

PARLIAMENT OF VICTORIA

**PARLIAMENTARY DEBATES
(HANSARD)**

LEGISLATIVE ASSEMBLY

FIFTY-NINTH PARLIAMENT

FIRST SESSION

TUESDAY, 3 MAY 2022

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By authority of the Victorian Government Printer

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The Honourable LINDA DESSAU AC

The Lieutenant-Governor

The Honourable JAMES ANGUS AO

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Deputy Speaker

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The Hon. DM ANDREWS

Deputy Leader of the Parliamentary Labor Party and Deputy Premier

The Hon. JM ALLAN

Leader of the Parliamentary Liberal Party and Leader of the Opposition

The Hon. MJ GUY

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Mr DJ SOUTHWICK

Leader of The Nationals and Deputy Leader of the Opposition

The Hon. PL WALSH

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Ms E KEALY

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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

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FIFTY-NINTH PARLIAMENT—FIRST SESSION

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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
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Battin, Mr Bradley William	Gembrook	LP	McLeish, Ms Lucinda Gaye	Eildon	LP
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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 Addison, 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 Theophanous 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 Blandthorn, Mr Fregon, Ms McLeish, Ms Settle, Ms Sheed, Ms Staley, Ms Suleyman 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 Symes and Ms Tierney.

Electoral Matters Committee

Assembly: Ms Hall, Dr Read and Mr Rowsell.

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, Mr Fregon, Ms Sandell, Ms Staley and Ms Suleyman.

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

Integrity and Oversight Committee

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

Council: Mr Grimley.

Pandemic Declaration Accountability and Oversight Committee

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

Council: Ms Crozier and Mr Erdogan.

Public Accounts and Estimates Committee

Assembly: Ms Connolly, 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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Tuesday, 3 May 2022

The SPEAKER (Hon. Colin Brooks) took the chair at 12.02 pm and read the prayer.

Announcements

ACKNOWLEDGEMENT OF COUNTRY

The SPEAKER (12:03): 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.

Questions without notice and ministers statements

AMBULANCE SERVICES

Mr GUY (Bulleen—Leader of the Opposition) (12:03): My question is to the Minister for Ambulance Services. Nick from Hawthorn recently felt unwell while he was with friends and stepped outside for fresh air. Seconds later his friends found him passed out on the footpath, having hit his head on the asphalt. He sustained a concussion and significant bleeding from his head. When his concerned friend Joe called an ambulance they were told there was no ambulance available in the area and that it would be over 2 hours before overworked paramedics would be able to arrive. Can the minister explain to Nick why under his government's watch he was denied urgent basic care as he sat on the side of the road, dazed and bleeding from the scalp?

Mr FOLEY (Albert Park—Minister for Health, Minister for Ambulance Services, Minister for Equality) (12:04): Can I thank the Leader of the Opposition for his question. Whilst I am not familiar with the particular set of circumstances that the honourable member highlights in his question, nonetheless, should the patient concerned be acceptable to it and the honourable member forward me the details, I will of course work with Ambulance Victoria and presumably the dispatch system to inquire as to the specifics of that set of circumstances.

But what we do know is that, depending on when the particular incident that the honourable member refers to occurred, our entire health system has been under pressure from the global pandemic like at no other time in its history. We know that by courtesy of the fact that in 2019 our ambulance response times had reached record levels—ever on record—as a result of sound investment, cooperative workplace practices and engagement across the whole breadth of how ambulance systems relate to both ESTA and the 000 services and the emergency departments that they rely on.

Since then what we have had is a global pandemic that has seen circumstances change in how all parts of the ambulance and health systems have operated. But during that time this has been a government that has invested every step of the way under those extraordinary circumstances to support our paramedics and our ambulance service. We did not declare a war on those ambulance services; what we did was fund last year alone over 700 further paramedics. What we did indeed was further fund different systems and bring forward, again, just two months ago, a further \$1.4 billion worth of investment in emergency department interfaces with emergency departments, ambulances and other areas in response to the fact that we have seen on average somewhere between 1400 and 1900 frontline healthcare service workers being furloughed every day this year. That reached a peak of 5000 people in late January out of our healthcare system, including our ambulance system, and that regrettably meant the kind of circumstances occurred far too often that the honourable member points to. But what you can do is you can choose to invest, you can choose to work, you can choose to put patients first or you can choose war with paramedics.

Mr GUY (Bulleen—Leader of the Opposition) (12:07): Nick is one of many Victorians waiting unacceptable times for overworked ambulance staff to respond to them, with recent reports revealing that a further three Victorians have tragically died waiting for an ambulance, bringing this toll to over

15 Victorians in the past few months. How is it acceptable that 15 Victorians can lose their life because the minister has waited years to fix this problem?

Mr FOLEY (Albert Park—Minister for Health, Minister for Ambulance Services, Minister for Equality) (12:08): Can I thank the Leader of the Opposition for his question. With the greatest of respect to the Leader of the Opposition, he conflates a number of matters incorrectly in his proposition there. I did see those media reports today. My understanding of those reports was that the three incidents referred to—all of which are unacceptable, and we send our deep and sincere sympathies and support to those families that were put through that trauma—related to the kind of challenges of the 000 emergency services system, if the reports are correct, not so much the response from the ambulance services and paramedics themselves. That was my reading of the media report. But if the Leader of the Opposition has anything further, I am sure he can provide that to me and the house.

MINISTERS STATEMENTS: HEALTH SYSTEM

Mr ANDREWS (Mulgrave—Premier) (12:09): I am very pleased to rise on behalf of all honourable members to thank each and every one of our health team across hospitals and across all settings within our health system for the amazing work they have done these last couple of years. Of course there are some in this chamber who know and understand and have acknowledged the amazing work they did before the pandemic. So it is only fitting to acknowledge the quite amazing achievement of having so, so many challenges met, having so many patients cared for in unprecedented times—demand shattering all records, a wildly infectious disease—very, very challenging times indeed. But our nurses, our ambos, our allied health professionals—our whole team—have done an amazing job.

Look, I will say to you this: governments are only as good and health systems are only as good as the support that governments provide to our health workers. That is why we have upgraded health buildings across the state—in the centre of Melbourne, in the suburbs, in big regional centres, in the smallest of country towns. And we have recruited more nurses, more paramedics, more doctors, more allied health professionals—the list goes on and on.

We have not cut health funding. We have not taken away from the very health professionals that we are indebted to—all of us—the resources that they need to treat more patients and treat them well. We have in fact boosted the number of staff so that we can have a health system that can meet the challenges—and there are considerable challenges. In a little while the Treasurer will outline yet again a further boost, a pandemic repair plan: thousands of extra staff to support hundreds of thousands of patients across our state and the best care close to home because we do not cut health; we invest in the nurses that are needed.

HEALTH SERVICES

Ms McLEISH (Eildon) (12:11): I have a question for the Minister for Health. Sharelle presented to the Alexandra hospital on 22 April at 7.00 pm with complications related to her advanced ovarian cancer. An ambulance was called, and Sharelle's husband, Wes, left her at the hospital at 10.00 pm. At 1.30 am Sharelle rang Wes to come and get her because no ambulances were available and the Alexandra hospital needed Wes to drive his wife to the Maroondah Hospital. They arrived at 3.00 am and were seen 6 hours later. Can the minister explain to Sharelle why under his watch the health system has deteriorated to a situation as unacceptable as this?

Mr FOLEY (Albert Park—Minister for Health, Minister for Ambulance Services, Minister for Equality) (12:12): Can I thank the member for Eildon for her question. Whilst I am not familiar with the specifics of the set of circumstances of the patient that the honourable member refers to, I can nonetheless, should she choose to provide those to me, undertake to get the specifics in terms of the circumstances that have been presented here in this place. But more broadly what we do know is that this is a regional hospital that this government has invested in, as opposed to some regional hospitals. When others had the opportunity they sat around the cabinet table and extended the privatisation of

some of those hospitals, or they cut the services around how regional and other hospitals were delivering services—

Ms McLeish: On a point of order, Speaker, on relevance, the minister is absolutely waffling and not addressing the situation.

The SPEAKER: Order! The question that the member asked at the end of giving a specific example was a broad question. The minister is being relevant to it.

Mr FOLEY: Thank you, honourable Speaker. But what we do know is that, coming off a high in 2019 when our entire health system was reporting performance measures of the highest possible standard—in many cases the highest on record as a result of record investment support from this government—what we have then had is a global pandemic that has seen awful sets of circumstances in Victoria, in Australia and globally. Over 6 million people officially have lost their lives to this global pandemic and we have seen, tragically, deaths right across comparable regimes, including our own here in Victoria and in Australia. At the same time we have also seen infection prevention and control measures, and on the back of the omicron peak that has swept through Australia we have seen thousands of people furloughed. You add all of that together and this has presented unprecedented challenges for our healthcare workers right across the system.

You can make a choice in these things: you can choose to work cooperatively and invest in the recovery and the rebuilding of that system from the global pandemic, or you can take the alternative path, such as we have seen from the federal government at the moment—a \$1.5 billion forecast cut to this state alone when it comes to our healthcare services from the commonwealth, arguing that somehow or another it is all over and that it is all fixed. Or you can, as this government is choosing to do, put in place a plan that puts patients first and that puts the rebuilding of the workforce, the infrastructure and the systems that govern and make our healthcare system one of the most high class in the world first—and we choose the latter.

Ms McLEISH (Eildon) (12:15): Sadly for Sharelle, situations like this are not unfamiliar. On the evening of 20 February she was in excruciating pain. Her husband called an ambulance, which took an hour to arrive. Whilst being transferred to Monash hospital, Sharelle vomited in the ambulance. On arrival she spent 12 hours on a gurney in a holding corridor in emergency. Unable to get any of the overworked staff's attention, covered in dried vomit and with her blood sugar levels plummeting, Sharelle was forced to ring her husband for help. She had not been put first there, that is for sure. How has the minister allowed our hospital system to fall to a state where situations like this are a regular occurrence?

Mr FOLEY (Albert Park—Minister for Health, Minister for Ambulance Services, Minister for Equality) (12:16): Can I thank the member for Eildon for her supplementary question. Again, I am not familiar with the specifics or the circumstances of the patient that she highlights, but should she choose to do so I am more than happy to—whether it is through ESTA, the ambulance service or Monash Health—follow up those particular circumstances for her constituent. But I do know that Monash Health as our largest health service has had tremendous pressure put on it through the global pandemic and that it has seen hundreds and hundreds of workers furloughed as it has dealt with unprecedented levels of demand across its system and unprecedented challenges. I do know from constant engagement with Monash Health that they have put in place systems where the investment in extra doctors, extra nurses and extra systems put patients first, and that is what this government is all about.

MINISTERS STATEMENTS: BETTER AT HOME PROGRAM

Mr FOLEY (Albert Park—Minister for Health, Minister for Ambulance Services, Minister for Equality) (12:17): I had great pleasure in joining the Premier this morning at the Australian Nursing and Midwifery Federation headquarters to kick to a whole new level the Better at Home care system that the Victorian government has pioneered. I was very pleased that as part of that we were able to announce today a \$698 million investment to expand the successful Better at Home care program. As

a result of the global pandemic we have seen new models of care arise, partly as a result of necessity and having to be piloted, but strangely enough through that the system has been delivering better models of care that deliver better outcomes for patients and better outcomes for the health system by keeping people closer to their support networks at home and the pressure off the tertiary and other hospital systems. It has been a remarkable success, and that is why I was only too pleased to see the commitment that we made today that will see 15 000 Victorians access home-based care each year going forward from here on in.

I was also pleased that we were able to announce a \$3.6 million investment in the transitional care program for people who are stuck in our public health system because the federal government will not stand up and fund the national disability insurance scheme properly. Last night we had 208 Victorians who were clinically cleared to go home with nowhere to go because the national disability insurance scheme is not stepping up and doing its job. These people—there is nothing wrong with them, they are cleared to go—are stuck in these beds blocking access to systems. That reflects choices. You can put patients first or you can put patients last. We choose to put patients— *(Time expired)*

AMBULANCE RESPONSE TIMES

Mr GUY (Bulleen—Leader of the Opposition) (12:19): My question is for the Minister for Ambulance Services. Last week Ambulance Victoria called a code orange, meaning there were fewer than 4 per cent of ambulances available, on top of ambulance ramping continuing and code 1 response times across the state being well under 60 per cent. I ask the minister: how many times in the past six months has Ambulance Victoria had to call a code orange or a code red because the ambulance system has been unable to cope with demand?

Members interjecting.

The SPEAKER: Order! Before calling the minister I just warn members that if they shout across the chamber they are going to be removed without further warning.

Mr FOLEY (Albert Park—Minister for Health, Minister for Ambulance Services, Minister for Equality) (12:20): Can I thank the Leader of the Opposition for his question. The most recent quarterly ambulance and indeed health system performance measures were released just in the weekend gone past. What those figures reveal is a stabilisation when it comes to the code 1 response times across our system for that quarter ending the third quarter of this current year. And that is in a time when we have had remarkable furloughing, record levels of furloughing, which peaked at over 5000 people in late January, including hundreds of paramedics—at a time in which we have seen record levels of demand for those code 1 responses and indeed—

Mr Walsh: On a point of order, Speaker, on the issue of relevance, the question was very clear to the minister: how many times in the last six months has Ambulance Victoria had to call a code orange or a code red? If the minister does not know the answer, could he at least take it on notice and actually get back to us, please.

Members interjecting.

The SPEAKER: Order! The question contained a preamble. The minister is being relevant to the question.

Mr FOLEY: Thank you, honourable Speaker. We do know as a result of unprecedented levels of demand as a result of the global pandemic that our ambulance services have been placed under huge levels of demand. Faced with this we have seen a number of code red announcements and declarations being made by Ambulance Victoria because of course Ambulance Victoria place the wellbeing of both their patients and their staff foremost in their activities. We thank them for it, and that is why we fund arrangements that go to—

Mr Walsh: On a further point of order, Speaker, on the issue of relevance again, in answering the question the minister has just said there were a number of times. Could he please just tell Victorians how many times there has been a code orange or a code red? If he knows the answer, please tell us. If he does not, take it on notice.

The SPEAKER: Order! The Leader of The Nationals knows that a point of order is not an opportunity to ask a question again. The minister is being relevant to the question.

Mr FOLEY: Thank you, honourable Speaker. We do know that as a result of the global pandemic our ambulance services have been under pressure like never before. We have seen that come from a high point in 2019 when code 1 response times and the overall performance of our ambulances reached the highest level on record. What we have seen since then is the impact of a global pandemic and this government responding to that and Ambulance Victoria responding to that. The efforts that Ambulance Victoria, paramedics and the whole emergency health response system have put in place have been under the most trying of circumstances. Whether it is the 700 further paramedics engaged last year, whether it is the over \$220 million component of the \$1.4 billion investment announced into emergency responses in February, this is a government that will work with our ambulances, with our paramedics, with our hospital services, with our nurses and with our wider community to respond to this crisis.

Members interjecting.

The SPEAKER: The Leader of the House will come to order. Order! The Leader of The Nationals has the call—without the assistance of members opposite.

Mr Walsh: On a point of order, Speaker, on the issue of relevance again, in the 20 seconds left can the minister please just answer the question?

The SPEAKER: Order! The Leader of The Nationals knows that is not a point of order.

Mr FOLEY: Thank you, Speaker. So you can make choices in how you go about responding to this global pandemic. You can choose to work with our health services, our doctors, our nurses, and you can put patients first or you can choose to wage war on them. We choose the former.

Mr GUY (Bulleen—Leader of the Opposition) (12:25): With the unnamed number of code red or code orange situations posing many life-threatening situations to Victorians who may call for an ambulance at the time, I ask the minister: why did the government not issue an alert or a warning to notify Victorians of these situations so that alternative means to get to hospitals could have been put in place?

Mr FOLEY (Albert Park—Minister for Health, Minister for Ambulance Services, Minister for Equality) (12:25): Can I thank the Leader of the Opposition for his supplementary question. The Leader of the Opposition, I think, fails to understand that that is precisely what Ambulance Victoria do when they put out code reds. They do so as an operational response, and they let their workforce and the community know. Of course that is as a result of the unprecedented levels of demand and service capacity that we have seen over the course of the global pandemic, and that global pandemic has seen this government make the choice that it will invest in and work with Ambulance Victoria, our paramedics, our workforce and our emergency services crews. We will, as a result of the global pandemic, get the investments in place to rebuild our healthcare system and our ambulance system and get back to those world-leading reforms.

MINISTERS STATEMENTS: VOCATIONAL EDUCATION AND TRAINING

Mr MERLINO (Monbulk—Minister for Education, Minister for Mental Health) (12:26): I rise to update the house on the most significant reform to senior secondary education since the inception of the VCE three decades ago. From next year the new VCE vocational major will replace VCAL, offering students more choices, a higher quality curriculum and better workplace experiences and preparing students for further study, training at TAFE or work as soon as they leave school—one

integrated VCE—because a vocational pathway is every bit as valued and in demand as an academic one, often more so.

This is a \$277 million investment. Schools will receive over \$120 million to help them implement the new reforms, ensuring universal access to a core offering of vocational pathways, no matter where a student lives; \$69.4 million to expand the successful Head Start program to every government secondary school in the state, giving students the opportunity to complete an apprenticeship or traineeship before they leave school; and \$87.9 million to strengthen the teaching workforce—funded training to attract 400 extra VET trainers and professional development for 1900 teachers. These reforms will also save many Victorian families an average of \$300 and up to \$1000 by cutting out-of-pocket expenses.

But there are alternative approaches when it comes to vocational education. There are those who cut VCAL coordinators from schools as they cut and closed TAFEs, and given the chance that is exactly what they would do again because that is in their DNA. Only the Andrews government will keep supporting students, giving them real choices whatever their career path.

DRUG COURTS

Mr NORTHE (Morwell) (12:28): My question is to the Premier. Premier, I commend the government for its recent expansion of the successful Drug Court program into the regional communities of Ballarat and Shepparton. Treating persons in Drug Court settings by way of a health- and rehabilitation-related response to their behaviours rather than a punitive-based response is clearly beneficial for the individual, their family and their community. Analysis has shown that there has been up to a 31 per cent lower rate of reoffending for Drug Court participants compared to those going through the normal court process. Premier, only those residing within the catchment areas of existing Drug Court locations can access these courts. It seems unfair that those residing outside of these areas can be treated differently in the courts. Subsequently I ask if the government has any plans to change the current criteria or further expand the Drug Court program to enable a fairer and more equitable judicial system for all Victorians.

Mr ANDREWS (Mulgrave—Premier) (12:29): I thank the independent member for Morwell for his question, and I also thank him for the acknowledgement that the Drug Courts are a great reform. Of course the first of those Drug Courts was in Dandenong. Just a couple of years ago, in 2019–20 in fact, we invested \$35 million to expand on a pilot basis into a number of other regional communities, taking that drug court model, which is about active engagement, management and supporting people to change their lives, break the cycle of addiction, get educated, get employed and not reoffend—a much more therapeutic and a much more commonsense approach—rather than locking people up and essentially sending them to crime school. It does not make any sense. You have got to deal with addiction as a health issue, and that will then deal with—

Members interjecting.

Mr ANDREWS: Some will laugh about these matters, and while they laugh we will get on and deliver a great Labor reform allowing people to get their lives back on track, cutting recidivism rates, saving taxpayers hundreds of millions of dollars and saving families the pain and anguish that the alternative approach would—and indeed did—deliver.

I thank the honourable member for his acknowledgement that we have moved in this space. We have expanded the pilot. My latest brief on this—I will confess it was not this morning, it was some time ago—and advice is that the pilot is not yet complete. But you would assume given the reviews—I know KPMG did a very good piece of work, I think it was KPMG—on the Melbourne Drug Court under the excellent leadership of Magistrate Tony Parsons, a very good man and a great servant of Victoria and a great servant of justice, there was nothing but praise for the reductions in the crime rates. The reoffending rate was down, there were better life opportunities, we were saving money and

doing so much better. It is commonsense reform. I would expect those same results would be reflected in the Ballarat and Shepparton Drug Court trials.

I do not know that we are necessarily in a position yet to make decisions about future drug courts in regional Victoria, but I acknowledge, just as the member has acknowledged, that there is a need. You do not do the trial unless you are convinced that there is a need to have these courts not just in Melbourne but across the state, and I hope, pending positive results of that trial that is not yet complete, that we can further expand the drug courts so that everyone who needs that therapeutic justice approach, that commonsense approach dealing with not just the crime but the addiction that drives that crime so people can get their lives back on track—I want that available for everyone who needs it, as I think the honourable member does as well. If there is anything further that I can add, then I am more than happy to write to the honourable member.

Mr NORTHE (Morwell) (12:32): Premier, as you know, drug courts are in place in part to deal with individuals with drug or alcohol issues that have led them to commit low-level criminal offences, so on that basis it would make sense to locate drug courts where the highest incidence of drug-related crimes occur. However, that does not necessarily seem to be the case. For example, in 2021 in the Ballarat region there were 305 recorded offences for drug possession, an LGA rate of 269.1 per 100 000 population. In comparison, in the Latrobe region there were 872 recorded offences for drug possession, an LGA rate of 1148.7 per 100 000 of population. Basically in Latrobe these and other drug-related offences are more than four times higher per population than in Ballarat. Premier, given these and other compelling statistics, along with support from local police and alcohol and drug service providers, will the state government commit to delivering a Magistrates Drug Court in the Latrobe Valley?

Mr ANDREWS (Mulgrave—Premier) (12:33): I thank the member for Morwell for the compelling case that he has made based on the data. I took it as a given that the honourable member would be advocating for, subject to the trial, if you like, firming up that this model works not just in Dandenong but in regional Victoria as well, which I think is a case well made and I am sure that is what the trial will tell us—I took it as read that the member for Morwell would like one of these innovative, commonsense and, if you like, broad-based approaches to this issue not just as a crime issue but as an addiction and health issue. I took it as read that he would want and would be an advocate for one in his local community, and I will give him my commitment that subject to this trial being completed I am more than happy to sit down with him and work through those issues. He is a passionate advocate on behalf of his community. We are all about making sure that we get the best outcomes for everyone who needs that care and support, so perhaps we will be able to get on, subject to the trial, and roll this out right across the state, including in the proud Latrobe Valley.

MINISTERS STATEMENTS: POWER SAVING BONUS

Ms D'AMBROSIO (Mill Park—Minister for Energy, Environment and Climate Change, Minister for Solar Homes) (12:34): I am absolutely delighted to inform the house of the latest action that we are taking to cut the cost of living for Victorians. From 1 July this year every single Victorian household will be eligible for our \$250 power saving bonus by simply searching for a better energy deal on the Victorian Energy Compare website. The bonus will not only give immediate relief from cost-of-living pressures but also encourage Victorians to shop around for longer term energy bill savings.

We know that seven out of 10 Victorians can save an average of \$330 in the first year alone from their power bills simply by switching their energy offers. Combined with the \$250 power saving bonus, that is \$580 back in the pockets of hardworking Victorians. And, if you are an eligible concession card holder and you have not already done so, you can claim a \$250 bonus right now, plus another payment in July, ensuring that those who need it the most get help from this government. Victorians have responded with a resounding 'Yes' to our announcement, with more than 130 000 people visiting our website yesterday alone. That is more than double the previous daily record set under the current power saving bonus.

We have taken on the big energy companies by banning their dodgy marketing practices, including door-to-door sales and cold calling, and we have increased penalties for those that do the wrong thing against hardworking Victorians. We have forced retailers to notify customers of their best offers in the market, and we have introduced the Victorian default offer, which the ACCC cites as the significant factor in reducing retail margins. This is why Victorian power prices are at their lowest level in five years and Victorians are better protected—unlike those opposite, who sold our assets and ensured that retailers put their hands in the pockets of hardworking— *(Time expired)*

HEALTH SERVICES

Ms KEALY (Lowan) (12:36): My question is to the Minister for Health. Nine days ago Cecelia had a fall and broke both of her arms. She presented to Grampians Health in Horsham immediately and was told she would have to go to Ballarat for an urgent appointment to have the fractures reset and urgent surgery. Nine days later Cecelia still has not had her urgent appointment and surgery with Grampians Health. Cecelia cannot feel her left hand, she cannot work, she cannot feed herself, she cannot drive and has difficulty doing the basics like just going to the toilet. What does the minister have to say to Cecelia, who continues to suffer because of the dire situation of Victoria's health system?

The SPEAKER: Order! I rule the question in order, but I just remind members that questions need to be specific, relating to government business. I will allow the minister to answer this question, but it is just a reminder to those people asking questions.

Mr FOLEY (Albert Park—Minister for Health, Minister for Ambulance Services, Minister for Equality) (12:37): Can I thank the member for Lowan for her question. I am not familiar with the particulars of her constituent's engagement with Grampians Health, but I do know that I would need to take what the honourable member asserts with a degree of caution because this member has a bit of form when it comes to misrepresenting the position of her community, particularly when it comes to Grampians Health. This is the same member that asserted that maternity services had stopped. That comes as a shock to the 20 women who have given birth—

Ms Kealy: On a point of order, Speaker, I note the Premier's interjection that 'It's all about politics'.

Members interjecting.

The SPEAKER: Order! Without the assistance of any members.

Ms Kealy: This question went specifically to Cecelia, who has two broken arms. She cannot eat, she cannot take herself to the toilet, she cannot drive and she cannot work. She also cannot get support in Victoria's public health system. I ask you to bring the minister back to Cecelia's situation on why she cannot access support in Victoria's public health system.

The SPEAKER: Order! I have already warned members that they could be removed from the chamber without further warning. I do not uphold the point of order that the member has raised. The question that the member asked is, 'What does the minister have to say in relation to the specific example that was mentioned?', so it is a broad question. But I do ask the minister not to attack the opposition or other honourable members in giving his answer.

Mr FOLEY: Thank you, Speaker, and I will take your guidance as given. The point I was simply trying to make is that you need to be careful with what you say in this business. You need to be careful with your public comments that are designed to instil fear and concern in your own community.

Ms Kealy: Speaker, on a point of order, the minister continues to attack the opposition. They continue to ignore the needs of Cecelia. I ask you to again attempt to bring the minister back to addressing this question around why people cannot get two broken arms fixed—

The SPEAKER: Order! The member knows this is not a way to make a point of order. The minister is being relevant to the question.

Mr FOLEY: You can make a choice about playing cheap politics based on lies or you can make a decision based on—

Members interjecting.

The SPEAKER: Order! Honourable members on my right!

Ms Kealy: On a point of order, Speaker, the minister is using unparliamentary language to say that a Wimmera Health executive that called out the huge problems with Victoria's health system—

The SPEAKER: Order! I uphold the point of order that the member has raised. I asked the minister not to use unparliamentary terms.

Mr FOLEY: Thank you, Speaker. I will certainly make sure that I stick to appropriate parliamentary requirements.

You can make a choice when it comes to responding to the biggest global health crisis in a century. You can work with your workforce, with your health agencies and with your emergency services and respond to the biggest challenges that this workforce has seen in their professional experience. You can invest in them, in their infrastructure and in their systems and deal in a cooperative arrangement with the biggest health challenge we have ever seen, and you can base your recovery coming out of that on a health-led recovery by investing in record amounts in those people.

Or you can choose the alternative route that we are seeing the federal government currently pursue. You can deny people in aged care the support they need to get access to decent services in their community and in their aged care facilities. You can choose to ignore thousands of people stuck in hospitals when they should be at home being supported by the NDIS, you can—further from the commonwealth government—pretend that the pandemic is over and cut \$1.5 billion from Victoria's health system, or you can choose to invest record amounts and work cooperatively with our professionals in our public health system and drive a health-led recovery. You can put patients first or you can wage war on the community. We choose the former.

Ms KEALY (Lowan) (12:43): After presenting to the Horsham emergency department Cecelia was told that a referral had been made and that Grampians Health Ballarat would contact her regarding her urgent appointment. This call never came. In fact Cecelia had to call Grampians Health 11 times over the following week until she received confirmation the referral had finally been received and the urgent appointment was scheduled. How can you be putting patients first when a woman who has sustained two broken arms requiring urgent medical attention and possible surgery is left waiting nine days for an urgent appointment to be secured?

Mr FOLEY (Albert Park—Minister for Health, Minister for Ambulance Services, Minister for Equality) (12:44): Can I thank the member for Lowan for her supplementary question. I am more than happy, should the honourable member seek to provide me with the details of her constituent's concerns, to follow that up with Grampians Health, but I would need to fact-check it and I would need to make sure that the no doubt legitimate issues about responding to record demand are investigated. What we do know is that, sadly, over the course of the global pandemic what should be a bipartisan, national, unifying issue of supporting our healthcare system has become the subject of cheap politics, and some choose to misrepresent the position of great organisations like Grampians Health in Horsham. They choose to present the fact that apparently maternal and child health supports have been shut in that service, which is a bit of a shock to, like I said— *(Time expired)*

MINISTERS STATEMENTS: LEVEL CROSSING REMOVALS

Ms ALLAN (Bendigo East—Leader of the House, Minister for Transport Infrastructure, Minister for the Suburban Rail Loop) (12:45): On 14 May 2015 the Leader of the Opposition proudly proclaimed that Labor's level crossing removal program was 'all talk and no action'. On 14 May this year what we will see is the dangerous and congested level crossing at Glenroy will be gone for good—

the 60th level crossing to be removed in seven years by the Andrews Labor government and the tens of thousands of people who are working on our program.

Members interjecting.

The SPEAKER: Order! The member for Frankston can leave the chamber for the period of 1 hour.

Member for Frankston withdrew from chamber.

Ms ALLAN: And not only that, there will be a new Glenroy station, marking the 35th new train station to be built as part of this program. And, as we have seen, we are also bringing a new vibrancy to the heart of Glenroy with the new station—a new open space that will unite the community of Glenroy for the first time in 100 years.

Only the Andrews Labor government committed to removing 50 level crossings by the end of this year, but what we are seeing is that 59, soon to be 60, will be gone. It has been a massive driver of support for the Victorian economy and the Victorian community as thousands of workers and small businesses have worked with us on this program. Some might shut up shop on their attempts to oppose this program, but no—at Surrey Hills, at Parkdale and at Ringwood they continue to fight the removal of every single level crossing. Only the Andrews Labor government committed to 50 in the first place—we have added 35—and it is only the Andrews Labor government that will continue to deliver the removal of dangerous and congested level crossings.

Mr R Smith: On a point of order, Speaker, I have an outstanding question in to the Minister for Planning. The Minister for Planning was supposed to give me an answer to this question on 21 April this year. The question is: what percentage of fines issued by the Victorian Building Authority between 1 January 2019 and 28 February 2022 remain outstanding? The minister has not yet replied. I am sure that he has been very busy, but I would love a response to that question. I will pass the number on to the clerks as soon as possible.

The SPEAKER: I thank the member for raising that issue, and I am sure the Minister for Planning will organise that response very quickly.

Mr Rowsell: Also on a point of order, Speaker, I have a number of unanswered questions: 4661, 4602, 6331, 6273, 6244, 6214, 6184, 6114, 6090 and 5753. I am happy to provide those to the Clerk. I will just note one is to the Premier in relation to events that are being sponsored by the Victorian government to celebrate Her Majesty Queen Elizabeth II's platinum jubilee. As we are about a third of the way through that program already and that answer is well overdue, I would be very keen to receive that response.

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

Mr Wells: Also on a point of order, Speaker, on unanswered questions, 5885 was due on 7 July last year, can you believe it, and that was to the Minister for Disability, Ageing and Carers. My second one is 6174, which was for the Minister for Child Protection and Family Services, and that was due in early January. I would ask if you could follow those two up, please.

The SPEAKER: I thank the member for that. We will follow those matters up.

Constituency questions

CAULFIELD ELECTORATE

Mr SOUTHWICK (Caulfield) (12:49): (6326) My question is to the Premier. On the eve of Yom HaZikaron, where many soldiers in Israel have died defending their country, and just following Yom HaShoah, the remembrance of the Holocaust, we are seeing an increase in antisemitism and anti-Israel sentiment. We have seen that in attacks on the candidates for Kooyong and Goldstein by these teal candidates showing antisemitic and anti-Israel sentiments. We have also seen that with Australasian Union of Jewish Students students, many of whom live in my constituency of Caulfield. The

Melbourne University student union attacked these AUJS students. They demonised many of those students. They called for the bringing back of boycott, divestment and sanctions, and they have left many of those students on campus feeling very uncomfortable and very unsafe. The Liberal Party have called for the International Holocaust Remembrance Alliance definition of antisemitism to be adopted, and we would ask the Premier to follow suit and call for the IHRA definition to be adopted.

WENDOUREE ELECTORATE

Ms ADDISON (Wendouree) (12:50): (6327) My question is for the Minister for Employment in the other place. Will the minister please provide me with an update on how Jobs Victoria programs are supporting my local jobseekers to find employment and supporting local businesses to fill roles in the Ballarat community? A number of local organisations have already benefited from Jobs Victoria initiatives, including the Ballarat art gallery, McCallum Disability Services and the Ballarat Regional Multicultural Council. The Ballarat community welcome the minister's recent Jobs Victoria announcement of additional training for hospitality workers, which will help meet their urgent workforce demands. Last week I had the pleasure of meeting with Kelly-Louise Austin, who is a Jobs Victoria mentor at AMES Australia. Kelly-Louise supports people from culturally and linguistically diverse backgrounds to find work in Ballarat. It was wonderful to hear of the success stories and the difference that this program is making. I look forward to hearing from the minister and her providing me more details on how Jobs Victoria is supporting my community.

GIPPSLAND EAST ELECTORATE

Mr T BULL (Gippsland East) (12:51): (6328) My constituency question is to the Minister for Energy, Environment and Climate Change, and the information I seek is whether greater consideration will be given to areas of assessment for public camping. The Department of Environment, Land, Water and Planning is currently assessing a number of riverfront licences in my area; however, it seems very little consideration is being given to these locations. Some of the suggestions are adjacent to existing camping areas that have toilets and facilities there, and we are suggesting riverside camping where there are no toilets, for instance. Others have been suggested very close to commercial caravan parks and camping areas, where you have the owners that are relying on income from campers, and we are going to set up more free camping options in close proximity. There does not appear to be a lot of thought going into the assessment of these locations. We have great concerns over this policy full stop. These assessments are going on in areas where they simply should not be assessed, and I ask the minister to review it.

NARRE WARREN SOUTH ELECTORATE

Mr MAAS (Narre Warren South) (12:52): (6329) My constituency question is for the Minister for Prevention of Family Violence regarding the Free from Violence local government grant program. Minister, how does this program support and benefit my electorate of Narre Warren South? I recently had the pleasure of attending the minister's announcement of the successful applicants under the 2022–25 program at Bunjil Place in Narre Warren, including help for the City of Casey, and that was to implement the local government guide for preventing family violence and all forms of violence against women. This program will provide over \$3.5 million to 15 councils, all of whom are well placed to influence social change, with reach into their communities through their services and as large local employers as well. I would really appreciate further information that the minister can provide on this program and how it will support my constituents in Narre Warren South.

EILDON ELECTORATE

Ms McLEISH (Eildon) (12:53): (6330) My question is to the Minister for Energy, Environment and Climate Change. Will the minister release Parks Victoria's detailed plans to repair or perhaps replace the Dee Road trestle bridge on the O'Shannassy Aqueduct Trail, which has been closed for public safety? The Parks Victoria website confirms:

CONSTITUENCY QUESTIONS

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Legislative Assembly

Tuesday, 3 May 2022

Works to construct a new section of trail to bypass the bridge are due to commence in 2022 with completion expected by the end of 2023.

Contradicting these comments, your letter to me dated 29 March 2022 said:

... the trestle bridge is scheduled for replacement in 2022, with detailed design work currently underway.

Comments are unclear as to whether the damaged bridge will be left, removed or replaced, and when. Community member safety is at risk. The bridge's cyclone fencing is often obstructed by frustrated pedestrians. Other able pedestrians have resorted to climbing up and down the slope to cross over. Plans to repair, replace or remove the bridge need to be made public.

BASS ELECTORATE

Ms CRUGNALE (Bass) (12:54): (6331) My constituency question is to the Minister for Fishing and Boating. What is the latest information and update on the progress of the detailed concept plans for the Inverloch boat ramp and time line for the tender process for awarding contracts for the Cowes and Mahers Landing boat ramps? Recreational boating is a big part of our Bass Coast local and visitor community, gets people outdoors, into nature and onto our stunning waterways and also has an economic benefit to our coastal inlet and bay communities through visitation and tourism. Over the last 12 months Cowes and Mahers Landing sites have had detailed plans released, working towards obtaining necessary legislative approvals and converting the concept designs to get construction ready for 2022. Back in 2018 our Andrews Labor government committed to having all the licence fees and recreational registration go towards boating infrastructure and programs, as we have also invested \$33 million in this Better Boating Fund. I look forward to this update, and thank you, Minister, and your department, for your support.

MILDURA ELECTORATE

Ms CUPPER (Mildura) (12:55): (6332) My constituency question is for the Minister for Agriculture, and the information I seek is about the government's plans to assist our region to build its stock of seasonal worker accommodation. Sharp, rapid growth in horticultural productivity in the last decade has outpaced the development of suitable seasonal accommodation. This has led to farmers being short on workers, fruit being left on vines and overcrowding in substandard conditions. Recently the government announced a grant of \$744 000 to Robinvale Backpackers to help the business build accommodation for 60 workers. This was gratefully received, but the reality is we need to turn those 60 beds into at least 6000, with industry leaders in the table grape and citrus industries saying the shortage might be as high as 7000 beds. Several months ago I forwarded a proposal to the minister that contained various ways the government could work in partnership with the private sector to increase the number of seasonal worker accommodation beds in our region. Can the minister provide information to me and our local industry on the government's response to that proposal?

