



# **Hansard**

## **LEGISLATIVE ASSEMBLY**

### **60th Parliament**

**Tuesday 23 May 2023**



**Office-holders of the Legislative Assembly**  
**60th Parliament**

**Speaker**

Maree Edwards

**Deputy Speaker**

Matt Fregon

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Juliana Addison, Christine Couzens, Jordan Crugnale, Paul Edbrooke, Bronwyn Halfpenny,  
Paul Hamer, Michaela Settle, Meng Heang Tak and Jackson Taylor

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Daniel Andrews

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Jacinta Allan

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**Deputy Leader of the Nationals**

Emma Kealy

**Leader of the House**

Mary-Anne Thomas

**Manager of Opposition Business**

James Newbury

**Members of the Legislative Assembly**  
**60th Parliament**

<b>Member</b>	<b>District</b>	<b>Party</b>	<b>Member</b>	<b>District</b>	<b>Party</b>
Addison, Juliana	Wendouree	ALP	Lambert, Nathan	Preston	ALP
Allan, Jacinta	Bendigo East	ALP	Maas, Gary	Narre Warren South	ALP
Andrews, Daniel	Mulgrave	ALP	McCurdy, Tim	Ovens Valley	Nat
Battin, Brad	Berwick	Lib	McGhie, Steve	Melton	ALP
Benham, Jade	Mildura	Nat	McLeish, Cindy	Eildon	Lib
Britnell, Roma	South-West Coast	Lib	Marchant, Alison	Bellarine	ALP
Brooks, Colin	Bundoora	ALP	Matthews-Ward, Kathleen	Broadmeadows	ALP
Bull, Josh	Sunbury	ALP	Mercurio, Paul	Hastings	ALP
Bull, Tim	Gippsland East	Nat	Mullahy, John	Glen Waverley	ALP
Cameron, Martin	Morwell	Nat	Newbury, James	Brighton	Lib
Carbines, Anthony	Ivanhoe	ALP	O'Brien, Danny	Gippsland South	Nat
Carroll, Ben	Niddrie	ALP	O'Brien, Michael	Malvern	Lib
Cheeseman, Darren	South Barwon	ALP	O'Keeffe, Kim	Shepparton	Nat
Cianflone, Anthony	Pascoe Vale	ALP	Pallas, Tim	Werribee	ALP
Cleeland, Annabelle	Euroa	Nat	Pearson, Danny	Essendon	ALP
Connolly, Sarah	Laverton	ALP	Pesutto, John	Hawthorn	Lib
Couzens, Christine	Geelong	ALP	Read, Tim	Brunswick	Greens
Crewther, Chris	Mornington	Lib	Richards, Pauline	Cranbourne	ALP
Crugnale, Jordan	Bass	ALP	Richardson, Tim	Mordialloc	ALP
D'Ambrosio, Liliana	Mill Park	ALP	Riordan, Richard	Polwarth	Lib
De Martino, Daniela	Monbulk	ALP	Rowswell, Brad	Sandringham	Lib
de Vietri, Gabrielle	Richmond	Greens	Sandell, Ellen	Melbourne	Greens
Dimopoulos, Steve	Oakleigh	ALP	Settle, Michaela	Eureka	ALP
Edbrooke, Paul	Frankston	ALP	Smith, Ryan	Warrandyte	Lib
Edwards, Maree	Bendigo West	ALP	Southwick, David	Caulfield	Lib
Fowles, Will	Ringwood	ALP	Spence, Ros	Kalkallo	ALP
Fregon, Matt	Ashwood	ALP	Staikos, Nick	Bentleigh	ALP
George, Ella	Lara	ALP	Suleyman, Natalie	St Albans	ALP
Grigorovitch, Luba	Kororoit	ALP	Tak, Meng Heang	Clarinda	ALP
Groth, Sam	Nepean	Lib	Taylor, Jackson	Bayswater	ALP
Guy, Matthew	Bulleen	Lib	Taylor, Nina	Albert Park	ALP
Halfpenny, Bronwyn	Thomastown	ALP	Theophanous, Kat	Northcote	ALP
Hall, Katie	Footscray	ALP	Thomas, Mary-Anne	Macedon	ALP
Hamer, Paul	Box Hill	ALP	Tilley, Bill	Benambra	Lib
Haylett, Martha	Ripon	ALP	Vallence, Bridget	Evelyn	Lib
Hibbins, Sam	Prahran	Greens	Vulin, Emma	Pakenham	ALP
Hilakari, Mathew	Point Cook	ALP	Walsh, Peter	Murray Plains	Nat
Hodgett, David	Croydon	Lib	Walters, Iwan	Greenvale	ALP
Horne, Melissa	Williamstown	ALP	Ward, Vicki	Eltham	ALP
Hutchins, Natalie	Sydenham	ALP	Wells, Kim	Rowville	Lib
Kathage, Lauren	Yan Yean	ALP	Wight, Dylan	Tarneit	ALP
Kealy, Emma	Lowan	Nat	Williams, Gabrielle	Dandenong	ALP
Kilkenny, Sonya	Carrum	ALP	Wilson, Belinda	Narre Warren North	ALP
Wayne Farnham	Narracan	Lib	Wilson, Jess	Kew	Lib

**PARTY ABBREVIATIONS**

ALP – Australian Labor Party, Greens – Australian Greens,  
Ind – Independent, Lib – Liberal Party of Australia, Nat – National Party of Australia

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**Tuesday 23 May 2023**

**The SPEAKER (Maree Edwards)** took the chair at 12:03 pm, read the prayer and made an acknowledgement of country.

*Questions without notice and ministers statements*

**Health system**

**Roma BRITNELL** (South-West Coast) (12:04): My question is to the Minister for Health. 8664 Victorians were removed from the elective surgery waitlist in the first quarter of this year. How many of these patients were removed because they lost their lives?

**Mary-Anne THOMAS** (Macedon – Leader of the House, Minister for Health, Minister for Health Infrastructure, Minister for Medical Research) (12:04): As this house well knows, our health system has been under unprecedented pressure as a consequence of the COVID pandemic. This has been experienced by health systems not just here in Victoria but indeed around the nation and across the world. But only our government is investing in a \$12 billion pandemic repair plan, and what we have seen as a consequence of the repair plan has been the stabilisation of the numbers of those that are on our waitlists for planned surgery. There is still more to do. There is absolutely no doubt about that, but that is why our government is investing in the healthcare workers that we need. It is why we are making it free to study nursing and midwifery. It is why we are delivering –

**James Newbury**: On a point of order, Speaker, on standing order 58, this question was a direct question. It did ask for the number of people that have passed away of the 8664 that were removed from the waiting list. A minute into the answer the minister has not come to that question, and I would ask you to bring the minister to that important question.

**The SPEAKER**: The minister is being relevant to the question that was asked.

**Mary-Anne THOMAS**: Thank you very much, Speaker. I appreciate your guidance. As I was saying, we have seen some pleasing results with the waitlist, but this is as a consequence of the changes that our government is implementing. It is as a consequence of the dedication of our highly trained clinicians and nursing staff, those that are working with people on the waitlist both before and after surgery, including of course our highly trained allied healthcare staff. So I look forward to continuing to release the data in relation to the waiting list for planned surgery – something I might say that those on the other side never did. They never did. Only Labor is transparent –

**James Newbury**: On a point of order, Speaker, the minister knows not to debate the question. This was a serious question about people who have lost their lives, and I would ask you to bring the minister back directly, which the minister is required to be, to the question.

**The SPEAKER**: The minister will come back to the question and not debate the question.

**Mary-Anne THOMAS**: Thank you, Speaker. Again I will comment that we are seeing some pleasing results with our waitlists as a consequence of the investments that our government is making. We are seeing stabilisation in the numbers.

**Roma BRITNELL** (South-West Coast) (12:07): One in four people waiting for elective surgery at the Peter MacCallum Cancer Institute were removed from elective surgery waitlists for the first quarter of this year. How many of these patients were removed because they lost their lives?

**Mary-Anne THOMAS** (Macedon – Leader of the House, Minister for Health, Minister for Health Infrastructure, Minister for Medical Research) (12:08): This question gives me an opportunity to once again remind the house, and thank our hardworking healthcare workers, that all of category 1 – that is, the sickest patients – are treated within the clinically recommended time frames and that that statistic

had been maintained throughout the peak period of the pandemic. That is only because of the dedication of our healthcare workers. I will take this opportunity to say that every –

**James Newbury:** On a point of order, Speaker, on relevance, this question specifically asked about the Peter MacCallum Cancer Institute. The minister has not even come close to answering that question or referring to the institute and the number of people that passed away at that particular institute, and I would ask you to bring the minister, again, back to the question.

**The SPEAKER:** Order! The question also referred to waiting lists, and the minister is being relevant to the question.

**Mary-Anne THOMAS:** Thank you, Speaker. I will just make the point once again: the sickest patients in Victoria have always been treated within the clinically recommended time frames.

### Ministers statements: government achievements

**Daniel ANDREWS** (Mulgrave – Premier) (12:09): I am delighted to rise to remind all honourable members of the positive and optimistic plan that we took to the Victorian community last year, which was resoundingly endorsed in historic terms. Despite the noise and juvenile interjections of some, the Victorian community spotted a positive plan, and you know what? They voted for it. It is so good to be able to join a record number of colleagues here in this place. The plan of course included building new schools, upgrading and building new roads, building new hospitals –

**John Pesutto** interjected.

**Daniel ANDREWS:** We do love schools, John. We do not shut them; we build new ones. But you are about to go back to school, I think. The plan involved building new hospitals, new roads, new rail, new schools, upgrading TAFE, adding to the free TAFE list. It involved free kinder, bringing back the SEC – government-owned renewable energy for people, not for profit. It went a lot better than the privatisation delivered by some – a terrible failure, lining the pockets of big business and doing nothing but seeing power bills skyrocket. There is a better way. Renewable electricity is a better way. Battery storage, including 100 neighbourhood batteries, is a better way, and the Victorian community could see that. That is why they voted for it.

There are hospitals – the biggest hospital project in our country’s history down there at the soon to be completed, very final station in the Metro Tunnel, Arden station – a new campus of the Royal Women’s and a new campus of the Royal Melbourne Hospital, the biggest hospital project in our state’s history. Beyond that, hospitals are not much without staff – thousands of extra staff – and we are making nursing degrees free. In so many ways it is a positive plan, rightly endorsed by the great people of this great state.

**The SPEAKER:** I remind members to refer to other members by their correct titles.

### South-West Coast electorate mental health services

**Roma BRITNELL** (South-West Coast) (12:11): My question is to the Minister for Mental Health. When a Hamilton resident contacted the emergency after-hours hotline at South West Healthcare for a person with extreme depression and suicidal ideation, he was told that they were so under-resourced that he should call Lifeline or get police to do a welfare check. This government is raising over \$850 million from the mental health levy this year. Why are residents being told to call Lifeline instead of receiving the urgent mental health services they need?

**Gabrielle WILLIAMS** (Dandenong – Minister for Mental Health, Minister for Ambulance Services, Minister for Treaty and First Peoples) (12:12): I thank the member for her question. As the member will well know, a couple of years ago the Royal Commission into Victoria’s Mental Health System handed down its report, some 74 recommendations, and this government, those on this side of the house, committed to implementing –



**Daniel Andrews:** And a few over there.

**Gabrielle WILLIAMS:** that is right, a few over there as well – all 74 of those recommendations, with an investment so far of some \$6 billion. That is more than every other jurisdiction in Australia. This is – and we can never forget this – a complete rebuild of our mental health and wellbeing system in acknowledgement of the fact that it had some significant challenges. On this side of the house, we believe in big reform, difficult reform, challenging reform. We do not shy away from it.

**John Pesutto:** You can't deliver it, Gabrielle. That's the problem.

**Gabrielle WILLIAMS:** Well, the Leader of the Opposition says we cannot deliver it, but the Leader of the Opposition oversees a party room which effectively voted it down. So let us not forget that. We as a part of this reform agenda have introduced –

**James Newbury:** On a point of order, Speaker, on relevance, this question went to a person being told to call Lifeline rather than receiving the help they needed, and I would ask you to bring the minister back to the important question.

*Members interjecting.*

**The SPEAKER:** Order! I will rule on the point of order. The minister was being relevant to the question that was asked. I ask the minister to come back to the question.

**Gabrielle WILLIAMS:** Thank you, Speaker. As a part of this reform agenda it should be remembered that this government introduced a dedicated revenue stream to ensure that this work would not be undermined should those opposite come into government. That is effectively what we were doing – futureproofing an investment that was so very important to the rebuilding of our mental health and wellbeing system. Now I am pleased to say that two years in, there are more services operating in our state today and there will be more to come. We are deep into the foundational work of rebuilding our mental health system.

