

PARLIAMENT OF VICTORIA

**PARLIAMENTARY DEBATES
(HANSARD)**

LEGISLATIVE ASSEMBLY

FIFTY-NINTH PARLIAMENT

FIRST SESSION

THURSDAY, 24 MARCH 2022

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By authority of the Victorian Government Printer

The Governor

The Honourable LINDA DESSAU AC

The Lieutenant-Governor

The Honourable JAMES ANGUS AO

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Minister for Prevention of Family Violence, Minister for Women and Minister for Aboriginal Affairs	The Hon. G Williams MP
Minister for Planning and Minister for Housing	The Hon. RW Wynne MP
Cabinet Secretary	Ms S Kilkenny MP

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FIFTY-NINTH PARLIAMENT—FIRST SESSION

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The Hon. CW BROOKS

Deputy Speaker

Ms JM EDWARDS

Acting Speakers

Mr Blackwood, Ms Blandthorn, Mr J Bull, Ms Connolly, Ms Couzens, Ms Crugnale, Mr Dimopoulos, Mr Edbrooke, Ms Halfpenny, Ms Kilkenny, Mr McCurdy, Mr McGuire, Mr Morris, Ms Richards, Mr Richardson, Ms Settle, Ms Suleyman, Mr Taylor and Ms Ward

Leader of the Parliamentary Labor Party and Premier

The Hon. DM ANDREWS

Deputy Leader of the Parliamentary Labor Party and Deputy Premier

The Hon. JA MERLINO

Leader of the Parliamentary Liberal Party and Leader of the Opposition

The Hon. MJ GUY

Deputy Leader of the Parliamentary Liberal Party

Mr DJ SOUTHWICK

Leader of The Nationals and Deputy Leader of the Opposition

The Hon. PL WALSH

Deputy Leader of The Nationals

Ms SM RYAN

Leader of the House

Ms JM ALLAN

Manager of Opposition Business

Ms LE STALEY

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 ASSEMBLY
FIFTY-NINTH PARLIAMENT—FIRST SESSION

Member	District	Party	Member	District	Party
Addison, Ms Juliana	Wendouree	ALP	Maas, Mr Gary	Narre Warren South	ALP
Allan, Ms Jacinta Marie	Bendigo East	ALP	McCurdy, Mr Timothy Logan	Ovens Valley	Nats
Andrews, Mr Daniel Michael	Mulgrave	ALP	McGhie, Mr Stephen John	Melton	ALP
Angus, Mr Neil Andrew Warwick	Forest Hill	LP	McGuire, Mr Frank	Broadmeadows	ALP
Battin, Mr Bradley William	Gembrook	LP	McLeish, Ms Lucinda Gaye	Eildon	LP
Blackwood, Mr Gary John	Narracan	LP	Merlino, Mr James Anthony	Monbulk	ALP
Blandthorn, Ms Elizabeth Anne	Pascoe Vale	ALP	Morris, Mr David Charles	Mornington	LP
Brayne, Mr Chris	Nepean	ALP	Neville, Ms Lisa Mary	Bellarine	ALP
Britnell, Ms Roma	South-West Coast	LP	Newbury, Mr James	Brighton	LP
Brooks, Mr Colin William	Bundoora	ALP	Northe, Mr Russell John	Morwell	Ind
Bull, Mr Joshua Michael	Sunbury	ALP	O'Brien, Mr Daniel David	Gippsland South	Nats
Bull, Mr Timothy Owen	Gippsland East	Nats	O'Brien, Mr Michael Anthony	Malvern	LP
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Carroll, Mr Benjamin Alan	Niddrie	ALP	Pearson, Mr Daniel James	Essendon	ALP
Cheeseman, Mr Darren Leicester	South Barwon	ALP	Read, Dr Tim	Brunswick	Greens
Connolly, Ms Sarah	Tarneit	ALP	Richards, Ms Pauline	Cranbourne	ALP
Couzens, Ms Christine Anne	Geelong	ALP	Richardson, Mr Timothy Noel	Mordialloc	ALP
Crugnale, Ms Jordan Alessandra	Bass	ALP	Riordan, Mr Richard Vincent	Polwarth	LP
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Dimopoulos, Mr Stephen	Oakleigh	ALP	Sandell, Ms Ellen	Melbourne	Greens
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Edwards, Ms Janice Maree	Bendigo West	ALP	Sheed, Ms Suzanna	Shepparton	Ind
Eren, Mr John Hamdi	Lara	ALP	Smith, Mr Ryan	Warrandyte	LP
Foley, Mr Martin Peter	Albert Park	ALP	Smith, Mr Timothy Colin	Kew	LP
Fowles, Mr Will	Burwood	ALP	Southwick, Mr David James	Caulfield	LP
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Guy, Mr Matthew Jason	Bulleen	LP	Staley, Ms Louise Eileen	Ripon	LP
Halfpenny, Ms Bronwyn	Thomastown	ALP	Suleyman, Ms Natalie	St Albans	ALP
Hall, Ms Katie	Footscray	ALP	Tak, Mr Meng Heang	Clarinda	ALP
Halse, Mr Dustin	Ringwood	ALP	Taylor, Mr Jackson	Bayswater	ALP
Hamer, Mr Paul	Box Hill	ALP	Theophanous, Ms Katerina	Northcote	ALP
Hennessy, Ms Jill	Altona	ALP	Thomas, Ms Mary-Anne	Macedon	ALP
Hibbins, Mr Samuel Peter	Prahran	Greens	Tilley, Mr William John	Benambra	LP
Hodgett, Mr David John	Croydon	LP	Vallence, Ms Bridget	Evelyn	LP
Home, Ms Melissa Margaret	Williamstown	ALP	Wakeling, Mr Nicholas	Ferntree Gully	LP
Hutchins, Ms Natalie Maree Sykes	Sydenham	ALP	Walsh, Mr Peter Lindsay	Murray Plains	Nats
Kairouz, Ms Marlene	Kororoit	ALP	Ward, Ms Vicki	Eltham	ALP
Kealy, Ms Emma Jayne	Lowan	Nats	Wells, Mr Kimberley Arthur	Rowville	LP
Kennedy, Mr John Ormond	Hawthorn	ALP	Williams, Ms Gabrielle	Dandenong	ALP
Kilkenny, Ms Sonya	Carrum	ALP	Wynne, Mr Richard William	Richmond	ALP

PARTY ABBREVIATIONS

ALP—Labor Party; Greens—The Greens;
Ind—Independent; LP—Liberal Party; Nats—The Nationals.

Legislative Assembly committees

Economy and Infrastructure Standing Committee

Ms Addison, Mr Blackwood, Ms Couzens, Mr Eren, Ms Ryan, Ms Theophanous and Mr Wakeling.

Environment and Planning Standing Committee

Ms Connolly, Mr Fowles, Ms Green, Mr Hamer, Mr McCurdy, Ms McLeish and Mr Morris.

Legal and Social Issues Standing Committee

Mr Angus, Mr Battin, Ms Couzens, Ms Kealy, Ms Settle, Ms Suleyman and Mr Tak.

Privileges Committee

Ms Allan, Mr Carroll, Ms Hennessy, Mr McGuire, Mr Morris, Mr Pakula, Ms Ryan, Ms Staley and Mr Wells.

Standing Orders Committee

The Speaker, Ms Allan, Mr Cheeseman, Ms Edwards, Mr Fregon, Ms McLeish, Ms Sheed, Ms Staley and Mr Walsh.

Joint committees

Dispute Resolution Committee

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

Council: Mr Bourman, Ms Crozier, Mr Davis, Ms Mikakos, Ms Symes and Ms Wooldridge.

Electoral Matters Committee

Assembly: Ms Hall, Dr Read and Mr Rowswell.

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

House Committee

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

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

Integrity and Oversight Committee

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

Council: Mr Grimley and Ms Shing.

Pandemic Declaration Accountability and Oversight Committee

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

Council: Mr Bourman, Ms Crozier, Mr Erdogan and Ms Shing.

Public Accounts and Estimates Committee

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

Council: Mrs McArthur and Ms Taylor.

Scrutiny of Acts and Regulations Committee

Assembly: Mr Burgess, Ms Connolly and Mr Morris.

Council: Ms Patten and Ms Watt.

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Thursday, 24 March 2022

The SPEAKER (Hon. Colin Brooks) took the chair at 9.32 am and read the prayer.

Announcements

ACKNOWLEDGEMENT OF COUNTRY

The SPEAKER (09:32): We acknowledge the traditional Aboriginal owners of the land on which we are meeting. We pay our respects to them, their culture, their elders past, present and future, and elders from other communities who may be here today.

Documents

DOCUMENTS

Incorporated list as follows:

DOCUMENT TABLED UNDER AN ACT OF PARLIAMENT—The Clerk tabled the following document under an Act of Parliament:

West Gate Tunnel (Truck Bans and Traffic Management) Act 2019—West Gate Tunnel Project Agreement—Third Amending Deed (three volumes).

Motions

QUESTIONS WITHOUT NOTICE

Ms STALEY (Ripon) (09:34): I desire to move, by leave:

That the house notes the Premier misled the house in question time on 22 March 2022 by claiming ESTA met all its benchmarks when in truth 000 ambulance dispatch failed to meet code 1 dispatch targets in every single financial year from 2016–17 to 2019–20.

Leave refused.

Business of the house

ADJOURNMENT

Ms ALLAN (Bendigo East—Leader of the House, Minister for Transport Infrastructure, Minister for the Suburban Rail Loop) (09:34): I move:

That the house, at its rising, adjourns until Tuesday, 5 April 2022.

Motion agreed to.

Members statements

HAMPTON LIFE SAVING CLUB

Mr NEWBURY (Brighton) (09:35): Hampton Life Saving Club is a wonderful organisation. On top of teaching young people important skills they are advocates for all abilities, including girls' participation, environmental protection and mental wellness. A Guy Liberal government will deliver \$125 000 to support the redevelopment of the club.

HEAD STREET, BRIGHTON, CAR PARKING

Mr NEWBURY: Port Phillip council is proposing to redevelop the Elwood foreshore and shift almost 300 car parks into and around Head Street in Brighton. Head Street is a municipal boundary, and many residents believe the move is cynically designed to shift the problem out of Port Phillip. The draft plan should be rejected by councillors.

HOON DRIVING

Mr NEWBURY: The Bayside residents near St Kilda Street have had enough of unlawful traffic, associated noise and a lack of action from the Labor government. As Paul said, these hooners seem to think they can treat this as a speedway. This is costing people's lives, and the noise level is greatly compromising the amenity of the Bayside area. Residents deserve more than to be ignored by Labor.

ST MARY'S PRIMARY SCHOOL, HAMPTON

Mr NEWBURY: St Mary's Primary is a remarkable school in Hampton. The school will soon celebrate its centenary and it currently teaches almost 290 students. The school has a vision to invest in a \$3 million extension of their junior school block but needs state government support. The extension will include more classrooms, a new STEM space and the creation of a multipurpose room.

WEDDING ANNIVERSARY

Mr NEWBURY: On indulgence, all my love to my wife, Suzanne, as we celebrate our 15th wedding anniversary today.

WYNDHAM COMMUNITY INFRASTRUCTURE PROJECTS

Mr PALLAS (Werribee—Treasurer, Minister for Economic Development, Minister for Industrial Relations) (09:36): I rise to update the house on one of the many ways that the Andrews Labor government is supporting growing communities, such as my electorate of Werribee. The Growing Suburbs Fund is an initiative of the Andrews government and one which has supported many important projects and local community infrastructure for the growing Wyndham community.

Last week I joined the mayor of Wyndham, Cr Peter Maynard, and others from Wyndham City Council to acknowledge the \$6.3 million that Wyndham will receive from the latest round of the fund. In my electorate of Werribee this includes \$1.3 million to deliver the Black Forest Road South community centre and \$1 million towards the Manor Lakes North family centre. Community centres such as these are important for our diverse and multicultural populace, as they provide inclusive spaces for meeting and gathering. Additionally, new and innovative family centres are great for the locals.

Funding through the Growing Suburbs Fund will ensure Wyndham remains welcoming, accessible and enjoyable to all. I acknowledge Wyndham council's investment in the Black Forest Road South community centre and the Manor Lakes North family centre. I am proud of our continued collaboration as we continue delivering such fantastic and innovative facilities to our thriving community. With the latest round the Andrews Labor government has now invested more than \$38.8 million to make 25 projects possible across Wyndham through the Growing Suburbs Fund.

LICENSED HOSPITALITY VENUE FUND

Mr T BULL (Gippsland East) (09:37): How is this for bureaucracy at its finest? Dylan Clark and his partner took over the Marlo Hotel late last year, but they have not received anything from the Licensed Hospitality Venue Fund, which was created to support these very businesses through the COVID lockdowns. The hotel was eligible for support, but it was sold and in the selling of it the liquor licence changed hands. The fund was no longer open to new applicants, so while other hotels continued to receive the support, Marlo was simply cut off and they received no further support through that system simply because the liquor licence had changed hands. It is not fair, and efforts to rectify that have fallen on deaf ears. The government made this criterion, so surely it can change this criterion for the right outcome. The owners requested an exception, but the business that was previously eligible and supported by this fund was given absolutely no resolution at all. The hotel closed its doors, it put off staff, it went through hardship—it went through a very difficult period—and this ought to be fixed.

MONARO HIGHWAY

Mr T BULL: The final point I want to make is that I raised the issue of the Monaro Highway last sitting week. Last week we had a terrible accident in relation to its condition. It is not ‘smoother and safer’ as the minister said. I know accidents can happen, but they will continue to happen unless we get major investment in our road network in rural and regional Victoria, and it ought to be fixed.

MILL PARK ELECTORATE SPORTING CLUBS

Ms D’AMBROSIO (Mill Park—Minister for Energy, Environment and Climate Change, Minister for Solar Homes) (09:39): Today I want to acknowledge the important contribution our local sports clubs continue to make to the Mill Park electorate. They are the heart and soul of the community. They provide a safe environment for players of all ages to exercise and connect with the local community. Last weekend I attended the Bundoora United Football Club to officially open the Puma Cup for junior soccer players. More than 50 clubs from across Melbourne participated in the three-day event, and, of course, that includes another great local club—that is, the Mill Park Soccer Club. The event brought together hundreds of kids and families to reconnect and enjoy the beautiful game. It was a delight to meet newly appointed club president Dean Triantafylidis and the new executive to discuss their plans for the club and their efforts to attract more women to the sport.

WHITTLESEA CITY BASKETBALL ASSOCIATION

Ms D’AMBROSIO: I also had the opportunity last week to visit the Whittlesea City Basketball Association leadership team at the Mill Park basketball stadium. It was great to speak with chairperson David Hughes and his team about how they are now preparing for a great year in 2022. Mill Park stadium is in the middle of a major redevelopment thanks to our government’s community sports infrastructure stimulus program. I am looking forward to celebrating the reopening of this stadium when works conclude in a few months time. To all the amazing sporting club volunteers across the electorate, including coaches, umpires, fundraisers, sponsors and committee members, your work is greatly appreciated. Your commitment to community sport is inspiring. Thank you for everything you are doing for our local community.

EASTERN FREEWAY GRAFFITI

Mr R SMITH (Warrandyte) (09:40): I want to raise an issue today in the house on the state of the Eastern Freeway with regard to the graffiti. Members in this chamber who travel up the Eastern Freeway would have seen the growing amount of graffiti and the weeds that are springing up along the centre of the freeway, but it is getting to the point now where the eastern gateway to our city is a complete disgrace. I have raised this in the house before, so the minister cannot say that he does not know what is going on. I can only conclude there are two possibilities with why that graffiti is not getting removed: one is that the government has just run out of money and they cannot afford to do anything about it, and the second is they simply do not care.

Members of the Labor Party might think it is great street art, but the fact of the matter is it is an unsightly blight on, as I said, the eastern entrance to our city. I think that when you compare this publicly managed part of the freeway with the bit that is managed by the private operator, ConnectEast, there is no graffiti past the tunnel and no graffiti where the private operator is looking after things, but where the government is looking after things we just have a complete mess. We have got signs that are covered in graffiti, and that area next to Alexandra Parade is so covered in graffiti that it is a complete disgrace.

I have had many members of the community come to me over the last year talking about it. I implore the minister: please go down and have a look at it, look at it for what it is, which is the result of a crime. Graffiti is not welcome in this city or this state. Do something about it, because it looks awful and it looks like we do not care about our city, and I would say that every member of this house does in fact care about our city. Let us demonstrate that pride that we have.

BELLFIELD INFRASTRUCTURE PROJECTS

Mr CARBINES (Ivanhoe—Minister for Child Protection and Family Services, Minister for Disability, Ageing and Carers) (09:42): It is all happening in Bellfield in my electorate of Ivanhoe. Can I just say that on the weekend I will be opening the Ford Park redevelopment thanks to the great work of the North East Link Program. That is going to be a fantastic redevelopment that will support Ivanhoe Junior Football Club, Bellfield Cricket Club and many others.

But just last week we were back out there with the shovels turning the sod on a huge redevelopment for social housing in Bellfield. It is a \$24.3 million project thanks to \$18-plus million from the state government under the Victorian Social Housing Growth Fund. That is going to provide some 58 social housing dwellings in Bellfield. It is with Launch Housing, and I want to thank them for their commitment to that development but also Banyule City Council, who have provided the land in Bellfield for that project. There are 200 jobs as part of that project, which is part of our \$5.3 billion Big Housing Build.

Just over the back of that housing development I did a walk-through of the Bellfield community hub, which is going to include maternal and child health, a range of community rooms and kindergarten rooms as well. That is a \$14.5 million project in Bellfield. It includes a \$2 million contribution from the state government, working in partnership with Banyule City Council. Right there it is a drop-punt to each of those facilities: the social housing redevelopment of some \$23-plus million, the \$14.5 million Bellfield community hub, which has almost completed construction, and Ford Park, which is opening on the weekend. Get down to Bellfield. It is all happening.

GOVERNMENT PERFORMANCE

Mr SOUTHWICK (Caulfield) (09:44): I am pretty competitive, and when Victoria is being sent backwards by lockdowns and by a government that does not care, I am really keen to ensure we make Victoria number one again. Many of my locals in Caulfield ask me, ‘Well, what are you going to do about it?’. The Liberal-Nationals have released a plan to make Victoria number one again, and one of the six elements of this plan is no more lockdowns. It is important that we do not have any more lockdowns. We need to ensure that we fix the health crisis that the Premier and the government have created, including at the likes of Caulfield Hospital, which has not had a dollar spent on it. The mental health crisis is something that all Victorians face, and we need to ensure that we put the support and the effort in for all Victorians that have suffered under this Andrews government. Our schools are broken. Homeschooling is something that so many of our kids have faced. We have got to ensure that we get kids back to where they need to be, not only in the classroom but also by providing the education standards that they deserve. Also cost-of-living pressures are affecting every single Victorian. We have got so many taxes—40 new taxes under the Andrews government—and we have got to ensure there are no more new taxes.

And finally small businesses: have a look at the CBD. There are so many ‘For lease’ signs under this government. In my area of Caulfield we have had so many small businesses that have struggled with restrictions and regulations that have not made sense. Our shopping strip policy to ensure we bring many people back to our strips will help with that—as well as so many other policies to ensure we make Victoria number one again.

CULTURAL DIVERSITY WEEK

Ms SPENCE (Yuroke—Minister for Multicultural Affairs, Minister for Community Sport, Minister for Youth) (09:45): Today I rise to acknowledge the wonderful celebrations that have taken place across the state during Cultural Diversity Week. Here in Victoria we are so lucky to be able to celebrate one of the world’s strongest and most vibrant multicultural societies, and this week’s festivities kicked off with a bang on the weekend. On Saturday I was delighted to join the Premier, the member for Carrum and the member for Cranbourne as we were splashed with colour at the Holi festival in Carrum Downs. After a quick wardrobe change the Premier and I congregated again at the

Victorian multicultural gala dinner to celebrate the rich tapestry of cultural and faith communities with 1400 other guests, including many members of this place. Then on Sunday I joined my local Hindu community at their festival of colours event in Craigieburn. Also on Sunday Greek national day was recognised at the Shrine of Remembrance and celebrated again last night at the wonderful Hellenic Museum.

Labor has a long and proud history of supporting our multicultural communities. My thanks go to the multicultural community members, leaders and organisations who have worked closely with us to keep people safe and informed during the pandemic and who are working with us to inform Victoria's first anti-racism strategy. Cultural diversity is embedded in Victoria's identity. It is what makes our state a special place to live, and I am proud to be the Minister for Multicultural Affairs in a government that celebrates and strengthens our diverse communities.

MORNINGTON PENINSULA METROPOLITAN DESIGNATION

Mr BURGESS (Hastings) (09:47): Last week, in the lead-up to the 28 March release of the *Mornington Peninsula Economic Disadvantage Report*, the Leader of the Opposition summarised the challenges confronting the Mornington Peninsula by saying that the peninsula has all of the negatives that come with metropolitan status but none of the benefits. The report commissioned by the Committee for Mornington Peninsula found that a change to a regional designation would unlock funding opportunities to improve transport and infrastructure, health and education, community and recreation.

Over the last several years Mornington Peninsula residents and businesses have been calling on the Andrews Labor government to urgently release the Mornington Peninsula shire from inclusion in metropolitan Melbourne and the COVID lockdowns that were applied to it. Throughout the pandemic and despite the entirely different conditions it was experiencing, the Mornington Peninsula was subjected to the same harsh restrictions metropolitan Melbourne was suffering under. Other areas similarly regional in nature to the Mornington Peninsula, and in some instances closer geographically to the city, continued to enjoy the far greater freedoms of regional designation.

The opposition leader said it was unfair to burden the peninsula with the higher taxes and fees that come with being part of metro Melbourne. The member for Nepean made claims in this house during the last sitting that changing the Mornington Peninsula's designation from metro to regional would endanger its green wedge. In response, the opposition leader said the Mornington Peninsula is not metropolitan and should not be classed as such. The argument that the metro classification is needed to protect the green wedge just does not stack up.

MS LOVELL (NORTHERN VICTORIA REGION)

Ms HENNESSY (Altona) (09:48): I rise to condemn in the strongest possible terms the offensive, inaccurate contribution that was made by Ms Lovell yesterday in the Legislative Council, and I do so on behalf of my constituents, my neighbours, my friends and my family who have lived in public housing and social housing for many, many years. The contribution that was made yesterday was nothing more than an attempt to argue for a form of economic ghettoisation. To suggest that children and their parents were somehow less deserving of living in certain suburbs, to make a contribution that essentially sought to propagate unfair stereotypes, was a disgrace not fitting of this Parliament.

Certainly I am very, very proud of the contribution that our government has made around housing, and as a person who lives next door to people who live in social housing, as a person who knows and loves many people that live in social and public housing, the implications that were made in respect of the contribution were so fundamentally offensive. I certainly believe that it would be fitting for the opposition to distance themselves from those and for the speaker from the other place to apologise for those matters.

GREGORY ‘WATTO’ WATSON

Mr TILLEY (Benambra) (09:50): 319378 Staff Sergeant Gregory ‘Watto’ Stewart Watson—on 10 March at 2215 hours we lost a great man, one who loved life, one who many would envy. He was loyal, loving, hardworking and jovial. Gregory ‘Watto’ Stewart Watson was born in Broken Hill in 1958. He joined the Australian regular army in 1976 and was allocated to the Royal Australian Corps of Transport, where he was employed as a driver. Watto transferred to the Royal Australian Corps of Military Police in 1978 and was posted to the 3rd Military Police Company in Melbourne, where he immediately made his presence felt with his friendly, cheerful attitude to everyone he encountered.

He was willing to learn and after two years was posted to the 5th Military Police Company, the special investigations branch, where he became a very competent investigator. In 1985 he did a stint over in South-East Asia, in Malaysia. Greg served in the SIB in Melbourne and Bandiana until his discharge in 1990, where others, apart from during his military service in Benambra, would remember him as the publican at Chiltern’s Telegraph Hotel and in his roles in security management in the district. Jobs done with mates and mates helping each other out—he was always there, always had time for a mate and was fearlessly staunch to his family and friends. The end of the night was signalled by his call of, ‘Say goodnight, Watto’. Goodnight, Watto. He is survived by his wife, Sharon, sons, Chris and Daniel, and their families and grandchildren, Annalise and Stewart. Condolences, Sharon and family. Lest we forget.

SICK PAY GUARANTEE

Mr FOWLES (Burwood) (09:51): I rise today to highlight a fantastic piece of news for casual workers. The Andrews government has launched a two-year pilot program that will give casual workers in target industries up to five days a year of sick or carers pay at the national minimum wage. Occupations in the first phase include hospitality workers, food trades workers and preparation assistants such as chefs and kitchen hands, supermarket and supply chain workers, retail and sales assistants, aged and disability care workers, cleaners, laundry workers and security guards. Throughout the pandemic we have learned that going to work while you are sick can be a disaster for community health. Putting aside the obvious flow-on consequences, the Victorian sick pay guarantee is an important financial safety net for those who need it most. Across Victoria’s workforce there are approximately 1 million casual and contract workers, and these workers are over-represented by women, young people, temporary residents and migrants.

I would like to correct a common misconception regarding pay conditions for casuals. Yes, casual workers are entitled to a loading of around 25 per cent on their hourly rate. This is to compensate them for the lack of some paid leave entitlements as well as the insecure nature of their work. And, no, this loading cannot absorb the financial impact of taking time off work when they are sick or need to care for loved ones. Missing a shift or two can be the difference between food security, paying rent and being able to afford a rapid antigen test under the Morrison government. The Victorian sick pay guarantee is another example of our government’s core values. The Andrews government always has and always will put people first.

MOOROOPNA CHILDREN AND FAMILIES CENTRE

Ms SHEED (Shepparton) (09:53): It was wonderful to attend the official opening of the Mooroopna children and families centre on Thursday last week by the Minister for Early Childhood, Ingrid Stitt. The centre, which is part of the *Shepparton Education Plan*, has been open for a few months already, and it was fantastic to see the three- and four-year-old kindergarten students thriving in this stunning new facility. The centre has everything young children need to begin their educational journey and help them transition easily into primary school, which is just next door. As well as a kindergarten, the centre has child healthcare facilities, which include a maternal and child health nurse, paediatric services and a therapeutic play specialist, and community meeting facilities. All of this provides a convenient way for parents to monitor and participate in their children’s early education. The aim is to develop happy, healthy and resilient children who will make their way through the education system with a capacity to learn and ultimately enter the workforce and live a fulfilling life.

It is a program that has been done in partnership with the Julius Colman foundation and provides some really outstanding opportunities. This is a regional community where people live together, they work together and their children go to school together. Anyone who is a regional MP knows that in regional communities we all live together, we all go to the same supermarkets, we all share the same hospital—we do not look for any form of segregation, because we are a community.

INTERNATIONAL WOMEN'S DAY

Ms WARD (Eltham) (09:54): to attend the School Strike 4 Climate she has also been a driving force behind clean-ups of local parks, like Grace, who has helped people living with an intellectual disability for many years and was involved in creating the Oasis schools action kit, a resource for schools to learn and take action for young people at risk of experiencing homelessness. Congratulations and thank you to all these wonderful young women working hard to break the bias. Happy International Women's Day.

MS LOVELL (NORTHERN VICTORIA REGION)

Ms WARD: I will also take this opportunity to join with the member for Altona in condemning the words that were said by a member for Northern Victoria yesterday. My mum grew up in public housing. She grew up on the outskirts of Fawkner in a two-bedroom concrete block. She had the right, along with every other Victorian, to secure housing in a friendly neighbourhood, no matter where that neighbourhood was. For the member to lean into economic prejudice and to think that that is acceptable, particularly in this day and age, is absolutely shameful. People in this state have got the right to live in the communities in which they reside or want to reside—or in fact where the department puts them. Sometimes they do not even have a choice. To think that you can say, 'You don't have the right runners. You haven't got an iPod or an iPhone. You shouldn't live here. You should go and live somewhere else', is absolutely unconscionable. It is necessary for governments to create equality of opportunity. To tell people, 'You don't have the right to live here because you're poor', is nothing short of shameful, and I urge the member to apologise.

COST OF LIVING

Mr WAKELING (Ferntree Gully) (09:56): The impact of six lockdowns has taken a financial toll on many Knox families. Businesses are closing, and many locals are struggling financially. The Andrews government has failed to help Knox residents with their cost-of-living pressures. The government's solution was to introduce or increase 42 taxes. Knox residents need help to recover and rebuild from the high cost of living.

AMBULANCE SERVICES

Mr WAKELING: Victorians are deeply concerned with the harrowing stories of unanswered or delayed dispatch of ambulances due to the under-resourced 000 service. Since October of last year 12 Victorians have passed away due to the failure of 000, and this includes four children. Knox residents need certainty that if they contact 000 they can be assured the call will be answered and an ambulance dispatched on time to ensure our community receive the health services they desperately need and deserve.

MENTAL HEALTH SERVICES

Mr WAKELING: Over recent months I have spoken to many Knox residents who have raised significant issues about their own mental health or the mental health of a family member. Six lockdowns have had a significant impact on the Knox community. The Liberal-Nationals plan to help our community recover and rebuild includes allowing 2000 registered counsellors to immediately deliver mental health services within the Victorian community—plus launching the largest ever mental health worker recruitment drive. The mental health of Victorians desperately needs help, and the Liberal-Nationals have a clear plan to fix it.

HAWTHORN ELECTORATE SCHOOLS

Mr KENNEDY (Hawthorn) (09:57): I had the pleasure of another visit to the Rossbourne School to present the school representative council badges. This microcosm of democracy always warms my heart, and it was fantastic to see a set of passionate students and another great Hawthorn school. I am proud of the way our government has supported our schools, with over \$10 million for Auburn High to deliver stage 2 of the school's master plan, \$1.76 million for Camberwell Primary to convert the car park to open space for the school and \$3.3 million for Auburn South Primary School to upgrade and modernise the school—of course I could go on.

This experience with our Hawthorn schools is why I was appalled by the thoughtless comments of the federal acting education minister about dud teachers last week. After a lifetime in education I can tell you that our teachers work hard at every school that I have ever encountered in this country. If the acting minister wants to improve NAPLAN results, he should take some advice from our own Victorian Minister for Education, after another round of great Victorian results.

WHITEHORSE COLTS JUNIOR FOOTBALL AND NETBALL CLUB

Mr HAMER (Box Hill) (09:59): The Whitehorse Colts Junior Football and Netball Club is a wonderful local club based at Springfield Park in Box Hill North. The existing precinct includes a pavilion accommodating men's and women's change rooms, two ovals and cricket nets, but despite the word 'netball' featuring in the club's name there is no facility at Springfield Park for young netballers in the Box Hill North community to train at. Typically their eight teams are forced to train at local schools and, when this is unavailable, in the small space outside the change rooms, which provides neither an appropriate surface nor the space to do any netball-specific drills.

It is so important for the club to be seen at its home venue. The visibility provided by a court at Springfield Park will help the club attract and retain players in the same way that boys and girls are encouraged to join the local football or cricket club by seeing their mates down at the park on a weekly basis. The club has been advocating to Whitehorse council for better netball facilities for some time, and that is why I was proud to support the club's petition calling on Whitehorse council to undertake a feasibility study into the construction of outdoor netball courts at Springfield Park. Highlighting the immense support for this project, in the space of a couple of weeks in late 2021 over 1200 people signed this petition.

I want to pay tribute to Melissa Collard, president of the netball club, for being the driving force behind this petition and for her tireless advocacy for and support of better netball facilities at Springfield Park. At its meeting on 13 December 2021 council accepted the petition and referred it to officers for investigation. More than three months have now passed, and I call on Whitehorse council to update the club and the broader Box Hill North community on the status of this project.

MELTON RECYCLED WATER PLANT

Mr McGHIE (Melton) (10:00): It was a delight to attend Greater Western Water's new 1.1-gigalitre recycled water storage dam at the Melton recycled water plant with the ever hardworking Parliamentary Secretary for Water, Harriet Shing from the other place. Water is now flowing into the storage dam at the Melton recycled water plant. It was a pleasure to mark the occasion of the first drops of water entering the network. By next year the water stored at the dam will irrigate thousands of hectares of farmland, supporting agricultural production in the Parwan-Balliang region. The Parwan-Balliang region in Melbourne's outer west experiences unreliable rainfall. Using recycled water for irrigation will help boost agricultural production in this region, transforming it into a thriving agricultural district. Reliable access to recycled water also offers customers better value for money when using water for non-drinking purposes.