BAYSWATER ELECTORATE

Mr TAYLOR (Bayswater) (12:56): (6333) My constituency question is to the Minister for Workplace Safety. My question is: what do the benefits of the Labor government's sick pay guarantee mean for my local community in the Bayswater district? Nobody, no matter their situation, no matter where they live, no matter their employment status, should have to weigh up going to work sick and risking their health and putting food on the table. I have had conversations with locals who have let me know they have faced this exact same situation, particularly over the past two years. Nobody should be forced into making this choice. That is why I am so proud of the Andrews Labor government's sick pay guarantee, a true Labor reform and an Australian first. The \$245.6 million pilot will look to give eligible casual and contract workers, including hospital workers, retail employees, disability care workers and cleaners, five days of sick pay per year. It will mean they will not have to make the choice between their health and a day's pay. I spoke with local businesses too that say this is a great reform and are appreciative that the government will be doing the back-end administration work, taking one more thing off their hands. It will mean staff can concentrate on getting well and they

can concentrate on growing their business. It is a win-win. I am looking forward to welcoming the minister down to our community soon to speak with a local business about exactly this.

ROWVILLE ELECTORATE

Mr WELLS (Rowville) (12:57): (6334) My question is to the Minister for Health. Minister, when will the government fund enough nursing staff at Dandenong Hospital to open up hospital beds and stop ambulance delays? A Rowville constituent who was sent to Dandenong Hospital by ambulance with a lung infection recently waited for 23 hours in the emergency department before a bed could be found. Despite his lung condition requiring oxygen, he was left on a ward from 4.00 am to 8.00 pm with two patients who were close contacts of a confirmed COVID case. When both patients tested positive he was deemed a close contact, and nurses tried to move him into a room with another patient waiting for a PCR result, risking further cross-infection. He is one of thousands of people whose lives have been put at risk by the Victorian health crisis. Frustrated nurses say a 26-bed ward sits empty because there are not enough staff. Up to 10 ambulances were ramped outside the hospital recently during another code red. Health experts are warning patients may die.

THOMASTOWN ELECTORATE

Ms HALFPENNY (Thomastown) (12:58): (6335) My constituency question is for the Minister for Energy, Environment and Climate Change. Residents living in the electorate of Thomastown have been subjected to unprecedented levels of illegal rubbish dumping. There is general litter in the parks and reserves, construction rubbish dumped on roadsides and vacant blocks, and household rubbish, unwanted furniture and mattresses piled up on nature strips. While this is a matter for local council, it seems they are completely overwhelmed. Can the minister provide information on what the Environment Protection Authority Victoria can do to assist and guide council to address this issue?

Bills

STATE TAXATION AND TREASURY LEGISLATION AMENDMENT BILL 2022

Introduction and first reading

Mr PALLAS (Werribee—Treasurer, Minister for Economic Development, Minister for Industrial Relations) (12:59): I move:

That I introduce a bill for an act to amend the Borrowing and Investment Powers Act 1987, the Duties Act 2000, the Essential Services Commission Act 2001, the Land Tax Act 2005, the Payroll Tax Act 2007, the Taxation Administration Act 1997 and the Windfall Gains Tax and State Taxation and Other Acts Further Amendment Act 2021, to make consequential amendments to other acts and for other purposes.

Motion agreed to.

Ms McLEISH (Eildon) (12:59): I require a further brief explanation from the Treasurer.

Mr PALLAS (Werribee—Treasurer, Minister for Economic Development, Minister for Industrial Relations) (13:00): I thank the member for her question. The purpose of this bill is to give effect to the 2022–23 budget measures and to amend various taxation and treasury laws and support their effective operation.

Read first time.

Ordered to be read second time tomorrow.

Petitions

Following petitions presented to house by Clerk:

GIPPSLAND SOUTH ELECTORATE PUBLIC TRANSPORT

This petition of residents in Victoria draws to the attention of the Legislative Assembly that the township of Yarram and surrounds is under-served by public transport to Sale.

The petitioners therefore request that the Legislative Assembly calls on the State Government to provide services that travel between Yarram and Sale, or at the very least initiate a trial to gauge the level of demand.

By Mr D O'BRIEN (Gippsland South) (13 signatures).

SEAFORD NOISE MITIGATION

The Petition of certain citizens of the State of Victoria draws to the attention of the Legislative Assembly that LXRA have no plans to provide mitigation for noise, for the Ultimate Kananook Train Stabling Facility in Seaford. Noise in this 24/7 facility will be continuous and close to residents and the Seaford/Edithvale Ramsar Listed Wetlands. Operational noise includes: The Safety Check (idling train for 5 minutes, test brakes and horn) shunting trains, horns sounding, air conditioning for maintenance shed, staff amenities and administration buildings, two outside train washes, pneumatic tools, forklifts and accelerating trucks, roof mounted exhaust fans, internal cleaning and maintenance in trains as the air conditioning—2 units per train—must run. Health complications of noise for the community as noted by the World Health Organisation: sleep disturbances, learning disorder and cognitive impairment, heart disease and stroke. Health affects for the birds who migrate to reproduce in the RAMSAR listed wetlands nearby: Birds unable to detect danger from predators as they use their hearing, The mothers of the migratory birds become stressed by noise which affects the chicks birth weight and the number of chicks the bird will have, thus their reproduction rate decreases.

The petitioners therefore request that the Legislative the Assembly of Victoria direct LXRA to provide mitigation for the noise generated by the operational procedures at the Kananook Train Stabling Facility in Seaford.

By Mr BURGESS (Hastings) (42 signatures).

NORTHERN SCHOOL FOR AUTISM

This petition of residents in Victoria draws to the attention of the Legislative Assembly that we, the undersigned, request that in the May 2022 State Budget, the Minister for Education, Hon James Merlino and The State Government make a financial commitment to fund the build of a new Senior Campus at Lalor, for the Northern School for Autism. The Northern School for Autism (NSA)-Lalor Campus is part of a Masterplan to redevelop the Peter Lalor Secondary College/ NSA site however, with no confirmed financial commitment to continue planning and commence construction. We have 159 students (12–18 years of age) at the Lalor Campus who only have access to minimal specialist classrooms with no Library, Gym, Science labs, Music/Performance or Therapy rooms, nor does the current campus have adequate green spaces. The Lalor Campus is also seeing an increase of 20+ students every year and the current students do not have the same infrastructure, resources/ facilities which are equitable to those of their peers in the mainstream setting. It is critical that this funding is provided by the State Government as a matter of urgency in the May 2022 State Budget.

The petitioners therefore request that the Legislative Assembly call upon the Minister for Education, Hon James Merlino and the State Government to make a financial commitment in the upcoming 2022 May Budget, to fund the planning and construction cost of a purpose-built Senior Campus for Northern School for Autism in Lalor.

By Ms HALFPENNY (Thomastown) (1055 signatures).

YUROKE ELECTORATE PUBLIC TRANSPORT

This petition of residents in Victoria draws to the attention of the Legislative Assembly the lack of access to metro trains for residents in the Donnybrook, Kalkallo and Mickleham area.

The petitioners therefore request that the Legislative Assembly calls on the Minister for Public Transport and the State Government to make a financial commitment in the upcoming 2022 State Budget for an express bus service operating between Donnybrook Station and Craigieburn Station, providing Donnybrook, Kalkallo and Mickleham residents with improved access to the metro train network.

By Ms SPENCE (Yuroke) (499 signatures).

Tabled.

Ordered that petition lodged by member for Gippsland South be considered next day on motion of Mr D O'BRIEN (Gippsland South).

Ordered that petition lodged by member for Thomastown be considered next day on motion of Ms HALFPENNY (Thomastown).

Documents

UNIVERSITY OF DIVINITY

Report 2021

Mr MERLINO (Monbulk—Minister for Education, Minister for Mental Health) (13:02): I table, by leave, the report 2021 of the University of Divinity.

BUDGET PAPERS 2022–23

Mr PALLAS (Werribee—Treasurer, Minister for Economic Development, Minister for Industrial Relations) (13:02): I table, by leave:

budget paper 1, ‘Treasurer’s speech’;
 budget paper 4, ‘State Capital Program’;
 budget ‘Overview’;
 budget information paper, ‘Suburban’;
 budget information paper, ‘Rural and Regional’; and
 ‘Gender Equality Budget Statement’.

Tabled.

DOCUMENTS

Incorporated list as follows:

DOCUMENTS TABLED UNDER ACTS OF PARLIAMENT—The Clerk tabled the following documents under Acts of Parliament:

Bendigo Kangan Institute—Report 2021
 Box Hill Institute—Report 2021
 Chisholm Institute—Report 2021
Crown Land (Reserves) Act 1978—Order under s 17D granting a lease over Gillott Reserve
 Deakin University—Report 2021
Duties Act 2000—Report 1 July to 31 December 2021 of Foreign Purchaser Additional Duty Exemptions under s 3E
 Federation University Australia—Report 2021
Financial Management Act 1994:
 2022–23 Budget Paper No 2—Strategy and Outlook
 2022–23 Budget Paper No 3—Service Delivery
 2022–23 Budget Paper No 5—Statement of Finances (incorporating Quarterly Financial Report No 3)
 Report from the Minister for Energy, Environment and Climate Change that she had not received the reports 2021 of the:
 Falls Creek Alpine Resort Management Board
 Mount Buller and Mount Stirling Alpine Resort Management Board
 Mount Hotham Alpine Resort Management Board
 Southern Alpine Resort Management Board—
 together with an explanation for the delay
 Report from the Minister for Higher Education that she had not received the Report 2021 of the University of Melbourne, together with an explanation for the delay
 Gordon Institute of TAFE—Report 2021
 Goulburn Ovens Institute of TAFE (gotafe)—Report 2021
 Holmesglen Institute—Report 2021

Integrity and Oversight Committee—Report on the Inquiry into the education and prevention functions of Victoria's integrity agencies, together with appendices and transcripts of evidence—Report and appendices ordered to be published

La Trobe University—Report 2021

Melbourne Polytechnic—Report 2021

Monash University—Report 2021

Occupational Health and Safety Act 2004—Order approving the Lead compliance code

Parliamentary Committees Act 2003—Government response to the Public Accounts and Estimates Committee's Report on the Inquiry into Auditor-General's Report No 202: Meeting Obligations to Protect Ramsar Wetlands (2016)

Parliamentary Salaries, Allowances and Superannuation Act 1968—Compliance Officer—Statement of Findings under s 9H—Ordered to be published

Planning and Environment Act 1987—Notices of approval of amendments to the following Planning Schemes:

Ararat—GC200

Banyule—C160, C164

Boroondara—C357, C362, C375

Darebin—C207

Greater Shepparton—C235

Hepburn—C81, C82

Mansfield—C45

Maroondah—C137

Melbourne—C424

Monash—C152

Moonee Valley—C209

Moreland—C215

Nillumbik—C141

Northern Grampians—GC200

Port of Melbourne—C4

Pyrenees—GC200

Towong—C38

Warrnambool—C204

Wodonga—C137

Public Health and Wellbeing Act 2008—Report to Parliament on the extension of the pandemic declaration

Royal Melbourne Institute of Technology (RMIT University)—Report 2021

South West Institute of TAFE—Report 2021

Statutory Rules under the following Acts:

Confiscation Act 1997—SR 21

Magistrates' Court Act 1989—SR 20

Sex Work Act 1994—SRs 22, 23

Subordinate Legislation Act 1994:

Documents under s 15 in relation to Statutory Rules 20, 22, 23

Documents under s 16B in relation to:

Environment Protection Act 2017—Amendments to the Environment Reference Standard

Gambling Regulation Act 2003:

Ministerial direction under s 6A.7.2

Victorian Gambling and Casino Control Commission Gaming Machine Rules (Casino)
Sunraysia Institute of TAFE (SuniTAFE)—Report 2021
Swinburne University of Technology—Report 2021
TAFE Gippsland—Report 2021
Victoria Police, Chief Commissioner—Report 2021 under s 96 of the *Drugs, Poisons and Controlled Substances Act 1981*
Victoria University—Report 2021
Victorian Inspectorate—Inspection Report March to August 2021 under the *Terrorism (Community Protection) Act 2003*
William Angliss Institute of TAFE—Report 2021
Wodonga Institute of TAFE—Report 2021.

Bills**PUBLIC HEALTH AND WELLBEING AMENDMENT BILL 2022****PUFFING BILLY RAILWAY BILL 2022***Royal assent*

The SPEAKER (13:05): I inform the house that the Governor has given royal assent to the Public Health and Wellbeing Amendment Bill 2022 and the Puffing Billy Railway Bill 2022.

Members**MR LIMBRICK***Resignation*

The SPEAKER (13:05): I wish to advise the house that I have received a letter from the Governor advising that she had on 11 April 2022 received the resignation of Mr David Limbrick as a member of the Legislative Council.

Bills**APPROPRIATION (2022–2023) BILL 2022***Appropriation*

The SPEAKER (13:06): I have received the following message from the Governor accompanied by the estimates:

In accordance with the requirements of section 63 of the Constitution Act 1975 the Governor recommends to the Legislative Assembly that an appropriation be made from the Consolidated Fund for the purposes of a bill for an act for the appropriation of certain sums out of the Consolidated Fund for the ordinary annual services of the government for the financial year 2022–23 and for other purposes, and hereby transmits to the Legislative Assembly estimates of the expenditure requiring annual appropriation in the financial year 2022–23.

Estimates tabled.*Introduction and first reading*

Mr PALLAS (Werribee—Treasurer, Minister for Economic Development, Minister for Industrial Relations) (13:06): I move:

That I introduce a bill for an act for the appropriation of certain sums out of the Consolidated Fund for the ordinary annual services of the government for the financial year 2022–23 and for other purposes.

Motion agreed to.

Read first time; under standing order 61(3)(a), ordered to be read second time immediately.

Statement of compatibility

Mr PALLAS (Werribee—Treasurer, Minister for Economic Development, Minister for Industrial Relations) (13:07): In accordance with section 28 of the Charter of Human Rights and Responsibilities Act 2006 I table a statement of compatibility in relation to the Appropriation (2022–2023) Bill 2022.

In accordance with section 28 of the *Charter of Human Rights and Responsibilities Act 2006* (Vic) (**Charter Act**), I make this statement of compatibility with respect to the Appropriation (2022–2023) Bill 2022.

In my opinion, the Appropriation (2022–2023) Bill 2022, as introduced to the Legislative Assembly, is compatible with the human rights protected by the Charter Act. I base my opinion on the reasons outlined in this statement.

Overview of Bill

The Appropriation (2022–2023) Bill 2022 will provide appropriation authority for payments from the Consolidated Fund for the ordinary annual services of Government for the 2022–2023 financial year.

The amounts contained in Schedule 1 to the Appropriation (2022–2023) Bill 2022 provide for the ongoing operations of departments, including new output and asset investment funded through annual appropriation.

Schedule 2 of the Appropriation (2022–2023) Bill 2022 contains details concerning payments from the Advance to Treasurer in the 2020–2021 financial year.

Human Rights Issues**1. Human rights protected by the Charter Act that are relevant to the Bill**

The Appropriation (2022–2023) Bill 2022 does not raise any human rights issues.

2. Consideration of reasonable limitations—section 7(2)

As the Appropriation (2022–2023) Bill 2022 does not raise any human rights issues, it does not limit any human rights and therefore it is not necessary to consider section 7(2) of the Charter Act.

Conclusion

I consider that the Appropriation (2022–2023) Bill 2022 is compatible with the Charter Act because it does not raise any human rights issues.

TIM PALLAS MP
Treasurer

Second reading

Mr PALLAS (Werribee—Treasurer, Minister for Economic Development, Minister for Industrial Relations) (13:10): I move:

That this bill be now read a second time.

I acknowledge the traditional owners of the land on which we are meeting. I pay my respects to their elders, past, present and emerging, and the Aboriginal elders of other communities who may be here today.

Speaker, today I deliver the Victorian budget 2022–23.

I'd like to start by expressing my appreciation to all the health workers with us today.

To those sitting in the gallery, but also to those working in hospitals and clinics all over the state right now.

There's a saying that the best way to change the world is by example.

Our state's nurses and doctors, paramedics and healthcare workers set a powerful example of compassion and selflessness right throughout the pandemic.

They delivered more than 15 million doses of vaccine as Victorians stepped up to build immunity.

They administered more than 20 million PCR tests.

They treated thousands of COVID patients.

They fought a threat from which they were not immune, facing exposure and isolation and taking on extra work when colleagues were furloughed.

Today we say thank you.

Today I hand down a budget that gives our healthcare workers the extra pair of helping hands they need so they can give Victorians the very best care.

Back in 2014 when the government won office, nobody could have predicted the pandemic.

But what this government has always understood is that every day in office is an opportunity to make life better for Victorians.

Since 2014, we haven't wasted a minute.

From the outset, we have planned and built for the future.

Not just for tomorrow, but for the many years ahead.

Together with the Victorian community, we've built schools and hospitals, roads and railways.

We've overseen the biggest infrastructure program in the nation.

We've delivered projects that hundreds of thousands of Victorian workers can look at with pride and say: 'I helped build that'.

We've led social change to make this community fairer and more compassionate—through free TAFE, three-year-old kinder and reforms to address family violence and mental health.

Together with our community we've nurtured an enviable lifestyle and a world-class major events calendar, and we've attracted investors from around the globe.

We've created 560 000 jobs—of which more than 400 000 are full time.

The tireless efforts of Victorians—their innovation, enthusiasm and hard work—have paid dividends.

Speaker, if your state must face a global crisis, it helps to have the most robust economy in the nation.

When the pandemic hit, we moved quickly to protect Victorians while vaccines and treatments were being ordered by the commonwealth.

We used our balance sheet to support businesses and household budgets.

We put tutors in schools, provided grants and hardship relief—we delivered more than \$44 billion to protect health, save jobs, and respond to the pandemic.

Throughout it all, we never lost our focus on what we were elected to deliver for Victorians: health, education, infrastructure, jobs.

We dealt with the crisis, while keeping our eyes on the long-term goal: making this state a prosperous and fair place to live.

A state with world-class education and health care, one that encourages success and opportunity but that also cares for those in need.

Speaker, we know the pandemic caused pain. We know it hasn't been easy.

Victorians pulled together to get their community through.

And we know that the best way to honour that is to rebuild our health system and our community so that we are stronger together.

Speaker, the Victorian economy suffered an extraordinary shock due to the pandemic, as did jurisdictions right across the globe.

And the jobs plan, announced in the 2020–21 budget, was our strategy to protect the economy and protect jobs.

Today, with one of the world's highest rates of vaccination, we are open and rebuilding.

We were confident of a quick bounce back, but I'm pleased to say it's been even faster than predicted.

At 4 per cent, the statewide unemployment rate is at its lowest since current records began.

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

Employment in regional Victoria has increased by over 80 000 people since November 2014.

State final demand is now back above prepandemic levels, and the economy is forecast to grow by 3.25 per cent in the coming financial year.

Industries are roaring to life.

Victorians are crowding back to jobs, restaurants, theatres and stadiums.

Business conditions are well above their long-term average.

Leading employment indicators are strong.

Female and youth employment are now above prepandemic levels.

Since the trough in employment in September 2020, an amazing 280 000 jobs have been created across the state, smashing our target to create 200 000 jobs by late 2022.

Workforce participation is now near an all-time high.

I'm proud to say that this government's jobs plan has well and truly delivered.

Speaker, Victorians have achieved this extraordinary economic recovery despite the commonwealth government short-changing them by billions of dollars.

The recent federal budget revealed Victoria's share of new infrastructure spending would be mere scraps—less than 6 per cent of new funding, despite us having 26 per cent of the nation's population.

Their \$7 billion regional development plan allocated Victoria a grand total of exactly nothing.

Under the commonwealth government's distorted GST carve-up, Victoria could lose over \$1 billion a year if the no-worse-off guarantee is allowed to expire in 2027.

Federal funding for COVID-related health costs will be cut this year, as the commonwealth fades ever further from view and increases the burden on Victoria.

We've had to do more to vaccinate Victorians, help businesses and support workers, because the commonwealth simply didn't do its job.

This all means less for our hospitals and schools, for roads and rail.

The commonwealth government, whoever they are, must stop short-changing hardworking Victorians and give us our fair share.

As the Premier has said, funding Victoria fairly is not foreign aid—this is simply what Victorians are entitled to, as Australians.

Our federation won't function effectively if the commonwealth disappears in our hour of need and treats Victorians as second-class citizens.

Speaker, health was a top priority of the Andrews Labor government long before the pandemic.

We have always believed in putting patients first.

Since our first budget we've dramatically increased health funding—by \$9.2 billion a year—and we've employed 29 000 extra healthcare workers.

But the deadly pandemic has pummelled health systems around the world.

Our incredible nurses, doctors, paramedics, allied health practitioners, cooks and cleaners—indeed all our health workers—deployed all their training, experience and grit to face this once-in-a-lifetime health crisis.

They cancelled leave, they worked through exhaustion, they took on new duties, and they risked their own health.

They provided exceptional clinical care—and so much more.

They held patients' hands, they comforted families and their kindness brought humanity into COVID wards.

We owe them a great debt.

They are our front line.

They are the best of us.

Their example, and their sacrifice, brought out our better selves.

Their discipline, determination and compassion gave us the courage to keep trying, to persevere and to prevail.

That's why in this budget, I'm proud to announce a pandemic repair plan for more staff, better hospitals and first-class care.

The pandemic meant elective surgery was put on hold for many Victorians.

It's now time to start catching up.

We'll ramp up elective surgery to record levels as part of a \$1.5 billion COVID catch-up plan.

We'll set up extended hours for hospital operating clinics to perform more surgeries each day.

We'll convert Frankston Private Hospital into a public surgery centre with capacity to perform up to 9000 surgeries a year once fully operational.

Our goal is to carry out 240 000 surgeries annually by 2024.

We'll invest in the care patients need.

We are training and hiring up to 7000 new healthcare workers, of which 5000 are nurses.

We'll recruit up to 2000 of these through a global recruiting drive to bring more expats home.

We'll deliver an extra 400 perioperative nurses, upskill 1000 nurses and technicians and we'll create more than 1200 new nursing and midwifery training places.

We'll nurture the mental health of our workforce by extending our program of one-on-one psychological support.

And we'll back more traineeships for Aboriginal healthcare workers, so our First Nations people have more culturally sensitive care.

The pandemic has tested our emergency responses, and every Victorian deserves to know that when they need it, help will come.

So we'll put more paramedics on the road with an extra \$124 million, while we're freeing up emergency departments.

We're investing \$333 million to add nearly 400 new staff so we can increase 000 call-taking and dispatch capacity, including for ambulances.

And we're training more operators to allocate calls across the state.

We'll set up a second mobile stroke unit in Melbourne's south-east so that stroke patients can get the fast care that saves lives.

I'm very proud to announce that we are building a 24/7 hospital for the growing communities in Melbourne's west, with more than \$900 million in this budget for the new Melton hospital.

We'll also deliver the Barwon women's and children's hospital for Geelong's rapidly growing population with an investment of over half a billion dollars.

We'll expand emergency departments at Werribee Mercy Hospital and Casey Hospital with \$236 million.

And more people will get the care they need in the comfort of their own home as we expand the Better at Home program.

Victorians in every corner of our state deserve access to high-quality care.

This budget boosts the Regional Health Infrastructure Fund by \$300 million so our regional and rural health services can be upgraded with operating theatres and medical equipment.

Since this fund began in 2016, we have financed over 480 projects, and with today's funding boost our investment will total \$790 million.

Speaker, we'll keep fighting the fight against COVID-19.

We'll support our hospitals with an extra half a billion dollars to keep combating the virus.

And we'll invest to extend our respiratory clinics, which are so critical for treating severe cases.

We are distributing 200 million free rapid antigen tests to our hospitals, critical workers, schools and childcare centres and to every Victorian who attends a testing site.

We've invested in a new mRNA manufacturing facility, in partnership with the commonwealth, to make the latest vaccines right here in Victoria.

Speaker, this is a budget that puts more than \$12 billion into the hospitals and health care our state needs and the Victorian workers who will deliver it.

This pandemic repair plan means more staff, better hospitals and first-class care.

This budget is putting patients first.

Speaker, the Royal Commission into Victoria's Mental Health System provided a plan for a world-class network of services.

This massive social reform is one of the biggest in our state's history, the sort of generational change that only Labor governments make.

It will not just improve quality of life for thousands of people—it will save lives.

For the truckie pulling over in the dead of night to weep, for the new mother stricken by panic attacks, for the young person feeling like nobody has ever felt so alone—for these people, their families and many more, our mental health reform might be the most important thing this government ever does.

Last year, we delivered \$3.8 billion to accelerate this change and to build a system which gets people the care and help they need and deserve.

Our record spend in this critical area continues in this budget, which invests in mental health with a further \$1.3 billion.

Mental health care is about so much more than buildings or equipment. It's about people caring for patients with compassion.

That's why we're ramping up our mental health workforce to deliver on the commission's reforms with \$372 million to help train 1500 workers, including 400 mental health nurses.

We'll open 82 new mental health beds across the state, making a total of 274 new beds that have received funding since the 2019–20 budget.

We'll build a bigger mental health facility at Goulburn Valley Health in Shepparton.

So that older Victorians receive the high-quality care and comfort they deserve, we'll invest more than \$140 million to build three new public sector residential aged care facilities in Camperdown, Mansfield and Orbost.

We'll also be helping Victorians living with a disability who have not been eligible for the NDIS with more than \$130 million for tailored support.

Speaker, preventing a problem from getting worse has far more impact than only acting once it becomes an emergency.

That's why we're funding an early intervention package, with half a billion dollars to address issues sooner for students in crisis, those exiting the justice system and those at risk of homelessness.

These investments focus on helping Victorians early, improving their lives and reducing their need for more intensive services later.

Speaker, the Andrews Labor government knows that a fantastic education gives every child the chance to reach their potential.

Because the unfortunate truth is that the playing field is not always even. Some kids leave for school with a hug and a packed lunch while others walk out the door with an empty stomach and a heart full of worry.

No matter their background or their postcode, we want every child to have world-class schooling that will give them the key to unlock their best life.

Since 2014, this government has employed nearly 10 000 new teachers.

This budget continues that commitment to a culture of learning and growth with funding to expand schools, grow our teaching workforce and help our kids.

We promised in 2018 to open 100 new schools across our state by 2026, a pledge we are ahead of schedule to deliver.

Today, we're funding an additional 13 new schools for Victorian students, taking us to 75 of the 100 schools we promised.

We're also going to upgrade a further 65 schools, including 36 special schools, meaning this government will have upgraded every single special school in the state.

This budget invests an extra \$1.8 billion to build new schools and improve existing ones, bringing this government's total investment to more than \$12.8 billion for new schools and upgrades.

We'll fund extra literacy and numeracy support for students who need it most, with new funding of more than \$130 million.

Speaker, any parent raising a teenager knows there's no 'one size fits all' for young people finishing secondary school. If you pigeonhole a kid, this can impact their entire life.

Next year, 2023, will see the start of the biggest reform of VCE since it began.

We'll introduce a new vocational pathway to give every student more choice in VCE with a commitment of nearly \$280 million.

That will expand the Head Start school-based apprenticeship model to every government secondary school in the state.

Speaker, in 2022 we reached a milestone—every Victorian child can now get at least 5 hours of funded three-year-old kindergarten each week, getting them off to a better start in life.

In this budget we're giving every child starting three-year-old kinder a kinder kit, with educational items like books and games.

Schoolteachers have gone above and beyond through the pandemic, working hard to keep kids engaged.

This budget invests \$779 million to recruit around 1900 more teachers.

That means more time for each teacher to prepare and focus on each student, to get to know them better and to meet their individual learning needs.

Speaker, we're creating decent, secure jobs by investing in Victorian industry, because when we back homegrown innovation, every Victorian benefits.

That's why we're announcing a new Victorian Industry Investment Fund, with \$40 million in grants to support growing businesses.

We'll open a new trade and investment office in Paris and commit another \$40 million to attract more business to Victoria, from companies around the world.

We'll deliver programs to encourage investment and jobs in renewable energy, digital manufacturing and defence research.

We are investing more than \$100 million in the skills and training Victorians need, with more support for TAFEs and an expanded apprenticeship support officers program.

Speaker, in any humane and fair society, jobs should be secure and safe.

That's why the government is piloting Australia's first sick pay guarantee, providing insecure workers up to five days sick pay every year.

This means they will no longer be forced to choose between a day's pay and looking after their health or a loved one who needs them.

We're also fighting wage theft by arming the Victorian Wage Inspectorate with the resources it needs to take on this injustice.

We'll help community service organisations and their workers by covering cost increases with an extra \$90 million.

Victorian workers have driven our remarkable economic recovery, and unlike the commonwealth, the Andrews Labor government will continue to stand with workers and fight for better and more secure jobs.

Speaker, every Victorian deserves a roof over their head.

People with secure housing have more chance of finding a job, staying healthy, caring for their families and reaching their potential.

Our Big Housing Build invested a record \$5.3 billion for more than 12 000 new social housing homes.

In this budget, we will work with the community housing sector to make available a further \$1 billion in low-interest loans and government guarantees to create up to 6000 more homes.

We're also working to support after-hours homeless services with an \$85 million package, taking total support for homelessness in this term of office to over \$700 million.

Speaker, Victorians know that our regions are—quite simply—spectacular.

We all treasure our opportunities to experience regional Victoria's natural beauty, local ingenuity and heartfelt hospitality, whether for a long weekend or a lifetime.

Soon, we'll get to share all of that with the world.

I'm tremendously proud that Victoria will host the Commonwealth Games in 2026.

Known as the 'regional Victoria games', they will feature hubs in Ballarat, Bendigo, Geelong and Gippsland.

Shepparton will also hold events, and other regional towns and cities will be added to the program.

This budget provides \$2.6 billion in funding for this historic event, which will provide a massive economic boost through event infrastructure, new housing and promotion of our great state.

Our games funding is part of more than \$5.7 billion in initiatives for regional Victoria in this budget.

An unprecedented \$36 billion has now been invested in regional Victoria since the government came to office.

Speaker, this government knows that to be a world-class state you need world-class transport.

Our flagship transport projects—the Metro Tunnel, level crossing removals, the West Gate Tunnel, the Suburban Rail Loop, the North East Link and the Melbourne Airport rail—are shaping our state's future.

The Regional Rail Revival and our regional road upgrades are making it easier and faster for Victorians to travel throughout the state.

Our infrastructure investment will average \$21.3 billion a year over the budget and forward estimates—more than four times the average before we came to government.

All up, our capital works program has supported more than 190 000 jobs since 2014.

Victoria's strong recovery owes a lot to our Big Build.

It is the economic and jobs powerhouse which is fast turning our big dreams into reality.

This budget invests in preparing for day one of the Metro Tunnel, from the first driver trained to signage for the first passengers.

Work on the Suburban Rail Loop continues, with planning and procurement for the eastern section well underway.

By 2025, we will have removed 85 dangerous level crossings, clearing away boom gates and freeing up new community spaces.

Today, we're committing \$250 million to buy 12 more VLocity trains for regional Victoria.

These will be built and maintained in Victoria for Victorians, supporting hundreds of jobs in Victorian manufacturing.

And \$213 million will deliver the Mickleham Road upgrade, creating a safer journey for the thousands of drivers who use the road every day.

Speaker, families work hard to hold it all together.

The Andrews Labor government understands that living costs are rising, and we want to help make things easier.

That's why this budget invests a quarter of a billion dollars so that Victorian households can access a one-off \$250 power saving bonus—that's direct support while we also help them find the best deal on their power bills.

We have always supported families with their household budgets. We've expanded free and subsidised kinder, launched the Victorian Homebuyer Fund and introduced free TAFE.

We helped households through the pandemic with free RATs, the test isolation payment and rental assistance grants.

And our dining, entertainment and travel vouchers not only helped the economy, they made it cheaper for Victorians to get back out there and eat, play and stay.

Speaker, this budget invests in equal opportunity for all Victorians, because everyone deserves to live their best life and to be their whole selves.

We are very proud to be the first state to introduce gender responsive budgeting, ensuring we consider the impact on gender of all public policy and investment.

In this budget we are committing around \$940 million in initiatives designed to improve outcomes for women.

Speaker, every woman and child deserves to be safe, and this government has already invested over \$3.5 billion to protect Victorians from family violence.

In this budget there's a further \$241 million to support victim-survivors, including two new family violence refuges and six new crisis accommodation properties.

We'll support our LGBTIQ+ Victorians with almost \$15 million in funding for legal services, specialist health programs and pride events.

This government values our transgender and gender-diverse communities, their achievements, their views, their contributions, their voices.

For our First Nations peoples, the Andrews Labor government is enormously proud to be supporting the groundbreaking process of treaty.

This budget invests more than \$150 million to progress treaty negotiations and self-determination.

Since we took office in 2014, we've announced a total of \$1.6 billion in new funding benefiting Victorian Aboriginal communities, including \$400 million in this budget.

Speaker, unlike some others, this government is united behind a target of net zero emissions by 2050.

We have had the greatest annual increase in renewable energy output of any state in history, cementing Victoria's status as the clean energy capital of Australia and creating thousands of jobs.

And now we're delivering the nation's first offshore wind targets, aiming to generate 9 gigawatts of power by 2040 as we harness the wild winds off our coast.

Some said our strategies would increase power prices! How wrong they were.

We now have the lowest power prices in five years.

We're making sure Victoria is part of the solution to climate change, and this budget invests \$215 million towards an environmentally sustainable future.

Speaker, Victoria is renowned as the creative state, with Melbourne the cultural and events capital of the nation.

Our creatives—the artists, writers, musos and performers—are our heart and soul, reminding us to stop and think, to laugh and cry and to dream.

When the visitors stopped and the stage lights went out, our arts industry took a real hit.

So we're investing \$245 million to help our creative industries bounce back, with affordable creative spaces for artists, and the Go West Festivals Fund to take the arts in Melbourne's west to a whole new level.

We're backing our arts organisations and we'll fund new blockbuster exhibitions at the NGV.

We are building NGV Contemporary, Australia's new home for contemporary art, which will transform Melbourne's arts precinct, create jobs and attract visitors to Victoria.

Speaker, the brave men and women of Victoria Police work every day to keep our community safe, often dealing with volatile situations.

They step up with courage and strength, determined to protect the vulnerable.

This budget delivers more than 500 new police officers and 50 protective services officers to meet the growing needs of our state.

And we'll invest in our emergency response with more than \$35 million going to the VICSES and the CFA to back up the great work that they and their volunteers do.

Speaker, before the pandemic, this government maintained strong surpluses while at the same time delivering improved services and new infrastructure.

Our priority through the pandemic was to protect lives and to save jobs.

We borrowed to do this, but we had a clear four-step fiscal strategy to recover.

A strategy we unveiled in the 2020–21 budget, one which we've applied and one which is succeeding.

The first step was to create jobs and restore economic growth.

The second step was to reach an operating cash surplus, which we delivered a path to in last year's budget and which we'll deliver in full this coming financial year.

The third step was to reach an operating surplus.

I'm pleased to say that with this budget we are delivering on step 3, with an operating surplus of over \$650 million forecast in 2025–26.

Our budget will recover by over \$18 billion in just four years.

We are delivering a path back to surplus without jeopardising our economic recovery or cutting the services on which Victorians rely.

By contrast, the federal government will stay in deficit for more than a decade.

In this budget, we're also making progress on step 4 in our fiscal strategy to stabilise debt levels.

Debt will be \$7.8 billion lower than forecast in last year's budget update.

In this budget, we are establishing the Victorian Future Fund to reduce the pandemic debt burden on future generations.

The fund will initially be set up using proceeds from the VicRoads modernisation joint venture.

The new Victorian Future Fund is projected to have a balance of around \$10 billion in the medium term.

It will be supplemented by investment returns, land sales and a proportion of future surpluses once net debt stabilises.

The fund will ultimately be used to repay COVID-19 borrowings at the appropriate time to support our fiscal strategy.

With this budget, Victoria takes another step towards an exciting and prosperous future.

Speaker, let's jump ahead to the end of the forward estimates period.

The year is 2026.

The Commonwealth Games is on, with excited tourists on our streets and a buzz throughout the state.

We're catching trains through the Metro Tunnel, marvelling at its five new underground stations before we emerge into a bustling, lively city.

The state budget is back in surplus.

Seven thousand healthcare workers have been trained and hired so that when our children or our parents need care, we know they're in the best possible hands.

The new Footscray Hospital is open, and Melton hospital is taking shape.

The West Gate Tunnel is easing traffic in Melbourne's west, and apprentices are hard at work building the Suburban Rail Loop.

Our reform of Victoria's mental health system is saving lives.

We're producing Australia's mRNA vaccines right here in this state.

The Australian Institute for Infectious Disease is developing new vaccines and therapeutics in our world-leading biomedical precinct.

Victorian students are walking through the gates at 100 cutting-edge new schools, and 85 dangerous level crossings are gone for good.