**Daniel Andrews:** We'll chase up that individual.

**Gabrielle WILLIAMS:** Absolutely. We have committed to implementing or putting online more beds than the royal commission actually recommended that we do. But of course I am happy to follow up the specific circumstances of the case that the member raised – always happy to do that. It is very important to me and all of those in the government that we are able to connect people with the services that they need, which is the very reason that many of the recommendations of the royal commission go to providing local care to people close to their home, effectively. We are in the process of rolling out some 50 locals across the state, with more to come online very soon –

**Daniel Andrews:** And another stage of Warrnambool hospital.

**Gabrielle WILLIAMS:** That's right – in addition of course to those acute beds and in addition to a range of different initiatives which target young people, infants and families and LGBTIQ+ people. This is a very comprehensive reform agenda, and what I would say is that it is so very important that those opposite get on board with this reform so we can ensure it gets done.

**Roma BRITNELL** (South-West Coast) (12:16): In my electorate mental health services are so overwhelmed that only one in five people that present to an emergency department in acute mental distress are treated within the clinically acceptable target of 8 hours. Despite the raising of over \$850 million from the mental health levy, why are 80 per cent of people languishing in an emergency department rather than getting the urgent mental health care they need?

**Gabrielle WILLIAMS** (Dandenong – Minister for Mental Health, Minister for Ambulance Services, Minister for Treaty and First Peoples) (12:17): I again thank the member for her question. Again, the mental health royal commission acknowledged – and the government acknowledged in instigating that royal commission – that our system is under extraordinary pressure and, more than

that, needed to be rebuilt to be able to meet the needs in our community. It also should be pointed out that as a part of that reform, the thinking and the logic goes that we do not want people necessarily only accessing the system at the acute end. We want people to be getting early help and to be getting it closer to home, and that is at the heart of so many of the recommendations of the royal commission and indeed so much of the work that is being led here in Victoria by this government – work like our 50 locals that are being rolled out across the state, work that goes to support a number of different agencies in providing that early intervention and prevention piece to ensure that people’s mental ill health is not escalating into the acute services.

### **Ministers statements: State Electricity Commission**

**Lily D’AMBROSIO** (Mill Park – Minister for Climate Action, Minister for Energy and Resources, Minister for the State Electricity Commission) (12:18): I am absolutely delighted to update the house on how our government is doing what matters and bringing back the SEC. Victorians overwhelmingly supported the plan to bring back the SEC, lowering power bills and supercharging our renewable energy revolution. The SEC will absolutely push down wholesale prices, bringing 4.5 gigawatts of new power generation – the equivalent replacement of Loy Yang A power station. And just six months in we have not wasted a single day. Back in February we announced an interim expert advisory panel, who are right now providing excellent expert energy and financial advice to the government.

But it does not stop there. In early May we released the *SEC Pioneer Investment Mandate*, and we will deliver the first SEC project by the end of the year, accelerating the renewables energy transition with a minimum of 100 megawatts of new capacity, powering at least 60,000 new homes in Victoria. Projects like these will make sure that the 100 per cent publicly owned SEC drives our ambitious renewable energy target of 95 per cent renewable electricity by 2035. And whilst we are doing that, bringing back the SEC will accelerate the development and creation of 59,000 jobs along the way – jobs of the future for Victorians today. The SEC will support workers across Victoria with the SEC centre of training excellence and the creation of 6000 apprenticeships and traineeships. Just last week we formalised the most ambitious emissions targets in the country: 75 to 80 per cent emissions reduction by 2030 and net zero by 2045. The SEC will help to deliver a renewable zero emissions future in Victoria for all Victorians.

### **Home building industry**

**Jess WILSON** (Kew) (12:20): My question is to the Assistant Treasurer. On 2 May the Assistant Treasurer said that the government would look at those affected by the collapse of Hallbury Homes on a case-by-case basis. Why has the minister made life harder for these Victorians by failing to deliver on this promise?

**Danny PEARSON** (Essendon – Minister for Government Services, Assistant Treasurer, Minister for WorkSafe and the TAC, Minister for Consumer Affairs) (12:20): I thank the member for Kew for her question. We have had instances where companies which should have done the right thing have not done the right thing, and we do not have any visibility around that per se in relation to the conduct of individual businesses because our expectation is that businesses do the right thing. The overwhelming majority of those businesses do do the right thing.

In relation to Porter Davis, that was a much larger case where a larger number of people were impacted, and it has been our focus to date to try to stand up a compensation scheme and to examine what has happened and understand what may have occurred in relation to those companies as well in terms of their conduct and behaviour. For example, we do not know at this stage whether there has been criminal behaviour, and that is why further work needs to be done. In relation to the specifics that the member for Kew raised, we are in the process of seeking that information for individuals. Obviously we need to identify who those individuals are. We need to then cross-reference and check whether they have made those payments and to validate and verify those payments have been made. It is a smaller number involved compared to Porter Davis, but that work is ongoing.

**Jess WILSON** (Kew) (12:22): Sushant and Anamica have lost their \$75,000 deposit as a result of Hallbury Homes not taking out domestic building insurance. Will the Assistant Treasurer commit to compensating Sushant and Anamica and other Hallbury Homes victims who have lost their deposit, or is the government denying compensation because Victoria is broke?

**Danny PEARSON** (Essendon – Minister for Government Services, Assistant Treasurer, Minister for WorkSafe and the TAC, Minister for Consumer Affairs) (12:22): Dear, oh dear, oh dear. I will leave the last bit of that question because all will be revealed in a few moments time. But just in relation to that first –

*Members interjecting.*

**The SPEAKER:** Order! The Leader of the Opposition! Members at the table!

**Danny PEARSON:** In terms of domestic building insurance, that is for a 5 per cent coverage, so the \$75,000 seems to be a very large amount if the 5 per cent represents \$75,000. Again, the member for Kew may well have already provided me with some information, and it seems like she has. I am happy to individually follow up that case, but as I said, I am not in a position to make any announcements about those specifics today. We have undertaken that we will do further work on this case, and we will.

#### **Ministers statements: multicultural communities**

**Colin BROOKS** (Bundoora – Minister for Housing, Minister for Multicultural Affairs) (12:23): Victoria is doing what matters. We are the multicultural capital of the country, and we are ensuring that multicultural communities can celebrate their cultures and traditions with equal rights, protections and opportunities. To this end, we have criminalised the intentional public display of the Nazi symbol, and we are expanding that to include the hateful Nazi salute. We will strengthen the Racial and Religious Tolerance Act 2001 to make it easier to prosecute any individual who incites hatred or bigotry based on someone's faith or race. The Bracks Labor government introduced that landmark legislation more than 20 years ago, and the Andrews Labor government will make it stronger.

Our government has promised \$6 million to fund an Islamophobia and antisemitism campaign to stamp out racism and protect our Jewish and Islamic communities. We have also established the Anti-Racism Taskforce, which is chaired by the member for Preston and member Sheena Watt in the other place. It is currently developing the first ever statewide anti-racism strategy and will soon establish the new Multicultural and Multifaith Law Reform Consultative Committee to ensure the voices of our diverse communities are heard in the development of Victorian laws.

We know that having safe and secure places to celebrate and share cultural history and traditions is so important to our multicultural communities, which is why we have pledged \$40 million to help community organisations build, renovate or upgrade community infrastructure and \$12 million for the multicultural festivals and events program.

We are proud to support Victoria's multicultural seniors also with a strong sense of connection and community by providing ongoing support to some 1001 multicultural seniors organisations. In recognition of the critical role of multicultural media, we have committed to providing \$1.5 million in support and tripling the proportion of government advertising expenditure to multicultural media to 15 per cent of total government advertising spend. The Andrews Labor government has a proud record of supporting multicultural and multifaith communities and a plan to keep backing them well into the future.

#### **Housing affordability**

**Sam HIBBINS** (Pahran) (12:25): My question is to the Treasurer. Treasurer, why is the government allowing business to benefit from replacing stamp duty with land tax by removing upfront costs but not people who are struggling to afford a home?

**Tim PALLAS** (Werribee – Treasurer, Minister for Industrial Relations, Minister for Trade and Investment) (12:26): I thank the member from Prahran for his question. I am looking forward to talking about the great aspects of the budget, but now is not the time to do it. I will wait of course until the budget is delivered before I deal with questions that deal with the budget.

**Danny Pearson** interjected.

**The SPEAKER:** Order! The Assistant Treasurer will come to order.

**Sam Hibbins:** On a point of order, Speaker, the question was based on a media release that the government put out last night. This information is in the public domain, and I would ask you to ask the Treasurer to answer the question.

**The SPEAKER:** The Treasurer has concluded his answer.

**Sam HIBBINS** (Prahran) (12:27): Experts, economists, housing advocates are all saying that replacing stamp duty is a critical element of housing reform to address the housing crisis. How much worse does the housing crisis have to get before the government implements this reform?

**Tim PALLAS** (Werribee – Treasurer, Minister for Industrial Relations, Minister for Trade and Investment) (12:27): I thank the member for his supplementary question. I would make the point that if the Greens political party is interested in the housing shortfall that this community confronts, perhaps they can talk to some of their colleagues in the inner-city councils who do all they can to frustrate and avoid the capacity for us to build social and public housing in these communities. Perhaps they would have recognised that this government has been doing an enormous amount for a very long and consistent time in supporting a fair go for renters in making an effort to ensure that this community is properly served by a government that takes action to take a share in equity to get people on that first rung of home ownership. We recognise that we need more supply into the market, and we are doing more about that as a government. Our *Homes for Victorians* policy – we have a well-established track record, one we are proud of and one which I am looking forward to saying a lot more about very soon.

#### **Ministers statements: inclusive education**

**Natalie HUTCHINS** (Sydenham – Minister for Education, Minister for Women) (12:28): I rise to update the house on how this government is doing what matters in the Education State, and that is our nation-leading work in supporting students with disabilities across our schools. Our \$1.6 billion disability inclusion reforms are transforming our schools and transforming kids' lives, but we are not stopping there. Since being re-elected we have not wasted a day. I have met with countless families and students and visited many schools, and I know how important our election commitment of fighting for students with disabilities is to so many families. At the election we committed \$207 million to do what matters at Victorian specialist schools. This package includes after-school care at specialist schools where they have never had it before, NDIS navigators at every single specialist school, more assistance dogs and therapy dogs, more therapy pools, access to communication software – so important for kids that cannot speak – more extracurricular activities and a formal voice for young people and their families through the Premier's advisory council.

We are also committed to delivering TAFE transition officers to give kids the future pathways that they absolutely deserve. We also want to ensure the best and brightest speech pathologists, occupational therapists and disability workers for students in specialist schools in regional and rural settings. We have committed to 1000 scholarships in these professions. Whether you send your child to a mainstream or a specialist school, the Andrews Labor government is committed to ensuring your child gets the education they deserve and that you get to make the choice for your child, because we know that is what matters.

### Small business support

**Cindy McLEISH** (Eildon) (12:30): My question is to the Minister for Small Business. The October 2022 floods had a devastating impact on caravan parks. Banks will not provide finance to rebuild these small businesses if they are more than halfway through their 21-year lease with the government. Minister, to enable these businesses to access finance to rebuild their businesses, will the government provide them with a new 21-year lease?

**Natalie SULEYMAN** (St Albans – Minister for Veterans, Minister for Small Business, Minister for Youth) (12:31): Thank you for that question. First of all, we have been supporting small businesses and in particular those that have been affected with flood relief programs. Just recently we announced further flood relief grants for affected communities. In relation to the specific question that you have raised, I would be more than happy to raise those issues with the minister in the other place Ingrid Stitt.

**Cindy McLeish**: On a point of order, seeking clarification from you, Speaker. On at least five occasions the minister has stated during question time that she and the government are backing small business, and that is exactly what I am asking her to do now – and to answer that question here to let us know now. If she is not going to stick up for small business, who is?

**The SPEAKER**: Order! That is not a point of order. I rule it out.

**Cindy McLEISH** (Eildon) (12:33): Like other small businesses, caravan park operators are finding it impossible to get insurance. To help resolve this failure in the insurance market, will the minister work with the government, have a strong voice at the cabinet table and have the VMIA step in as the insurer of last resort to ensure caravan parks continue to operate? The Minister for Small Business needs to stick up for small businesses.

