would again point out that we are locking people up via refusing bail because they do not have a home. We are effectively locking up people because they are homeless, not because of a crime that would have accounted for a jail term. Look at the awful, awful circumstances of Veronica Nelson. She stole an ice cream; she died in our prison.

The hydromorphone trial for clients of the supervised injecting room—I was very sad to see that that did not get up. Again, we know that by providing hydromorphone to clients at the supervised injecting room we would have reduced crime. We would have engaged those people to come back from where they had been, engaged them back into services, engaged them back into treatment and, more importantly, stopped them having to traffic on the streets or purchase on the streets. We would have reduced the crime enormously, and I will keep on at the government about a hydromorphone trial. We have seen it in other areas.

I would like to also give a shout-out to the Legislative Council. I know that those in the other chamber do not seem to know what we do here, and I have heard them say that more than once—and the budget shows that. We get a tiny amount of the budget, yet this is where law is actually passed. This is where law is reviewed. This is where law is, effectively, made. Our Legislative Council committees, our standing committees, do an enormous body of work in policy. This is about connecting with our community. This is about our transparency and our accountability to our community. This is so important, and yet the Legislative Council gets a tiny proportion—\$2 million. So again I would implore the Treasurer and the government to start spending and start valuing the work that this house does.

Finally, measures like the GDP—they are relevant but they are not the whole picture. Other jurisdictions are working into a wellbeing budget, and I think we need to do that. Our constitution says

that we are for and on behalf of the people of Victoria now and into the future. We have to be measuring that. The former chair of the United States Federal Reserve, Ben Bernanke, noted that:

The ultimate purpose of economics ... is to understand and promote the enhancement of well-being.

Now, again, I know that the government has shown some interest in this area. I would hope that the next budget that we see here will have some wellbeing indexes. Let us measure that. That is what I would love to see in the next budget: more measurements of our wellbeing. As a fun fact, the GDP went up when we had the Black Saturday bushfires. GDP went up, so as far as the budget was concerned, that was a great result. But we know we need to measure the wellbeing of our community. That is what they expect us to do, that is what we need to do. It is not my position to oppose a budget bill or a financial bill, so I will leave it there.

Ms BURNETT-WAKE (Eastern Victoria) (19:00): I rise to speak on the Appropriation (2022–2023) Bill 2022, regarding the state budget that was handed down on 3 May. At the outset I will say that this budget completely misses the mark. This is a budget that completely misjudges the needs of our state and the economic environment Victorians are currently living in. It completely misunderstands the impact of lockdowns on business, on the economy and on mental health at a time when Victorians desperately wanted to see a budget that invests in fixing that damage.

Instead we get more debt. Victoria already had a monstrous level of debt, and what we see with this budget is that debt continue to climb. The debt level of our state alone will soon be equal to that of New South Wales, Queensland and South Australia combined, with debt projected to reach \$162 billion by 2025. We are talking about billions of dollars in interest alone that could have been invested into our communities, into our health system, into roads and into mental health, but instead Victorians will be plagued by this enormous debt for many, many years—generational debt.

What do we get for all this debt? The government's public relations made use of a big headline in the budget that read, 'Putting patients first'. The Andrews Labor government boasted about a \$12 billion investment in health care to address the dismal state they have gotten our healthcare system into. When we break that \$12 billion down, it becomes clear: it is just more deceit. Of that \$12 billion, \$1.3 billion has already been spent on PPE and the COVID pathways program, which was jointly funded with the Liberal Morrison commonwealth government. More than \$1 billion has already been spent on RATs, which was also jointly funded by the Morrison government. A further \$466.5 million has already been spent on a COVID-19 transitional operating model, also jointly funded. And let us not forget the \$257.9 million already spent on COVID-19 vaccinations, which was again jointly funded.

So here we have the Andrews Labor government boasting about a \$12 billion investment in health care, but what they failed to tell Victorians was that most of this funding had already been spent and it was jointly met by the previous Morrison Liberal government. They have deceitfully included more than \$3.5 billion in health funding that has already been spent, last year. In fact the Andrews Labor government have cut health funding by \$2 billion. While hospitals are overrun and ambulances are ramped, this government has cut \$2 billion from health funding. That is right. This could not have happened at a worse time. Twenty-one Victorians have died waiting for an ambulance in the past six months. It is an absolute disgrace that the government has still failed to address the issues with 000 and the healthcare system. These cuts have failed every Victorian.

There was, however, one win for the Eastern Victoria Region when it comes to health, with a commitment made for a new mental health, alcohol and other drugs emergency department hub at Latrobe Regional Hospital. This aims to free up space in the emergency department and shows that the government recognises that mental health, drugs and alcohol are a huge problem in the Latrobe Valley.

It was, however, disappointing to see that the Latrobe Valley Magistrates Court was not prioritised to receive a dedicated drug court. I have previously spoken in this chamber about the importance of drug courts and the need in Latrobe Valley, given the positive outcomes these courts have achieved in

Melbourne and Dandenong. Drug courts are now available in other regional communities, such as Ballarat and Shepparton. I am perplexed as to why the Latrobe Valley is still not high on the government's priority list, given that they clearly recognise the higher incidences of drug and alcohol use and offending in my region.