And in 2026 I hope, Speaker, I can say that the global pandemic is now a distant memory.

That it is remembered as a time when the Victorian community came together to carve out new directions and to reach for better dreams.

In my second budget speech in 2016, a very different time, I quoted an ancient Greek saying: 'A society grows great when old people plant trees whose shade they know they shall never sit in'.

I still believe this is true.

Today's doubts must not constrain tomorrow's opportunities.

So, in this budget, we plant the trees.

And our children and grandchildren will enjoy their shelter.

So I commend this bill to the house.

Mr GUY (Bulleen—Leader of the Opposition) (13:49): I move:

That the debate be adjourned.

Motion agreed to and debate adjourned.

Ordered that debate be adjourned until tomorrow. Debate adjourned until Wednesday, 4 May.

APPROPRIATION (PARLIAMENT 2022–2023) BILL 2022

Appropriation

The SPEAKER (13:50): I have received the following message from the Governor, accompanied by the estimates:

In accordance with the requirements of section 63 of the Constitution Act 1975, the Governor recommends to the Legislative Assembly that an appropriation be made from the Consolidated Fund for the purposes of a bill for an act for the appropriation of certain sums out of the Consolidated Fund for the Parliament in respect of the financial year 2022–2023 and for other purposes, and hereby transmits to the Legislative Assembly estimates of the expenditure requiring annual appropriation in the financial year 2022–2023.

Estimates tabled.

Introduction and first reading

Ms ALLAN (Bendigo East—Leader of the House, Minister for Transport Infrastructure, Minister for the Suburban Rail Loop) (13:50): I move:

That I introduce a bill for an act for the appropriation of certain sums out of the Consolidated Fund for the Parliament in respect of the financial year 2022–23 and for other purposes.

Motion agreed to.

Read first time; under standing order 61(3)(a), ordered to be read second time immediately.

Statement of compatibility

Ms ALLAN (Bendigo East—Leader of the House, Minister for Transport Infrastructure, Minister for the Suburban Rail Loop) (13:52): In accordance with the Charter of Human Rights and Responsibilities Act 2006 I table a statement of compatibility in relation to the Appropriation (Parliament 2022–2023) Bill 2022.

In accordance with section 28 of the *Charter of Human Rights and Responsibilities Act 2006* (Vic) (**Charter Act**), I make this statement of compatibility with respect to the Appropriation (Parliament 2022–2023) Bill 2022.

In my opinion, the Appropriation (Parliament 2022–2023) Bill 2022, as introduced to the Legislative Assembly, is compatible with the human rights protected by the Charter Act. I base my opinion on the reasons outlined in this statement.

Overview of Bill

The purpose of the Appropriation (Parliament 2022–2023) Bill 2022 is to provide appropriation authority for payments from the Consolidated Fund to the Parliament in respect of the 2022–2023 financial year.

Human Rights Issues

1. Human rights protected by the Charter Act that are relevant to the Bill

The Appropriation (Parliament 2022–2023) Bill 2022 does not raise any human rights issues.

2. Consideration of reasonable limitations—section 7(2)

As the Appropriation (Parliament 2022–2023) Bill 2022 does not raise any human rights issues, it does not limit any human rights, and therefore it is not necessary to consider section 7(2) of the Charter Act.

Conclusion

I consider that the Appropriation (Parliament 2022–2023) Bill 2022 is compatible with the Charter Act because it does not raise any human rights issues.

TIM PALLAS MP

Treasurer

Second reading

Ms ALLAN (Bendigo East—Leader of the House, Minister for Transport Infrastructure, Minister for the Suburban Rail Loop) (13:52): I move:

That this bill be now read a second time.

I ask that my second-reading speech be incorporated into *Hansard*.

Incorporated speech as follows:

The Appropriation (Parliament 2022–2023) Bill 2022 provides appropriation authority for payments from the Consolidated Fund to the Parliament in respect of the 2022/2023 financial year, including ongoing liabilities incurred by the Parliament such as employee entitlements that may be realised in the future.

Honourable Members will be aware that other funds are appropriated for parliamentary purposes by way of special appropriations contained in other legislation. In addition, unapplied appropriations under the *Appropriation (Parliament 2021–2022) Act 2021* have been estimated and included in the Budget Papers. Before 30 June 2022, the actual unapplied appropriation will be finalised and the 2022/2023 appropriations will be adjusted by the approved carryover amounts under section 32 of the *Financial Management Act 1994* (Vic).

In line with the wishes of the Presiding Officers, appropriations in the Appropriation (Parliament 2022–2023) Bill 2022 are made to the departments of the Parliament.

The total appropriation authority sought in this Appropriation (Parliament 2022–2023) Bill 2022 is \$268 739 000 (clause 3) for Parliament in respect of the 2022/2023 financial year.

I commend the Bill to the House.

Mr BATTIN (Gembrook) (13:52): I move:

That the debate be now adjourned.

Motion agreed to and debate adjourned.

Ordered that debate be adjourned until tomorrow. Debate adjourned until Wednesday, 4 May.

APPROPRIATION (2022–2023) BILL 2022**APPROPRIATION (PARLIAMENT 2022–2023) BILL 2022***Concurrent debate*

Ms ALLAN (Bendigo East—Leader of the House, Minister for Transport Infrastructure, Minister for the Suburban Rail Loop) (13:53): I move, by leave:

That this house authorises and requires the Speaker to permit the second reading and subsequent stages of the Appropriation (2022–2023) Bill 2022 and the Appropriation (Parliament 2022–2023) Bill 2022 to be moved and debated concurrently.

Motion agreed to.

Business of the house**STANDING AND SESSIONAL ORDERS**

Ms SHEED (Shepparton) (13:53): I desire to move, by leave:

That so much of standing and sessional orders be suspended to allow general business, notice of motion 48, relating to the reintroduction of non-government business, to be moved immediately.

Leave refused.

Mr HIBBINS (Pahran) (13:54): I desire to move, by leave:

That so much of standing and sessional orders be suspended to allow general business, notice of motion 48, under the name of the member for Shepparton, relating to the reintroduction of non-government business, to be moved immediately.

Leave refused.

ADJOURNMENT

Ms ALLAN (Bendigo East—Leader of the House, Minister for Transport Infrastructure, Minister for the Suburban Rail Loop) (13:54): I move:

That the house, at its rising, adjourns until Wednesday, 11 May 2022.

Motion agreed to.

Members statements

SENIOR CONSTABLE BRIA JOYCE

Mr BATTIN (Gembrook) (13:54): Today I speak on behalf of Bria Joyce, who was a Victorian police officer with the number 42368 and who tragically lost her life recently in Mildura. She was the adored partner of Kyle and a loved daughter of Dianne. She was known up there as bright and bubbly and described as a real country girl. She was much loved and active in and passionate about her community. She was very involved in sports as well as other things up in her local community. She was just 25 years old, and she was a police officer for six years. But her policing life has left a memorable impact. She was off duty when she rescued a young girl struggling in the Murray River, and the girl's father said it could have been a disastrous day if Joyce had not been there and she needed to be thanked for these things.

She joined the police force on 22 August 2016 in squad 6 of 2016–17, and she graduated eighth in her squad. She was sworn in on 11 November 2016. She had a distinguished career and ended up moving back up to Mildura, where she enjoyed working with her colleagues, who have all spoken very, very highly of her. As many know, she lost her life. She was in the car with Senior Constable Thomas Kinnane, who was injured. Thomas was a squad mate of mine back in 2001. I have messaged Thomas to send through our thoughts, and our thoughts from the entire Parliament, from every person, should be sent to every member in Mildura not just of the community but particularly of the police force to thank Bria for her duty to Victoria.

ANZAC DAY

Ms THOMAS (Macedon—Minister for Agriculture, Minister for Regional Development) (13:56): I want to begin by thanking the Mount Macedon Anzac Day dawn service committee for hosting me at their event on Anzac Day this year. Once again the committee put on an extremely moving service that marked the day with reverence and respect for all those who have served our country. It was great to see all the locals and travellers alike, including so many local students, make the hike up to their cross to mark the occasion. I want to particularly thank event organisers Marcus Fielding, Bruce Mildenhall and Ruth De Jong for hosting me on the day. Special thanks also and always to Frank Donovan and to Afghanistan veteran Alan Mitchell-Lappin for the role that they played during the service.

D'ARCY EGBERTS

Ms THOMAS: Speaking of Anzac Day, I would like to congratulate Sacred Heart College student D'Arcy Egberts. D'Arcy has been recognised for her dedication and leadership skills in the Shrine of Remembrance's young ambassador leadership program. Through the role D'Arcy will encourage other young people to understand the importance of remembering Australia's service community and military history. Congratulations to D'Arcy.

TARYN LANE

Ms THOMAS: In more positive news I was delighted also that Daylesford local Taryn Lane was recently inducted into the Victorian Honour Roll of Women. Taryn's induction recognises her tireless campaigning for community energy and climate transition projects across Australia. This includes Taryn's advocacy as the general manager of Australia's first community-owned wind farm, Hepburn Wind. Congratulations, Taryn.

ROAD MAINTENANCE

Ms RYAN (Euroa) (13:57): I rise today to call out the appalling mismanagement of Victoria's road network. Last year Labor cut funding for road maintenance by 23 per cent, ripping \$191 million from the budget. Instead of restoring that today, the government has doubled down on those cuts, cutting even more funding from the state's crumbling roads. Labor has been in power in this state now for eight years, and Victoria's roads have never been so bad. Government MPs are so out of touch with reality that they think the concerns of Victorian motorists are 'imagined fantasies', in the words of the member for Eltham. In 2017 the Auditor-General warned the government that:

The increasing proportion of the state road network in very poor condition presents a growing risk to public safety and increases road user costs.

Not enough funding is allocated to road maintenance to sustain the road network ...

KILMORE-WALLAN BYPASS

Ms RYAN: Speaking of roads, today's budget offered Labor its eighth opportunity to match the commitment previously made on this side of the house to build the Kilmore-Wallan bypass. Labor has again pushed back the land acquisition process for that project. The government has delayed, delayed, delayed, fabricating excuse after excuse. It is now six years since funding was first put in the budget to acquire the land—six years to acquire some land for a bypass. It is a complete joke.

GREENING THE WEST

Mr CARROLL (Niddrie—Minister for Public Transport, Minister for Roads and Road Safety) (13:59): The Victorian Treasurer just handed down the budget for 2022–23, and he quoted at the end of his speech an ancient Greek saying: 'A society grows great when old people plant trees whose shade they know they shall never sit in'. I had the great pleasure, on that very subject, to welcome the Minister for Energy, Environment and Climate Change to my electorate a fortnight ago at the social enterprise Ecodynamics to talk about our Greening the West initiative, where we are going to plant more than 500 000 trees over the coming years. It is really important, and the pandemic has shown how important spending time in nature and open space is. In my electorate, from Aberfeldie Park to Brimbank Park to the Green Spine linear park in Airport West, this Greening the West initiative will go a long way to ensuring that we have a cleaner, greener, safer community.

I also had the great pleasure of having with me Nick Somes from Ecodynamics as well as Horseshoe Bend ward councillors Virginia Tachos and Jae Papalia, and Jasmine Nguyen, the mayor of the City of Brimbank. Can I also say that a great highlight for me was having the founding members of the new Horseshoe Bend Community Group, Cynthia Frayne and David Monty, there on behalf of their group that is doing outstanding work with the Wurundjeri corporation to ensure that Brimbank Park, in particular Horseshoe Bend Park, caters for future generations in Melbourne's north-west. We know trees are key to a healthier and happier community.

WARBURTON HIGHWAY, SEVILLE EAST

Ms VALLENCE (Evelyn) (14:00): Seville and Seville East residents were thrilled when two weeks ago the Leader of the Opposition and I met them on the corner of Peters Road and Warburton Highway in Seville East to announce that a Guy state government would invest \$5 million to ensure desperately needed safety upgrades are made to the dangerous stretch of Warburton Highway between Peters and Douthie roads to allow a safer commute for residents and tourists. We have listened to this

community. I have campaigned alongside this community. Our \$5 million pledge could include the installation of safer turning lanes, road widening and improving crossing points for pedestrians, particularly for schoolchildren crossing from the bus. It comes after years of being ignored and shunned by the Premier and his Labor government, who have sadly refused to listen, including in today's state budget—there is nothing for it.

Our community-led campaign is supported by emergency services first responders, including the Seville fire brigade and Yarra Ranges police officers. They are fed up with attending road trauma incidents and tragedies on this road. Only a Liberal state government is committed to fixing the Warburton Highway in Seville East. We will work with the community and road safety experts to get this done. A massive thanks to Joel Supple, Claire Knowles, Andrew Sands and many other residents who are leading this road safety campaign. If we are elected to government this November, we are the only party that will get it done.

ANZAC DAY

Ms HORNE (Williamstown—Minister for Ports and Freight, Minister for Consumer Affairs, Gaming and Liquor Regulation, Minister for Fishing and Boating) (14:02): On Anzac Day I joined the Williamstown, Newport and Spotswood Kingsville RSLs at their services. All three RSLs provide such important support to our local community, and it was an honour to be able to commemorate such a meaningful day with them.

I am absolutely delighted to announce that the Newport RSL sub-branch will be receiving \$36 000 for essential structural works as part of the veterans capital works grant program. The grant will go towards making emergency repairs to make the building safe and the provision of absolutely critical welfare and wellbeing services to the local veteran community. The Newport RSL is a pillar of our local community. On Anzac Day president Ernie Poole told the story of the RSL's efforts in engaging with local schools, community groups and organisations to connect with our veterans and their families. I would like to thank Ernie and also the indomitable Ian Nicholls for his continuous hard work in supporting our veteran community in Newport and beyond.

Spotswood Kingsville RSL is another important part of the local community and is the recipient of nearly \$750 000 from the state government's West Gate Neighbourhood Fund to transform the facilities into a sustainable and vibrant community hub. The refurbishment will create an inclusive space to connect defence force personnel, veterans and members to the local community. It is a vision that the new president, Gabrielle Prideaux, embodies.

HAMPTON ROVERS FOOTBALL CLUB

Mr NEWBURY (Brighton) (14:03): Thank you to the Hampton Rovers Football Club and president Gary Nash for hosting their annual Anzac game. Our community appreciated Hampton RSL executive members Bill Mirabito, Corey Denning, and Arron Scott performing part of the Anzac ceremony before the game. Bill—or Choc to locals—was also awarded an important service award by the Salvation Army. Congratulations to the Rovers, who then won their game by 137 points.

ELWOOD CROQUET CLUB

Mr NEWBURY: Elwood Croquet Club and its 60 members recently celebrated its 95th birthday. The event was an opportunity to acknowledge the club's founding women and the hurdles they overcame, Mrs Robinson, a former St Kilda mayor, and the way she fought for its establishment. When she moved that council expand the club a fellow councillor outrageously alleged that the ladies had got around councillors. Congratulations to the club on the milestone.

BRIGHTON BAPTIST CHURCH

Mr NEWBURY: The Baptist community has been worshipping in Bay Street, Brighton, for 171 years. On Sunday the newly renovated church reopened its doors. Hundreds of local residents

visited to see the new site, which now operates in partnership with Crossway. Best wishes to the Brighton pastor, Brendan Smith, and the congregation.

NORTH BRIGHTON TRAIN STATION

Mr NEWBURY: Residents who live near North Brighton railway station are concerned about increased train noise. It is affecting their amenity significantly. Sixty neighbours to the train line, led by Julian and Maria Fraraccio, have petitioned the state government saying the noise is 'extremely upsetting and stressful' and 'most of us cannot have a safe enjoyment of our home and garden area'. Labor must stop ignoring my community.

BAYSWATER ELECTORATE INFRASTRUCTURE PROJECTS

Mr TAYLOR (Bayswater) (14:05): This is my fourth budget, and I am so proud that the Andrews Labor government is continuing to deliver for the community that I proudly represent. I want to focus on a couple of exciting local funding announcements.

The McMahons Road intersection—we are fixing this intersection. The state Labor government, the Andrews Labor government, is fixing this once and for all, installing lights and making it safe, ending the years of empty promises, ending the talkfest and getting on with it with real budget funding secured. It had been long talked about, but nothing had been done. Actions speak louder than words, and after years of empty promises the community spoke loud and clear: it is not good enough. This upgrade will mean we will deliver lights, we will fully signalise it, we will improve travel time and we will make it more efficient and, importantly, safer for all road users who use that part of the world. I tell you what: the community spoke. With hundreds of signatures on my petition, they said loud and clear: get it done. And we are doing exactly that. We are getting on with it, and we will deliver it in this year's budget—funding secured, black and white. I am proud to be delivering for this wonderful part of the community on this long-awaited and much-needed upgrade.

Of course there is huge news out at Wantirna College, with the Deputy Premier to announce \$11.2 million of real funding in the budget—secured, black and white. It is big. We were up and about yesterday for a double-court, competition-grade gym, a learning facility, a performing arts space and other facilities. I have worked on this since when I was a local councillor—over four years ago now—which the principal noted yesterday at that exciting announcement. And there is \$5.7 million for Eastern Ranges School. There is plenty more. There is lots more work to do. Only this Andrews Labor government—only this government—delivers for the east real funding.

UNITING PRAHRAN

Mr HIBBINS (Pahran) (14:06): For this budget I have been advocating to government for more funding for social services in Prahran, so I was really pleased to see funding for the improvement of facilities at Uniting Prahran in today's state budget as part of the emerging with stronger communities program to support the social recovery of Victorian communities. Uniting Prahran, like community services across the state, has played an invaluable role in supporting people through the pandemic and now as we recover and heal, with so many people pushed to the margins or off the edge and falling through the cracks. The pandemic has resulted in a massive increase in demand for Uniting services in Prahran, particularly for emergency relief, due to the rising cost of living. There has also been an increase in people presenting with distress and with complex health needs. Uniting has identified a safe and welcoming reception area as a key action that could increase its service reach and impact and provide a significant benefit to the community.

I have been pleased to advocate for Uniting Prahran to the state government. I always really appreciate visiting Uniting, just as I did as recently as last week at their winter breakfast to meet with clients, and it is always good to see some familiar faces—volunteers and Uniting staff. People were given a good breakfast and, more importantly, a chance to connect with the community and with services. Social justice and caring for people in need and for our community's most disadvantaged are values that I share.

HAWTHORN ELECTORATE SMALL BUSINESSES

Mr KENNEDY (Hawthorn) (14:08): Today I would like to speak about the superb small businesses that call Hawthorn home. I recently had the pleasure of meeting with the traders of the iconic Glenferrie Road shopping strip with the member for Werribee and Treasurer at the terrific Le Clec cafe. Small businesses are the livelihood of our communities, and businesses like those on Glenferrie Road serve as real hubs not just for shopping but for meals and conversation. The cafes are constantly bustling with students, and the shops are frequented by customers from miles away. After all, over \$129 million in COVID support payments were provided to Boroondara businesses during the pandemic.

These businesses were showcased recently when the Glenferrie Traders Association held the incredible Glenferrie Festival, with estimated foot traffic of around 100 000 people. Whilst plenty of politicians attended—surprise, surprise—it was my pleasure as the member for Hawthorn to converse with so many of my wonderful constituents. I found people especially enamoured of the presence of model trains at my stall, showcasing the unique Victorian appreciation of public transport.

HEALTH SERVICES

Mr ANGUS (Forest Hill) (14:09): The health and ambulance crisis here in Victoria is continuing with, in some well-documented cases, tragic results. An ambulance was required last evening for one of my family members, and after a 1½-hour wait a non-emergency ambulance arrived. When discussing options, the helpful, hardworking crew noted that it would be at least a 5-hour wait at the local public hospital emergency department.

This is yet another example of how the ambulance and health systems are failing Victorians in their time of need. The state government has known about these problems for many years and has completely failed to address them. It is time for the government to acknowledge its failures and apologise to all Victorians for its incompetence. The minister responsible for both the ambulance system and the health system should do the decent thing and resign.

YOUTH MENTAL HEALTH

Mr ANGUS: The mental health issues of young Victorians continue to be neglected by this government. After two years of governing by fear and dictatorial control, the negative impact on the mental health of young people was outlined clearly in evidence received at last week's parliamentary pandemic committee public hearing. It supported a recent newspaper article which noted that one in four young Australians thought about suicide over the past two years and 15 per cent attempted self-harm. We know that the level of mental health issues—including anxiety, depression, eating disorders, self-harm and suicidal ideation—amongst children and young people is at record levels following the last two years. With 76 000 calls from desperate children to Kids Helpline going unanswered during the pandemic last year, the crisis in mental health in Victoria is worse than expected. Victoria's chief psychiatrist gave evidence about the number of teenagers presenting—*(Time expired)*

HIGHTON VILLAGE REDEVELOPMENT

Mr CHEESEMAM (South Barwon) (14:11): Over the last few months I have had the opportunity to engage with the Highton community about their iconic Highton Village, and the community in that interaction described to me that Highton Village is very much the heart and soul of their community. The City of Greater Geelong currently have on their books a proposition to redevelop the much-loved Highton Village, a village that is loved in its current format. I am calling on the City of Greater Geelong to review and undertake community consultation about how the village can be upgraded without changing the heart and soul of the Highton community, because the village in its current format is much loved by that community. It very much gives the Highton community a heart and soul, a place where they love to come together to have a coffee, to go shopping and to visit the bank and the post office. The Highton Village is important to that community, and I call on the City of Greater Geelong

to make sure that they engage with that community about how the village can be upgraded in a sensible way to make sure that Highton Village is kept as the heart and soul of the Highton community.

WILLIAM 'BILL' O'KANE AND ROSS TURNBULL

Ms SHEED (Shepparton) (14:12): In March this year we lost two of Shepparton's significant community leaders in the fields of resource management and horticulture who enriched our community greatly, Bill O'Kane and Ross Turnbull.

As the former chair of Goulburn Broken Catchment Management Authority, Bill became a national leader in the field of natural resource management. We often spent time discussing local issues, especially when it came to water reform and the environment. In the early 1990s Bill took on the chief executive officer role of the Salinity Program Advisory Council and faced the growing salinity threat to our agricultural sector. Then the millennium drought took hold, and Bill had to tackle a whole new range of water issues. In retirement Bill took on leadership roles in a range of community organisations and went on to establish Shepparton Foodshare in 2007. Bill leaves behind his wife, Marian; twin daughters Alannah and Bridget; and three grandchildren.

Ross Sugden Turnbull died at 82 years of age. A male choir of 52 Samoan men who harvested fruit at Turnbull Brothers Orchards sang at his funeral service. He was well known for his role as chairman of Ardmona Fruit Products. He spent time working for the company in England and then spent time in the United States studying fruit growing innovation there. Ross led Turnbull Brothers Orchards, which was the largest pear orchard in the Southern Hemisphere. Ross, in his later years, became involved in community work and helped raise \$2 million for a new high-care aged care facility in Shepparton and more than \$2 million for an oncology unit at Goulburn Valley Health.

TARNEIT ELECTORATE SCHOOLS

Ms CONNOLLY (Tarneit) (14:14): I want to celebrate the fantastic commitment of this budget to schools and the families right across my electorate of Tarneit. In the last four years four new schools in the Tarneit electorate have been opened by our government, with another two set to open next year. I am pleased to announce that in 2024 a brand new primary school and a high school will open in Tarneit, along with Truganina North Secondary School, which was funded last year and has received an additional amount of funding to go ahead and build the junior campus in Elements estate at the recently announced Truganina North education precinct. This was a triumph for my local community, where land that would have otherwise become housing instead will now host a secondary school campus.

And I am pleased to tell those folks they are not just getting a secondary school, they are getting a primary school as well, with Truganina North primary school funded to be built and opened in 2024 at the same time as their high school, years and years ahead of schedule. To top this off, land will also be bought for another primary school in Tarneit in Riverdale North. We are also upgrading Mossfiel Primary School with almost \$500 000 and Warringa Park School, which will receive \$14.6 million. Now, when those opposite were last in government they did not deliver the schools we needed and in opposition have showed no commitment whatsoever to building new schools in Wyndham and Melbourne's outer west. From 2018 to 2025 nine schools will have been built in the Tarneit electorate alone. It is clear to me which side of the chamber cares about education opportunities.

FEDERAL ELECTION

Mr ROWSWELL (Sandringham) (14:15): Until GetUp!, Climate 200 and a fake independent recently concerned themselves with my community, en masse and unrelenting destruction of private property never happened during election time. But disappointingly that has now changed. Night after night Bayside residents who are freely expressing their democratic right to support their outstanding federal MP, in Tim Wilson, are waking up to election signs graffitied and denigrated. Driving through my area I have observed every Liberal sign defaced but have never observed a fake independent or ALP sign defaced. One 75-year-old Sandringham resident has had her election sign defaced five times

in the last two weeks. That election sign is but 4 metres from her bedroom window. That resident is my mother. She lives alone, and I rightly have fears for her safety.

Criminal destruction of private property must end, and GetUp!, Climate 200 and the fake independent must call in their cronies and tell them to stop. Freedom of speech, freedom of expression and fully engaging in our democracy are the bedrock of our community. Destruction of private property is not, but of course Tim's opponents want to tear him down. He is a local who has a proven track record of delivering locally. Whether it be \$6 million for the restoration of Elsternwick Park, \$5 million towards the Bayside warm water pool or \$1.3 million for new women's change rooms at the Trevor Barker oval in Sandringham, Tim's record of local delivery is unrivalled. He has done the work, he has supported our community and that is why I will be backing him on 21 May this year.

BUDGET 2022–23

Mr FOWLES (Burwood) (14:17): It is my pleasure to rise today with terrific news for our community. Today is state budget day, the day we announce our plans for the coming year and continue to build a positive future for all Victorians. That process starts with excellent Labor budgets, budgets which put Victorians first, and the 2022–23 budget again delivers on our commitments.

I firmly believe that all Victorians regardless of their ability deserve the very best education, and that is why I am delighted to announce today a massive \$9.74 million upgrade of Ashwood School to deliver a brand new school building and state-of-the-art sporting facilities for students to enjoy. It is a terrific investment to support the next generation of special-needs Victorians in my community.

The Andrews government knows that looking to the future is about investing in the environment around us, both through our world-leading climate action but also through action locally, which is why I am so pleased to announce a quarter of a million dollars to establish the landmark Gardiners Creek (KooyongKoot) master plan. This funding will create a coordinating committee to improve the health and amenity of the creek, which runs from Blackburn all the way to the Yarra.

We know that community sport binds us, building community resilience and connection right across the state—and that is why I am delighted to announce \$250 000 to upgrade lighting at the Bennettswood Reserve, because demand for community sport space is at an all-time high. We are responding by backing local clubs with infrastructure that increases capacity and utility. I commend the Treasurer on this budget. It is outstanding.

ANZAC DAY

Ms ADDISON (Wendouree) (14:18): Ballarat is very proud of our veterans, and a number of Anzac services were held across Ballarat, including the dawn service, the Arch of Victory, the Ex-Prisoners of War Memorial, the Sebastopol RSL parade and service and the Ballarat RSL parade and service at the Cenotaph. Thank you to the dedicated volunteers who organise Anzac events each year, including Allan McKinnon, Bill Bahr, Alan Douglass, Eric Duggan, Gordon Hunt, Gary Snowden, Phillip Hills, Mark Broemmer and Barry Harris, to name but just a few.

The significance of Anzac Day is also not lost on our young people, and it was wonderful to see scouts, guides and students from many primary and secondary schools attending services. Twelve-year-old Angus Le Marshall did a fantastic job playing the bagpipes at the Cenotaph service at 11 am. Angus comes from a long line of pipers going back to his great-grandfather, who was a proud piper and a POW in Singapore during World War II.

This year was also the Reverend John Furness's final service after serving as a padre for more than 30 years. He will be missed, and I wish John all the best for his well-deserved retirement.

Prior to Anzac Day the Ballarat cemetery unveiled 19 plaques for previously anonymous World War I soldiers. It was moving to see these soldiers being publicly honoured for the first time this Anzac Day.

Well done to Gary Snowden and Sally Kennedy. Thanks also to Ballarat Cemeteries CEO Annie De Jong and board chair Gayle Boschert.

ANZAC DAY

Mr HAMER (Box Hill) (14:20): I was honoured to join the thousands who gathered at the World War I memorial in Box Hill Gardens in the predawn for this year's Anzac Day service. I congratulate and thank president John Haward, secretary Ray Wall and all of the committee for organising this important commemoration in honour of those who have sacrificed so much for our country and our freedoms. For over 100 years the Box Hill RSL has organised an Anzac Day service to honour those who served and died in Gallipoli and other battles, with the haunting last post bugle call commemorating those who have gone to their final resting place.

Many other Anzac Day services were held across the Box Hill electorate. Hundreds gathered at the Blackburn War Memorial on Central Road for the Blackburn RSL sub-branch Anzac Day service. I congratulate president Graham Hutchinson, secretary Pauline Bradley and the Blackburn RSL sub-branch committee on their moving service. Also attending that service were members of the Blackburn Football Club. The Blackburn Football Club has formed a terrific relationship with the Blackburn RSL sub-branch, and the honour is returned in the afternoon with a traditional Anzac Day clash between Blackburn and South Croydon. It was very fitting that the Blackburn RSL turned up at the match to deliver the Anzac Requiem.

The Surrey Gardens commemorative service was also well attended, with several hundred gathering for services organised by the Surrey Hills and Mont Albert Progress Association, the Surrey Hills Neighbourhood Centre and the Rotary club.

SICK PAY GUARANTEE

Ms COUZENS (Geelong) (14:21): I was pleased to join the Minister for Workplace Safety in Geelong at the Eastern Hub Geelong community centre where we met with disability workers who are eligible for the first phase of the sick pay guarantee. Casual and contract workers in Geelong are signing up to the Andrews government's sick pay guarantee to get the safety net they need for when they become sick and miss work or need to care for a loved one. There are approximately 24 000 casual workers in the greater Geelong area, nearly a quarter of the region's total workforce. Health care and social services are the largest employers in the greater Geelong area, followed by retail, accommodation and food services, all of which are eligible industries under phase 1 of the sick pay guarantee.

We need every worker for the recovery of our economy. The best way to do that is through secure work, which is exactly what we are doing. This scheme will protect more workers and give them the support they need so they do not have to make the choice between a day's pay and looking after their health. Whilst talking to those workers, they agreed that the last thing they want to do when they are sick is try to fill in forms, so they have already registered, giving them that peace of mind. This scheme will help to keep our community and local businesses safe and healthy, because we all know how important that is.

CHRIST THE KING PRIMARY SCHOOL, NEWCOMB

Ms COUZENS: It was great to officially open the redevelopment of Christ the King Primary School in Newcomb recently. It really was a celebration of the benefits that brings to students and teachers.

HAMPTON PARK SECONDARY COLLEGE

Mr MAAS (Narre Warren South) (14:23): I was delighted to recently attend Hampton Park Secondary College to officially open their stage 1 works, which include refurbished and modernised classrooms and the conversion of the old gym into a senior learning centre. It was fantastic to be at the school as yet another project was delivered by this Andrews Labor government. The \$2.62 million

stage 1 is just part of an overall commitment of \$14.5 million to modernise Hampton Park Secondary College and help deliver the education that our local students deserve. The new senior learning centre is a space where students can achieve the best learning outcomes and develop critical skills for their future success.

We also celebrated the doctors in schools program, which was recently introduced there. Some \$43 million, as we all know, has been invested in that program for the terrific outcomes that it produces. I would really like to thank principal Wayne Haworth, his teaching team, his leadership team and of course all the students who do magnificent work out at Hampton Park Secondary College. They have been really patient while all these works have been going on. I really look forward to being there for the stage 2 and stage 3 works as they open over the coming years.

Business of the house

NOTICES OF MOTION

Ms THOMAS (Macedon—Minister for Agriculture, Minister for Regional Development) (14:24): I advise that the government does not wish to proceed with the notice of motion, government business, today and ask that it remain on the notice paper.

Bills

AGRICULTURE LEGISLATION AMENDMENT BILL 2022

Second reading

Debate resumed on motion of Ms ALLAN:

That this bill be now read a second time.

Mr WALSH (Murray Plains) (14:25): I rise to make a contribution on behalf of the Liberal and National parties on the Agriculture Legislation Amendment Bill 2022. This bill actually amends 11 different agricultural acts and has a range of changes that I will talk about as I go through these bills, but they are the Agricultural and Veterinary Chemicals (Control of Use) Act 1992, the Catchment and Land Protection Act 1994 (CALP act), the Dairy Act 2000, the Drugs, Poisons and Controlled Substances Act 1981, the Farm Debt Mediation Act 2011, the Livestock Disease Control Act 1994, the Meat Industry Act 1993, the Plant Biosecurity Act 2010, the Rural Assistance Schemes Act 2016, the Veterinary Practice Act 1997 and the Wildlife Act 1975. The Liberals and Nationals obviously will not be opposing this bill. I am sure there will be a number of questions in the upper house in the committee process. We had a very detailed briefing from the department yesterday evening. A number of MPs were at that briefing, and I think there will be some more questions on detail around the legislation in the upper house, but for the debate in this house we will not be opposing it.

With the Agricultural and Veterinary Chemicals (Control of Use) Act 1992 there are some updates to the authorised officers' powers to remove certain barriers to sharing information with other regulators and to clarify requirements for giving notices, making requests and recovering debts. In the discussion in the briefing about more clarity around what the additional powers are for authorised officers and the issues around giving notices, the explanation that we received, which is what we will tease out in the upper house debate in the committee stage, was around how authorised officers actually go to properties. A lot of farmers now do not live directly on the properties that they might own—they live on an adjacent property or even a property quite a distance away—so our understanding of this from the brief is it is about how an authorised officer can go about their job to inspect a property and take samples, particularly with the issue of chemical drift, without having to go through the quite arduous process of actually visiting the landholder that owns that particular land if they are not in residence on that property. So we would like some extra explanation in the upper house about how that will actually work and also on the issue around how, once an authorised officer has visited that farm, they will communicate what they have found and the fact that they have been there to that landholder to make

sure that particular farmer knows who has been on their property and what they have done or collected from their property.

The other issue that is dealt with in this piece of legislation is the issue around labels on chemical drums that are sold, so that the Australian Pesticides and Veterinary Medicines Authority's approved label is the label that is used. The question that was asked again in the briefing was: 'If a chemical is sold with the old label on and the label has been updated, whose responsibility is it to make sure the farmer is aware of what the new issues with the label may be?'. I suppose again we want an explanation as to how that will work in practice. I agree with the principle, but how does it actually work in practice if a drum is sold with the old label on but APVMA has updated the label? How is the purchaser of that chemical made aware of the fact that there is a new label that applies to that particular chemical that is being sold? This effectively harmonises Victoria with the other states around these particular requirements, but I think there needs to be some detail teased out so that people are very clear about how this is going to work in practice.

The next piece of legislation that is amended is the Catchment and Land Protection Act to improve control of noxious weeds and pest animals and to strengthen the related inspection enforcement powers of authorised officers to better regulate their introduction or spread. I suppose the comment I would initially make around giving more powers to authorised officers is that on the one hand we have the Andrews government bringing this piece of legislation to deal with this, but on the other hand we actually have cuts to the Department of Jobs, Precincts and Regions and the number of staff that are going to be available to enforce these new penalties and requirements. So if the Andrews government is serious about controlling pest plants and animals, it should not have made cuts to the department of agriculture and the people who will actually be doing the enforcement of these changes here.

The bill also creates a new offence and imposes new requirements to address the risks of noxious weeds and pest animals actually coming into the state or spreading. It is interesting when you look at the list of weeds and invasive species from Agriculture Victoria's website and look at the responsibilities of the various levels of government and landholders here in Victoria, it says right up the front that all landowners and land occupiers, public and private, are responsible for managing noxious weeds and established pest animals on their land under the CALP act and any local laws. Under section 20 of the CALP act all landowners, including the Crown, public authorities and licensees of Crown land, must in relation to their land:

take all reasonable steps to—

- (a) avoid causing or contributing to land degradation which causes or may cause damage to land of another landowner; and

...

- (d) eradicate regionally prohibited weeds; and
- (e) prevent the growth and spread of regionally controlled weeds—

on their land and—

- (f) prevent the spread of, and as far as possible eradicate, established pest animals.

If you go over to the next page, it talks about the responsibilities of the three levels of government here in Victoria. The Australian government's role in managing invasive plants and animals is mainly about national preborder and border biosecurity, with a coordination-of-leadership role for achieving national biosecurity outcomes. That is to make sure we keep Australia safe from these pest plants and animals from overseas. The state and territory governments are primarily responsible for managing the risk of invasive species that are already present in their respective jurisdictions and managing those things on public land. I think the issue that comes up every time something is talked about with pest plants and pest animals is that, with all due respect to the various government agencies, private landholders that own land next to public land generally consider that the public land is the neighbour from hell because they do not control their weeds and they do not control their pest animals, and that

has been an issue for a long time. Again, with the reduction in staff in the departments because of the recent cuts, that will only get worse instead of getting better.

So it is the state's responsibility to actually manage their land. Then you go to local government, who have a responsibility to manage noxious weeds and established pest animals and protect land and water resources on the land that they manage. Again this is an issue for local government. I know in the Mallee particularly a farmer may control rabbits on their property but if the local government does not control the rabbits on the roadsides, they reinfest literally within minutes of the person that is controlling the rabbits on private land living there, so there is a real issue around state government not doing their fair share under this particular legislation.