**Natalie SULEYMAN** (St Albans – Minister for Veterans, Minister for Small Business, Minister for Youth) (12:33): Thank you for that question. In relation to the specific question, many times I have relayed that to and had conversations with the Assistant Treasurer, who is responsible for that specific matter. Let me say this for the record: we have not stopped supporting small business since the Andrews Labor government was elected. We have invested billions in the last few years to make sure that small businesses are standing and are able to keep their doors open. And let me say, there could be no stronger voice and advocate for small business than the Andrews Labor government.

### Ministers statements: Victorian Cancer Plan

**Mary-Anne THOMAS** (Macedon – Leader of the House, Minister for Health, Minister for Health Infrastructure, Minister for Medical Research) (12:34): I rise to update the house on how the Andrews Labor government is doing what matters to improve the care and transition of Victorians living with cancer. Our government's *Victorian Cancer Plan* sets the ambitious goal of saving 10,000 lives by 2025. To achieve this we are working to strengthen cancer research, diagnosis and care across our state.

Many Victorians have been impacted by cancer and, sadly, an estimated 750 Australian families will get the devastating news this year that their child has been diagnosed with cancer. Today indeed we remember our friend Jaala Pulford and her beautiful daughter Sinead, who lost her life to cancer. Our government is committed to doing more to save young lives, and that is why we are going to deliver \$35 million for the Victorian Paediatric Cancer Consortium to develop new therapies and long-term management strategies for the youngest cancer patients. To make sure that more Victorians can access advanced diagnostics closer to home, we have also committed to delivering eight new PET scanners.

But we also recognise that people's experience of cancer is different, and we know that cancer mortality rates are significantly higher for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people. This is unacceptable, and that is why I am proud that our government is partnering with the Victorian Aboriginal Community Controlled Health Organisation to deliver the self-determined *Victorian Aboriginal Cancer Journey Strategy*, making sure that Aboriginal Victorians can access culturally safe cancer care. I look forward to launching this strategy tomorrow with VACCHO. By investing in innovation infrastructure and

supporting our world-class health care and medical research, our government remains focused on delivering the very best cancer care for all Victorians, no matter where they live.

**Sam Groth:** On a point of order, Deputy Speaker, question 57, for the Minister for Education, was due on 24 March. On 5 April the Speaker wrote to the minister, and I also raised this as a point of order on 2 May. There is still no response from the minister. There are still the issues at Dromana college. There are still the issues with education on the peninsula. Can you please direct the minister to answer the question, after three months.

**Annabelle Cleeland:** On a point of order, Deputy Speaker, I am also two months overdue. The questions overdue are 177, 178, 179, 180, 181, 182, 183, 184, 185, 256, 257, 258, 259, 260 and 261. Thank you for playing along, and please reiterate the urgency of all of these questions.

**The DEPUTY SPEAKER:** I will pass them to the Speaker.

### *Constituency questions*

#### **Polwarth electorate**

**Richard RIORDAN** (Polwarth) (12:39): (170) My question is to the Minister for Community Sport, and the question I have is: will she commit to supporting the people of Torquay and the Surf Coast shire in a commitment to helping them get their swimming pool? The Surf Coast and Geelong community are incredibly disappointed today following further revelations that the promise of swimming events at the Commonwealth Games and the promise of a pool to the fast-growing Armstrong Creek and Surf Coast communities has in fact been abandoned by this now-broke state government. One hundred-odd million dollars will be spent on a blow-up swimming pool that will not serve the purposes of that community. A culture of swimming, outdoor activity and water safety are essential elements for those living in Geelong and the Surf Coast, and I urge the minister to get together with the Surf Coast shire, talk to that community and make sure they have got funding for a legacy pool so that they can benefit from the regional games also.

#### **Northcote electorate**

**Kat THEOPHANOUS** (Northcote) (12:40): (171) My question is directed to the Treasurer. I know that in a few moments he will be standing up to deliver our ninth state budget, and we are all waiting in eager anticipation to hear more about it. Ahead of that detail, I would like to ask the Treasurer: what measures are in the state budget to alleviate cost-of-living pressures on households in the Northcote electorate? We know that rising interest rates and inflation have put pressure on households, and we know that the cost of living has increased and rents have increased. Many people living in the inner north do not have the benefit of secure employment. Initiatives like the sick pay guarantee, free TAFE, the power saving bonus and our rental reforms have all made a real difference in easing some of that pressure. My community are eager to know in what ways this next Labor budget will assist households in meeting the challenges the economy is placing on people living in the inner north.

#### **Gippsland South electorate**

**Danny O'BRIEN** (Gippsland South) (12:41): (172) My question is to the Minister for Regional Development, and I ask: what industries will the government be seeking to bring to Gippsland now that it has brought forward dramatically the shutdown of the native timber industry to January 2024? We have already lost major employers like Hazelwood, with Yallourn to come; we have seen the shutdown of white paper manufacturing at Maryvale; and now the timber industry will be gone in just over six months. This will damage Gippsland towns, cost jobs and cost livelihoods. The loss of forestry contractors will see the forest burn when the next fires break out, and strong demand for hardwood will simply see more timber imported from overseas, where there is less environmental regulation than we have here. It is a bad day to be an orangutan. What a farce, what a disgrace and what better evidence that the once great Labor Party that used to support blue-collar workers is now more interested in out-greening the inner-city Greens.

**Pascoe Vale electorate**

**Anthony CIANFLONE** (Pascoe Vale) (12:41): (173) My constituency question is for the Minister for Community Sport. The action I seek is for the minister to visit my electorate to meet with local sporting clubs to discuss opportunities to improve local sporting facilities, particularly with a view to supporting more women and girls to get fit and active. Building on the \$7 million invested by the Andrews Labor government to improve local sport facilities since 2014, I intend to work with all of my local sporting and recreational groups to keep improving local health and wellbeing outcomes. Across Pascoe Vale we are home to a wide number of sporting clubs, all of whom would be more than happy to welcome the minister for a visit and a discussion. They include Brunswick Juventus Football Club, Brunswick City Soccer Club, Brunswick Zebras Football Club, Brunswick Hockey Club, Coburg Giants and basketball association, Coburg Lions football club, Coburg Districts Football Club, Coburg Cricket Club, Coburg Harriers athletics, Coburg Table Tennis Club, East Coburg Cricket Club, Moreland city soccer club, Pascoe Vale football and cricket club, Pascoe Vale soccer club, St Andrews Cricket Club, West Coburg Sports Club, West Coburg Bowling Club and Yeti FC Nepalese football club. Along with these there are many other swimming, tennis and bocce clubs the minister can come and visit.

**Brighton electorate**

**James NEWBURY** (Brighton) (12:42): (174) My question is to the Premier, and I ask: when will the state Labor government respond to allegations by neighbours of Homes Victoria's New Street redevelopment in Brighton that workers on site have behaved inappropriately towards young women? It has been alleged that workers at the New Street redevelopment made sexual noises towards a young woman who lived in a neighbouring property while she was swimming in her pool. For background, the redevelopment towers five storeys over abutting suburban homes. Giant apartment blocks now look directly over backyards and pools. After becoming aware of the serious allegations at the site, I raised them directly with the Minister for Planning on 19 January, 124 days ago, and then the Premier on 1 March, 83 days ago, and both have refused to respond. It is deeply concerning that allegations of sexualised behaviour towards a young woman have been raised with the Premier of the state and he has ignored them. I call on the Premier to show this affected young woman, who has had the courage to speak out, the decency of at least responding.

**Albert Park electorate**

**Nina TAYLOR** (Albert Park) (12:43): (175) My question is to the Minister for Energy and Resources, and I ask for an update on how much households in my seat of Albert Park have saved on their electricity bills since the power saving bonus opened on 24 March 2023. The \$250 power saving bonus is a brilliant cost-of-living measure that is putting money back into the pockets of Victorians. My office has assisted several hundred Albert Park constituents to apply for the latest round, which is still open to all households. This initiative also helps residents compare energy providers, ensuring that locals in Albert Park get the best deal possible, all while keeping bills down for years to come. I am so proud to be part of the Andrews Labor government, a government unwaveringly committed to delivering for all Victorians, and I look forward to hearing the minister's response.

**Shepparton electorate**

**Kim O'KEEFFE** (Shepparton) (12:44): (176) My question is to the Minister for Small Business, and I ask: when will critical flood relief payments be made to businesses who have applied and qualified for flood relief grants but have not yet received their payment? It has been eight months since the floods, and our region is still rebuilding and trying to recover. Small business owners have suffered significant financial and personal loss during the pandemic, followed by the impact of the floods. The stress and pressure continue. Many business owners and members of the community have contacted me frustrated with delays and are feeling let down at a time when they need support most. The red tape and bureaucracy made applying for the last round of funding a difficult process, causing stress and frustration, with applications denied when clearly qualified for. Many have been waiting for

months for their applications still to be processed. I ask the minister to ensure that people are not waiting for long periods of time and that the flood relief payments are made promptly.

#### **Preston electorate**

**Nathan LAMBERT** (Preston) (12:45): (177) My constituency question is for the Minister for Roads and Road Safety, and my question is: can the minister's department provide some information regarding the semi-mountable curbs on the Bell Street bridge over Merri Creek? The bridge is well known across the Coburg and Preston areas. It has been there in one form or another for about 150 years, and the original iron lattice truss structure was built in 1880. It was widened in the 1950s and further reinforced in the 90s. Users of the bridge are interested in knowing more about the semi-mountable curbs, which are an unusual feature not found in other bridges in the area. Specifically, they are interested to know when the semi-mountable curbs were installed, what safety purpose they serve relative to more conventional barrier curbs, whether they are used on any other road bridges across Melbourne and how they are treated in national design standards. I thank the minister in advance for any information that her department can provide.

#### **Mornington electorate**

**Chris CREWITHER** (Mornington) (12:46): (178) My question is to the Minister for Public Transport. It is budget day. The Frankston to Baxter rail upgrade has been called for since the 1920s, with \$225 million of federal budgeted funds there for the project since 2018, so will the minister commit to delivering this much-needed project? There are no rail services in the Mornington electorate. This project will revitalise Frankston Hospital and Monash University and give people closer parking, stations and bus services, less time commuting, more time with families and less costs. In 2018 I secured \$225 million from the federal Liberal–Nationals government. In 2019 Albanese said Labor would deliver this project and do it sooner. However, the ongoing lack of support by the Andrews government means this project is now at risk of being scrapped by the Albanese government following their 90-day review. There are also reports that these cut federal funds will be shifted to the white elephant Suburban Rail Loop in an attempt to prop up the state Labor government after their budget.

#### **Narre Warren South electorate**

**Gary MAAS** (Narre Warren South) (12:47): (179) My constituency question is for the Minister for Government Services and concerns the Andrews Labor government's recent announcement to introduce digital driver licences. Minister, how will digital driver licences benefit constituents in my electorate of Narre Warren South? The times, they are a-changing, and the technological advances of the last 10 years have been really swift. We now have so much of our lives and our connection to the world on the phone in our pockets. I am looking forward to adding my driver licence to the digital wallet, and I know many of my constituents have also been waiting for this service. I understand that the drivers licence will be accessed through the Service Victoria app. I would appreciate any further information that the minister could provide on the benefits of digital driver licences for drivers, departments and businesses in my electorate, and I look forward to sharing the minister's response with my community.

### ***Bills***

#### **State Taxation Acts Amendment Bill 2023**

##### *Introduction and first reading*

**Tim PALLAS** (Werribee – Treasurer, Minister for Industrial Relations, Minister for Trade and Investment) (12:49): I move:

That I introduce a bill for an act to amend the Duties Act 2000, the Fire Services Property Levy Act 2012, the Land Tax Act 2005, the Payroll Tax Act 2007, the Planning and Environment Act 1987, the Subdivision Act 1988, the Taxation Administration Act 1997 and the Valuation of Land Act 1960 and for other purposes.



**Motion agreed to.**

**Read first time.**

**Ordered to be read second time tomorrow.**

### **Victorian Future Fund Bill 2023**

#### *Introduction and first reading*

**Tim PALLAS** (Werribee – Treasurer, Minister for Industrial Relations, Minister for Trade and Investment) (12:51): I move:

That I introduce a bill for an act to establish the Victorian Future Fund and set out the purposes for which money in the Victorian Future Fund may be used and to amend the Duties Act 2000 and for other purposes.