There is also further mention of the Frankston Hospital upgrades, which I understand were first announced in September 2018, and completion is still not expected until 2026. This project was initially set to cost \$562 million, but this year's budget revealed a total estimated expenditure of over \$1 billion. The project has blown out to a disastrous \$556 million. How does the government get it so wrong? I know from speaking to my constituents that there is a real and urgent need for upgrades at Rosebud Hospital. The peninsula has the second-oldest population in Victoria, with over 44 per cent of residents over the age of 50. The main buildings of Rosebud Hospital have not been comprehensively redeveloped or expanded in the last 25 years, and the two operating theatres cannot be used because they no longer meet Australian standards. My constituents on the southern peninsula are having to drive over 30 minutes to Frankston Hospital for basic care, which is simply not good enough. The hospital is there, but due to underfunding, parts of it are just going to waste. These are services and rooms that could be used to save lives and complete life-changing procedures. If the government knew how to manage money, we could have had the Rosebud and Frankston hospitals upgraded and within budget; instead it has blown out by almost double, and the residents in Frankston and Rosebud continue to suffer.

While we are on the topic of the peninsula, I have been vocal inside and outside the Parliament on the need to save Flinders Pier at a time when the community was seeing and hearing nothing from their Labor member. It was therefore a pleasant surprise to see funding allocated for critical works on Flinders Pier as part of this year's budget. I will not speak to this at length, because I already did so in a recent members statement a few weeks ago; however, I would urge the government to get on with that project as soon as possible for the wider peninsula community.

That brings me to roads. The government have cut a further \$24 million from the road asset management program. That is after already slashing the program by \$191 million in the previous year's state budget. As I travel across my electorate it becomes clear that roads are simply not as good as they used to be. It is just absolutely disgraceful, the state of our roads. Our country roads are riddled with potholes. Many are notorious for accidents that have taken lives, and this government's solution is to just lower the speed limit from 100 kilometres an hour to 80 kilometres an hour. They lower the speed limits instead of investing in overpasses, traffic lights or whatever is going to make those individual regional roads safer. The perfect example is in Tynong North, out the front of Gumbuya World. This is a notorious intersection that has taken many lives. Despite these tragedies, the government still fails to invest in that stretch of the road. They reduced the speed limit and gave themselves a pat on the back, while my constituents are left navigating this dangerous stretch of road each and every day.

Another example of inaction on roads is Jetty Road down on the peninsula. The federal government provided \$75 million in funding in 2019 for the Victorian government to use to complete much-needed upgrades at the intersection of the Mornington Peninsula Freeway and Jetty Road. That money has sat there for three years, and all the state government has done is use \$3.5 million of that for a business case. Meanwhile my constituents on the peninsula sit in congested traffic and have to navigate the dangerous intersection daily. The money is sitting there, and the Andrews Labor government continue to fail to act. They say they are acting. They say they are working on a business case. My constituents do not want a business case that wastes another year; they want action. This funding has sat there for over three years. I really feel for my constituents who have to navigate these dangerous roads while the state government take their time acting.

Since the government first announced the expansion of the Angliss Hospital in Upper Ferntree Gully in the 2019–20 state budget the total estimated investment has blown out to \$8.58 million. This is explained by a small line in this year's budget that puts it down as 'market conditions' and 'COVID-

19 impacts'. That is a huge blowout, and it is only made worse by the fact that so many of my constituents cannot even use this hospital. I am talking about the maternity ward, which has been closed since March due to a broken lift, which I have mentioned many times in this chamber and also spoken about in the media. It is appalling that the government knew about this faulty lift for so long but failed to act. Now my constituents are paying the price by having to travel to Box Hill to give birth in an unknown environment, and this government cannot even give me an answer on when this lift will be repaired.

While my constituents navigate roads and hospital ward closures, they hear about how the government blows billions on its major projects. The state budget revealed a huge \$4.7 billion blowout to the West Gate Tunnel Project. It is quite sad that the tunnel was originally scheduled for completion in September this year and has now been pushed back years due to Labor's inability to manage money and its projects on time. Victorians are the ones meeting the cost through the never-ending list of taxes that this government continue to impose. I think we are up to 42 new taxes from a Premier who once promised every single Victorian that he would not introduce any.

Victorians deserve so much more than what this budget has delivered in Eastern Victoria Region. Alone we have seen a \$69 million blowout to the Seaford stabling project, an \$11.8 million blowout to the Frankston station upgrade and \$5 million added to the bill for the Latrobe Valley government hub, and that is just to name a few. I have already mentioned many of the areas that have been forgotten, but business owners across the state have also been neglected. We know that local shopping strips have been left devastated by the extended lockdowns imposed by the Andrews government. These business owners need practical support to recover and rebuild, but sadly that too was overlooked in this budget.

Instead the Andrews Labor government are going to spend \$14.8 million on trade growth programs, including the establishment of a trade and investment office in Paris. Is that really what Victorians want their money spent on? I do not think so. From the conversations I have had, this is definitely not what my constituents would have liked to have seen prioritised by the state. Overall it is disappointing that the government have not prioritised Victoria's long-term economic recovery. Victorians deserved a budget that fixed the health system crisis, invested in mental health, created a strong economy and kept the cost of living down and a budget that helped businesses get back on their feet. That is exactly what a Matthew Guy Liberal-Nationals government will do if elected in November. Underneath the Andrews spin it becomes clear the government have missed the mark in so many areas impacting the lives of those in Eastern Victoria and Victoria more broadly. I will continue to advocate for my constituents to get their needs heard.