If you look at that strategy for pest animals and plants, the *Invasive Plants and Animals Policy Framework*, the last time it was actually updated Joe Helper was the Minister for Agriculture, which was from 2006 to 2010, and Gavin Jennings was the Minister for Environment and Climate Change. So there needs to be a lot of work done on contemporising these issues and making sure that government agencies and government have the resources that are available to make sure they control pest plants and animals.

There are a number of examples, and I think everyone would have heard discussion in this house at various times about the control of blackberries. Blackberries are probably one of the worst infesters of public land across Victoria, and there is just not enough done by government and private agencies to control blackberries—including private landholders. Gorse, for those that drive around the areas where gorse infests, again, if it is left for a few years without any control work, is a huge issue for not only that particular landowner but also neighbours who get infested.

I suppose in my area one of the issues that has come to the fore in the last decade is wheel cactus. If you go to Mount Kerang and Mount Buckrabanyule near Wychitella, wheel cactus is just out of control, and there is nothing effectively being done to control it. It is very difficult to control, but there is very little being done.

I suppose the weed I would finish on in what is a long list of weeds is Paterson's curse. It is a weed that is supposed to be controlled, and as you drive around in the spring and you see the purple flowers everywhere, it is not controlled very well by public land managers. And sadly, I do not think there is enforcement by the agencies to make sure private landholders do their bit too, because it is actually not a hard weed to control if you have a proper management strategy. For the changes that are made to the Catchment and Land Protection Act we need to make sure that government resources are put into that to make sure it actually achieves the outcomes that are set out in this particular piece of legislation.

The next piece of legislation that is amended is the Dairy Act 2000. The bill effectively harmonises the employees of Dairy Food Safety Victoria under the Public Administration Act 2004 and makes sure that those employees are subject to the values and principles set out in the Public Administration Act 2004. Dairy Food Safety, over a number of iterations, has effectively followed on from the old Victorian Dairy Industry Authority, which did not come under that particular act. It is my understanding that this just harmonises something that is a historical issue rather than making any major changes that are needed.

The next piece of legislation that is amended in this omnibus bill is the Drugs, Poisons and Controlled Substances Act 1981, and there are a couple of particular changes there. One is around the use and transportation of schedule 4 and schedule 8 medicines to treat animals and wildlife, particularly after bushfires and after major events. I know the member for South-West Coast might have more to say about this in her contribution, but as I understand it, this is about making sure that there are actually those pharmaceuticals which are restricted use available for use in treating animals who have been burnt or are in severe stress because of a burn and need to be treated. There needs to be access to enough of those schedule 4 and schedule 8 medicines that may not be available in the immediate facilities and can be brought in to be used.

The other issues the Drugs, Poisons and Controlled Substances Act 1981 will deal with are effectively removing the impediments to the interstate trade in the hemp industry, harmonising legislation thresholds for THC and low-THC cannabis with other states and improving the effectiveness of how authorities actually regulate low-THC cannabis. I think we all know examples of businesses that are setting up for the production of low-THC cannabis here in Victoria for medical purposes. They are going to be very successful. I know there is a very large one in Mildura, and this legislation will assist them in how they do business between the states for these particular products.

The Farm Debt Mediation Act 2011 is the next piece of legislation that is amended. This was a piece of legislation that I had the honour to introduce as the Minister for Agriculture back in 2011. It was modelled on similar legislation in New South Wales. The issue that it was there to address—and we can see how effective the New South Wales act was—was a deficiency here in Victoria. Particularly my then federal colleague John Forrest, who was then the member for Mallee, was a very strong advocate of having this sort of legislation in Victoria so that if a farmer was at risk of having his farm foreclosed because he could not meet the payments on that particular farm, there was a process there where he could get a mediator in and they could work through the issues. Too often when farmers get to that particular situation, there is a lot of mental stress and anguish and they do not necessarily engage with their banker in a constructive way or do not engage at all with their banker because they have put the shutters up and are fearful and stressed about what might happen.

With a farm it is also the family home quite often, and if people are foreclosed on and the farm is sold, they lose their home as well, so there are stresses that go onto people. So this legislation puts in place a process where there was mediation and there were proper rules around how a bank or a financial institution dealt with a farmer who had got themselves into that particular situation and gave them some breathing space and gave them a formalised process to work through those issues. Even if at the end of that process the farm ended up being sold, the farmer had someone there to assist them who was trained to work through those particular issues.

The changes to the Farm Debt Mediation Act 2011 in this omnibus bill are just about harmonising it with the other states and also changing the definition of ‘farming operation’ to include forestry and aquaculture, which are primary production pursuits, so that they come under this piece of legislation as well. The bill transfers all of the administration of this act to the Victorian small business commissioner. Rather than the department of agriculture having some role and interacting with the small business commissioner, this goes to the small business commissioner to run into the future.

The next piece of legislation that is amended under this omnibus bill is the Livestock Disease Control Act 1994. The bill strengthens the existing legislative framework available for the prevention, monitoring and control of animal diseases in Victoria by improving compliance and enforcement tools, creating new offences to underpin livestock and bee traceability through the supply chain and extending and clarifying the powers of inspectors. These clauses also address Victoria’s biosecurity by extending beekeeper registration requirements, establishing better risk management of livestock and providing for the Exotic Diseases Fund to pay the costs of administering exotic disease response activities associated with animal welfare.

The exotic disease welfare fund is a fund that is jointly funded by the states and the commonwealth, and quite often it is used to actually stop an exotic disease in one of the other states so it does not get to Victoria. The experience I had when I was the minister was with fire ants in Queensland. We do not want to get fire ants in Victoria, so Victoria actually paid the control program—as did the other states, as did the commonwealth. And the other one is bees—we also contributed to a joint fund that was administered by Queensland to stop the incursion of Asian honey bees into Queensland. The Asian honey bee is a vector of the varroa mite. It would destroy the honey industry in Victoria as we know it if we had the varroa mite here in Victoria. There was an Asian honey bee incursion in Cairns. Unfortunately it got into the jungle up there before it could be stopped, but at this stage it is still isolated in north Queensland; it has not actually come into Victoria.

The bill changes the governance arrangements around appointments to the animal compensation funds here in Victoria. We were assured that this does not change the role the Victorian Farmers Federation has in actually appointing people to those compensation funds, but again, in getting answers in detail in the upper house, it would be good if the minister could take on notice that we would like some very clear assurances that this actually does not change the VFF's role in how they appoint people to those particular compensation funds, because there is a substantial amount of money in those compensation funds. They do a number of things, but most importantly they are about having people that have literally got skin in the game—having farmers—on those compensation funds who are actually paying the levies to know that those levies are being administered and spent as per the right requirements. At the moment those boards are going to use the Premier's circular of 2015 about good board governance, which sets out the skills that are necessary on those boards and the mix of skills that are needed. We just want to make sure that the bill does not exclude the VFF from putting forward the names that they want to under that particular piece of legislation.

The next piece of legislation changed is the Plant Biosecurity Act 2010, and it provides additional supports to inspectors when they are intercepting and applying the requirements of this act and changes the definition of a plant health declaration to provide a clear power to authorise a person to issue a declaration. One of the things that we unfortunately have had happen in the past in Victoria is that, while most farmers would know what particular weeds are, plant nurseries sometimes have inadvertently sold noxious weeds as garden plants, and that has created some issues over time. So it is about making sure that people can actually make declarations and stop the importation or stop the selling of those particular plants. They may be all right in the garden, but if they escape the garden, as a lot of the weeds that we have now originally were brought here for various purposes—

Ms Britnell: Lantana.

Mr WALSH: Lantana is one. Horehound is another.

Ms Britnell: Pampas grass.

Mr WALSH: Pampas grass. They escape and they cause trouble when they get into the wider environment for farmers.

The next act that is amended is the Rural Assistance Schemes Act 2016, and this is effectively to allow for assistance commissioners to work part time rather than full time.

The next piece of legislation changed is the Veterinary Practice Act 1997, and it provides greater flexibility for the Veterinary Practitioners Registration Board of Victoria, where at the moment there is a requirement for the chair of that particular board to actually be a veterinarian and there are non-veterinary members on that board. This opens up the opportunity for non-veterinary members of that board to actually chair that particular board. It also makes some changes around the fact that one of those veterinary positions has to be an employee of the University of Melbourne.

One of the last two acts amended under this omnibus bill is the Wildlife Act 1975, and it corrects an administrative area that clarifies who can remain in a specified hunting area at certain times during the duck season, ensuring that people in specified hunting areas during specified times during the duck-hunting season hold the relevant game licence. This piece of legislation ensures for the general public but particularly protestors that if they are actually on a wetland during the duck season, they have a duck identification certificate, which gives them a right to be in that particular wetland. It will stop any ambiguity about who can and who cannot be in a wetland during the duck season and will make sure that obviously those protestors are not there causing trouble to the hunters. There are rules at the moment around the distance that a protester can be from a hunter, and there are rules around how close to the water's edge a protester can be before an authorised officer can take action. So this just strengthens, I suppose, the way that authorised officers or the police can actually enforce the rules around duck season. We have seen some unfortunate situations, I think, where some protestors—and everyone has a right to protest as long as they protest lawfully and they protest safely—get

overenthusiastic and enter the water, enter effectively the shot range of those that are shooting ducks. There is a real risk to their personal safety. We do not want to see anyone get hurt in a duck season, but some protesters do go to extremes, which does put at risk their own personal safety. This change, as I understand it, will enable authorised officers and police to better enforce who is actually in a wetland during the duck season.

The last piece of legislation that is changed is the Meat Industry Act 1993, and this makes some minor operational changes relating to the food safety regulatory framework for meat, including packaged meat, and removes ambiguity about the application of the Public Administration Act 2004 to PrimeSafe employees to clarify they are public sector employees subject to the values and principles set out in the act, which is the same as the changes to the Dairy Act that I spoke about earlier.

I suppose the key change that this makes for the meat industry is where there have been some issues over time around particularly farmers markets, where a meat retailer at a farmers market will have their van all set up, they will have packaged meat there that they are selling and there was some ambiguity around whether they actually needed a PrimeSafe licence to have that refrigerated van and sell that meat at a farmers market. This clarifies the issue where if the meat is processed at a PrimeSafe-licensed abattoir and is packed in a cryovac pack—not just wrapped in Glad wrap or something but packed in a sealed cryovac pack—that can be sold by a stallholder at a farmers market without needing to be PrimeSafe licensed. They would need to abide by the local government health inspector's rules, but they would not need to be licensed by PrimeSafe as long as that pack is not broken or opened to split the meat up and retail it from that.

I can actually remember going to the Kyneton market a number of years ago, and there was a meat retailer at the Kyneton market who was doing exactly that. They had a refrigerated utility. He was selling cryovac-packed meat from an abattoir, but there was this issue around whether they had to have a PrimeSafe licence to do that. So this clarifies those particular issues there for those people who want to buy their meat effectively from a stallholder at a farmers market, at one of our community markets—and a lot of people go to the markets now and actually buy fresh produce. They can now buy meat, as long as it is cryovac packed, from these particular sellers.

In summary, there are just a couple of issues, which I have already raised as we have gone through the bill, for the minister and the department to take on notice for questions in the upper house, but I suppose just to reinforce those, they are around making sure of how the enforcement and the responsibility are going to be handled around the labelling of chemical products, as I mentioned at the start of the debate, and a criticism of the government that cutting agriculture staff is not actually the way to control weeds and pest animals here in Victoria. If you want to work with farmers, if you want to work with Landcare groups and if you want to work with weed-control groups—there are a lot of groups that come together both under the auspices of Landcare but also under the auspices of weed-control groups, and I with the member for Narracan have met with a number of groups in his electorate down in Gippsland, where they actually come together to work across the community to control weeds—they need the support of the department. They need the support of the enforcement powers of the department to make sure a recalcitrant neighbour in that particular district does not let the whole system down. Weed control or pest animal control is a bit like the weakest link in a chain. If there is one farmer or a minority of farmers in a district that do not want to do the right thing and control their weeds or if there is one farmer or a minority of farmers that do not want to control pest animals—rabbits would be the classic example, but it also goes to some areas where there are wild dogs, if you are actually baiting for wild dogs and you have one farmer that is not part of that particular program—it makes it very difficult for that program to be successful across the whole district.

I remember attending a public meeting in Omeo a number of years ago, which was again about wild dogs. There was a gentleman there that got up and said that it was not until he realised that they actually all had to work together—it had to be a partnership between the department, the wild doggers and the farmers with their baiting program and with electric fences to actually make it successful for everyone—that they actually started to go forward.

It is very disappointing that although this legislation is giving the department some more clarified powers around the enforcement of pest plants and animals, the Andrews government has cut staff who were doing that. We would very much like to see, on behalf of those farmers, those staff positions reinstated so this legislation can work for farmers.

Ms GREEN (Yan Yean) (14:55): Deputy Speaker, it is always lovely to see you in the chair—another great regional Victorian MP. I take great pleasure in joining the debate on the Agriculture Legislation Amendment Bill 2022. It is a bit of a shame that we only get 10 minutes to speak on a bill like this. For those who are watching in the cheap seats at home, that is how thick this bill is. A lot of work has gone into putting this together, and I want to commend the minister's office and the career public servants, who we respect a great deal, who have worked really hard in putting this comprehensive bill together. It makes a range of miscellaneous amendments to the Agricultural and Veterinary Chemicals (Control of Use) Act 1992, the Catchment and Land Protection Act 1994, the Dairy Act 2000, the Drugs, Poisons and Controlled Substances Act 1981, the Farm Debt Mediation Act 2011, the Livestock Disease Control Act 1994, the Meat Industry Act 1993, the Plant Biosecurity Act 2010, the Rural Assistance Schemes Act 2016, the Veterinary Practice Act 1997 and the Wildlife Act 1975.

All Victorians benefit from a strong and growing agricultural sector and the jobs that it supports. That is why the Andrews Labor government is backing agriculture with an ambitious vision for the future. We are investing in the strengths of our farmers, our food and in turn our regional communities. In fact we have invested well over four times more than the previous coalition government, which neglected and cut funding to agriculture and regional Victoria.

Victoria punches well above its weight on a national level when it comes to agriculture. Despite the challenges of the pandemic and global shocks to the supply chain Victoria remains the nation's largest agriculture exporter, accounting for a massive 29 per cent of national food and fibre exports—that is \$14 billion in exports. By comparison the next largest exporters are New South Wales at 19 per cent and Queensland at 17 per cent. Overall the total value of agricultural production in Victoria is \$17.8 billion, so we are the largest ag producer in the country. We have over 21 000 farm businesses across the state supporting 75 000 jobs in the agriculture sector, predominantly located in rural and regional Victoria.

Victoria is the leading agricultural producer in milk, where we account for 64 per cent of national production; sheepmeat, 64 per cent of national production; vegetables, the nation's largest producer with 25 per cent of national production; fruits and nuts, 35 per cent of national production, more than any other state; and table and dried grapes, where we account for a massive 70 per cent of national production. Victoria is also the number one exporting state in dairy, sheepmeat, wool, horticultural products and poultry. In short Victoria is the agricultural powerhouse of the nation, and that is why our government is backing farmers and primary industries with our transformative 10-year agriculture strategy, which will strengthen, grow and protect the sector so it continues to be a cornerstone of our economy. That is why we brought this bill to the house: to support that growth.

The changes that are in the bill before the house can be grouped into supporting Victoria's emerging hemp industry, and haven't we seen that take off? Whether it is medical marijuana, whether it is within food or whether it is fibre for rope, these trial commercial hemp crops are being grown across all parts of Victoria, but most commercial production currently occurs in Tasmania. In Victoria hemp now can be legally grown to produce seed for food and seed or fibre for industrial purposes, including use in construction and textiles. I am really proud to have strongly pushed for the changes that led to medical marijuana being legal in this state. Not only has that been crucially important to those suffering a variety of conditions—for pain relief, to limit seizures; it has made a transformative difference to so many people—but also it has grown an industry in this state.

I had the privilege, during our last term, actually, of representing I think it was the agriculture minister or the health minister—I cannot actually remember which one I was representing during the last term—at a national ministerial council of health and agriculture ministers. We signed off a national

protocol so that hemp could be recognised as a food. It shocked me when I heard other voices around the table, particularly public servants, saying that it had taken 17 years to get to that place. I am glad that once we got there we moved really swiftly to grow this industry in Victoria. We need the legislative framework to support that.

There are other changes categorised in responding to animal health and welfare emergencies. They ensure that veterinary practitioners can rapidly respond to animal health and welfare needs in emergencies such as bushfires. We know that Victoria is the most fire-prone state in our nation. Of the many profound memories I have of Black Saturday, there is none more than that of being in Strathewen and being on the back of a fire truck and seeing a wildlife rescuer who literally—you could tell from sitting on the back of that truck—was in absolute shock. If he had been prepared for seeing the death of animals, he certainly was not prepared to be dealing with the death of human beings. This poor man was in such a state. We saw at that time that really no native animals were remaining on the fireground, and what many of those wildlife rescuers ended up doing was mostly treating companion animals who had more likely been rescued or saved from that fire.

We really need to support our vets in responding to disaster, but also we need to support our vets because it has been a really difficult time, like for everyone in the pandemic. I want to congratulate our vets and particularly my neighbour Harriet, who is a vet, because last Saturday we marked World Veterinary Day, which celebrates the outstanding work of our vets to promote the profession. We have got actual staff shortages. Just a bit like in the human health medical workforce there is actually a shortage in the veterinary workforce, which is why the government recently added a certificate IV in veterinary nursing to the free TAFE list in 2022. So it is a comprehensive approach that we have to agriculture and to supporting our industries.

In the final minute and a half that I have I would like to express some surprise that the former Minister for Agriculture, the Leader of The National Party, made a positive comment about a previous agriculture minister in Joe Helper. The member for Lara and I had the privilege of serving with Joe Helper as the Minister for Agriculture and member for Ripon. There is no fool such as an old fool, and referring to a minister and saying that a particular strategy had not been renewed since that time, when in fact you were one of those ministers during that four years, I found quite surprising. There was certainly no agriculture strategy that came out of the member for Murray Plains's office during the time that he was the minister. He also referred to other government agencies and local government not being good neighbours to farms and to pest animals and plants escaping from there. I would remind the member for Murray Plains that when he was the lead minister the environment was made subservient to agriculture under the Baillieu and Napthine governments and the member for Murray Plains oversaw the biggest cuts that we have ever seen to Parks Victoria and to the Department of Environment, Land, Water and Planning. You reap what you sow, mate, and I reckon that a lot of those pest plants and animals that we are dealing with now escaped on your watch. I commend the work of the minister, and I condemn, as always, the poor response of the National Party and their lack of policy and ideas. I commend this bill to the house.

Ms BRITNELL (South-West Coast) (15:05): I rise to speak on the Agriculture Legislation Amendment Bill 2022. This bill is an omnibus bill that amends around 11 different acts, and the Liberal-Nationals are not opposed to these amendments. In fact some of these amendments do some good things, such as giving authorised officers improved access to enable them to investigate different events that need to take place so we can prevent weed infestation or infectious diseases in animals or biosecurity issues.

I will begin by saying that agriculture in South-West Coast is a very significant industry. Before I go on to talk about the bill, I would like to put on the record some of the facts that really do demonstrate how much of an economic backbone agriculture is for our region. It is the largest food and fibre region in Victoria, the south-west region, and it has an economic impact of about \$2.3 billion annually. That equates to about 22 per cent of the total jobs. That does not include the flow-on effects that these jobs have, whether it is teachers in schools or nurses in hospitals who have family members in the industry

who are attracted to the region because of the agricultural sector. We produce a very high-quality food and fibre product that clothes and shelters and feeds many people in most countries around the world. We actually export to many, many countries and have a very, very high reputation for quality food. Given that supply and demand for food will be under pressure due to more demand and decreased supply, given that only about 7 per cent of the earth's crust is now being harvested for food, given the burgeoning growth we have in population, it is a real challenge. Having areas like South-West Coast that are so fertile producing this sort of food for our world is highly important. That is why any legislation that supports and grows agriculture is of vital importance.

I will note that in South-West Coast we are very organised and we understand the importance of agriculture. A group like Food and Fibre Great South Coast, who formed many years ago now out of the economic pillar of the Warrnambool City Council's initiative, coming from the dairy industry back in 2003 I think it was, brings together all the sectors around agriculture by putting together this group so we can prioritise and make sure we get the environment right for agriculture to thrive. It is a real shame that I did not see in the budget—and maybe I missed it, because it was only an hour or so ago—any funding for that group, who are doing so well to pull together the region and be representative of the region to government so we can have improvements in the sector. It is very disappointing.

Some of these changes, such as to the Agricultural and Veterinary Chemicals (Control of Use) Act 1992, the Catchment and Land Protection Act 1994, the Livestock Disease Control Act 1994 and the Plant Biosecurity Act 2010, I want to focus on a bit. One of the changes is that authorised officers will have more access to land. It worried me in the briefing—it worried me considerably—that the department that represented the Minister for Agriculture were not confident in their answers when we asked questions around how notifications would be improved to landowners who are not present and do not live on the land that the officers want to make an inspection of. They talked about leaving notifications. We asked questions around: if you nail it to a fence post—if that is how it is going to be notified—what happens if it rains and the person does not see it? Because in the legislation it does say that notification will be oral or in writing. I do not want to have a hearsay situation where farmer A says, 'I never heard from anyone', the inspector says, 'Well, I told them', and it becomes a 'he said, she said'. I think in the upper house we will seek some real questioning around what sort of detail will give confidence, because I am afraid the answer that I was given by the department representative of the minister that common sense surely will prevail was a bit concerning. That is why we have legislation—so we eliminate those sorts of situations where things are not clear—and we really need to have a good ability to ensure that we can have inspections when there is something happening.

I remember a situation in my own experience where we had certain conditions that resulted in rough dog's-tail, which is a noxious weed, growing in a paddock that we had just agisted. It had not been used by farmers for a while, and it ended up creating a situation where cattle just started dropping dead around us. There were 20 dead animals within a couple of hours, and when you have got the department coming and helping you, you really appreciate it. We actually thought we had an outbreak of mad cow disease—that was what they thought was happening at the time—so you can imagine how challenging and stressful that was. It is really important to have the department. So when I see this sort of legislation that strengthens and improves the powers of the authorised officers, such as the vets and the representatives from the department, and we have got outbreaks like we have got at the moment with Japanese encephalitis, and you can see that—that is really unfair. Sorry, I have been passed a note by the member for Polwarth about mad cow disease. I will not share what he has written on his piece of paper, but it has thrown me. Anyway, I am getting back to it. When you have got things like what is going on at the moment with Japanese encephalitis and you cannot actually get someone in the department who has got enough experience to be an incident management person, which is what I am being told by people who are working in the department at the moment in south-west Victoria who I know quite well, or when you have got carbon scientists losing their jobs when the government say they are really interested in making sure we improve the outcomes for the environment by understanding the carbon footprint of agriculture and minimising that—and agriculture have done a hell of a lot to actually minimise the emissions—we have got on one hand some legislation that is

improving the powers, but at the same time just in February we saw cuts of hundreds of jobs from agriculture, so it is a bit of a ‘Say one thing but do another’.

I also want to raise the Veterinary Practice Act 1997 changes. There are some things that will assist the Veterinary Practitioners Registration Board of Victoria to be more flexible—that is very good. At the same time we are seeing that vets have far more legislative requirements upon them. As a result we are seeing an increase in the government putting pressures on them, and that has resulted in their registrations going up 15 per cent, the local vets tell me. And what we really see then is that gets pushed back onto farmers, that cost, or onto pet owners who go and see their vets, because at the end of the day it is just a tax that the government are pushing onto the vets, which then gets pushed onto landowners and pet owners. Those legislative requirements have to be implemented by the veterinary practitioners board, and they have to fund it somehow.

Farmers also tell me that whilst we see in this bill improved authority to manage weeds and pests, what we see is that Crown land should be falling under that same responsibility. That is not what farmers experience when they have got as a neighbour Crown land beside them. In these CALP act changes, the Catchment and Land Protection Act 1994, it actually says that all landowners, public and private, have an obligation to the environment to manage their weeds, and we know that is not the case. We see, for example, the Cobboboonee National Park, which is a state-managed forest in South-West Coast, where the biodiversity of that forest is almost lost because the pittosporum has infiltrated the forest to such a degree. When you talk to people like Garry Kerr, who volunteers his time like many others, trying to control it on a voluntary basis, we are losing the biodiversity because we have got one monoculture in the forest of pittosporum instead of the biodiversity of a variety of different species underneath the canopy. Why would we as a state back in the 1990s protect an area and then leave it to be invaded by something like pittosporum, which destroys the biodiversity? It makes no sense, but that is what happens when you have got a government that changes all these acts to improve the powers but then cuts the funding to the department and then leaves not enough to carry out those acts. And it is no attack on the good people in South-West Coast who try and do their best in places like Tower Hill.

Ms CRUGNALE (Bass) (15:15): I rise to speak on the Agriculture Legislation Amendment Bill 2022. It is not my first time this year speaking about how important agriculture is to our state. Speaking to our government’s commitment to agriculture and primary producers, in February we presented the Livestock Management Amendment (Animal Activism) Bill 2021.

Broadly speaking this bill continues the themes of our government’s agriculture strategy, *Strong, Innovative, Sustainable: A New Strategy for Agriculture in Victoria*—themes of ‘recover’, ‘grow’, ‘modernise’, ‘protect’ and ‘promote’—launched in 2020 by the then Minister for Agriculture, the Honourable Jaclyn Symes, and continued by our current minister, the member for Macedon. I thank both colleagues for their outstanding contributions to ensuring the future of agriculture is strong in Victoria through an ambitious 10-year plan with a focus on ag tech and low-emission agriculture, including a \$20 million agriculture sector emissions reduction pledge.

Today we are making amendments to 11 acts to improve their administration, operation and enforcement. They do say the devil is in the detail, meaning that whatever you do should be done thoroughly; details are really important. So it is with this bill. There are obsolete references that will be removed and technical amendments to improve clarity and improve legislative schemes.

Following on from the important changes we introduced last February, this legislation addresses biosecurity. For example, the Plant Biosecurity Act 2010 will be amended to assist in the protection of future plant production, particularly in the Victorian potato industry. My electorate of Bass knows a little bit about potatoes. The first Koo Wee Rup potato festival was held almost 50 years ago in 1973, drawing a crowd of over 4000 people, and the festival may not have been held over the last 20 years, but the area still depends on this industry. Last year’s report showed that in 2020 Victoria had the strongest growth in fresh potato exports of any state, with a 42 per cent increase.

This bill provides additional support for inspectors to prevent the entry and spread of plant pests and diseases. Disease spread intentionally or unintentionally has the potential to wipe out an industry, and our government is committed to ensuring that Victoria maintains its global reputation for first-class produce. Eradication of weeds once introduced, as we know, is almost impossible, and seeds are transported through fodder, machinery and contaminated crops. Invasive plant and animal species will be an ongoing battle, and the proposed amendments will allow officers to search any package that they reasonably believe is in contravention of the Catchment and Land Protection Act 1994.

We are this country's largest vegetable producer, accounting for one-quarter of the national production, and in Bass and the surrounding areas, I guess, too, we are a food bowl—so not only potatoes, but we are very famous for our asparagus fields, growing over 95 per cent of the Australian market. They certainly come to life in September. We have got celery, snow peas, spinach, leek, peas, rocket and herbs—anything green is grown in these amazing rich soils. I did learn recently in Devon Meadows that what is grown there—which would probably go for the Koo Wee Rup swamp area as well—grows six times faster than if it were grown anywhere else, because of the nutrient-rich soil. It is lovely—and you know, there is housing creeping into that area as well, so it is a real balance between the two.

We have Macca's Farm—and the member for Cranbourne beside me may know of Macca's Farm on the way to Kilcunda. It is just off the highway in Glen Forbes, proudly boasting acres of free-range paddocks for pigs and cattle, but there are also strawberries and a whole range of produce that is grown there. I am sure they will be pleased to hear the changes contained in this legislation. An amendment introduced into the Meat Industry Act 1993 will reduce the regulatory burden for packaged meats, acknowledging that they are low risk. Small producers who want to sell their product direct to customers will not need a retail butcher licence from PrimeSafe, saving costs on licensing and compliance and helping the small-scale producers. We do have a lot of organic beef farmers: Bimbadeen on Phillip Island and—I think it is—Annie's meats in the hills just around Archies Creek. We see them often at our farmers markets, whether it be at Churchill Island, Tooradin or Inverloch.

Beekeeper registration requirements will also be extended under the Livestock Disease Control Act 1994, ensuring that interstate beekeepers mark and brand hives and register them in Victoria. Of course we have got bees as well. Nearly two-thirds of Australia's agricultural production benefits from bee pollination, and we will be celebrating World Bee Day later this month, on 20 May.

The Agriculture Legislation Amendment Bill 2022 reforms and amends the agriculture portfolio to strengthen Victoria's biosecurity and food safety, part of our 10-year strategy for agriculture in Victoria helping the sector adapt for the future and creating opportunities with flexibility. While this bill deals with the protection of food resources, it also focuses on another really vital and emerging agricultural crop, hemp, grown for food but also industrial purposes, construction and textiles. We have got medicinal cannabis as well in Wonthaggi—it is all happening actually in the electorate of Bass. We listened to the recommendations made by the 2020 Industrial Hemp Taskforce Victoria. We listened and heard their recommendation that we raise the THC threshold to 1 per cent to be in line with other states and territories. This legislation amends the Drugs, Poisons and Controlled Substances Act 1981 and aligns us with other states as well, making it easier for Victorian producers to work with their counterparts in other parts of the country.

Humanitarian practices are also at the heart of the proposed amendments. Despite our government's many commitments to climate action, we must prepare for future catastrophic natural weather events, be they bushfires or floods. Animal welfare was tested to its limits during the horrific bushfires that devastated East Gippsland two years ago when the veterinary community was hampered from assisting local practitioners with the donation of essential drugs and delayed or prevented from sending veterinary supplies and medicines for animals impacted by the disaster. So after consultation with the Department of Environment, Land, Water and Planning, Zoos Victoria and the Australian Veterinary Association, this legislation will ensure that our animal health and welfare is first and foremost in any future emergency, ensuring that life-saving medications can be supplied without delay even when they are needed the most. I add my voice to those who have already thanked our frontline vets, both here

in this chamber and last Saturday on World Veterinary Day. Our government acknowledges that the shortage of vets and vet nurses has put further demand on the stretched workload that they face, from the bushfires to the pandemic, when we saw a surge in pet ownership and now see the surrendering of animals as people return to offices or regret their decisions. It is heartbreaking stuff for the veterinary sector. Adding the certificate IV in veterinary nursing to the free TAFE list in 2022 shows our government listens and acts.

On humanitarian practices for our farmers, the bill also strengthens the Farm Debt Mediation Act 2011. Again, much of my electorate of Bass relies on farming. My travels into the areas included in the boundary changes have given me the opportunity to connect with more of our food producers—as I was mentioning earlier, with Devon Meadows—and hear their concerns and priorities as well. These proud people are often not wanting to ask for help. We know the mental health implications of farming, and I hear the stories of things that are beyond their control as well, like the weather.

So to those who say Labor only cares about the city folk: no, that is not true. Of course Labor cares about all Victorians, and strengthening the safety net for farmers facing enforcement action by creditors shows it. We care about farmers. We care about their mental health, and we thank them for the food they provide. One amendment in this bill removes the double handling of sensitive information by transferring responsibilities to the Victorian Small Business Commission, so respecting the integrity and privacy of farmers as businesses and people.

The omnibus legislation amends, as I said earlier, 11 acts to protect our agriculture sector and those in it—the farmers and producers, the professions that assist in their care and the animals and plants that provide us with food. Without them we are actually lost. The origin may not be known, but the quote has truth: ‘When the last tree has been cut down, the last fish caught, the last river poisoned, only then may we realise that we can’t eat money’. Our government is committed to ensuring that will not happen in Victoria, and I commend the bill to the house.

Mr D O’BRIEN (Gippsland South) (15:25): I am pleased to rise to say a few words on the Agriculture Legislation Amendment Bill 2022, which is an omnibus bill that covers a wide range of things. But I want to start by seeing if I can get a rise by saying I am pleased to rise as the member for Gippsland South, the greatest agricultural electorate in the state, particularly the greatest dairy electorate in the state.

Mr Eren: Calm down. We’re not bad in the west.

Mr D O’BRIEN: I am surprised, member for Lara, that the member for Polwarth did not beat you to it.

Mr Riordan interjected.

Mr D O’BRIEN: The member for Polwarth does indeed represent a very good dairy electorate, but Gippsland South has got it all. We do, I would say, probably with the member for Polwarth, the member for Murray Plains and perhaps the member for South-West Coast, represent the main dairy electorates across the state. It is indeed a massive industry for Victoria, as it is for my electorate—likewise, beef in particular. Really dairy and beef underpin a huge proportion of the employment and industry in my electorate, and aren’t they loving it at the moment? In particular in the beef sector we have had a couple of very good seasons on the back of good prices. Indeed whilst input costs are going up constantly—whether is electricity, fertiliser, urea and the like, or diesel in particular at the moment of course too—at the same time our dairy farmers are enjoying good prices thanks to strong global demand.

Likewise, in my electorate we are actually seeing an increase in the output per hectare, if you like, in terms of the value of production, as a number of horticultural producers have come into my electorate. We have already got some fantastic salad growers—Covino Farms at Longford is one of the biggest in the state. Indeed I think Gippsland has eight of the top 10 salad producers in the country, including Schreurs down in Middle Tarwin, who have moved in with predominately celery production. I think

there is great opportunity for it to grow further in Gippsland South, both in South Gippsland, where we have naturally excellent rainfall and soils, but also in Central Gippsland, where the Macalister irrigation district is a powerhouse of production—historically in dairy, but it is growing more so in horticulture.

I have been pushing the government for some time now for further expansion of irrigation in Central Gippsland, particularly along the Latrobe River. I note there is some money in the budget announced today for the implementation of the central and southern sustainable water strategy. I would hope though that the government actually does follow through with some of the recommendations or the comments in the draft SWS, particularly those on providing more water that is currently sitting in a dam unused by the power industry that could be used for irrigation broadly along the Latrobe. There are great opportunities for existing farmers and for new people to come in.

This bill has a wide range of changes. I think there are amendments to 11 different acts, many of them relating to authorised officers in respect of ag and vet chemicals, plant biosecurity and drugs, poisons and controlled substances and the like. The point, I guess, I would like to make is that it is all well and good to be making changes to clarify or increase the powers of authorised officers, but if you do not actually have any authorised officers it does not make much sense. We have seen under this government over the last couple of years significant job cuts—145 across Agriculture Victoria, which were reported in February of this year, on top of another 47 last year, which were predominantly soil researchers. We hear whenever these come up. We hear a lot from government members about supposed cuts under Liberal and National governments, but they never actually acknowledge that they are doing these cuts, particularly in the agricultural sector and in Agriculture Victoria.

We often hear the minister say in response, ‘Oh, well, but these won’t affect the services provided to Victorians and to Victorian farmers’. It does beg the question: well, what are those people doing now if their loss is not going to mean anything? So while we see the level of executives, particularly in the public service, skyrocketing under this government, we are actually seeing the number of people on the ground—authorised officers, extension officers and the like in Agriculture Victoria—reduced. To go with that we see in the budget today that, whilst the budget papers claim an increase in the budget for agriculture under the Department of Jobs, Precincts and Regions, in fact when you look at the revised figure for 2021–22 of \$551.9 million and the budget figure for next year of \$504.1 million, that is a \$47.8 million cut to the agricultural output budget—in today’s budget papers released—or 8.6 per cent, so a significant cut. You do wonder, ‘Well, how are all these changes in this legislation to be implemented when there is such a significant cut to both the staffing levels and the actual budget of the agriculture department within DJPR?’. This is on top of significant cuts last year to both agriculture and regional development and is a significant issue going forward.

I might just touch on clauses 89 to 107, which talk about the Farm Debt Mediation Act 2011 and include expanding the definition of ‘farming operation’ to include forestry and aquaculture. And just briefly on farm forestry, it is an area of considerable opportunity for Victoria, but on plantations more specifically it is an issue again of great failure by this government. We saw an announcement in 2017 of \$110 million from the government to establish new plantations in the Latrobe Valley, which was in part to try and address the shortfall in plantations and was subsequently relied on by the government to say, ‘It’s part of our transition out of native forest harvesting’. But what has happened with that \$110 million? We are now five years down the track—literally five years today since the 2017 budget—and that \$110 million has not gone anywhere. There is not widespread new plantation—indeed, from the Public Accounts and Estimates Committee we have been able to ascertain that so far just 500 hectares of plantations have been planted under that scheme and indeed they were not new plantations; they were government plantations on land that had previously been leased by HVP. So it is a net gain of zero in terms of forestry plantations, and that is not helping with our food and fibre production in this state, it is not helping with our exports and it is particularly at the moment not helping with the cost of building materials and subsequently the issues that are affecting the state in terms of housing and housing affordability. So the government stands condemned for being all press release

and no action on that issue. I would be concerned as to where it goes in future as well, and there is nothing further in the budget today to give us any hope that that situation will improve.