**Motion agreed to.**

**Read first time.**

**Ordered to be read second time tomorrow.**

### *Petitions*

#### **Home building industry**

**Richard RIORDAN** (Polwarth) presented a petition bearing 305 signatures:

This petition of residents in Victoria draws to the attention of the Legislative Assembly the financial hardship of the Porter Davis victims left in financial distress after the builder's liquidation. More than 1700 families have been impacted in Victoria after having saved for years to afford their first or dream home. The Victorian Government has acknowledged the housing crisis in Australia and has committed to increase housing supply as a matter of Victorian interest and to reduce homelessness. It is now clear that VMIA's insurance payout will be insufficient for those who are in mid-construction. The banks have continued business as usual with very limited support towards affected victims. First home buyers cannot secure further funds due to FHBG capped building contracts terms and with reduced borrowing capacity arising from higher interest rates. Owner builder options are unavailable because banks require large amount of self-funds which is unattainable. Without your help, many of us will not be able to finish our homes and will possibly force us into bankruptcy or even homelessness – the opposite of the Victorian Government's housing plan.

The petitioners therefore request that the Legislative Assembly:

- waive FHBG building contract caps requiring homes to be valued under a certain threshold to be eligible – this will allow banks to revalue land and homes at the current price;
- introduce the Victorian Home Rescue package – a state funded guarantee scheme available to victims experiencing financial hardship following liquidation of construction companies. The scheme will provide funding for the completion of homes in exchange for a percentage stake that can be repaid over the term of the loan/within a time frame. This will ensure that homeowners can move into their homes without being further affected financially and will give them a chance to settle financially before repaying the scheme.

**Ordered that petition be considered tomorrow on motion of Cindy McLeish.**

#### **Probationary driving age**

**Danny O'BRIEN** (Gippsland South) presented a petition bearing 27 signatures:

This petition of residents in Victoria draws to the attention of the Legislative Assembly the concern with the minimum driving age in Victoria. All other states and territories in Australia have their driving age set at 17 or 16 1/2 and lowering the driving age to 17 in Victoria will encourage more young people to seek employment and education opportunities with greater accessibility when it comes to transport, particularly for young people living in regional Victoria with limited to no access to public transport. Additionally, those coming to Victoria from other states and territories who have obtained a probationary licence but are yet to turn 18 are put back on a learners permit which may cause disadvantage for them, particularly for interstate university students who don't have access to a supervising driver. We still request that the requirement to hold

a learner permit for the minimum prescribed amount of time and the completion of at least 120 hours of supervised driving for drivers under 21 years of age still remain in force.

The petitioners therefore request that the Legislative Assembly amend section 19(1) of the Road Safety Act 1986 (Vic) to allow those who have completed all relevant tests and qualifications to apply for a driver licence from 17 years of age.

### *Documents*

#### **Budget papers 2023–24**

**Tim PALLAS** (Werribee – Treasurer, Minister for Industrial Relations, Minister for Trade and Investment) (12:53): I table, by leave:

budget paper 1, ‘Treasurer’s speech’;  
 budget paper 4, ‘State Capital Program’;  
 budget ‘Overview’;  
 budget information paper, ‘COVID Debt Repayment Plan’; and  
 budget information paper, ‘Gender Equality Budget Statement’.

### *Committees*

#### **Scrutiny of Acts and Regulations Committee**

##### *Alert Digest No. 5*

**Iwan WALTERS** (Greenvale) (12:54): I have the honour to present to the house a report from the Scrutiny of Acts and Regulations Committee, being *Alert Digest* No. 5 of 2023, on the following bills:

Energy Legislation Amendment (Electricity Outage Emergency Response and Other Matters) Bill 2023  
 Independent Broad-based Anti-corruption Commission Amendment (Facilitation of Timely Reporting) Bill 2022

together with appendices.

**Ordered to be published.**

### *Documents*

#### **Documents**

#### **Incorporated list as follows:**

##### **DOCUMENTS TABLED UNDER ACTS OF PARLIAMENT** – The Clerk tabled:

###### *Financial Management Act 1994:*

2023–24 Budget Paper No 2 – Strategy and Outlook  
 2023–24 Budget Paper No 3 – Service Delivery  
 2023–24 Budget Paper No 5 – Statement of Finances (incorporating Quarterly Financial Report No 3)

###### *Planning and Environment Act 1987* – Notices of approval of amendments to the following Planning Schemes:

Corangamite – C60  
 Merri-bek – C218  
 Yarra – C303, C316  
 Yarra Ranges – C197 Part 1A

###### Statutory Rules under the following Acts:

*Architects Act 1991* – SR 28  
*Local Government Act 1989* – SR 29  
*Public Health and Wellbeing Act 2008* – SR 27

*Subordinate Legislation Act 1994* – Documents under s 15 in relation to Statutory Rules 28, 30

*Wildlife Act 1975* – Wildlife (Closure of Lake Connemara State Game Reserve) Notice (*Gazette S233* 16 May 2023).

### ***Bills***

#### **Water Legislation Amendment Bill 2023**

##### *Council's agreement*

**The SPEAKER** (12:55): I have received a message from the Legislative Council agreeing to the Water Legislation Amendment Bill 2023 without amendment.

#### **Disability and Social Services Regulation Amendment Bill 2023**

#### **Water Legislation Amendment Bill 2023**

##### *Royal assent*

**The SPEAKER** (12:56): I inform the house that today the Governor gave royal assent to the Disability and Social Services Regulation Amendment Bill 2023 and the Water Legislation Amendment Bill 2023.

#### **Appropriation (2023–2024) Bill 2023**

##### *Appropriation*

**The SPEAKER** (12:56): 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 2023–24 and for other purposes, and hereby transmits to the Legislative Assembly estimates of the expenditure requiring annual appropriation in the financial year 2023–24.

#### **Estimates tabled.**

##### *Introduction and first reading*

**Tim PALLAS** (Werribee – Treasurer, Minister for Industrial Relations, Minister for Trade and Investment) (12:57): 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 2023–24 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*

**Tim PALLAS** (Werribee – Treasurer, Minister for Industrial Relations, Minister for Trade and Investment) (13:00): In accordance with section 28 of the Charter of Human Rights and Responsibilities Act 2006 I table a statement of compatibility for the Appropriation (2023–2024) Bill 2023.

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 (2023–2024) Bill 2023.

In my opinion, the Appropriation (2023–2024) Bill 2023, 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**

The Appropriation (2023–2024) Bill 2023 will provide appropriation authority for payments from the Consolidated Fund for the ordinary annual services of Government for the 2023–2024 financial year.

The amounts contained in Schedule 1 to the Appropriation (2023–2024) Bill 2023 provide for the ongoing operations of departments, including new output and asset investment funded through annual appropriation.

Schedule 2 of the Appropriation (2023–2024) Bill 2023 contains details concerning payments from the Advance to Treasurer in the 2021–2022 financial year.

### **Human Rights Issues**

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

The Appropriation (2023–2024) Bill 2023 does not raise any human rights issues.

#### **2. Consideration of reasonable limitations – section 7(2)**

As the Appropriation (2023–2024) Bill 2023 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 (2023–2024) Bill 2023 is compatible with the Charter Act because it does not raise any human rights issues.

**TIM PALLAS MP**  
**Treasurer**

### *Second reading*

**Tim PALLAS** (Werribee – Treasurer, Minister for Industrial Relations, Minister for Trade and Investment) (13:00): I move:

That this bill be now read a second time.

We are here today on the lands of the Wurundjeri people, and I wish to acknowledge them as traditional owners.

I would also like to pay my respects to elders past and present and Aboriginal elders of other communities who may be here today.

The Andrews Labor government is committed to truth, treaty and self-determination for Victoria's First Peoples. Just as we support a Victorian Voice, we support the establishment of a Voice to our nation's Parliament.

Speaker, today I deliver the Victorian budget 2023–24.

I do this amid a booming jobs market, a healthy economy and every sign that the state has bounced back.

Victorians are filling theatres, footy grounds, bars and restaurants.

We're meeting friends, family and colleagues for coffees, birthday parties and concerts.

The Melbourne Comedy Festival, the Formula One Grand Prix, the footy – all back, all better than ever.

Last year the Andrews Labor government put forward a positive plan to keep building the hospitals, schools, roads and rail that our state needs now and for the future.

It was a plan to do what matters.

Speaker, I'm proud to be part of a government that delivers on that plan.

In this budget we will:

- deliver on every commitment we made at the last election;
- build better hospitals;
- back our incredible health workers with thousands more nurses and paramedics;
- build new schools and expand free TAFE;
- train thousands of workers so the SEC can provide cheaper, cleaner energy;

- reform taxes, including changes to stamp duty;
- help Victorians beat the rising cost of living; and
- responsibly address our COVID debt within 10 years, by 2033.

Speaker, the COVID pandemic sent shockwaves through economies big and small right around the globe.

When it hit Victoria we acted quickly.

On the advice of the Reserve Bank of Australia, we borrowed billions of dollars to prevent economic scarring that would have left a generation out of work.

We used the state budget to protect household budgets and businesses.

We borrowed \$31.5 billion to pay for the tools to confront the emergency, such as hospital equipment, testing centres and business support.

Before COVID we had the sort of debt that you take on to build, to invest, to grow an economy for the future.

But with the pandemic emergency we borrowed to keep Victorians safe.

These two different reasons to borrow will be understood by any homeowner with both a mortgage and a credit card.

We're not going to cut back the mortgage that's funding our Big Build, but we are going to pay off our COVID credit card.

We're not the only government in this position.

But we are the only government with a plan to manage it, with our COVID debt repayment plan.

This will ensure we manage our finances responsibly so we can keep investing in the health, education, cost-of-living relief, transport and infrastructure that matters to Victorians.

Our plan is temporary, targeted and, above all, responsible.

It will raise an equivalent amount of funds, including interest, to address \$31.5 billion of COVID debt over the next 10 years.

It includes three elements.

Firstly, the government will do its bit, restoring the public service back towards pre-pandemic levels while not affecting frontline workers.

We'll make savings across government totalling \$2.1 billion over four years, with reduced corporate and back-office functions and less spending on consultants and labour hire.

Secondly, we know some did better out of the pandemic than others, and it's only fair that those that did well contribute to the repayment effort.

We'll introduce a temporary and targeted COVID debt levy with two components. It will end in 10 years, in 2033.

We'll ask large businesses with national payrolls above \$10 million a year – around 5 per cent of Victorian businesses – to pay additional payroll tax.

We'll also lower the land tax threshold and add a modest fixed charge, with larger landholdings also paying an extra 0.1 per cent of land value – that is, zero point one per cent. Family homes are not affected.

Business profits are up 24 per cent over the past three years compared with the previous three. Land values have increased 84 per cent in the past 10 years.

We've structured the repayment plan in a way that's reasonable and proportionate to those with an ability to pay.

All up, the COVID debt levy will raise \$8.6 billion in COVID debt offsets over four years. It will end in 2033.

Thirdly, we'll use the growing Victorian Future Fund to help manage the COVID debt over the next 10 years.

After this time the state's balance sheet will be focused on productive investments such as infrastructure which produce long-term economic benefits to the state.

Our plan will get Victoria's finances back on track by 2033 – to where they would have been without the pandemic.

Speaker, in the words of Ben Chifley, 'War costs do not end when fighting ceases.'

Just as we took difficult decisions to protect Victorians through the pandemic, we are now taking responsibility for its fiscal legacy and our COVID debt repayment plan. Kicking the can down the road is not an option.

Speaker, Victoria's economy is strong and growing, bigger now than before the pandemic.

It's forecast to grow further by a healthy 2.75 per cent this financial year, with an average of 2.4 per cent a year over the forward estimates.

This follows growth of 5.6 per cent last year, the highest growth of all states and territories – more than 50 per cent higher than the national growth rate.

The current jobs market is fantastic for workers, with more Victorians in employment than almost ever before.

Our 2020 target to create 400,000 new jobs by 2025 has already been smashed, with almost 440,000 jobs created in that time – two years ahead of our 2025 goal.

Speaker, 440,000 – these aren't just numbers on a page.

Every single one is a story of hope, of opportunity, of progress.

Unemployment is around the lowest it's been for nearly 50 years and almost 3 percentage points lower than the rate when we came to office.

This is no mistake. The Andrews Labor government's investment has delivered the jobs we needed in the short term, and they're supporting our growing state into the future too. The number of women in work is near a record high.

Business investment is forecast to grow solidly this year.

Speaker, I won't waste the Parliament's time demonstrating this city's merits over the second-biggest city in the country, that one north of the Murray.

Suffice to say, Victoria is now home to the best student city in Australia and the friendliest city in the world, and it also has the nation's most livable city.

Across the world countries are grappling with high inflation and rising interest rates, and Australia is no different.

Russia's invasion of Ukraine and global supply chain disruptions have created shortages and driven up inflation.