Combined with existing storage, the dam will be part of a network capable of supplying 18.3 gigalitres of recycled water each year by 2050. Over 50 kilometres of pipeline will also be constructed throughout the project. By delivering class C recycled water to the farming region, the western

irrigation network will help transform the dryland farms into a thriving agricultural precinct. The project futureproofs precious water supplies across communities experiencing strong population growth and warmer, drier climate conditions. Providing farmers access to a reliable alternative supply of water will also bring wider regional benefits. The local farming community can expand agricultural production, generating more local jobs and growth in Victoria's agricultural sector.

RUSSIA-UKRAINE WAR

Ms KILKENNY (Carrum) (10:02): It is now a month since Vladimir Putin sent his troops into Ukraine on 24 February. A quarter of Ukraine's 44 million people have been driven from their homes and so many lives lost. Heavy sanctions have been imposed on Russia, and just yesterday the US formally accused Russian forces of committing war crimes in Ukraine following what appeared to be direct attacks on civilians, including children. Today NATO is meeting in Brussels. Almost incomprehensibly, part of today's meeting will be spent discussing how the world should respond if Vladimir Putin uses chemical or biological weapons against Ukrainian citizens. But perhaps the question is: how can the world not respond?

My neighbour Marina Morgan is from Ukraine, having moved to Australia eight years ago. She has a young daughter. Marina is from Chernihiv, one of the most ancient cities of Ukraine, about 100 kilometres north of the Ukrainian capital. Today Chernihiv is completely cut off from the capital. The Russians bombed the road bridge, humanitarian aid cannot get in and residents cannot get out. There is no electricity, water or heat. Infrastructure is destroyed. About 100 000 residents are trapped. Marina is raising funds for the women of Ukraine who remain. Please support Marina if you can. What is unfolding in Ukraine is truly terrible. What we need is strong leadership, considered diplomacy, open communication and perhaps most importantly compassion. Marina has this message for all of us: 'People of my country stand for the safe future of the entire world. And today, as never before, I am proud to be a Ukrainian'.

CATHOLIC EDUCATION WEEK

Ms BLANDTHORN (Pascoe Vale) (10:03): Can I concur with the member for Carrum's very powerful statement.

I would like today to acknowledge that last week was Catholic Education Week, culminating in the Mass of St Patrick on St Patrick's Day at St Patrick's Cathedral. A third of Victorian students are educated in Catholic and independent schools in Victoria. One in five students in Melbourne attends a Catholic school, and every baptised student in Melbourne, irrespective of their financial circumstances, is entitled to a Catholic education. There are 111 469 students across 290 schools, many of them in my electorate. Thousands of families within my community make that choice.

It was lovely to join the member for Sandringham and the member for Hawthorn at the feast mass of St Patrick with Catholic education, and it was great to be greeted by the students of Penola Catholic College in Glenroy and Broadmeadows and also the students of Mercy College in Coburg, particularly as a former student of Mercy myself. These are just two of the fantastic Catholic schools that serve my community and the families in my community so thoroughly, and we are so grateful for everything that the principals, the teachers, the support staff, the students and their families and the religious do in providing a Catholic education to thousands of students every day.

Can I also acknowledge the work that we are doing as a government in providing grants to rebuild Catholic schools right across our state, many of which are in my community.

Business of the house**NOTICES OF MOTION**

Ms HORNE (Williamstown—Minister for Ports and Freight, Minister for Consumer Affairs, Gaming and Liquor Regulation, Minister for Fishing and Boating) (10:05): I advise that the government does not wish to proceed with the notice of motion today and ask that it remain on the notice paper.

Bills**GAMBLING AND LIQUOR LEGISLATION AMENDMENT BILL 2022***Second reading***Debate resumed on motion of Ms HORNE:**

That this bill be now read a second time.

Ms RYAN (Euroa) (10:05): It is a pleasure to rise this morning to speak on the Gambling and Liquor Legislation Amendment Bill 2022, and it is excellent timing that the minister responsible is also at the table on table duty. I am pleased that she is here to listen to some of this debate on the bill that she has carriage of. The purpose of this bill is to make a range of amendments to the Casino Control Act 1991, the Gambling Regulation Act 2003 and the Liquor Control Reform Act 1998. From the outset I wish to thank the department and the minister's adviser, Kasey, for providing me with a briefing on the bill. They were very professional in doing so, and I thank them for their help with that.

On first reading this just appeared like a fairly technical bill, and it is in many respects, but one of the things that I did notice in my consultation with stakeholders on this bill is that industry and the various stakeholders who have an interest in this bill were not consulted before it landed in the house, which is quite unusual, I have to say. Generally with these pieces of legislation there is quite extensive consultation with key players, but more than one observed to me that that had not happened and that the first they knew about it was when it was introduced into the Parliament. That leads me to conclude that the manager of government business has perhaps issued an edict to ministers to look for uncomplicated and uncontroversial pieces of legislation and urged them to dust them off and bring them forward to keep the parliamentary agenda going. I think there are good reasons the government has for doing that, given the precarious position they find themselves in in the other chamber and the fact that there is so much internal strife with bullying allegations and the like with Labor MPs quitting the party, which means that the government no longer has guaranteed passage of its legislation upstairs. As a consequence I think generally what we find on the business program—

Mr Fowles: On a point of order, Deputy Speaker, we have strayed a very, very, very long way from the bill indeed, and I would ask you to ask the member at the table to come back to speaking on this bill.

Ms RYAN: On the point of order, Deputy Speaker, I refute that. I have not strayed from the bill. I am discussing the context with which I believe this bill has come to the house, and I will come to the point that I was about to make—

The DEPUTY SPEAKER: I will need to rule before you do that, member for Euroa. The member for Euroa has strayed a little bit from the bill, but I do understand the context that she is trying to make. I ask her to come back to the bill.

Ms RYAN: Thank you, Deputy Speaker. I think when you consider a lot of the problems that we have facing this state at the moment—we have more than 100 000 people on the elective surgery waiting list; we have an ambulance crisis facing the state, with 000 calls going unanswered; we have had a horrific toll from six lockdowns, with severe mental health problems facing Victorians and young people in particular—you have to question in that context why the removing of some obsolete gaming licences is the government's most pressing priority.

Back to my original point, I think it is quite simply the fact that the government does not actually have control of the upper house. Therefore with so much internal strife it cannot guarantee the passage of legislation that is controversial or does not have broad agreement on both sides of the house. Therefore we are seeing pieces of legislation come through that are not, at first glance, overly technical. Or perhaps it is just that the government is out of ideas; there is that possibility as well.

But this bill is not even the most pressing priority in this portfolio. We have of course just had a royal commission into the casino operator. We have just nine of 33 recommendations thus far that have been implemented from that royal commission, and we know that the government needs to bring forward a second tranche of legislation. In fact I observed to the minister across the chamber when she introduced this bill that this was not the piece of legislation I was expecting. I was actually expecting the second tranche of casino legislation. So the context in which this bill comes to the house is I think an interesting one and should be put on the record.

I was interested, in the minister's second-reading speech, to see that the government claims that it is leading Australia's efforts in addressing gambling-related harm because the government has given \$153 million to the Victorian Responsible Gambling Foundation. Now, that foundation was actually created by the Liberals and Nationals when we were in government; in fact it was created by the member for Malvern in his role as the Minister for Gaming. At the time there was \$150 million invested to combat problem gambling. It was the largest amount in Australian history, and as an entirely independent entity to provide problem gambling services to the community, the foundation was the first of its kind in Australia.

Less than a decade on now we have serious concerns that the Labor Party has actually used that foundation to branch stack. Just last year we heard from IBAC that Labor operatives have siphoned off money from a grant paid to the Somali Australian Council of Victoria by the foundation to potentially branch stack for the Labor Party. I just think it is absolutely scandalous that money that should have gone into helping some of the most vulnerable people in this state has potentially been siphoned off into Labor Party coffers.

A member interjected.

Ms RYAN: No, Minister, this is not disgraceful. This is an issue with the responsible gambling—

Mr Fowles: On a point of order, Deputy Speaker, I fail to see what any of these matters have to do with the bill that is before the house, and I would ask you to ask the member to come back to the subject of this debate.

Ms RYAN: On the point of order, Deputy Speaker, very clearly the minister in her own second-reading speech referred to the fact that the government is leading efforts to combat gambling harm through the responsible gambling foundation. That foundation at the moment is subject to a government inquiry about the activities funded by grants that were paid out through that foundation, and I think it is entirely within the context of this debate to be able to discuss that issue.

The DEPUTY SPEAKER: I have not heard the member for Euroa speak to the bill yet. I do hope she comes back to the bill.

Ms RYAN: Deputy Speaker, as I mentioned, in the minister's second-reading speech she referred to a record investment that this government has given to the responsible gambling foundation as evidence of the government's commitment to address problem gambling. I am now referring to the fact that this government, as we speak, has an inquiry underway, which is being undertaken by KPMG, in order to audit those very grants that the foundation pays, because there have been allegations made at IBAC that money that is supposed to help the most vulnerable in our community address problem gambling harm has indeed been siphoned off to groups who have been using that money to branch stack for the Labor Party. I am sorry if those opposite do not like to hear it, but that is a complete and utter scandal. When it occurred in October I called for a thorough and independent review of all of

those grants made by the foundation to ensure that no other grants have been used similarly for political purposes. In December the government finally agreed and came out and said that it was holding that review, but we have heard crickets since. The government actually said that that review was expected to wrap up early this year, and I just wish to point out that we still have heard nothing about that. The government may very well claim that it is making a record investment in problem gambling, but whilst that issue hangs over the government's head it needs to reflect on its record, because it is not one at the moment that is something to be proud of.

Turning to the amendments that this bill makes to the Casino Control Act, clauses 10 to 14 amend section 81AAB of the Casino Control Act to permit the payment of gaming machine winnings by electronic funds transfer. I note that this brings the casino into line with pubs and clubs, which were given this ability in 2017 through amendments to the Gambling Regulation Act. I understand that it is Crown that has raised this as an inconsistency and that the government sees making this change as a red tape reduction for Crown. I do not have a problem with that per se, but again I would point out that this is coming at a time when Crown's behaviour has been the subject of extreme scrutiny and a royal commission, and I question why this is the government's legislative priority. As I mentioned earlier, the government is supposed to be bringing forward that second tranche of legislation, with 24 of those 33 amendments still not yet implemented.

The bill also, as I have already mentioned, removes obsolete licences and tidies up the act to remove gaming operator licences, gaming licences and wagering licences, which are now redundant as a result of changes made to the sector in 2012. And I think members of this house, particularly some who have been around for a while, would well recall those reforms, which were made under the Brumby government at the time. Previously the right to acquire, distribute, operate and monitor electronic gaming machines in pubs and clubs existed under licences which were held by both Tabcorp and Tattersall's, but in April 2008 the government announced that it planned to restructure those licences to be venue led, and that gave venue operators, clubs and hotels the ability to actually buy an entitlement for each EGM that they wanted to operate in their venues. Now, that process, which was actually initiated by the current Premier when he was gaming minister, was a complete and utter disaster, costing taxpayers billions of dollars. The government bungled the auction of those poker machine licences, and in 2011 the Auditor-General actually held a review of that program. The member for Ferntree Gully agrees with me here because he was in the house at that time. The Auditor-General concluded that:

... the project failed to achieve a satisfactory financial outcome and there were serious shortcomings in the project management.

The revenue obtained from the sale of the entitlements was around \$3 billion less than the assessed fair market value of these assets.

So if you ever needed an example of the disastrous consequences of Labor's inability to manage money, then I think this process is it. Just imagine what \$3 billion in revenue could have done for this state in building hospitals and funding nurses and paying teachers and investing in ambulances. It was an absolute criminal waste of money. And the AG went on to say that large venue operators, rather than the community, were actually the beneficiaries of that windfall gain.

This bill also makes some amendments to the requirements of the wagering and betting licence by revoking the current fixed-term standard of 12 years. That licence currently is held by Tabcorp, and it expires in August 2024. The licence gives Tabcorp the right to conduct parimutuel and fixed-odds betting and to operate the only off-course retail network in Victoria. And I dare say that a number of my colleagues are perhaps frequent users of that. Certainly the member for Gippsland East does not mind the odd flutter—

Mr T Bull: Occasional.

Ms RYAN: The odd occasional flutter. Under the conditions of the licence a share of the revenue from the wagering and betting that is conducted under the licence is paid to the Victorian Racing

Industry Fund, and I have no doubt that that is the justification the member from Gippsland East gives—that he is strongly supporting the racing industry—

Mr T Bull interjected.

Ms RYAN: and supporting the thoroughbred, the harness and the greyhound industries. But the amendments that we have in the bill before the house are to enable the minister to actually determine the term of the wagering and betting licence and to specify the term of that licence. So expressions of interest for the licence post 2024 have already closed, and I suspect that this change is about providing some legislative certainty when the government takes that process to market. There is a belief that the government is going to seek to create more than one licence here and also to extend the term of this licence in order to maximise its profit.

I have to say, considering Labor's history in this space, I do lack the confidence that they will get it right, and I think it is very clear that the government is scrambling for cash here. We have seen them make a number of changes in recent weeks which are clearly about inflating the revenue that they get from these licences, and I will touch on a couple more of those. One in this bill is spelled out in clause 19, which is the current monitoring licence. This actually allows for the monitoring licence to provide technical support and services to electronic gaming machines. That licence is currently held by Intralot, but the government was quite open in acknowledging that this change is about making that licence more lucrative and therefore more competitive when it expires in 2027. Currently the ability to provide those services is prohibited under legislation, and the government argues that Intralot's ability to provide these additional services is going to bring them into line with their operations in WA.

To my point, I suppose, about the government seeking additional revenue and more cash through these licences, we have recently seen other changes, such as the change which is about to take place in Victoria's keno licence, which typically under the last licence has been held by Tabcorp but is about to become a dual licence with two authorised providers. I think it was quite a surprise, shall we say, that the government awarded one of those licences to Lottoland, given the significant controversy that surrounds that company. For starters, the company is actually registered in the tax haven of Gibraltar, so I do not know that the government is necessarily putting Victoria's interests at the centre here. Secondly, we saw that the federal Parliament passed legislation to ban its products, which are not lottos but rather jackpot competitions that involve betting on the outcome of major lotteries. There has been quite a degree of commentary from stakeholders like the Australian Lottery and Newsagents Association, which said that it believes that that kind of betting confuses consumers and damages newsagents' businesses, which of course we all have in our strip shopping centres or our main towns—they are small businesses, generally family owned—but also that that kind of betting is irresponsible and harmful. I note that the company is now offering betting based on numbers determined by financial markets. I think that decision by the government to award it one of Victoria's keno licences and also to take those licences online has been met with quite a degree of scepticism from many people within the industry, and people will be watching that very, very closely.

There is also of course the change which we saw last Friday where the minister gazetted extra numbers to Oz Lotto, which dramatically decreases people's chances of winning—

Ms Horne interjected.

Ms RYAN: Well, no, Minister. It is a national lottery. Other states need to sign off on it, but Victoria holds the licence under the public lotteries licence in Victoria. It is your decision—

Ms Horne interjected.

Ms RYAN: In Victoria it is your decision. It is the minister's decision to change that draw. It is absolutely the minister's decision. The minister has gazetted it, and she has in the process decreased people's chances of winning. But of course what it does is it leads to bigger jackpots, which drives ticket sales and as a consequence it delivers more revenue to the state and more tax paid to the

government. So we will watch these changes very closely, because it is quite clear that the government is making significant amendments to these licences in order to bolster their bottom line—because, quite frankly, they are out of money.

One aspect of this bill that I do welcome is the decision to lift the threshold for the minor gaming permit from \$5000 to \$20 000. I think all of us have Lions and Rotary clubs, CFA brigades, SES brigades, Scouts, different sporting clubs and cultural organisations in our electorates, and they all work incredibly hard to raise funds whether for charitable causes, equipment or the like. The ability for a declared community or charitable organisation to conduct raffles without having to obtain a permit if the value of those prizes does not exceed \$20 000 is a good thing. It is a small change in the scheme of things, but it will mean a lot to those small community organisations and sports clubs, which are generally the ones applying for these kinds of minor gaming permits. Those organisations are very much the fabric of our communities, and they should be supported. Making them go through hoops when they are relatively low risk is illogical. The current fee for a minor gaming permit for a raffle or a fundraising event is \$26.20, and last year I was interested to note that the Victorian Commission for Gambling and Liquor Regulation issued 565 permits for minor gaming activities, which collected a grand total of \$24 000 in licence fees. So it is not a big hit to the government's bottom line here to be making a small concession which will mean a lot to volunteers and community organisations on the ground.

There are also a few harm reduction measures spelt out in this bill. Clauses 136 to 138 ban bingo and lucky envelope sales online, which I think is a sensible change. Clauses 133 to 135 also allow unpaid prize money to be claimed for up to 12 months rather than just six. Certainly if you are a punter and you may have forgotten to check that ticket, no doubt that will be welcomed.

There is one clause that I wish to flag some concerns over, and that is clause 144, which introduces an offence for a provider if they permit a minor to gamble, regardless of whether they did so knowingly. I think my concern goes to that aspect which is whether or not they did so knowingly. Industry have raised some concerns with me about this, and I have no doubt that now that they have a full copy of the bill, they will probably do similar with the government. But their view is that that is akin to a 17-year-old going into a Woolworths, shall we say, buying a six pack of beer and Lion Nathan or CUB receiving a fine for that minor being able to buy alcohol. I think it is all very well and good if a fine is going to apply to Tabcorp as a licence-holder for allowing someone to bet in one of their own venues when they are under-age, but it is a bit rich to be saying to the provider of the licence, 'You're going to be hit with a fine even if a 17-year-old walks into a venue that you have no control over and you do not own and lays a bet. Because you provide the service, you are going to be fined'. That is probably a bridge too far. I am not entirely sure why the government has chosen to do that. But I do flag that that is something that I will be looking at further between houses.

Finally, the government has also made some changes in this bill to the Liquor Control Reform Act 1998. Members of the house will recall that the government overhauled the Liquor Control Reform Act last year, which sought to do a number of things. Among them was to provide stronger regulation around the sale of alcohol online. Now, it seems that there has been an oversight in how that bill was drafted, in that orders placed online do not capture other methods of ordering or delivering alcohol—that is, the government informs me that there are some who still make their orders by fax machine. I would not have thought there were many, but apparently there are some. Of course there are people who also place their orders by mail or over the phone, and so there are substantial changes through here to change the references to 'orders placed online' with an 'off-premise request' to make it clear.

Mr Rowswell: Did we deal with this recently?

Ms RYAN: We did deal with this recently, member for Sandringham, but it seems that this is one area where the government had an oversight. I do appreciate the changes to the liquor act were quite extensive and took a long time to arrive at. I think industry were surprised when this bill landed in the house, because they were not aware that the government had intended to broaden the scope of the

legislation. But we will again continue our conversations with industry and consider our position before this bill arrives in the upper house.

Again, I would reflect on the fact that the government introduced this bill largely as a bit of a rats and mice tidy up of existing legislation because they thought that it would be uncontroversial and there were not many issues with it. I flag that there are potentially a couple of issues with it that we will be considering as this bill moves forward to the upper house. In concluding, I just want to thank the industry stakeholders who have engaged with us in good faith, as they always do, to help inform our position on this legislation.

Ms EDWARDS (Bendigo West) (10:30): I am very pleased to also rise to make a contribution on the Gambling and Liquor Legislation Amendment Bill 2022. I will commence my contribution by just saying that the member for Euroa in her contribution seemed to think that this legislative priority of the government was somehow surrounded by a ridiculous conspiracy theory, which is something that the Liberals and Nationals seem to have indulged in quite a lot lately—these bizarre conspiracy theories about why legislation is before the house. The legislation is before the house because it is an important piece of legislation that is about preventing gambling harm, and that is the bottom line. We want to make sure that we improve outcomes for people who have gambling problems. I thank the minister who was at the table just before, the Minister for Consumer Affairs, Gaming and Liquor Regulation, for bringing this legislation to the house.

The member for Euroa also made some references to the VRGF, the Victorian Responsible Gambling Foundation. I have been a member of that board since 2016, and one of the great pleasures in my life is to sit on that board with some very, very effective people who do some great work. That board and that foundation have changed so much since they were first established. It is not just a mouthpiece; it is now a considerable research and policy delivering organisation. The member for Euroa also made some allegations and insinuations about the VRGF in relation to IBAC. They are completely wrong and it is a disgraceful attack on an organisation that does outstanding work supporting people at risk of gambling harm. Reflecting on the foundation in that way has no basis in fact, and her insinuations are a reflection of what the Liberals and Nationals really think about the VRGF. The VRGF has followed all protocols in the allocation of grants, and I can stand here and say that with my hand on my heart, because I know it for a fact.

This legislation is brought to the house, as always by this government, within the framework of always having a mind to reducing harm from gambling and to preventing gambling harm. As the member for Euroa mentioned, in the minister's second-reading speech certainly she referred to the fact that addressing gambling harm is something that this government is very proud of and that we have delivered over \$153 million over four years with our mandate to reduce the prevalence and severity of gambling-related harm. This of course is Australia's largest commitment to addressing problem gambling.

The bill builds on the work that the government has already done in this space by introducing more legislation around further harm minimisation measures and improving the regulatory framework for gambling in Victoria. One of the areas that I am particularly interested in in this bill is that it reduces the risk of gambling-related harm by prohibiting online minor gambling activities, including bingo, fundraising events and lucky envelopes. I will come back to that in a moment, but currently these are not permitted under separate largely federal legislation. But the Gambling Regulation Act 2003 is still very unclear on this. As a result, people may think that these are allowed, and we all find ourselves in a situation where new licence applications are being made that cannot be granted, so the changes will give greater clarity to this.

I want to again refer to the VRGF, because the work that they do is outstanding, and I want to thank the CEO Shane Lucas and our board chair Tass Mousaferiadis. Just recently a new deputy chair has come on board to support the organisation and two new board members, one being Zana Bytheway, who is the executive director of JobWatch, and also Ms Hosseini, who is a passionate campaigner for multiculturalism, human rights, social justice and adolescent health and wellbeing. These two new

board members will make a huge difference to the board, and I am sure that they will be committed to giving their time and energy to the prevention of gambling harm.

Within the organisation there is a great learning and professional development program. Its aim is to strengthen the skills of Gambler's Help professionals and others who work with people affected by gambling, and it is informed by the needs and feedback of counsellors, community educators and venue support workers from our mainstream, in-language and First Nations gambling awareness programs. The foundation also collaborates with other sectors in providing and receiving training so we can deliver more holistic services.

The reason I was particularly interested in minor gaming such as bingo, lucky envelopes and fundraising events being prohibited online is that online gambling has become a significant issue. During the pandemic when we were in lockdowns the closure of a range of businesses in response to that COVID-19 pandemic meant that many Victorians who were required to stay at home for an extended period looked to fill a void in their lives. So the foundation has anticipated an increase in online gambling, and there is quite a bit of research being done in that space right now. We think that we will see scenarios where people gambling online has significantly increased. It was a stressful time for many people, and they sought an escape in a new activity. That might have been to take up gambling after even maybe not having been a gambler for a very long time. Online gambling is one of the riskier types of gambling because it is easy to bet and it is easy to lose a lot of money very quickly. One of the things about online gambling of course is that it is hidden away. It is tucked away in people's living rooms, in their lounge rooms and, for younger men in particular, in their private bedrooms. It is a form of gambling that is not seen, but the impact and the devastation and the damage that can be done is very, very significant.

I just wanted to give some data in relation to that if I can. Online gambling websites and apps are growing in popularity, especially for betting on sports and racing. About one in five adults bet online, which is 27.6 per cent of Victoria's gambling population. This data is coming from an online gambling survey, a health study that was done in 2018–19, even before the pandemic. An increased proportion of Victorian sports betters are using the internet to place bets on activities like the AFL, cricket and soccer, and of course betting on horse, harness and greyhound racing online has also increased. Other online activities, though, which also can lead to increased gambling and increased harm, are buying scratch and lotto tickets, playing keno, betting on casino table games like blackjack, roulette and poker, buying raffle tickets or entering sweeps or other competitions, and betting on fantasy sports. On average people who gamble online participate in a significantly higher number of gambling activities than their counterparts.

We know that this bill will make a big difference. In contrast I think to where we were some years ago in relation to impacts of gambling harm. We have moved so far forward, particularly with a very strong legislative agenda, including banning wagering service providers from offering credit vouchers or other rewards to an account holder, stopping operators from providing complementary or free bets on the condition that account holders can only use the winnings to continue to bet rather than giving customers an option to withdraw the funds, requiring customers to opt in to receive direct marketing from a wagering service provider, providing consumers with simple and easy-to-use tools to set limits on the amount of money that can be deposited into their betting accounts and ensuring consumers can easily close their betting account if they choose to do so while also restricting gambling providers from offering credit or other rewards to encourage consumers to keep their betting account open. These measures have been introduced by this government in agreement many times with the federal government as we committed to the national consumer protection framework for online wagering. These were Australian-first changes, and we will continue to make sure that our government is keeping an eye out for any ways we can reduce gambling harm and can support prevention of gambling harm.

We know the impact of that on families; we know the impact on individuals. Victoria was the first state to sign up to the national framework because it offered a greater protection to people who gamble online and it gave them practical steps to better manage their gambling. I commend this bill to the house.

Mr Wakeling interjected.

Mr ROWSWELL (Sandringham) (10:40): Thank you, member for Ferntree Gully, for your encouragement. Now, on face value the Gambling and Liquor Legislation Amendment Bill 2022 is something that I and many colleagues should at least have some interest in, just by virtue of the title of it, Gambling and Liquor Legislation Amendment Bill—if not an interest, maybe experience in. Thank goodness we are far from prohibition days and we can actually talk about things that are relevant to our modern day.

I am interested to hear, following my contribution today, the contribution from my colleague the member for Mornington, following on from the member for Euroa, the Shadow Minister for Gaming and Liquor Regulation, who made an outstanding contribution, in my view, to this debate. I would point out that the member for Euroa mentioned that in her consultation with stakeholders in relation to this bill she identified that there was a significant lack of consultation with industry and with stakeholders in relation to this matter, which was surprising to her. I would just point out that in my conversations with the industry that covers, that encompasses, gambling and liquor my observation has been that perhaps not in all but in many cases that particular industry does not necessarily sit idly by waiting for government to lead in the regulatory and legislative space. They themselves recognise the social licence, the social pact, that they have with the communities in which they operate, and they do their level best to get ahead of the game, sometimes well ahead of government regulation or legislation.

The member for Euroa also pointed out the fact that it is interesting that this bill has been raised at this point in time, because it was not so long ago that there was another bill in this place that dealt with liquor licensing. As the member for Euroa pointed out, this bill is largely non-controversial in its nature, and I concur with the member for Euroa's reflection that that is perhaps a comment on the government's decision to introduce bills to this place which are non-controversial in nature, given the current state of affairs in the other place.

Deputy Speaker, as you pointed out in your contribution just prior to mine, this bill and the purpose of this bill cover off a number of matters. It seeks to amend the Casino Control Act 1991 to permit casino licence-holders to pay winnings via electronic funds transfer in line with the current regulations that apply to clubs and hotels. It seeks to amend the Gambling Regulation Act 2003 to remove obsolete provisions and references, such as chapter 7 of the Gambling Regulation Act, due to discrepancies with commonwealth legislation and a 2012 gaming restructuring. It provides more flexibility for the government to alter the requirements of a wagering and betting licence by revoking the current fixed-term standard of 12 years. It allows the monitoring licensee, currently Intralot, to provide technical services for gaming machines and equipment in a bid to make the licence more lucrative and align with similar jurisdictions. It makes changes to requirements for unpaid jackpot funds to ensure players' funds are returned and ensures unpaid jackpot funds are allocated to linked jackpots. Later in my contribution I will just draw upon some of the precise clauses within the bill that refer to that. It increases the requirements for a minor gaming permit from \$5000 to \$20 000, and I will also speak further to that point. It bans bingo and lucky envelopes from being conducted or sold online, something which we agree with. It increases the holding of unpaid prizes by wagering and betting, keno and public lottery licensees from six months to 12. And further, it amends the Liquor Control Reform Act 1998 to remove obsolete provisions and references; authorise certain licence categories to supply liquor through all forms of remote ordering; amend the online-only vendor packaged liquor licence category; and extend measures introduced by the liquor amendment act relating to a state of emergency in the new pandemic legislation, and that is something which I will also address momentarily.

Specifically in relation to clause 142, which seeks to substitute \$5000 with \$20 000 or increase the threshold to \$20 000 for the minor gaming permit system, which in fact cuts red tape for charitable organisations and sporting clubs, we agree with that. We like that; we agree with it. I think of the many clubs and associations in my own constituency who heavily rely upon fundraising means, whether it be sporting clubs, footy clubs, hockey clubs, cricket clubs or local Lions clubs. Speaking of Lions, I was inducted as a new member of Lions just yesterday. For any of my parliamentary colleagues in the

chamber at the moment, if you are not a member of the Lions club of the Victorian Parliament, I highly recommend it.

Mr Fowles interjected.

Mr ROWSWELL: I do actually, member for Burwood. I highly recommend it. It is something that you should consider and I commend to you. But Lions clubs rely upon fundraising, as do Rotary clubs and other organisations, so increasing that threshold for minor gaming permits from \$5000 to \$20 000 just makes a lot of sense. It enables clubs to get on with the business of fundraising to improve lives and improve opportunities for locals in communities right around the state.

Clauses 128 to 132 deal with unpaid jackpot and linked jackpot funds. We also think that these are sensible and good changes. Clauses 133 to 135 allow unpaid prize money to be claimed for up to 12 months rather than six months. Once again, we think that that is a fair thing. We think it is a sensible thing and a good thing.

In relation to clause 144, it means that a provider commits an offence by permitting a minor to gamble regardless of whether they did so knowingly. We do have concerns about that and we, as the member for Euroa mentioned, will closely monitor the implementation of that because concerns have been raised with us on behalf of the industry specifically in relation to that clause, and rightly so. If a provider—for example, Tabcorp or another provider—does not manage a venue, does not run a venue, does not operate a venue, is it fair, is it just, for them to be held responsible for permitting a minor to gamble, regardless of whether they did so knowingly? It is a valid question to ask. It is one that we pose in good faith to the government and those charged with overseeing the implementation of this legislation, and I once again indicate that we will be closely observing the implementation of that particular clause.

Finally, clauses 150 to 157 replace the references to orders placed online with off-premise requests to authorise general licensees to supply liquor not only online but by other communications methods. I remember just very recently speaking in this place about those particular reforms. Clearly this is an admission by the government that they did not necessarily get that 100 per cent right at the time and now come into this place seeking to change it. We think it is a sensible change, but it does potentially draw people's attention to the fact that we could have got it right in the first place not so long ago. It has been wonderful to contribute on this bill, and I look forward to other contributions as well.

Ms SULEYMAN (St Albans) (10:50): I too rise today to speak on the Gambling and Liquor Legislation Amendment Bill 2022, and I echo the sentiments made by you, Deputy Speaker, in your contribution previously in relation to this bill. We all know how important it is in our state's legislation to stay relevant, up to date, effective and in line with today's rapidly changing society. This bill reflects some big changes over recent years in the way people purchase and consume not only with gambling but also alcohol. I do just want to talk a little bit about alcohol and I suppose the change in consumer behaviour in the last two years, in particular during COVID. We saw a new wave, with alcohol being delivered straight to your front door, and this service became quite a popular and convenient way of buying alcohol during COVID, an effective and a fast way. It is great to see that businesses were able to adjust to and overcome the challenges during COVID in the last two years and adopt these new and innovative business models to be able to deliver to consumers.

However, such changes mean that we need to make sure that consumers and businesses have proper guidelines in place so we do not see or hear stories of this system being abused and so it does operate safely and appropriately in the interests of our local communities. So this bill seeks to make changes to tidy up and improve existing gambling and liquor legislation.

It is also quite exciting to see new ways of doing business evolve and develop in Victoria, and this legislation will apply standard conditions to online orders and impose obligations and offences relating to online supply. I think we all know that is common sense. This is important so that legislation remains current and reflective of the technology of the day. With this bill we are helping to support the

innovative business practices that have been developed but also ensuring that these practices have the proper conditions and regulations in place. These reforms will increase competition and most importantly reduce red tape and improve operation of some legislative provisions.

The bill makes an important change to the arrangements for setting the term of future wagering and betting licences. We know for community organisations and charities, holding raffles—and we have heard this in previous contributions—provides so much. Some of these fundraising efforts are quite critical to organisations, whether it is a local senior citizens group, a Lions club, Rotary, sporting clubs or a multicultural community group. Fundraising is sometimes the only source of critical income and financial support for that organisation, and that is why we are making important changes like cutting the red tape for these organisations and increasing the threshold required to have a permit for a raffle. I know with my senior citizens group that at times in the past when they were raising more than \$5000 it was an enormous task for my senior citizens to actually go through the process of obtaining a permit and making sure that they adhered to the regulations. It is good to see that this threshold will now rise to \$20 000. I think that is sensible, and I think it is important for community organisations, in particular in my electorate, where at most of these organisations English is a second language. I think this is an important change.