In other aspects of the bill it certainly does touch on weeds and pest animals, and every rural MP will tell you that is one of the biggest bugbears of our farmers, not just from their neighbours but their roadsides. The Crown and indeed state land more broadly, whether it is state forests or national parks, are havens for weeds and pest animals, and I do not believe this government has given that issue serious enough consideration, including—and I go back to the issue of authorised officers—one of the issues that I get pretty much every year, which is the issue of ragwort in particular, blackberries and thistles in the hills, particularly in the Strzelecki Ranges. It is often about absentee neighbours—absentee landholders—but there is just not the effort from the department these days to enforce the existing rules. We can make changes to the legislation here today, but it is the enforcement of the existing rules, which is very, very much in my experience dependent on the actual ag officers within the department. There are some that have been great and they have a good reputation, but there are others where nothing is done and landholders who are doing the wrong thing simply do not get punished under the existing law.

This bill does tidy up a lot of areas. The opposition is not opposing this legislation. It is an omnibus bill with a lot of minor changes involved. But I say again there is no point making these changes trying to strengthen our agriculture sector when at the same time this government is taking it away by cutting jobs in Agriculture Victoria, cutting the agriculture budget and ensuring that we do not have the future that we should as an agricultural producing state.

Mr EREN (Lara) (15:35): I am delighted to be speaking on this very important bill before the house. Of course it is yet another superb bill by the Andrews Labor government, and I commend the minister involved, the Minister for Agriculture obviously, who has done a power of work in relation to this. This is an omnibus bill, and it makes amendments to 11 acts in order to improve their administration, operation and enforcement. It will introduce new legislative schemes, provide amendments to reflect machinery-of-government changes, remove obsolete references to departments and make various miscellaneous and technical amendments to improve clarity and consistency. The bill will make amendments to the following acts: the Agricultural and Veterinary Chemicals (Control of Use) Act 1992, the Catchment and Land Protection Act 1994, the Dairy Act 2000, the Drugs, Poisons and Controlled Substances Act 1981, the Farm Debt Mediation Act 2011, the Livestock Disease Control Act 1994, the Meat Industry Act 1993, the Plant Biosecurity Act 2010, the Rural Assistance Schemes Act 2016, the Veterinary Practice Act 1997 and the Wildlife Act 1975. So as you can see from that, it is a comprehensive overhaul of this very important sector. Of course we know how many jobs are associated with the agriculture industry, and there are 18 members of the government who understand and appreciate the valuable input that those industries provide for their electorates right across Victoria and obviously in those regional and rural areas.

I think it is important to highlight that we are back. As a state, obviously, we were the powerhouse for jobs in the nation prior to COVID. We got hit hard, as did many other states and indeed many other cities across the globe, with a once-in-a-century pandemic, and now we are back, bigger, hopefully, than before. And that is why the budget that was handed down today incorporated a sensible plan to grow our social services areas and health areas and educational services and, of course, importantly as well, to grow the economy and get our budget back to surplus. Certainly one of those ways to becoming a powerhouse in terms of employment in this nation is to look after our producers, our agricultural sector.

Despite some of the challenges that we have experienced, Victoria actually punches well above its weight on a national level when it comes agriculture, and I would like to highlight some of the stats that I will be presenting today. Despite some of the challenges of the pandemic, as I have indicated before, and global shocks to the supply chain, as we have experienced, Victoria remains the nation's largest agriculture exporter, which is amazing. That is a power of work not only by the producers themselves, obviously, in getting through that very hard period of COVID but also in terms of

government support. That is where I think congratulations should be given to those who have helped not only protect our agricultural industries but also enhance them in some way, shape or form.

So being the largest agricultural exporter, Victoria accounts for a massive 27 per cent of the nation's food and fibre exports—that is a whopping \$14 billion of exports. For comparison, the next largest exporters are New South Wales at 19 per cent, \$9.6 billion; and Queensland at 17 per cent, at \$8.6 billion. Overall, the total value of agricultural production in Victoria is \$17.8 billion. We are the largest ag producer in the country—and I underline that: the largest ag producer in the country—which is a credit to everybody involved in that industry. We have 21 000 farm businesses across the state, supporting 75 000 jobs in the agricultural sector, predominantly located in rural and regional Victoria.

I am lucky enough to have some wonderful ag businesses in my own electorate of Lara. I point out to the member for Gippsland South, who tried to take credit for being the biggest and the best dairy producer in the state—I admire his ambition and his enthusiasm, but I have got to correct him—obviously in the west we are much better than the Gippsland area in that respect.

Late last year I was able to visit one of these fantastic local businesses, the Kyvalley Dairy in North Geelong, along with the Minister for Agriculture. Kyvalley Dairy are one of the largest suppliers of fresh dairy products, with exports going to markets across China, Malaysia and Singapore. We are proud to announce support for the industrious team at Kyvalley Dairy through the Food to Market program. As you may be aware, Acting Speaker, it is a wonderful program which assists companies such as this one, which continues to grow its newly launched Geelong Dairy brand and expand it into new markets. And that is exactly what we want: we want to expand into new markets so that we can be the leader in this industry for many more years to come.

Victoria is the leading agricultural producer of milk, where we account for 64 per cent of the national production, which is a phenomenal amount; sheepmeat, where we account for 46 per cent of national production; vegetables, where we are also the nation's largest producer, accounting for 25 per cent of national production; and fruit and nuts, where we account for 35 per cent of national production and also more than any other state, which is again a credit to all of those businesses that are involved and all of those industries involved in this very important sector. Can I also mention table and dried grapes, where we account for a massive 70 per cent of national production. Victoria clearly is also the number one export state in dairy, sheepmeat, wool, horticultural products and of course poultry. It is safe to say that Victoria is the agricultural powerhouse of the nation. That is why I am proud to be a member of the Andrews Labor government, who are backing farmers and primary industries with our transformative 10-year agricultural strategy, which is working tremendously. This will strengthen, grow and protect the sector so it continues to be a cornerstone of our economy in this state—and in our nation to a certain extent. We are happy to carry that load, and we are doing it spectacularly.

This bill provides an opportunity to make a number of reforms and amendments across the agricultural portfolio, supporting Victoria's emerging hemp industry, if I can just mention that, which is obviously one of the big industries that is growing in terms of demand as well. The Victorian government is committed to working with industry, communities and trading partners to ensure that the agriculture sector is strong, innovative and sustainable going forward. The Victorian agriculture strategy is a 10-year strategy. It is a road map for action and investment to help the sector respond flexibly to emerging challenges and to capture new opportunities, and this includes supporting emerging industries such as hemp, an industry which has been developing since commercial production was first legalised in 1998. Agriculture Victoria issues licences to authorise the cultivation and processing of industrial hemp and seed for non-therapeutic and non-medicinal purposes.

There is so much more in this bill. I wish there was more time to go through all of the different changes that are occurring, but in terms of responding to animal health and welfare emergencies a further amendment to the Drugs, Poisons and Controlled Substances Act 1981 will ensure that veterinary practitioners can rapidly respond to animal health and welfare needs in emergencies such as bushfire. Unfortunately Victorians know too well how devastating fires are for our communities and also for

our pets, livestock and wildlife. The Black Summer bushfires of 2019–20 highlighted the issues that delayed or prevented the urgent provision of veterinary supplies and medicines for treatment of livestock, companion animals and wildlife caught up in the disaster. We know that during the fires vets seeking to donate medicines were unable to do so due to restrictions under the current act, so we are making changes there. We are supporting the veterinarians.

We are doing so much in this bill, which is fantastic obviously. I wish I could go through all of it: support for small-scale packaged meat producers, the Farm Debt Mediation Act, the Wildlife Act, the Dairy Act 2000, the Livestock Disease Control Act 1994, the Rural Assistance Schemes Act 2016, the Plant Biosecurity Act 2010—which is another very important part of our sustainability going forward as a state obviously—and the Agricultural and Veterinary Chemicals (Control of Use) Act. This is a fantastic bill; it really is. It is going to make a big difference to sustain growth in the industry and protect that industry going forward. I commend the bill to the house, and I wish it a speedy passage.

Mr RIORDAN (Polwarth) (15:45): The member for Sunbury was just getting a little bit ahead of himself there. There must be an election on. He is wanting to get up and make things known out in Sunbury that he actually knows what a farm might be, rather than an airport only.

I rise to speak on the Agriculture Legislation Amendment Bill 2022, and like an earlier speaker from Gippsland I too take credit for having one of the best and most productive and most profitable agricultural regions in the state. Despite the sort of pointed claims by the member for Gippsland South, I point out to the member for Gippsland South that I can actually grow real crops as well as dairy and meat and sheep and everything else—so anything they can do in South Gippsland, we can do better in Polwarth. There is no doubt about that.

This reform, this omnibus bill, is a fairly lengthy tome by the government. I do not know how many pages it racks up—there are a heck of a lot of them there. I reckon most farmers around my district would like to see a lot more reforms in this omnibus bill than what are suggested by the government in this round. I mean, as the member for Gippsland South pointed out, this government often gives far too much lip-service to the agricultural sector, which is always disappointing in our regional areas because it is in fact the farming sector which certainly through the COVID pandemic has really kept Victoria afloat. It has boomed along nicely. Without excessive hardship, of drought or flood or bushfires, which we have managed to avoid in the last few years, agriculture has really come into its own, producing pretty much the food, the fibre and the other basic day-to-day necessities that all people need not only in this state but around the world. I point to a couple of great success stories in my own community of Colac, where the local dairy plant and the local meat-processing plant really kept hundreds and hundreds, into the thousands, of people gainfully employed and in full-time work throughout the COVID pandemic, and that is a great credit to those operators and to the wonderful product and produce that they value-add to on a daily basis in our community.

The other thing that agriculture is doing so particularly well at the moment is innovation—new products both coming to our domestic market and also fit and ready for export. I will just mention a couple of stand-out boutique products that have really come into their own in recent years and continue to show that agriculture is not only an age-old profession and one of the oldest industries around but also one that continues to innovate and provide new opportunities. If we look through the Polwarth electorate, Shulz dairy down Timboon way has really gone well and strongly into the organic area. We have a product just to the north of the Polwarth electorate, in Meredith Dairy's goat cheese; it is a major producer to all the main supermarkets and exports. If you look at Bulla foods, which is now a well over 100-year-old company based out of Colac, not only does it provide huge quantities of ice cream and frozen product and high-value dairy products into the market but in the recent floods that were inflicted on New South Wales, where some of their processing capacity was somewhat diminished, those industries in our area were able to pick up the slack and continue to provide the food product into the marketplace.

This bill deals, as I said, with some basic tidy-ups around I think nearly 12 pieces of legislation that cover the important agricultural industries, but I will refer to some of the things that it could always go further on—even while the opposition is broadly supporting this omnibus bill. Take, for example, amendments to the Catchment and Land Protection Act 1994, the CALP act, which is a vital piece of legislation in its own right, governing catchment management authorities and the way we look after land. Farmers' one great contribution to society and economy is that overall land stewardship that all Australians take for granted really, that most of our land is being managed and by and large looked after by them. This amendment seeks to impose more stringent rules and enables the government to act more on recalcitrant landowners that are not doing the right thing, whether it be weeds or pests, but what it stays very silent on is who we all know in country Victoria to be the worst land manager, and that of course is the state government. One the worst things you can really do is have the government as your neighbour, whether it is a roadside, whether it is a state park or whether it is a national park. You can always bet that that parcel of land that is adjoining your property will be badly fenced and riddled with weeds and vermin, and there is really nothing you can do about it. I know most people in rural and regional Victoria would love to see and would support strengthening authorised officers' ability to police that, but they would love to see them actually policing Crown land as well.

This bill also seeks to deal a little bit with the potential growth of the hemp industry. The hemp industry is one that is starting to show its head in my electorate, and that is hemp for both the nutritional side, for hemp seed and hemp oil and other things of a medicinal or semimedical use, but also increasingly the fibre opportunities there for value adding, clothing ranges, other uses and potentially even paper and fabrics—a really important future use. There is no doubt people will support anything the government can do that will make trade in that particular commodity easier and more transparent and will enable that industry to grow well here in Victoria; that would definitely be supported.

Amendments to the Farm Debt Mediation Act 2011 is another important one. Even though we have had pretty good times in agriculture across south-west Victoria over the last few years, we have been through bushfires, we have been through droughts and we have been through dairy price crunches, and we know how important the rural financial counselling services are across our region. They are there when people and farms and farming families need them the most, so any amendments to continue to make sure that farmers are dealt with with as much dignity and compassion as can be at times of great financial hardship are ones that I certainly support. I have been with families who have had to use those services. It is a very good service that is basically backed by the state, and it is one that could always be funded better. But any elements to that that actually allow farmers to be dealt with more carefully and more compassionately are certainly things I would support.

They are only small amendments, but for new industries, new agricultural processing and new products that are coming to the market there are some minor amendments to the Meat Industry Act 1993, which I also support, because one of the things we are really seeing a lot of is boutique meat producers and people that are trying to work and produce a meat product that is ethically sourced and supplied in the best environmental conditions they can. They are finding a real economic opportunity in farmers markets, in stalls, in boutique product ranges, in some quite good restaurants and in the urban market, and so anything that allows those people to package their product, to get that product to market and get it to their customers more quickly and at lower cost is definitely a good change.

Amendments to the Plant Biosecurity Act 2010 is another important one, protecting and increasing powers that really protect farmers and farm communities, because if you get a disease into grapes, if you get a disease into potatoes or if you get a disease into hops or any sort of agricultural commodity that can be really detrimentally wiped out or badly affected, with years and years of crop prevented from growing, not only will it affect that farm and that farming family but it can quite often affect whole communities, because if you take out or wipe out production, whether it is on chook farms or any of these other food commodities, it is not only that farm that can be affected but whole communities, which can set local economies back for a long, long time. Anything that strengthens the ability to make sure everybody is kept safe and, all too importantly, biosecurity is kept under control

is a good measure. They are just some of the highlights for me that I think really affect constituents in my patch. I hope to see that some of the bigger questions are also further assessed when this bill heads into the upper house.

Mr J BULL (Sunbury) (15:55): Like others have this afternoon in the chamber, I rise to make a contribution to the debate on the Agriculture Legislation Amendment Bill 2022. As others have mentioned, this is of course an omnibus bill. It makes a number of amendments to 11 acts in order to improve their administration, operation and enforcement; to introduce new legislative schemes; to provide amendments to reflect machinery-of-government changes; to remove obsolete references to departments; and to make various miscellaneous and technical amendments to improve clarity and consistency.

There are a range of different provisions within the legislation that go to changing or making amendments to those 11 acts, those acts being the Agricultural and Veterinary Chemicals (Control of Use) Act 1992, the Catchment and Land Protection Act 1994, the Dairy Act 2000, the Drugs, Poisons and Controlled Substances Act 1981, the Farm Debt Mediation Act 2011, the Livestock Disease Control Act 1994, the Meat Industry Act 1993, the Plant Biosecurity Act 2010, the Rural Assistance Schemes Act 2016, the Veterinary Practice Act 1997 and the Wildlife Act 1975.

Before I go to some of the more specific changes which are contained within those changes to various pieces of legislation that I have just outlined, I do want to take this opportunity, as other members have done throughout the course of debate today, to acknowledge and thank local vets within my community and those who do really important work to support our wildlife and animals across my community but also right across the state. We know that those that work within veterinary clinics, whether it be the vets themselves or the staff within those organisations, and the many people who work within wildlife rescue and animal welfare groups across the state do important work. I just want to take this opportunity, as others have done, to acknowledge that because there are some changes that relate to veterinary clinics contained in the legislation.

We know of course that the bill goes to amending those 11 acts, but what is continually important for this government—and indeed should be important to all governments across states, territories and other jurisdictions across the nation—is to consult widely and to make sure that we are working with industry, working with those within specific fields, to ensure that we are getting changes to legislation and various amendments that go to better governance. So this government has through the development of this legislation consulted with Better Regulation Victoria, the Department of Environment, Land, Water and Planning, the Department of Health, the Department of Justice and Community Safety, the rural assistance commissioner, VCAT, Victoria Police, the Victorian Public Sector Commission, Dairy Food Safety Victoria, the EPA, the Game Management Authority, PrimeSafe, Animal Medicines Australia, the Australian Banking Association, the Australian Livestock and Property Agents Association, the Australian Meat Industry Council, the Australian Veterinary Association, CropLife Australia, Field and Game Australia, Nursery and Garden Industry Victoria, Sporting Shooters Association of Australia, Veterinary Manufacturers and Distributors Association, the Victorian Farmers Federation, the Victorian Farmers Markets Association and Zoos Victoria—a really extensive process of consultation—and importantly we will continue to engage with those stakeholders as we draft various amendments to various pieces of legislation.

Obviously other members of Parliament through the course of this debate have spoken about a whole range of those different amendments. I do want to focus my contribution on some of the responses to animal health and welfare emergencies. The amendment to the Drugs, Poisons and Controlled Substances Act 1981 ensures that veterinary practitioners can rapidly respond to animal health and welfare emergencies in bushfires. We know of course that this state is subject to some significant and devastating bushfires. We have seen that in recent times, and we have seen that over the course of many decades. We know that bushfires are a significant challenge for our community. We know that bushfire emergencies will continue within our community, and we know because of climate change that bushfires are going to continue to be a significant challenge for our community. So what this

amendment to this specific piece of legislation, the Drugs, Poisons and Controlled Substances Act 1981, does ensure that amendments allow for an animal health emergency to be declared, mirroring some current provisions within public health emergency orders, ensuring that some of those vital medicines that are required in times of the emergency are able to be provided quickly. In future emergencies this provision will allow for specific requirements in the act to be suspended or altered temporarily to ensure an efficient response to animal welfare needs. Another important change within the legislation is to ensure that a response can be generated or enacted in a timely manner.

I did mention and thank the work of our vets, and the Agriculture Legislation Amendment Bill 2022 contains amendments to the Veterinary Practice Act 1997. I do want to again take the opportunity to acknowledge that work. We know that World Veterinary Day was on Saturday, 30 April—a day to celebrate the outstanding work of our vets and promote the profession. We know that making sure that we have availability of local vets within our community is something that is incredibly important, but what we have seen on the back of some really significant demands that have been placed on local communities is a shortage of vet nurses. This we know is related to a significant amount of work and both mental stress and the impacts of dealing with the day-to-day challenges that that role brings. That is why it is important that we support our vets, and that is exactly what this government is doing.

In recognition of staff shortages and capacity constraints faced by the industry, the government has recently added certificate IV in vet nursing to the free TAFE list, and of course we know that for communities right across the state that ability to get training when and where you need it, but most importantly at no cost, is something that is incredibly important to this government, but most importantly, incredibly important to the individual that receives that level of training, that is able to upskill and access our free TAFE program. We know that list continues to grow. When we had the opportunity to first be elected to government, we knew the damage that had been done by those opposite to TAFE. We have at each and every opportunity, both through the budget process and through investment and initiatives that this government has generated, made sure we have continued to invest in TAFE, because we know it is critically important to upskilling individuals within our community to be their very best.

Many of the functions or the provisions contained within this legislation go to ensuring that those changes across those 11 acts are about striking a critical and important balance between, as I mentioned earlier in my contribution, industry and those who rely on community services right across the state, whether that be services within the city, whether that be services within the suburbs or indeed whether that be services in rural and regional Victoria. There are of course a range of other mechanisms within this piece of legislation that work across those 11 acts, but what we want to make sure we continue to do is invest in our local communities, make sure we are working with industry and make sure we are striking that key balance to always ensure that our acts that are before the Parliament are modernised and up to date but are responsive to the needs of local communities. This is an important piece of legislation. It builds on the government's strong record of investment in this space, and I very proudly commend the bill to the house.

Ms SANDELL (Melbourne) (16:05): Today I am also speaking on the Agriculture Legislation Amendment Bill 2022. As we have heard, the bill is a fairly large omnibus bill covering a lot of ground, so I will not speak to every aspect of the bill, but there are a few select areas that I do want to make some comments on.

Firstly, on invasive species management, which I will spend most of my time on, this bill makes changes to the Catchment and Land Protection Act 1994. They are things like improving powers to regulate weeds and pest animals and tweaking the penalties for spreading weeds. They are important changes, absolutely, but really they are just scratching the surface of the invasive species issues that Victoria is facing, which a lot of people in this chamber would have direct experience of. It is not a secret that introduced plants and animals are one of the biggest threats to Victoria's environment—probably the biggest threat after climate change, in all honesty. This comes out every time there is an

assessment of the state of Victoria's environment—just how damaging pests and weeds are to our native species and ecosystems and habitats.

The damage done by invasive species was again identified as a key threat to the environment in the recent ecosystem inquiry, which was initiated by the Greens. The Legislative Council's Environment and Planning Committee ran that inquiry over the last couple of years, and they came out with a good report that had a number of really important recommendations, which we are yet to see the government act on. We very much hope that they will act on them over the next six to 12 months, but unfortunately, to date, management of invasive species in Victoria has not received the attention it needs from the Victorian government. It has not been prioritised. It receives just dribs and drabs of funding, and beyond this it is largely done with a focus on agriculture rather than protecting threatened ecosystems. This is not always bad, but it does mean that sometimes a lot of the pests and weeds that are the most environmentally damaging, say, to our threatened species or our native habitats, do not get the funding or the attention they need, and then our native species and threatened species are put further at risk.

Back in 2011, under the previous coalition government, there actually was a comprehensive review of management of invasive species in Victoria, and it made a very strong case for the development of new standalone legislation for the management of invasive species. A key problem with the way we did things then, as is still the case now, was a lack of focus on prevention and early intervention when it comes to pests and weeds. This is absolutely key, because if you do not get something early, it becomes almost impossible to eradicate. We are seeing that now with, say, deer across Victoria, where we had this window to act and we did not and now it has become this huge problem that we may never be able to get rid of. It is a tragedy; it really is.

The other problem that we see is a real lack of funding for research into new methods for controlling pests and weeds. Yes, it is expensive to control pests and weeds in some cases if you do not get them early, but we do not even then do the research to look into, say, biological controls that might be effective or other measures that might be effective, and that lack of research funding means we are really hamstringing ourselves in the options that we have available to us.

In 2014 the coalition even got as far as preparing a standalone invasive species management bill. However, it did not pass Parliament before the change of government in November 2014. Then Labor came in and unfortunately in the eight years since, while of course they have done a few good things here and there with small amounts of money, the Labor government has not progressed the whole-scale invasive species reform that our state really desperately needs if we are to protect our threatened species and our habitats and the native habitats and ecosystems that people so value.

I think Victorians really value nature. They want to spend time in nature, and any Victorian that has gone out bushwalking or camping or who lives on the land or who has gone out and enjoyed our beautiful native environment would have seen for themselves with their very own eyes just the incredible damage that pests and invasive species are wreaking on our environment. Whether it is blackberries or deer or any number of other plants and pest animals, they are becoming worse and worse, and you are hard-pressed to go out and find an ecosystem that is untouched by them. I personally find that really sad and devastating when I experience it, and I know a lot of other Victorians do as well.

What we actually need is for invasive species management to be given a higher priority within government. The work, we believe, should be led from the environment portfolio, and it should be properly funded, especially given just the scale of the crisis that we have at the moment. We do need effective standalone laws. We need to undertake prevention and early intervention to stop new invasive species, and we need to do everything we can with the existing invasive species that we have running rampant across our state. We need containment and eradication of existing species driven by sound environmental and scientific outcomes, not simply for political reasons—not just picking a species like wild dogs, for example, because there is a particular industry that might be affected by that. We actually need to look at it from an environmentally sound perspective.

Over the last almost eight years Labor has, as I mentioned, done some good things on invasive species, particularly in regard to managing incursions of pest animals into new areas after the 2019–20 Black Summer bushfires. That was a good focus because we know that after bushfires invasive species find it easier to come into a damaged area. That is one good thing the government has done. But in a lot of other ways we have really dropped the ball, because if you look at, say, for example, deer, there are now more than 1 million deer roaming Victoria. They are having an incredibly devastating impact on the environment with their hard hooves. They are having a devastating impact on agriculture and community safety as well. You are seeing them run onto roads, and people are running into them with their cars. You are seeing them run onto school grounds in peri-urban and regional and rural areas. They are actually a huge threat to us as well as to the environment.

But in this ridiculous situation our laws in Victoria still categorise deer as a protected species, which does not make any sense whatsoever. This harks back to when deer were introduced as game and they were protected, but the law still continues, and it actually undermines a lot of the efforts needed to get on top of the problem. And when we ask the Labor government about it, they say, ‘Oh, no. It’s fine. It doesn’t really change anything, how we categorise them’, but it actually does because you need, for example, private landholders to be on board with eradicating deer, and if they are being sent mixed messages that actually deer are protected rather than a pest, then they are not given the kind of tools or even the social licence to be able to deal with them. So it really undermines our efforts in dealing with deer, having them still listed somehow, for some bizarre reason, as a protected species in Victoria when we know they are not. They are a pest species, and they cause so much damage.

Labor had the perfect opportunity to address this issue in the recently released deer management strategy. They did not. It could be because they caved in to pressure from the recreational hunting lobby, who have a vested interest in keeping deer populations actually up in our landscapes, and unfortunately, even though some of them might have intentions to help us deal with deer, the research shows that they do not make a dent in deer populations, recreational hunters, and also are not usually well equipped to deal with deer humanely either. Also, having non-professional hunters roaming around close to population centres can create a pretty significant community safety issue. We have seen instances, for example, of shots fired through houses into children’s bedrooms and things like that accidentally, which is a pretty scary situation, in some of these areas.

With the current review of the Wildlife Act 1975 underway, Labor has another opportunity now to fix this issue and recognise that deer are a serious problem, remove them as a protected species and categorise them as an invasive species. I really, really hope this government takes that opportunity. Feral horses, we know, are also a big issue. They are particularly devastating in our alpine environments, and a lot more work and attention needs to be given to horses as well as many other invasive species that we have across Victoria.

We would also really love to see another important reform, which is the introduction of a banned list to stop the sale of weed plant species in our nurseries. Right now nurseries in Victoria can still legally sell some of the most damaging weeds. You can walk into a nursery, buy them off the shelf and plant them in your garden. Then they get away; they proliferate and they might get into our waterways or our native ecosystems. That should not be happening. It is a really commonsense change that we could make that would make a big difference. That is a bit about the invasive species section of the bill.

Another area covered by this bill is the regulation of agricultural and veterinary chemicals. My Greens colleagues and I are particularly concerned when it comes to the use of rodent poisons, which are having a big impact on our native wildlife, particularly birds of prey. People may not be aware that there are two main different types of mice and rat poisons sold in Australia: there are what are called the first-generation rodenticides and there are what are called the second-generation rodenticides. The difference between them is quite significant. These products that we are talking about, you can just walk into Bunnings or walk into the supermarket and buy them off the shelf to control rats and mice in and around your home—things like Ratsak and the like. Unfortunately what happens is when

predators of mice and rats eat the second-generation rodenticides they get poisoned themselves. This is becoming a huge problem.

First-generation rodenticides work more slowly; they break down more quickly. I am going to completely butcher this, but they contain active ingredients warfarin and coumatetralyl. Sorry, Hansard—I will give Hansard my notes because I am completely butchering the names, and I do apologise. Owls and other wildlife like birds of prey or even marsupials might eat the rats and mice but they are unlikely to die from exposure to those poisons in those first-generation rodenticides. In contrast the second-generation rodenticides contain active ingredients of, bear with me, brodifacoum, bromadiolone and difenacoum. I am sure I have mangled those ones as well, but these poisons are faster acting on rodents and they build up in the animals that eat them. Unfortunately there is growing evidence that this build-up of these poisons is killing native birds of prey like owls and eagles and native carnivores like quolls. They are not just killing them but weakening them so they are less able to defend themselves or less able to go and get food, for example, and then they die. They are also, interestingly, dangerous to household pets. We have had a number of vets contact us who say they have seen a really big and worrying increase in cats, for example, coming in and needing to be treated for poisoning from these chemicals, so much so that some vets have run out of the chemicals and the medicines that they need to treat cats who have been poisoned by these chemicals.

The sad thing is there is not really a reason the second-generation rodent poisons need to be sold in Australia, let alone as widely as they are. At the moment anyone can walk into Bunnings or Woolworths or many other locations and buy them, and it really is a failure of regulation, a failure of governments to adequately regulate dangerous chemicals. Our regulation here in Australia is well behind the latest research and well behind other places such as Europe where the use of second-generation rodenticides is tightly restricted. They still allow some limited use in agricultural settings, for example, where it is needed, but they do not allow the sale at supermarkets to anyone given that there are much less dangerous alternatives available. What we are being told is that it is the use by households, particularly in peri-urban areas where there might be more wildlife around, that is causing the huge damage to bird and native animal populations, not necessarily agricultural use, although it would be great to have more evidence and research into that. But it is the fact that you can walk into Bunnings or Woolworths and buy these things off the shelf and then you are significantly putting wildlife at risk. Most people are not aware of it. We do need more than just labelling. I am aware that the federal government is looking at it, but it is happening very slowly. I am quite concerned they might make some pretty weak recommendations, like just putting a small label on the products, but what is needed is to restrict the sale like is done in other countries.

The ACT is actually looking to move ahead with restricting sale on its own, so it would be really great to see the Victorian government do that as well. I think it would be an easy way to protect some of our iconic species. We are talking about species like Bunjil, the wedge-tailed eagle—iconic and incredibly environmentally and culturally significant in our state and a species that should be protected. So what the Greens will be doing is seeking to amend this bill in the upper house to limit the sale of these second-generation rodenticides in order to protect our endangered and precious native species.

Before I finish I just want to make some very, very brief comments on other aspects of the bill. The Greens and I support the amendments to enable our hemp industry in particular to operate in Victoria. Low-THC hemp is an amazing fibre. It has huge potential to replace native forest fibre in many uses, and it is really quite a tragedy that the stigma associated with cannabis means the industry is really far behind where it could be. The bill also, in several places, makes changes to enable wildlife to be better cared for during emergencies, and of course the Greens will support those changes. With that, I will conclude my contribution.

Ms SETTLE (Buninyong) (16:22): I am very happy to rise to speak on the Agriculture Legislation Amendment Bill 2022. I come from a very proud farming family in the Western District in Ararat. For over 100 years our family have been on the farm, and I am really aware of what extraordinary communities collect in farming communities—incredibly resilient communities. I have been reading

the notes as we have talked about this bill. It is extraordinary that we have faced these incredible challenges through the pandemic—global supply chain shocks have just been felt throughout industry and business—and yet we find that the total of agricultural production in Victoria is \$17.8 billion. We are the largest ag producers in the country. Despite facing all of these challenges, the industry has been extraordinarily resilient.

This agriculture amendment bill is an omnibus bill; I think there are 11 different acts that it makes amendments to. But really if there is anything that we can do to support the agricultural industry, then I am delighted to stand and speak in support of it. While these amendments might seem small, they will make a real difference to many of our producers. In Victoria we have over 21 000 farm businesses across the state, and they are supporting something like 75 000 jobs in the agricultural sector. So it is an absolutely integral part of our economy. I would like to acknowledge our wonderful Minister for Agriculture. She has done some extraordinary stuff in this space, and I have seen that commitment from her, the commitment she has, to support our industry. So while these are smaller amendments, it just speaks to our commitment to this sector.

I look around at regional Victoria. Since this government was first elected we have invested over \$40 billion in regional Victoria. It is just extraordinary—and you can sense that. I live in the regions; I live and breathe the regions. It is no inner-city living for me, with an electorate that is a long way away. I actually live and breathe my area, and you can see what this government's investment has done. It is not just about the wonderful \$500 million hospital development in Ballarat; it is actually about those smaller towns around. This government understands that regional and rural Victoria are incredibly important to our economy.

I look at my own electorate, and you would be amazed at how much farming goes on in my wonderful electorate. It is primarily made up of three different local government areas. Look at Golden Plains shire. Golden Plains shire produces 21 per cent of Victoria's eggs. So next time you are sitting down and having your egg breakfast think about Golden Plains shire in my electorate. But it is more than that. The Ballarat region—the Ballarat LGA—produces about 100 000 tonnes of processing potatoes, so next time you are eating your chips, think about Ballarat. Bacchus Marsh is another extraordinary one. I look at Bacchus Marsh, and in Bacchus Marsh there is that whole irrigation sector—it is the food bowl. I know my wonderful colleague the member for Melton is very proud to show me around that area and to talk about how it is the food bowl for Victoria. We traditionally think of it as the irrigation area, but it is not just that. It is not just stone fruit; there are also those new businesses. The member for Melton and I were really delighted to visit, in fact with the Minister for Agriculture, Parwan Valley Mushrooms a while ago, a really amazing business locally. I guess what I am really trying to highlight here is that my electorate is 3000 square kilometres and within it there is an enormous amount of production.

On top of that, I come from further out, where there is that kind of broadacre farming. In the 10 years I lived and worked on our family farm, we started off as a fine wool farm, but by the end of it we were cropping and we were producing fat lambs for sale. Sadly, they were only \$70 a head in those days and they are more like \$350 now, but hey, that is the way it goes. I have got a really strong passion for agriculture, and I know that that is shared by the Minister for Agriculture. It is evident in everything she does, and this bill is just another sign of that commitment.

We have been backing farmers and primary industries with our transformative 10-year agricultural strategy. I know the Minister for Higher Education, the wonderful Minister Tierney, asked me to chair a review into agricultural training last year, and that was fascinating because I got to go out of my own electorate and really speak to farmers and the agriculture industry across the whole of Victoria. It is such a vibrant community and so, so important to our economy. But that was again another commitment from this government. We have got the Minister for Higher Education. Her mind is turned to how we can better service our agriculture industries, and she is obviously working with our wonderful Minister for Agriculture. So I just think it is plain to see the commitment that this government has had and continues to have for regional Victoria but also in particular the agriculture industry.

As I say, there are a variety of amendments in this bill. The member for Melbourne in her contribution differentiated farmers and people who care about the environment, and I would like to take that to task. You did very clearly say that this government concentrates on noxious weeds in terms of farming and agriculture but not so much on looking into the environment. I guess what I would really like to point out here is that from my many, many years on the farm there are no people more committed to landcare and the environment than farmers. For want of a better word, that is our office; that is our workplace. We care very deeply about the environment that we work in. I think you only have to look at one of the greatest environmental programs that Victoria has ever seen, which is of course the Landcare program, and let us not forget that that was a program that was established by a Labor government working hand in hand with the Victorian Farmers Federation. So farmers and Labor governments have been committed to working for landcare for a long time.

In this bill one of the amendments is around noxious weeds and pest animals. I know it might not be enough for those on the other side or for the Greens, but I look at my dad. I went to see him only the other day, and he was very proudly sporting his shirt from the Victorian Gorse Taskforce. He is a gorse task force warrior, and I am really proud of him for that.

Mr Edbrooke interjected.

Ms SETTLE: Yes, they run around and they clear up noxious weeds. Gorse is a terrible problem out there in the regions, and we have got these extraordinary volunteers, of course backed by government funding through the catchment management authorities (CMAs), that go out there and deal with noxious weeds. This bill is going to strengthen those enforcement powers, which is a wonderful thing.

There is also the element around the Drugs, Poisons and Controlled Substances Act 1981, which is around veterinary practitioners being able to respond to emergencies. I have seen the devastation that happens on a farm when fire runs through it, and it is heartbreaking. It is heartbreaking for every farmer when you have to look at those animals and, I am sorry, a lot of the time you have to put them out of their misery because they are in a very bad way after a fire, so anything we can do to support making sure that vets can be there to support farmers and to support those livestock is worthwhile.

Very quickly in the seconds that I have got left, the Farm Debt Mediation Act 2011—really pleased to see this. I personally many, many years ago sat down with the rural finance counselling service and talked about succession, which is a big issue in agricultural families, and they were just extraordinary, so again, we will do anything we can do to support that.

I am running out of time. In these last few moments I would again like to acknowledge the wonderful Minister for Agriculture and this government generally for standing up for regional people, for understanding the importance of agriculture in our economy broadly but also the work they do in the environment and supporting them all the way. Through CMAs, through the gorse task force, this government has been a great support to regional people.

Mr McCURDY (Ovens Valley) (16:32): I am delighted to rise and make a contribution on the Agriculture Legislation Amendment Bill 2022. This bill does make changes to 11 different acts, as we have heard from other speakers. Although we have been told through the department that the changes are minor and minimal, we know with this government's history of neglect of the regions we have got to watch very carefully how this rolls out. On face value it looks like most of the amendments and the changes to the acts are fairly minor and there are some good ones included in that.

I will start with the Agricultural and Veterinary Chemicals (Control of Use) Act 1992—no, I will not, because I will go into that in detail a little bit further. I will start with the Catchment and Land Protection Act 1994 amendments, which cover many things but significantly the declarations around weeds and pests, and I do hope this is the beginning of focusing on the weeds and pests that we have in regional Victoria. Our humble kangaroo is nearly not seen as a pest anymore because we are overtaken by sambar deer and the like up in our region. I was up at the Bright Autumn Festival on the

weekend, and you talk to people out of Harrietville and Smoko and Freeburgh and Bright and the likes and it really is a massive impost. The deer population is growing out of hand. If you live in Harrietville, you do not want to manicure your garden because it just makes it a lolly shop for the sambar deer as they come in every night. I also saw the result of an accident over Easter with a car and a sambar deer, and it is fair to say that it did not work well for either of them: the car is a write-off and the sambar deer is dead. As I say, with this bill it is about making sure hopefully this is a step in the right direction of making some significant changes and not just tweaking the edges.