But Victoria faces these headwinds from a position of strength.

Speaker, every budget is a document that recognises the challenges and opportunities of the times.

We know most of the heavy lifting in employment comes from small and medium businesses.

And we're keen to help this sector and turbocharge job creation.

Stamp duty adds to the cost of buying commercial property, and we want to ease this burden for future buyers.

So in this budget we're committing to transitioning away from stamp duty in favour of an annual tax for commercial and industrial land.

This means businesses can invest where they want, when they want.

We estimate this reform will increase the size of the Victorian economy by up to \$50 billion in net present value terms.

In further tax reforms, we will abolish business insurance duty over a 10-year period, becoming the first state in Australia to do so.

And we will lift the payroll tax free threshold from \$700,000 to \$900,000 from 1 July 2024, with a further increase to \$1 million from 1 July 2025.

This will save money for more than 26,000 small businesses, including 6000 businesses that will stop paying payroll tax altogether – saving a small business with a \$1 million payroll \$14,550 per year.

These changes will save small businesses with payroll of less than \$3.4 million in 2024–25, and \$3.6 million from 2025–26, \$580 million in just the first three years.

Our economic growth package also progressively abolishes business insurance duty from 2024–25, saving businesses more than \$275 million in the first three years alone. Victoria will be the first state to remove this handbrake on business resilience, investment and growth.

Speaker, when comparing revenue between states, it's important to consider revenue from three key sources: royalties such as mining, Commonwealth grants and state taxation.

Victoria raises very little mining revenue, and our Commonwealth grants income has been consistently below our population share.

Nevertheless, I'm proud to say that, according to Australian Bureau of Statistics data for 2021–22, total revenue per capita was lower in Victoria than any other state.

After adjusting for measures in this budget, Victoria will still be lower than New South Wales and all other states, bar one.

With this budget, we've now cut or reduced taxes and charges 64 times since 2014.

Speaker, we know the cost of living is tough and it's holding some families back, so we're helping where we can.

For too long parents have sat around kitchen tables doing complicated sums on whether it's really worth both going back to work after starting a family.

And that's if they can even find a childcare place.

This has hurt family budgets, and it's hurt our state's bottom line too.

It's taken up to 26,000 women completely out of our workforce and cost our economy billions of dollars a year in lost earnings alone.

We won't let this keep happening.

We're delivering an ambitious overhaul of early childhood education and care to help parents get back to work. We're giving more pre-schoolers access to early childhood education, along with free three- and four-year-old kinder right across the state.

Our free kinder will spread opportunity equally for kids, and it will save money for families – up to \$2500 this year alone.

Early education has positive impacts on the rest of a child's life.

To harness this, we're building 50 government-owned and run early learning centres across Victoria to serve communities with the greatest need.

In other initiatives to ease cost of living, we're bringing in a fourth-round power saving bonus, with \$250 to help households pay their bills.

We're helping our service men and women with cost of living by introducing the Victorian Veterans Card.

This will give vets discounts on vehicle rego and free fishing and boating licences.

And we're giving free car rego to our hardworking apprentices who rely on their vehicles for work, saving them up to \$865 a year.

Speaker, we know exactly how compassionate and capable our health service workers are.

But these dedicated workers need more than our gratitude. They need our support.

Last year we launched our pandemic repair plan for more staff, better hospitals and first-class care.

This budget provides a further \$4.9 billion to help our health system emerge strongly from the pandemic.

This brings our total additional health investment to more than \$54 billion since coming into government in 2014.

There's a saying, 'If you save one life, you're a hero. If you save a hundred lives, you're a nurse.'

We're funding extra nurses for our hospitals, as well as making it free to study nursing, and we're strengthening nurse-to-patient ratios.

We're doing design work to build and upgrade several major hospitals, including the Northern Hospital and West Gippsland Hospital.

We're also delivering eight powerful PET scanners to health services across the state, including to Ballarat Base Hospital and the Werribee Mercy.

Speaker, women and girls everywhere are still not having their health issues taken seriously, which means they wait too long for treatment.

Their health concerns are often ignored, misdiagnosed or diagnosed late.

We'll give women's health the funding it deserves, with \$63 million for 20 new women's health clinics, a dedicated Aboriginal-led women's health clinic and mobile clinics.

And we'll help more Victorian families access public fertility care, with \$50 million to fund up to 3375 treatment cycles per year.

We'll fund thousands of extra laparoscopies to help treat endometriosis, which affects one in nine girls and women. These investments are part of our plan to transform women's health care, ensuring Victorian women can access the support and treatment they need and deserve.

Speaker, mental health is one of the greatest challenges facing Victoria right now.



This budget continues our important work of rebuilding the state's mental health system from the ground up.

We're committing \$776 million to dedicated mental health services and better health in the workplace.

We're implementing every recommendation from the Royal Commission into Victoria's Mental Health System, as we promised.

This will take a decade or more.

The royal commission found Victorians needed more mental health support closer to home, so we are delivering 50 new mental health and wellbeing locals across the state.

Twenty-seven of these services are already underway. This budget delivers three more and plans for a further 20.

Local services help patients, but they also save us money.

Each ongoing service is expected to deliver over \$70 million in benefits throughout the next decade.

Across the past four budgets, including this one, we've invested more than \$6 billion into a kinder and smarter mental health system, one that supports all Victorians.

Speaker, education changes lives. It opens doors. It grants a passport to the future.

This government believes there is no better investment we can make from kindergarten to school, through to TAFE and uni.

That's why in this budget we're building more kindergartens, and it's why we made kinder free for Victorian children.

Speaker, Victorian families deserve great schools for their kids.

This budget provides \$2.1 billion to build new schools and maintain and upgrade existing ones.

This brings our total additional investment to nearly \$15 billion over the past nine years.

Parents of children with disability need our support, and one of the greatest challenges is finding before- and after-school care for their kids.

To help them, we're expanding the outside school hours care program to 30 specialist schools as part of a \$235 million package to support these students and their families.

Speaker, in this state we have skill shortages in almost every industry.

That's why we've expanded eligibility for training subsidies, including for our popular free TAFE program.

That means more Victorians can study for in-demand jobs like health care, mental health, construction, early childhood and hospitality.

Our TAFEs, once padlocked shut, are now open and filled with students, many of them studying for free.

Before this year, accessing a subsidised TAFE course – including free TAFE – was harder for anyone with a higher education qualification.

But now we've thrown open the gates for these people, because we need more Victorians who are willing to build new skills.

We'll also change the once-in-a-lifetime limit to free TAFE so students can take multiple courses in priority training pathways.

This means, for example, that if you want to work in community services, you can study free at cert IV and diploma level.

We'll also build and upgrade TAFE campuses across the state so students can keep studying in inspiring and built-for-purpose facilities.

Speaker, we've built so many of the roads, rail, trams and trains our state needs.

Since 2014 the Andrews Labor government has been getting on with the Big Build: the Metro Tunnel, the level crossing removals, the Suburban Rail Loop, the West Gate Tunnel and the North East Link.

These projects are transforming the way we travel, and they're creating rewarding career paths for apprentices and trainees, who in turn supercharge the state's growth.

This budget provides another \$7.3 billion to bring Victorians a world-class transport network.

We're getting on with the job of removing 110 level crossings by 2030 – 68, or should I now say 70, have already been taken away. And Speaker, in late-breaking news of course the Minister for Transport and Infrastructure announced just yesterday that another two are gone, so that 68 has to move up to 70.

We're going to give Melbourne's western suburbs the high-quality transport network they need.

We're increasing train capacity by up to 50 per cent on the Melton line, with a \$650 million upgrade.

We're making the Cranbourne, Pakenham, Frankston, Lilydale, Sunbury and, Speaker, might I say, Werribee lines level crossing free by 2030.

Speaker, 30 years ago our energy assets were sold outright, and these assets were run into the ground.

That privatisation failed us.

The Andrews Labor government will bring back the SEC and drive down power bills.

The SEC will increase renewable energy, reinvesting profits into Victoria rather than offshore.

In this budget we'll invest in the training we need for this workforce with a new SEC centre of training excellence.

And we'll fund six new tech schools across the state to improve students' hands-on learning in science and tech to support the jobs of the future.

That's on top of 10 tech schools we've already built since winning government in 2014.

The SEC will deliver Victoria's nation-leading renewable energy targets – reaching 95 per cent renewable energy by 2035 and net zero by 2045.

This will drive the creation of 59,000 jobs and increase gross state product by about \$9.5 billion.

Speaker, in this budget we're investing in Victoria's future.

This budget invests a further \$12 million to continue supporting our growing mRNA industry in Victoria.

It will capitalise on our world-leading community of medical researchers, helping them to save lives with treatments that can be manufactured and sold from Victoria.

And this budget continues to back Victoria's businesses to innovate and to grow. We're establishing a new Industry R&D Infrastructure Fund and a Manufacturing and Industry Sovereignty Fund, creating partnerships to help businesses grow.

We're also boosting the Alice Anderson Fund – dedicating capital to supporting startups led by Victorian women.

And we're helping businesses go global through the Boosting Victorian Exports program so that they can reach international markets.

Speaker, as this nation heads towards a referendum, there has never been a better time to reflect on how we can better respect the aspirations of First Peoples.

That is, a commitment to Aboriginal self-determination for Aboriginal people, with action on voice, treaty and truth.

At close to half a billion dollars, this budget is the largest whole-of-government Aboriginal affairs investment on record, both for the Andrews Labor government and in our state's history.

This includes funding for community controlled organisations because we know the best solutions are community led.

We will also provide \$82 million for the First Peoples' Assembly of Victoria to enter historic treaty negotiations.

This investment is a statement of the values of this government, one that has shown the nation what it means to truly listen to Aboriginal people.

This is the next step as we walk together to a better future, because a fairer Victoria starts with a better future for our First Peoples.

Speaker, regional Victoria is growing, with thousands of new residents generating record jobs.

When this government first came to office the regional unemployment rate sat at 6.6 per cent. It's now almost 3 whole percentage points lower.

We've supported regional business by cutting payroll tax rates for regional employers to just one-quarter of the metropolitan rate.

This budget invests over \$5 billion in regional Victoria to support its success and to tackle rising costs.

We're installing neighbourhood batteries in regional Victoria to help push down power bills.

We're also upgrading schools around our state and investing in regional health care.

We've slashed the cost of train travel across the state, bringing regional fares into line with metro fares.

Because a trip from Ballarat to central Melbourne is just as important as a trip from Hawthorn.

This budget commits to investing in another 23 new Victorian-made trains for our regional network.

From Morwell to Mallacoota to Murrayville, from Wangaratta to Warrnambool, we're continuing investments across our great state.

Speaker, in 2019 we moved to secure a long-term and sustainable future for Victoria's forestry industry and for the Victorian workers who rely on it.

We put forward a 30-year plan to support the sector as it transitioned, backing long-term, sustainable jobs and giving local workers confidence about their future.

Since then native forestry has been hit with increasingly severe bushfires, prolonged legal action and court decisions.

All of that has drastically cut the timber supply we can actually use.

Hundreds of workers across Victoria haven't been able to work a day in months.

It's not good enough for us to just cross our fingers and hope for the best. We need a plan to support workers and support jobs.

That's why we're stepping up to give these workers – and their communities, businesses and partners along the supply chain – the certainty they deserve.

Native timber harvesting in state forests will end next year.

But work has already started on a proper, managed transition.

We'll match some workers and their skills to jobs right across land management and critical forest bushfire response.

We'll retrain others to help them get jobs in growing regional industries like renewable energy or construction.

And most importantly, we'll back workers and their families with the financial and mental health support that they need throughout this transition.

Just as we've always done, we're being upfront with the industry and putting in place a plan to support every worker and every business.

Because we'll never leave them to go it alone.

Speaker, when we have the great honour of sitting on these benches, it is all too easy for us to get caught up in the headlines.

It is important to remember why we're here. Today, I would like to quote care leaver David:

When I was 15, I was homeless and living in Residential Care.

My leaving care plan didn't really work out. I hadn't turned 18 yet and I'd stayed in nine hotels over six months.

In the end, I got so sick of moving hotels, I couldn't go to school anymore.

But then I linked with Compass and things changed.

When David was linked with Compass, a wraparound program for people leaving care, the connection was made that radically changed his path – a path towards stable housing and a sturdier future.

We know this program works for people like David, and for so many others, to have the best possible shot at life.

And so, in this budget, we have expanded this program by investing \$33 million to help young people exiting residential care into housing and towards independence.

Speaker, we know that a stitch in time saves nine, and we also know that early action can save a lot of money and heartache down the track.