This bill will also extend the time line for payment of unclaimed prizes to the Treasurer. Additionally it will seek to reduce the risk of gambling-related harm by prohibiting online minor gambling activities including bingo, fundraising events and lucky envelopes. Currently these are not permitted under separate, largely federal, legislation, but the Gambling Regulation Act 2003 is still unclear on this. As a result some individuals may believe that these activities are still allowed and permitted, so these changes will provide greater clarity for the industry as a whole. Amendments in this bill will improve the cross-ownership provisions restricting the monitoring licensee from also providing gaming machine technical services to venue operators.

As we know, and most people will know, clearly gambling has for some people a very negative impact on the local community, on their families and on their communities. Unfortunately my municipality of Brimbank has the highest losses from electronic gambling machines of any LGA in Victoria. Over the last 10 years it is estimated that over \$1.3 billion has been lost by players in that area alone. I know that our government in the last six years have done tremendous work in providing support to problem gamblers and their families and making sure that there have been changes made to electronic gambling machines across the LGA as well, and we continue to do as much as we can in relation to supporting those who are problem gamblers and families that come into harm's way in relation to this. There is no doubt that this bill ensures that the current legislation is consistent with existing arrangements in the industry.

As many would know, before I entered this place and before I began politics I actually worked in the gambling industry. I have seen firsthand the negative sides of the industry but also the positive sides of the industry. As I said, in my municipality of Brimbank you see an enormous adverse effect on families, but you also see the positive stories in relation to employment opportunities, the chain reaction of local economies and in particular local community sporting clubs who have a gaming venue that gives back to the community and invests in sport. So it is not always negative for the community, and there always needs to be a balance. That is my view in relation to the industry, where we are providing appropriate measures for those who are in harm's way in relation to gambling but we are also looking at the positive effect that the hospitality and gambling industry has in local communities and in fact in Victoria. I have spoken previously in relation to the positive impacts the industry has on Victoria, whether it is tourism or whether it is local businesses that also are part of that chain, a chain that provides support and growth in our state.

I think this bill really is an opportunity to clean up some of the red tape, but also I would like to say: if you do have problems with gambling or liquor, please reach out to those support services in your local area. There are helplines where you can get assistance and support. Our government is committed to backing our local community groups and small businesses as we recover from the global pandemic.

This bill is a good bill that covers key industries, slashing red tape and most of all making sure the current legislation meets the demands of today. With that I commend the bill to the house.

Mr MORRIS (Mornington) (11:00): The Gambling and Liquor Legislation Amendment Bill 2022: I must say we have had some pieces of legislation that were less inspiring than others, but this one would have to be right up there on the list in terms of the sort of housekeeping that we can afford to wave through without a great deal of debate. There are a couple of nuggets in it that I think are worthwhile, but largely it is about housekeeping measures, about removing redundant pieces of legislation or legislation that is dealt with elsewhere—others have mentioned the commonwealth. This is not exactly groundbreaking stuff, but as I say, there are probably one or two important points in it.

Essentially it is amending the Casino Control Act 1991 to permit casino operators to pay winners by EFT. It is probably about 25 years too late, but at least it is happening. It amends the Gambling Regulation Act 2003—there we go, obsolete provisions on interactive gaming and gaming machine jackpots removed. As others have mentioned, there is an increase in the time for dealing with unclaimed prizes from six to 12 months—I think that is reasonable. And something I certainly strongly support: prohibiting online community and charitable gaming. There are some changes to the Liquor Control Reform Act 1998—changes that probably should have been made last year when the initial changes to remote ordering were made, but now we are finally getting around to it.

I would suggest that the fact that the Minister for Consumer Affairs, Gaming and Liquor Regulation's second-reading speech takes until the third paragraph on the second page to actually get into what the bill is about after a series of claims about what the government has done indicates that there is really not a lot of substance in this bill. Others have reflected on the quality of the legislation coming through, the quality of the legislative pipeline. I think I probably agree with those comments. One point in the minister's second-reading speech that caught my eye was the claim that Victoria is the Australian jurisdiction with the lowest density of gaming machines, except of course for Western Australia, which does not permit them outside the casino—and I hope to have the opportunity to come back to that in a few minutes.

There are some changes, as I mentioned, to the provisions with regard to charitable institutions, and they are indeed sensible changes. The first is the banning of online gambling with regard to bingo and lucky envelope sales. That is a very sensible measure. I cannot remember who it was—it may have been the Deputy Speaker—who talked about the opportunity for online gambling to do harm. Effectively online gambling occurs in an unrestrained environment, so there are not the safeguards that you have at the casino or even at any pokie facility. Those safeguards are not there, and people can get themselves into serious trouble very, very quickly, so I welcome that.

I also welcome the change in terms of the minor gaming permit system, upping the quantum there from \$5000 to \$20 000. It is hard enough for community organisations to raise funds either for their own purposes or to do good works in the community, as many do. The constraint that has been there of requiring a permit and the significant paperwork that goes with that and having a ceiling of \$5000 has made it almost not worthwhile running a raffle or a similar event. Increasing it to \$20 000 is a useful change.

The bill also makes some changes with regard to the Liquor Control Reform Act 1998. As I mentioned earlier there were some changes—last year, if I recall correctly—which were intended to counteract what was perceived as the impact of COVID and the increased demand for home deliveries and the risk particularly of the supplies falling into the hands of those who should not have them. This bill now extends that to other forms of remote ordering. As the Minister for Consumer Affairs, Gaming and Liquor Regulation said in the second-reading speech:

... telephone, mail order, facsimile and other forms of electronic communication.

It also recognises that those other forms of remote ordering were not captured in the initial amendments, and I have got to say I do find that rather surprising. I know many, many, many years

ago I worked for some time, probably a matter of months, in a family-owned liquor business that did home deliveries, and I have got to say I was always entertained but never surprised by the extent to which people not that many years younger than I was but certainly too young to be ordering alcohol would go to try to have us—I do not think we actually ever failed in our duty—deliver alcohol to under-age kids. That was back in the 1970s, so this is not exactly a new issue. Hopefully the changes that are proposed in this bill will do something about that particular problem.

The member for St Albans talked a few minutes ago about the issue with the losses from poker machines in Brimbank city, and that is something that has been on my radar for a while. But it is not just Brimbank, of course, it is a range of municipalities across the state. Brimbank, on the most recent figures, the 2021 figures, had a gross spend of over \$92 million and \$552 per adult. The City of Greater Dandenong had \$532 per adult and—with a lower population—\$73 million in round terms.

I am certainly not a wowser. I have no problem with electronic gaming machines, but I do have a problem where you have municipalities such as these where they are unfortunately still very high ranking in terms of socio-economic disadvantage. Brimbank is currently ranked third in the state. Greater Dandenong is ranked second in the state. You go a little bit further down the list. Latrobe city has a lower expenditure per capita, down to \$435, but is ranked fourth. Mildura, ranked fifth in socio-economic disadvantage, has a figure of \$399 per adult. Now, with regard to both Mildura and Latrobe, one would expect that there is an element of tourism in there, people on holiday wanting to go out and enjoy themselves, so the numbers per adult may be inflated, but the fact is that we have numbers that high with areas of such significant disadvantage—and we still do, there is nothing new about this.

So in terms of the rankings it is Brimbank first, Greater Dandenong second, then you go to Warrnambool, Greater Shepparton and Maribyrnong. The difference with those is that they are way down the list in terms of socio-economic disadvantage. Obviously we are not going to solve these issues today, but we have licence renewals coming up in the not-too-distant future, and I think we have a problem here that we have failed to address. We may have, as the minister said, the lowest density in the country, and that is a good thing to have, but we have pockets where we have significant problems and pockets where those who can probably least afford to entertain themselves in this way do.

As I mentioned at the start, there is lots of housekeeping in this bill. There is lots of stuff that needs to be done that the Parliament needs to do, but there are one or two good nuggets in it, and certainly I have no problem, as the member for Euroa indicated, with any of the changes.

Mr TAK (Clarinda) (11:10): I am delighted to rise today to speak on the Gambling and Liquor Legislation Amendment Bill 2022. It was only late last year that we were here debating some related amendments implementing recommendations of the Royal Commission into the Casino Operator and Licence, strengthening regulatory oversight of the casino and establishing the Victorian Gambling and Casino Control Commission. Since then, I understand that the inaugural chair of the commission has been appointed and the commission is well focused on providing stronger, more targeted regulation of Victoria's casino and oversight of all gambling and gaming activity in Victoria. The commission also has greater oversight of gambling harms and minimisation measures, with a dedicated casino division and commissioner focused solely on the casino operator, which is very important.

This government has shown its commitment to the regulation of gambling-regulated activity, and it has shown its commitment to responsible gambling and harm minimisation. This is important for many of my constituents. Gambling and responsible gambling remains a serious challenge in my electorate. This was highlighted during the royal commission, with submissions from many of my constituents, and I will talk about the organisations that are involved and that receive funding from our government to solve that problem, many of the community organisations in my electorate. It is extremely important for our community that gambling and relevant institutions are well regulated and that responsible gambling programs are well funded and well promoted. Once again, I would like to talk about that a little bit later.

This bill will make amendments to three acts. The purposes of these amendments are outlined in part 1 of the bill and include the following: that the Casino Control Act 1991 be amended to permit casino operators to pay winnings by electronic funds transfer (EFT) as well as some other miscellaneous amendments to remove obsolete provisions and references. Section 13(2) of the amendments specifies that a casino operator must at the request of a person pay out any winnings or accumulated credit from a gambling machine to the person by electronic funds transfer, and if at least \$2000 is to be transferred, to ensure that those funds are not transferred until 24 hours after that request. This comes with a penalty of 50 penalty units for breaches. This will be inserted into the Casino Control Act after section 81AAB.

There are also a significant number of amendments to the Gambling Regulation Act 2003 to achieve several purposes, and I would like to run through these here: firstly, to provide for the terms of the wagering and betting licence to be specified in the licence; secondly, to make changes to the treatment of unpaid jackpot funds held by the venue operator; and thirdly, to clarify provisions for payment of gaming machine winnings over \$2000 by EFT—similar to the changes under the casino act. Further, the amendments will remove the restriction that prevents an associate, subsidiary or related body corporate of the monitoring licensee from providing gaming machine technical services to venue operators; repeal the redundant gaming operator and wagering licence provisions; repeal the interactive gambling licence provisions in chapter 7 of the Gambling Regulation Act 2003; prohibit bingo, fundraising events and lucky envelopes from being conducted online; and increase the monetary threshold for the requirement to obtain a permit. This is a comprehensive list of amendments, and there are a few more here.

But I would just like to touch on what I said before about the community organisations. We see the importance of the community organisations in our communities to combat gambling-related harm. There are a significant number of community organisations in the electorate of Clarinda working hard to support community members affected by gambling. One such organisation is the Australian Vietnamese Women's Association, which has their office in Springvale on Parsons Avenue. They also made a compelling submission to the royal commission, and I thank gambling counsellor Ai Nguyen for making the submission and for the important work helping in their gambling counselling program. Last year I was very happy to see the Victorian Responsible Gambling Foundation award \$400 000 to the association for two important projects that aim to prevent and reduce the incarceration rates related to gambling harms in the Vietnamese community. I have heard from the AVWA about the effect on women experiencing gambling harm related to the behaviour of their partners and the work to challenge the belief that Vietnamese women are over-represented in Victorian prisons because of their own gambling. They run some very important initiatives delivered to women with preschool-aged children as well awareness-raising activities that increase awareness of gambling harm amongst socially isolated and disengaged women in the Vietnamese community.

The Cambodian Association of Victoria are doing some really important work in preventing and reducing gambling harm among those most at risk. One of their most recent projects was working in collaboration with the Cambodian Buddhist temples in my electorate. I know that this was a really important initiative for many people to learn and share about gambling-related harm in our community. This harm extends well past financial difficulty. We have seen through this project that there is a strong connection with family violence and also other serious harm, including isolation in the community. These projects are extremely important for the health and wellbeing of our community.

There are a host of other organisations working on this issue. South-East Monash Legal Service in Springvale are doing some important work in this space and have helped community members to share their stories with the royal commission. Thank you to everyone in my electorate that is working hard on reducing the risk of gambling harm among vulnerable people. It might be providing in-language support and social connectedness through access to healthy activities such as singing, dancing, acting, sports, excursions, one-day trips and other activities that reconnect the member of the community or the member of the family that has been impacted by gambling.

I just would like to say that with this bill we can see that it is a comprehensive bill that makes several important and sensible changes to our casino, gambling and liquor laws. These are important areas of our community, and our community know the importance of maintaining a well-regulated environment with strong, effective oversight of that environment. We have seen the government's commitment in this space with the royal commission and with the harm minimisation programs as well that I have ready touched on. We have heard so many stories about the impacts of gambling in the community, especially in multicultural communities such as Greater Dandenong and the surrounding suburbs. I look forward to supporting these programs wherever I can. I thank the Minister for Consumer Affairs, Gaming and Liquor Regulation for bringing this bill forward, and I commend the bill to the house.

Mr SOUTHWICK (Caulfield) (11:20): I rise to make some comments on the Gambling and Liquor Legislation Amendment Bill 2022. As we have already heard from a number of members in this house, this is not a controversial bill. It is pretty straightforward really, and it is not going to make a lot of changes. I think it has been a bit of a deliberate process. The government is going to be very conservative, as we know, on a number of these bills considering some of the situations, circumstances in the upper house. We have got a number of bullying allegations and a number of members in the upper house now who have crossed the floor and are not necessarily giving their support to the government's agenda, so it will be interesting to watch the government's legislative process and program going forward. We are probably going to see a pretty safe program of legislation in the coming weeks, leading up to November and the election, which is disappointing. This Parliament is here to try to ensure we make the best legislative changes possible and we ensure the safety of Victorians. When we are looking at things like gambling and liquor legislation, we have got to ensure that we provide those safeguards as part of all of that.

Some colleagues have mentioned today the importance of responsible gambling and some of the issues with problem gambling amongst vulnerable people. I had the good fortune of being a member of the inaugural Victorian Responsible Gambling Foundation board under the member for Malvern, formerly the Treasurer and Minister for Gaming, in our term of government back in 2010. That was a really important change, unlike the pretty uncontroversial legislation we are talking about today. That change brought together a foundation that looked at how we could make those that provide poker machines and gambling do it in a responsible way. There were a number of members that were on that board. Certainly it has both Labor and the Liberals involved in it—and I think an independent as well—so there are three members of Parliament on that foundation's board. As I say, it is important because it ensures that safeguards are in place.

In my electorate of Caulfield we have a number of pokie outlets. If you look at the Caulfield Racecourse, that is an establishment that has a number of pokie venues, both in Caulfield and in other venues around Victoria. Certainly a lot of money goes into providing racing, and it has a foundation and other things that are associated with it. They are a very, very good operator, I must say; obviously they are attuned to the problems of gambling as well. But we do need to make sure that those safeguards are in place.

If you go down the road to Caulfield RSL, they are a club that has struggled, I must say, with their pokie licences. In fact I have made representations to the minister on a few occasions now about their licences. They have struggled in terms of just trying to make the pokies work for them, because obviously there is a cost with these licences. You can in many ways become a bit addicted to the revenue that comes from them, but then it does limit you in other things that you can do. The club has on previous occasions made representations on how they can be released from those licences, but up until this point, unfortunately, it is concerning to say that the government has not done anything about being able to support those community clubs.

I talk very strongly about community clubs in my electorate of Caulfield. Community organisations and their volunteers are the bread and butter of everything that we do. They are just so important. We see it each and every day. I know that in this bill we are talking about things like raffles and fundraising

efforts that many community organisations might do. I know the Caulfield bowls club, the Armadale Bowls Club and a lot of the sports clubs run raffles, and we want to release them and reduce the red tape in their being able to run raffles. A number of schools run raffles as well to fundraise for playgrounds and the like.

There are a number of community organisations, a number of Jewish community organisations—we see it each and every day—and a number of other religious organisations doing fundraising initiatives all the time. We have a huge amount of community organisations in Caulfield—a lot that run programs for the homeless, a lot that run programs in terms of feeding people. I think we have probably got about half a dozen groups that do programs quite regularly, cooking and then distributing food. Souper Kitchen, which is across the road from my office, do a fantastic job of providing meals to particularly those from Russian-speaking backgrounds. Sarah and Avi do a fantastic job of that. In recent times I have been talking to Sarah and Avi about the Ukrainian situation. They have been doing some great work in terms of fundraising in support of those that are really suffering in Ukraine at the moment and also for those that are coming here in terms of settling them and providing food, clothing, jobs and education—all the things that must come for those that resettle from a very difficult situation like we see in Ukraine.

But to do all that work you need to find ways to fundraise. We have an organisation called Sharity that do a lot of fundraising online, and again there is talk about how that is all managed as well under the liquor and gambling legislation. It all fits into that in terms of running raffles and fundraising. It is all really, really important, and to have organisations that are actually set up to be able to do that is very, very important. There are a number of organisations that do that and do that very well.

As I say, this is not a very complex bill. It is pretty straightforward. I do say that it is very, very important that we look after those that are vulnerable when it comes to gambling. That is not to say that gambling does not fit into an important pastime in our community. I think back as a kid, having a couple of dollars in a family thing that we were doing, a sweep and that kind of thing—we have been brought up like that. It is a great Aussie thing. It is when it kind of goes beyond that. I remember meeting this guy, when I was part of the Victorian Responsible Gambling Foundation, at the casino. He was at one of the tables. He said to me that he had literally got his pay and come down and was putting his pay down on the tables. That is when it becomes an issue. It is getting the balance right, making sure that we are sensible about doing things, and for those people that are vulnerable, getting them the help that they need. So that is really what we have got to be focused on doing and supporting that wherever we can. It is about striking the right balance.

As I say, a big shout-out to all of our community organisations that fundraise each and every day to do the great work that they do. Having been a board member of Try Youth and Community Services and Big Brothers Big Sisters, they ran bingo centres. Those bingo centres were an important pastime and a way for people to come and meet friends. They would meet every single week at these bingo centres and enjoy playing bingo. The money from the bingo went to running childcare centres. So there is an example of effective gambling in a pastime that people enjoyed—that money from bingo actually helping families be able to afford child care. That is the kind of stuff where gambling can work sensibly and properly, and that is where we can be encouraging it. So I have no problems with that. I have always supported that. Where I do have an issue is where it kind of goes off the rails, so to speak.

Therefore we are not opposing this bill. I say let us do whatever we can to ensure there are safeguards in place but at the same time provide support to the many organisations that use fundraising as a way to do the very, very important work that they do.

Mr KENNEDY (Hawthorn) (11:29): I am very pleased to be speaking on the Gambling and Liquor Legislation Amendment Bill 2022. This bill makes a number of regulatory changes to ensure that both gambling and liquor are properly regulated in this state. I would just like to take up a few of the comments from the opposition. The Deputy Leader of the Opposition offered us the insight that we can expect all legislation between now and the end of the year to be safe legislation, and I am very

grateful to him for his insight, because I do not like too much excitement in my life. So if it is an easy ride from now to November, I will save it all for December onwards of course. I thank him for that insight. However, there were other things where it was not just a matter of speculation. There are a couple of factual things that we need to mention. The opposition is clearly confused when it comes to Oz Lotto. Let us be clear: this is a national lottery. It is not Vic Lotto, after all. I think we need to say that. The opposition is also confused about clause 144 of the bill. This is about making sure that people who allow minors to gamble are appropriately prosecuted.

Having said that, before moving into the more detailed stuff here I would just like to make my own comments. I look at a lot of the sport and things that are sponsored by gambling organisations, and I must say I almost want to hit the television set when I get these advertisements of really seductive people, seductive situations—‘seductive’ is my word of the day—in all the advertising that goes on for gambling. So you see all this and it is put forward as something that is reasonable and natural—night follows day et cetera—and then there is this tiny little sentence at the bottom, ‘Gamble responsibly’. Well, the whole advertisement is aimed at doing it irresponsibly, actually. Am I missing something? It is all based on feelings. So they are saying, ‘Take all this in’, but just to maintain the ‘balance’ they say, ‘Gamble responsibly’. I must say that does not bring out the best in me. That is one of the reasons why I am delighted to be speaking on this, to tell you the truth. Yes, I will have the odd flutter, but I am so glad because in some ways I am a weak individual and if I get onto something, I find it very hard to give it up, like food and things like that. So I am very glad I have never really started on gambling in a big way, because I fear that if I was into it in a big way, I would find it very difficult. I am not as disciplined as many other people in the chamber here, you see.

Mr Wynne interjected.

Mr KENNEDY: Through you, Acting Speaker, I will not respond to that. Broadly this bill will amend the Casino Control Act 1991, the Gambling Regulation Act 2003 and the Liquor Control Reform Act 1998. I would like to focus on how this bill affects gambling-related harm, as I know, like in all of our constituencies, many in Hawthorn have been touched by the scourge of gambling addiction. You see that, don’t you, when you walk through those areas into other parts of a pub or club. It seems to me at times when I look at it to be utter loneliness and despair that has a person there, and all they are doing is just handing over all that money.

The bill contains a number of provisions relating to that harm, like the important change that a casino must wait 24 hours before transferring winnings of at least \$2000 to a customer via electronic funds transfer. This delay is so important because it prevents individuals from immediately gambling away their winnings. As well as this it changes the arrangements for future wagering and betting licences. It also bans minor games like bingo and lucky envelopes online because these were already effectively prohibited in chapter 7 of the Gambling Regulation Act 2003. The sum total of these gambling-related provisions is a clear harm minimisation strategy. We are focused on reducing and eventually ending the scourge of problem gambling, and we are doing this through measures like those I have just mentioned—measures aimed at protecting our gamblers.

I would also like to speak for a moment about the dangers of problem gambling. We have all been to pubs with huge pokies sections or seen the betting ads on TV, as I have just referred to, and know how pervasive gambling is in our society. We have come into contact with individuals who struggle with gambling addiction. This issue affects so many in our state, and indeed we have only recently heard about the less-than-ethical behaviour of Crown Casino. Indeed Australians spend more per person on gambling than any other country in the world. In Victoria in 2019 we lost over \$3 billion on the pokies alone. These billions often do not come from those who can afford it but just your normal law-abiding Victorian. That is why this bill signifies an approach that puts harm minimisation and prevention first, allowing communities and those with lived experience to benefit from these changes. This is so all Victorians can be protected from the dangers of gambling addiction.

Just to say a few words about gambling-related harm, the government leads the country in addressing gambling-related harm. We have provided the Victorian Responsible Gambling Foundation with \$153 million over four years so they can reduce this harm. Other reforms have included introducing YourPlay, Australia's first statewide precommitment system, which is available on every Victorian gaming machine, the prohibiting of ATMs in gaming venues as well as \$200 transaction limits and \$500 daily EFTPOS withdrawal limits. After all, Victoria is the only mainland jurisdiction without ATMs in gaming venues. We have also capped the total number of gaming machines until 2042 as well as setting municipal limits and regional caps on gaming machine entitlements. These measures have allowed Victoria to remain the Australian jurisdiction with the lowest gambling machine density, except for Western Australia, which does not permit gaming machines outside the casino.

This is a tangible harm minimisation strategy, as these policies represent the taking of concrete steps to reduce and eventually eliminate problem gambling. We have established a strong regulator, the Victorian Gambling and Casino Control Commission, with oversight from gaming machines to the casino. All of us will continue to strive for a better gaming environment, for less Victorians to fall victim to problem gambling and for the industry to do better. This legislation is part of this approach. As we tweak our laws, the harmful effects of gambling are minimised for all Victorians.

The other major set of changes contained in this bill relate to the regulation of liquor via orders placed on the internet, especially relating to creating a new licence category of online-only vendor packaged liquor licence, allowing certain licences to supply liquor online without an additional licence, applying standard conditions to online orders, and obligations and offences relating to online supply. These changes are a representation of our proactive legislative approach in this vital area, as it is important that we regulate the ever-changing world of e-commerce. In this case it is important that relevant, adequate regulatory standards capture online liquor orders. I know that the healthy student population in my electorate of Hawthorn are regular users of this service, and that is only going to grow going forward. As we are all aware, it has become more and more common to order basic goods, and the ordering of alcohol has become very common. It is also important to note that this practice has been used to circumvent our under-age drinking laws on a regular basis. It is the risk posed by liquor, especially to those under 18, that makes these laws so important, as many of our lives have been touched by alcoholism, whether it be in a friend or in a family member.

I would like to draw your attention not just to the online orders themselves but to those who often deliver them. These are of course our delivery drivers, who are often international students or foreign workers, like constituents of mine who study at Hawthorn's Swinburne University. As we regulate liquor deliveries today, we must consider how we can better protect those who will be making many of these deliveries. Too many drivers and too many students have already died because of unsafe work conditions in this country. That is just another angle on it and one of the many reasons why I support this legislation.

Ms SETTLE (Buninyong) (11:39): I too rise to speak on the Gambling and Liquor Legislation Amendment Bill 2022. It is always a pleasure to follow my colleague and neighbour the member for Hawthorn. He always gives us a wonderful insight, but it is often very amusing, as again today was. I am sorry to be that person that now brings things down to a sadder level. I guess I really wanted to stand and speak on this bill because I am one of those people who have been deeply, deeply affected by gambling. I think most people are aware of that. Very sadly my husband—well, he is now my ex-husband—has a gambling addiction, so I have seen very close at hand what can happen to a family and to a life.

One of the reasons that I continue to tell my story is because the biggest issue we have around gambling remains the stigma, the stigma that people feel, so I think it is important to stand up and say this. We talk about this responsible gambling. For me that is almost victim blaming. It is not about the gambler. This is an addiction, and it is important that we acknowledge that. It is important that people like me stand up and talk about our experience, because it makes people feel more able to talk about it. I know that I spoke to Shane Lucas, who is the CEO at the Victorian Responsible Gambling Foundation, and

he told me that there were studies that say that people will more readily admit to being a heroin addict than they will to being a gambler—and I find that extraordinary—because of the stigma associated with it.

I know in my own circumstances my husband at the time had a couple of different episodes, if you like, over the 10 or 15 years we were together. What would happen was that it would be going on in the background without me knowing, and it would just escalate and escalate until finally he would have to tell me. In one instance it was when \$7000 had gone out of our bank accounts, and that escalated. So I guess what I am trying to say here is that it is important that people feel able to come and talk about this stuff. Maybe if he had come earlier, we would not have got to the really dire situation. And equally I really want that awareness for family, friends and carers of people that are addicted to gambling, because I look to my own circumstance and, very sadly, my mother actually came to me a couple of months earlier, before I became aware of this final incident. She came and she said, ‘We think something’s going on’, and I would not listen, would not hear. I have subsequently talked to therapists about it, and my therapist said to me, ‘Look, it’s because you don’t want to admit that your world’s about to come crashing down’. So I was kind of ignoring what I now know were some pretty obvious signs. So, again, I think it is really important for family and friends to feel that it is okay to talk about this.

This can happen to anyone. My ex-husband is no longer in the country, so I can talk about him—no, we are still friends, so I would not be rude. He has got a law degree from Oxford University. He is about as privileged as it comes, and it still happened to him, so I do not want this in any way ever to be viewed as a class issue. Although I must say it is striking to note that most of the gambling venues end up in low socio-economic areas, and they do that because people in those areas are under a lot of pressure. Gambling is a drug. People go there. I can remember talking to my ex about it and saying, ‘Look, weren’t you thinking about me and the boys when you were standing at the ATM machine?’, and he said, ‘No, I wasn’t’. He was out of it. He was literally out of it in the same way that one would be on any drug. He was just fixated on chasing a loss. In his instance I will not go into his emotional background and the reasons that he became an addict, but a lot of the time it is around social isolation and really also being under financial stress and so forth. So there are a lot of these venues that spring up in those areas.

I think we have got a lot to do. I really should be going into the substantive nature of the bill. There are some amendments here. I would always like to see more. I am delighted that the Minister for Consumer Affairs, Gaming and Liquor Regulation’s door is always open. I have banged on the minister’s door on many occasions. She is very receptive and is doing some great stuff in this space, and I know that there is more to come. I personally would really like to see the day when gambling just sits in the same space as alcohol and other drugs. I do not know, would it become GAOD? Do I put the ‘gambling’ at the front? What do you reckon, member for Oakleigh? GAOD will do. I would like to see it come together so that it is one thing. Interestingly enough I am about to go off to listen to a feasibility study around the Crossing, which is an addiction centre that is being looked at, and they are very keen to have gambling included in their work. I know that it is one of those things. Young men, sadly, get really whipped into it; you can see it on worksites and so forth. I find it devastating—turning sport, what is a pleasure for young men and young women, into a gambling source.

The Ballarat *Courier* ran an advertorial only two weeks ago on how to do online betting around AFL. I spoke to the editor there. He was very understanding. Of course it was an advertorial that had been purchased by the larger company that owned the paper, and I think he was pretty distressed himself about it. I have done quite a bit. The gambling foundation have a wonderful program called Love the Game, and I would encourage every member to talk to their local sporting clubs about it. I have been going and visiting lots of clubs. You just leave them with the paperwork. They can join up. Really all that they have to do is guarantee that they are not going to take money from gambling sources. But then the foundation will do some work with them around trying to get kids to understand that this is really a very, very harmful process.

There is a lot of wonderful stuff being done in this space. One of the programs I particularly like is the Libraries After Dark program. Again I would recommend any member to talk to their local library about signing up for it. It is something that was developed through the gambling foundation, but what is really interesting about it is it has actually become much broader than that because what it tries to target is that social isolation. The Sebastopol library stays open late into the evening, and they do lots of other community events there. You do not have to go there at all. It is not about identifying you as having a gambling addiction; it is just about saying, 'Here's an alternative', because there are a lot of people out there who are on their own.

The other thing I am incredibly proud of in Ballarat is that we received some government funding to do a trial around allied health early intervention. As I was saying earlier, it is so incredibly important to get to people before their lives fall to pieces. Sadly for my husband and I, it was too late. The damage was so great by the time I found out that, although we tried, we could not come back from it. I would like to see people getting help earlier. So I am very pleased that this government funded, through the foundation, a trial to get allied health people to try and start those conversations. They are in a situation where they have the ability to try and open the conversation. It is a tough one because what quantity do you ask about? If I am losing 20 bucks a week, that is not big, but if I was on Newstart, 20 bucks would be a large amount. So finding the right questions, finding the right way to talk to people, is incredibly important. This trial sadly has been a bit slow because of COVID, but we are looking to start ramping that up. I am really, really proud of that. I realise I have not talked a great deal about the bill. It does have small—

Mr Dimopoulos interjected.

Ms SETTLE: Thank you. But this government has gone a long way in trying to address things. As horrifying as it is we are still doing a lot better than the others in terms of the number of pokies that we have. Our maximum betting limit is lower than New South Wales's. We have statewide council caps. I know that there was talk from the member for Caulfield about the licence length, but at least we do have a limit, which New South Wales does not.

I am always going to be banging on the minister's door; I always want more in this space. I particularly want us to address it in the mental health space. I would like to see the addiction centres recommended by the royal commission include gambling. I am not getting so far on that one, but I am going to keep fighting. Thank you to the minister for what are small changes and her ongoing work in this space.

Mr Wynne: Brilliant contribution. Hear, hear!

Mr MAAS (Narre Warren South) (11:50): Indeed, an outstanding contribution from the member for Buninyong. You know you are very well supported by many of us in the caucus, and we really respect and admire your very strong advocacy in this area. I do remember your inaugural speech, and I just remember how passionate you were in relation to this area, and I am very supportive of that.

Whilst we are at this point I might just actually throw a shout-out to the Alliance for Gambling Reform, who are an incredible organisation. It is fitting in many ways that they occupy the building at 552 Victoria Street in North Melbourne, a building I spent some 10 years in with the National Union of Workers. It is an incredible organisation, the gamblers alliance.

Mr Wynne: It is on the corner of Curzon and Victoria.

Mr MAAS: Yes, that is right. You know it well. The gamblers alliance are just incredible at bringing together different harm minimisation groups in this space. They are really terrific at tackling the drivers related to gambling that are big causes of inequality and hardship in our community. The statistics that they produce: there is something like \$24 billion which is spent on gambling each year. Compare that to \$14.9 billion on alcohol, \$9.3 billion on illegal drugs and \$6 billion on tobacco and you can see just on that scale nationally how big the spend is on gambling.