Mr QUILTY (Northern Victoria) (19:12): I will be brief. Budget bills are a little bit difficult for the Liberal Democrats because we do not have a list of things we would like the government to spend money on, we would like it to cut spending. We look miserable rather than generous, but it is the people's money, not the government's. With this Appropriation (2022–23) Bill 2022 the government is asking the taxpayers for \$85 billion to cover its spending addiction over the coming year. This is a 31 per cent increase from prepandemic levels. Imagine an already heavily overweight person who weighed 100 kilograms before lockdowns putting on an extra 31 kilograms over the two years—the COVID gut. That is the growth we are seeing in this government. It is not sustainable.

Public sector education used to cost us \$14.8 billion and now costs \$17.1 billion, while our schools are being amalgamated to cut costs and classes cannot be run because there are no teachers. The Department of Environment, Land, Water and Planning went from \$2.3 billion to \$3.1 billion, and we are just talking about the costs of what the government spends. Most of the costs that DELWP impose on the economy come from additional expenses the private sector must incur to meet regulatory burdens. The Department of Health and Human Services grew so costly that it had to be split in two. The \$15.8 billion health portfolio is now \$20 billion across the health and welfare portfolios. Where is all this money going? We are certainly not seeing 31 per cent better government services. We do not have 31 per cent more hospitals. Inflation in hospital wait times and ambulance ramping does not

account for it. I certainly did not see anything for the new Wodonga-Albury hospital in the budget. This is not 31 kilograms of new muscle, it is 31 kilograms of double chins and sagging bellies.

One of the biggest increases has been payments from the Treasury department. It used to cost us \$8 billion; it now costs \$18 billion. These are government grants to prop up the economy after knocking it flat during COVID. The government want to build their re-election credibility based on infrastructure spending in Melbourne—a couple of hundred billion in debt for Melbourne rail and road projects. But you cannot use grand capital projects to cover up the massive blowouts in current spending with nothing to show for them, services going backwards and hospital waiting times blowing out. To any taxpayer watching this, I want you to try and imagine how this extra 31 per cent of money is being spent and how much value you are getting for it. Better yet, spend some time trying to figure out for yourself how the extra money is going to be spent. Comb through the budget, read the news—research it however you like—and look for anything more informative than a headline. The answers, if you find any, will not be satisfying.

There was \$17.4 billion more government this year than in the year before COVID, and that is set to rise to \$20 billion in the coming financial year. For reference, that is about \$7800 per household extra—and that is solely for the state government; that does not cover the federal government deficits, it does not cover Medicare or unemployment benefits or pensions. With that additional \$7800 the total per household spend for just the state government is \$33 000 a year. You pay another \$54 500 on top of that for the federal government. Is there anyone out there who can genuinely say that they would be willing to pay \$87 500 a year, plus local government rates, for the services they get from the government? There are millions of Australians who spend year after year of their life trying to pull together \$40 000 for the down payment on a house while at the same time they are paying \$87 000 a year for their subscription to the government. It is not a quality service. For a lot of households \$87 000 is more than their entire after-tax income. They spend more on government than on everything else combined, and they have little or no say in it at all. All I am saying is that it might be a good idea to cut back on the cost of government. Instead of stacking on bulk like they are training to become a sumo wrestler, the government should aim to be leaner and fitter. Wouldn't it be better to let people decide for themselves how they are going to spend some of the \$87 000?

So far I have talked about costs, but I want to quickly look at the other side. Let us talk about production. At the same time as spending all this extra money the government has banned huge sections of the population from working. Some of these bans are still in force today. At a time when our ability to produce is being pulled out from under us, mostly by the government, the government is ramping up its costs. You will be cutting back to home brand labels and the cans at the back of the cupboard while the government is using Uber Eats to order in from the expensive end of the menu.

Every sitting week this government passes new regulations, new rules and more red tape to weigh down small business—more sea anchors on the economy, dragging behind the ship of state and slowing it down. We are loading more weight on top of an increasingly small number of people, and eventually they will not be able to bear it. Again, this is not sustainable. We need to reverse course. For all those the-economy-does-not-matter advocates from the last two years, we are all going to find out, moving forward, why the economy really does matter. We need to remove all the COVID restrictions and many of the pre-COVID ones too. We need to cut taxes and let people spend more of their own earnings. We cannot just chuck the entire economy on the credit card and print money until we are in the clear—because we will never be in the clear. If our state keeps spending at this level, the hungry taxpayer is going to starve and our obese government is going to have a heart attack. The state has put on too much fat during COVID. The emperor will be unable to fit into their new clothes. I can only hope the sight of our recklessly bloated government leads to a new diet plan this November. The Liberal Democrats oppose reckless government spending and we oppose the budget.

Ms TAYLOR (Southern Metropolitan) (19:19): I move:

That debate be adjourned until next day of meeting.

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

AGRICULTURE LEGISLATION AMENDMENT BILL 2022

Council's amendments

The DEPUTY PRESIDENT (19:19): I have a message from the Assembly in respect of the Agriculture Legislation Amendment Bill 2022:

The Legislative Assembly informs the Legislative Council that, in relation to 'A Bill for an Act to amend the **Agricultural and Veterinary Chemicals (Control of Use) Act 1992**, the **Catchment and Land Protection Act 1994**, the **Dairy Act 2000**, the **Drugs, Poisons and Controlled Substances Act 1981**, the **Farm Debt Mediation Act 2011**, the **Livestock Disease Control Act 1994**, the **Plant Biosecurity Act 2010**, the **Rural Assistance Schemes Act 2016**, the **Veterinary Practice Act 1997**, the **Wildlife Act 1975** and the **Meat Industry Act 1993** and for other purposes' the amendment made by the Council has been agreed to.