Our world-first early intervention investment framework embeds actions that offer life-changing results.

It's smart policy that saves money and helps people before they reach crisis.

This year we'll invest more than \$675 million, our largest package on record, which will return \$1 billion worth of benefits over the next decade.

Year by year our cutting-edge early intervention investment framework is growing, saving money for Victorians, but most importantly, changing and saving lives.

Speaker, in late 2020 we set a four-step fiscal strategy to restore the state's finances after the pandemic.

**Step one:** create jobs, reduce unemployment and restore economic growth

Almost 440,000 Victorians have secured a job since September 2020 – 109,000 more than in New South Wales.

**Step two:** return to an operating cash surplus

We continue to deliver on this step in 2022–23 with a \$2.9 billion operating cash surplus.

**Step three:** return to operating surpluses

Our operating result is expected to be in surplus by \$1.2 billion in 2026–27, representing an improvement of \$15 billion since 2021–22.

**Step four:** stabilise debt levels

Our COVID debt repayment plan provides initiatives and a strategy to stabilise our debt so we can look towards the future.

As a state we're very close to stabilising our debt profile, but we're not there yet.

I am pleased to say that this step is within reach.

It's the reason why this budget is demonstrably pursuing an economic growth strategy, because a growing economy, with stabilised debt, will bring down the relative level of debt we must manage.

Put another way, once debt is stabilised, it shrinks relative to the size of a growing economy.

To those who criticise our debt, I would say it is easy to forget.

It's easy to forget the arrival of the pandemic and the grim possibilities ahead if we failed to act effectively.

We faced stark images from places like Italy and New York of hospitals and morgues tragically overwhelmed.

We feared an economy in ruins, with our prosperity evaporating.

We feared a generation with no jobs and no hope, like we saw after the First World War.

Through all our fears, we never doubted the resolve of the Victorian people. There was no panic.

But these were real dangers. That's why the International Monetary Fund recommended governments borrow, to protect their populations.

Thanks to Victoria's robust economic strength we were able to do this.

We did this to support our health system, to protect our jobs, to help households and to save the things that matter most to us all.

We used these funds to build a bridge over that catastrophe to the other side.

And here now, on the other side, we have high vaccination rates, record jobs and an economy that once again is flourishing.

We have packed events, we have busy calendars, we are working in record numbers and we are planning for the future with full confidence.

We, as Victorians, were greater than the sum of our fears, because hope defeats fear every time.

Now we're ready to capitalise on our booming economy and repay the COVID borrowings that made our success possible.

Our responsible COVID debt repayment plan will put Victoria on a sustainable path to grasp the opportunities ahead.

We'll do this for our young people, who've made enough sacrifices through recent years.

They'll inherit a thriving economy – a growing economy – in which they can focus on the future rather than the past.

And they will inherit a state with world-class health, education and transport systems.

This is a budget that responds to our times – growing the jobs of the future and helping the Victorians that need a hand.

This is a budget that strikes the right balance – delivering our promises while doing what matters.

This is the budget we need for the future – for a state that is stronger, fairer and more compassionate than ever.

This is our promise: we won't let you down.

Speaker, I commend the bill to the house.

**Brad ROWSWELL** (Sandringham) (13:35): I move:

That the debate be adjourned.

**Motion agreed to and debate adjourned.**

**Ordered that debate be adjourned until tomorrow. Debate adjourned until Wednesday 24 May.**

### **Appropriation (Parliament 2023–2024) Bill 2023**

#### *Appropriation*

**The SPEAKER** (13:36): 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 2023–24 and for other purposes, and hereby transmits to the Legislative Assembly estimates of the expenditure requiring annual appropriation in the financial year 2023–24.

**Estimates tabled.**

#### *Introduction and first reading*

**Mary-Anne THOMAS** (Macedon – Leader of the House, Minister for Health, Minister for Health Infrastructure, Minister for Medical Research) (13:37): 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 2023–24 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*

**Mary-Anne THOMAS** (Macedon – Leader of the House, Minister for Health, Minister for Health Infrastructure, Minister for Medical Research) (13:38): In accordance with the Charter of Human Rights and Responsibilities Act 2006 I table a statement of compatibility in relation to the Appropriation (Parliament 2023–2024) Bill 2023.

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 2023–2024) Bill 2023.

In my opinion, the Appropriation (Parliament 2023–2024) Bill 2023, 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**

The purpose of the Appropriation (Parliament 2023–2024) Bill 2023 is to provide appropriation authority for payments from the Consolidated Fund to the Parliament in respect of the 2023–2024 financial year.

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

The Appropriation (Parliament 2023–2024) Bill 2023 does not raise any human rights issues.

**2. Consideration of reasonable limitations – section 7(2)**

As the Appropriation (Parliament 2023–2024) Bill 2023 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 2023–2024) Bill 2023 is compatible with the Charter Act because it does not raise any human rights issues.

**TIM PALLAS MP**

**Treasurer**

*Second reading*

**Mary-Anne THOMAS** (Macedon – Leader of the House, Minister for Health, Minister for Health Infrastructure, Minister for Medical Research) (13:38): 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 2023–2024) Bill 2023 provides appropriation authority for payments from the Consolidated Fund to the Parliament in respect of the 2023/2024 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 2022–2023) Act 2022* have been estimated and included in the Budget Papers. Before 30 June 2023, the actual unapplied appropriation will be finalised and the 2023/2024 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 2023–2024) Bill 2023 are made to the departments of the Parliament.

The total appropriation authority sought in this Appropriation (Parliament 2023–2024) Bill 2023 is \$277 752 000 (clause 3) for Parliament in respect of the 2023/2024 financial year.

I commend the Bill to the House.

**Brad ROWSWELL** (Sandringham) (13:38): I move:

That the debate be adjourned.

**Motion agreed to and debate adjourned.**

**Ordered that debate be adjourned until tomorrow. Debate adjourned until Wednesday 24 May.**

**Appropriation (2023–2024) Bill 2023****Appropriation (Parliament 2023–2024) Bill 2023***Concurrent debate*

**Mary-Anne THOMAS** (Macedon – Leader of the House, Minister for Health, Minister for Health Infrastructure, Minister for Medical Research) (13:39): I move, by leave:

That this house authorises and requires the Speaker to permit the second reading and subsequent stages of the Appropriation (2023–2024) Bill 2023 and the Appropriation (Parliament 2023–2024) Bill 2023 to be moved and debated concurrently.

**Motion agreed to.**

*Business of the house*

**Adjournment**

**Mary-Anne THOMAS** (Macedon – Leader of the House, Minister for Health, Minister for Health Infrastructure, Minister for Medical Research) (13:40): I move:

That the house, at its rising, adjourns until 30 May 2023.

**Motion agreed to.**

**Program**

**Mary-Anne THOMAS** (Macedon – Leader of the House, Minister for Health, Minister for Health Infrastructure, Minister for Medical Research) (13:40): I move:

That, under standing order 94(2), the order of the day, government business, relating to the following bill be considered and completed by 7 pm on 23 May 2023:

Energy Legislation Amendment (Electricity Outage Emergency Response and Other Matters) Bill 2023.

We gather today for a sitting of one day, an opportunity for the Treasurer to deliver the budget. I know that many members of the house will welcome the opportunity to get in touch with their community to let them know about the delivery of each and every one of our election commitments. But we have business that we must transact in the house today, and that is of course the energy legislation amendment bill. This bill builds on the important work of the government in helping our emergency services' and electricity distribution businesses' efforts following energy emergencies and associated prolonged power outages. I am sure that there are members on this side of the house who are still keen to speak on this bill, and we look forward to it being guillotined later today, so now is the chance to get up on your feet. We hear from those on the other side about how committed they are to wanting to speak on bills, but we do not always see it in action, so again I encourage members of the opposition to take the many opportunities that are afforded to them in this place to get up and speak on legislation. Noting what a significant day it is and that we will be convening again next week for two days with another government business program, I propose that it is in all of our interests, perhaps, to have a short government business program debate today. So I commend the program to the house.

**James NEWBURY** (Brighton) (13:42): The coalition will be opposing the government business program. The minister spoke to the budget that was just delivered and the opportunity for members to go to their community and talk about the budget, and that is certainly the case – that members will be doing that. I know that in line with the minister's comments about communicating about the budget, one of the issues I will be talking about is the secret hit list on non-government schools that the Treasurer did not refer to in his speech. The government is proposing to introduce a hit list on non-government schools – to remove their payroll tax exemptions.

**Mary-Anne Thomas:** On a point of order, Speaker, as we know, the government business program debate is a narrow procedural debate. The member on his feet is looking to give his address-in-reply, which is completely inappropriate at this time given that we have not yet heard from the Shadow Treasurer. So I would ask that you call the member back to debating –

**James NEWBURY:** On the point of order, Speaker, the minister, in addressing the government business program, spoke to the budget speech and did have some latitude in the way that she spoke to the issue. I would say that it is entirely within order, considering the matter that was raised, for me to refer to the budget speech and the fact that the schools hit list is not in the budget speech.

**The SPEAKER:** Order! On the point of order, this is a narrow procedural debate on the government business program. I ask members to stay within the bounds of the government business program and not stray into debating bills before the house.



**James NEWBURY:** Another point that the coalition has been raised repeatedly over recent weeks is the fact that the government has had difficulty in managing the Parliament and managing the program. The government have not been able to fill their agenda, and therefore the coalition has raised repeated concerns that not only is there a slowing of infrastructure in the state but also there is a slowing in the Parliament doing the work that it should be doing and considering proposed legislation, and that the Parliament has been filling its time with motions.

**Mary-Anne Thomas** interjected.

**James NEWBURY:** As the minister interjected and spoke to in her contribution to the government business program, the Parliament may consider a motion later this afternoon. We know that in the last sitting week, the government suggested that we would be dealing with two motions during the week and instead we dealt with four. Noting that the minister has confirmed that we will be debating potentially a motion later today, I would note that one of the motions that could be considered is the education motion. I know that I will certainly be looking forward to an opportunity to raise the 54 election commitments to schools that have not been included in the budget speech. That is an opportunity I think we will all share – the school funding that was promised in the election that has not been delivered, with 54 schools left out.

The coalition is deeply concerned that the Parliament and the government's management of the Parliament is grinding to a halt in the same way that infrastructure is grinding to a halt. The coalition is concerned that the government does need help in managing the Parliament, and I can put on record the growing relationship between the Leader of the House and me in terms of working through the program and working through how the house operates and put on record my regard for the Leader of the House. But I know that the Leader of the House at the end of the day is unfortunately only able to put through the Parliament what the ministers complete, and we know that the ministers are not completing enough work and so they do not have enough to put through this chamber. That is an issue that has been raised repeatedly. I think it is now becoming quite obvious to Victoria at large that the government is having problems with managing the Parliament, and on that basis and the fact that we are dealing with a bill that was only given a six-day layover, the coalition will be opposing the government business program.

**Will FOWLES (Ringwood) (13:47):** Well, that was laughable. It was laughable for a number of reasons, not least being that the Manager of Opposition Business seeks to draw into question the management capabilities of those sitting on this side of the chamber. I do not know if anyone has caught a newspaper in recent times or maybe logged onto the interwebs. Have we caught any stories recently about the toings and froings in the Liberal Party? It is almost like disorganisation is sort of a mantra in the joint, and –

**James Newbury:** On a point of order, Deputy Speaker, I certainly cannot call people out for straying a little bit, but that was straying a lot from the motion before the house, and I would ask you to bring the member back to the question.

**The DEPUTY SPEAKER:** Thank you, member. The Speaker did implore us all to stick to the government business program, and I bring the member back to it.

**Will FOWLES:** Thank you, Deputy Speaker. I am more than happy to talk about the government business program because it is fair to say I think that the government is getting on with business, not just with the delivery of the budget for the financial year ending 30 June 2024, as has been foreshadowed by both contributors already on this narrow procedural motion, but also in relation to the bill, which we will be debating later today. Now, the contents of that bill I do not seek to anticipate, of course, but what I would say is that the opposition worked themselves into a high state of froth about the time between the introduction of this bill and the debating of the bill when we had this discussion last week, and I hope that they have used that time to prepare a bunch of scintillating speeches on it. I fully anticipate that all 20-odd Liberal members and eight or nine National members

will be getting up and giving fulsome contributions about this bill, a bill they were so concerned about having the time on and so concerned about needing to debate at length. I just hope that they have managed to gather up the various strands of their arguments about this and are going to put to us over the course of the day some scintillating speeches on the subject matter at hand.