I am very proud of the track record of this government, because even though this bill is largely a technical bill, what it does is actually set up the regulatory framework, which other bills we hope to pass in the future will be able to build on. So we are setting that up by having this bill go through the Parliament. It is also a government that does listen and does consult all stakeholders. Many of the changes that are in this bill have come from feedback which has been gathered by industry over recent years. Indeed the industry has been very well briefed on the bill.

The government is overhauling how we regulate gambling in the state. This is one part of that, and there will be further bills before the house, as I understand the Minister for Consumer Affairs, Gaming and Liquor Regulation has said. Just incidentally, these changes have all been approved in New South Wales, Queensland, South Australia, the Northern Territory and the ACT as well. It really is only this government that is serious about protecting young people from the risks of gambling-related harm. We have provided the Victorian Responsible Gambling Foundation with some \$153 million over four years to deliver on its mandate to reduce the prevalence and severity of gambling-related harm. This represents the country's biggest commitment to address problem gambling.

I did say that I was proud of our record whilst acknowledging that there is much more that we can do. The government has introduced other reforms, including the country's first statewide precommitment system, YourPlay, which is available on every gaming machine in the state. It has prohibited ATMs in gaming venues and imposed \$200 transaction and \$500 daily EFTPOS withdrawal limits. Victoria is the only Australian mainland jurisdiction without ATMs in gaming venues. There has also been the capping of the total number of gaming machines in the state until 2042 and the setting of regional caps and municipal limits on gaming machine entitlements.

The caps and limits help to ensure that Victoria remains the Australian jurisdiction with the lowest density of gaming machines, except for Western Australia, which does not permit gaming machines outside of the casino. I am really happy that the state has done this, because if you look at my community, which falls within the LGA of the City of Casey, statistics show that over the last year—and keep in mind too that as a result of COVID there was a lot of time that people could not go out and had to stay indoors—there was \$387 000 spent on pokies per day, if you average that out. That is for the 207 operational days that there were—\$387 000 per day, with \$80 million spent on pokies per year in Casey—and that is just across the 13 venues where there are pokies. It works out to about \$300 per person for residents of the City of Casey. It just keeps driving that socio-economic disadvantage. The City of Casey does have the second-highest pokies expenditure in Victoria, and it is something that we would like to see continually being driven down. I am really happy that we have those caps and limits in place. I understand that in the City of Casey there was actually only one application for a gambling venue to have pokies, and that was indeed knocked back. That was some three years ago now, and it is good to see that these applications are not proceeding.

So what is done instead of gambling? Well, I am really happy that the foundation has been consulting with many councils, including the City of Casey, to implement the Libraries After Dark program. That program is focused on reaching at-risk communities and those most vulnerable to social isolation. As the member for Buninyong has said, that is a known risk factor for gambling harm. I think it was the member for Clarinda who spoke about the prevention partnerships program in funding the Engaging Cambodian Buddhist Temples in Gambling Prevention Partnerships project. This is also happening in the City of Casey, and the aim of the project is to build the capacity of Cambodian community leaders, including monks, in Melbourne's south-east to raise awareness of gambling harm within the Cambodian community and to engage community members with the issue.

In terms of the bill itself, we have established a stronger, more focused regulator through the Victorian Gambling and Casino Control Commission. The new regulator will have oversight of all gambling and gaming activities within Victoria, from gaming machines through to the casino. The bill will build on the work of the government by introducing further harm minimisation measures and improving the regulatory framework for gambling in Victoria. The bill does make those amendments to the Casino Control Act 1991 to enable the casino operator to pay gaming machine winnings by electronic funds

transfer, and the provisions replicate provisions applying to clubs and hotels. As I have made mention of, these provisions and changes have indeed been approved in other states before, including New South Wales, Queensland, South Australia, the Northern Territory and the ACT. This is good legislation. It shows our government's commitment to harm minimisation in gambling, and I commend it to the house.

Mr McGHIE (Melton) (12:00): I rise today to also contribute to the Gambling and Liquor Legislation Amendment Bill 2022. Firstly, I just want to commend the contribution by the member for Buninyong, her personal contribution. It was fantastic, and it puts a different perspective on gambling and the effects of gambling. We know that many people suffer through the addiction of gambling, so I thank her for her contribution.

I also just want to add that this bill is a technical bill, and the Andrews Labor government is very serious about tackling gambling-related harm and making sure our regulatory framework is fit for purpose. Of course the government has also consulted many industry stakeholders. A lot of the changes that are in this bill have come from feedback from those industry stakeholders, and that is why we are moving ahead with the introduction of this bill.

The bill seeks to make amendments to the Gambling Regulation Act 2003 (GRA), the Casino Control Act 1991 and the Liquor Control Reform Act 1998, and the amendments aim to increase competition, reduce red tape and improve the operation of some legislative provisions. Of course this bill makes an important change to the arrangements for setting the term of future wagering and betting licences.

We know that community organisations and charities who hold raffles provide so much, and fundraising is critical to those that facilitate this. And I know with my involvement in a lot of sporting clubs we relied on raffles every year to sort of raise money to keep the clubs going. So we are cutting the red tape for these organisations and increasing the threshold required to have a permit for a raffle, and I think that is a great change.

This bill will also cut red tape by extending the time line for payment of unclaimed prizes to the Treasurer. Currently these are not permitted under separate, largely federal legislation, but the GRA is still unclear on this at this stage. As a result, people may believe these to be allowed, and we find ourselves in a situation where new licence applications are being made that cannot be granted, and these changes will provide greater clarity. Amendments in the bill will remove the cross-ownership provisions restricting the monitoring licensee from also providing gaming machine technical services to venue operators. These changes aim to increase competition for future monitoring licences and bring Victoria into line with other Australian states.

The bill also will repeal obsolete provisions in the Gambling Regulation Act that relate to the former gaming operators, and the bill will also repeal the interactive gaming licence framework to avoid overlap with the commonwealth Interactive Gambling Act 2001. It also makes changes to the way clubs and hotels handle unpaid gaming machine jackpot winnings to make it easier for venue operators to return these funds to the players. And the bill addresses a regulatory gap in the Liquor Control Reform Act to ensure all supply of liquor remotely is captured by recent changes to the act.

The bill includes amendments to the Casino Control Act to permit the casino to pay winnings by EFT, consistent with the same requirements as hotels and club venue operators. This bill will reduce the risk of gambling-related harm by prohibiting online minor gambling activities, including bingo, fundraising events and lucky envelopes. The reforms are unrelated to the planned legislation which will establish new liquor and gambling regulator arrangements and the other reforms arising from the Royal Commission into the Casino Operator and Licence.

It will come as no surprise to many who know me that I enjoy a bit of a punt on most forms of gambling. I have certainly thrown the odd pineapple into a poker machine, and I have had many a bet on horseraces and the trots and the dogs. There is not much that I have not bet on. And I always have a flutter on lotto, of course. We always dream of the jackpot. I dream of it because I always see new

caravans on the horizon. I would love to purchase another big caravan one day—maybe out of some lotto winnings, you never know.

I am passionate about the races. I do not believe I am addicted to it, but I am passionate about it. And certainly in my electorate, in Melton, we have fantastic harness racing facilities at Tabcorp Park. It was only last Saturday night I had to attend an event for the Melton City Council. It was the Melton Plate, which is a big trots race, and I was fortunate enough that I backed the winner. But, you know, the good thing about that facility, putting aside the harm of gambling, is that for most people it is an entertainment facility. On this particular night, in front of the grandstands, there were many families out enjoying carnival activities on the lawns. While there was gambling involved, there were a lot of other activities there for families. While we need to deal with the harms of gambling, these sorts of facilities provide entertainment and they provide some local jobs.

I have also attended that facility at Tabcorp Park, and I have spoken about this before. There is an event each year as a fundraiser for ovarian cancer and it is Team Teal. It is through the trotting industry that a high level of money is raised, through the trots races. If female drivers win those races, then there is much money raised to contribute to improving outcomes for women in regard to ovarian cancer and also to provide greater teaching, research and things like that. It is a really worthy event.

Tabcorp Park is an amazing asset for events and entertainment in Melton, and it creates a lot of jobs in the local area, in events, hospitality and accommodation. Again, I will say I am aware of the harm that gambling causes and can cause in our communities, especially in electorates like mine. In the outer-metropolitan electorates we see some of the greatest harm from gambling to those who are often the least able to afford to bet and of course who suffer the consequences. I refer back to the member for Buninyong's contribution about how it can affect an individual and their family. There is obviously a lot more work to be done in that space in regard to gambling addiction and harm from gambling.

For many families and partners who are problem gamblers, the COVID restrictions over the last couple of years may have come as a bit of a reprieve as the pokie venues were closed. But it is important that as a government we have a strong regulatory system in place to prevent the harm that can stem from problem gambling. In my electorate of Melton I can think of only a few venues—we have got around about five gambling venues—that have poker machines, but the losses in Melton are some of the highest in the state unfortunately.

I did happen to write a letter to the Melton City Council a couple of years ago in regard to the Melton Country Club. They were seeking to have their licence extended. I think it is the Essendon Football Club that owns the Melton Country Club or has the licence for the Melton Country Club. They were seeking to extend their licence. I had no objection to the extension of the licence, but I felt the timing of the request was a bit unusual. But one of the issues that also came out of that was extending the operating hours of the country club. I think it was extending them from a 1.00 am finish to 3.00 am. I made the point to the Melton City Council that no good happens in a gambling den after midnight technically. I accepted the fact that they were open until 1.00 am, but then they wanted to extend it until 3.00 am. I have been in gambling dens at 3 o'clock in the morning, but it was mainly to get a drink more than to gamble. As people would know, me going to get a drink late at night is not unusual. If you have got gamblers at pokies after 1.00 am, say, they are not people that are there for entertainment. They are there because they are desperate. From my point of view, I was trying to make the point to the Melton City Council that we have got to protect these people and one way of protecting them is by reducing the hours in which they can spend all their money at a machine. I would have thought that spending your money at a machine up until 1 o'clock is plenty, rather than going until 3 o'clock. It did not work. The council did not take that on board, but anyway that is the way it goes. This is a good bill, and I commend this bill to the house.

Mr HAMER (Box Hill) (12:10): I rise too in support of the Gambling and Liquor Legislation Amendment Bill 2022, which makes a range of amendments to the Casino Control Act 1991, the Gambling Regulation Act 2003 and the Liquor Control Reform Act 1998. The bill does contain a

range of reforms that will improve the regulation of gambling and liquor in the state of Victoria and more accurately reflect community expectations and technological changes.

Before I begin I do want to acknowledge the minister at the table, the Minister for Consumer Affairs, Gaming and Liquor Regulation, for bringing this important bill to the house today and also again, like the member for Melton, acknowledge the member for Buninyong in relaying her personal experience. I also acknowledge you, Deputy Speaker, particularly in terms of your long-term role and commitment with the Victorian Responsible Gambling Foundation and the very important work that they do.

The Gambling Regulation Act changes are important changes. Some of them may be seen as technical changes, but I think they will have a really important impact on individuals' lives, particularly those who might get into some gambling harm, and also on the clubs and community side in supporting some of the work that local community clubs and charities do. So broadly, just to summarise, some of the key changes that will be made to the Gambling Regulation Act are seeking to amend the requirements for the term of a wagering and betting licence, remove the restriction that prevents an associate subsidiary or related body corporate of the monitoring licensee from providing gaming machine technical services to venue operators, make changes to the treatment of unpaid jackpot funds held by venue operators, increase the monetary threshold to obtain a permit for raffles, repeal the interactive gaming licence provisions in chapter 7 to avoid the uncertainty and inconsistency with the commonwealth regulation, and prohibit certain fundraising events from being conducted online.

I want to focus on a couple of the specific clauses that will be amended through this bill, and the first one relates to clause 133, which is to allow the extension of time to claim winnings from six months to 12 months. Now, probably until a few weeks ago I would not have really seen that this may be such an issue, but I have actually had an individual come to a couple of my street stalls who presented me with this exact challenge. He had purchased a lottery ticket just prior to the lockdown last year, and because the retail store was not open he was not able to go and claim it and did not have the facilities to claim it online. Six months has passed, and he obviously did not have the opportunity to do that once the retail store was open. He is now trying to work out how he can have access to those winnings. It just illustrates that there are real-life examples where this change will make a difference.

Turning to clauses 136 to 138, which deal with the prohibition of a number of online gaming services, particularly in the community and charity space, I think this is a really important change. It is more, I guess, a clarification given the restrictions on interactive gaming and online gaming that come through the commonwealth legislation. Online gaming and online gambling can really be the avenue through which gambling can begin. Often you do not set out to become a problem gambler and to have that issue take over your life, but you can be easily sucked into that world.

By having the online presence, as I think it was described by one of the speakers earlier—it might have even been you, Deputy Speaker—you are in a dark room, a dark environment, in the comfort of your own space, and there might not be anyone who is sort of watching over you and checking on you and seeing if it is time to go and time to check out. Even though this online gaming prohibition relates primarily to certain elements, such as bingo and lotto run by a community for charitable purposes, it is the starting point. It is that introduction that people might get, particularly when we are looking at trying to improve the regulations for community groups and charities in terms of how they may offer some gambling services like raffles and the like. Keeping that away from the online system is really important.

Turning to clause 142, which deals with the raffle prize money threshold, that will increase from \$5000 to \$20 000, with the threshold to be indexed each year from 1 July 2023. This is going to have a really important effect for local community organisations right across Victoria, including in my own electorate of Box Hill. You just see the number of local sporting groups, of our schools, that run raffles on a regular occasion simply to patch things up, to buy new equipment that is needed around the club and help run the club, particularly in sporting organisations. These raffles make such a huge difference in actually being able to run their club operations. A lot of the semiprofessional clubs also do pay some

of their players a small recompense for their services. All of that costs money, and raffles can form an important part of that.

Of the parties that contribute to those raffles, there are many local businesses that will donate raffle prizes, and obviously with inflation since 1997, I do not think that the \$5000 threshold has increased since 1997. So with the cost of these prizes and the generosity of the local businesses who are putting up these prizes we will often see not only individually the prizes being valued at more than \$5000 but certainly collectively in terms of what that overall raffle prize pool will accumulate to. When I look at what the permit costs at the moment, it is only a small fee of \$26.20. It is not a significant windfall for the government in terms of these permit fees, but it is just an additional impost on the clubs from not only a financial point of view but also a process point of view in making sure that they get all their permit terms and conditions right and the timing right to actually get that permit in place before they can run the raffle. I understand that that is going to reduce the requirement for those permits by about 50 per cent, which is I think a great initiative. With that, I commend the bill to the house.

Mr CHEESEMAM (South Barwon) (12:20): It is with some pleasure this morning that I rise to speak on the Gambling and Liquor Legislation Amendment Bill 2022. I must say, in listening to a number of fantastic Labor contributions this morning it gave me pause for thought to reflect on gambling within my community and across the Greater Geelong area and certainly gave me pause for thought about my interest in this area for a long time.

I must say that about 10 years or so ago now, as a federal member of Parliament, I found my photo actually posted—literally—on about 2000 poker machines across the then federal seat of Corangamite when we were looking to put in place a number of profound reforms to tackle the challenges of poker machines in the Victorian and Australian contexts and particularly in terms of the harm that they do. In reflecting on that time, that particular personal journey and the advocacy that I took up at that point, and in reflecting on the policy direction of the Andrews Labor government, I must say I do very much recognise that many, many people do enjoy gambling as a pastime and do indeed gamble in a responsible way that provides a great deal of entertainment for them and in a way that is not harmful to them or their communities or indeed their households. Having said that, though, what I have found with gambling is that those that have an addiction, that have those particular challenges, can find it very, very difficult and very distressing to escape addiction, and that has profound consequences not only for them, it has profound consequences for their households and it has profound consequences for their communities.

Reflecting on the City of Greater Geelong, we do see from time to time reports of extremely high levels of gambling and extremely high levels of addiction, particularly in communities that I suspect in so many ways can least afford that. Certainly from my end what we need to make sure we do, and I think what we have been doing as the Andrews Labor government, is recognise that people do enjoy it but also recognise in the same breath that we need to put in place appropriate mechanisms to protect those that need that protection—that is an appropriate and responsible role of any government—and particularly to make sure that we do not see the continued concentration of gambling in communities that can least afford it.

I must say, again in reflecting on so many fantastic contributions in this place, as many of my colleagues have done today, I wish to acknowledge the contribution from the member for Buninyong in telling her personal story of the consequences of an addiction within her household, what that meant for her, what it meant for her former husband and indeed I have no doubt what it meant for her kids, and the profound challenges at that time. From my end, whilst gambling again is something that people do enjoy, we do need to make sure that we have an appropriate policy response, an appropriate legal framework to support those communities, those families, those households that can least afford it.

In terms of South Barwon, I must say we do not have that many poker machines in my community, and that is something that at a personal level I am very pleased with. But what we do have is a number of community organisations, such as one of the clubs locally that supports some of the football leagues.

They indeed do put a lot of money into football clubs to help support them with the capital improvements that they might wish to make to their grounds, to help support the growth of junior football and participation, and I think that is a good thing and that is a healthy way by which we can have a well-regulated gambling industry locally that does very much help support our local industries.

I just want to very briefly mention that I am someone who only really has a punt on a very limited number of occasions through the course of the year. I might put a few pennies into a poker machine on one or two occasions through the course of the year, but it is generally not something that I look to do as a part of my normal weekly routine. And it is not something that the majority of my community look to do in the course of their normal weeks either.

What I am a bit concerned about, particularly in terms of commercialised sport, are the online betting houses, for want of a better term, that can be found online. Often some of them will be advertised on commercial TV. But some of them, to be frank, are not in our jurisdiction, and the capacity for us to limit their activities, particularly if they are done in an unsafe way, is problematic. I actually think the commonwealth needs to show a lot more leadership around this. I think they do need to work a lot closer with the states to make sure we do have stronger national regulation to make sure that we have consistency around these things.

A lot of parents, when I am just out in the community holding street stalls and the like, express to me a frustration, an anger and an annoyance that they are sick of their kids being exposed to gambling through sports. That is something that I have picked up on, I am reflecting on and no doubt in the years to come we will seek appropriate public policy around those things. I think there is more that we ought to do. I certainly think that there is a lot more that the commonwealth ought to do in that context as well. It is certainly not something that was raised with me four or five years ago. It is a bit of an emerging issue, and it is something that we do need to profoundly reflect upon.

The other thing that we need to be conscious of is that the pandemic was a bit of a step change in so many different ways in our lives. I suspect when it comes to online betting that the pandemic has seen more people take it up, but that does not necessarily mean it has been taken up in a particularly safe way, and that is something that I continue to reflect on. I do commend the minister at the table, the Minister for Consumer Affairs, Gaming and Liquor Regulation, for this legislation. I hope it has a speedy passage. I want to see this cleared up.

Mr HALSE (Ringwood) (12:30): It is a privilege to follow on from the member for South Barwon in this debate this afternoon. I commend the minister at the table, the Minister for Consumer Affairs, Gaming and Liquor Regulation, for bringing the bill to the house on this day. It is a good proposed bill, one that is responsive to some of the needs within our community and within the industry and reflects some of the changing nature of the way in which gambling and liquor legislation should operate in the state of Victoria.

There has been a wideranging debate over the last hour or so on this bill, and people have brought with them their experiences from their own districts and electorates about the nature of gambling, how they understand that to intersect with their constituents and issues of harmful gambling or problem gambling. The ever-changing nature of gambling, Deputy Speaker, as you well know and have spoken about, necessitates therefore that the Andrews Labor government keep pace with some of the changes within the sector and make sure that we are balancing out that pursuit, which is one of course of permitting gambling within our community but making sure that gambling has appropriate oversight regulation. I was listening to the member for Melton talk about his experience of writing to his local council to seek an explanation as to why it was that the pokie machines, the slot machines, needed to run until 3 in the morning. So people right across this debate have brought significant local references to their local communities.

In my community we have a number of venues that have pokie machines; we have a number of gambling facilities. Some of those that I enjoy frequenting to have a drink or a meal with my family

also have associated pokie machines. So it is something that I think probably across all of our communities we are dealing with in some way or another. We see, as the member for South Barwon said, the externalities and consequences of problem gambling too frequently here in Victoria and right across Australia, particularly during the pandemic with the advent of new gambling devices and systems that are embedded within the ways that you can access and utilise gambling. It is something that we should always be particularly cognisant of.

I want to just get to some of the specific aspects of the bill before making a few comments about a number of people who are doing some fantastic work in this area. Let me just go to the Gambling Regulation Act 2003 and the amendments that have been put forward. Obviously they provide for the term of the wagering and betting licence to be specified in the licence; change the treatment of unpaid jackpots funds held by venue operators; prohibit bingo, fundraising events and lucky envelopes from being conducted online; and clarify the functions of the independent review panel overseeing the regulatory review and licensing processes for major commercial gambling licences. Also it will capture all sellers who supply liquor deliveries with no retail premises in a category, which will be renamed 'the remote seller's packaged liquor licence'. These reforms, as has been noted, will reduce red tape, improve the operation of some legislative provisions and set up the arrangements for setting the term of future wagering and betting licences when the current licence held by Tabcorp expires in 2024.

I want to go to the support for community organisations and charities that is embedded in this bill by cutting red tape around raffles. We need to draw a bit of a distinction between those local groups that might rely on the local raffle as a source of funding and revenue in their facility. We know that these groups often form the very core of our community in so many different ways and they rely heavily on raffles, so we are increasing the monetary threshold required to have a permit for raffles to ensure that this effective fundraising method is as accessible as possible.

A key focus of the bill, as has been spoken about, is the reduction of harmful gambling-related activities. This government of course has a track record of reforms to minimise numerous types of harm, including the YourPlay precommitment system, the prohibition of ATMs in gaming venues as well as transaction and daily withdrawal limits and our caps on the number of gaming machines in the state of Victoria until 2042. We are the only mainland jurisdiction in Australia without ATMs in gaming venues. Victoria has the lowest density of gaming machines other than Western Australia.

I would like to make just a few comments on the work of the Alliance for Gambling Reform, which met with a number of MPs, including the minister at the table, the Minister for Consumer Affairs, Gaming and Liquor Regulation, at the end of last year. They came in to really express their lived experience of harmful and problem gambling. I remember meeting with Ian in particular from the alliance who shared his story about the hold that gambling addiction had had on him at one point in his life. He spoke about the vulnerability, financial and otherwise, it brought him. It is these personal stories that we hear too often within our community of people who get caught in the throes of gambling and its tremendously addictive power, and we see the way it impacts all demographics. The construction of the pokie machine industry seeks to exploit often the most acute vulnerabilities of people at their lowest ebb, at times. We heard from Ian from the alliance—the minister and I—and listened to that story of hardship and addiction.

That is why these reforms are part of a broader project that this government is working towards, which the minister is leading, to make sure that we get that balance right, that we make sure that people have appropriate supports so that if they want to have a flutter, if they want to go down and have a punt, if they want to gamble, that they can do that—that is part of the cultural fabric of our state—but also that we have adequate provisions in place to make sure that we are mitigating the very worst consequences and externalities that lead people into hardship, that lead people into poverty, that lead people into financial distress or ruin, that seek to put tremendous pressure on relationships and families and that often can take food off the table, as the lyrics of the famous song say.

This is one piece of reform that is moving in the right direction. The minister is doing some fantastic work in this space, and her diligence in addressing this, taking it seriously and meeting with people across the sector to make sure we get the balance right is just another piece of reform that the Victorian Andrews Labor government should be proud of.

Mr DIMOPOULOS (Oakleigh) (12:40): It is a pleasure to follow the member for Ringwood, and he concluded on a point that I want to raise a bit later in terms of a broader approach to protecting people. As the member for Buninyong said, there is no class system around gaming addiction. However, it is peculiar or probably noteworthy that many of the venues seem to be in some of the poorest parts of Melbourne. Nonetheless it is about the pressures that the member for Ringwood was talking about that people face in their daily lives.

Just to kick off my contribution, obviously there are a range of elements in this bill, but the one I wanted to focus on was, effectively, helping to protect young people, who are not really adequately protected from the risks of gaming. There have been technological advances that have helped us to do things better. Whatever people may think of certain platforms, the fact that you can get your meal delivered to your door, the fact that you can shop online and the fact that you can book pretty much anything online are benefits to the way we live. Technological advances have helped us in that regard, but they have also made it easier to harm children—not just in terms of gaming but in other areas too. It is much easier now for young people to get caught up in the gaming regime, and the current regulations have not caught up. They do not capture the advances in online gaming, so we are responding accordingly. We are trying to create a system where a young person is as protected online as they are if they walk into a gaming venue in person. We are trying to provide that protective environment. That is one part of this bill.

Interestingly, gambling problems and mental illness—or a version of some sort of mental condition or issue—often occur together. Approximately three-quarters of people seeking treatment for gaming problems also have a mental illness, most commonly a mood disorder such as depression. But interestingly, and on a sad note, only about 22 per cent of people with gaming problems seek help for their gaming problems. It makes me think of the reference that the member for Buninyong made in her contribution to this debate about something to the effect that there is evidence that it is easier for people to come out as having a heroin addiction rather than come out as having a gambling addiction. It seems to be similar in the mental health space. As much as it is a stigma for someone to own up to living with a mental illness, it seems to be more difficult to come out as being addicted to gambling.

Of course gambling addiction, for all of the obvious reasons, adds to the complexity and compounds anxiety, depression and other comorbidities. We intend to break that cycle of anxiety, depression and addiction. It is why we are passing this essential piece of legislation. But back to the member for Ringwood's point, it is more substantial than that. I see the Minister for Consumer Affairs, Gaming and Liquor Regulation in the chamber, who has done outstanding work. But she alone and her portfolio alone cannot fix this problem. You need to create a protective environment. That is why we are investing \$3.8 billion over four years in mental health and wellbeing. That is more than all of the other states and the commonwealth put together in terms of new investment in mental health. We are glad to hear—in fact I would even say some of us are appropriately jolly—that the opposition has decided to finally accept all of the recommendations of the Royal Commission into Victoria's Mental Health System, including the levy. That is something to be thankful for—both the Parliament and the Victorian community. It is noteworthy that while it took too long, in my view, it took them a lot less time than the decade or two it took them to accept climate change is real and that they would also set some targets.

So this bill is one part of the equation, but there is a broader part of the equation in keeping people safe in Victoria. That is about creating a society, an economy and a community that allows people to live their very best life. That sounds lofty, but we have put that into practice step by step over the last 7½ years in this government—step by step. Look at the three-year-old kinder investment, for example. It is not just a three-year-old kinder investment; it is an investment in the life chances of that three-

year-old. We have got the evidence from overseas and other places that someone who does two years of kinder actually has a better chance statistically of holding down a better job, a higher paying job, and of being healthy, mentally and physically. Imagine that, just from two years of kinder. This is just as relevant to gaming as anything else, because if you help create a healthy community, they are less vulnerable, as the member for Ringwood said, to being preyed upon by market forces, we will call them, like gaming venues. The wonderful member for Hawthorn talked about the ads that are enticing. You know, if you help create a healthy, good community, you are less likely to be prone to that.

Free TAFE is another one of those fundamentals that we helped create to create a good society and prevent people from being dragged into these activities. Free TAFE: the opportunity to re-skill and do something, whether you are young person or mid-career. Family violence reforms: you know, that is often another comorbidity—family violence and gaming also seem to occur together.

And of course the economic performance of this government—if you think about it, we have broken every jobs target we have set from year one. From the day we were elected we have broken every jobs target that we have set, and we set bold ones. It is a pretty incredible statistic—and from a pretty incredible Treasurer, in fact the best Treasurer in Victoria's history. That is not just my view. I am sure that is objectively assessed somewhere in some magazine or some article.

But if you look, for example, again at the cohort that the member for Buninyong talked about, loosely—those communities that may be more vulnerable and stressed—they are also more likely to be those communities that prior to this government did not have access to long service leave, whether they be in security or contract cleaning. Those same communities did not have access to sick leave because they were gig economy workers or casual workers. All those pressures in life absolutely do create the environment where you are more susceptible to harm, whether it be problem gaming or other items—substance abuse.

Speaking of substance abuse, we set up—yesterday we announced—Turning Point as the centre of excellence for substance abuse treatment and research. That is an extraordinary commitment by this government—not just to accept what is given and known now in terms of mental health and wellbeing and drug and alcohol abuse and other addictive behaviour but to actually say, 'We will set up this institution to find new and innovative ways into the future'. A lot of innovation in mental health and wellbeing across alcohol and other drug and every other area will come from Victoria in the next 10, 20 years because of both the announcement yesterday, with Turning Point, and also the collaborative centre that we have talked about that we are setting up, partnering a clinical service with a research partner.

They are all the things that help Victorians live their best lives. That means they also help less people come into contact with the problematic elements of some activities which we enjoy and are lawful but which some people unfortunately, because of their context that they are in, get caught up in a way that is problematic, like gaming. So this bill is extraordinarily important in catching that and keeping people safe, but it is no more important than all the rest of the work this proud government has done through economic policy and social policy to actually create a better society. I commend the minister's work, and I commend the bill to the house.

Mr FREGON (Mount Waverley) (12:50): I also rise to add my little bit on the Gambling and Liquor Legislation Amendment Bill 2022, and I thank the minister at the table, the Minister for Consumer Affairs, Gaming and Liquor Regulation, for her considered and considerable work in the areas of gaming and the regulation of such. This is an important bill that will amend the Casino Control Act 1991, the Gambling Regulation Act 2003 and the Liquor Control Reform Act 1998. I follow on from my colleagues the member for Oakleigh and the member for Ringwood, who I have been listening to, on some very important insights into gambling and the effects of gambling in our state and how the minimisation of the harm of gambling is something that we will continue to have to work towards and improve for as long as gambling exists. I think it has probably always existed and always will, so it will be an ongoing task.

If I think back to my introduction to or first awareness of gambling, I was probably a fairly young tacker, five or six. I remember being at my grandmother's house in Hilltop Avenue in Ashburton. We would go on a Sunday afternoon for lunch, for the roast, and we would come in and—I have said this before—my grandfather would be sitting there and have the radio on, and he would be listening to the races and having his flutter. That was his pastime, that is what he enjoyed on a Sunday afternoon. Then we would sort of nag him to take us down to the park, and he would continue to bet while we just ran around in circles. There was no harm as such.

Mr T Bull: It could be me.

Mr FREGON: I did not hear the interjection from the shadow minister at the table, but I appreciate the smiles. I am sure it was kind.

Mr T Bull: It was.

Mr FREGON: It was? Thank you.

Mr T Bull: I said, 'It could be me'.

Mr FREGON: It could be you. It could be any of us. That is very true.

The gambling as such all by itself is not definitely harmful because not everyone has an issue with it, but a lot of people do. Having an introduction, say, like mine, where you might have a bet on Melbourne Cup Day—you have a sweep or you choose a horse or your father or your grandfather or other family members might have a bit of a flutter and a few bucks on it—there is no harm in that. Where it starts to be a problem—and this is where I and many others get concerned—is when gambling starts to permeate on a daily basis all of our lives, and especially for young people. These days with, say, sports gambling you hear sometimes young people, even primary school kids, mentioning it. When you potentially ask them or hear a conversation talking about, 'Is Hawthorn going to beat North Melbourne on the weekend?'—which we did, by the way—rather than hear, 'Yeah, I reckon they'll win by 20 points', you might hear something like, 'Oh, well, they're three to one'. It is when gambling starts to become part of the vocabulary that I think we need to do more to prevent that.

I have raised in this house before, I think March last year, the issue of loot boxes in gaming. This is another way that I am concerned that there is more that as a country we can do. I appreciate that the minister at the table has got some programs, which I am happy to mention in a moment, that will help with awareness and education for young people. But I do encourage the federal government to do more in this space because it is an unregulated area of gambling-like behaviour. The danger is that we are teaching our young people who are playing games how to gamble.

Now, anyone familiar with recent computer games, whether they be free or paid, will know that in many of these games there is an ability for players of the games to choose a pack or a box or a crate or whatever they are called, depending on the game, and pay either in-game money or real money and spin the wheel, so to speak, and get a random prize. The gaming industry is coming towards self-regulation in some of these ways, which is a good thing. But I think even though it is a good thing that they will put in some mechanisms for managing spending, that also acknowledges that there is a problem. So, again, I encourage the federal government and the minister for communications to look into what more we can do to regulate what is turning into a very, very profitable industry. I have no problem with that, but if there is harm associated, we need to be aware of that and we need to do more.