The bill goes into detail about noxious weeds—buying and selling noxious weeds—and the penalty is a whopping 480 penalty units. At \$161 a penalty unit, that is a \$77 000 fine. That is quite significant, and when I compare that to the Gippy Goat scenario it is significantly different. That was just a slap on the wrist. I am not critical of the fine in this instance because it is important that we do not have people trading and dealing in noxious weeds and seeds, but we just want to make sure that we are fair when we are putting fines on, and the points system and the dollars represent the significant impost that it has on the farming community as well.

While I am still on weeds and pests—you would have heard it from other speakers—blackberries on Crown land continue to get out of control. I talk to many farmers in my electorate in the Ovens Valley, whether they are through Milawa and Oxley or further up in the hills in Myrtleford and Bright. Sometimes they describe Crown land as the neighbour from hell, because the blackberries do get out of hand, and although they are required to look after the noxious weeds on their place, for the neighbour, being Crown land, it significantly gets away. Again, we have to make sure we are balanced when we put in these rules and regulations to make sure what is good for the goose is good for the gander.

The amendments to the Dairy Act 2000 pretty much just deal with the appointed officers and the employees of Dairy Food Safety Victoria. They are minimal changes and there is nothing significant in that.

I will go back to the agricultural and chemicals act, which makes changes to labelling. The bill will amend the definition of the advice note, so we are talking about the labels on the containers. That came through again yesterday in the bill briefing with the department, the uncertainty about the supply chain and who is responsible for that note, or the labelling, on the drums or the cans of spray, whether it is the retailer or the wholesaler or the purchaser in the end. I think there is still a bit of detail to find out about that, so we will look forward to that feedback when it comes.

Drugs, Poisons and Controlled Substances Act 1981—there are some changes in there, and they are focused around the schedule 4 and schedule 8 drugs for animal use. These changes will help to ensure that the drugs are available and certainly more available after a bushfire event or another catastrophic event, and as other speakers have said in the chamber tonight, that is a step forward to make sure that those drugs are available in those circumstances.

Now, touching on the Farm Debt Mediation Act 2011, that is another change in the bill—of the 11 changes, this is one of them. Having been a dairy farmer for nearly 30 years before stepping into this industry, I have certainly seen the highs and lows. Many dairy farmers do—whether it is milk prices, whether it is the Australian dollar or whatever it might be, the challenges that you have in the dairy industry or of the farming industry, so to speak, whether it is Mother Nature or the climate. It is a really difficult situation. I think it is really important. As the member for Murray Plains said, when he introduced the debt mediation bill in 2011 it was modelled on a New South Wales system, and that became a safety net for farmers. Before bankruptcy or before foreclosure it was compulsory to have those discussions with the banks. That was a really significant step forward because, as the member for Murray Plains said, when you are a farmer your home is on the farm, so if foreclosure sets in, bankruptcy, you are not just losing the farm and the business, you are losing the family home as well. I think it is significant that those discussions and that moderation are compulsory and go ahead because quite often people close down. Sometimes you see what might be the second, third or fourth generation of the farm, and through no fault of their own, through Mother Nature or other circumstances, they are

selling out or foreclosed on, and that is why it is important that this takes place. In terms of that, it is a significant step forward. It does open up communications between the bank and the farmer. And now this legislation will include the forestry and the aquaculture sectors, and that certainly is a big assistance in this, that mediation. So it is important that takes place and includes those other two industries within the farming sector.

I will also touch on the Meat Industry Act 1993, focusing on meat being sold in farmers markets. Up in my electorate we have farmers markets and markets in every small town going round. Whether it is Moyhu, whether it is Whitfield or whether it is Katamatite or Tungamah, all the small communities have farmers markets, and it is imperative that we protect them and we do not compromise anything that can compromise these markets going ahead—and also the future of the tourism in those smaller towns, because they do not always get the big holiday-makers and the caravans and everything coming through, but they are great little tourism spots for people who stay in Wangaratta and then go out to the smaller towns of Milawa and Oxley or Yarrawonga and come out to Tungamah and Katamatite et cetera. These changes will make sure that meat is processed through a PrimeSafe-accredited processor. As long as it is cryovacked, that meat can be sold at a farmers market through a stallholder. Again, I think that is a really significant step just to make sure that we have food safety as the number one priority. What we do not need is a major outbreak of food contamination or food poisoning, because that just affects those small markets and that affects the tourism for those communities and people's trust in those small farmers markets. This is a really significant step in making sure that that takes place.

In the few seconds I have left I just also want to address that the government members here today have been talking about how important agriculture is to Victoria. I understand that and I agree with that; it is important. But even today having a quick look through the budget I see money has also come out of the budget for Agriculture Victoria—I think about \$50 million. It surprises me that they understand or they talk about how important agriculture is to Victoria but at the same time they take money out, whether it is from the fruit fly program, whether it is from spraying the blackberries or whatever it might be. They understand how important agriculture is to our economy, but at the same time they are cutting money out of the budget. But without any further ado, most of the changes in this bill are significant and are useful, and I commend the bill to the house.

Mr EDBROOKE (Frankston) (16:41): Thank you, Acting Speaker. It is lovely to see you in the chair this budget day and lovely to see the Minister for Aboriginal Affairs at the table. The minister has had a substantial win in the budget today. I am very proud to stand here after reading in the budget that as well as being the first state to put forward a truth-telling commission and a plan for treaty we are actually backing it up with our budget. It is quite amazing. Although the minister would say we should not be patting ourselves on the back—we are the only commonwealth nation without a treaty, and of course that is a federal issue as well—we are making movements towards repatriation and doing the right thing by our First Nations people, which makes me very proud.

But I am also proud to get up this afternoon and speak on this bill, the Agriculture Legislation Amendment Bill 2022. We have heard from many people who have got farming backgrounds—the member for Buninyong and the member for Ovens Valley just then. They have been quite educational, and they make me want to go out and I guess hitch a caravan on and go to some of these places. Some of the places I do not think I have been to, let alone heard of. We have got so many regional people in this caucus and cabinet that will be right now shaking their fists at the TV going, 'You can come out anytime. We've got a beautiful place', and this is a bill that makes sure that we look after the people that live in the country and have those businesses.

The bill modifies or makes amendments to 11 acts: the Agricultural and Veterinary Chemicals (Control of Use) Act 1992, the Catchment and Land Protection Act 1994, the Dairy Act 2000, the Drugs, Poisons and Controlled Substances Act 1981, the Farm Debt Mediation Act 2011, the Livestock Disease Control Act 1994, the Meat Industry Act 1993, the Plant Biosecurity Act 2010, the Rural Assistance Schemes Act 2016, the Veterinary Practice Act 1997 and the Wildlife Act 1975 as well.

Two things have jumped out at me as someone who does not live on a farm but was brought up for some of my childhood on a small farm. I guess this debate has brought back many memories of relatives having to deal with weeds and blackberries and things like that, but of the two I guess stand-outs for me in this bill, one is the amendments to the Farm Debt Mediation Act 2011. This bill goes a long way to strengthening an already effective act and harmonises some provisions with farm debt mediation legislation in other states. The bill will strengthen farmers rights to farm debt mediation by expanding the definition of ‘farming operation’ to include forestry and aquaculture—that retains a farmer’s right to be offered mediation by a creditor if the farmer has previously initiated mediation when not in default—and requiring a creditor to hold an exemption certificate in all instances prior to taking enforcement action under a farm mortgage. The bill will also streamline the administration of the farm debt mediation scheme by transferring all administrative responsibilities to the Victorian Small Business Commission.

As well as those amendments to the Farm Debt Mediation Act we have got amendments to the Rural Assistance Schemes Act 2016. This bill improves flexibility for an externally appointed member of the rural assistance commissioner to operate part time rather than full time. Accountability and administrative efficiency are improved by requiring only the minister responsible for rural assistance to approve an instrument of delegation as it relates to their portfolio rather than the lead minister of a department. This is really an efficiency measure but does go some way also to improving the lives of our farmers and taking the stress out of the ebb and flow of farming, which we have heard plenty about.

We have heard about droughts, drought indexes, fires and everything that people, regardless of where you live in Victoria, know that our farmers go through. As far as some of those crises go, this bill actually provides amendments to ensure that there are more efficient processes and more humane processes in relation to some of the issues that farmers and people in regional areas deal with as well. Some of the amendments are to the Livestock Disease Control Act 1994. This bill strengthens the existing legislative framework available for the prevention, monitoring and control of animal disease in Victoria by improving compliance and enforcement tools, creating new offences to underpin livestock and bee traceability through the supply chain and extending and clarifying the powers of inspectors. When I was growing up I do not think we really knew the importance of bees, or we were not educated about them in any way. Certainly when I go to primary schools these days—not that they have got bees on their property at the school—there are kids that can probably teach me more about bees than I ever knew and tell me about the importance of those bees in our ecosystem and what our world would be like or how our world would be without bees fertilising and doing the work they do. So it is really important to ensure that certain diseases, which have been mentioned before in this house, do not affect our local populations of bees. Certainly we have heard about the market stalls and small towns, and one of the great things when you drive through Bright and some of the other places is if you go to a servo there will be a couple of jars of their local jam or a honey or something like that there, and it always tastes different wherever you are. It is always pollen collected by bees from different trees and whatnot, and there is something really nice about that, I think.

The other amendment in this omnibus bill is an amendment to the Drugs, Poisons and Controlled Substances Act 1981. This is a really important one. Everyone has seen on the news and on social media the fires in the past couple of years. Some of the images that were portrayed and that people had lived experience of were quite full on. One of those that would keep on coming up I think was of animals: how animals suffer through fires and how we treat those animals or how we deal with those animals if we have to end their lives. So this bill ensures that in the event of large-scale natural disasters, such as the 2019–20 bushfires or even biosecurity responses where there might be infections, the health and welfare outcomes for animals, both domestic and wild, are improved. We do this by mirroring the existing human health emergency order to allow broader controlled access to schedule 4 and 8 medicines for animal treatment. The tangible impacts are basically that these medicines can be used to, with the animal’s health and welfare in mind, ensure pain relief and anaesthetics for surgical and medical treatment of wounds, which, as everyone in this house will have seen, can be terribly bad. It is vision that nobody likes to see. When you are out amongst it, it is certainly something that does

affect you, and it is good to know that we are part of a government that can look at some of those factors and listen to the people on the land, knowing that we will do something to make that situation better, more efficient and more humane.

As well as those parts and those amendments, the bill removes an ambiguity in the Public Administration Act 2004. Dairy Food Safety Victoria employees are basically clarified as public sector employees and are subject to the values and principles set out in the Public Administration Act as they work for Dairy Food Safety Victoria.

We have heard a range of different stories and tales. I would go as far as to say that everyone who has got up this afternoon, as well as having that experience when they tell their stories about how hard it is to be on the land, has also talked about not the romanticism but why people actually live on the land.

I was really interested to hear the member for Buninyong talking about how she still knows the price of sheep; she has still got her eye on that these days. The member for Buninyong recalled her time on a farm, that decade on a farm. She recalled that with good humour. I think that was time well spent, but also it was hard. And it is hard on a farm. It is hard in agriculture, and most people know that. If you do not, you should go out to a farm. You should go and meet some people on the land, because they will tell you the ups and downs. Certainly this bill goes a long way to ensuring that we can improve the lives of people that use the land, and also it makes things a lot more efficient to ensure that we have biosecurity risks that are measured and managed and make sure that meat products and things like that are packaged properly and there is no fear of contamination or food poisoning. I certainly think that the minister has done a great job with this, and I commend the bill to the house.

Ms COUZENS (Geelong) (16:51): I am pleased to rise to contribute to the debate on the Agriculture Legislation Amendment Bill 2022, and I am proud to be one of 18 regional members. Of course some have already made contributions today, and I am sure there are a few more to come. The Geelong region has many local producers passionate about quality and what our region has to offer. We know very well that the agricultural industry is vital to our communities, and of course that sits very strongly in Geelong, in our Geelong region. The region is home to diverse agricultural production that includes grain, beef, lamb, wool, dairy, chicken and pork as well as aquaculture, viticulture, floriculture and other horticultural products. We are very lucky to have a major seaport, an international airport and extensive rail and road infrastructure in our Geelong region. The G21 agriculture pillar brings the industry together, providing support and innovation opportunities. They also have a strong focus on the circular economy to help make best use of resources. We have a thriving agricultural industry in Geelong, which we are very proud of, and the diversity of the agricultural industry and the breadth and depth of related sectors in our region are critical to serving the growing population and expanding our visitor economy. We all benefit from a strong and growing agricultural sector and the jobs that it supports. That is why the Andrews Labor government is backing agriculture with an ambitious vision for its future. I am also very pleased with the work we are doing with the Aboriginal community in agriculture and what tourism a treaty might bring, particularly across my region and Wadawurrung country.

We are investing in the strength of our farmers, our food and in turn our regional communities, and in fact we are investing well over four times more than the previous coalition government, which neglected and cut funding to agriculture and regional Victoria. So we continue to support agricultural businesses and provide whatever it is that they need and the resources they need. Victoria does punch well above its weight on a national level when it comes to agriculture. Despite the challenges of the pandemic and global shocks to the supply chain, Victoria remains the nation's largest agricultural exporter, accounting for a massive 27 per cent of national food and fibre exports. That is \$14 billion in exports, and much of that is coming from Geelong as well. For comparison, the next largest exporters are New South Wales at 19 per cent and Queensland at 17 per cent. Overall the total value of the agricultural production in Victoria is \$17.8 billion. We are the largest ag producer in the country, and the Geelong region plays a significant role in that. We have over 21 000 farm businesses across the state, supporting 75 000 jobs in the agricultural sector, predominantly located in rural and regional Victoria.

Victoria is a leading agricultural producer in milk, where we account for 64 per cent of national production; sheepmeat, where we account for 46 per cent of national production; vegetables, where we are the nation's largest producer, accounting for 25 per cent of national production; fruits and nuts, where we account for 35 per cent of national production, also more than any other state; and table and dried grapes, where we account for a massive 70 per cent of national production. Victoria is also the number one exporting state in dairy, sheepmeat, wool, horticultural products and poultry. That is why the Andrews Labor government is backing farmers and primary industries with its transformative 10-year agricultural strategy, which will strengthen, grow and protect the sector so it continues to be a cornerstone of our economy.

The Agriculture Legislation Amendment Bill 2022 provides an opportunity to make a number of reforms and amendments across the agricultural portfolio. The bill proposes amendments to 11 acts and seeks to improve the administration and enforcement of these acts, which relate to Victoria's biosecurity and food safety, veterinary practice, agricultural chemical use, the hemp industry, catchment and land protection, rural assistance and farm debt mediation schemes.

We are committed to working with industry, communities and trading partners to ensure that the agricultural sector is strong, innovative and sustainable. The Victorian agricultural strategy, our 10-year strategy for agriculture in Victoria, provides a road map for action and investment to help the sector respond flexibly to emerging challenges and capture new opportunities. It acknowledges the potential contribution of new and emerging industries, alongside more traditional commodities, to regional economies and communities. This includes supporting emerging industries such as hemp, an industry that has been developed since commercial production was first legalised in 1998.

In Victoria hemp can legally be grown to produce seed for food and seed fibre for industry purposes, including use in construction and textiles. Agriculture Victoria issues licences to authorise the cultivation and processing of industrial hemp and seed for non-therapeutic or non-medical purposes. There are currently 62 industrial hemp licence holders in Victoria, including six authorised for research purposes. This bill will support further development of this emerging industry with amendments to the Drugs, Poisons and Controlled Substances Act 1981. Currently inconsistent regulatory arrangements between states and territories are creating trade barriers and inconsistent compliance and business outcomes. Victoria's THC thresholds are lower than other jurisdictions. This impediment to industry and development will be removed by this bill, which amends the maximum allowable level of the psychoactive compound THC in low-THC cannabis to align with other states. A number of amendments will also be made to hemp licensing to ensure it is appropriately regulated.

In terms of animal health and welfare emergencies, a further amendment to the Drugs, Poisons and Controlled Substances Act 1981 will ensure that veterinary practitioners can rapidly respond to animal health and welfare needs in emergencies such as bushfires. Unfortunately Victorians know too well how devastating fires are for our communities and also for pets, livestock and wildlife. The Black Summer bushfires in 2019–20 highlighted issues that delayed or prevented the urgent provision of veterinary supplies and medicines for the treatment of livestock, companion animals and wildlife caught up in the disasters—and we know how tragic that was.

I just want to note that recently we funded the Cherished Pets program, which is a group of volunteer vets that come together and deal with pets in crisis. Whether pets have been caught up in a natural disaster or they are, I suppose, a victim of family violence or any of those sorts of things, this group of volunteer vets looks after those animals and makes sure they get the treatments they need. We recently funded that program, which I am really proud of, in the Geelong region, because what it means is that with this section of the act that we are talking about here there will be even more supports for those animals that may be impacted by some crisis.

This is a really important piece of legislation. As was said, there are 11 different acts that come under this. It is important work for a community like mine. I suppose there is a little bit of agricultural industry in my electorate, but after the next election Geelong will incorporate Bannockburn, which is a more

rural community. So this is really important for me, but it is important for the broader Geelong region because we do have such diversity in the agricultural industry right across our region, right across Wadawurrung country. There are exciting opportunities that are being worked on by the Aboriginal community—or the Wadawurrung community—to look at how they incorporate agriculture.

Ms McLEISH (Eildon) (17:01): I rise to make a contribution to the Agriculture Legislation Amendment Bill 2022 and note like many others that this bill that we have before us amends 11 different acts relating to agriculture. Certainly during the bill briefing, that was extremely well attended yesterday by many people from the Liberal and Nationals who have a strong interest in this, it was put to us that pretty well this is a bill aimed at modernising, updating and addressing gaps, and as a result it is an omnibus bill which does capture 11 different acts. This happens from time to time; the government will wait for the right opportunity to roll a whole lot of related issues together.

Agriculture in Victoria is extremely important, as we have heard. The latest figures that I could find were that it contributes \$17.8 billion to the Victorian economy. But that was in the 2019–20 financial year, and it is a bit disappointing that we have not been able to have it updated even to 2020–21. I thought the Agriculture Victoria website perhaps could be updated, but I do notice that they have had an enormous slashing of jobs in that sector, as well as budget cuts, so I can only imagine the pain that people working in that area are feeling at the moment.

There are many different elements to this bill, which is accompanied by the longest statement of compatibility that I have seen for a very long time—some 26 pages—and that in itself is quite unusual. I am going to start with the amendments to the Veterinary Practice Act 1997. As you would know, vets have certain legislative requirements. Their practitioners registration board has to look at what each veterinarian does and how they do it. At times there are complaints and there are hearings that are conducted—and investigations—and this bill makes a couple of changes in this area. I think it is quite interesting, because I know there is a shortage of vets, like there is a shortage of many other skills, across the state.

This bill makes a number of changes. One of the changes that I thought was quite interesting is that it improves the efficiency and flexibility of the board in their conduct of investigations. They have an option now to work with the practitioner that there has been a complaint about. Now, it could be that that practitioner was reckless, they made errors. It could be about conduct, misconduct, perhaps misuse of drugs, or there could have been the death of an animal. The death of a cat compared to the death of a racehorse—people feel equally passionate about those. There might be a number of issues that have been caught up with a particular practitioner. One of the things that this bill allows is flexibility. The veterinarian can continue to practise in different ways. They might have restrictions placed on them. Whereas before it was probably a little bit more one size fits all, now there are different things. They may be able to do one aspect of the job, not all aspects of the job, depending on the nature of the complaint. So I think that flexibility is quite good. It also allows that the registration board does not have to have a vet as its president or deputy president. Whilst that may happen a lot of the time, we know that people on the tools may not be the best at running and conducting board meetings, so it also offers that flexibility.

There are amendments to the Wildlife Act 1975 which fix up an administrative error. This in particular refers to duck hunting, and it will improve the safety in that activity. We know that hunters and protesters sometimes have a clash, and what is most important is that no-one comes to harm or is killed. This will make it a little bit clearer around the specified hunting areas during the specified times that duck hunting is being undertaken.

The farm debt mediation changes, to the Farm Debt Mediation Act 2011, I think, are something that will be well received by many. At the moment, first of all, we are moving to national harmonisation, but this puts forward the right of farmers to mediation before insolvency, before foreclosure and throughout the process. You can imagine that it is extremely stressful when things are tight in times of perhaps drought, which we would be very familiar with. People have to keep paying out for feed and

all sorts of things when they do not have revenue coming in because they have lost their herd for whatever reason. This is about helping them through that process and giving a little bit more strength to them before, really, the rotten stuff does happen. Also included here is forestry and aquaculture, which is quite pleasing.

I want to now focus a little bit more on the Catchment and Land Protection Act 1994 changes. This is about controls for noxious weeds and pest animals and strengthening the related inspection and enforcement powers of authorised officers to regulate their introduction or spread. At the bill briefing there was quite a lot of talk about the notices that are given, because this allows people to come onto properties—entry to a property without a warrant. The officers cannot enter a home, but they can enter a shed and they can certainly go onto properties. They may be able to take a sample, such as a sample of soil if there are, say, dead eagles or something like that, which have been poisoned in the past. There have been some pretty horrific instances of that. So it does allow them to come onto properties. But the issue of how landowners are notified about this is quite important, because very often a landowner does not live on the farm. I think of my own family. When I grew up we had three farms and there was a house on only one of those, so while identifying the landowner should be done, how you notify them that their farm has been entered is something that we want to see a lot of clarity on because it is not just about nailing a notice to the fence to say somebody has been here and visited. I think that landowners, regardless, need to have respect given to them so that if anything goes to further litigation all due process has been followed.

With regard to this section, I want to talk about the priority weeds and pest animals. These are huge issues in my electorate. Again, questions were raised at the bill briefing about controlling the spread of some seeds. For example, in and around the area where I live Paterson's curse rears its ugly head way too often. But if somebody cut hay and then they sold those bales of hay to an area such as down in the south-west coast where they may not have any Paterson's curse, quite easily and innocently the seed might be spread. It is really difficult to control those sorts of things. One of the things that the state government have in their remit is managing invasive species—those that are here. The federal government is supposed to try and stop some of these things getting here, but once they are here the state government needs to manage them, and they need to manage that on public land.

In my area you do not have to go too far to see the lack of management on public land. I see streams and rivers that have been fenced off that are choked with blackberries. I have seen roadsides up between Mansfield and Whitfield, over near Tolmie, where the blackberries are 3 and 4 metres high and thick and deep—acres and acres. This has been neglected. What farmers get really cheesed off at—I know that, I am one of those farmers—is when you do your absolute best to manage the invasive weeds, you do everything that you can, and a bird just eats the fruit off another one and then drops it on your property.

We are every year constantly on the lookout for these weeds. Blackberry does remain an issue, and you need to be vigilant every year. Gorse can rear its head when you are not looking, and Paterson's curse—all of a sudden you may see a number of paddocks in the distance that have got that purple tinge about them. It is very difficult to manage these weeds, and I know farmers do their very best to do so. But equally they get a bit cheesed off if the property next door to them is not managed properly and effectively. It is something that I think has not been looked at near enough, and I think maybe this will strengthen it to allow the department a little bit more strength to go in and to deal with those recalcitrant landowners but more importantly to deal with the public lands that just are not managed. We have seen broom up and down the highways, and certainly in and around my place there are blackberries everywhere. More needs to be done.

Mr HAMER (Box Hill) (17:11): It is a delight to rise this evening to talk about the Agriculture Legislation Amendment Bill 2022 on a very significant day in the Victorian Parliament, being budget day. I want to pay credit to the minister for bringing this very important bill to the Parliament, and I note the admirable aims of these amendments to better protect public safety, animal health and welfare, biosecurity and the economic contribution made by Victoria's food producers. The bill before the

house is a broad one and covers amendments to 11 different primary acts. The focus of most of my contribution will be on the Livestock Disease Control Act 1994.

The value of protecting our state's agriculture from pests and diseases cannot be overstated. Biosecurity is fundamental to growing the state's \$17.8 billion food and fibre sector, which is a sector that relies upon safe, traceable goods for export to both the domestic and international markets. A strengthened biosecurity framework helps create and protect jobs and helps manage the risks to the economy, the environment and most importantly to the communities where pests and diseases are entering, growing or spreading and pose a threat to the agricultural sector. The amendments to the Livestock Disease Control Act 1994 will strengthen the current legislative foundation for preventing, monitoring and controlling animal diseases in Victoria; improving compliance and enforcement; and improving measures for livestock through the supply chain.

The particular reason that I wanted to focus on this section of the amendment relates to the increased provision in relation to bees and bee traceability, including the registration of beekeepers. Obviously being in a suburban seat fairly close to the CBD we do not have a lot of agriculture, but we do have very strong apiculture. We have a number of local apiarists. The member for Frankston was talking about going on the country roads and finding particular bottles of honey or jam along the road, which is always a highlight whenever I go into regional Victoria, but in Box Hill we also have our own local honeys. You can get Box Hill honey, Blackburn honey, Balwyn honey, Burwood honey, Surrey Hills honey, all with their distinct flavours and locally collected from local hives. The whole pollination process afflicts me terribly given my allergy to pollen, but it is fantastic for the environment, and there is an enormous wealth of flowers in the Box Hill electorate for which bees are needed to pollinate and obviously create their wonderful, aromatic flavours of honey.

I do want to call out to a couple of particular individuals who are in this business and local people, and one is Ben Moore. Ben is a passionate apiarist. He is an urban farmer and environmentalist who runs Ben's Bees. He often attends schools to educate kids about the vital role that honey bees play in our lives and livelihoods, with bee pollination necessary for 33 per cent of our food production, with some crops such as almonds, blueberries and cotton—obviously not in Box Hill—heavily reliant on bee pollination. The economic value created by bee pollination services in Victoria is estimated to be over \$8 billion, with beehives transported far and wide across the state.

If anyone has an opportunity, they should check out Ben's Facebook page. He is quite the comedian as well as being a fine honey producer. At the start of the federal election campaign he put out a big sign, and it said: 'Ben Moore: he's not running for anything, he just deserves a sign'. I think that was just perfect in the context of this current election campaign. I think he may have hit the nail right on the head. But he does produce terrific high-quality honey and honey products. He also offers safe beehive removal services, trains keen budding apiarists and, as I said, works hard to educate about bees and urban farming. One of his disciples is a 16-year-old resident in the Box Hill electorate who also has his own hives. He has been beekeeping for about two or three years, and he now markets his own honey under the title 'Swarm Boy'. He is quite fortunate; his parents run a fantastic chocolate and lolly shop in Box Hill South, so he has got a ready-made shop. If you want sugar and treats, you can go there and you can buy the real deal that is raw honey.

I also want to give a shout-out to some other very keen apiarists in our local area—that is, Peter and Jane Dyer. They started a business, Backyard Honey. It recently has been sold into I guess a larger enterprise, but they began their business to help others learn how to keep healthy beehives and pollinate local gardens, and they make delicious raw unheated and untreated honey from their own hives and from hives collected around the local neighbourhood. It just I guess goes to demonstrate how important this industry is, even in local suburbia, making sure that those flowers continue to get pollinated and actually then being able to utilise the product from having healthy bees and healthy hives.

Strengthening biosecurity does help protect our beekeeping industry. It keeps our local beehives from many of the pests that other countries must contend with from overseas and protects the safety and the

purity of our honey products. Freedom from exotic pests and better management of endemic ones helps protect the unique products, profitability and sustainability of our Victorian beekeeping industry.

Just on the other legislation that is being amended as part of this bill, the amendment to the Catchment and Land Protection Act 1994 will provide a benefit for all farmers in both urban and rural contexts through improved controls of noxious weeds and pest animals to help control the incursion and spread of weeds and pests that further threaten our community and food safety. The previous speaker, the member for Eildon, did mention Paterson's curse, and that is a weed that is toxic to many farm animals—although it is attractive to bees due to the high pollen count. In strengthening measures to control noxious weeds, this bill does support our agricultural producers across the state and protects the safety of our food from noxious weeds, pests and diseases.

The bill also contains amendments to the Agricultural and Veterinary Chemicals (Control of Use) Act 1992. This will improve labelling so that the Australian Pesticides and Veterinary Medicines Authority approved label is the new applicable standard, instead of the label that is affixed to the chemical product itself. This change will help protect both the animals and the environment by ensuring a uniform standard which governs how to use pesticides or veterinary products safely and legally and will bring our laws into line with other jurisdictions, thereby improving efficiency and enforcement.

Finally, I just want to touch on the changes to the Drugs, Poisons and Controlled Substances Act 1981, which makes sure that the health and welfare outcomes for animals are improved in the aftermath of natural disasters. I think we all recall the images going back to the 2009 bushfires but also in more recent times, in the 2019–20 bushfires, and how much land was burnt and then how both the native animals but also the domestic animals, the farm animals, were affected. The bill will change the regulations with regard to access to schedule 4 and 8 medicines for animal treatment so that pain relief and anaesthetic can be provided quickly. For all those reasons it is a terrific bill, and I commend the bill to the house.

Mr MORRIS (Mornington) (17:21): It is a pleasure to have the opportunity to make some comments on this Agriculture Legislation Amendment Bill 2022, which is not only physically a fairly substantial bill, but it does introduce a range of changes. It is effectively an omnibus bill in the context of the agriculture area. True, I think most of the changes that are proposed are in fact related directly to agriculture; with some the link is perhaps a little more tenuous. Certainly with the proposed amendments to the low-THC definition, I think the link is non-existent, but ultimately they are, I guess, related in some way.

I think one of the issues, though, with a bill of this nature is that the changes are so many that, frankly, with the speaking limits we have we do not actually get to talk about all of them in any case—and I will not labour this point because I will obviously be burning time—and we do not get the opportunity to really address the whole bill, let alone particularly contentious clauses. I guess the comments from the member for Box Hill bear that out; he needed to focus on one particular area. There are many changes. Most of them are administrative—or many are administrative, I should say—but some are in fact reasonably significant. I will comment briefly on the less contentious or less complex matters covered by the bill and then, hopefully, spend a bit more time on the bigger changes and where I see more issues.

The changes proposed to the Meat Industry Act 1993 and the Dairy Act 2000 are relatively straightforward. They are about ensuring that the Public Administration Act 2004 applies to both PrimeSafe employees and Dairy Food Safety Victoria employees. There is an unambiguous exclusion in the current legislation. When we sought an explanation as to why that was in fact the case, apparently the reasoning was lost in the mists of time. No-one seems to know why the exclusion was put there—it is not obvious—so I certainly do not object to it being removed, but hopefully it will not come back to bite us.

The changes with regard to the Farm Debt Mediation Act 2011 extend the application of that act to forestry and agriculture and require that an exemption certificate is in place at all times before further measures are taken. From my perspective any measures that serve to keep people on the land to keep them producing food and fibre are worthwhile measures. This bill will certainly assist in that way but it also does in fact streamline the processes associated with it, hopefully for the beneficiaries as well as the people seeking to enforce their entitlements.

The changes to the Plant Biosecurity Act 2010 appear to expand the role of inspectors but also to clarify their powers, so while some of it may be controversial, I think again it is largely acceptable. With the Rural Assistance Schemes Act 2016, it is streamlining again. Essentially providing flexibility for a member appointed to the rural assistance commission to operate part-time makes sense.

With the Wildlife Act 1975, a couple are very small, but I think certainly one of them is an important change. The first one is changing the words ‘game birds’ to ‘game that is waterfowl’, a distinction that is apparently important, and the second one of course is substituting a full stop for a semicolon, so we are dealing with another matter of substance there. The first one, though, relates to the measures to protect non-shooters and shooters under section 58C of the act—that is, during the 2 hours before sunset through to 10.00 am the following morning, the exclusion of non-shooters through that period. I think it is important that that measure continues to work.

Changes to the Agricultural and Veterinary Chemicals (Control of Use) Act 1992—changes to the labelling requirements—are potentially controversial but, provided they are enforced the right way, are not a big issue.

With the Veterinary Practice Act 1997, there are a couple of concerns there from my perspective. There are some changes to the way the board can negotiate with those under investigation for professional misconduct. The changes proposed there, I think, are welcome. There is a more nuanced approach to penalties; again, that is welcome. There is a change to remove the entitlement of Melbourne University to nominate a member of the board and replace that with a person experienced in veterinary education or veterinary professional development, and I think that makes sense as well. But then there is the curious decision to remove the requirement that the chair and deputy chair of the board are in fact veterinary practitioners. That one I am not so enthusiastic about. The justification given during the briefing yesterday was that there are sets of skills required to chair a board. I agree, absolutely there are, but those skills are not mutually exclusive from being a veterinary practitioner, and I think if you remove that requirement and then move away from having practising vets on the board, it does change the way the organisation operates.

With the Catchment and Land Protection Act 1994, there are significant changes to the noxious weed provisions. I will not go through the details; there are many pages of them. I think the most significant thing is that the number of penalty units that will apply for breaches with regard to state prohibited weeds will move from 120 penalty units to 480 and for regionally prohibited weeds it will move from 120 to 240, but on the other side of the coin, regionally controlled and restricted weeds both drop down to 60 penalty units—so there are some winners and some losers. I think the key point though is the potential for damage to be done to the livelihood of a primary producer through the spread of noxious weeds is significant. These are serious issues and they do require serious penalties, so I think that is a reasonable change, and the sliding scale is an improvement.

With regard to the Livestock Disease Control Act 1994, there are changes to the Apicultural Industry Advisory Committee, the Cattle Compensation Advisory Committee, the Sheep and Goat Compensation Advisory Committee and the Swine Industry Projects Advisory Committee. Changes to the composition and changes to the way that the funds that these bodies administer are spent are largely to allow the cost of recruitment and so on to be defrayed and administrative costs to be defrayed. Surely that is something the government should be doing. Secondly, there are big changes in terms of the membership. Each of those committees currently is constituted differently with different numbers and so on. This bill will increase the numbers to nine members. In each case—

except the agricultural industry one—the members are often industry body nominees, and they have specific requirements related directly to that industry.

The bill that we have before us provides just basically a link in the first prerequisite and then provides a whole lot of others that require the board members to have no connection with the industry at all. Certainly the last prerequisite listed is basically whoever the minister thinks is appropriate, which gives, in my view, far more flexibility than is desirable. It would be far more appropriate, I think, to keep those industries engaged, because—not that I am suggesting this minister will—a minister could in the future appoint a whole committee which would have absolutely no connection to the industry whatsoever under this legislation.

I want to finish on the changes through part 5 to the Drugs, Poisons and Controlled Substances Act 1981. There are two distinct changes to schedule 4 and schedule 8, prescription drugs and controlled drugs, with regard to catastrophic natural events to assist the treatment of animals. That is a change that is very welcome. Changes around cannabis, particularly the provisions relating to the authority to cultivate and process low-THC cannabis, are I think a big improvement as well—and beefed up. Where I have a problem is the increase in the definition of ‘low THC’ from 0.35 to 1.0. We are tripling that number, and we have had no real commentary from the government, no explanation during the briefing. I am concerned about that particular measure.

Mr FOWLES (Burwood) (17:31): What a treat it is to make a contribution on the Agriculture Legislation Amendment Bill 2022, and especially following the member for Mornington, whose eye for detail sits somewhere in the range between outstanding and terrifying. We were alerted there to one of the amendments in this bill being to change a semicolon to a full stop, and I will express again to the member for Mornington that I wish his recent preselection had been but a semicolon in his political career and not a full stop, because we will miss him in this place. We surely, surely will.

On beautiful Bridgewater Bay down in Western Victoria there is the most magnificent white sand. There are the waves of the great Southern Ocean barrelling in, and behind those dunes lies some of the best winter grazing country in the nation. Extending all the way down indeed east of there through to Warrnambool there is some great dairy country, but my formative farming experiences were down near Portland, near Bridgewater Bay.

A member interjected.

Mr FOWLES: Yes, fantastic grazing country for magnificent Black Angus. My great-aunt, who is still farming at age 90—good Scottish stock—grows magnificent Black Angus down there. And with my late great-uncle, it was there that I learned to ride a motorbike, drive a truck and drive manual vehicles generally, learned about the dangers of bull pits in otherwise flat paddocks and learned a bit about all the ins and outs—that is not an insemination joke—of farming and in particular raising cattle down in that part of the world. It is just a magnificent thing. There is no doubt that giving kids the opportunity to spend some time in those farming environments is just such an important part of their development and upbringing, and I hope that as many kids as possible have that opportunity.

It is the same farm that my father had his formative farming experiences on, although he did more horseriding than motorbike riding back when he was helping out—and just loved it. He loved every minute of it, and when he decided to exit commercial life he decided to become a farmer, so my family for the last 20 years has been a farming family. We grow fat lambs—so sheepmeat—as well as wool in central Victoria near Euroa, in the seat of Euroa, and we grow wine near Avenel, which is also in the seat of Euroa. As a farming family we know how important Australia’s trade relationships are and we know how important it is to diversify those relationships.

Now, plenty of winemakers have had different experiences about which markets they have gone to and how they have diversified their business, but we know that the relationship Australia has with China has impacted substantially on a bunch of our agricultural export markets, including wine, including wool and including a bunch of our agricultural commodities.