It remains the case that as much as the Manager of Opposition Business might seek to categorise the timing of bills in this place as being a function of ministers working, not working or whatever, it is just dross. It is nonsense. The proof is in the pudding – do not worry about it – because when the Manager of Opposition Business has a go about infrastructure grinding to a halt, I do not think he has taken a look at the Dublin Road level crossing in Ringwood East or the Bedford Road level crossing in Ringwood or the level crossing removals underway in Pakenham or the level crossing removals underway in various other parts of the state –

**James Newbury:** On a point of order, Deputy Speaker, as much as it pains me to draw attention to the fact that the member is now showing up his own minister in his contribution, I would ask you to bring the member back to the question.

**The DEPUTY SPEAKER:** Order! Points of order are not an opportunity for debate. The member to continue on the government business program.

**Will FOWLES:** or the new station in Boronia or any number of infrastructure investments occurring right across the state –

**The DEPUTY SPEAKER:** Order! Back to the government business program, please, member for Ringwood.

**Will FOWLES:** I have only referred in that way, Deputy Speaker – just by way of explanation; I am not calling into question your ruling – because the Manager of Opposition Business had a go at describing the government's infrastructure program as stalling, and I am rebutting him on that point. Nonetheless, this is a government business program that reflects the nature of this week – the short week – that reflects the very busy legislative agenda of the government, that reflects the very busy infrastructure program of the government and that reflects the very busy work of all members on this side of the chamber out there now talking about the very important initiatives that are contained in this budget. As much as those opposite might not like the fact that they are not in a position to write a budget, they do have to accept the lived reality that we are cracking on and getting it done and doing what matters for Victorians.

**Jade BENHAM (Mildura) (13:52):** The opposition will be opposing the government business program, as the member for Brighton pointed out – a government business program that has one amendment bill and a number of motions to debate. I am sure there will be some scintillating debate, particularly from my colleagues in the Nationals, who have been jumping over one another even though we were only given six days to properly consult on the Energy Legislation Amendment (Electricity Outage Emergency Response and Other Matters) Bill 2023.

This is a narrow procedural debate, so I will try to keep things narrow. Not only – and we have mentioned this on a number of occasions – are we disappointed that we do not get to go into the consideration-in-detail stage on bills, but with six days to properly consult on the one bill that is on the government business program, there is concern with that. Another couple of motions are possibly up for debate later on – obviously there is the Education State motion and the nuclear motion that was raised last week. I am sure we will have plenty of scintillating debate on that motion, one that I and a couple of other National Party colleagues are looking forward to debating.

When we talk about things slowing down, with only one amendment bill to debate, things are slowing down. You can make data sing any way you want, but the practicality on the ground is – when you start to dissect the budget that we have just received – things are slowing down. We are running out of money. We are broke. Infrastructure is absolutely grinding to a halt, because –

**Mary-Anne Thomas:** On a point of order, Deputy Speaker, the member for Mildura is doing what her colleague the member for Brighton did, straying into the budget debate, and I might say we have not yet heard from the opposition spokesperson for the Treasury, who did not take the opportunity, like predecessors have, to get straight up on the budget.

**The DEPUTY SPEAKER:** Order! We are trying to keep it to a narrow debate on the government business program. Please come back.

**Jade BENHAM:** I will try and narrow the debate on this bill. We will no doubt be able to debate how things are slowing down in a number of aspects during the course of today's business program. But I will keep this brief because it is such a brief business program that the government has presented today, and for that reason the opposition are opposed.

**Darren CHEESEMEN** (South Barwon) (13:55): It is with some pleasure that I rise this afternoon to make my contribution to the government business program. I always think the budget day, which is of course an annual event here in this Parliament, provides an opportunity for the government of the day to set forward a very important document for the running of this state. In the context of this chamber it is really the pre-eminent day of the Victorian Parliament, which happens in or around May of every year. I must say I listened very intently to the Treasurer's contribution – a significant part of the budget day – and what I noticed and paid particular attention to was whether the Leader of the Opposition would take the opportunity to stand on his feet, once the Treasurer had completed his contribution, to make his contribution to this debate.

**James Newbury:** On a point of order, Deputy Speaker, this is really scraping the bottom of the barrel for the member, and that is saying something. I would ask you to bring the member back to this tight procedural question. This is not observation time.

**The DEPUTY SPEAKER:** The member to resume, on the government business program.

**Darren CHEESEMEN:** On the government business program, as I said, the Treasurer rose to his feet earlier today to make his contribution on the budget, and I wondered whether the opposition leader would have the courage to stand on his feet –

**James Newbury:** On a point of order, Deputy Speaker, the member is now defying your ruling. It is disappointing. It is true to character, by the way. I would ask you to bring the member back to the question.

**The DEPUTY SPEAKER:** Member for South Barwon, I think you pretty much repeated exactly what you said before. It would be appreciated if you did not do that again and came back to the government business program in front of the house.

**Darren CHEESEMEN:** Terrific. Thank you, Deputy Speaker. I will of course move on. This is a significant day, and we have continued through the course of the sitting weeks early on in this parliamentary calendar to deliver through the government business program all of the reform that we took to the people of Victoria last year. Indeed in delivering that, the government increased its electoral majority at the last state election, and what that effectively means is that the government continues to have the mandate of the Victorian people to set the government business program.

The point that I made the last time that I contributed to a debate on the government business program – and I again take the opportunity to reinforce it – is that if you are given that great gift of government by the Victorian people, you get the opportunity as a consequence of that to set out the legislative program of this chamber. Again we come to this chamber in this sitting week with some very important work that I look forward to contributing to and that I know all of my colleagues look forward to contributing to. Every single week that we come to this chamber with our government business program we hear the opposition squawking on that they never have the opportunity –

**James Newbury:** On a point of order, Deputy Speaker, for the third time I ask you to bring the member back to the question. I am not sure that the member can reflect on the character of any other member in this place.

**The DEPUTY SPEAKER:** Order! The member had been speaking on the government business program and strayed slightly towards the end.

**Darren CHEESEMAM:** They continue to squawk on. We continue to get on with it.

**Roma BRITNELL** (South-West Coast) (14:00): I will stay on the topic of opposing the government business program, because there is so much to say on such a topic – because it continually occurs in this place that the debate that should be taking place and the time and the respect to have the Parliament operate the way it should are just being ridden roughshod over by this government. Now, just for those who do not understand, normally there is a two-week process where you introduce a bill, and before debate occurs, you have a two-week time frame when you go out to your community, because this is a place of the people, the people's house, and the people want to know what we do in here. That is called consultation, and that process has been a tradition for decades and decades – until we see this very arrogant government, who cannot get themselves organised and run out of things to do and so introduce bills without the process being respected and give no time for that consultation, like we saw with the last bill that was introduced, with only six days allowed to consult with our community.

Some of you may not find electricity very exciting. Some of you may think this is not an important bill. But in my community electricity is a very important discussion because of the increased costs, the lack of security and the fear people have – people who run dairy farms or who have businesses like the abattoirs, the dairy processing factories or the aluminium plant, who rely heavily on secure, reliable, affordable power. And what we saw and what we are debating in this Parliament this week is a bill that talks about the way the outages are managed, because that is now, under this government, the subject we have to address.

As I say, the government may not think consultation is important, and that is why they introduce bills and do not allow a respectful amount of time for us to take these pieces of legislation to the community who will be affected by them so that the community can give the feedback – because I guarantee you, the 88 of us in here are not experts on every subject, but our communities certainly have the information, the expertise and the knowledge for us to be hearing from them so we can have informed debate and not have unintended consequences. That is why the process of democracy exists. And why is it that we have a government that continually rides roughshod over democracy? It is because they have become arrogant. They have been in for so long that they do not think they need to talk to anyone, they do not think consultation is an important part of the process anymore. Well, what are we seeing? We are seeing chaos, we are seeing nothing from this government other than running the state into a significant debt. In fact the word 'broke' is coming up quite a lot lately, and we have not seen that since the Cain–Kirner years, but what we are seeing right now is a much bigger debt, a much bigger hole, than we saw then, so my goodness we are in trouble.

**Michaela Settle:** On a point of order, Deputy Speaker, we seem to be straying a long way from government business.

**The DEPUTY SPEAKER:** The member to continue on the government business program.

**Roma BRITNELL:** Thank you. I will. That leads me to the fact that we have been asking in this Parliament for a very long time now for respect of the process so we can do the role we are asked to do, and that is represent our communities. We asked in the last Parliament, so many times, to go into consideration in detail so that we could actually debate the bills and have the minister at the table go through clause by clause so we could get a better understanding of the unintended consequences that we know will happen if we do not have a proper debate, but oh no. How many times did that request get refused? In the whole four years I think we did that once or maybe twice; it could have been twice.

That means this government think they have got it all right. But that is not true either, because we saw many times where they had to amend their own bills because they had not got them right.

So a bill that comes into this place with six days to debate it shows pure arrogance, and that is from a government who will not listen to a community – like they have not listened to my community about how desperately in need we are of roads funding. And what have we seen in this budget? Road cuts. I cannot believe they have cut the roads funding again.

**Michaela Settle:** On a point of order, Deputy Speaker – sorry; what has this got to do with the government business program?

**The DEPUTY SPEAKER:** Thank you, member. Back to the government business program. The Speaker has previously ruled on pre-debating.

**Roma BRITNELL:** Thank you. In the last 9 seconds, I will leave it with the fact of the matter that this government has ruined the state of Victoria – we are broke.

#### **Assembly divided on motion:**

*Ayes (53):* Juliana Addison, Jacinta Allan, Daniel Andrews, Colin Brooks, Josh Bull, Anthony Carbines, Ben Carroll, Darren Cheeseman, Anthony Cianflone, Sarah Connolly, Chris Couzens, Jordan Crugnale, Lily D'Ambrosio, Daniela De Martino, Steve Dimopoulos, Paul Edbrooke, Will Fowles, Matt Fregon, Ella George, Luba Grigorovitch, Bronwyn Halfpenny, Paul Hamer, Martha Haylett, Mathew Hilakari, Melissa Horne, Natalie Hutchins, Lauren Kathage, Sonya Kilkenny, Nathan Lambert, Gary Maas, Alison Marchant, Kathleen Matthews-Ward, Steve McGhie, Paul Mercurio, John Mullahy, Danny Pearson, Pauline Richards, Tim Richardson, Michaela Settle, Ros Spence, Nick Staikos, Natalie Suleyman, Meng Heang Tak, Jackson Taylor, Nina Taylor, Kat Theophanous, Mary-Anne Thomas, Emma Vulin, Iwan Walters, Vicki Ward, Dylan Wight, Gabrielle Williams, Belinda Wilson

*Noes (27):* Brad Battin, Jade Benham, Roma Britnell, Tim Bull, Martin Cameron, Annabelle Cleeland, Chris Crewther, Wayne Farnham, Sam Groth, Matthew Guy, David Hodgett, Emma Kealy, Tim McCurdy, Cindy McLeish, James Newbury, Danny O'Brien, Michael O'Brien, Kim O'Keeffe, John Pesutto, Richard Riordan, Brad Rowswell, Ryan Smith, David Southwick, Bill Tilley, Peter Walsh, Kim Wells, Jess Wilson

**Motion agreed to.**

#### *Members statements*

##### **You Yangs and Serendip Sanctuary**

**Ella GEORGE (Lara) (14:11):** The Lara electorate is home to some of the most beautiful places our great state has to offer, and the You Yangs and Serendip Sanctuary are the embodiment of that. These parks are visited by more than 470,000 people each year to enjoy bushwalking, hiking and mountain bike riding and to experience the great outdoors, and they are very special places for residents in the electorate of Lara and the wider Geelong community. Today's state budget will deliver \$11 million in funding to improve these amazing assets and the experience to be had when visiting them. This funding will include improving walking and bike-riding tracks; replacing some outdated core visitor facilities, such as picnic areas, shelters and toilets; and enhancing park entrances and creating a better sense of arrival. Importantly, this funding will enhance opportunities for connection to country and engagement with the Wadawurrung people, the traditional owners of this country. Today's state budget and the \$11 million investment recognise the significance of these places, whether it is for local families who enjoy a walk around the You Yangs; children experiencing nature at Serendip Sanctuary; our traditional owners, for whom this area means so much and is so important; or the tourists who visit our beautiful region. I am so pleased that this funding has been confirmed, and I cannot wait to see these magnificent places reach their full potential.