The Be Ahead of the Game education program developed by the Victorian Responsible Gambling Foundation is playing an important role in helping our students understand the risks and recognise the potential harms associated with gambling. I commend the minister's and the department's work in championing these programs to equip our young people with knowledge that will hopefully help them better defend themselves against falling into addictive gambling behaviour. It is a program that I would like to see in all of the schools and sporting clubs in my area. We have been talking to a number of the schools. We are going to work through that. I know John Ballagh down at Brentwood Secondary

College is interested and Mount Waverley Secondary College is interested in how we can get that knowledge across, so I thank them for that.

One of the statistics that I saw is that young men aged 18 to 24 bet more on sport than any age group. You do not just start gambling at 18. No-one just turns up and goes, 'Oh, it's my 18th birthday now. I'll start gambling'. It is something that you are looking at. It is something that has permeated through society. You see the banners around the MCG, and as soon as the goal is kicked, just before they flash off to the commercial break, up comes the Bet365, or whatever it is, just to remind you that it is there so that on the commercial break you can go and check your phone to see if you can win some money or lose some money. If you do get a payout, you can buy back in. Programmers know what they are doing. When you walk into a poker machine place and you just throw in your hundred bucks and you go, 'Oh, it's a bit of fun', that is fine. When you are there over and over and over again and you play the numbers, you are not going to win. The game is set. There is a certain amount that gets paid back. Over time, over space, over a number of people, the bank always wins.

I commend the bill to the house. I commend the work the minister is doing in this space. I look forward to us talking more about the programs at the schools, which I think are a fantastic idea. I also beseech the federal government to do more work in this space. It is a bit of a gaping hole at the moment. In the meantime, we will keep educating, and I commend the bill to the house.

Sitting suspended 1.00 pm until 2.01 pm.

Business interrupted under standing orders.

Members

MINISTER FOR CRIME PREVENTION

Absence

Mr ANDREWS (Mulgrave—Premier) (14:01): The Minister for Consumer Affairs, Gaming and Liquor Regulation will answer questions for the portfolios of crime prevention, corrections, youth justice and victim support today.

Questions without notice and ministers statements

HEALTH SERVICES

Mr GUY (Bulleen—Leader of the Opposition) (14:01): My question is to the Minister for Health. James from Melbourne's south went to his GP on Tuesday at 1.30 pm, who diagnosed appendicitis. He was sent immediately to Sandringham Hospital for emergency surgery. After waiting overnight there, there was still no theatre available, so he was transferred to the Alfred at 10.00 am yesterday, where there was also no theatre available. He is still waiting right now for emergency surgery and risks a burst appendix. He faces the very real risk of death, but his surgeons cannot tell him when or where he will be operated on. Minister, after eight years in government is this the best the government can offer Victorians in need of emergency surgery?

Mr FOLEY (Albert Park—Minister for Health, Minister for Ambulance Services, Minister for Equality) (14:02): Can I thank the Leader of the Opposition for his question. What we know is that this is a government that has resourced our public health system like no other. It has put in record amounts of support, particularly at that rough end of high demand in the surgical and emergency areas.

In regard to the different campuses of the Alfred Health network, I do not have the specifics as to the circumstances of the individual case that the honourable Leader of the Opposition refers to. But what I do know is that whether it is the Sandringham campus, the Caulfield campus or the Prahran campus, Alfred Health deliver the world's best quality services to tens of thousands—hundreds of thousands—of Victorians in their catchment area, no doubt also including the person that the honourable Leader of the Opposition refers to. They do so in the context of a global pandemic that has seen demand on them rise to record levels and at the moment sees some 1600 people being furloughed across our public

health system, including at Alfred Health. This has increased over 50 per cent in the past two weeks as we have seen the omicron BA subvariant increase in its infectivity right across our community. Our public hospitals are not immune from that. In fact our public hospitals are particularly at risk from that because they see this in its first instance; they see demand increase right across our public health system once again in response to that increasing number. At the same time, to then have their own workforce increasingly sidelined as a result of the omicron variant growing again in our community has raised this. But at the same time, whether it be Monash Health, the Alfred or indeed Peninsula Health, they are working together collectively to see how these kinds of operational demands can flow across the system in a timely way.

Should the opposition leader share the particular circumstances with me, I will be more than happy to have my department follow up, but I am prepared to make a bet that Alfred Health are already working around the clock to make sure that that particular case is being fitted in within the clinical demands and constraints that the global pandemic has put on them and is putting on them right now as we speak. On behalf of all honourable members I thank the Alfred Health team for their world-class leadership.

Mr GUY (Bulleen—Leader of the Opposition) (14:05): I do appreciate the minister's answer, but none of what he says is helping James, whose health is deteriorating because he has been fasting since 11.00 pm on Tuesday, waiting for emergency surgery. Minister, when no-one can identify a time or even a day for James to have emergency surgery, as James asks, how is it acceptable in Victoria today that he still does not know when he will get the surgery he needs to save his life?

Mr FOLEY (Albert Park—Minister for Health, Minister for Ambulance Services, Minister for Equality) (14:06): Again can I thank the honourable Leader of the Opposition for his supplementary question. Indeed the answer is largely within the confines of the answer to his first question, whether it is the person that the honourable Leader of the Opposition refers to or any of the other record numbers of Victorians who have come forward to rely on the support of our world-class public health system every day in the context of a global pandemic, where we are seeing record demand day in, day out, particularly as we have very few, if any, restrictions whatsoever on the normal operation of our community. That is playing through as we see now the BA.2 subvariant in its slow but steady increase across our community. We are seeing, as I point out, 1595 staff furloughed— *(Time expired)*

MINISTERS STATEMENTS: RURAL AND REGIONAL EMPLOYMENT

Ms THOMAS (Macedon—Minister for Agriculture, Minister for Regional Development) (14:07): I rise to update the house on an extraordinary achievement. Backed by the Andrews Labor government, rural and regional Victoria is booming. Today's ABS data shows us that Victoria has a record low regional unemployment rate of 3 per cent, the lowest in the nation, and 3.5 per cent lower than when those on the other side were last in government. Of course we all know that agriculture continues to underpin our rural and regional economies, and we are so proud that Victoria is the largest agriculture producer in the nation and accounts for \$17.8 billion of production and more than 74 000 direct jobs. Our flagship Regional Jobs and Infrastructure Fund is of course a key part of our success in rural and regional Victoria, and since 2015 it has delivered almost \$700 million of funding supporting the creation or retention of around 13 000 jobs.

But behind these numbers there are important stories—stories of opportunity, hope and dignity. Like that of Ashleigh Angwin, a dental lab technician who I had the pleasure of meeting recently at the Latrobe Community Health Service dental prosthetics lab in Churchill. Our support for the clinic has enabled Ashleigh to complete her apprenticeship locally and given her a secure career in high-value manufacturing in the Latrobe Valley, a place that she is proud to call home. Wherever they live, whatever their postcode, from Shepparton to Brighton, Victorians deserve a secure job, a decent home and to know that their government has their back— *(Time expired)*

HEALTH SERVICES

Mr GUY (Bulleen—Leader of the Opposition) (14:09): My question is to the Minister for Health. Belinda from Bendigo recently had her teenage daughter taken to hospital with chest pains. Belinda and her daughter were left in a waiting room at 1.30 in the morning to have medical staff check in on them only once during that wait. After hearing the triage nurse telling them that sadly there was only one doctor on duty and no available beds, she made a difficult decision at 5.00 am to take her daughter, who was still having chest pains, home. Belinda has contacted me to ask the minister the question that she wants answered: Minister, why aren't you doing better for our sick kids?

Mr FOLEY (Albert Park—Minister for Health, Minister for Ambulance Services, Minister for Equality) (14:10): Can I thank the Leader of the Opposition for his question, and again, whilst I am not in a position to comment on particular cases, I am more than happy in the circumstances to just verify the material that the honourable Leader of the Opposition provides. But I can say when it comes to Bendigo Health just what an outstanding investment the people and the community of Bendigo and the Victorian people have made in that hospital and the outstanding work that it does every day, day in, day out.

In regard to the particular circumstances that the honourable Leader of the Opposition raises, I am in a position to say that what we do know is that Bendigo Health through their entire range of services provide a suite of opportunities for the particular specialist areas that the honourable Leader of the Opposition touches on, indeed right across the health, peri-health and other areas, to the point where that now acts as a beacon for support right across the goldfields and central Victoria region. That is as a result of the record investment that this government continues to put in.

Now, in regard to the particular circumstances and timing, I would reiterate that this global pandemic is not over as far as our health services are concerned. We know that there were some 1595 healthcare workers across our system out of action yesterday as a result of this global pandemic. We will work with those health services, with our frontline healthcare professionals, to make sure that they have the resources they need and the confidence that the Victorian people and our healthcare professionals have in place to make sure that we continue to build our responses and our opportunities to make sure that all Victorians get the world-class health and care in their community as they have come to expect and as we continue to deliver.

In regard to specific circumstances that the honourable member might bring in this or other circumstances, I am more than happy to follow up those individual cases and make sure that the particular circumstances are shared with him or indeed those family members.

Mr GUY (Bulleen—Leader of the Opposition) (14:12): Belinda's daughter has complex pre-existing health conditions and was listed as a fast-track category 2 because her chest pain was viewed as serious. Category 2 patients are required to be seen within 15 minutes, yet due to resourcing issues she remained for 3½ hours without medical attention. As Belinda further asks, 'How has the minister and the government allowed our health system to become as dangerous as this for Victoria's sick children?'.

Mr FOLEY (Albert Park—Minister for Health, Minister for Ambulance Services, Minister for Equality) (14:13): Any suggestion that the Victorian public health sector, but particularly Bendigo Health, is a dangerous facility is one that I would take objection to. I would ask the Leader of the Opposition to carefully measure his language. What we have seen in the opposition increasingly is a Trumpian tendency towards extreme overstatement—

Members interjecting.

The SPEAKER: Order! Members on both sides! Before calling the Leader of the Opposition, members on both sides will be removed without further warning for shouting across the chamber.

Mr Guy: On a point of order, Speaker, on relevance, I have been quoting some comments from the mother of a sick child who was brought in seeking medical attention. If the minister wishes to cast aspersions on the mother of a teenage daughter, which he is, then that is a reflection on the minister and the government and the fact that they have left our health system in such an abysmal state.

The SPEAKER: Order! I do not uphold the point of order. The minister is being relevant to the question that was asked. I again warn members not to shout across the chamber.

Mr FOLEY: Can I thank the Chair for the ruling. Bendigo Health is one of the most outstanding regional and rural health services in our country, let alone in our state. The fact that it drives 5000 jobs in its own right, let alone the many that rely on it in that community, shows the growth that this government has placed in it, including in the emergency departments, including in the cardiac area, including in the paediatric areas, and I am more than happy to follow up the specifics— *(Time expired)*

MINISTERS STATEMENTS: WATER SECURITY

Ms NEVILLE (Bellarine—Minister for Water, Minister for Police) (14:15): I want to update the house on the work that we have been doing in upgrading our system to ensure greater water security but also to create jobs across the state in construction and ongoing. Members will of course be aware of some of our large projects: the Connections Project, 433 gegalitres saved through that program, 439 ongoing jobs as a result—a project that was left in complete disarray when we came to government; the \$45 million Werribee and Bacchus Marsh irrigation project, 1000 jobs and major water savings and quality of water for irrigators; the \$60 million stage 2 Macalister modernisation, creating 250 jobs; the Mitiamo pipeline, \$29 million, creating 170 jobs and a new growth area; the south-west Loddon pipeline, helping 1500 properties—a project, I must say, that would never, ever have happened if it was not for the Labor government; and the western irrigation network, \$112 million, and I know the member for Melton is very supportive of this, creating 40 jobs but also supporting recycled water for irrigators to grow their business.

We have also invested \$22 million in water projects that are focused on stormwater and recycled water projects. These are already saving in excess of 1 billion litres of drinking water every year, and 18.3 billion litres of recycled water are going to high-value agriculture. These projects are creating hundreds of jobs and growing the agriculture industry. They are critical also to restoring our waterways in many places like the Bendigo Creek restoration—projects right across the state. We all remember the Office of Living Victoria, which was all about recycled water and stormwater re-use. Well, it did not deliver a project, just some jobs for the former minister's mates.

PORTLAND DISTRICT HEALTH

Ms BRITNELL (South-West Coast) (14:17): My question is to the Minister for Health. Last week Portland District Health suspended its maternity service. This has left dozens of expectant mothers and their families in limbo, having to travel well over an hour to Warrnambool or Hamilton to have their babies. Tiarna is an impacted mum and said:

Due start of may and now very stressed I won't make it to warni as my first daughters labour was 1 hr and 30 mins.

Stacey is another, who said:

Due on 1 may with my first baby, absolutely terrified of giving birth on the side of the road.

Why has the government shut the Portland hospital's maternity service, and how is it fair on these women and their families that they cannot access the health care they need to have for their babies to be born in Portland?

Mr FOLEY (Albert Park—Minister for Health, Minister for Ambulance Services, Minister for Equality) (14:18): Can I thank the member for South-West Coast for her question. The premise of her question is somewhat incorrect. The Victorian government's Department of Health has not shut Portland's maternity services. What the Portland health service has done, as a result of the inability of

that service to hire midwives, is temporarily suspend service delivery—in a similar position to midwifery shortages right across the country. What they have done in terms of the specifics of the cases that the honourable member has highlighted, in the statement from Portland health, which is a fine and outstanding health delivery service, to quote them, is to temporarily pause their birthing suite services for a period of time whilst they address that midwifery shortage. The health service will continue to provide antenatal classes. It will continue to provide birthing classes and domiciliary care during this time. It will make sure that it provides certainty, safety and support for all the expecting families—there are, in the period under immediate review, some 10 women due to give birth over the next 2 to 3 weeks, with a further 21 women scheduled for birth over the next three months. All the women and families affected by this change are being carefully case managed by the Portland District Health service, and I have nothing but strong support for them. The Department of Health will continue to work with them as indeed will South West and all the other healthcare networks to make sure that this issue of shortages of midwifery professionals in that area are addressed as soon as possible and that Portland can get back to the important work that they and many other regional health services need to deliver.

Ms BRITNELL (South-West Coast) (14:20): As the Premier said about country health on Tuesday:

The fact that you are a long way from Melbourne does not mean you should have to settle for anything other than excellence.

Why did the government fail to alert staff, doctors or even mothers about the closure of Portland maternity services to the extent that women giving birth turned up to the Portland, only to be turned away and sent an hour away to Hamilton?

Mr FOLEY (Albert Park—Minister for Health, Minister for Ambulance Services, Minister for Equality) (14:20): I thank the member for South-West Coast for her supplementary question, and again I would take issue with the language that those opposite use to overstate this arrangement. All of these women and their families have been contacted and supported by Portland District Health to manage their way through a staff shortage in the short term. It is highly regrettable that there is a nationwide shortage of midwife professionals, which we have seen as a result of our borders being closed for two years and the normal pipeline of recruitment right across the country, particularly in our regional and rural community health services, having been affected in many areas and particularly when it comes to maternal and childcare health.

Ms Britnell: On a point of order, Speaker, that was debating the question. There is no way that it was reasonable to state that. Or was it misleading the Parliament? Perhaps my point of order is on misleading the Parliament. There has been no advertising of any work for any midwives in the last two years at all.

The SPEAKER: The member for South-West Coast should know that that is not a point of order. The minister has concluded his answer.

MINISTERS STATEMENTS: TRANSPORT INDUSTRY

Ms HORNE (Williamstown—Minister for Ports and Freight, Minister for Consumer Affairs, Gaming and Liquor Regulation, Minister for Fishing and Boating) (14:22): I rise to update the house on this government's \$3 million investment in creating jobs to keep Victorian freight on the move. You would have to be blind not to see that supply chains have been hammered all over the world during the pandemic, but in Victoria this task has been made even more difficult by a shortage of skilled people in workforce. So we are making sure that freight keeps moving by training jobseekers and linking them with transport and warehouse businesses.

The government is fast-tracking 125 jobs in partnership with the Victorian Transport Association over the next two years. This new partnership will deliver specific training in critical areas such as heavy vehicle driving, forklift driving—although you will have to be over 16—and warehousing.

Importantly, it will create well-paid long-term employment, and the VTA will place graduates with transport companies to ensure that they are set for long-term success. We also know this is a sector where women make up just 16 per cent of employees, and that is why we have made women a priority focus for the program, particularly women over 45, as well as people under 25, Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people, and people with non-English speaking backgrounds.

We know our freight task is set to double over the next decade, which is why we need more people trained and ready to go. Whether it is supporting our exporters in regional Victoria like quality agricultural products from Mildura such as grapes, or the export of barley and other important grains through the port of Geelong, we need a workforce ready to move them. There are times when you need a light touch to support industry, but there are times when you need to lean in to stop a sector falling over. Now is the time to do just that. Unlike those on the other side, who get a bit wobbly when they need to have a tough conversation with their federal mates, we are getting on with the job of supporting the regions. It is intoxicating to know that the Andrews Labor government is getting more people into quality jobs to support our producers and our exporters.

SOCIAL AND AFFORDABLE HOUSING

Mr HIBBINS (Pahran) (14:24): My question is for the Treasurer. Treasurer, environmental groups and the car industry opposed the EV tax, but the government went ahead with it anyway. The mining industry did not want the gold royalty, but the government went ahead with it anyway. Big business did not want the mental health levy, but you went ahead with that anyway. The developers and the property industry did not want to pay for a levy to fund new social and affordable housing, so the government scrapped it. Why does the property industry get to pick and choose which taxes they get to pay?

Mr PALLAS (Werribee—Treasurer, Minister for Economic Development, Minister for Industrial Relations) (14:24): I thank the member for Pahran for his question. I am not sure whether he is advocating that there should be more taxes that the government raises or less taxes, or that perhaps we should choose our friends more carefully. But let me be very clear: this government makes choices around taxation to ensure that it has a fair and progressive tax system, one that ensures that Victorians get value for money from government but also that Victorians get value for money for the assets that they own, they produce and they regulate. That includes, of course, royalties for gold or brown coal; it also includes whether or not we make decisions to redistribute some of those funds. For example, we gave about \$1 billion a year over the last four years to ensure that people got into their first home. Those were judgements that this government made. We also put aside \$5.3 billion for the outstanding minister for public housing to get on and deliver housing for those who most desire it. That is why, despite the fact that this government in per capita terms has the lowest revenue per capita of any state in the nation, it is an efficient government that makes efficient choices around the welfare and the wellbeing of Victorians.

That is why as a government we make choices. For example, around electric vehicle usage we ensure that people who use our roads pay for their maintenance so that those roads are safe. But they will still get incentive payments of up to \$3000 from the government if they purchase one—again, a choice that we have made out of our consolidated revenue—and they will also get, of course, the opportunity to save up to \$2600 a year on average, compared to the cost of what they would have to otherwise pay to put petrol into their car, and they will avoid paying the federal fuel excise. The government makes choices. We make those choices in the interests of and for the wellbeing of all Victorians, recognising that there are many in this state who need support and assistance.

Now, I understand that there will be many in the property industry who from time to time will complain about the fact that they actually have to pay to ensure that Victorians get the support and the services and the infrastructure that they deserve, but this government will make no apology for ensuring that they pay their fair share and that the taxes that we put in place provide for those in Victoria who need the greatest support and assistance.

Mr HIBBINS (Pahran) (14:28): On a supplementary question, the levy was expected to fund 1700 new social and affordable homes each year after the Big Housing Build finishes. Now that the government has abandoned the levy, what is the government's plan to fund more social and affordable housing once the big build concludes?

Mr PALLAS (Werribee—Treasurer, Minister for Economic Development, Minister for Industrial Relations) (14:28): Well, I just make the point to the member for Prahran that it is in fact Labor's big build. It is in fact \$5.3 billion worth of investment over 10 years, so I do not think there is any shortage of activity that will be going on. And, yes, it is the case that there will be massive efforts, massive work and massive investment going on under the guardianship of the Minister for Housing, but the economic activity essentially that will stem from this investment will serve Victoria well into the future. The building and construction industry will be of course the principal beneficiary of it in terms of direct jobs. There is no shortage of effort. It is the biggest investment in public housing in this nation's history, so I do not think it can be demeaned by those opposite.

MINISTERS STATEMENTS: LEVEL CROSSING REMOVALS

Ms ALLAN (Bendigo East—Leader of the House, Minister for Transport Infrastructure, Minister for the Suburban Rail Loop) (14:29): I was thrilled yesterday to join the member for Hawthorn, the member for Burwood and the member for Box Hill at Union Road to talk about the ongoing removal of level crossings, particularly at Union Road and Mont Albert Road—two of the 85 we are removing, with 58 already gone. I am pleased to say I have been to these level crossing sites a number of times and met with locals in the community. These are great projects, but they are also a sombre reminder of how dangerous these level crossings are: in 2016 two people were killed at the level crossing location on Union Road. That is why we decided to fast-track the removal of these dangerous and congested level crossings, and they will be gone for good next year.

The local members in this area, particularly the member for Box Hill, have done a terrific job representing their communities. The member for Box Hill said, 'Look, the locals love this project, but they want us to do a little bit more. They want to see the addition of decks over the rail trench at both Mont Albert and Union roads', and that is exactly what we are doing. Yesterday we announced the details of the deck at Union Road, and I do want to acknowledge the support for that part of the project from the Boroondara council. This is another great example of where we have got the opportunity to remove more than level crossings to provide a greater community benefit. We have grabbed those opportunities. Plus we were pleased to announce that the new station that we are building in this location is going to be named Union station.

Further, this project is not just going to benefit the Surrey Hills community but people all the way to Lilydale and Belgrave, as these level crossings will reduce delays, and we are removing every level crossing on these corridors all the way to Lilydale and Ferntree Gully. Some are opposing this. A member for Southern Metropolitan in the other place, David Davis, is actually supporting a legal challenge, trying to block this project. We are removing level crossings. When it comes to David Davis and the Liberal Party, all they can do is whine, whine, whine about level crossings.

Members interjecting.

The SPEAKER: Order! It might be the last question, but members will still be removed from the chamber for shouting.

AMBULANCE SERVICES

Mr T BULL (Gippsland East) (14:31): My question is again to the Minister for Health. Last August Stephen of Traralgon phoned 000 at the direction of his GP because he was experiencing excruciating abdominal pain. 000 dispatched paramedics; however, while halfway through the call they were told to leave him for another call. In significant distress Stephen's wife drove him to the hospital, where he

spent several days. Why are seriously ill Victorians like Stephen being told to drive themselves to hospital if the system is up to standard, as this government claims it is?

Mr FOLEY (Albert Park—Minister for Health, Minister for Ambulance Services, Minister for Equality) (14:32): I thank the member for Gippsland East for his question. I think the honourable member said that that was in August of last year, if my memory serves me correctly—thank you. I am more than happy to follow up the particular circumstances of that Traralgon case, should the honourable member be in a position to provide them for me. But in regard to the general proposition that the honourable member raises, what we do know is that during the course of a global pandemic in which our ambulance services and indeed the emergency services part of ESTA have been under pressure like never before in their recorded history—indeed to the point where in the last quarter of 2021, the year the honourable member’s question relates to, the ambulance service saw a record level of demand for its services when it came to code 1, sirens and lights, call-outs—at the same time that same service was delivering, through infection prevention and control measures, supports for its staff that necessarily placed both the staff and their patients at particular risk, which was having to be managed as a result of the COVID-19 pandemic.

Then indeed, again, we have also seen during that period of time, over the course of the pandemic, significant impacts on the workforce itself. In terms of August 2021, that would not have been to the same extent as it is with the omicron variant. We have seen since then not just record investment in the 2020–21 year of over 700 extra paramedics being delivered into that system in the course of that financial year; we have also seen how these services relate across the demand period and how the call allocation dispatch system from ESTA is managed in that relative priority sense. So it is a bit hard to give the honourable member a specific answer to his—

Mr T Bull: On a point of order, Speaker, I appreciate the minister’s answer, and without repeating the question, the premise of the question was: how can the government claim that the system is up to standard if people are having to drive themselves to hospital? I would encourage you to bring him back to answering that element of the question.

The SPEAKER: Order! The substance of the question was a broad one—why are seriously ill Victorians being treated in such a way—and the minister is being relevant to that question.

Mr FOLEY: Thank you, Speaker. In regard to the particular circumstances in Traralgon in August 2021 and the relative decisions as to what were the clinical priorities for available assets in a global pandemic at that time, I would have to take that element on notice. But in regard to the general proposition, what our paramedics know, what our emergency services know, what our emergency departments know, is that this is a government that can be trusted to deliver on the investment and the support that they need, and that Victorians need, to recover from this global pandemic and continue to deliver world-class services.

Mr T BULL (Gippsland East) (14:36): Five weeks after Stephen was released from hospital he experienced serious chest pains. After being told by government to only call 000 in case of an emergency, as the minister has said, Stephen hesitated. Thankfully his wife did not hesitate, instead driving him to hospital. She discovered that he was having a life-threatening heart attack. When it comes to the failures of 000 and the ambulance dispatch, why does the government continue to blame Victorians rather than fixing the problems it created?

Mr FOLEY (Albert Park—Minister for Health, Minister for Ambulance Services, Minister for Equality) (14:37): Can I thank the member for Gippsland East for his question. Again we see these theatrical, Trumpian overstatements from those opposite designed to scare people, designed to strike fear rather than support. Can I yet again caution those opposite not to deride our emergency services, not to attack and drive fear into the people of Victoria, when those same people of Victoria can see through that. They know full well that life is about choices and that there are some who will support—

Ms Ryan: On a point of order, Speaker, I think the minister is now attacking the opposition. The point of this question was the fact that this man did not call the ambulance the second time because he had been informed under the government's policies that he should not. That is the point of the question. No-one is seeking at all to undermine the fantastic work of our paramedics, and I would ask you to instruct the minister to stop attacking the opposition and making false claims.

The SPEAKER: Order! I do not uphold the point of order. The substance of the question at the end of the example given was a broad one, and the minister is being relevant.

Mr FOLEY: I would caution those opposite to of course raise significant issues, as is their job, but to do it in a way that is constructive and to do it in a way that is not misleading and does not strike unnecessary fear deliberately into the Victorian community. *(Time expired)*

MINISTERS STATEMENTS: NORTH EAST LINK

Mr ANDREWS (Mulgrave—Premier) (14:38): I was very pleased recently to visit Victoria's biggest ever road project, the North East Link, to celebrate a number of significant milestones that have been reached. There are 1000 workers working on that project at the moment. They have done a total of 4 million hours of hard work delivering that project. A hundred of those workers are apprentices, trainees and cadets, and they have done 100 000 hours of work alone. They will have the skills for a lifetime of work, a lifetime of building in our state, and those skills will be attained and accumulated—their tickets will be granted, their qualifications will be secured—working on this project. It is a fantastic project, one that ought to have been built many, many decades ago. We have that dubious honour of perhaps being the only great city in the world with a ring-road that has got a great gap in the middle of it. It does not make any sense. But we are getting on and we are doing it now.

We are also hiring. We need many more workers in the trades, in engineering, in project management, in environmental management—the whole sweep of different skill sets—to get this project done. As I said, it is the biggest ever road project in our state. We have set up a jobs and skills centre. We are hiring. There will be 10 000 people working on this project, 35-minute travel time savings and 15 000 trucks off local roads. This is a great project. Some have described it rather colourfully. They are wrong, of course. This is a project Victorians voted for, and it is a project that we are getting on and delivering. Do you know why? Because it will link communities, not divide communities based on how much income their parents have, for instance. It is about linking communities. This is a valuable project—a project that ought to have been done 30, 40, 50 years ago. It is being done now, and it is being done now by a proudly Labor government.

Mr Wells: On a point of order, Speaker, it seems to be a weekly occurrence that I raise a point of order about unanswered questions. I am wondering if you could follow up questions 5885, 5945, 6000, 6100 and 6174. The first one, for example, was due on 7 July last year.

The SPEAKER: I will follow that matter up for the member for Rowville.

Rulings by the Chair

CONSTITUENCY QUESTIONS

The SPEAKER (14:42): Just before calling the first constituency question, the Assistant Treasurer raised a point of order yesterday and asked me to review the member for Brighton's constituency question on the basis that it sought action rather than asking for information. I reviewed the question, and I can confirm that it asks for information and is therefore in order.

Constituency questions

EVELYN ELECTORATE

Ms VALLENCE (Evelyn) (14:42): (6286) My question is to the Minister for Education on behalf of schools in the Evelyn electorate that have again been knocked back by him for important minor

capital works grants. Students, their families and the staff at Rolling Hills Primary School in Mooroolbark, Chirnside Park Primary School and Coldstream Primary School want to know why their grant applications for important projects have again been denied. Can the minister provide meaningful and detailed feedback to these schools to enable them to submit successful applications for the next minor capital works grants round? Feedback received from the Victorian School Building Authority has been underwhelming, specifying that 'it has not been possible to support all eligible applications'. It makes no sense that these schools had applications that met all eligibility criteria only to get knocked back. One parent said that they are at a loss as to what they need to do to ensure the safety of the children from the extremes of the weather. Minister, shade sails are not outdoor court covers. These schools are after outdoor court covers or air-conditioning projects that will assist them with ventilation.

CARRUM ELECTORATE

Ms KILKENNY (Carrum) (14:43): (6287) My question is for the Minister for Training and Skills in the other place. What is the Andrews Labor government doing to support people in my electorate of Carrum to train or retrain to gain the skills they need for the jobs of the future here in Victoria? I recently visited Chisholm TAFE in Frankston to check out plans and designs for stage 2 of the Andrews Labor government's \$67.6 million campus redevelopment of Chisholm TAFE. This project is transforming Frankston and building a state-of-the-art TAFE campus close to my community. It is fabulous to see TAFE thriving under the Andrews Labor government, and I am looking forward to seeing more students enrol in TAFE.

GIPPSLAND EAST ELECTORATE

Mr T BULL (Gippsland East) (14:44): (6288) My constituency question is to the Minister for Fishing and Boating, and the information I seek is whether the minister is aware of the need for a boat ramp upgrade at Metung. The Shaving Point area of Metung is named Shaving Point because it is so deep that the steamers used to shave that point back in the old days—a bit of trivia for you there, Speaker. The boat ramp there is in disrepair, and the whole area, which includes a car park and park area, is also in need of a face lift. But I am asking this question because the boat ramp is of key importance to the tourism industry in Metung. It desperately needs an upgrade, and I am seeking not only for the minister to understand that issue but I also believe a grant application is pending, and I encourage her to give that extremely strong consideration.

FOOTSCRAY ELECTORATE

Ms HALL (Footscray) (14:45): (6289) My constituency question is to the Minister for Consumer Affairs, Gaming and Liquor Regulation. The Victorian government has acknowledged that issues affecting the property market are of significant interest to people across Victoria and in my community in Melbourne's inner west. With consumers, including those in my electorate of Footscray, concerned about housing affordability, increases in the already high property market prices driven by COVID-19 and record low interest rates and up-front costs for buyers entering the market, to obtain insights into the current state of the property market the minister has commissioned a property market review. Minister, will you and the property market review team meet with me and the constituents of Footscray to fully understand their concerns and issues with the local current property sales laws and regulations?

HASTINGS ELECTORATE

Mr BURGESS (Hastings) (14:46): (6290) My question is directed to the Minister for Public Transport, and the information I seek on behalf of my Hastings community is regarding amended bus routes 782 and 783 in High Street, Hastings. Constituents continue to request an extension of 782 and 783 bus routes above Frankston-Flinders Road to include the north end of High Street, Hastings, that will allow residents to access Hastings Community Health, Western Port Community Support, Hastings Community House, Western Port Secondary College, retirement villages and new housing estate areas. Local residents and workers have been calling for a bus service to be provided to this vital cluster of services along the top end of High Street for literally years. Bus services are an essential

component of connecting individuals to local shops, health services, schools, work, and family and friends. Many people who depend on these vital services do not drive a car. This goes for elderly passengers as well and those with small children who cannot walk a long way.

BOX HILL ELECTORATE

Mr HAMER (Box Hill) (14:47): (6291) My constituency question is for the Minister for Transport Infrastructure. I ask: how will the widened Union Road bridge in Surrey Hills benefit local traders and residents in Surrey Hills? On Wednesday I was very pleased to join the minister along with my colleagues the member for Hawthorn and the member for Burwood at the Surrey Hills railway station to announce that the final designs for the level crossing removal project at Union Road will include a deck with new seating, lighting and pedestrian paths. I have spoken with many Surrey Hills residents and traders during the project design phase. Locals want to see the removal of the dangerous level crossing at Union Road, a level crossing that tragically was the scene of two deaths in 2016, and a level crossing that only the Andrews Labor government has committed to remove. Locals also want to see a project that provides a positive legacy for the Union Road village precinct that will remain long after the construction works have been completed. The creation of additional public open space at Union Road is an outcome that I have strongly advocated for on behalf of the community, and I want to thank the minister for listening to my community.