Questions without notice and ministers statements

WRITTEN RESPONSES

The DEPUTY PRESIDENT (07:20): In respect of questions from question time, I have reviewed *Hansard* from today. In relation to Mr Davis's first substantive question to Minister Leane, I note that the member asked three questions in one and that the response from Minister Leane did at least touch on two of those questions. On that basis I do not order a written response from the minister. In relation to Mr Davis's questions to Ms Stitt, *Hansard* shows that the minister provided considerable context and detail in her answers. However, the questions were quite specific, and the minister did not address that question adequately. I ask the minister to provide written responses to the substantive and supplementary questions. In view of the fact that it is very late in the day now, we will give the minister two days to provide that.

Adjournment

Ms STITT (Western Metropolitan—Minister for Workplace Safety, Minister for Early Childhood) (19:21): I move:

That the house do now adjourn.

BAMFORD AVENUE–FORMAN STREET–MICKLEHAM ROAD, WESTMEADOWS

Mr ONDARCHIE (Northern Metropolitan) (19:21): (1953) My adjournment matter this evening is for the Minister for Roads and Road Safety. Attwood residents are concerned about traffic and congestion and the time it takes them to get to work. Every morning Attwood residents experience choked roads and frustration that the traffic is banked up around the Bamford Avenue, Forman Street and Mickleham Road intersection. I am very, very grateful to those residents who responded to my recent community survey.

Mr Finn: Did you do a survey?

Mr ONDARCHIE: I did do a survey. I did, and they responded very well. Residents have told me that it is a nightmare trying to turn right at this intersection and that it affects their ability to get to work on time and during the morning peak hour, and especially in the evening trying to get home to their families. The action I seek from the minister by way of directing the Department of Transport is to do an investigation on the intersection of Bamford Avenue, Forman Street and Mickleham Road near Attwood so my residents can spend less time in traffic and more time with their families.

BUSHFIRE PREPAREDNESS

Mr MEDDICK (Western Victoria) (19:22): (1954) My matter this evening is for the Minister for Energy, Environment and Climate Change, and the action I seek is for her to make appropriate changes to ensure that before, during and after any further planned burns, no matter the reason for them, local wildlife rescuers and carers along with Wildlife Victoria be informed, consulted and involved. This has become particularly important with the recent incident at Mount Richmond, where several koalas were burnt to death. We need to make sure this does not happen again. In this incident two koalas were found alive by rescuers severely burnt, in agony and vocalising their pain. They were beyond saving and had to be euthanised.

I toured the site on Saturday with departmental representatives, local rescuers and the CEO of Wildlife Victoria, Lisa Palma. What is apparent is that koalas and other wildlife were let down by an inadequate system that did not allow for the numbers of animals counted at the perimeter of the fire area to be extrapolated to consider the entire zone. This meant that those viewed on the edge were considered to be the only animals in the entire 214-plus hectares. The area is quite inaccessible in many places; however, in this day and age we have drone technology that has been employed highly successfully in every other area of forest management. This should have been made available to assess the population. I hope that the minister will now insist upon the use of that technology, as well as the involvement of Wildlife Victoria and their resources and local rescuers, throughout the entire process of any further planned burns in Victoria.

BASS COAST PLANNING

Ms BURNETT-WAKE (Eastern Victoria) (19:24): (1955) My adjournment matter is directed to the Minister for Planning. It concerns the distinctive areas and landscape draft statement of planning policy and how it impacts farmers in the significant landscape overlay on the Bass Coast. The action that I seek is for the minister to confirm that post-and-wire fences will be exempt from these rules altogether and to abandon all other proposals which adversely impact the farming community in the Bass Coast council area.

This issue was raised with me by Aaron Brown, the Liberal candidate for Bass. Aaron has a farming background so knows firsthand how some of the proposed amendments will adversely impact the farming community. I know he has also consulted with them widely. The government is proposing to amend the planning scheme and require farmers in the significant landscape overlay to obtain a permit for post-and-rail fences over 1.8 metres. These changes will also mean sheds and structures must be located out of sight of roads and public walking tracks. Permits will also be required to remove or lop native vegetation and exotic trees.

My farming constituents in the Bass Coast region are outraged by these proposals. As anyone with the slightest clue about farming would know, if a fence is broken you have very limited time to get in and fix that fence before livestock starts straying onto roads or blocking laneways. Farmers are subject to penalties under state laws if their animals roam onto roads and become a safety hazard. If a council officer believes livestock are not adequately confined and serves a notice, the owner can be hit with fines of up to \$9087—that is, 50 penalty units. These animals are farmers' livelihoods. They do not have the time to sit through bureaucratic processes and wait for a permit to replace a fence. This government, under the draft, wants farmers to pay and wait to receive a permit before removing native vegetation. What happens when a tree is about to fall on a house or a fence? Are they meant to let the cattle roam while they apply for a second permit to fix the fence? The rules around placement of sheds are costly and impractical. Sheds are often near road corridors so farmers can get equipment out and drive across the farm with ease.

I again thank the Liberal candidate for Bass, Aaron Brown, for raising this issue with me. I note that the government's member for Bass said in the media recently that there was a drafting error and that post-and-wire fencing would be exempt. That is why I call on the minister to confirm that post-and-wire fencing will be exempt from permit requirements altogether and that all bureaucratic proposals

will be abandoned. This is a city-centric government at its worst. Farmers should not have to apply for permits to build fences or remove hazardous plants on their own properties. I urge the government to listen to the concerns of the Victorian Farmers Federation and individual farming families. It is critical that changes are made to the planning system to support the retention and growth of agriculture in Victoria. Modern-day farming has enough challenges. The last thing my farming constituents need is more red tape.