It is so important to get that relationship right. I have been fascinated by some of the discourse in this election campaign because it seems to be focused entirely on the validly held security matters and there does not seem to be enough focus, to my view anyway, on the importance of getting the trading part of that relationship right. Before people jump up and down and start saying ‘It’s very important—security things are important. We shouldn’t be trading with jurisdictions that don’t have particularly good human rights records’ or the like, I will just remind everyone that all of our oil comes from Russia and Saudi Arabia, hardly beacons of good global citizenry. I think it is important to bear in mind that these trade relationships can sometimes sit to one side a little bit, separate from some of the diplomatic relationships. But I digress, Deputy Speaker, as I know you are almost certainly about to tell me.

I do want to in the context of this agricultural legislation omnibus bill talk a little bit about some of the really innovative agricultural exports that we are now growing. I was reading a great little article in the *Good Food Guide* the other day about some terrific organic garlic which has been grown in the Keilor Valley, just 20 kilometres away from where we stand. It has been utilised by the former chef from Bar Saracen, and he has been making this fantastic hummus and harissa using this brilliant garlic to that end. There have also been some fantastic innovations from people like Beechworth Bitters, who have been using a bunch of native botanicals and growing their own rare citrus and rhubarb and making fantastic bitters. These all become ultimately brilliant exports for us. And it is even more exotic things. I think many people in this chamber would now be familiar with yuzu, one of the Japanese citrus fruits. It has a sour relative called sudachi. There have been plenty of local growers of sudachi, and we are developing a market for that product as well. These are the opportunities that a well-supported agricultural industry in Victoria has. These are the opportunities that Victoria as the powerhouse agricultural jurisdiction of the nation has to exploit the diversification and the change in the Australian palate and indeed in the global palate.

It is interesting to note that we have 21 000 farm businesses right across the state, employing 75 000 people. I think people have a sense that there is a lot of farming that happens in Australia, but I do not think they necessarily have a sense about just how important Victoria is in the context of the national agricultural industry. I do not think if you were to ask a bunch of people out the front that people would necessarily know that we are the largest agricultural exporter, accounting for 27 per cent of food and fibre exports—\$14 billion grown here and sold overseas. That is the sort of outstanding activity. We have got high-value markets overseas. We have got efficient and innovative producers in Victoria exporting to those markets, and it is absolutely fantastic to see. Indeed we account for about two-thirds of the nation’s milk and nearly half of the nation’s sheepmeat. There is lots, lots, lots happening in Victorian agriculture, and it is absolutely fantastic to see agriculture being supported by this government, by our outstanding Minister for Agriculture and by her predecessor, also an outstanding ag minister, making sure that we do everything we can to support these industries, because as someone who comes from a farming family and, like everyone else in this chamber, someone who enjoys some of the great fine dining that Melbourne has to offer, so often that is derived from our brilliant local produce. That is something we all ought always to protect, preserve and continue to grow and support.

I did want to come to the issue of some of the animal health and welfare emergency amendments that are part of this omnibus bill. We all know that the Black Summer bushfires highlighted the issue with the delay of providing veterinary treatment and the ability for vets to transfer medications from one another. There is a whole bunch of legislation that for entirely valid public policy reasons restricts the ability of vets to move a bunch of those medications around, particularly in stressed and short-term circumstances, so we had a situation where it was illegal, for example, for vets to donate medicines, and this was in circumstances where the animal welfare issues were acute during some of those bushfires. This bill makes amendments that will allow animal health emergency orders to be made to allow that emergency to be declared, just like a public health emergency is declared, and that will give effect to a whole bunch of powers that will make it easier for vets to provide the important care and treatment they need to in circumstances where animals are, very sadly, injured as a result of bushfires. It is one of those little changes that could potentially make a big, big difference.

Finally I do want to talk briefly about the small-scale producers of packaged meats. Again, as someone who is fortunate enough to eat meat that is grown and processed on farm, it is a fantastic product, and there are certain benefits to that that you simply cannot replicate in the supermarket experience. The amendments that support these small innovative and niche businesses to sell direct to consumers either at the farm gate or at farmers markets are very, very good amendments, very important amendments, and I am very glad that they have been introduced into this bill, which is a terrific bill which I take great pleasure in commending to the house.

Dr READ (Brunswick) (17:41): Today I simply wish to make a brief comment on the Agriculture Legislation Amendment Bill 2022. I will refer members to the more substantive speech from the member for Melbourne about our position on the bill, which contains many useful and necessary and quite diverse changes to agricultural and wildlife legislation. I just comment briefly on the fact that deer remain a protected species in Victoria when there are a million of these at least roaming Victoria, some of them coming as far as Fitzroy but more often around the outer suburbs, and they are very prevalent in eastern Victoria. In fact I saw one just as I was driving into the entrance to Wilsons Promontory National Park recently. I understand there is a fence plan to keep them out, which is certainly a very good initiative, but we need to do way more than we are currently doing for the control of deer in Victoria. The government has been ineffectual in its efforts to control deer, and the measures have thus far been ineffective as their numbers are exploding across the state.

The Agriculture Legislation Amendment Bill also amends the Wildlife Act 1975 to clarify an exception for the offence against entering or remaining in a specified hunting area during certain times, and it ensures that duck shooters must have a licence which requires them to have passed the waterfowl identification test. But we know a waterfowl identification test is insufficient to save protected native species from duck hunters, because every duck-shooting season we find shot dead protected native birds. Bird numbers, birds of all sorts, have been in steady decline in Victoria over the decades, and this has been worsened by climate change, particularly when we have periods of drought and particularly when we have the big fires that we have really become used to this century. Habitat for ducks and other waterfowl is disappearing as farmland reclaims swamps and as rainfall steadily declines due to climate change. In fact there has been a steady decline in rainfall across Victoria ever since about 1950. No part of Victoria has been spared but eastern Victoria has been hit particularly hard. The average rainfall now is significantly lower than it was, and that is reflected in waterbird numbers.

Victorians value our wildlife and the forests and the marshes that sustain it even more now as we realise how little remains and how little of this habitat is unaltered by colonial settlement, by farming and by urban sprawl. And yet every year, including this year, the Victorian Labor government disappoints us by declaring another duck-shooting season to appease a small number of shooters who want to drive into the country and blaze away at native birds. Duck shooting really has had its day now in this era. We do not allow dog fighting and cockfighting and other so-called sports based on animal cruelty. So this bill really is an opportunity to do more than ensure that duck shooters have a licence. We should use this bill as an opportunity to abolish duck shooting.

Ms HALFPENNY (Thomastown) (17:45): I am also rising to speak on the Agriculture Legislation Amendment Bill 2022. It has been really good to hear from the Labor members that have been in the chamber speaking on this bill and to see the really strong connections many Labor MPs do have to the land, whether it is their agricultural background or ancestry on farms, and of course we also have Labor MPs that currently have farms or have recently worked on farms. For me, I am afraid that is not my history, although my father did live in the country, in Donald—talking about duck shooting. But my family were not on the land. They were actually probably often in tension with the farming community because they were railway workers, so it was a railway family in Donald, especially my grandfather, during the big industrial disputes on the railways many years ago. And also they were goldminers.

But in saying that, the agricultural industry in Victoria, in Australia, is very, very important and one that we need to support, as well as supporting those that are involved in the agricultural industry. Of

course some people may be surprised to know that the Thomastown electorate was actually dairy farming country many, many years ago. Where the new suburbs are being built now you can still see the remnants and some of the history of those dairy farms from the past, as we now see that land being subdivided. So when the dairy farms went, then there was sheep grazing and there were chickens. But of course now most of that has moved completely away as new estates really are being built up all over the outer northern suburbs.

This legislation, the Agriculture Legislation Amendment Bill 2022, makes changes and amendments to a number of acts—in fact 11 in total. The bill we are talking about today again shows how when community changes and as requirements change, pieces of legislation are fluid. They are sort of living, in a way, because they are here to order society. Of course as things change in society the legislation also needs to change with them to ensure that it continues to maintain its purpose as time goes on.

The Andrews Labor government is investing in the strengths of our farmers, our food and in turn our regional communities. In fact we have invested well over four times more than the previous coalition government, which neglected and cut funding to agriculture and regional Victoria. Despite the challenges of the pandemic and global shocks to the supply chain Victoria remains the nation's largest agriculture exporter, accounting for a massive 27 per cent of national food and fibre exports—that is \$14 billion in exports.

I am going to talk a little bit about the amendments to the Meat Industry Act 1993 and some other amendments, because it is very difficult to address all that is contained in this legislation. As the previous speaker, the member for Burwood, said, Victoria is home to many small-scale producers, and they are the highlight of many country towns and farmers markets, whether it is going to the farm gate or whether it is farmers markets taking their produce around to various areas and people buying direct from producers. The government is supporting these small-scale producers of packaged meats by simplifying regulations with an amendment to the Meat Industry Act 1993, because currently under the Meat Industry Act 1993 all meat-processing facilities in Victoria require a licence issued by PrimeSafe in order to operate. The PrimeSafe licence conditions require facilities to comply with relevant Australian and Victorian standards that apply to each licence category, and these include scheduled audits and food safety programs based on the principles of hazard analysis critical control point, which consist of components like cleaning, maintenance and training—all things, of course, that we need to protect the population.

The amendments proposed in this bill will reduce the regulatory burden for packaged meats, which are low risk for food safety. So we are talking about not the processing or manufacturing of that meat but meat that is already packaged, and rather than being required to meet the PrimeSafe standards just for that meat that is already enclosed and packaged—so it is sort of a double regulatory burden—these amendments will ensure that while it is of course important that food safety is maintained, this additional burden really is not required for that maintenance of food safety. This will also lessen the confusion for businesses about how the existing regulatory arrangements for the handling of packaged meat apply, including which activities need to be licensed by PrimeSafe or other regulators, such as local government, and again also ensure that local government can in fact oversee the packaged meat sellers at local markets and so on.

An amendment to the Meat Industry Act 1993 would more clearly describe the delineation between businesses that should be licensed by PrimeSafe and those that should be registered with their local council. These businesses of course would no longer need licensing from PrimeSafe. The same legislation would apply through PrimeSafe where animals need to be slaughtered and their meat processed, packaged and labelled, so there will be no watering down of legislative requirements around those areas—another area where this amendment will provide clarity for all businesses involved in this complex supply chain and make these small enterprises more viable by saving thousands of dollars, all through the government's continued support of Victoria's powerhouse agricultural industry.

While we are talking about the meat industry, I would also like to take a moment to recognise the many thousands of workers in the meat industry who work tirelessly in these high-risk and difficult environments to keep the wheels turning and keep the food on our tables, particularly during the pandemic with the additional risk that we know has occurred in terms of the virus, and also of course all the health and safety representatives in the meat industry, union delegates and the meat industry union itself, who advocate for safer and healthier systems of work. Just in terms of the meat industry I would like to give a special shout-out to Gwynnyth Evans. I recently attended the WorkSafe Awards, where a special commendation was made to Gwynnyth Evans. She received an outstanding leadership and contribution to health and safety award for her decades-long career dedicated to improving workplace health and safety, especially for workers in the meat industry, and I would like to congratulate her on her very, very well-deserved achievement, one that recognises the really selfless commitment and passion with which she pursued the rights of workers in the meat industry and in fact workers everywhere in Victoria.

I will also talk quickly about the amendment to the Agricultural and Veterinary Chemicals (Control of Use) Act 1992, and this is about again the bill modernising authorised officer powers and clarifying requirements for giving notices, making requests and recovery of debts. At the moment an authorised officer, in order to attend or enter a premises, needs to have the owner there. But when we are talking about the agricultural business there may be many paddocks and a long area without any sort of residence or building, and this allows an authorised officer to enter a premises—or enter a paddock, I guess—obviously in relation to the control of use of agricultural and veterinary chemicals, without having the owner or operator present. Of course there are a lot of restrictions and safeguards around that, so it cannot just be that an authorised officer walks into anywhere—they cannot go into a person's home or residence—and there have to be very strict, particular purposes and reasons for them doing so. So I commend this bill to the house.

Mr MAAS (Narre Warren South) (17:55): It is great to rise and to be able to speak to the Agriculture Legislation Amendment Bill 2022. As many of my colleagues have previously noted, this is an omnibus bill, and there are changes to some 11 different acts as part of this bill. It will make discrete amendments to those 11 acts, including the Agricultural and Veterinary Chemicals (Control of Use) Act 1992, the Catchment and Land Protection Act 1994, the Dairy Act 2000, the Drugs, Poisons and Controlled Substances Act 1981, the Farm Debt Mediation Act 2011, the Livestock Disease Control Act 1994, the Meat Industry Act 1993, the Plant Biosecurity Act 2010, the Rural Assistance Schemes Act 2016, the Veterinary Practice Act 1997 and the Wildlife Act 1975 too. But as we know, all Victorians of course do benefit from a strong and growing agricultural sector and the jobs that that supports, and that is why our government is backing agriculture with a very ambitious vision for the future. We are investing in the strengths of all of our farmers, the food that they produce and, in turn, our regional communities as well. As has been well noted in this house today, we have invested well over four times more than the previous coalition government.

We also note that Victoria punches well above its weight on a national level when it comes to agriculture in this state. Of course the pandemic provided many challenges to agriculture, in particular throughout the supply chain, and the delay that it has created is very well documented. But Victoria remains the nation's largest agriculture exporter, accounting for some 27 per cent of national food and fibre exports; that equates to something like \$14 billion in exports. For comparison, the next largest exporters are New South Wales at some 19 per cent and Queensland at 17 per cent.

Overall, the total value of agricultural production in Victoria is \$17.8 billion, and we are the largest ag producer in the country. There are some 21 000 farm businesses across the state that support 75 000 jobs in the sector, predominantly located in rural and regional Victoria. We produce agricultural products in various sectors, including our dairy sector, which is well known, where we account for some 64 per cent of national production; cheap meat, where we account for 46 per cent of national production; vegetables, where we are also the nation's largest producer, accounting for some 25 per cent of national production; fruit and nuts, where we account for 35 per cent of national

production, which is more than any other state; and table and dried grapes, where we account for a massive 70 per cent of national production. Victoria is also the number one exporting state in dairy, sheepmeat, wool, horticultural products and poultry. So when it comes to agricultural production throughout the nation, we really have this sense and this notion of being a very important state and a powerhouse of the nation. The government is continuing to back farmers and primary industries through that transformative 10-year agricultural strategy, which will strengthen, grow and protect the sector so it continues to be a cornerstone of the economy.

This bill provides an opportunity to make many reforms and amendments across the agriculture portfolio which will ultimately help Victoria keep that coveted spot and continue to be the powerhouse of the nation. As I mentioned, it proposes amendments to some 11 acts and seeks to improve the administration and enforcement of those acts, which relate to Victoria's biosecurity and food safety, its veterinary practice, agricultural chemical use, the hemp industry, catchment, land protection, rural assistance and farm debt mediation schemes.

We have mentioned the hemp industry. In terms of that the Victorian government is committed to working with industry, communities and trading partners to ensure that the sector is strong, innovative and sustainable. The Victorian agriculture strategy, our 10-year strategy in Victoria, provides a road map for action and investment to help the sector respond flexibly to emerging challenges and to capture new opportunities as well. It acknowledges the potential contribution of new and emerging industries alongside more traditional commodities to regional economies and to communities too. This includes supporting emerging industries such as hemp, an industry which has been developing since commercial production was first legalised in 1998. Hemp may be grown in Australia for food or industrial purposes. The plant's broad adaptability makes it suitable for cultivation in several growing regions of Australia. It is a high-yielding, hardy and fast-growing annual crop which can be sown from early spring through to late summer and early autumn. Commercial or trial hemp crops are grown in all states of Australia, but most commercial production currently occurs in Tasmania, the first state which has permitted hemp cultivation. In Victoria hemp can legally be grown to produce seed for food or fibre for industrial purposes, including use in construction and textiles. Agriculture Victoria issues licences to authorise the cultivation and processing of industrial hemp and seed for non-therapeutic and non-medicinal purposes. There are some 62 industrial hemp licence-holders in Victoria, including six authorised for research purposes.

This bill will support further development of this emerging industry with the amendments that are being made, in this instance, to the Drugs, Poisons and Controlled Substances Act 1981. Currently inconsistent regulatory arrangements between states and territories are creating trade barriers and inconsistent compliance and business outcomes. Victoria's tetrahydrocannabinol—or THC—thresholds are lower than in other jurisdictions. In future emergencies this provision will allow for specific requirements in the act to be suspended or altered temporarily to ensure an efficient response to animal welfare needs. We are lucky to have outstanding and caring veterinarians and wildlife carers in Victoria who do not hesitate to get out and respond when there is an emergency, so we are grateful for their contribution and this important amendment will help them to get on with their job and to do their amazing work.

In terms of supporting our vets the amendment bill also contains amendments to the Veterinary Practice Act 1997, and I would like to take a moment and this opportunity to again acknowledge the outstanding work of our vets. On Saturday, 30 April, we marked World Veterinary Day, a day to celebrate the outstanding work of our vets and to promote the profession. Indeed there is a shortage of vets in Victoria at the moment. I would like to acknowledge that it has been a very difficult year for them on the back end of the bushfires and then straight into that pandemic, which has seen a surge in pet ownership and a subsequent surge in the demand on our vets.

There has been an incredible workload that they have had to endure. But on the upside, the impediments to industry development will be removed to ensure that our vets have what they need and can carry out the very important work that they do for not only our pets but all animals. Those

impediments will be removed by this bill, which amends the maximum allowable level of the psychoactive compound THC in low-THC cannabis in line with other states. I might leave my contribution there, and I commend this bill to the house.

Ms THEOPHANOUS (Northcote) (18:05): It is with great pleasure that I rise to speak in support of the Agriculture Legislation Amendment Bill 2022. The bill makes amendments to 11 separate acts to deliver improvements across biodiversity and food safety, veterinary practice, agricultural chemical use, the hemp industry, catchment and land protection, rural assistance and farm debt mediation schemes. Agriculture is and will continue to be a cornerstone of our economy. Victoria is a powerhouse when it comes to agriculture, and we continue to punch well above our weight. Despite our small size, Victoria is the nation's largest agriculture exporter, accounting for a massive 27 per cent of national food and fibre exports.

While the bulk of our agricultural industries are located in rural and regional Victoria, as the member for Northcote it would be remiss of me not to point out the significance of Melbourne's food bowl to our food security in this state. Across the metropolitan area of greater Melbourne, across the city's urban fringe and out to the peri-urban ring, there are highly productive agricultural areas, including the Yarra Valley and the Mornington Peninsula, Koo Wee Rup and Werribee, and Bacchus Marsh and Baw Baw shire. Collectively Melbourne's food bowl produces a wide variety of fresh foods, particularly fresh fruit and vegetables but also eggs and chicken meat and some beef, lamb, pork and dairy. According to a report by the Foodprint Melbourne project, Melbourne's food bowl represents just 2 per cent of Victoria's agricultural land but produces around 47 per cent of the vegetables grown in Victoria and around 8 per cent of fruit. Highly perishable foods such as leafy greens and berries are typically grown in the inner food bowl close to the city. That includes 96 per cent of berry fruits, 94 per cent of asparagus, 92 per cent of cauliflowers, 88 per cent of mushrooms and 93 per cent of herbs.

In my own electorate of Northcote and across the inner north we have excellent examples of urban farming which are shortening supply chains and putting sustainability at the heart of their work. Both CERES, along the Merri Creek, and the Melbourne Food Hub, along the Darebin Creek, are leaders in their missions to demonstrate how urban agriculture and food waste recovery can work. Through gorgeous farmers markets every weekend, they are giving locals access to delicious, fresh, local produce. I highly recommend visiting these sites to get a sense of how much can be achieved on a small footprint and the innovative methods they are using to lower emissions, lower water usage and recycle their waste.

To help back our farmers and primary industries the Andrews Labor government has developed a transformative 10-year agriculture strategy which will ensure they are best placed to meet the challenges of the future and play to our strengths. Before I turn to some of the key amendments contained in the bill, I just want to say a few words on the strategy itself, in particular the way sustainability and climate action have been embedded in our plan to support Victorian farmers. We know that agriculture is Victoria's fourth-largest source of emissions, accounting for 15 per cent of total emissions. But changes to our climate also have a direct impact on the success and future of our primary industries. With decreasing rainfall, rising temperatures and increased frequency of extreme weather events, it is our farmers who often feel the brunt of this. Since 2001 our farmers have seen a 7.7 per cent on average drop in cropping productivity due to climate change. It is not in the interests of our agriculture and primary industries to ignore or delay climate action. The dithering and neglect we have seen from the Liberals and Nationals has been nothing short of reckless over the past decade. On the other side of the pendulum, it does not work to vilify our primary industries, as some of those in the Greens political party have been known to do. Instead we are getting on with the job of changing things for the better. We are investing in our primary industries, in developing the research, technologies and skills that will deliver our ambitious target of 50 per cent emissions reduction by 2030 and zero net emissions by 2050.

There are already a number of important actions underway, including \$92 million for land restoration and carbon farming initiatives, almost \$20 million to support the agriculture sector to respond to a

changing climate, \$10 million to be invested in a pilot program to deliver up to 250 on-farm action plans, an expanded agriculture energy investment plan to support farmers to improve on-farm energy generation and efficiency, and accelerating two trials of methane-inhibiting feed additives at Victoria's Ellinbank SmartFarm research centre. The 231-hectare, 500-cow farm is Australia's leading dairy innovation facility and is on track to become the world's first carbon-neutral dairy farm by 2026. There is no doubt that there is still work to do in this space. What is clear is that only Labor has the vision and the commitment to make it happen.

Turning to the details of the bill itself, I know one element my community will be particularly interested in is the improvements to controls and stronger enforcement powers to better regulate the risk of noxious weeds and pest animals. As a community bordered by a number of sensitive waterways, we are very sensitive to the detrimental impacts that noxious weeds and pests can have on habitat and biodiversity. The spread of weeds from one location to another is a significant issue. Once established in an area, the window of opportunity to eradicate weeds is small and much more expensive than prevention.

Locally we have got some incredible groups, like the Merri Creek Management Committee, the Darebin Creek Management Committee, Friends of Merri Creek and countless volunteers who give up their time to help protect and restore these environments. Litter is one of the biggest problems that we face, but it is not the only one. Weeds and pests like prickly pear are a real concern. These groups do an incredible job of organising activities like weedathons, educating locals and hosting native planting days, and I am actually pleased to be joining the Friends of Merri Park this weekend for a planting day to restore native herbs and grasses. The Victorian government has been an ongoing supporter of these local groups through funding programs and grants like our Landcare grants, but what was really exciting two weeks ago was seeing a federal Labor commitment of \$1 million to support restoration and protection activities along the Merri and Darebin creeks in my electorate. This bill creates new offences and imposes new requirements to address the risk of introduction or spread of noxious weeds and pest animals as well as improving consistency between the treatment of weeds and pests—a welcome change for my community.

Turning now to improvements to animal welfare, one of the things the bill does is ensure veterinary practices can rapidly respond to animal health and welfare needs during an emergency like a bushfire. During the Black Summer bushfires residents contacted me concerned about the welfare of wildlife and domestic animals impacted by this tragedy, and they welcomed the deployment of wildlife triage units, food drops and grants provided by the Victorian government to shelters and foster carers to help look after and rehabilitate wildlife. But these fires did highlight key issues that delayed or prevented the urgent provision of vet supplies and medicines for the treatment of livestock, companion animals and wildlife caught up in the disaster. The current legislation is not flexible enough, and the changes in this bill will make improvements to that.

The bill also acts to support our wonderful community of vets, who have faced a couple of challenging years—facing first bushfires and then the pressures of the pandemic. There are improvements to information-sharing provisions, additional investigation and enforcement options for complaints and allowances for more flexibility in registrations. This past Saturday was World Veterinary Day, and I want to take this opportunity to thank each and every vet across my community who cares for our much-loved household pets and wildlife.

These amendments build on other important reforms in animal welfare that this government has done, including establishing a pet exchange register. We have delivered Australia's first animal welfare action plan, we have established Animal Welfare Victoria and we are underway to developing a new animal welfare act, which will for the first time in our state's history recognise the sentience of animals. This is a hugely significant change, but personally I know that there is more work to do as we look to lead a culture change in the way that we think about and respect the place of animals in our society.

There are a number of other amendments in this bill which reduce red tape and costs for our primary industries, but as I am running out of time I will just say that I am very pleased with the changes that support our emerging low-THC hemp industry, which is an excellent food and fibre crop and an environmentally sustainable material for the building industry as well. Victorians benefit from a strong and growing agricultural sector, the jobs that it supports as well as the skills, expertise and innovation the industry brings to issues like climate change. That is why we are supporting our agriculture and primary industries, backing them in with a plan for the future, and that is why I commend this bill to the house.

Mr BRAYNE (Nepean) (18:15): Acting Speaker, it is good to see you in the chair this evening. I also join with my colleagues to rise and speak on the Agriculture Legislation Amendment Bill 2022. Obviously all Victorians benefit from our agricultural sector and the jobs it supports, and that is why it is so important that we do back our agricultural sector with an ambitious plan for its future. That is exactly what this government is doing. Whether it is our farmers, our food or our regional communities, this government is investing in our agricultural sector to secure this important industry for Victoria's future.

The Agriculture Legislation Amendment Bill 2022 provides an opportunity to make various reforms and amendments across the agricultural sector. The bill proposes amendments to 11 acts and seeks to improve the administration and enforcement of these acts, which relate to Victoria's biosecurity and food safety, veterinary practice, agricultural chemical use, the hemp industry, catchment and land protection, rural assistance and farm debt mediation schemes. These reforms all come from a commitment to strengthen and grow our agricultural sector so that Victoria's position as the agricultural powerhouse of Australia is secured for future generations.

As part of this commitment this government is working with industry, communities and trading partners to make our agricultural sector as innovative and sustainable as it can be. The Victorian agricultural strategy provides a road map to help our agricultural sector respond to emerging challenges and capture new opportunities. It acknowledges the potential contribution of new and emerging industries alongside more traditional commodities to regional economies and communities. Of course, as noted by multiple previous speakers on this bill, one of these emergent industries is the hemp industry, which has been developing since commercial production was first legalised in 1998. In Victoria, hemp can be legally grown to produce seed for food and seed or fibre for industrial purposes, including use in construction and textiles. As such, to support the further development of this emerging industry this bill will make amendments to the Drugs, Poisons and Controlled Substances Act 1981. The key change will be to remove inconsistent regulatory arrangements that are impeding industry development. In particular the maximum allowable level of the psychoactive compound THC in low-THC cannabis will be aligned with other states.

A further amendment to the Drugs, Poisons and Controlled Substances Act 1981 will ensure that veterinary practitioners can rapidly respond to animal health and welfare needs in emergencies such as—obviously—a bushfire. All Victorians remember the horrors of the Black Summer bushfires not only on our communities but on our pets and livestock and the tremendous loss of animal wildlife. These bushfires highlighted issues that delayed or prevented the urgent provision of veterinary supplies and medicines for the treatment of these animals. As such this bill will make amendments to allow for an animal health emergency to be declared, mirroring current provisions for public health emergency orders.

I would like to take this moment to acknowledge the outstanding work of our caring veterinarians and wildlife carers, who commit themselves to protecting our pets, livestock and wildlife, including my friend Brenda, who lives in Rye. I know that all Victorians are so grateful for their contribution. I personally am, and I know this bill will help them to continue the incredible work they do day after day. On this note, the bill also contains amendments to the Veterinary Practice Act 1997. In recognition of the staff shortages and capacity constraints faced by the veterinary industry, the government has recently added certificate IV in veterinary nursing to the free TAFE list in 2022.

Through this investment more Victorians will be encouraged to participate in education and training and broaden their employment opportunities within the veterinary sector.

Other amendments in this bill include improving information-sharing provisions, providing additional investigation and enforcement options for complaints and allowing more flexibility in registrations. While Victoria is home to many nation-leading agricultural businesses, many small-scale producers make their homes amongst our towns and farmers markets. This bill supports those small-scale producers of packaged meat by simplifying regulation with an amendment to the Meat Industry Act 1993. This amendment will reduce the regulatory burden for packaged meats and allow producers to operate under local government regulations and the Food Act 1984. By streamlining regulation of our agricultural sector we can help our agricultural businesses to thrive. That is exactly what this bill does.

Other reforms include streamlining the administration of the farm debt mediation scheme with changes to the Farm Debt Mediation Act 2011. In particular, arrangements with schemes in New South Wales and Queensland will be harmonised to be in line with national agreements. The Rural Assistance Schemes Act 2016 will also be amended to enable external members appointed under the act to be employed on a part-time basis and also to clarify ministerial delegation responsibilities. It really is an omnibus bill, because amendments are also being made to improve the functioning of the Livestock Disease Control Act 1994 and there are amendments to the Wildlife Act 1975, the Dairy Act 2000, the Plant Biosecurity Act 2010, the Agricultural and Veterinary Chemicals (Control of Use) Act 1992 and the Catchment and Land Protection Act 1994.

As I said, all of these amendments are being made with the aim of improving the administration and enforcement of these acts so that the sector itself can thrive. Whatever the industry, agricultural businesses and workers form an integral part of Victoria's economy. It is so important that we are protecting and enhancing the sector. That is why the Andrews government is backing farmers and primary industries with a 10-year agricultural strategy which will strengthen, grow and protect the sector so that it continues to be a cornerstone of our economy.

It is of course important to note my own electorate of Nepean with this bill, given that agriculture is a really important sector of the electorate. There are many workers in the agricultural sector on the southern Mornington Peninsula. People in my community understand the value of agriculture and tourism as well to our region. Agriculture on the Mornington Peninsula produces a diverse range of wine, food, fibre and fodder—all of which support local jobs for local workers. The southern peninsula is in particular home to a variety of agricultural businesses—obviously the beloved Hawkes Farm in Boneo that provides the community with incredible fruit and veg, or one of the many Red Hill and Main Ridge wineries that see visitors from across Victoria flock to our region.

The southern peninsula really is a hub of agricultural activity, and much of this activity occurs in our sacred green wedge that covers approximately 70 per cent of the Mornington Peninsula. Without the green wedge the Mornington Peninsula would be at risk of becoming unrecognisable—an overdeveloped suburbia with less green spaces, less livability and less character, and that is not to mention the risk that losing our green wedge would have on our local agricultural sector, which provides not only jobs and business opportunities but so much of the Mornington Peninsula's identity. There really is no room for movement when it comes to our green wedge—not with the green spaces it protects nor the jobs it provides. That is why it is so important on the southern peninsula for us to have a government that is committed to protecting our green spaces and strengthening our agricultural sector. That is what this government delivers.

Whether it is on the southern peninsula or across Victoria, this government has a track record of growing jobs in the agricultural sector. Obviously despite the challenges of the pandemic and global shocks to the supply chain, Victoria does remain the nation's largest agriculture exporter, accounting for 27 per cent of national food and fibre exports, which I am told accounts for \$14 billion in exports. The overall total value of agricultural production in Victoria is \$17.8 billion. This means we are the largest agricultural producer in the country. It is no surprise, as we have over 21 000 farm businesses

across the state, many of them on the Mornington Peninsula, supporting 75 000 jobs in the agricultural sector. Whether it is in milk or sheepmeat or vegetables, fruit and nuts or table and dried grapes, we account for a significant proportion of Australia's agricultural production. In short, Victoria is the agricultural powerhouse of the nation. That is what this government understands. That is what this bill will enhance and protect. The bill is another example of this government's commitment to our farmers, our food and our regional communities. I commend this bill to the house.

Ms KILKENNY (Carrum) (18:25): I am delighted to rise this evening to speak on the Agriculture Legislation Amendment Bill 2022. This is a bill, as we have heard, that proposes amendments to 11 acts right across the agriculture portfolio. At the outset I would like to really acknowledge the tireless work of our Minister for Agriculture, who is also the Minister for Regional Development. I know she works hard every single day to support our farmers and the agricultural sector to really innovate and to grow and to support the many thousands of jobs across the industry as well as the communities that rely on those jobs.

Since coming to government in 2014 we have seen investment in regional Victoria like never before. The investments that we have made have been four times that of those made under previous Liberal governments. We have seen communities transformed with infrastructure projects and development. We have seen investments in education, and of course I cannot miss the opportunity to talk about our investment in three-year-old kinder, because it was in regional Victoria that we rolled out funded three-year-old kinder first. It was regional Victoria that led us on that terrific rollout of this program and this investment in funded three-year-old kindergarten. We know it is absolutely transforming and changing lives, and as I said, I was so proud to be able to see that roll out in regional Victoria first.

Just on that, it was a great opportunity to visit those regions and to meet with the early childhood educators and teachers as well as local councils and communities.

Mr Riordan: On a point of order, Acting Speaker, the member's contribution is not particularly relevant—

A member: What is your point of order?

Mr Riordan: On relevance, Acting Speaker. Unless the government is planning to plant kinders, I am not sure about talking about early childhood development and kindergarten on an agricultural bill, because agriculture, as I know only too well, is a very important industry—

The ACTING SPEAKER (Mr Morris): Thank you, I have heard enough. I do not uphold the point of order, but I do ask the member to link what she is saying more closely to the bill.

Ms KILKENNY: Thank you, Acting Speaker. I was speaking about the communities that the agriculture sector supports and those communities that are represented, including our early childhood educators and teachers who work in those communities as well.

But when it comes to agriculture, we are absolutely backing our farmers, the local communities and the primary industries. We have introduced our transformative 10-year agriculture strategy, which we know is going to strengthen and grow the sector and also protect the sector going forward. It will support, I think quite importantly, our sector to innovate, to adapt and to show flexibility, which is something we know coming out of the pandemic has been absolutely critical.

We are investing like this, like never before, because the Andrews Labor government understands just how important the agriculture sector is to this state's economy. We have heard from many speakers about that contribution and about the way that the agriculture and food production sector is an absolute powerhouse and a cornerstone of Victoria's economy. It is important, as I said, for the communities that rely on those jobs, those businesses and that production. They are an integral part of the way we live, and I think for many people in Victoria, perhaps those who do not live in regional Victoria, the strength and the contribution of Victoria's agriculture sector may not be fully appreciated, but a powerhouse it certainly is. We recognise that, and that is why the Andrews Labor government will

continue to support our regional communities, will continue to make record investments in our regional communities and will continue to support Victoria's agriculture sector to grow and to prosper.

We are going to be doing this, as I said, through the 10-year strategy, which will help to modernise Victorian agriculture and will continue to protect and enhance the future viability of our agriculture sector to ensure that it is best placed to deal with future challenges, including of course climate change and the introduction of pests and noxious weeds but also things like pandemics. We are doing this because at the very heart of it all of Victoria benefits from a strong agriculture sector and a sector that is diversified and growing and is able to adapt and innovate. As I said, this is something the Minister for Agriculture works on every single day, supporting over 21 000 farm businesses across Victoria and supporting more than 75 000 jobs in the agriculture sector, and the bill before us is a really important part of this agenda.

As I have said, the bill before us is an opportunity to make a number of reforms and amendments across the agriculture sector, proposing amendments to 11 acts covering Victoria's biosecurity, food and safety, veterinary practice, agricultural chemical use, the hemp industry, catchment and land protection, rural assistance and farm debt mediation schemes. With, for example, amendments to the Agricultural and Veterinary Chemicals (Control of Use) Act 1992, the bill will modernise powers of authorised officers to better protect the health of users and the public, animal health and welfare, the environment and trade. We have heard about amendments to the Drugs, Poisons and Controlled Substances Act 1981, and these will help veterinary practitioners better respond to animal health and welfare needs in emergencies such as bushfires.

The bill also proposes some amendments to the Meat Industry Act 1993 to better support small-scale producers of packaged meats, and we know that there is a real growing market in the industry for niche products from small and innovative businesses, including those that sell direct to the public or through farmers markets. I have got a terrific farmers market in my electorate, the Bonbeach Farmers Market, which operates out of the Bonbeach Primary School, and this has been such a success story. Through the coronavirus pandemic it managed to continue to operate; in fact it grew and it attracted even more stallholders. I want to particularly acknowledge one of the operators of that market, Amy Dowling, who is a constituent of mine who has done a really extraordinary job to support that farmers market and the stallholders and those producers who are selling direct to the public from the Bonbeach Farmers Market. There are amendments in this bill that will impact that farmers market—my farmers market—and will impact other local farmers markets as well, and by doing that it obviously attracts more stallholders, including, as I said, those niche businesses who sell direct to consumers. On packaged meats, these amendments will simplify regulations and the regulatory burden on these producers by allowing them to operate under local government regulations and the Food Act 1984. I have to say, these are really sensible amendments. They will make life a lot simpler and make these small enterprises and businesses much more viable, and that is a great thing. So even in a small way that is contributing to Victoria's economy. It is contributing to a number of local communities just by ensuring that those producers have an easier way to sell their very niche product to the public.

There are a number of other amendments, as I have said. The bill will also further support the development of the emerging hemp industry, and these changes will bring Victoria's regulatory arrangements in line with other states to remove some of those inconsistencies that might be creating a barrier to some of our producers here.

In essence I want to thank the minister for bringing in these reforms, and of course I want to acknowledge and thank Victoria's agricultural sector. We are leading the nation in so many ways, and this bill will contribute to support them further.

Mr McGHIE (Melton) (18:35): I rise today to contribute to the Agriculture Legislation Amendment Bill 2022, and what a pleasure today to be in this house to contribute to this legislation. It is a great day to be the member for Melton. I have had to drag myself away from re-reading the budget and pinching myself to check that I was not dreaming.