MORWELL ELECTORATE

Mr NORTHE (Morwell) (14:48): (6292) My constituency question is directed to the Minister for Mental Health. Minister, what is the latest information with regard to the state government increasing the number of alcohol and drug detox beds in the Latrobe city catchment and the wider Gippsland region? I was recently contacted by one of my constituents who is concerned for the welfare of a family member. Despite being linked into services with local alcohol and drug providers, the family has been advised there are simply no detox beds available in our local hospitals to help the person commence their recovery. This is not a new issue. Some three years ago a number of local forums were hosted by Rotary, and I quote Rotarian Dr Len Cairns, who said in part at the time:

There are no detox beds in the Latrobe Valley or at Warragul.

The only questions now being asked in 2022 are: how many detox beds actually exist in Latrobe city, how many detox beds are there in the wider Gippsland region and what are the government's plans to expand detox beds further in our community?

PASCOE VALE ELECTORATE

Ms BLANDTHORN (Pascoe Vale) (14:49): (6293) My question is for the Minister for Workplace Safety in the other place, and the question I ask is: what will the Victorian sick pay guarantee mean for workers, their families and their workplaces and teammates in my community of Pascoe Vale? For so many low-income workers, particularly casual workers, there is no real choice when they are faced with the option of staying home sick or caring particularly for their children who might be sick. There is no choice between that option and the option of going to work, because they are simply dependent on their wages, otherwise they cannot put bread on the table. This announcement was particularly welcomed by members of my community, and I ask the minister if she could detail what this guarantee will mean for the eligible casual workers across the industries in my electorate that have such a high dominance of these types of workers amongst them?

ROWVILLE ELECTORATE

Mr WELLS (Rowville) (14:49): (6294) My question is to the Minister for Tourism, Sport and Major Events. Minister, what funding is available from the Victorian government to upgrade the female change rooms and the car park at Knox Park off Ferntree Gully Road, Knoxville, where the Knox Churches Soccer Club play? Knox Churches have advocated for many years for the gravel car park to be resurfaced. The club has an extensive membership, with 19 junior teams, two women's

teams and eight men's senior teams. During the winter months, when the club is most active, a large number of members and families park at the club. The gravel car park is unsuitable for the amount of traffic, leading to large numbers of potholes and puddles and cars parked on grassy areas. With no drainage or lighting, particularly in winter, the car park is a significant safety issue for players. With the growing interest in women's soccer, the women's team are in urgent need of a new change room facility, as the facilities they currently use are just not big enough for the number of women playing at the club, let alone hosting other teams.

NARRE WARREN SOUTH ELECTORATE

Mr MAAS (Narre Warren South) (14:50): (6295) My constituency question is for the Minister for Disability, Ageing and Carers and concerns support for carers. Minister, how will the boost to the Support for Carers Program and additional respite funding help carers in my electorate of Narre Warren South? There are so many family members and friends taking on the role of carer for those facing health challenges, ageing or disability. Their work is selfless, and it is unpaid. The care they provide is often 24/7 and can be extremely mentally and physically draining, with no respite, as they sacrifice their lives and livelihoods to provide comfort for others. The Andrews Labor government is investing in those who care for our most vulnerable. We must recognise their mental health and need to recharge. I would appreciate any further information that the minister can provide on how the Support for Carers Program and additional respite funding will assist my constituents.

Bills

GAMBLING AND LIQUOR LEGISLATION AMENDMENT BILL 2022

Second reading

Debate resumed.

Ms WARD (Eltham) (14:52): This is more terrific legislation coming forward from our government. I find it quite amazing to have heard some commentary talking about the fact that we are not doing exciting legislation at the moment—we are just, you know, getting on with the job. That is exactly what we are doing: we are getting on with the job, and we are still coming forward with important legislation.

These amendments will increase the raffle permit threshold, which directly benefits our community organisations that are running fundraisers. I know I, along with many others in this place, have gone to a lot of community events where there is regularly a raffle, and the raffles are an important part of community organising as well as community fundraising. We are extending the time line for the payment of unclaimed prizes to the Treasurer. That means if you have lost your Tatts ticket or you do not know where you put it, you have actually got a bit of time to find it hidden behind the couch or crunched up in that coat pocket.

We are helping to reduce the harmful impact of gambling on children by prohibiting online minor gambling activities, and this is really important. We do really need to protect our children from gambling. I can see you nodding your head, member for Mount Waverley, and I know that this is something you are particularly passionate about, especially in terms of online gaming. I share your concerns about how our kids are being saturated with gambling ads, with gambling being such a constant presence in so much of what they do, whether it is online, whether it is on TV, whether it is on radio. I congratulate this government for the legislation that we put in a couple of years ago which prevented advertising, in any form, of gambling within 150 metres of a school fence line.

I have got a petition going—and you, member for Mount Waverley, might be interested in my petition—wanting to see more gambling advertising reform, because I do not want our kids to see this stuff. In fact I do not want to see this stuff. I am tired of watching a footy match or watching the cricket and having betting odds thrown at me what feels like every 5 minutes—‘Bet this way’, ‘Bet that way’, ‘Bet on this’, ‘Bet on that’. It is insane the amount of these gambling ads that we are confronted with.

The *Age* in February this year reported that more than a third of those surveyed by the grassroots AFL Fans Association said they were concerned about gambling advertising both at stadiums and on television, with 12 per cent naming the ads as their number one issue. And that is just footy fans; that includes people who are probably happy to bet on football. It is not a depiction of the overall community. So if it is 12 per cent of footy fans who have had enough, imagine how much it is of the overall community who are tired of being bombarded with gambling ads.

Last year it was reported that research by the Office of Responsible Gambling revealed 77 per cent of the community believes there is too much gambling advertising and four in five believe advertising increases the risk of developing a problem with gambling—because it completely normalises it. And while it might be normal to go out and have a bet on the races, have a bet on a footy game, it is not normal to be on your phone 24/7 looking for the best odds, always upping your betting amount—and the whole dependence on multis and people pulling out things for you, recommending the way that you should gamble and the way that you should bet. It is completely normalised, not in the sense of a bit of fun on the side, something that might be an addition to your sporting activity, but as almost the focus of your sporting activity—that you should disseminate what is going on on the sporting field so that you can pull out of it various components to bet on. It is real money that you are betting with. It is not Monopoly money. It is not, you know, imaginary points or scores or anything like that. It is money, hard-earned money out of your pocket that you are continually being told you should be spending on gambling ads.

Now, with your indulgence, Speaker, I just want to flip to the federal government, which has overall jurisdiction in this space for gambling ads. In 2015 the then minister, Scott Morrison, announced that there would be a review into gambling advertising. It took a couple of years for them to figure out what they wanted to do, and by the 2017 budget, when now Prime Minister Morrison was Treasurer, gambling advertising on TV and radio during live sport games was to be banned and \$130 million in broadcast licence fees abolished. This is when we still had Prime Minister Turnbull. We then had a switch. What was it he said? He put his hand around Turnbull's shoulders, and what was it he said?

A member: I'm ambitious.

Ms WARD: 'I'm ambitious for him'. Well, we know where his ambitions were. We know absolutely where his ambitions were. And then he became Prime Minister.

So we go to March 2018 and we have got bans on gambling ads during broadcasts of live sport from 5.00 am to 8.30 pm. Well, as you know, the footy usually starts about 7.30. So if you are sitting down with your kids watching football, it is not unreasonable on a Friday night that your kids will stay up till at least 9.30 watching to see what your game is—unless of course you were an Essendon supporter last week, when you would have turned the footy off at quarter time. But I digress. Kids are still watching sport after 8.30 at night. We, adults, are still watching sport after 8.30 at night. Kids think this is normal. Kids can actually name betting agencies, and it is just wrong.

So I would encourage anybody in my community to please sign my petition, and I am happy to share my petition with anybody in this place who would like to join with me in asking our Minister for Consumer Affairs, Gaming and Liquor Regulation to consider measures to restrict betting advertising, particularly on television, streaming and subscription services, to limit the risk of harm to our community.

We want responsible gambling. I have got an Irish Catholic background. I know that gambling is fun. It can be a thing that we do, I get that. I am not a wowser who is saying, 'Please don't bet on anything'. What I am saying is: 'Can you please not hammer me with it when I'm just trying to watch my football team maybe get a couple of goals in?'. Right, member for Broadmeadows? We just want the Bombers to get a couple of goals in.

In 2016 a study found that 75 per cent of Australian children think that betting is a normal part of sport. They think it is a part of participation in sport, not that you are sitting there watching the game, talking

with your family and friends and watching it. I am sure you, member for Broadmeadows, remember, and I know you do, member for Mount Waverley—in fact most of you here—sitting at the footy with your record, writing down the possessions, writing down the handpasses, the points, the goals and paying attention to the game. I had no idea what betting odds were when I was a kid. I had no idea that you could bet on football, because I was too busy watching the game and complaining because we had soggy sandwiches in mum's bag and I could not go and get some hot chips. I mean, these were the things that you focused on as a kid at the footy, not what the betting ads were, and it is just relentless. It is just relentless.

There was another study in 2016 that collected data from children and parents at community sporting venues in New South Wales and Victoria. Three-quarters of 8- to 16-year-olds interviewed could name at least one gambling brand, and one-quarter could name four or more. Twenty-five per cent of kids, one in four kids, can name four betting brands. That is how pervasive this messaging is. I know that this study was done before the 2018 changes, but they are still watching the footy after 8.30 at night so they are still seeing this online gaming advertising.

Now, in 2011 the gambling industry spent \$89.7 million on advertising. In 2020 they spent \$271.3 million on betting advertising. That shows you how much money they are actually earning from betting. If you can afford to spend over a quarter of a billion dollars on advertising in a year, you are clearly making a lot of money—a ridiculous amount of money. And you are conditioning children to be a part of that revenue raising so that when they become adults it is an automatic feeder for you to continue to make record profits year after year.

Mr McGuire interjected.

Ms WARD: It can absolutely become an addiction, member for Broadmeadows. People are turning the TV off because the amount of advertising they are getting saturated with is getting so ridiculous. It impacts our enjoyment of sport, it impacts our experience with our family, and we have got to explain to our kids what gambling ads are and why they should not be paying attention to them. Then they have celebrities, they have other sportspeople and they have sports broadcasters who are talking about betting. When I am talking about the revenue that they are spending on gambling advertising, that does not include the in-house stuff. That does not include discussions on *The Front Bar*, for example, where they are talking about betting odds and mixed multis. It does not include all of the in-kind conversation around betting advertising.

Mr McGuire (Broadmeadows) (15:02): The Victorian government is overhauling how we regulate gambling in this state, and it is in this context that I want to make a succinct contribution. I want to address a couple of key issues and in particular acknowledge the member for Buninyong, before she leaves the chamber, for an insightful, courageous and forthright contribution that I would recommend to all members. It is that lived experience of what can happen from gambling that is critical to understand—within personal relationships, within families and in communities. So before the member leaves the chamber, I want to give full acknowledgement for that, because that was an important contribution so that we understand it at this level. Thank you.

Just on community, the point that I want to make is that the Victorian government is looking at how we address the issue of gambling, and what happens with the government's take from the gambling dollar is critical. I would like to propose that that amount of money goes back to the communities from where it was drawn. This will be critical to help address place-based disadvantage, and if this is done, we can see that this can go into social infrastructure or into different programs in these communities. I say this as the member for Broadmeadows, noting that the Hume City Council area has the fourth-highest number of poker machines. That way it works is that in poor areas that have the highest number, the money is taken out of them. Let us make sure that when the government is looking to reinvest that, it goes back into these communities.

I want to connect this up in repeating my call that within the Department of Treasury and Finance there be a unit that looks at place-based disadvantage and how we address these issues. I think that would be absolutely in the public interest. I know it is in the public interest because it was one of the things we did way back when Steve Bracks was the Premier. That is how we got the first public library in Broadmeadows; it was a contribution out of the Community Support Fund and then putting the two tiers of government together with big business in the Broadmeadows electorate, even getting the late Richard Pratt and Visy and their foundation—everybody—involved. That is how we can do it, and that is really a good way to look, first of all, at how we reduce harms from gambling, how we reduce the excesses of gambling and then where we invest to get the best benefit in return to these communities. I just thought that was a contribution that I should make as the member for Broadmeadows, and I am now happy to—

Mr Fowles interjected.

Mr McGuire: Okay. I was going to yield to the member for Burwood, but he is happy for me to continue, so I will keep going. These are the key things. I do want to acknowledge the government has provided the Victorian Responsible Gambling Foundation with \$153 million over four years to deliver on its mandate to reduce the prevalence and severity of gambling-related harm. This represents the nation's largest commitment to addressing problem gambling. The Victorian government is the national leader on this matter, and I think where we actually target the return is the critical thing that I am asking for now.

Just to put that into context, we got our first public library in Broadmeadows, which is in the global learning centre in Broadmeadows, the next one was in Craigieburn—that ended up being the best community library in the world; it won that title—and then we got another one in Sunbury. So you can see how you can form communities and form hubs that have preschool readings through to postgraduate degrees. That is how you can actually connect up so that people do not get lost. I remember in her contribution the member for Buninyong referenced social isolation. That is how you can get into gambling. It does not matter whether you have got a law degree from Oxford; you can find yourself caught up in this. These are personal tragedies that have huge impacts on families and communities. Connected is connected. You give people the opportunity to be part of something bigger than themselves and also the tools and the connections to do other things. I think that has gone to the points that I wanted to make, so I am happy to yield to my good friend and colleague, who was very generous, the member for Burwood.

Mr FOWLES (Burwood) (15:07): It is my pleasure to make a contribution around a bill that, look, is largely technical. But despite the criticisms of the lead speaker for the opposition, we can actually walk and chew gum at the same time. We are serious about tackling gambling-related harm, we are serious about making sure that the regulatory environment for gambling is fit for purpose and, as we have said over and over and over again—and it continues to fall on deaf ears—we are in the process of completely overhauling how we regulate gambling in this state. There will be more legislation this year in relation to this space. There will be further opportunities for those opposite to wax lyrical, throw barbs and smear members of the government, as indeed the member for Euroa did in her lead speech on this bill, but it remains the case that most of what is before us today is relatively uncontroversial in nature.

I did want to take a moment to thank the member for Buninyong for her contribution. This Parliament is at its best when people speak from personal experience. I know that many members, on a range of issues, over the life of this Parliament have spoken from personal experience—on both sides of the chamber. But I know that the things that have really resonated with me over the course of the last 3½ years have been when people have spoken of the difficult stories in their backgrounds and the challenges they have faced as human beings. Ultimately I think that humanises all of us, and it is an opportunity to demonstrate that we as parliamentarians are human beings first. We do have families, we do have our own friendships and we do have our own challenges. There are certainly many members in this place who have overcome significant challenges in their lives, and we all benefit when

they are brave enough and have the courage to share those challenges with us. The member for Buninyong's contribution to that end was a very, very good one, and I thank her indeed for making it.

The notion that we are just bringing uncontroversial legislation to the house is of course a complete nonsense. The reality is that there are at any one time any number of pieces of legislation working their way through the cabinet processes and through, ultimately, this chamber and then on to the other place. The minister at the table, the Minister for Energy, Environment and Climate Change, has had legislation that could fall into either category over the course of the life of this Parliament—stuff that is a bit technical, a bit dull, frankly. Well, we certainly do not draft for excitement; we draft for legislative effect. But importantly, the minister at the table has also had legislation that is really exciting and that goes to some of the outstanding commitments Labor has made in the sustainability space, in the environmental space and, most particularly, with regard to renewable energy.

It is terrific to see this government making a pledge for offshore wind. Offshore wind is one of those classic areas. It is a new part of the universe, certainly in the Australian context; it is very well established particularly in northern Europe. Offshore wind promises to deliver amazing things for the state of Victoria, and that is an example of, I guess, something that is a bit more legislatively ambitious or, from a government's perspective, a bit more ambitious than perhaps some of the measures we are debating today.

This is all about increasing competition and reducing red tape. One of the changes is increasing the threshold for permit requirements for community organisations to hold raffles. We know, especially I suspect in the political universe and perhaps more so on our side of the chamber, that there are lots of raffles in the world. There are lots that go on at any one time. I think we all as members of this place would receive requests from our local community organisations—everything from primary schools to neighbourhood houses to sporting clubs—to make contributions to their raffles. We know that the law as it sits at the moment means that if the value of your raffle is more than \$5000, you need to apply for a permit. The reality is that I do not consider that there is a huge amount of risk attached—in fact I consider it riskless, frankly—to raising that threshold to \$20 000. That is an entirely sensible change, and it will have the effect of limiting the licensing regime, if you like, to those raffles that are genuinely large scale. If you are talking about \$20 000 or more in prizes, you are at the sort of raffle that is going to reach well beyond, probably, the immediate confines of that organisation, its members and its immediate supporters. Once you are at that level in raffle land you are typically going well beyond your particular organisation in trying to source people to buy tickets in that raffle.

I am reminded of a story. I was at a community group fundraiser. There was a raffle underway, and it had been going pretty well. In fact it had been going so well—it was a pretty informal kind of raffle, one of those sort with one ticket for \$2, three for \$5; it was at an event, so no-one was writing names down or anything, but the ticket sales had gone particularly well—that someone ducked up to Officeworks to grab another book and came back and sold that book as well. It was something of a chastening moment when, in my role of MCing this particular function and then drawing the raffle, I drew the lucky winner—orange, C27—and sure enough, two people put up their hands. What had happened of course was the procuring of the additional raffle book had not been checked off against the previous raffle books and we had duplicate tickets in the field, which made for some excitement at that function as we determined exactly how to resolve that matter. We know that community organisations organise these things with great intentions. They organise them in order to deliver great things for their communities, and they ought not be encumbered with a whole bunch of regulations for those sorts of efforts.

I did want to take the house's attention to a particular phrase in both the second-reading speech and elsewhere about bingo fundraising events and lucky envelopes being expressly prohibited from being conducted online. Now, necessarily when you talk about something coming out of the physical domain into the electronic domain, sometimes the language does not have quite the same meaning or it can be interpreted differently. I think we all understand what bingo is, and a lucky envelope I guess could be done electronically with a virtual envelope, but when we are talking about fundraising events in this

context, we are talking about fundraising events that have a gambling component. It is important to make that clear. Previously the things that were regulated were these fundraising events which have a casino-like element to them or events at which gambling occurs. I guess an example of that might be a poker night—if you have a poker night down at the local footy club or whatever. Now, what these rules do is make sure that by saying it is an event you cannot just then use that in effect to offer an online poker product by saying, ‘Oh, this is just a poker night at the local football club, but we’re going to let people do it electronically’. Clearly we do not want that happening, and that is what the words in this bill seek to make sure does not happen.

I thought it useful in the context of gambling harm minimisation to talk a bit about the government’s commitment in this space. It has been substantial: \$153 million over four years to the Victorian Responsible Gambling Foundation. It is instructive that, like in so many other areas of social policy, that is the biggest commitment to address problem gambling in the nation. So often we find that the commitments made by the Victorian government to address matters in Victoria are approximate to or even dwarf commitments by the commonwealth where they too have the ability to make contributions in that space. Whether it is public housing or whether it is renewable energy, we typically find that Victoria is doing more than the rest of the nation combined, doing more than the commonwealth government is doing, and that is because this is a government of ambition, a government of progress, a government that is determined to continue to deliver each and every day over the remaining eight-month life of this Parliament.

A bunch of harm minimisation measures are being introduced by this government. They include the very first statewide precommitment system in the nation, getting rid of ATMs in gaming venues altogether, introducing transaction limits—\$200 in one go, \$500 on any given day—and, importantly, capping the total number of gaming machines in the state until 2042 and making sure there are limits on gaming machines in particular regions and municipalities. That of course is important because we do see a proliferation of gaming machines in areas where there is also significant disadvantage and that is something that every member in this place ought to be alive to. It is of course the reason that Victoria is the jurisdiction with the lowest density of gaming machines, other than of course Western Australia, which has none. It is a good bill, and I commend it to the house.

Ms D’AMBROSIO (Mill Park—Minister for Energy, Environment and Climate Change, Minister for Solar Homes) (15:17): I move:

That the debate be now adjourned.

Motion agreed to and debate adjourned.

Ordered that debate be adjourned until later this day.

PUFFING BILLY RAILWAY BILL 2022

Second reading

Debate resumed on motion of Mr PAKULA:

That this bill be now read a second time.

Ms HALFPENNY (Thomastown) (15:18): As I was saying, I think it was yesterday, this legislation that we are debating again today is a direct response to the Ombudsman’s report into the sexual abuse of children by a member of the Puffing Billy Preservation Society. The changes that we are looking at and talking about today are very important changes to strengthen the railway’s governance and in doing so strengthen the protections for children in this organisation.

When I was reading this proposed legislation and the explanatory notes, I recalled that when I was in my first term in this place I was appointed to the Family and Community Development Committee. This was the committee that undertook the inquiry into institutional abuse of children and then produced the *Betrayal of Trust* report. I was on that committee together with the member for Broadmeadows. It seems such a long time ago that I was on that committee. Hearing the voices of victim-survivors and

the families of those that did not survive child abuse was difficult, and some of the stories were just horrendous. How could adults do these sorts of things and how could other adults stand by and allow it to happen? It seems that this is what was going on with that child abuser, whose name I will not speak, at the Puffing Billy Preservation Society. This was enabled by the board that was supposed to be overseeing the historical society and those employed and volunteering in that organisation.

So really the main purpose of this legislation is to ensure that we do not have that situation where in effect the society had members that were sitting on the board and therefore the society was running the board rather than the board overseeing the society. And of course it seemed like it was a bit of a mates club, with people turning a blind eye to the most horrific of crimes and allowing a convicted sex offender to continue to work for the historic society and of course have unsupervised contact with children. It is the case, as I say—and I was on that inquiry a number of years ago in 2012, I think it was—that you see this happen over and over again, people just turning the other way and allowing these things to happen.

So the purpose of this legislation, as I said, is to ensure that there is proper governance overseeing the historical society. For example, you will have to declare a conflict of interest, so members of the society cannot just sort of nominate and also become members of the board. The board itself will be appointed through the Governor in Council and on the recommendation of the minister. That will again ensure further oversight and accountability. There will also be oversight from the minister in terms of the work that it does and how it does it. There will be a requirement to have strategic plan, a financial plan—all the things that a modern organisation requires in order to do the best that it can. These are the sorts of requirements that also assist the volunteers and those that are employed in the organisation, making it more professional and making, you hope, the work environment a better one and in that way attracting more volunteers and doing an even better job than what Puffing Billy is doing now.

Of course I think it is back on track now, after the terrible pandemic. I believe I was reading there are over 1000 volunteers in the organisation. So it really is an icon—from a small sort of operation many years ago to now a really big tourist attraction for the state of Victoria. So it is something that we want to continue to see going from strength to strength, now and continuing into the future, so that we can preserve a little bit of the past but also give children and families a great experience, chugging through the hills and the mountains and the forest on the great Puffing Billy. I think I have only been on it once, and I think of my children sadly only one has actually been on Puffing Billy, but perhaps they will go again with their friends or children in the future.

Now, I suppose when we are talking about this bill there are also some minor changes in terms of the name. In the past it I think it was called the Emerald because that is where it is, in the area of Emerald, rather than Puffing Billy. The legislation will change the name, so we are talking about the Puffing Billy board rather than where it is located. The board will also be required to report to the minister any incident or alleged incident of which the board is aware that occurred or allegedly occurred in the operation of the railway or in public traffic on the railway or caused or allegedly caused death or serious injury to any person or serious damage to property or the environment or may reasonably be expected to cause harm to the reputation of the railway as well as any significant risk of which the board is aware, which includes a risk to the operation of the railway and the board's financial viability. In reading this you sort of wonder how it was able to operate without this, because these are just normal requirements that any organisation ought to be following.

So again I just commend this bill to the house, and in saying so I hope that we are again that one little step further towards providing better protections for children. I just end with a quote from when I made comments on the report in this house a few years ago:

... institutional abuse and its impact on individuals, families and generations will always be unfinished business. When the camera lights dim and the media gallery is empty, it is up to all of us to remember this and to do whatever we can to make sure that it does not happen again.

Mr BRAYNE (Nepean) (15:25): I also rise today to speak on the Puffing Billy Railway Bill 2022. Of course the Puffing Billy Railway is one of Victoria's most popular and iconic tourist attractions. It sees visitors from all over the world come to our state to see some of the best scenery that Australia has to offer. I know that most Victorians do have fond memories of boarding Puffing Billy and riding through the forests and hills of the Dandenong Ranges. I was fortunate to visit in year 1 with my classmates, my mum being one of the parent volunteers, and obviously I look forward to taking my own kids when I have them to visit this icon of Victoria.

The Dandenong Ranges have been home to the Puffing Billy Railway for 121 years. The Puffing Billy Railway was built in 1900 to serve the local communities who lived in the hills of the Dandenong Ranges. The train would carry a range of goods to and from these communities—timber, livestock, perishables, newspapers and parcels being among the many goods that the Puffing Billy would bring each day, and of course in that sense the railway really was a lifeline to those communities that lived in the hills there. That is why when the line was closed in 1954 the Puffing Billy Preservation Society was formed and this iconic railway was rescued. Since that time Puffing Billy has been servicing our tourism industry here in Victoria. It has provided generations of families with lifelong memories of this much-loved attraction.

The rescue of the line and its present-day success would not have been possible without the hard work and dedication of many, many volunteers who are committed to preserving this iconic railway. More than 300 volunteers support the Puffing Billy Railway, and many of them come from the Puffing Billy Preservation Society. The tireless work of these volunteers has sustained the Puffing Billy Railway for many years. It is because of them that Australia's favourite steam train has been attracting visitors for decades now. It is these volunteers who have been front of mind throughout the drafting of this bill, because this government understands that it is the hard work and dedication of Victorians that underpin the tourism industry right across the state. Obviously tourism is such an important driver of the local economy in my electorate as well. Like the Puffing Billy Railway, the Mornington Peninsula sees people from across the globe visiting our community to enjoy the many attractions that we have on offer. All of this is underpinned by the tireless work of locals who either run their own small businesses or volunteer to keep our attractions running and our coastlines clean. That is why it is so important that the work of people who volunteer to run our state's premier tourist attractions, wherever they are, are recognised, and I commend the drafters of this bill for making a point of doing so.

This bill was drafted in response to the Victorian Ombudsman's report that was released in June 2018 titled *Investigation into Child Sex Offender Robert Whitehead's Involvement with Puffing Billy and Other Railway Bodies* and all the horrors linked to that. The Ombudsman provided a suite of recommendations to ensure that those events related to the previous governance of the railway would never happen again. The government accepted in full the recommendations that were provided. This included a recommendation to review the structure and composition of the Emerald Tourist Railway Board. As part of this review it was found that the Emerald Tourist Railway Board was guided by provisions in the existing act that were outdated and redundant. As such, these provisions needed updating in order for the Puffing Billy Railway to operate in a contemporary tourism environment. Following these recommendations this bill will support the growth and sustainability of the Puffing Billy Railway Board while addressing previous shortcomings and recognising the heritage of the railway, the significance of its volunteers and its importance to the local community.

I will now turn to the specifics of this legislation. The Puffing Billy Railway Bill repeals and replaces the Emerald Tourist Railway Act 1977 to provide a modern framework that will futureproof the operations and governance of the attraction for many years to come. This will help the Puffing Billy Railway to operate more effectively and continue to draw visitors to the Dandenong Ranges, where they can see some of the best of our state's scenery while creating memories that will last them a lifetime. The bill changes the name of the Emerald Tourist Railway Board to the Puffing Billy Railway Board to prevent confusion and to reflect the name of the railway that we are all familiar with. The bill also modernises the provisions relating to good governance and the operation of the railway. These

modernisations include a requirement that the board develop strategic plans and empowering the minister to make written directions and request information. Alongside this requirement, the bill provides a range of objectives for the Puffing Billy Railway Board, including ensuring the economic sustainability and viability of the railway; maintaining the heritage significance of the railway; managing and promoting the safe operation of the railway; promoting the tourism offering and enhancing the visitor experience provided by the railway and the surrounding Dandenong Ranges region; promoting an understanding of and education relating to rail heritage; developing and maintaining partnerships with community organisations and businesses; developing and maintaining harmonious relations between the board and the community; providing safe, inclusive and diverse working environments for employees and volunteers; and perhaps most importantly, as has been noted throughout this contribution, recognising the importance of volunteer participation in the operation of the railway.

These requirements will modernise the operation of the board and will ensure the good governance of the railway for many years to come. This will in turn enhance the experience of every person who comes to visit the Puffing Billy Railway, allowing all of them to better enjoy one of Victoria's premier tourist attractions. As I mentioned earlier, the hard work and dedication of volunteers underpins the Puffing Billy Railway, and I commend the fact that this bill includes an objective of the board to recognise the importance of these volunteers and their invaluable contribution to the running and preservation of this historic railway. The more than 300 volunteers who assist with the running of the railway make vital contributions, such as driving locomotives, preserving trains and preserving and maintaining tracks. I know that expressly recognising the important work that these volunteers do for the railway will have a positive impact on volunteer engagement going forward. Acknowledging the tireless work of those who underpin our tourism industry is so important, particularly as we recover from the COVID-19 pandemic that saw obviously all tourist attractions affected. Hopefully we will see an increase in the number of international arrivals coming to Victoria so that they too can enjoy our world-class tourist attractions, whether that be the Puffing Billy Railway or the Mornington Peninsula.

The Andrews Labor government understands that, and that is why this government has committed to supporting our tourism industry. The proof lies in this government's strong support of the Puffing Billy Railway, with \$11.2 million being provided in the 2021–22 budget to protect local jobs and to support its operations as it recovers from the pandemic and once again attracts tourists. Further investment has been made for the establishment of the Lakeside visitor centre, which was backed by a \$12.7 million commitment from this government and which, like so many of our tourist attractions in Victoria, has world-class facilities that tourists, daytrippers and school groups can enjoy.

Of course the benefits of the Puffing Billy Railway are not only felt by tourists but by other sectors of our state's economy, with two-thirds of the railway's suppliers being Victorian companies. The railway and the tourists it attracts go a long way to supporting other Dandenong Ranges and Yarra Valley businesses, with visitors being exposed to the wineries and gourmet producers that operate in that region. Around 500 000 tourists visited Puffing Billy Railway each year prior to the pandemic, and while it may take some time to once again reach those numbers, it is heartening to see Victoria's and Australia's favourite steam train back up and running. The return of this iconic experience will deliver benefits to local businesses as people return to doing the things they love with family and friends. Families from all over the world can once again enjoy the magic of a steam train ride through the forests and hills of the Dandenong Ranges, which is truly one of the most beautiful regions in Australia. The Puffing Billy Railway Bill will ensure that this iconic experience can continue to attract visitors and benefit the region for many years to come.

As I said, the Andrews Labor government is committed to supporting our tourism industry and recognising the work of the volunteers who underpin it, and this bill does exactly that. I commend this bill to the house.

Mr FOWLES (Burwood) (15:35): I too am pleased to make a contribution on the Puffing Billy Railway Bill 2022—it is a Billy bill. Notwithstanding the challenges of getting the words out, the bill itself is not particularly complicated, but it does address a few very, very important matters. Before I go to those matters, though, I do want to just step back a moment and talk a bit about the importance a century ago of coal-fired transport and the transition we are undergoing at the moment to electric transport. Of course there is no point at all in seeing a transition to electric vehicles if you have got a coal-fired grid, because essentially at that point an electric car is like Puffing Billy—it is fired by coal. The only way you make that transition to electric cars and other electric vehicles count, the only way you make sure it is sustainable and the only way you make sure it is environmentally prudent is by having heaps of renewable energy in the grid.

I note that the Minister for Energy, Environment and Climate Change is at the table, and I want to thank her and her team for having done so much work over the life of this government to improve Victoria's energy grid by bringing in stacks and stacks of renewables. Indeed we have increased the Victorian renewable energy target, the VRET, to 50 per cent by 2030. It is worth just pausing and reflecting on that: 50 per cent by 2030. It was not that long ago that Victoria was just very much the brown coal state. I think I saw a statement many years ago that said we had enough brown coal to get us through to the year 3100. That is the size of the resource in East Gippsland. It is absolutely phenomenally big. What we did not know then and what we know now is that if we were to burn all that coal, that would be an environmentally disastrous outcome. So the only way you get away from having coal-fired cars in effect is by making sure you have got renewables in the grid, and boy, have we done some work to that end.