BRIMBANK MENTAL HEALTH SERVICES

Dr CUMMING (Western Metropolitan) (19:27): (1956) My adjournment matter is for the Minister for Mental Health in the other place, and the action that I seek is for the government to work with Brimbank City Council to ensure that the new mental health and wellbeing service is fit for purpose and that the council can continue to deliver mental health services that they provide—and they need funds. Brimbank has one of the highest levels of very high psychological distress in Victoria. COVID also had a significant negative impact on residents' mental wellness, with many facing job losses, lack of social interaction and uncertain futures. Now Brimbank will become the home of a new \$8 million mental health and wellbeing service.

The council plays an important role in mental illness prevention, early intervention and advocacy. They want to see more protection and support, particularly concerning young people and the newly arrived communities. They have been delivering a number of programs, including Tuning in to Teens. This is an evidence-based program that supports parents and carers to develop an emotional connection with their children and help them to learn about emotions and emotional intelligence. They also run youth mental first aid. This is based on guidelines developed with professionals and people with lived experience of mental health problems. The course is great for parents, teachers, sports coaches and youth workers. It gives them the skills to recognise and respond to those who might be experiencing a mental health problem or crisis. They also have trialled SafeTALK and applied suicide intervention skills training. Provided in schools at no cost through the Melton-Brimbank suicide prevention network, they help students better understand mental health and how to access support if they need it.

They would like to see the expansion of these programs as well as the development of a website with details on specific mental health issues. It could also provide a live chat feature and information on the locations of treatment specialists. Brimbank council know their local community. They have designed and delivered a number of programs to help with the mental health and wellbeing of their residents, especially their youth. It would be great to see this government work with the council to ensure that these programs can continue and be expanded—and be funded by this government.

ST MICHAEL'S SCHOOL, ASHBURTON

Mr DAVIS (Southern Metropolitan—Leader of the Opposition) (19:30): (1957) My adjournment tonight is for the attention of the Minister for Education, and it concerns St Michael's primary school on High Street, Ashburton. I visited the school last week with the Shadow Minister for Education, David Hodgett, and Asher Judah, who is the Liberal Party's candidate in the new seat of Ashwood. We met with the acting principal, Anita Dell'Orso, and a number of other key staff.

Look, St Michael's is a great school, a school that people would have enormous support for. It has got a very vibrant culture and strong academic focus, but its facilities leave quite a lot to be desired. We saw in one particular block very significantly dilapidated carpets, vermin and, concerningly, mould on the ceilings. I understand the way funding is arranged. Most of the funding goes through the Catholic education office, and I understand that mechanism. But nonetheless state government money for capital works is available, and I think that this is a very meritorious case. I think that this is a case where on health grounds and on good sense grounds there ought to be a state allocation to support St Michael's primary school and to ensure that it is actually brought up to the standard that I think most of us would expect. Now, David Hodgett sees a lot of schools. He has seen a lot of schools with me over the recent period, and he has got a very good sense of this, but he also was quite surprised. I

know that Asher Judah will be working very hard to ensure that there is a just outcome here with St Michael's primary school.

So I would seek from the Minister for Education an early response on this—an early response with a capital injection that would deal with the particular block that is dilapidated, where the quality of the roof is not up to scratch and where indeed there is some mould on the ceilings. I do not think that is good enough in this day and age. We cannot have a system where only one part of the system is supported adequately. I strongly support public schools, but I also believe there are a number of private schools that need government support in this way. This is an important school in High Street, Ashburton, St Michael's primary, and I ask the Minister for Education to ensure that this school is immediately given the upgrade that it needs to ensure that it is safe and of a modern standard.

BULLA TIP

Mr FINN (Western Metropolitan) (19:32): (1958) I wish to raise a matter this evening for the attention of the Minister for Energy, Environment and Climate Change. The minister might be pleased to know that I have no intention of raising with her this evening the matter of the Ombudsman's report into the EPA's dereliction of duty on the dumping of carcinogenic PFAS material near Sunbury and Bulla, but I can assure her that is coming. That is coming; you can put the house on that.

I wish to raise with her tonight the matter concerning an issue just down the road at the Bulla tip. At the Bulla tip there have been a number of fires in recent times, one as late as just last week, and we know that there has been over a period of time asbestos dumped at that tip. As Sunbury grows closer to the tip and the number of vehicles using Sunbury Road grows ever more by the day—in fact more by the hour, as it were—we must be very concerned about what any smoke or any fire impact would have on people who are passing or people who are living nearby. We are very, very concerned about the environmental disaster that the minister and this government have allowed to occur in Sunbury Road. It is a disgrace. It is a disgrace what this government has been allowed to do.

Mr Ondarchie interjected.

Mr FINN: Have I been there? I have been there. Has she been there? I tell you what, if the minister went there, she might not get back. I tell you what, such is the anger of people in Sunbury and Bulla that if Lily D'Ambrosio came out to Sunbury and Bulla she might not get back to wherever the hell she lives—in Brunswick or wherever it is.

I am livid at what has happened there, and what I am asking the minister to do—apart from her job, which would be a good start—is to give us an assurance that she has this situation under control, that the safety and the health of people in Sunbury and Bulla and those travelling past on Sunbury Road is her first priority and that she has the matter under control. We want guarantees that these fires in the Bulla tip, which seem to be ongoing, are not impacting lives and are not impacting health. We need to know. We need an assurance from the minister that she has all of this under control. I have no confidence, I have to say, in the minister. I do not think there is anybody in this state who has any confidence in the minister. But I ask her at least to tell us what the hell is going on.