Mr Riordan: No, you were dreaming.

Mr McGhie: No, no, no. That will be later. I am proud to be one of the 18 regional members of the Andrews Labor government, and it is a pleasure when we have our regional caucus meetings to talk about regional issues, which would include agriculture and farming of course, and being the member for Melton, this includes the gateways to our regions such as Moorabool. I am excited to see a number of reforms included in this legislation, and the regional communities in Victoria know that this Andrews Labor government and its members support and invest in the regions.

Bacchus Marsh is a major food producing area, producing fruit and vegetables for Victoria and across Australia. We have invested into the Parwan employment precinct, which will deliver up to 1500 jobs through agribusiness and companies moving into that area in the Moorabool shire, creating those agribusinesses. My colleague the member for Buninyong referred to the mushroom farm out at Parwan, and what a fantastic agricultural business that is. They provide mushrooms not only across Victoria but right across Australia. Of course in one of the other areas of agriculture in the Bacchus Marsh area we have a strawberries and cherries festival each year. Unfortunately over the last couple of years due to COVID that festival has not been able to be conducted, but we are very happy that that festival will be back on later this year.

All Victorians benefit from a strong and growing agricultural sector and the jobs that it supports, and that is why the Andrews Labor government is backing agriculture with an ambitious vision for its future. We are investing in the strengths of our farmers, our food and in turn our regional communities, and in fact we have invested well over four times more than the previous coalition government, which neglected and cut funding to agriculture and regional Victoria.

Victoria punches well above its weight on a national level when it comes to agriculture, and despite the challenges of the pandemic and the global shocks to the supply chain, Victoria remains the nation's largest agriculture exporter, accounting for a massive 27 per cent of national food and fibre exports, and that is \$14 billion in exports. By comparison, the next largest exporter is New South Wales at 19 per cent, which is \$9.6 billion, and then there is Queensland at 17 per cent at \$8.6 billion. Overall, the total value of agricultural production in Victoria is \$17.8 billion, and we are the largest ag producer in the country. We have over 21 000 farm businesses across the state, supporting 75 000 jobs in the agriculture sector, predominately located, obviously, in rural and regional Victoria. We know how difficult it has been trying to fill some of those jobs in recent times due to the pandemic.

As the leading agricultural producer, Victoria is producing things such as milk, where we account for 64 per cent of the national production; sheepmeat, 46 per cent of the national production; vegetables, 25 per cent of the national production; fruit and nuts, 35 per cent; and table and dried grapes, where we account for a massive 70 per cent. And then of course there is the production of wine, which is a thing that comes to my favourite pleasures outside of Parliament, let me tell you. So we are the number one exporter state in dairy, sheepmeat, wool, horticultural products and poultry, and in short Victoria is the agricultural powerhouse of this nation. That is why the Andrews Labor government is backing farmers and primary industries with its transformative 10-year agricultural strategy, which will strengthen, grow and protect the sector so it continues to be a cornerstone of our economy.

This legislation provides an opportunity to make a number of reforms and amendments across the agricultural portfolio. It proposes amendments to 11 acts and seeks to improve the administration and enforcement of these acts which relate to Victoria's biosecurity and food safety, veterinary practice, agricultural chemical use, the hemp industry, catchment and land protection, and rural assistance and farm debt mediation schemes.

One of the things that I am pleased to see in this legislation is measures to support the hemp industry. There is potential for a new industry in Victoria to have huge possibilities, and it is something that could have a positive impact on our rural and regional communities. As the world changes and we need to transition from previous ways of operating, industries like hemp can help create new jobs and

opportunities in agriculture and manufacturing. Of course the potential is massive. I would like to see if there is the ability to develop a hemp pulp industry and explore possibilities of developing niche paper industries for hemp. This could potentially capitalise on skills and expertise already available in Victoria. But exploring any new idea is difficult if there is not the right support in place. That is why I am proud that this legislation includes support for the hemp industry in Victoria.

The Victorian government is committed to working with industry, communities and trading partners to ensure that the agriculture sector is strong, innovative and sustainable. The Victorian agricultural strategy, our 10-year strategy for agriculture in Victoria, provides a road map for action and investment to help the sector respond flexibly to emerging challenges, and it captures new opportunities. It certainly acknowledges the potential contribution of new and emerging industries alongside more traditional commodities to regional economies.

It includes supporting those emerging industries, such as, as I said before, hemp, an industry that has been developing since commercial production. I think it dates back to 1998. It can be grown in Australia for food or industrial purposes. The plant's broad adaptability makes it suitable for cultivation in several growing regions of Australia. It is a high-yielding, hardy and fast-growing annual crop which can be sown from early spring to late summer or early autumn. Commercial or trial hemp crops are being grown in all states of Australia, but most commercial production currently occurs in Tasmania, the first state to permit hemp cultivation. In Victoria hemp can legally be grown to produce seed for food or seed or fibre for industrial purposes, including its use in construction and textiles. There are currently 62 industrial hemp licence holders in Victoria, including six authorised for research purposes. This bill will support further development of this emerging industry with amendments to the Drugs, Poisons and Controlled Substances Act 1981.

I suppose it is also known that I am a bit of an animal lover. I have many animals at my place, and I am passionate about the health and welfare of animals.

Ms Connolly interjected.

Mr McGhie: Yes, I know. My wife and I rescue horses. We have one rescue horse at home at the moment with another horse that is a pet of mine that I bred. I get more love from my horses than I do on Facebook sometimes, but that is okay, I can live with that. One of my horses is a bit of a feisty beast, but she is a gentle giant around my wife. At times she tries to take it out on me, I think.

It is important to know that the government that I am a member of has systems in place to respond to animal health and welfare, especially in emergencies. I want to thank our vets, our animal welfare workers and our volunteers who look after and support our animals in need. I specifically want to thank my vet, Wei, who comes out from the Ballarat Veterinary Practice equine clinic. He was out at our property today tending to one of my horses because she had facial palsy, which is a bit unusual for a horse. She is recovering, and he had to come out today to check one of her eyes because she has been unable to blink and they were a bit worried about her eye being affected. He was out there today tending to that horse, and I await his bill obviously in the mail. But they are fantastic, the vets that attend to our animals; the work that they do is just absolutely amazing.

This bill will make amendments to allow for an animal health emergency to be declared, mirroring current provisions for public health emergency orders. So in future emergencies this provision will allow for specific requirements in the act to be suspended or altered temporarily to ensure an efficient response to animal welfare needs and to reduce animals' suffering. That is the most important thing—making sure that our animals are being well looked after. I commend this bill to the house, and I want to thank the minister for all the work that she has done. I support this bill.

Ms Connolly (Tarneit) (18:45): I too rise to speak on the Agriculture Legislation Amendment Bill 2022, and it is lovely to follow my colleague and great friend and fellow westie the member for Melton talking about his love of animals, and most certainly he has a huge heart there in Melton. It is lovely to hear him speak so passionately about looking after his animals, including his horses.

My colleagues on this side of the house have talked at great length about the important changes that this bill makes, and it does make some really important changes to a wide variety of laws governing Victoria's animal industry in terms of both animal products and animal care. It was actually really surprising for me to learn that Victoria is the agricultural powerhouse in Australia. As someone who grew up in New South Wales and has spent time up in Queensland, I can wholeheartedly understand what big states both New South Wales and Queensland are, and Queensland, being a resources state, I thought would be leading in this space. But let me say it again: Victoria is the agricultural powerhouse of this nation, with \$14 billion worth of agricultural exports and 27 per cent of national exports. That is a really big deal. That is something we should all feel very, very proud of. Top that off with another \$3.8 billion in local consumption and we are the largest producer overall.

The sector alone employs 75 000 Victorians right across our regions over 21 000 farm businesses—that is a lot of farms. But I have to say I have been pleasantly surprised at the amount of interaction I have had with this sector over the past couple of months in somewhere where you would not really think there is a lot of agriculture going on. Tarneit and Melbourne's western suburbs are not really what come front of mind and first to mind when one thinks of agriculture. Nevertheless it was an absolute pleasure to have the Minister for Agriculture with me as recently as last week out at Purearth Foods in Truganina. This business specialises in dairy products and was fortunate enough to receive a \$485 000 grant from our government's \$15 million Food to Market program. This grant from our government will help this great local up-and-coming business purchase and install new processing equipment to increase efficiency and reduce allergen risk between dairy and the many, many plant-based products it is producing there at the site in Truganina. What they do down there is really impressive, and it is important too, because Victoria accounts for 64 per cent of our national milk production. I love talking about milk, as the daughter of a milkman who has only just retired at age 70. My whole life has been around the milk industry, and I even remember back in the day holding I think it must have been half a dozen milk bottles. If we were too naughty, we would be punished in having to go out with my dad on the milk run to deliver the milk, and I remember carrying the milk there in the glass bottles like that.

One of the smaller things that this bill actually does is amend the Dairy Act 2000 to clarify that employees of Dairy Food Safety Victoria, the public body that regulates the quality of dairy products, like those produced at Purearth Foods in my electorate, are held to the same standards as any other public sector employee under the Public Administration Act 2004.

Another area where this bill makes changes is when it comes to our vets. Victorians love their pets. Particularly after the last two years of being confined to the four walls of our homes, pets have made being at home maybe for many families just that little bit easier, and most certainly people like me really value our hardworking vets, who take care of our pets when they need assistance. I have spoken in this chamber before about my love of pets and the dogs that we have had in the Connolly household I think over the past 17 years, and they are Ulysses, Penelope and Isolde. Well, this coming weekend—on Mother's Day, in fact—there will be a brand new family member to the Connolly household. I am very, very pleased and proud to announce that we are getting a new arrival, a new baby beagle named Ringo Starr. You can tell from that name what else we do and listen to in my household. Again quite recently I was very fortunate to join the Minister for Agriculture out at Westside Community Desexing clinic in Sunshine, along with my great friend and fellow westie the member for St Albans, where our government had just invested \$150 000 to go ahead and help manage and tackle the cat population problem that is arising in Melbourne's western suburbs. I think it was quoted at this visit that there are around 300 000 cats that are officially registered, but that is just a drop in the ocean compared to how many cats are actually in homes and on our streets. In order to help manage that cat population and prevent it from ever increasing and rising and getting out of control, desexing is such an important part. I remember at that visit with the minister and the member for St Albans I took my daughter along with me, and she was very keen to investigate what a desexing clinic does and is. Funnily enough we had to have a conversation on the way there about what the desexing of an animal actually is and what it stops it from doing. Really there is never a dull moment in the life of an 11-year-old girl.

We have a number of vets across Melbourne's west that do perform those important procedures like desexing animals, and what this bill does is it helps provide more flexibility and empowers the Veterinary Practitioners Registration Board of Victoria in regard to their actual abilities. The board, yes, is responsible for registering vets. It can investigate and conduct hearings for alleged misconduct. The bill is also going to allow for certain offences under the Veterinary Practice Act 1997 to be enforced by issuing a fine, so where minor mistakes are made—and I say minor—mistakes that are recognised and not likely to be repeated, a fine is probably the best measure of enforcement, as opposed to more serious disciplining. To that end the bill also allows the board to engage in an agreement with a practitioner accused of professional misconduct which may impose conditions or restrictions on their actual practice. So this way vets who do the wrong thing and it is minor are not suddenly without a job and we do not have less vets in the community, and they can continue to operate safely. This may include being required to report to the board every so often or not being able to perform specific operations while still being allowed to perform others.

In addition to this the bill is going to make changes to the way in which the board is composed. Under the current arrangements the president and the deputy president must be registered vets and there will be a position reserved solely for an employee from the University of Melbourne, which I thought was pretty interesting, because I understand that that university has a very long tradition of excelling in veterinary sciences. In fact they have a vet school based right in the heart of my community in Wyndham, right on the Princes Freeway in Werribee. I am sure in coming years or coming decades I will be taking a keen interest in the University of Melbourne and vet sciences, because my son not only wants to be a soccer player and a footy player but does not like a lot of blood, he told me quite recently, so he wants to be a vet. So I will be checking out the University of Melbourne, it looks like. But of course there are a wide range of possible candidates for these types of positions, with a wealth of skills and a wealth of experience, that could do a wonderful job on the board, and they also deserve to seek an opportunity on a level playing field.

Another change I am really pleased to see is that the bill will allow for vets to respond quickly and appropriately to animal health and welfare needs in emergency instances like bushfires. We all know how much pets and animals suffered during the bushfires of 2019–20. We know how devastating it can be not just for pets but for livestock and for wildlife as well. I could go on and on about the great things that this bill does. Some of them seem quite minor, but they actually make important changes that go towards the welfare of our pets and the people that look after them, also giving confidence to people like me that when Ringo Starr gets sick or needs desexing it is done by a vet who is qualified to do so and he is not just going off to someone who does not really know what they are doing.

I have to say that the minister attending in the western suburbs two very different but equally important sites in Sunshine and Truganina was a fantastic experience for me, hearing some of the wonderful things she is doing in the sector. I commend the bill to the house.

Ms RICHARDS (Cranbourne) (18:55): I am really very pleased to make a short contribution on the Agriculture Legislation Amendment Bill 2022 and so very pleased to be in a caucus with so many regional members, although, as you have just heard in the contributions from the last two members—and I think I will also be supporting this view—there are many of us who are living in interface areas, and whilst I think of Cranbourne as very much a place where people live, there are still quite a few farms, particularly flower growers and other really important industries, that are not just in Cranbourne but also around the edge, especially going into Bass. So I was very pleased earlier today to listen to the contribution from my neighbour the member for Bass.

This is a reformist bill. It is an omnibus bill, and it is a great example of making sure that we are getting ahead and making the changes that need to be made. This bill will make amendments to the Agricultural and Veterinary Chemicals (Control of Use) Act 1992, the Catchment and Land Protection Act 1994, the Dairy Act 2000, the Drugs, Poisons and Controlled Substances Act 1981, the Farm Debt Mediation Act 2011, the Livestock Disease Control Act 1994, the Meat Industry Act 1993, the Plant

Biosecurity Act 2010, the Rural Assistance Schemes Act 2016, the Veterinary Practice Act 1997 and the Wildlife Act 1975.

I do want to in the very short time I have just touch on, as others have, the role of industrial hemp and make sure I do record that the Victorian government did establish the industrial hemp task force in 2019 to explore the challenges and opportunities facing the industrial hemp industry. It does engage directly with industry stakeholders. In Victoria hemp can be grown legally to produce seeds for food and seed or fibre for industrial purposes, including use in construction and textiles. A licence is required in Victoria to authorise the cultivation and processing of industrial hemp and seed for non-therapeutic, non-medicinal purposes. And it is really important for us to recognise the role that industrial hemp has. This idea that there is any psychoactive effect that comes from industrial hemp needs to be debunked; like so many other things in this place, we need to debunk myths. To apply for a licence, applicants are required to provide national police history checks for themselves and their associates, credit reports, business research plans and information about the proposed growing site, and the Agriculture Legislation Amendment Bill does propose to amend the allowable threshold of THC in low-THC cannabis hemp.

It is a really important industry, and if we do not harmonise and make sure that we are providing some congruence with other states, we will lose the competitive advantage that Victoria has in industrial hemp. If we do not harmonise, then Victoria will be behind Tasmania and South Australia, potentially, as the places with a climate that can grow industrial hemp. I keep on using the term and maybe emphasising 'industrial hemp' because it is indeed hemp that has no psychoactive effects on people. This has been very well researched. It has been used extensively for a long time in other states. We are absolutely making sure that we keep ahead of any potential to lose this really important industry in this state. Several people have identified that Victoria is the powerhouse, and I think that that phrase has been rightly used frequently.

But also I will acknowledge, in the last seconds I have, the extraordinary work of our vets and particularly thank the vets of Cranbourne, who have been providing care especially during difficult times for our animals and particularly beloved setters.

Business interrupted under sessional orders.

Adjournment

The SPEAKER: The question is:

That the house now adjourns.

FIVE WAYS INTERSECTION, WARRANDYTE

Mr R SMITH (Warrandyte) (19:00): (6336) My adjournment debate tonight is for the Minister for Roads and Road Safety, and my request to him is to fund the Five Ways intersection in Warrandyte South. I have raised this issue many times in this place. It is a serious concern in my area. Many residents who use that particular intersection have raised with me their concerns about coming out onto that intersection, particularly during peak times. In fact I have presented a petition of around 1000 signatures to this place of people who want to see some work done in that area. I have presented this issue to now three successive roads ministers, all of which have said that the issue and the intersection is not a concern to them. The current minister told me from his office in Niddrie that the intersection in Warrandyte South is completely safe. He clearly thinks he knows better than the residents in Warrandyte.

This is a state road and as such it is the responsibility of the state government to do something about it. Having said that, I am very pleased to say that the federal candidate for Menzies, Keith Wolahan, has actually listened to residents, unlike the state government, and committed up to \$10 million towards fixing that intersection. It is unfortunate and an indictment on this government that a state road that is a state responsibility has to have works done to make it safe for residents by the federal

government should they be returned later in May. Certainly it is very good that the candidate for Menzies, Keith Wolahan, has actually been at listening posts, been talking to local residents and understands their concerns about this particular intersection, an intersection I might add that had a significant accident there last year in September or October, and while the young lady who was involved in that accident left the scene alive, I am led to understand that she later passed away from her injuries. It is appalling that given that circumstance and the concerns of so many residents—as I said about 1000 people have sent me to this place with a petition asking for changes—this government has ignored those concerns, ignored the ramifications of that accident and left it to the federal candidate to make the funding commitment that is desperately needed in this area.

Once again, I ask the minister for roads to reassess this particular intersection, to acknowledge the safety concerns that residents have and to commit the extra funding—the top-up funding—in addition to the money committed by the federal government. Thank you to Keith Wolahan as the federal candidate for Menzies for making that commitment. Thank you to the Morrison government for making that commitment. It is a shame they have to step in where the state government will not.

GLENROY LEVEL CROSSING REMOVAL

Mr McGuire (Broadmeadows) (19:02): (6337) My request is to the Minister for Transport Infrastructure. The action I seek is for the minister to join me for the opening of the new Glenroy railway station as the centrepiece of the \$285.6 million Level Crossing Removal Project. I launched this campaign from opposition in 2014 with the late Fiona Richardson. I want to acknowledge her vision, plan, strategy and commitment to this. I remember we had a whole host of community leaders and local people holding the placards ‘Labor will remove this level crossing’. This election commitment was under Project 10 000, which concentrated on trains, roads and jobs, and is being delivered. I want to congratulate the minister for that achievement and for getting the job done and also highlight that the removal of this level crossing improves safety, cuts traffic congestion and has delivered an estimated 500 jobs in communities where they are needed most. This is how Labor in power delivers what is critical. We had the vision from opposition and then delivered when in office.

I want to congratulate the minister for this landmark project. I have regularly inspected the construction works running through the electorate of Broadmeadows. I also note that today’s budget provides funding to upgrade the forlorn Jacana station. This adds to the critical rail network for Melbourne’s north, servicing passengers with increasing population growth and the freight network for economic development under the \$125 million commonwealth and Andrews governments investments designed to fast-track exports and imports from Labor’s designated capital of Melbourne’s north, the state district of Broadmeadows. This features the freight hub at Somerton running directly to the port of Melbourne. It cuts business costs, boosts economic growth and protects the environment by reducing trips by trucks on suburban roads by up to 20 000 trips annually.

Labor in power delivered an upgrade to the Broadmeadows railway station where I hosted the opening with the minister in 2021. This followed the reverse Robin Hood strategy from the one-term coalition government when the then planning minister, the member for Bulleen, cancelled the \$80 million catalyst investment to unlock the value of Broadmeadows station and town centre. He redistributed the funding down the line to Frankston in an attempt to sandbank a marginal seat, which the coalition lost. This was another failure in a litany of the triumph of politics over rational decision-making.

As the chair of the Broadmeadows Revitalisation Board, I also call on Hume City Council to honour its \$40 million commitment to investments in the Broadmeadows town centre. This will help leverage the private sector investment for economic and social development and new technology-driven jobs where they are needed most and will have a huge added value for economic and social development.

COUNTRY FIRE AUTHORITY BRIGADE ULTRALIGHT VEHICLES

Mr D O’Brien (Gippsland South) (19:05): (6338) My adjournment matter this evening is for the Minister for Emergency Services, and the action I seek is for the minister to deliver a solution to a

debacle that has been occurring with a number of CFA brigades around the state in relation to ultralight vehicles. The issue in essence is that new vehicles were provided—in my case, there are a number in my electorate. But a particular complaint has come from the Loch Sport brigade, which actually raised money and put significant funds towards the purchase of this ultralight vehicle.

The issue is broadly that there have been load restrictions imposed on these ultralight vehicles. Effectively they are Toyota LandCruiser utes with gear on the back, including a tank and various other bits and pieces. But there is a problem with the weight-bearing issues in relation to the rear axle on the configuration of these ultralight tankers. Believe it or not, because of this issue, which has been identified since the vehicles were produced, these brigades have been told there are a couple of solutions. These solutions include removing the tow bars, removing lockers on the back and, believe it or not, reducing the water available in the tanks from 550 litres to 400. On what planet it would be thought that a firefighting vehicle would need to reduce the amount of water on board I do not know.

This is an issue that has been going on for a number of years. Some of the brigades involved have accepted the various solutions that have been put forward by the CFA, but certainly there are others, including Loch Sport, Yanakie and I think a few others, that are very upset about what has been proposed and just want the ultralight vehicle that they were promised and that they paid for. I understand there is an engineering solution to replace the rear axle which will fix this issue. Just late today I have been advised by one of the brigades that they have got an email back from the CFA and that there is some progress on addressing this issue, so I hope that does come to fruition. But it is a frustration. The volunteer members that I spoke to are really angry about this because they put a lot of work into raising the funds for these ultralight vehicles. They want them to work. They have had issues. There are concerns still that if the rear axle issue is not addressed, they will not perform well, particularly in difficult circumstances like on sand and in mud. If you are in Gippsland, both of those are regular things that you encounter as a firefighter.

I ask the Minister for Emergency Services to deliver a solution to this—it is of great frustration to our CFA volunteers—and make sure that these vehicles are up to scratch and delivering as they should be for our communities.

ST ALBANS ELECTORATE SMALL BUSINESS

Ms SULEYMAN (St Albans) (19:08): (6339) My adjournment matter is for the Minister for Small Business in the other place, and the action I seek is that the Minister for Small Business provides me with an update on how the state budget will support and benefit local traders in my electorate of St Albans. Recently I had the pleasure of hosting the Treasurer along with the St Albans traders for a Q and A session in the heart of St Albans. We discussed many issues that are facing the local traders and small businesses of St Albans.

I want to take the opportunity to thank the St Albans Business Group Association, in particular Gemma Loyer and Sebastian Agricola, for all their help and support in organising the Q and A session. It was an absolutely great opportunity to talk to local businesses in the heart of St Albans, and most importantly to some of the local businesses, including Big Sam market and of course the fantastic hair salons and local Vietnamese restaurants in the heart of St Albans, along Alfrieda Street. A couple of months ago we hosted the Lunar New Year in the centre of our community, which saw close to 80 000 people attend this particular festival. It was a really great opportunity to celebrate the lunar festival, but also it showcased the many businesses in St Albans, bringing people and small businesses together to celebrate the Lunar New Year.

No doubt we have already seen some snippets from the budget, and we are making sure—and I certainly as the local member am making sure—that our small businesses are turbocharging our economy, the local economy, and of course the local community are supporting our local businesses. I know that the Andrews government will always put local small businesses at the heart of our economic agenda. And I know that the electorate of St Albans values our small businesses, whether it is our salons or whether

it is our restaurants—the Vietnamese cuisines and many varieties and options that are available in the heart of St Albans. That is what makes St Albans a unique place in Melbourne.

I ask the minister to provide an update on how the state budget will support and, most importantly, benefit my small businesses in St Albans. This was a strong question that was asked during the Q and A session, and I look forward to the response. I also look forward to the St Albans local businesses going from strength to strength. I am very proud of each and every one of them, and in particular the St Albans business association for all the work that they are doing.

CURDIES RIVER MANAGEMENT

Mr RIORDAN (Polwarth) (19:11): (6340) My adjournment matter this evening is for the Minister for Energy, Environment and Climate Change, who is at the table this evening. The action I am seeking, Minister, is for you to make your way down to Peterborough and the Curdies River. In a couple of weeks time, on Friday, 13 May, at 7.00 pm in the Peterborough hall, there is going to be a community meeting about the ongoing parlous state of the Curdies River and its estuary and the beautiful area around Peterborough, where at the moment there is a massive blue-green algal bloom. It has led to a considerable amount of fish death. It stinks. It is quite toxic there. It is making what is really a beautiful part of the world—

Ms Green: It needs a federal government that actually takes climate change seriously.

Mr RIORDAN: Well, it has got nothing to do with that. The government has been in charge of funding and looking after our waterways now for eight years, and every year of that eight years this waterway has gotten worse—and it comes in stark contrast because the government, with its commitment to fishing and recreational fishing, is making a lot of the fact that these waterways should be available to the general public to enjoy, catch fish and make the most of it.

Ms Green: They're getting warm. The algae will grow.

Mr RIORDAN: Unfortunately the retiring member for Yan Yean—well, she probably is quite aware of Peterborough because she spent most of lockdown out in our part of the world rather than looking after her own constituents. However, this is an important matter to that community, and the Peterborough community would love the minister to come down and see firsthand what a lack of investment and what a lack of funding looks like on a really important waterway. That is in stark contrast to some of the money that they have spent for recreational fishermen—so not the local community so much but people coming in. They have built a new boat ramp, and that has been much appreciated; that has added value. There are other fishing spots along the river. But if the water is toxic, if there are massive blue-green algae outbreaks and if there are dead fish, this is not a way to attract people to rural and regional Victoria.

The farmers and the landowners, the people that really care about this part of the world, need to know that this government has got their back and that this government is prepared to help the catchment management authorities and others to invest in the long-term health of this waterway. It cannot be done alone. It is a big job, and many of the issues that the Peterborough community are concerned about will be discussed in the public hall at 7.00 pm on Friday the 13th. Minister, you are most welcome to come down, have a cup of tea and listen firsthand to the concerns that this community has.

NEPEAN ELECTORATE BUS SERVICES

Mr BRAYNE (Nepean) (19:14): (6341) My adjournment is for the Minister for Public Transport, and the action I seek is for the minister to update my community on the popularity of the FlexiRide Rosebud bus service since its launch in February and how it is improving public transport options for bus users in Nepean. The FlexiRide Rosebud service has been a huge win for communities in the southern peninsula, providing communities with more flexibility when using our public transport network. For the past two months the service has been connecting passengers directly to dedicated bus hubs across Dromana and Rosebud. Alongside upgrades to routes 887, 788 and 781, passengers in

Nepean have been able to jump on and off more bus services than ever before. As someone who grew up on the southern peninsula, I know that local commuters needed more frequent public transport options, and I am proud to say that the FlexiRide service has delivered exactly that. So can the minister update my community on the popularity of this new service and how it has improved public transport outcomes in Nepean?

STRZELECKI KOALA PROTECTION

Ms SANDELL (Melbourne) (19:15): (6342) My adjournment this evening is to the Minister for Energy, Environment and Climate Change. I am very pleased to see her at the table today. The action I seek is for the minister to write to whoever is Australia's next federal environment minister after the election, asking them to support the nomination of the Strzelecki koala to be recognised as vulnerable under federal environment law.

Victoria is incredibly lucky to be home to koalas. They are obviously very special and beautiful creatures and of course such an icon for our country. What many people might not realise is that Victoria actually has a really unique population of koalas known as the Strzelecki koalas. In the early days of colonisation koalas across Australia were hunted to such an extent that on the Victorian mainland koalas were driven almost to extinction by the early 20th century, except for a population in the Strzelecki Ranges in South Gippsland. In the late 19th century new populations were established on French Island and Phillip Island, but they were sourced from a very limited genetic pool of koalas—only three koalas in the case of French Island and 10 in the case of Phillip Island.

Later, koalas from these island populations were brought back to other parts of Victoria and also South Australia, but unfortunately they had really limited genetic diversity, which makes them really vulnerable. By contrast the Strzelecki koala population has more of Victoria's original koala genetic diversity, so it is incredibly unique and important, as the minister would know. In fact they are seen as so vital for securing the future of the koala species in Australia that the South Australian government has actually brought in a group of Strzelecki koalas as part of a research and breeding program. But unfortunately neither the Victorian nor the Australian law currently recognises the significance of that unique population. It is not a separate species or subspecies, but it is a distinct population with distinct genetic diversity, which means it needs to be protected. Right now this koala population is actually under threat from logging, land clearing, fires and climate change, and at an overall species level koalas are not considered threatened in Victoria even though the genetic diversity is very low. To plug this hole in law an incredibly dedicated group of people at Friends of the Earth have taken the important step of nominating the Strzelecki koala population to be recognised as vulnerable under national environment law. They believe that less than 2000 of these animals remain.

If the nomination is accepted, this population and its habitat would achieve additional protection, but to have the best chance of success the nomination needs to be supported by the Victorian government. It would also be great to see the Victorian government invest in our own research and advocacy for this koala population. The South Australian government is funding research with these Victorian koalas, but as far as I am aware we are not doing that here at home. So I very much hope that the environment minister plays a strong role here in advocating for this really special population.

BANYAN FIELDS PRIMARY SCHOOL

Ms KILKENNY (Carrum) (19:18): (6343) My adjournment matter is for the Treasurer, and the action I seek is for the Treasurer to join me on a visit to Banyan Fields Primary School in Carrum Downs. The reason I would like the Treasurer to visit Banyan Fields Primary School is obviously to take him on a tour of this wonderful local school and introduce him to the fabulous teaching and support staff, led proudly by principal Bethany Jackson and assistant principals Sharleen Nason, Jacqui Sampson and Ricky Joyce, and the inspiring school community supported by school council under the leadership of school council president Jacqui Allan. But there is another reason too. Today is state budget day, and today's Victorian state budget handed down by the Treasurer contains something truly wonderful for Banyan Fields Primary. Today's state budget includes funding to upgrade Banyan

Fields. Banyan Fields Primary will receive over \$2.1 million to modernise its prep building and multipurpose hall.

I could not be more excited for Banyan Fields Primary. I know how important this is for the school community. I know because the school community has actively campaigned for this upgrade. So today I am immensely proud that the Andrews Labor government will deliver this important major upgrade for Banyan Fields Primary, and I look forward to the Treasurer joining me to celebrate this tremendous announcement about the future of Banyan Fields Primary with the staff, students and broader school community and to congratulate them on a fabulous campaign. The major upgrade will make a big difference to this school, making this great local school even better by making sure students at Banyan Fields Primary are learning in the best, most modern learning environment, because they deserve it. Congratulations, Banyan Fields Primary. I cannot wait to visit you soon.

MORNINGTON PENINSULA PLANNING SCHEME

Mr MORRIS (Mornington) (19:20): (6344) My adjournment matter this evening is directed to the Minister for Planning, and the action I am seeking from the Minister for Planning is that he call in planning application P21/1949 to the Mornington Peninsula shire planning scheme—it applies to a property at 60 Kunyung Road, Mount Eliza—and reject it.

Speaker, I think with you in the chair I have raised matters relating to this property on many occasions in this house over the last three years, perhaps a little bit longer, most recently with regard to planning scheme amendment C270 for a rezoning. This is the second planning application on this site. The first one was rejected, quite rightly. The applicant has done what—and I do not blame them for doing it—so many applicants do: they put in the ambit claim, put in the big one, then they come back with a smaller one and say, ‘Well, how does this fit?’. The first application was rejected, and the second one should absolutely be rejected as well. This is a site outside the urban growth boundary. It is a site in the area that amendment C270 seeks to rezone to green wedge. It is a landmark site right on the southern side of Mount Eliza. What is proposed here is a development with a footprint of nearly 15 000 square metres. It is not a modest, sympathetic extension to an existing facility, it is a massive development—yet smaller than the first one, but it is an absolutely massive development with numerous three- and four-storey buildings.

As I mentioned, it is outside the urban growth boundary. To approve this application would be totally contrary to planning policies that go back to the 1970s in this area. There is a Mornington Peninsula planning statement, or localised planning statement, that expressly talks about providing a clear separation of the peninsula from metropolitan Melbourne, protecting the character and functions of the towns and villages, protecting areas of special character and having developments sympathetic with, respecting and enhancing the natural environment. In this case this is a linear development between towns. It is effectively an expansion of the urban area of Mount Eliza. To those of you who are familiar with the Planning and Environment Act 1987, this would be contrary to the intent of the Planning and Environment Act, where every expansion of the urban growth boundary needs to be agreed to by a motion by this house and by the other place. So this application is totally contrary to every agreed policy. I request the minister: call it in and knock it on the head.

MERENDA REGIONAL SPORTS AND AQUATIC CENTRE

Ms GREEN (Yan Yean) (19:23): (6345) I am delighted to raise this adjournment matter tonight. The action I seek is from the Minister for Community Sport, and the action I seek is for her to meet with the City of Whittlesea and also stakeholders and user groups in the Mernda region to discuss how state government funding programs can assist the City of Whittlesea in delivering the much-anticipated regional sports and aquatic facility at Mernda. I am so glad to see you in the chair, Speaker, given that your electorate covers the southern part of the City of Whittlesea, and the Minister for Energy, Environment and Climate Change at the table, who is also the member for Mill Park. All three of us, I know, understand acutely the needs of people wanting to play sport and to be healthy in the City of Whittlesea.

One of the reasons that I absolutely supported the sacking of the Whittlesea council and the appointment of administrators was their complete lack of planning and attention to the needs of the community to work on forward plans for regional sports facilities—well, local sports facilities. I think we are seeing that lack of planning coming home to roost now in that the City of Whittlesea has the highest rate of heart disease in the metropolitan area and really low rates of activity. When we see neighbouring municipalities with similar demographics, they have higher rates of participation in organised sport, so I think that it really comes home to roost with those previous elected councillors who just could not get along with each other to appropriately plan and deliver facilities.

I want to commend Craig Lloyd, the CEO, and the administrators at the City of Whittlesea because they have come up with a magnificent plan. At the council meeting on 6 December 2021 they approved the expected scope of the Mernda leisure, aquatic and sports court facility. It is expected to include four pools, including a 50-metre multipurpose pool, a warm-water exercise pool, a learn-to-swim pool and a children's leisure pool; a regional netball complex with six indoor sports courts and eight outdoor netball courts; a gym; a group fitness area; a spa and sauna; health and wellbeing consulting suites; and an occasional care facility. I know that the Minister for Community Sport, who represents a neighbouring area in Hume and Mitchell, truly understands the needs of these growing communities, and I urge her to come and meet with the City of Whittlesea.

RESPONSES

Ms D'AMBROSIO (Mill Park—Minister for Energy, Environment and Climate Change, Minister for Solar Homes) (19:26): Thank you to the member for Polwarth for raising a matter regarding what appear to be conditions that are not ideal in terms of blue-green algae blooms at Peterborough, in the Curdies River. The way I understood the issue that was raised and the action sought, it is a matter that I think I should refer to the Minister for Water, if the member will allow me to refer that to the Minister for Water given that algae bloom there. But if there is an element of the concern or the action that the member is seeking that is relevant to my portfolio, I will definitely be coming back to him on that matter with further information. I take it, though, that his request was for a visit to that area, so allow me to deal with that with the Minister for Water.

If I may turn to the member for Melbourne, the issue that was raised for me was seeking for me to write to whoever is the next federal environment minister to nominate and support a nomination for the Strzelecki koalas to be recognised as vulnerable under commonwealth legislation, by which increased protection would be afforded to them. What I will do is I will seek some advice from my department on that matter in terms of the status of the Strzelecki koalas, and then I will come back to the member for Melbourne on this issue in terms of what steps could be taken if the department's advice aligns with her description.

If I may go to other matters which have been raised, which I will refer to the appropriate ministers, the member for Warrandyte raised a matter for the Minister for Roads and Road Safety regarding further funding for the Five Ways intersection at Warrandyte South. The member for Broadmeadows raised a matter for the Minister for Transport Infrastructure asking her to join the member in, I suppose, a celebration of the level crossing removal at Glenroy railway station. The member for Gippsland South raised a matter for the Minister for Emergency Services regarding ultralight vehicles at local CFAs in the electorate and some concerns around those ultralight vehicles. The member for St Albans raised a matter for the Minister for Small Business seeking to have an update provided on state budget support and any support that might be available for local traders in her community.

The member for Nepean raised a matter for the Minister for Public Transport seeking an update on the progress or the success of the FlexiRide bus service for his community. The member for Carrum sought an action from the Treasurer, asking that he join her on a tour of the Banyan Fields Primary School and meet with the school community. The member for Mornington raised a matter for the Minister for Planning seeking the calling in of a development application related to a property in Kunyung Road, if that is correct, in Mount Eliza. The member for Yan Yean raised a matter for the

ADJOURNMENT

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Legislative Assembly

Tuesday, 3 May 2022

Minister for Community Sport seeking that the minister meet with the City of Whittlesea and particularly user groups in the Mernda region to discuss how state government programs may be able to assist with improving or indeed providing new sporting facilities, including an aquatic centre, I understand, for the Mernda area.

The SPEAKER: The house now stands adjourned.

House adjourned 7.30 pm until Wednesday, 11 May.