The *Renewable Energy Action Plan* outlines a whole bunch of things to assist in transitioning Victoria to a clean and modern energy future, supporting the sector's growth, empowering communities and consumers and modernising the energy system. One of the things I really like is the \$48 million for renewable energy certificate purchasing to power Victoria's tram fleet.

Mr Hodgett interjected.

Mr FOWLES: Getting there. Victoria's trams were effectively coal-fired trams up until we started putting all the renewables in the grid. Just like Puffing Billy, all the trams were coal fired, and we of course are moving away from that. We in fact now have renewable energy powering the totality of Victoria's tram fleet.

But with the encouragement of the member for Croydon—and I do thank him for it—I will talk about the original bit of coal-fired transport, which is Puffing Billy. Puffing Billy is a very special part of Victoria's cultural history. I think we can all hark back. Many of us will recall our first ride on Puffing Billy. Many of us will recall the first time we took our kids on Puffing Billy. It approaches a rite of passage for Victorian kids, having that all-important ride on Puffing Billy, particularly as it exposes kids to the majestic beauty of the magnificent rainforest we have surrounding Melbourne. We are extraordinarily lucky to have a resource as magnificent as that right on the doorstep of the city. It is a terrific thing, but it is a facility that has had a difficult past, particularly when it comes to governance matters. What this bill does is make sure that ongoing management and good governance are put in place to ensure that this is a facility that not just my children but their children and beyond can continue to use. Hopefully they will enjoy it at a time when the notion of any coal-fired transport is completely foreign and when they will have a transport system that is wholly electric and that electricity is wholly sourced from renewables.

We know that there have been some difficulties in the past, and I do not propose to canvass any of those. I think others over the course of this debate have canvassed those matters; there are some very, very distressing matters. But what is absolutely critical here is that we focus on what is the right governance model, and this bill does exactly that. It moves it away from the way in which it was structured back in the 1970s and onto a modern footing. Part of that change is changing the name of the board to the Puffing Billy Railway Board because, as much as those inside the Beltway or here on

Spring Street might know what the Emerald tourist railway is, this is a tourist attraction that is known universally by a colloquialism or a nickname, Puffing Billy—which I guess in a technical sense refers merely to the locomotive and not to the whole train and indeed not to the entire track and the entire thing. Everyone knows what Puffing Billy means.

The corporate governance reporting mechanisms being introduced will require the development of strategic plans and business plans, improve the reporting from the Puffing Billy Railway Board to the minister and empower the minister to make written directions and request particular information. This brings this attraction into line with a whole bunch of other attractions in Victoria and makes sure that it can continue to offer its services with greatly reduced risk of the sorts of practices that we have sadly seen in the relatively distant past. The board framework is an important part of that. Moving to a skills-based directorship will make sure that the needs of the board are reflected in a contemporary way and with the right people available to support the work and to support the organisation.

I take the opportunity to note, particularly with the Minister for Women in the chamber, that this government has done outstanding work to improve the proportion of women on all government boards. It has done absolutely outstanding work in this space, and it is terrific that we are now seeing so many boards being half or more women. That is absolutely appropriate, it is absolutely as it should be, and it is terrific to be able to make sure that we are drawing on all the expertise, life experience and skills that those women bring and make sure that these boards are more representative of the communities they serve.

Those things do not happen by accident, Acting Speaker Richards, as I know you know. If you allow the organic run of things, you do not actually get those sorts of results. You have to intervene. It requires more than mere lip-service to improve the percentage of women, say, hypothetically, in one's political party. We have seen plenty of lip-service around this issue from other political parties, but only Labor has put in place the quotas needed to improve the percentage of women in the caucus. It is absolutely fantastic that we have a cabinet that is majority women, something that hopefully will cease to be noteworthy very, very soon but is noteworthy at the moment, not least because of the composition of other cabinets around the nation and in particular the cabinet of the federal Morrison government. I am very hopeful, of course, that the composition of the federal government cabinet will change at some point in the next few months—and you can bet London to a brick that there would be more women in an Albanese cabinet than there are currently in the Morrison cabinet.

Elsewhere in the bill there is a more comprehensive listing of functions and objectives, making sure that we are clear about what it is that the Puffing Billy Railway Board is responsible for, what it needs to do, and making sure that it continues to reflect its contemporary usage, it remains a much-loved tourist attraction in Victoria and it remains a much-loved part of the experience of growing up in Victoria. It is part of our wonderful Yarra Ranges, which as I have noted, are just a terrific asset to have so very close to the city.

We are fortunate in this state to have any number of brilliant attractions, many of which rely on our natural environment. On Victoria's natural environment, Michael Leunig put it so eloquently in his cartoon of a eucalyptus leaf, speaking about 'Her beauty and her terror'. Whilst these treed hills around Melbourne have at times been the source of angst, terror and sadly in some bushfire seasons deaths as well, we know that they are a magnificent natural asset. They warrant protection, they warrant preservation, and part of that is introducing more people to them through the Puffing Billy experience. I am absolutely delighted to commend this bill to the house.

Mr HAMER (Box Hill) (15:45): I too am pleased to rise today to speak on the Puffing Billy Railway Bill 2022. The member for Burwood is always a difficult act to follow in any environment, particularly in debating a bill. I think he has left me with an indelible image of trams chugging up Bourke Street with kids hanging out, their legs dangling out of the windows and the coal-fired smoke pouring out of the boiler at the front. I do not think I am going to be able to get that image out of my head particularly quickly.

I do want to pay a particular tribute to the member for Lara, the former Minister for Tourism and Major Events, who spoke very passionately on this bill on Tuesday, I believe, and of course had carriage of the initial Ombudsman's report when that came through back in 2018. He was really the instigator of where we are today and where this bill sits today. I have had the opportunity over the last couple of weeks, since this bill was introduced, just to review the Ombudsman's report and also speak to a few people who had been involved in some of the court cases that pursued claims against the various institutions. Their description was that these were amongst the worst crimes that they had ever seen of this nature. It is not appropriate to go into detail, but it was a shameful period of that organisation's history.

For me, I only have good memories of Puffing Billy. I do remember as a child we would drive down to Canterbury station and then catch the train down to Belgrave and just walk across to the Puffing Billy station at Belgrave. We would catch the train out to Lakeside, where it then ended, and go to Emerald Lake. If memory serves me correctly, they had some water slides there at that stage, and I think that was the first time that I had ever been on a water slide. They certainly were good memories for me. My kids were just of the age in March 2020. We were planning to go down there, and they were having their special Thomas the Tank Engine run, but unfortunately that got cancelled because of COVID, so we have still not brought the kids down to experience Puffing Billy. No doubt that will come about soon.

As I mentioned, obviously for some people and particularly some of the volunteers that were working through the 1970s and 80s it was not such a pleasant experience—in fact it was a terrible experience. As the Ombudsman's report found, some of this could have been improved or potentially prevented through a much stronger governance arrangement. As was reported in the Ombudsman's report, they found significant governance failings at the former Emerald Tourist Railway Board, a poor legislative framework with respect to conflicts of interest and an inappropriate board and management composition that had enabled the Puffing Billy Preservation Society to control the board. The report concluded that the governance failings of the board, which included the society's position of control, had facilitated the offending. In response to that investigation the government did commission PricewaterhouseCoopers to undertake a review into the governance arrangements of the board, and that is what has really led to the process that has been finalised in this bill today.

Just having a look at some of the key provisions of the bill and the provisions for how the board will act, the minister will be empowered to request that the board provide information relating to the operation and management of the railway and the performance of its functions under the act. The board will be required to report to the minister on a range of incidents and risks rather than just accidents, which is the position in the current act. It will be required to prepare a rolling four-year strategic plan annually and develop a rail corridor plan every 10 years. It will be subject to the general direction and control of the minister, and the minister will be permitted to give written directions to the board in relation to the performance of its functions.

There is an updated conflict-of-interest provision, including a requirement for a director to disclose to the board if they currently hold or have held within the previous 12 months a membership at the rail preservation society. All appointments of the directors will be made by the Governor in Council on the recommendation of the minister, which replaces the power in the current act for the society to in fact nominate up to four members to the board. As I was reading through the Ombudsman's report, this was a key issue in terms of the way that the board was functioning in that even though the minister had the power to nominate a majority of members, that power was rarely exercised, so in reality the society often had a numerical advantage, which created an obvious conflict of interest.

In the time remaining I do want to just focus a little bit on the volunteers. A lot of these railways, including Puffing Billy—and we do have a number of other heritage railways across the state—could not operate without the hard work of the volunteers. I assume it is probably because of the nature of the industry that I worked in before coming to this place, being in transport infrastructure projects, that I did work with a lot of people who had been involved in railways, and a lot of those people actually on their weekends or holidays would volunteer for Puffing Billy or the Yarra Valley Tourist Railway

or a number of other tourist railways across the state. That is a really important role that they serve. They do it out of their interest in and their love and their passion for the railways, and they keep a lot of that heritage alive for all of the tourist railways that are across the state. It does provide a particular tourist function: not only does it introduce kids and families and bring local people from Melbourne out to the Dandenongs or out to the Yarra Valley but it also then gets them to stay and enjoy some of the local retailers and local small businesses.

I know even in my own area in Box Hill we have a heritage steam railway. It is only a small one, not the size of Puffing Billy, but the Box Hill Miniature Steam Railway has been going for many, many years. It is a great place to have a birthday party. Again, it is run by a terrific group of volunteers that service the track and service the vehicles and engines and go around a small mini track in Elgar Park. They run a terrific partnership with a local Rotary club, the Rotary Club of Balwyn, and not only raise money for a lot of charities on their regular days that they run the operation—on the Sundays when they raise money just for Rotary's general causes—but also always organise a special Good Friday run to raise money for the children's hospital appeal. Back in early 2020 they organised a special run to raise money for bushfire relief from the 2019–20 fires. They are a terrific local organisation, and it shows how passionate volunteers are who work on these heritage railways, and for those reasons I commend the bill to the house.

Ms RICHARDS (Cranbourne) (15:55): It is a pleasure to rise to speak on the Puffing Billy Railway Bill 2022 and to follow on from some terrific and important contributions that recognised both the complexity of this bill and also the reasons that it has come to be before us now. This bill, as has been canvassed, is a response to the findings of the Victorian Ombudsman's June 2018 report that looked at the governance arrangements of the Emerald Tourist Railway Act 1977. It looked to improve the legislative framework that was in place and to make those changes that mean the modern governance arrangements are fit for purpose, especially in the context of the tragedy that people experienced as result of the behaviour and the horrendous acts that have been discovered.

This bill will be established as the Puffing Billy Railway Act 2022, a new principal act that addresses the findings and recommendations from the reviews. This bill aligns with the government's commitment to victim-survivors of abuse, and we recognise that this can never happen again. If the structural and framework-level issues with the current principal act were not amended, then they needed to be replaced and improved upon. This bill will become a new principal act that introduces disclosure and reporting obligations and aligns with modern standards of practice and improved ministerial oversight.

Now, I am only going to speak for a short time. I am not going to take up my allocation of time on this, because I understand the house has other matters to explore more deeply on these issues. But I do recognise—and I have enjoyed the reflections of people in the chamber—the importance that Puffing Billy has to so many Victorians. I am not able to stand here without adding the importance that this iconic tourist attraction has had to the people that I serve, to my own childhood, to my time with my own children travelling to Belgrave to catch Puffing Billy to Emerald and the joy that this facility has brought to so many people.

From Cranbourne it is not a very long drive. It is actually a beautiful and scenic drive to get to the starting point—to either Emerald or Belgrave—to enjoy the opportunities that come with coming together as a family or in whatever way, often intergenerationally, and also with tourists. I know it is something that most of my family if they have visitors from overseas do travel to, because it does travel through an extraordinary setting. This is an opportunity to make sure that it is a well-run resource and that it is a safe resource, and it does not matter whether you are coming from Belgrave, Emerald, Cranbourne or the other side of the world. That is actually a really important element to this. Of course getting to the other side there is the new Lakeside visitor centre. There is a \$12 million commitment from the Victorian government to improve this amazing visitor centre.

We are at a time now where we are looking to our economic recovery, and we really are so fortunate to be able to welcome visitors back. In my own family we have been able to welcome some visitors back just in the last couple of weeks from overseas. To have the Yarra Valley, to have the Dandenong Ranges, to have all of those opportunities that come with having this very well run, very well maintained and well governed resource, we are particularly grateful—and for our extraordinary volunteers as well. With those brief words, I commend the bill and look forward to its speedy passage.

Motion agreed to.

Read second time.

Consideration in detail

Clause 1 (16:00)

Ms McLEISH: Firstly, I just want to acknowledge my appreciation to the minister for going into a consideration-in-detail stage for this bill. He will understand that there are lots of issues that I would like to canvass, and this provides that opportunity. He will also know that the Puffing Billy Preservation Society has been in contact with me. In fact I have almost been overwhelmed by the number of emails that I have received that have all been very personalised and customised, certainly not pro forma.

I also just want to start by mentioning that Anne MacLeish, who is the president of the Puffing Billy Preservation Society, is no relation of mine. Her name has a different spelling and her lot arrived here some 110 years after my lot. I wanted to get that out first of all.

Prior to digging into the purposes, I am trying to get an understanding of the extent of the consultation and the role of the board in the drafting of the legislation. What was the extent of that consultation? With whom did the minister or the department engage, including local residents, people whose land adjoins the corridor or the track, the preservation society, and of course what role did the current Emerald Tourist Railway Board (ETRB) play in shaping this legislation?

Mr PAKULA: First of all, I would like to thank the member for Eildon for the constructive way in which she has approached this consideration in detail and to indicate that my mob clearly arrived here much later than her mob if she is talking about 110 years before the MacLeishs.

I should just indicate at the outset that I recognise that there are elements of this bill that are of difficulty for the Puffing Billy Preservation Society, but as I think is well understood by members on both sides of the house, the bill emanates from a very difficult set of circumstances. Some of the recommendations of the Ombudsman's report into the activities of Mr Whitehead and others are recommendations which are, by their definition, somewhat difficult for the preservation society.

I would finally, in moving into this consideration-in-detail stage, indicate that I will try and keep my answers brief so that the member for Eildon and other members of the opposition who may wish to ask questions can get through as many of them as possible in the time allotted.

My department, the Department of Jobs, Precincts and Resources, has met with representatives of the preservation society on numerous occasions over the last four years to discuss all manner of matters relating to the railway, certainly in advance of the bill at cabinet stage so that a summary of the bill which outlined the impact of the society's future representation on the board could be made available. I will just take the member very briefly through some of the key meetings of relevance.

Back in May 2019 the governance review, which was undertaken by PwC, involved them meeting with a number of members of the executive committee of the society on 16 May that year. In December of that year I wrote to the society to advise that that review had been completed and to indicate that I had asked my department to meet with the society to discuss the recommendations of that review. That happened in January of 2020. There was an overview of the key findings and recommendations of the review. The department informed the society of the recommendations

regarding limiting the representation of the society on the board, and we did indicate to them that there would be legislative amendments to implement those recommendations brought forward.

In February of this year my department met with the preservation society before bill at cabinet to provide a summary of the bill, and at that meeting those recommendations from the review were reiterated and the future changes to the society's representation on the board were outlined. The society was given an opportunity to provide feedback. It is fair to say that the society indicated then its disappointment with the imposition of measures to limit its future representation on the board.

I should also indicate that only a week or so ago, after the bill was introduced in the Parliament, Eastern Bridge lawyers under the signature of Mr Simon Nunan wrote to me on behalf of the society to outline various concerns with the bill, a copy of which I am quite confident the member might have with her. That was responded to by my relevant deputy secretary, Chris Miller, two days ago, responding to many of the issues raised in that correspondence from Mr Nunan.

In regard to volunteers, the PwC review also provided an opportunity for volunteers to undertake a survey regarding the governance arrangements and legal structure of the Emerald Tourist Railway Board. We have not directly dealt with volunteers as part of the development of the bill. The department engaged with the board and the CEO of the railway, and indeed there have been representations with the society, which I have referenced. Opportunities to provide input were also provided to Cardinia Shire Council, Yarra Ranges Shire Council, Parks Victoria and VicTrack, given their connection to the railway. There was a lot of consultation across government. I would say to the member we did not consult directly with residents adjoining the track, because the bill is principally focused on the operations and governance arrangements of the board.

I would just make one final reference in that the member may have also seen some correspondence in the last couple of days from the Emerald Village Association, which was very reasonable correspondence, from Mr Budge on behalf of Mr Bartley and other members of the Emerald Village Association, which was responded to yesterday by Peter Abbott, the CEO of the railway. There has been some back and forth, and those correspondences have been extremely civilised. I do not want to verbalise the Emerald Village Association, but they appeared to be quite satisfied with the response they have been provided.

Ms McLEISH: Just continuing on with the purposes, just touching again on heritage and volunteering, clauses 6(e) and 6(f) are about recognising the heritage significance of Puffing Billy and the importance of volunteers. The minister has talked a little bit about that, but what directions or guidance will you be providing to the board to make sure that those purposes are crystal clear and met?

Mr PAKULA: I thank the member for her question. I will deal with it sequentially. I will deal with the member for Rowville as well if he would like. In terms of heritage, the member for Eildon is correct. The purpose of the act is to recognise the heritage significance of the railway. There are various mechanisms in the bill to protect the heritage significance of the railway. Just to go through a couple of those, one of the requirements is that directors collectively possess skills, knowledge and experience that includes heritage preservation. Clause 6(b) of the bill provides that the objective of the board is to maintain the heritage significance of the railway, which it must have regard to in performing its functions, clause 6(f) provides for the board to promote understanding of and education relating to rail heritage, and clause 6(g) provides for the board to promote the preservation of narrow-gauge railway heritage, all of which I would say to the member it does.

I was at Puffing Billy only a few weeks ago with the Deputy Premier, and every element of everything that is done—and this is a tribute not just to the board but indeed to the volunteers and others—all of that heritage element of Puffing Billy and the fact that it has been something beloved by generations, is beautifully preserved. But of course it is important that the act, as we hope this bill will become, does that as well. I think that it does.

In regard to volunteers, the bill does recognise the significance of volunteers, including in clause 6(e), because there is an objective of the board to recognise the importance of volunteer participation, and the board must have regard to the benefits of volunteerism and the expectations of the community in relation to the board's use of volunteer time. That specific provision is in clause 7(2)(c)(iv).

The member asked about my own expectations. The board is expected to operate in accordance with functions and objectives, and that includes the recognition of the importance of volunteers to the operation of the railway. The bill does empower the minister, whether that is me or a future minister, to request that the board provide information relating to the performance of its functions under the act. That means that the minister of the day can request information on whether the board is performing its functions in regard to the benefits of volunteerism, and the Emerald Tourist Railway Board is responsible for the ongoing support, attraction and engagement of all volunteers, including those who might also be members of the Puffing Billy Preservation Society.

I would say to the member that the board already undertakes many activities to support and recognise volunteers, and that will continue in this act in a new guise. At the moment there is a volunteer engagement subcommittee of the board. I would expect that that will continue. There is a volunteer representative group that includes volunteers from all branches of the railway to regularly meet and discuss volunteer matters, and the minutes of those meetings are published on the volunteer resource page of the ETRB volunteer section of the website. There is a weekly notice and monthly newsletter that goes to all volunteers.

In February of this year, so just a month ago, the board hosted a Puffing Billy Railway volunteer recognition evening at the magnificent new Lakeside visitor centre to recognise volunteers' length of service. We had about 100 volunteers there, and I am sure the member would be pleased to know those 100 volunteers represented about 2100 years of service to the railway, and that was I think appropriately recognised. And of course the ETRB awards gold passes to honour outstanding service to the society. They were previously awarded by the society.

I should just finally add that as a core part of the board's operations it has to outline its plans regarding volunteerism in its strategic plan. I have asked the board to prioritise regular communication and collaborative engagement with volunteers and the society through the 2021–22 statement of expectations, and I can assure the member that as long as I am the minister that will continue to be requested through future statements of expectations.

Mr WELLS: Thank you, Minister. And thank you for allowing this to go into the consideration-in-detail stage. Obviously the effectiveness of our Manager of Opposition Business was very successful. In regard to an answer to a question earlier, you mentioned a letter by Mr Nunan. Is it possible for the opposition to receive a copy of that response to allow us to be able to deal with some of our concerns between the houses? Or do we have that?

Mr PAKULA: You might appreciate that I just needed to check whether there would be any legal reason not to provide it. I can see no reason not to provide it. It is a letter that is now in the hands of the lawyers for the preservation society. So in those circumstances I would just want to check with the lawyers for the preservation society whether they have any issues with privilege—legal privilege, not parliamentary privilege—that would prevent that correspondence from being circulated. But if neither the preservation society nor their lawyers have any issue with that correspondence being provided, then it will be.

Mr WELLS: Thanks, Minister. Obviously one of the big issues has been the relationship between the board and the volunteers, and that has obviously been a theme through some of the concerns that have been raised by the opposition, and you have made some commitments. I am wondering if you would commit to a ministerial review of the relationship between the board and the volunteers after maybe 12 months of the legislation being enacted.

Mr PAKULA: Look, I would say to the honourable member for Rowville that I am not prepared to give a commitment on the run. I think it is well documented that there has been significant to and fro between the board and the preservation society probably over the last four years, since the handing down of the Ombudsman's report. There have been a number of attempts at mediation and intervention by my department, and I and my department have indicated very clearly to the board, through its chair, Mr North, and indeed to the society as well that we would like to see some of those issues resolved. And they are genuine issues. But we are also—and this legislation is a manifestation of that—obligated to implement the recommendations of the Ombudsman's report, and some of those recommendations do create some difficulty for the preservation society. That is something that we recognise. There are also issues in regard to the ownership of assets, and they have been well ventilated between the board and the preservation society.

I do not think it would be appropriate—and I answer this in the good spirit in which I take the question to have been asked—to just make a blind commitment to a review as part of this consideration-in-detail stage. But what I would say to the honourable member is that if a good deal of additional time elapses and matters that are unresolved remain unresolved, then I think it would stand to reason that other interventions and other approaches might become necessary. I would be very hopeful that those matters can be resolved amicably, and certainly it would be the government's hope that relationships between the board and the preservation society—which I would not characterise as bad; these are just difficult issues—can be such that those matters can be resolved. I would not want to rule out what the member requests, but I also would not want to provide him with a blank cheque.

Clause agreed to; clause 2 agreed to.

Clause 3 (16:18)

Ms McLEISH: I just note in the definitions that we have been provided there is not a definition of the rail corridor. When I asked during the briefing about the rail corridor—what that extended to, where that was—the department had a lot of difficulty, and I thank Sarah Wilson from your office for actually going and getting that to me. I did wonder whether in this section it would not be wise to include a definition of the rail corridor. I also want to note that under the definitions we have got the preservation society. We note that that is their own company limited by guarantee. And I guess the land is owned by them—and we have touched on this—and the assets are owned by them, and we will probably explore that a little bit later. But I want to note that definition. But also 'Puffing Billy Railway' does include 'any land vested in or owned, leased or managed by the board' and 'rail infrastructure', so other assets. So my concern is, and I guess the main concern of the society is, how that definition actually impacts on their ownership and their ownership of freehold land and ownership of assets.

Mr PAKULA: I am about to make a bald statement, but let me just check before I do.

It is always nice to confirm that you are right. It does not impact on their ownership. It does not transfer assets or anything of that nature. The bill does define the railway as:

any land vested in or owned, leased or managed by the Board; and

any rail infrastructure, facilities or rolling stock owned, leased or managed by the Board ...

There is a broad definition because we have to ensure that all of the land and infrastructure of the railway is captured, and that is a reflection of the fact that the railway is broader than just the track and the rolling stock itself—for example, it includes the Lakeside visitor centre. It reflects the broad responsibility of the board for all of the actions taking place on that land and the infrastructure that is managed by the board, and that includes maintaining safety. I understand that the society believes that the definition of 'Puffing Billy Railway' is problematic because it does not specifically define the narrow-gauge railway and the rolling stock and it does include infrastructure outside of the railway corridor, but if we provided a very narrow definition of 'Puffing Billy Railway', I would suggest the

unintended consequence of that might be to constrain the scope of the board's activities to not include things like the visitor centre, which I do not think anybody would suggest is sensible.

I understand that the member is going to ask some questions maybe in later clauses regarding the Puffing Billy Preservation Society's land, and I will be happy to deal with them then.

Clause agreed to; clauses 4 and 5 agreed to.

Clause 6 (16:21)

Ms McLEISH: I notice the first objective of the board is to ensure the economic sustainability and viability of the railway—some of the issues that I will canvass actually relate to the skills required of the board members—and I am after the minister's confidence, I suppose, in the board being able to do that. I have got before me documents obtained through FOI from 2018–19 to date, and it appears that the government has provided \$35 million to the Emerald Tourist Railway Board and there was an additional \$5.5 million from the commonwealth. Now, some of that was for infrastructure funding. But I was concerned that in the 2019–20 budget there were a lot of ongoing solvency things, and I do not believe that was just related to COVID, because the budget prior to that had a \$4.89 million commitment as well. I am just concerned that they have had so many handouts from the government through different means, whether that be through the Department of Environment, Land, Water and Planning or Visit Victoria or the Department of Transport, and the importance of being sustainable is something that the volunteers are particularly worried about, as I guess are most people.

Mr PAKULA: I thank the member for Eildon for her question. I would say to her, and I will say this very clearly: prior to the pandemic Emerald Tourist Railway Board—Puffing Billy—was financially sustainable. What I just checked with my department was whether any of the support provided pre pandemic was for ongoing to keep them solvent—it was not; it was for projects. We did of course provide support to the Emerald Tourist Railway Board throughout the pandemic. I made some comments early on in the pandemic which referred to a number of tourism assets that I thought all Victorians would imagine are critical to support and maintain throughout any downtime, and Puffing Billy clearly is one of them. It is something that everybody expected to see come through the other side of the pandemic, and we provided support to enable it to do so. It has been very gratifying that Puffing Billy has been able to maintain its operations throughout this very, very difficult period. We do believe and expect that, as we come out of COVID and as domestic, interstate and international visitors return, it will return to its position of financial sustainability that it had before the pandemic, and that is reflected in the legislation. It should not be taken by anyone, whether it be the opposition, the volunteers or indeed the society, to suggest that this government, or indeed any government, would allow Puffing Billy—and the extraordinary history that it represents—to be left to its own devices should it require the support of government sometime in the future.

Ms McLEISH: Thank you, Minister, for your response. Just continuing on with the objectives, there have been a number of suggestions put to me that I want to put to the minister with regard to potential rewording. We are having a look at objectives, and clause 6(b) is about 'maintaining the heritage significance'; I am wondering whether or not the minister would be open to 'maintaining and developing the heritage significance'. Equally clause 6(i) could be 'to develop and maintain harmonious relations between the board, volunteers and the community'. Would those suggestions be something that the minister would be willing to consider?

Mr PAKULA: Well, as I understand what is being put to me by the honourable member, she references 6(i)—and what was the other one, sorry?

Ms McLeish: 6(b).

Mr PAKULA: 6(b). I think the honourable member would understand that it would not be good or common practice for any minister at the dispatch box during consideration in detail to commit to changes to legislation before the house. What I would say to the honourable member is that I believe

the legislation as it is currently drafted would have the same effect as the effect that she would seek or that those who have been in contact with her would seek as part of any change to the legislation. I believe that the practice of the board has been to do those things in any case, and the government is satisfied with the legislation in its current form.

Clause agreed to.

Clause 7 (16:27)

Ms McLEISH: Minister, you previously said when the member for Rowville was on his feet, after he sat down, that you would not describe the relationship as bad, but ‘just having some difficult issues’. I think that is probably understating it because the atmosphere I am told out there is really quite toxic, and clause 7(1)(a) and (b) really lead to part of that relationship. I appreciate that you have already spoken considerably about your expectations and some of the systems and processes that are already in place to deal with this, but at the heart of the issue very clearly is the operation, management and maintenance of the assets, particularly those that are integral to the day-to-day running but are owned by the society. Their main concerns, certainly as you can see, are that they may be stripped of those assets, whether or not there will be any compulsory acquisition of those assets and whether or not they will be required to go to court, because the worst thing that can happen in this instance and what could drive a wedge even further between the board and the society is an ugly court case. The preservation society are very keen to understand that they will not be stripped of all that they have worked for from 1955 and what they have owned—and they own a significant asset portfolio, as you will be aware—that this will not be stripped from them. I think you would agree that would be for them the most devastating thing that could happen.

Mr PAKULA: I thank the honourable member for Eildon for her question. In some respects she goes to the heart of some of the issues between the board and the preservation society, and I would ask the honourable member to appreciate that in my position I have an obligation to the state to not put the state or its representatives, in this case the board, in a disadvantageous position in what are very difficult negotiations—and negotiations which are integral to the ongoing management of the railway.

When we are in an environment where there is ongoing communication and engagement between the board and the society, where my department and I have encouraged both the board and the society to continue that engagement and if necessary to engage an independent mediator to help resolve those issues and where we have endeavoured to agree on an MOU to formalise the relationship between the board and the society—and I should say to the honourable member that there is a draft of that MOU which is currently with the society for feedback and review—what I am not going to do is tie the hands of the board by making a commitment in advance.

What I will say is that there is no intention to seize or compulsorily acquire the assets of the Puffing Billy Preservation Society. What I could not do, what it would not be prudent for me to do and what would completely fetter the board in those discussions would be to give an absolute carte blanche forever guarantee about those things, because it would then diminish the negotiating position of the board and, I would respectfully suggest to the honourable member, it would diminish the incentive for the society to engage in good faith in those discussions. So there is no intention. Nobody wants to see it get to that point—not the board, not the government, not the society and I am sure not the opposition. There is no intention for it to get to that point, but if the society wants an absolute commitment that it can never occur, that is not something I am in a position to give.

Mr WELLS: Along the same lines, Minister, is there a possibility where the volunteers have done fundraising to buy a particular asset or maybe a parcel of land that through negotiations that would remain with the society and not come under the control of the board?

Mr PAKULA: I thank the honourable member for Rowville for his question. Look, I would say to him that at this point in the negotiations a number of things are possible. It might be that parcels of land remain within the ownership of the society and there is a lease arrangement. It might be that they

agree to sell for an agreed price. There are a number of potential outcomes if people operate in good faith, and if the member's question is, 'Is one of the potential outcomes that parcels of land remain in the same ownership structure as they are in at the moment?', yes, that is one of the potential outcomes provided other arrangements can be arrived at.

Ms STALEY: I would just like to ask the minister in relation to the ownership of the various assets within the rail corridor, including the rolling stock: do you have a table of who owns what?

Mr PAKULA: Not with me.

Ms STALEY: Can you provide it?

Mr PAKULA: Well, I understand that the board has generated that table and it has been provided to the society, so I suspect it might be in the hands of someone opposite.

Ms Staley: So that is a no?

The DEPUTY SPEAKER: I just remind members: if you have spoken twice, it is by leave next time.

Clause agreed to.

Clause 8 (16:35)

Ms McLEISH: I think that we have probably discussed this already in some detail, but it is about the board being able to enter into an agreement, contract or lease et cetera. This comes back to clause 27 as well. I think that there were concerns about the board being able to grant a lease over land that is owned by the society.

Mr PAKULA: I am sorry, I am not sure what the question is.

Ms McLEISH: The question is: the society owns particular parcels of land—rolling stock; can the board enter into a lease or an agreement with somebody else over that?

Mr PAKULA: I thank the member for her question. There is nothing substantive in clause 8 which changes existing powers in regard to leaseholds, but I am advised that the board would not be in a position to grant a lease or a licence or an easement over land that it manages that is owned by the society. There might be a lease with South East Water, but it is unclear. That goes back so long that it is unclear what the pre-existing situation was when that lease was given.

Clause agreed to; clause 9 agreed to.

Clause 10 (16:38)

Ms McLEISH: With regard to the appointment of directors to the board, clause 10(2), and the collective skills, knowledge and experience that they have, one of the things that I have noticed—just being able to have a look at what has been published about the skills of the current board and what has also been brought to my attention—is that it does appear that there is a little bit of a lack around heritage preservation, operation and safety of railways and in particular economic development and also a lack of those who really understand the history of the rail and train heritage. Has the minister committed, within that change of the board's skills mix, that those sorts of things will now be reviewed with the current skills matrix, which I assume the minister has possibly seen, to identify and ascertain that each of those nine areas listed are currently met by the board and maybe that new people will come on?

Mr PAKULA: Well, the answer is: possibly. The honourable member for Eildon would probably be aware that there was—I will be delicate here—at least a director with particular rail industry experience who was required to depart from the board for reasons that I think members are aware of. That has left a bit of a gap. As I am advised, the board currently has six members. The act provides for a maximum of 10. Scope exists for additional directors to be added to the board to augment the

current skills and experiences of the board, and that is something that as minister I will give consideration to.