CHILDREN, YOUTH AND FAMILIES AMENDMENT (CHILD PROTECTION) BILL 2021

Dr BACH (Eastern Metropolitan) (19:36): (1959) My adjournment matter tonight is for the Minister for Child Protection and Family Services, and the action that I seek is for him to bring the Children, Youth and Families Amendment (Child Protection) Bill 2021 back to this house to enable it to be discussed through the committee stage and then ultimately passed, as it inevitably will be.

Ms Crozier: What happened to it?

Dr BACH: Ms Crozier asks me what happened to it. Until recently I was not sure. You see, late last year the government, with much fanfare, brought the children, youth and families bill to the

Parliament. It easily passed the lower house, and my colleagues in the other place made it very, very clear that we supported the bill. I am the relevant shadow minister. When the bill came to this place I led the debate, and I made it abundantly clear that we on this side of the house fully supported the bill. However, after the conclusion of the debate and before the committee stage the bill disappeared, and it has been gone for months and months.

It is fantastic to see Dr Ratnam in the chamber, because it seems that the government has been spooked by Dr Ratnam. Dr Ratnam—quite legitimately, may I say—wanted to amend the bill to raise the age of criminal responsibility. This is a perfectly legitimate debate. This is a very important debate given the crisis in youth justice and given the crisis in child protection that we see in this state. Right now one in 10 Indigenous kids in Victoria is in the care of the state. Last year we saw a fantastic report from our independent children’s commission—a commission that the Liberal Party established last time we were in power, at the same time as establishing IBAC and several other very important entities—and that body made it abundantly clear that the government is shockingly failing Indigenous kids. So it is perfectly reasonable for Dr Ratnam to want to investigate mechanisms that may or may not have the support of the house but nonetheless various other important groups say could help.

However, the government, it seems, has now put the heavies on Indigenous organisations to then go back to Dr Ratnam to try to convince Dr Ratnam to withdraw her amendment before the government will have the ticker, have the basic courage, to debate the bill. It is an astounding and bizarre process. The government said that this bill was supremely important to protect vulnerable kids, and quite frankly I agree. The bill is not a significant reform, but it makes some small steps in important areas. It legislates for the Home Stretch program, which has bipartisan—

A member: Hear, hear!

Dr BACH: tripartisan support. It also shifts some power to Indigenous-led organisations, which everybody in here agrees is really important. It makes some small steps to engage in more evidence-based early intervention practices—all things that I have been, and we on this side the house have been, calling for for years. The bill will pass. Have the ticker to bring it back. Debate Dr Ratnam’s amendment. If you do not like it, vote it down. But the bill is important, and it needs to pass.

Ms Stitt: On a point of order, Deputy President, I just want to seek some clarification from you about whether or not it is appropriate in an adjournment debate for legislation to be called on to be debated. I just seek the guidance of the Chair because I am not clear.

Mr Ondarchie: On the point of order, Deputy President, I draw your attention to standing order 4.12, which talks about members being able to ask questions on the adjournment that are within the administrative competence of the government, and I put to you that what Dr Bach has asked for today is actually compliant with standing order 4.12.

The DEPUTY PRESIDENT: We will take that one on notice and try and resolve it by the end of the adjournment. Thank you very much for pointing out that standing order, Mr Ondarchie.

WALLAN QUARRY

Ms MAXWELL (Northern Victoria) (19:40): (1960) My adjournment is to the Minister for Planning, and the action I seek of the minister is for him to listen to the loud voice of the community and reject the disastrous planning application for a quarry that is set to gut the connecting communities of Beveridge and Wallan. Wallan and Beveridge are fast-growing and thriving communities. More than 120 000 people are likely to call this area home in the next 20 years, and the community has worked hard to plan its future to ensure there will be local services and amenities to make the community a great place to live.

I have received countless amounts of correspondence from concerned locals that the proposed quarry that was inserted into the precinct plan is going to be a stone’s throw from their homes, a couple of kilometres from primary schools and high schools and close to community and sporting centres. Blasts

could occur over a 5-hour period from Monday to Friday for 20 years, disrupting residents' rights to peace and quiet, including those of shiftworkers, babies and young children—scaring their pets, creating dust and traffic and ruining their landscape. People moving into the area have written to me completely bewildered that consideration would be given to a proposal that is so close to homes and will likely impact future access to services, shopping facilities, recreational areas and the aesthetic appeal of the community. They are also concerned about traffic congestion. The Northern Highway, already under strain, and the Hume Freeway are the only realistic routes from Beveridge to most other areas. They have had no assurance that blasting from the quarry will not impact their health and wellbeing or lead to long-term structural damage. A local resident wrote to me last week, saying:

It appears that there is no regard for the future of the locals ... without the health and safety impacts to any existing community.

They rightly noted that the time frame for the life of the quarry—some say 20 years and others say 30 years—is not temporary but intergenerational. The Mitchell Shire Council could not have put it any better:

A quarry in Beveridge/Wallan is the pits.

The community is not anti quarry. They know that resources are a necessary part of building vital infrastructure, but a quarry in the middle of a residential precinct is not good planning or good practice. It is set to stifle development and makes little economic sense except to the owner of Conundrum Holdings.