Ms McLEISH: Further to the appointment of directors, what provisions exist to ensure that no other organisations, such as a tourist heritage railway or other community organisations or a government department, can acquire more than the two board positions? As you know, at the moment the society has board positions. They have to have not been a member for 12 months. I guess the question is: why is that the case in this instance when there are other, say, tourism bodies that are around that might want to have representation or be represented on that—that they are not limited in the same way?

Mr PAKULA: I thank the honourable member for her question and indicate that those other tourism bodies, whilst there might not be a statutory limit, are not currently represented on the board in a way that would be in excess of what might be available to former members of the preservation society. But the simple answer to the member's question is that that specific provision is a direct consequence of the Ombudsman's report and a direct consequence of the governance failings under the old legislative framework that was found to exist. It does not, as the member correctly identifies, completely prohibit society representation on the board in that the bill permits up to two current non-elected members or members who have concluded their membership of the society more than 12 months ago, but the Ombudsman did find that there were some substantial governance failings that facilitated offending. I do not want to overstate that or to attribute any of those failings to existing persons, but I think when the government is provided with a report in the form that it was, it has a responsibility to implement that appropriately, and that is what we say this bill does.

Clause agreed to; clause 11 agreed to.

Clause 12 (16:43)

Ms McLEISH: I am interested with regard to the terms and conditions and the length of appointment. A director can hold office for three years, and they are eligible for reappointment, but I am advised that there are no limitations beyond that, so it would be quite easy for someone to stay 21 or 35 years. I am curious as to why there is no upper limit on how many terms a director can serve.

Mr PAKULA: I am happy to be proven wrong by members opposite, but my appreciation of most of the boards that I have responsibility for is that whilst there is an unstated application of decent corporate governance principles which would normally suggest that board members should not serve more than 10 to 12 years, they do not typically have a legislative prohibition on that or a legislative maximum number of terms. Now, some government boards might, but I think typically they do not, and in that regard this bill is unremarkable. I would simply say to the honourable member that that is really something that is down to ministers and Governor in Council, as advised by ministers, about to what extent a board member who is a long-serving board member ought to have their term extended. In most circumstances ministers from both sides of this chamber have, I think, applied those corporate governance principles responsibly and ensured that in general board members do not serve for decades and decades on end. But at the end of the day, that is a matter for the minister of the day to advise Governor in Council.

Clause agreed to; clauses 13 to 20 agreed to.

Clause 21 (16:46)

Ms McLEISH: I was just actually remembering—and this is possibly where I could bring this up—that with conflicts of interest there is no restriction on the appointments of, as we were discussing just previously about members as directors, employees to be directors. I would think that if an employee is not ruled out of the board—an employee of the Puffing Billy Railway—and if they can also be a director, that would be a conflict of interest. Is that the minister's understanding?

Mr PAKULA: I would say to the honourable member that in this regard this board would be treated no differently to other boards inasmuch as you expect your boards, whatever they are, to manage their conflicts of interest. Sometimes, whether it is on a government board or on a corporate board, conflicts of interest, given that directors often have a multitude of interests, are difficult to avoid, but they are able to be managed. To give you an example, a director could conceivably also be a director of a food and beverage company to which an organisation might contract, and you expect your board's governance procedures and practices to be able to deal with and manage those conflicts of interest. Obviously at the base level you expect any conflicts to be declared. You then expect those conflicts to be appropriately managed. Sometimes that requires a director to absent themselves from any room when decisions are made and for that to be properly minuted.

The bill that we have before us actually introduces a stronger conflict-of-interest provision compared to those general practices to further minimise the risk of governance issues as a direct consequence of the Ombudsman's report, and so to that extent I am satisfied. I understand that the member has sought a specific opinion from me about whether a conflict would be created by an employee becoming a director; that would be a matter that the board would have to manage through their conflict-of-interest provisions, and I am quite confident that, certainly under the chairmanship of Mr North, they will be able to do that quite well.

Ms McLEISH: Thank you, Minister, for your response. Just with regard to clause 21(2), with regard to a director who is or was in the previous 12 months a member of the society having to disclose that to the board, why was it necessary to include that clause?

Mr PAKULA: Well, I would say to the honourable member: simply because of the provision elsewhere in the bill that indicates that membership of the society within the previous 12 months would be sufficient to effectively disbar someone from membership of the board.

Clause agreed to; clause 22 agreed to.

Clause 23 (16:50)

Ms McLEISH: With regard to the appointment of the CEO—this is clause 23(2)(b)—they:

... must not be—

...

a person who is, or was within the previous 12 months, a member of the Puffing Billy ... Society.

Given that the members of the society have all varieties of backgrounds—some have corporate backgrounds and very successful corporate backgrounds, others may be tradies, a huge variety—why would that be specifically there, that they cannot have been a member? Because when a position is advertised and they are a member and they think 'I could be that CEO', they will have to resign, and they still cannot do it for 12 months. And they are not necessarily going to know when that position is going to come up.

Mr PAKULA: I thank the honourable member for her question, and I appreciate the complexity that that provision might provide for someone who aspires to be CEO of the board if that person is a current member of the society. I would simply indicate to the honourable member that that prohibition aligns with other provisions in the bill. Those other provisions are specifically designed—again, consequent to the recommendations of the Ombudsman in her report—to provide greater separation between the board and the management of the railway and the society.

I think the member would appreciate I have tried my best to be delicate about this, but the Ombudsman's report did find quite specifically that the previous close relationship between management, the board and the society was in part responsible for the governance failings of the board and some of the things that occurred as a consequence of that. I understand that it may at some point in the future create a fetter for a member of the society that might see themselves as a potential CEO.

It may be an unfortunate by-product of implementing those recommendations, but we would say it is a necessary one.

Clause agreed to; clauses 24 to 32 agreed to.

Clause 33 (16:52)

Ms STALEY: I want to ask about the concept of having a rail corridor plan that is reportable to the minister. I ask the minister this in the context of clauses 29 to 32, which are the usual clauses for requiring a strategic plan to go to the minister for approval, which many boards have, and they have risk management, so that to me seems a very normal structure. But then we get to clause 33, which has this additional requirement not so much for simply the creation of the rail corridor plan but for it to be ticked off by the minister. So I am querying: what was the thinking of government in creating this additional ministerial oversight?

Mr PAKULA: I thank the member for Ripon for her indulgence. My advice is that she is correct in regard to the normalcy of ministers requiring specific information about incidents, risks, strategic plans and the like. This additional obligation—I cannot indicate one way or the other to the honourable member whether that is a change to current practice, but I can provide her with that information while the bill is between the houses—is primarily and simply designed to ensure that the minister of the day is provided with clear information from the board about how they are managing particularly the safety matters that relate to the rail corridor specifically.

Ms STALEY: I thank the minister for his answer. In light of his answer I ask, and it goes to the question I asked earlier around the different ownership of various parts of the rail corridor and the assets: would it be the minister's intention that this report would divide up its setting out? The bill says:

A rail corridor plan must set out how the rail infrastructure, facilities and rolling stock ...

Will that be set out in terms of its ownership so we can see that each of those aspects is being attended to appropriately?

Mr PAKULA: I thank the honourable member for her question. I cannot say to her specifically the form a report would take, but I would say logic and I think the normal expectation of both the board and the minister would be that as a report that describes matters in the rail corridor, as a matter of course if some parts of that corridor are not owned by the board, it should make that clear.

Ms STALEY: Okay. Thank you.

Clause agreed to; clauses 34 and 35 agreed to.

Clause 36 (16:57)

Ms McLEISH: The minister previously referred to correspondence from the Emerald Village Association, which I do not think I have seen. I certainly have had correspondence from individuals but not from the association. Matters that were raised with me were about the notification that is going to be provided to them, whether there will be prior consultation and whether, if there is the need for an objection, there are mechanisms in place that they will be able to use without finding out that the trees have all come down or this has happened or that has happened and they are the last to find out and there may have been an alternative way to do that reduction that could have been required.

Mr PAKULA: I thank the honourable member for her question. I would indicate to her that I think the key element of this is clause 36(1); all the rest of it follows. It only applies if:

... any tree or wood in the vicinity of a railway track forming part of the ... Railway poses a risk to the safety of any person on or using the railway track.

Given this is about removal of material that may pose a risk to safety, it is not envisaged that that would necessarily involve prior consultation, because sometimes that is just not an option if safety is involved. The bill does not require the board to notify owners or occupiers, but the board may do so.

But I would indicate quite transparently to the honourable member that the bill does not make that a requirement.

Ms McLEISH: Thank you, Minister. I will certainly make sure that those residents understand and know that, and likewise the volunteers. It was something that they were quite concerned about as well.

I think that pretty well wraps everything up. I would like to thank the minister for the opportunity to go into consideration in detail here because I was able to put a lot of questions forward and have them adequately answered. I know members of the society have tuned in to this and will appreciate, I think, how we have gone about this in good faith.

Mr PAKULA: I concur.

The DEPUTY SPEAKER: The time set down for consideration of items on the government business program has arrived, and I am required to interrupt business. The house is considering the Puffing Billy Railway Bill 2022 in detail. The question is:

That clause 36 stand part of the bill.

Clause agreed to; clauses 37 to 47 agreed to.

Bill agreed to without amendment.

Third reading

Motion agreed to.

Read third time.

The DEPUTY SPEAKER: The bill will now be sent to the Legislative Council and their agreement requested.

**JUSTICE LEGISLATION AMENDMENT (FINES REFORM AND OTHER MATTERS)
BILL 2022**

Second reading

Debate resumed on motion of Ms HUTCHINS:

That this bill be now read a second time.

Motion agreed to.

Read second time.

Third reading

Motion agreed to.

Read third time.

The SPEAKER: The bill will now be sent to the Legislative Council and their agreement requested.

GAMBLING AND LIQUOR LEGISLATION AMENDMENT BILL 2022

Second reading

Debate resumed on motion of Ms HORNE:

That this bill be now read a second time.

Motion agreed to.

Read second time.

Third reading

Motion agreed to.

Read third time.

The SPEAKER: The bill will now be sent to the Legislative Council and their agreement requested.

Business interrupted under sessional orders.

Adjournment

The SPEAKER: The question is:

That the house now adjourns.

SWAN HILL BRIDGE

Mr WALSH (Murray Plains) (17:01): (6296) My adjournment matter tonight is for the Minister for Roads and Road Safety, and it concerns the proposed new bridge in Swan Hill.

Ms Allan: New bridge in Swan Hill?

Mr WALSH: The new bridge in Swan Hill.

Ms Allan: A new bridge.

Mr WALSH: The new bridge. The people of the wider Swan Hill district, including the current Swan Hill Rural City Council, are extremely concerned that after more than 40 years of campaigning, pleading and fighting for a new bridge and with \$60 million in funding being allocated by the federal government three years ago the project has stalled. There is some urgency with this issue, and the action I seek from the minister is that he receive a delegation with me—the mayor of Swan Hill rural city, Jade Benham, and the two councillors, Bill Moar and Les McPhee, who were both previous mayors—at the next sitting week, so that they can come down and they can meet with the minister and actually brief him on the concerns that they have on how this project has stalled.

The Swan Hill new bridge is a project that is now managed by Transport for New South Wales. It was previously managed by the Department of Transport here in Victoria. Option 9A was chosen a number of years ago. That has now been scrapped, and a new alignment, the McCallum Street option, has been approved by both councils on each side of the river, the Murray River Council and the Swan Hill Rural City Council. The two road authorities have agreed to that alignment. Nearly \$6 million of the \$60 million from the federal government has been drawn down to do some preliminary designs and to do the business case for the bridge, but because of some restructures that are happening in the transport department in Victoria, the Swan Hill Rural City Council is very concerned that there is no one to talk to to actually progress the issue and make sure there is good dialogue going on with the New South Wales department of transport to progress this particular issue.

And there is also an overlaying issue around the heritage of the bridge, in that it is heritage listed. Heritage New South Wales had agreed to shift the heritage listing from the Swan Hill bridge to the Tooleybuc Bridge, which is a bridge of similar construction with Allan trusses on it—he was the engineer that built those bridges 150 years ago. The small part of the bridge that is on the Victorian land, the abutment on the Victorian side, is actually listed by Heritage Victoria. Heritage Victoria is being difficult about actually having that heritage value transferred, and I seek an opportunity to talk to the minister about that.

NARRE WARREN SOUTH ELECTORATE YOUTH MENTAL HEALTH

Mr MAAS (Narre Warren South) (17:04): (6297) The adjournment matter I wish to raise is for the attention of the Minister for Mental Health and concerns youth mental health. The action I seek is that the minister provide further information on how the Andrews Labor government is supporting the

mental health of young people in my electorate of Narre Warren South. For many years seeking help was seen as a sign of weakness, and people were encouraged to either just get over it or even to just suck it up. Thankfully times are changing, and there is a recognition that many in our community need mental health support and specialised services to get them through their difficult times. It is especially hard for our youth, who have limited world experience and coping mechanisms to deal with everything they are facing, often for the first time. Growing up can be hard, as we all know, and mental health issues are another challenge in their daily lives.

That is why the state government is investing \$3.8 billion in our mental health system and implementing every single recommendation from the Royal Commission into Victoria's Mental Health System. The stakes are of course very high, as there is no doubt specialised services are needed to make sure our children and teenagers get the help they need through school initiatives and community services, including suicide prevention programs. I would appreciate any further information that the minister could provide on the supports for youth mental health in my electorate, and I look forward to sharing the minister's response with my community.

MANSFIELD KINDERGARTEN

Ms McLEISH (Eildon) (17:05): (6298) My adjournment matter this evening is for the Minister for Early Childhood, and the action I seek is for the minister to ensure additional funding is provided to complete the Mansfield Kindergarten redevelopment project. The Mansfield Kindergarten is actually somewhere that I have visited a number of times, and I have watched the committee and the staff really get behind the growth that is happening in the town and try to work out the best option for children going forward, and they have had a project on the go since 2018.

I do want to provide a little bit of background here, because the population in Mansfield has really grown. Even though it only grows by a few hundred thousand every year, it is still growing. What I have seen is a lot of younger families and children coming in. So they have had the growth over the past 18 months—3.5 per cent. Going forward the forecast is 2.2, but that is the second highest behind Wodonga. This project though, similar to many projects in the state, has hit a little bit of a hurdle with the increased costs. They have been very appreciative of the support that the government has given and the support that the council has given with regard to this project, but there has been an unprecedented cost escalation in the construction industry in the last 24 months. And as has happened with other projects, this has put upward pressure on the outcome of what they can get for the funding that has been made available. Now, this is a three-part project. There is the addition of a third teaching space, an update to existing buildings and the restoration of the mechanics institute building. They are offering three- and four-year-old kinder classes and after-kinder care, but this all requires more space as the numbers increase. So I guess at the moment they are very concerned that this project is in jeopardy because of these increased construction costs, and they would very much like to be able to get enough to complete that, because the cost of going back to the architects and to everybody to get it redrafted is probably going to be equivalent to what is needed. You know, you are just eating into that base cost. So I would really appreciate it if the minister could look favourably on increased funding for the Mansfield Kindergarten project.

ELECTRIC VEHICLES

Mr KENNEDY (Hawthorn) (17:08): (6299) My adjournment matter is for the Minister for Energy, Environment and Climate Change, and the action I seek is for the minister to give an update on how the government is encouraging and supporting the uptake of electric vehicles in Hawthorn. I trust that we all saw the recent IPCC report, which details the brief and rapidly closing window that we have to avoid the catastrophic events of climate change. My own constituents have regularly contacted my office and me about this issue and I have frequently met with local environmental groups. I am sure we have all seen the massive global protests and the wider movement calling for climate action, and these calls are especially strong in Hawthorn. Our student community around Swinburne University has been especially vocal in fighting for their future, and these young people serve to remind us of just

how important this issue is. However, it is people from all walks of life, young and old, from tradies to teachers, who continue to fight for meaningful climate action.

I am proud to be part of a government that just recently announced plans to make Victoria an offshore wind giant by 2032, when 1.5 million homes will be powered by renewable energy. Indeed it is now the state governments around Australia taking the lead on this vital issue in the absence of meaningful federal action. The transition to electric vehicles is an integral part of this progress, as transport emissions make up 17.6 per cent of our greenhouse gas emissions. The Andrews government has made concrete commitments to combat climate change and increase the uptake of electric vehicles. We are going to reduce greenhouse emissions by 28 to 33 per cent by 2025 and 45 to 50 per cent by 2030, eventually reaching net zero by 2050. More than 25 per cent of our electricity already comes from renewable sources, and we have invested \$1.6 billion in clean energy and energy efficiency in the 2020 Victorian budget. These goals, with the funding and policy to back them up, show we are a government dedicated to combating climate change. I look forward to the minister's response.

SHEPPARTON ELECTORATE MULTICULTURAL COMMUNITIES

Ms SHEED (Shepparton) (17:10): (6300) My adjournment is to the Minister for Multicultural Affairs, and the action I seek is that she visit Shepparton to meet with multicultural groups and leaders in the Shepparton community. As the minister knows, Shepparton has a long, proud history of multiculturalism, where people from across the world have come together as refugees or migrants to make it their home. Whether it be our more recent arrivals from African nations or the Middle East or going back to earlier decades when Greek, Italian, Albanian and Turkish communities came to Australia and chose Shepparton district as their home, the community has welcomed them. We have a range of cultural events at the Shepparton Festival currently, where dancers, singers and performers from different cultures display their talents. We have food festivals like the St Georges Road Food Festival and the Shepparton Albanian Harvest Festival, which was on just last week.

As well as these many cultural events that we all enjoy and welcome back after cancellations in 2020 and 2021, our multicultural communities are making great strides in lifting one another up in a professional and business opportunity sense. There is a multicultural women's group forming with a spotlight on what it really means to back one another and form a solid sisterhood, not just in friendship but in enhancing careers and employment opportunities for all women. I am excited to share a bit more about this project when it launches next week. We have many organisations, such as the Shepparton ethnic council, St Paul's African House and Philippine House, to name just a few.

We saw the huge team effort our community made during the severe COVID-19 outbreak last year, which landed a third of our population in isolation. Our community was quick to get on their feet and ready to care for every culture when it came to translation services, culturally appropriate food and whatever services were needed in that time of emergency. It was wonderful to see every nationality volunteering to deliver food and medicine to families in isolation and helping in whatever way they could. It showed what a great community Shepparton is and how we get the job done.

I would like the minister to come and meet with some of these groups and leaders to see firsthand the progress we are making as a community and to see if she can offer any assistance to help them keep up their fantastic work, because there is always more to be done.

COBURG LIBRARY

Ms BLANDTHORN (Pascoe Vale) (17:12): (6301) My adjournment matter is for the Minister for Local Government in the other place, and the action I seek is that he join me on a visit to the Coburg Library to see firsthand the benefit of nearly \$100 000 of investment in making the Coburg Library more accessible, particularly in relation to the bathroom facilities. The libraries in our communities—all of our communities, and mine is no different—are absolutely a cornerstone from the early years, from the children's sections and the wonderful Rhymetime programs and other children's services offered by libraries like Coburg, through to the services that our libraries provide for our

neighbourhood houses and our adult learning communities as well as the accessible resources in their computer facilities and other resources that libraries have on offer. Our libraries are absolutely fundamental to our communities, and my community is no different. Our government has also invested around \$750 000 in the new library in Glenroy, which will be co-located with the new children's centre in Glenroy and a range of other services, including community health. We are certainly investing in our libraries. I am really proud of the investment that our government has made in the Coburg Library, and I would like the minister to join me to visit that library.

FOREST HILL ELECTORATE SCHOOLS FUNDING

Mr ANGUS (Forest Hill) (17:14): (6302) I raise a matter of importance for the attention of the Minister for Education. The action I seek is for the minister to ensure there is funding included in the forthcoming state budget to fund the desperately needed infrastructure improvements that are required at many of the schools in the Forest Hill district. The demand for school places within the various very successful schools in the Forest Hill district continues unabated. Sadly, however, the infrastructure has not kept pace nor kept up to date with the growth that has been expressed locally. As a result, there are numerous local schools that have buildings and facilities which are just not fit for purpose.

I have raised the needs of my local schools many times in this place since being elected. Thankfully over the years there has been some funding to make improvements at some of the schools; however, there is still much more that needs to be done.

Fantastic local schools like Vermont Primary School, Highvale Primary School, Camelot Rise Primary School, Livingstone Primary School, Orchard Grove Primary School, Vermont Secondary College and Forest Hill College, just to mention a few, are all in great need of funding to bring their facilities up to standard. Members of these school communities continue to contact me to express their concerns about the condition of the buildings and facilities at their schools. They are desperately seeking support to have the facilities brought up to current standards and improve the schooling experience for their children.

Minister, I note that the government likes to refer to Victoria as the Education State, so ensuring the school facilities available for students in the Forest Hill district are up to standard should be a priority for the government. Thus I look forward to receiving a positive answer from you with money provided in the budget so I can convey this to my constituents and the various school communities and others who have contacted me about this very important local issue.

SICK PAY GUARANTEE

Ms SULEYMAN (St Albans) (17:16): (6303) My adjournment matter is for the Minister for Workplace Safety in the other place. The action that I seek is for the minister to provide me with an update on how the Victorian sick pay guarantee will benefit the many working families across the electorate of St Albans. I know that in my electorate and across the west in particular we have many people with a high reliance on casual and insecure work. I welcome the government's program of five-day sick and carers pay for casual and contract workers, a truly groundbreaking, innovative way forward for families right across the state and a first for this nation. The \$245.6 million scheme will mean that over 150 workers in Victoria will be able to access the safety net that they need so that they can take time off when they are sick or take care of their loved ones when they need it most. Whether it is hospitality, cleaning or security workers, the front line in our fight with the pandemic, everyone deserves the dignity that fair work, pay and conditions provide.

I know that in my electorate families, without this sick pay guarantee, oftentimes are having to choose between attending work or staying back when they are sick, because it is about juggling the challenges of paying the rent or a mortgage and paying the bills. I know for a fact that in my electorate there is high reliance on whether it be hospitality, cleaning or contract work, and there really needs to be some stability for these workers. It would be good for families, and I think it would also ease some of the challenges and pressures in those particular types of employment.

We know that the last few years have created a tremendous challenge for working families, including contract workers and casual workers, through the insecurity of these workplaces. In particular, with the last two years of the pandemic, we need to make sure that Victorian workers and families have security. Even though it is a small blanket, it is a blanket that is needed by some of the families that are most vulnerable and who depend on day-to-day pay to get through the week. So I look forward to the minister's response on this very important program for my community in St Albans.

TRARALGON BYPASS

Mr D O'BRIEN (Gippsland South) (17:19): (6304) My adjournment matter this evening is for the Minister for Roads and Road Safety, and I seek from him an update and indeed progress on the Traralgon bypass on the Princes Highway. This is an issue of interest particularly to my constituents in the Wellington shire, beyond Traralgon, and no doubt to those of the member for Gippsland East as well, further along the road. The government provided \$1.4 million for planning of this bypass in 2017, although that is the latest in a long list of planning. This has been planned, I reckon, since the late 1980s—

Mr Richardson interjected.

Mr D O'BRIEN: When I was a wee lad, member for Mordialloc, the Traralgon bypass was an issue that was being talked about. But so far that is all that has been done—it has been talked about. It is an issue that needs to be addressed.

I count 10 sets of traffic lights in Traralgon. There will soon be, I believe, an 11th, at the golf course, across the railway line there, because even though that was something that was funded by this government apparently in the budget four years ago, it still has not happened, and it is now being funded by the federal government. So that will make it 11 sets of traffic lights through Traralgon from west to east, and it has become a congestion issue. While I appreciate that there may be some businesses in town, in Traralgon itself, that will be concerned about a bypass, I actually think Traralgon itself would benefit, because there is such congestion in there now. But certainly those motorists travelling beyond Traralgon would benefit immensely from the bypass.

There are concerns, I understand, about the bypass. The planned route would go close to the Loy Yang mine, and I believe according to the Regional Roads Victoria website there are some concerns or some issues about how the mine is going to be rehabilitated. That mine is scheduled not to be rehabilitated for decades yet, so we cannot simply keep using that as an excuse. We do actually need to get on with this project in a safe manner, in a manner that can ensure that the bypass will be in a good location and not subject to subsidence or any other issues as a result of the mine. But we do need to address that.

I know that the Traralgon community and Latrobe City Council also would like to see some accommodation of flood mitigation on the Traralgon Creek, so potentially the bypass could include some sort of flood mitigation as well. The Traralgon Creek is a regular problem in terms of flooding for the people of Traralgon. I have been saying for some time to people that we need to get the duplication of the highway between Traralgon and Sale done first, but that is now finally happening and well underway, so I think we now should be moving to what the next big job on the Princes Highway east is, and that is going to be the Traralgon bypass. So I would like to get an update on where the planning is at from the minister but, more importantly, actually start to progress this and get funding underway, get a final route confirmed and ensure that we do get that town bypassed.

MORDIALLOC ELECTORATE LEVEL CROSSING REMOVALS

Mr RICHARDSON (Mordialloc) (17:22): (6305) My adjournment this evening is to the Minister for Transport Infrastructure, and the action I seek is for the minister to update my community on the progress of the Parkdale level crossing removal open space advisory panel, including the time frames for the release of the first conceptual designs for the new Parkdale station, level crossing removals and open space.

It was in July last year that the Victorian government announced the removal of 10 further level crossings as part of an economic stimulus package to support local jobs and transform our community for the future. This will include 85 level crossing removals by 2025, including the dangerous and congested level crossings at Warrigal Road and Parkers Road in Parkdale. To date the Andrews Labor government has removed 58 level crossings, which is substantially further ahead than we anticipated with the commitment of 50 level crossing removals by 2022, and this amazingly includes 16 level crossing removals on the Frankston train line and the building of several new stations.

In and around my community we have seen a new train station at Cheltenham and the removal of the Charman Road and Park Road crossings; a new station at Mentone and the removal of the Balcombe Road level crossing; a new station at Edithvale and the removal of the Edithvale Road and Lochiel Avenue crossings; a new station in Chelsea, the removal of the Swanpool Avenue, Chelsea Road and Argyle Avenue crossings and a new road bridge connection at Thames Promenade; a new station at Bonbeach and the removal of the Bondi Road crossing; and a new Carrum station, the removal of the Station Street and Eel Race Road crossings and a new road connection at McLeod Road.

The Andrews Labor government has delivered generational change and improvements to our region, creating thousands of jobs and making our communities safer, and it is incredible to think that in just over two years time Parkdale will be level crossing free after its train station was built back 100 years ago and surrounded by road connections. These two level crossings at Parkers Road and Warrigal Road take 20 000 vehicle movements each and every day on average. The boom gates are down for 44 minutes during peak times for the 34 trains that go through, and with the Metro Tunnel opening up in 2025 this will see substantially more train services coming through the area.

As part of the Parkdale level crossing removals the open space advisory panel was recently appointed. It is made up of local residents around the Parkdale community. The community members will contribute ideas and feedback on the design, the new open spaces and the broad range of community perspectives to be considered and share that project information and those updates with our community. These designs and spaces will be developed in conjunction with the panel and with the ongoing input from the community. These opportunities are visionary. They include new open space, including trees and landscaping, walking and cycling pathways, playgrounds, recreational spaces, sporting facilities and more parking around the local shops. So I am really keen to understand from the transport infrastructure minister when these early conceptual designs for the Parkdale level crossing, the open spaces and the Parkdale station will be released.

RESPONSES

Ms ALLAN (Bendigo East—Leader of the House, Minister for Transport Infrastructure, Minister for the Suburban Rail Loop) (17:25): Before I respond to the member for Mordialloc's outstanding adjournment contribution on the wonderful work that we are doing on removing level crossings in his community, I actually, on behalf of the Minister for Roads and Road Safety, am able to address the matters raised by the member for Murray Plains and the member for Gippsland South.

I will start with the member for Murray Plains. The member for Murray Plains, as I recall, raised a matter about the bridge in Swan Hill, noting of course that this is a bridge that spans the Murray River and covers the jurisdictions of both Victoria and New South Wales. If I remember correctly, the request from the member to the minister for roads was to meet with him and other councillors from the Swan Hill Rural City Council to discuss the progress of this project. I do have to inform the member that the advice I have is that this is actually a project that is being managed by the New South Wales government, so his request—

Mr Walsh interjected.

Ms ALLAN: very good, very good—for progressing the project is best put to the New South Wales government. For clarity, the Victorian government was very proud to deliver, and it is very close to finishing the delivery of, the Echuca–Moama bridge. Yes, member for Swan Hill, you will get an

invite to the opening. I will be looking forward to telling the story of how the Andrews Labor government delivered the Echuca–Moama bridge project, but I do digress. But I will, consistent with the minister’s request, still inform the minister for roads of that request for a cup of tea with the member for Murray Plains and other councillors from the Rural City of Swan Hill. Or we could save you all a trip and do it on Teams, as we have all become very comfortable and familiar with it.

Now, the member for Gippsland South has popped back in, and I am glad he has, because he also did raise a matter for the Minister for Roads and Road Safety. On my advice I directed him that way, but thanks to the hard work of my office and the work of the minister for roads’ office I also have an update for the member for Gippsland South. As I recall, his request was for an update on the planning work that is going on with the Traralgon bypass. We are very proud of some of the work we are doing in the Gippsland community. I was pleased to see the terrific progress on the Princes Highway east. The two final sections of that duplication are powering ahead—

Mr D O’Brien interjected.

Ms ALLAN: three sections. Yes, thank you. It is just as well I have got the local member here to make sure we are being fully accurate. Now, I am advised that the planning work is being undertaken by Regional Roads Victoria and that there is some advice from Regional Roads Victoria that there is to be some further work done on the rehabilitation options for the Loy Yang mine. Further work on that needs to be undertaken and advice on that work—I think in the member’s contribution you did refer to the proximity of potential alignments to the Loy Yang mine and this has been probably one of the issues that I know for some time has vexed the progress of this project, because it does come through some really challenging terrain and there are the obvious environmental and other issues that need to be considered in the delivery of this project. So there is the need to wait and get the advice on the rehabilitation options for the Loy Yang mine that are better understood and assessed and would then intersect with the completion of the planning work for the Traralgon bypass that would then be undertaken by Regional Roads Victoria. So I hope that information is of some use to the member for Gippsland South.

The member for Mordialloc, as he has just concluded his adjournment, has asked for an update on the open space advisory panel that is being implemented as part of the removal of the dangerous and congested level crossings around the Parkdale community. I would like to really commend the member for Mordialloc. He is a fantastic advocate for the removal of level crossings in his community and indeed along the Frankston line. He has been pretty successful. We are removing 20 level crossings on the Frankston line and 16 of them have already been removed. I know from working closely with the member for Mordialloc he also in turn works very, very closely with his local community and gives me regular reports and updates. This has been our experience at the Edithvale, Chelsea and Bonbeach sites, where we removed the level crossings and opened the new stations last year. He is so dedicated to the removal of level crossings that he even popped over the border of the electorate into the member for Sandringham’s electorate in the last term and worked closely with the Cheltenham and Mentone communities.

It was a bit of a shame the member for Sandringham at the time was not doing that work. He had a different view; he was opposing those works, which is consistent with the Liberal opposition’s view on level crossings. But I digress. We are here to talk about the work at Mentone and Parkdale. Now, the advice we have, as I think is well known in the local community, from our expert engineers is that we are removing the level crossings with a rail bridge. We have done this successfully in many different parts of Melbourne. The great outcome of this is that we are creating two MCGs worth of open space in Parkdale. That is a really valuable space that is being created because we are lifting the rail line and then will be able to develop the space in and around what had previously been a rail corridor. That is why we have established an open space panel. I know the member for Mordialloc is involved in the open space panel, looking at all of those wonderful opportunities that come from planting new trees and landscaping and looking at walking, cycling and other recreational opportunities that can be done there. Also I know parking is important for the local community and

accessibility to the local shops. This is also a great outcome. Whereas the community here has been divided since the train line went in, lifting the rail line unites the community and makes it so much more accessible and easier to move around the Parkdale community. I am pleased to advise the member that the panel had their first meeting late last month and that there is a lot of work also with engineers and architects that will take on the local views and work through the consultation processes, and the concept designs for feedback, I am advised, will be released in the middle of the year. I look forward to working with the member for Mordialloc again on continuing the removal of dangerous and congested level crossings along the Frankston line and specifically in his local community.

Now, by my count there are seven remaining items that various members have raised for ministers for their attention, and they will be referred to those ministers for their action and response.

The SPEAKER: The house now stands adjourned.

House adjourned 5.32 pm until Tuesday, 5 April.