Council has opposed the quarry. In fact they have rejected the permit application twice. But they were nonetheless directed to draft permit conditions by the ministerial advisory committee for them to consider as part of their process. The advisory committee chair, Nick Wimbush, said it did not signify the quarry would be approved, but it is madness that consideration of this has come this far when everyone is saying no. As I raised in my adjournment on the same issue back in December 2021, the original precinct structure plan was exhibited publicly and approved without the inclusion of a quarry.

SOUTHERN METROPOLITAN REGION HERITAGE

Ms CROZIER (Southern Metropolitan) (19:43): (1961) My matter this evening that I would like to raise is for the attention of the Minister for Planning, and it is in relation to a campaign that is being conducted by the Boroondara heritage group and Roseberry Street residents, who last Sunday week were in Fritsch Holzer Park and had a great display. Mr Hayes is nodding. Did you attend?

Mr Hayes: No, I didn't attend.

A member: Great park.

Ms CROZIER: Well, it is. It was a terrific display of heritage and the historical nature of what has occurred in that area of Hawthorn. I was there with the Liberal candidate for Hawthorn, John Pesutto—

Dr Bach: Wonderful candidate.

Ms CROZIER: He is a terrific candidate, Dr Bach. Mr Pesutto; Ms Jess Wilson, the Liberal candidate for Kew; and I have been meeting with these various groups to discuss their concerns with the issues around heritage in Hawthorn and Kew. Right across the Southern Metropolitan Region there are massive issues around heritage and the development that has been going on where local communities are not getting a say.

There on site, as I said, on Sunday a week ago, was a display of the Hawthorn brickworks and the significance it has had over many years for that community's heritage. Really it was wonderful to see so many local community members there. In recent years these properties, especially along Roseberry Street, have been threatened by proposed developments, and four cottages were demolished in 2021. The local residents are really concerned about the level and extent of demolition around these areas, and they really do want to have some protections put in place.

The action I seek is for the planning minister to meet with these local residents as a matter of urgency and as a matter of priority so that he can hear firsthand from them their concerns, see the historic nature and the heritage that this area provides to Hawthorn and indeed to Melbourne. Many homes were established from bricks out of those brickworks, especially around those areas, and they are very well known to so many. I think it is just another display of our wonderful heritage and the history of this very significant area. I do hope the planning minister will take this up as a matter of urgency. This group is a very committed group. They are very concerned about what is going on, and they would very much appreciate the planning minister's presence so that he understands exactly what their concerns are.

RESCODE REFORM

Mr HAYES (Southern Metropolitan) (19:46): (1962) My adjournment matter is also to the Minister for Planning. Councils have raised concerns that the proposed changes intended to improve the operation of ResCode will actually undermine the role of local policy in protecting and enhancing neighbourhood character. Councils have expressed concern that the Department of Environment, Land, Water and Planning has not provided a sufficient period for consultation to properly consider the proposed reforms. The burden on council resources to introduce, amend and revise their neighbourhood character provisions will be huge, particularly when they are concerned the proposed system will result in less favourable outcomes for communities.

Protection of neighbourhood character was a key direction given to the state planning provisions introduced by the Bracks Labor government. The Municipal Association of Victoria has said it is critical that local discretion around character and other detailed design elements remains part of the planning system. These reforms must not weaken councils' ability to develop and implement local policy. Local planning policies are vital to meeting community expectations, expressing local character and providing guidance as to how change will be managed. Councils must retain the right to strive for higher standards above the statewide baselines for dwelling design. Neighbourhood character cannot be assessed through solely applying purely quantitative measures. The fundamental importance of qualitative measures is expressly acknowledged in planning practice note 43, 'Understanding neighbourhood character', with references to measures such as rhythm, consistency and respect. The practice note also clearly states that any assessment that takes a tick-a-box approach to identifying the features and characteristics of the neighbourhood is not sufficient. It is this statement that underpins the position of the MAV and municipal councils in their position on these reforms.

Implementing the proposed reforms will require councils to undertake new or updated strategic planning work on neighbourhood character. This is highly resource intensive work that will require significant investment of council time and funding. It is a particular concern to the councils that the proposed performance assessment model, PAM, will be introduced before the councils have the opportunity to amend their zone schedules. The action I seek is that the minister provides an undertaking that the state-led amendment implementing the new PAM system will not jump ahead of councils' work on amendments that update zone schedules in line with the new system.

PAYNESVILLE WASTEWATER TREATMENT PLANT

Ms BATH (Eastern Victoria) (19:49): (1963) My adjournment matter this evening is for the Minister for Water, the Honourable Lisa Neville in the other place. The action I seek on behalf of the Paynesville community is for the minister to create contingency funding to assist the East Gippsland Water Authority to ensure that there is adequate infrastructure investment in the wastewater facility there to cater for changing climatic patterns and increased regional demand.

Bureau of Meteorology and Bairnsdale airport data indicate that 2019 was the driest year on record and, by contrast, 2021 has been the wettest year at the same location. If you live in or visit that area, you know 2019 was the culmination of a terribly long drought. Many people suffered as a result, and we had a lot of wet weather last year. Coupled with the sustained growth in the permanent and temporary population, the wastewater treatment plant at Paynesville has not kept pace with human

demand and environmental fluctuations. This is not a new problem. It has been building over time, but it certainly came to a head last year and again now this year.

Waterlogged pastures are one way that East Gippsland Water provides a filtration mechanism for the treated wastewater. But the waterlogged pastures were there last year and this year, and there were controlled discharges into Forge Creek in September, December and again on 31 May this year. There has been considerable community concern and media interest, and constituents have contacted me. Constituents from Newlands Arm have flagged with me the EPA notice and also licensing requirements. I know my dear colleague Tim Bull has raised the EPA licence in the other house, and I am not going to readdress that. That is for the Minister for Energy, Environment and Climate Change. I thank Tim for doing this.

But the three lagoons they have as onsite storage are inadequate, and I understand that East Gippsland Water has been making plans to upgrade the facility and also the pasture. But they need to put in plans in a five-year rotation, and the key factor here is that population and environmental issues are impacting on each other. I call on the minister to review the current funding and ensure that there is additional contingency funding made available to fast-track this issue, because it is not going away. People are concerned about (a) their health and also (b) the discharge into Forge Creek that can then work its way down into our fantastic Gippsland Lakes.

REGIONAL RAIL

Mr QUILTY (Northern Victoria) (19:52): (1964) My adjournment matter is for the Minister for Public Transport. Regional rail is not this government's strong point. It was only last week that I was asking about the reliability of the north-east V/Line service. I was highlighting the ongoing delays and need for buses to replace trains. We continue to see disruption, inconvenience and long travel times despite years of government promises. This time it was the signals at Southern Cross station resulting in all V/Line services being halted, causing delays across the network. It seems we have signal faults and delays every other day, constituents once again stranded and scrambling to reorganise their days because this government cannot ensure the services they provide are reliable.

Then came the news that the long-awaited VLocity trains that have so long been promised as the solution to our old and unreliable current trains are facing a large setback. We will not even mention the buffet cars. Last week came reports that the undercarriage of a VLocity train was damaged on the north-east rail line. Pieces were breaking off the wheels. This has forced the train off the line indefinitely. V/Line has come out saying the problem was caused by the tracks maintained by the Australian Rail Track Corporation. ARTC have come out strongly denying the problem is with their tracks at all. Joint inspections have so far failed to identify the source of the problem, so back to coaches we go.

Northern Victorians should be able to travel on trains that work. They need a government that spends less time posing for election year photos with the new trains and more time on getting them running. Minister, the action I seek is for V/Line to get the north-east trains running, spend the necessary money, fix the signals, fix the track, buy enough carriage sets so we have spares for breakdowns, stop stuffing around and fix it.

BUSHFIRE PREPAREDNESS

Dr RATNAM (Northern Metropolitan) (19:54): (1965) My adjournment this evening is to the Minister for Energy, Environment and Climate Change. The action I seek from the minister is that she commission an independent review into a government burn-off that took place at the Mount Richmond National Park in late May. It has been raised in an adjournment discussion this evening previously as well. Following this burn, deeply concerning reports have come to light that multiple koalas were killed during the burn. It appears that two were killed and a further two had to be euthanised afterwards. After the devastation of the Black Summer fires and their impact on animals, it is horrifying to see more koalas killed by fire, only this time their death has been caused by our own government. That is

why I am asking for an independent investigation into what happened. This incident should not have occurred; however, now that it has, Forest Fire Management Victoria and other government agencies involved must ensure similar tragedies do not happen in the future.

This government has an aggressive burning agenda and allocates hundreds of millions of dollars more to burning the state than it does to protecting and restoring our environment and threatened species. The incident at Mount Richmond raises many questions about the impact of government burning on our precious wildlife. In relation to this incident there are some key questions that must be answered, such as: what was done prior to the burn to identify wildlife, especially koalas, and keep them safe? Were there sufficiently qualified wildlife staff involved in this burn, both in the planning and when it took place? Was burning this area even the most appropriate management technique, and was the burn conducted in a suitable way? If it was meant to be a cool burn, why were tree canopies scorched and animals killed? And after a burn takes place, what management procedures does Forest Fire Management Victoria have to deal with injured wildlife? Reports from Friends of the Earth suggest that trees where dead koalas were found had many koala scats beneath them, clearly showing that koalas were around, and if there were qualified wildlife staff involved, these staff would have been able to identify koala habitat and make sure burning did not occur in these areas.

I am aware that there are plans for further burning in the Mount Richmond National Park and even more outside in state forests. It is vital that the government learn from whatever went wrong here and make sure it does not happen in the future. This incident also begs broader questions about the impact of other burning activities on wildlife, and I will be asking questions on notice to obtain further information from the minister and the department. I ask the minister to commission an independent review into the burn-off.

The DEPUTY PRESIDENT: Earlier in the adjournment Dr Bach raised an adjournment matter for the Minister for Child Protection and Family Services asking for legislation that was already on the notice paper to be brought on for debate. *Rulings from the Chair* states that you cannot request the introduction of new legislation during the adjournment debate, but clearly this piece of legislation is already on the paper, so it is within the competency of the government. But the piece of legislation is actually in this house, not in the other house, so I ask Dr Bach to redirect his adjournment debate to the minister responsible in this house.

Dr Bach: Thank you very much, Deputy President, for that ruling, and my apologies for misdirecting that adjournment matter. I ask that it be redirected to Minister Stitt, thank you.

RESPONSES

Ms STITT (Western Metropolitan—Minister for Workplace Safety, Minister for Early Childhood) (19:57): That certainly took a twist that I was not expecting, so thank you for that, Dr Bach, and I will take that matter on notice so that I can consult with my colleague the Minister for Child Protection and Family Services. There were 13 adjournment matters this evening, including Dr Bach's, and I will ensure that there are answers provided according to the standing orders.

The DEPUTY PRESIDENT: The house stands adjourned.

House adjourned 7.58 pm.