**Maria Karvouni**

**John PESUTTO** (Hawthorn – Leader of the Opposition) (14:12): Late last year the principal of Auburn High School Maria Karvouni tragically passed away from a longstanding illness. Maria was an outstanding educator and leader in her field, and I often only half-joke that she was the sort of educational trailblazer that movies are made about. She took over Auburn High School in 2014 and completely turned the school around. She was someone who attracted enormous warmth and support and love from her community, including from me. She was just a terrific advocate for her school and the students who passed through her school.

I certainly want to take this opportunity today to pay tribute to Maria for her service to our community. Maria was a much-loved and valued principal, and she was instrumental in establishing a pioneer French program at Auburn High School, where French was taught in accordance with the French national curriculum. She was described as one of the pillars of Victoria's French education. I often recall visiting the school, not only as the member for Hawthorn between 2014 and 2018 but in my time as a candidate, and seeing how frequently students won international awards in French learning. Again, Maria Karvouni was an indomitable, resilient and inspirational individual. I know it took a lot for the school and its community to get past this, but all of us are committed to upholding Maria's terrific legacy of education in our state.

**Sebastopol Primary School**

**Juliana ADDISON** (Wendouree) (14:14): Happy 150th to Sebastopol Primary School. Congratulations to everyone involved in organising events over the weekend, celebrating 150 years of public education in Sebastopol. It was a pleasure to join with principal Michelle Wilson, current teachers, students, families and special guests, including past pupils and parents and former staff members, for a very special school assembly on Friday. The school choir sang beautifully, the senior students shared their plans for a time capsule to be buried later this year to mark the anniversary, and of course there were blue and gold cupcakes to be enjoyed by all. It was incredibly special to have former principals John Stuchbery and Donna Bishop in attendance as well as the oldest living past pupil, William Wills, better known as 'Old Wizza', aged 94 years. Wizza attended the school in the 1930s and was a parent of Sebastopol Primary students in the 1950s and 1960s.

I give huge thanks to the Sebastopol Historical Society for creating the wonderful displays that celebrated school life at Sebast Primary across the decades, which brought back so many memories and provided opportunities to reconnect with the school community. Well done to Margaret Phyland and Susan Parker from the Sebastopol Historical Society, who authored the book *Sebastopol School Days: A History of the Sebastopol Primary School No. 1167 1873–2023*, which was so popular that all copies sold out on Saturday. Well done to everyone.

**Native forest logging**

**Tim BULL** (Gippsland East) (14:15): Today's announcement to close down Victoria's native timber industry on 1 January is appalling, and for Labor to paint it as a positive for the industry is quite embarrassing. To announce a full closure in six months with a paltry \$200 million in compensation will strike fear into the hearts of the workers and those communities. This will not go anywhere near meeting the payouts required to individuals, let alone the communities that are forced to rebuild. It is a decision that is simply so wrong on so many levels. The government and the Greens, who are in unity on this, have never been able to explain where our hardwood timber is going to come from. Market demand is increasing, and the Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change (IPCC) recognises timber is the only carbon-storing building material in existence. It has said:

In the long term, a sustainable forest management strategy aimed at maintaining or increasing forest carbon stocks, while producing an annual sustained yield of timber, fibre or energy from the forest, will generate the largest sustained mitigation benefit.

If market demand is increasing, the IPCC is telling us to build with wood and we do not have the plantations, where is our hardwood going to come from? One suggestion is that it will come from countries with far less oversight – so it is a bad day to be an orangutan, I can tell you. This decision also decimates our frontline firefighting response. Our timber workers were at the forefront in 2019–20. It is wrong on many levels.

### **Parktone Primary School**

**Tim RICHARDSON** (Mordialloc) (14:17): Recently we had the opportunity to join the Parktone Primary School community to open their brand new library. It has been a wonderful journey with the legends of Parktone Primary School, from their hall rebuild to an investment from the Inclusive Schools Fund that has transformed an indoor and outdoor learning space for children with additional needs, providing that sensory experience they get as part of their education. Just a few years ago we committed to building them a brand new library as part of stage 2 of their works. Can I give a big shout-out to principal Genevieve Casonato, the principal leadership team, the teachers and the educational support staff for everything they do. It definitely takes a village to raise our kids, and the Parktone community is truly extraordinary. They came together to campaign for a brand new hall, and to see the hundreds of parents, guardians, grandparents and friends of the Parktone school community come together to celebrate this milestone was extraordinary. The team at Tandem Design Studio and Kingdom Projects have done a great job in delivering this outcome. It has been amazing. With the camp fire gathering in the library space, everything that has gone in and the sensory check-out spaces, it is a really great project and outcome, so we give them a big shout-out as well.

It is just another example of the investment in education that we are making across Victoria. When we see the transformation that has happened at Mordialloc College, Parkdale Secondary College, Yarrabah School, Chelsea Heights, Edithvale, Aspendale, Aspendale Gardens and Keysborough Gardens Primary School, it is truly extraordinary.

### **Budget 2023–24**

**David SOUTHWICK** (Caulfield) (14:18): Under Labor, Victoria is broke. Life is getting harder under Labor, and Victorians are being punished by Labor's incompetence. This was brought home to me today by Deborah, who just wrote to me, saying, 'I am lucky to have a young mum as my cleaner. She had to bring three of her littlest with her today as they had no babysitter or day care. Her husband is unwell and cannot work. She cannot afford formula for the baby. Living hand to mouth at present, the cost of living has hit her with a very big stick. I am so grateful for what you are advocating out there. Wishing you all the best, but we are in dire straits.'

And that is where Victorians are at the moment. This budget is an absolute shambles. Nobody is being looked after here. Certainly my constituents in Caulfield have absolutely missed out. There is nothing for schools – absolutely broken promises when it comes to schools. Fifty-four schools were meant to get funded, and they missed out. Caulfield South Primary School have got absolutely nothing of what they were promised in this budget. We see massive debt and we see massive blowouts, and again Caulfield residents are absolutely struggling. Caulfield Racecourse Reserve has great opportunities for parkland and sports – nothing, zip, doughnut. Caulfield Hospital – nothing, zip, doughnut. There is absolutely nothing. Our poor constituents have missed out, and this government are smiling and patting themselves on the back while everyday Victorians are really struggling.

### **Sunshine Special Developmental School**

**Sarah CONNOLLY** (Laverton) (14:20): It was great to be down two weeks ago at Sunshine Special Developmental School for the opening of their new mini Woolies store. Working in partnership with Woolworths, the school has been able to set up a simulation of an actual Woolies grocery store, complete with shopping baskets, grocery shelves, ticketing, signage and even uniforms, for students to immerse themselves in. This helps create a learning environment where these students can not only learn to do things like scan grocery items and look at shopping lists but also, really

importantly, greet customers, communicate and learn to handle money. For these children to go on to education and further employment will be extremely challenging. What the mini Woolies program does for these kids, including students like Rita, who I was fortunate enough to meet, is link them with work experience at a nearby Woolworths store, in this case in Sunshine, where they are paired up with a mentor to teach them workplace skills that will potentially help them to gain future employment or work experience. It was clear from the parents' reaction in the room that this is a really important program because this program is giving kids with disability the opportunity to develop skills that they can apply in a workplace environment, not to mention in their everyday lives, because no matter who you are, every single one of us deserves the chance to thrive through the actual dignity that comes through work and work experience.

#### **St Mary's Pre School, Brighton East**

**James NEWBURY** (Brighton) (14:21): St Mary's is a community-run kindergarten in Brighton East that has been offering wonderful preschool education to our community since 1958. The kinder is treasured and much loved. The preschool recently unveiled a new Indigenous artwork crafted by Kellie Congues, a locally residing Wiradjuri artist. Congratulations to lead teacher Tammy Silber and preschool president Myles Harris on the wonderful initiative.

#### **Schools funding**

**James NEWBURY** (Brighton) (14:22): This budget has unveiled a secret attack on our schools – a secret attack, a hit on 110 schools. What the members of this Parliament have not seen is that there is a \$400 million rip-out of funding for 110 schools. That means 110 schools in this state will lose \$1 million each year over the next four years. The 110 schools will lose \$1 million over the next four years. We have not seen a hit list like this since Mark Latham developed one in 2004 with Julia Gillard. This is a hit list on 110 schools. Not only that, the government promised 54 schools election commitment funding. They put it out on social media before the election – Gardenvale, \$11.7 million; Hampton Primary, \$9.8 million. Guess what? The money was not in the budget. They have lied. They have broken their election promises. Neither of those schools has received funding, and the 54 schools that were committed to have been left out and ripped off by Labor.

**The SPEAKER:** I caution the member for Brighton on unparliamentary language.

#### **Wellsprings for Women**

**Gary MAAS** (Narre Warren South) (14:23): I recently had the pleasure of representing the Minister for Police and the Minister for Prevention of Family Violence at the launch of the Wellsprings for Women's *Be the Voice* magazine. Wellsprings for Women was established in 1994 and works to provide support to vulnerable and disadvantaged women in the cities of Greater Dandenong, Casey and Cardinia. Wellsprings for Women work primarily with women from migrant and refugee backgrounds to build their skill sets and their capacity to improve their social, economic and emotional states while raising awareness of family violence, coercive control, sexual assault and early and forced marriage. Wellsprings' *Be the Voice* magazine has been established for women by women and will be an invaluable source of information and support for women in my electorate and throughout the south-east. The *Be the Voice* magazine is a part of Wellsprings' safety and equality matter project 2.0, which is funded through the state government's *Crime Prevention Strategy* building safer communities program and empowering communities partnership in Casey. Wellsprings' safety and equality matter project raises awareness by developing culturally sensitive and respectful messages across various platforms, and English and multilingual resources are distributed via a range of outlets. Thank you to Dalal Smiley, CEO for Wellsprings for Women. She and her team do an amazing job.

#### **St Paul's Primary School, Mildura**

**Jade BENHAM** (Mildura) (14:24): Recently I was invited to St Paul's Primary School in Mildura. Grades 5 and 6 are currently studying civics and citizenship, and they asked me to come in so they could



grill me with questions, which they did. Some great questions were asked, and we had a terrific time. Thank you to Mr Tom Pike for the invitation and St Paul's Primary grades 5 and 6 for having me.

#### **St Mary's School, Robinvale**

**Jade BENHAM** (Mildura) (14:25): I also recently visited St Mary's School, Robinvale, for their Mother's Day celebration. The teachers and students put on a wonderful morning of performances, song and activities as well as doughnuts for morning tea. Again, thank you for the invitation, St Mary's, Robinvale, and good luck with the ongoing construction.

#### **Mildura Field Days**

**Jade BENHAM** (Mildura) (14:25): Last Friday and Saturday I attended the Mildura Field Days at the Mildura Racecourse – a terrific couple of days showcasing our dried fruit and horticulture industries in the Sunraysia region. I was thrilled to use green hydrogen in the H<sub>2</sub>Cuts trailer, which uses green hydrogen to power a mobile hair salon. I am so excited for the opportunities that exist in the Sunraysia region for the production of green hydrogen and was thrilled to use it. Well done to the field days committee and the Mildura Racing Club for getting the venue in top condition for the event.

#### **Mildura electorate health services**

**Jade BENHAM** (Mildura) (14:25): Last week I spoke about two-year-old Octavia in this place and her struggle to get the surgery she needs to alleviate her food aversion and some severe obstructive sleep apnoea. On Saturday at the field days, I got a visit from Octavia, her mum Megan, dad Josh and little sister Elizabeth, and I am thrilled to report now that Mildura's local children's charity, Children Having an Illness Living in Sunraysia, or CHAILIS as it is affectionately known locally, have come to the rescue with the funds needed for Octavia to have her operation.

#### **Budget 2023–24**

**Chris COUZENS** (Geelong) (14:26): The Andrews Labor government is continuing to do what matters for the Geelong region, delivering cost-of-living relief and important upgrades to local community infrastructure and schools just like Geelong East Primary School. We have continued our strong record of delivering on every election commitment in this budget and more. In Geelong we have a lot to be excited about. We are giving women's health the focus and funding it deserves with \$58 million to create 20 comprehensive women's health clinics across Victoria. This means we will have our very own Barwon Health women's health clinic. It will operate as a one-stop shop for women in Geelong needing treatment or advice on conditions from contraception to pelvic pain. This investment also means that women in Geelong have access to the specialist support they need close to home.

I am extremely pleased to share that the Andrews Labor government will continue to invest in the Strong Brother Strong Sister program, an Aboriginal-led program to support First Nations children and young people in the Geelong region. The program delivers social and emotional wellbeing supports and suicide prevention programs that empower Aboriginal children and young people experiencing personal challenges, life stressors, anxiety or depression or who are at risk of mental illness, self-harm or suicide. I am extremely pleased that the community organisations in Bannockburn have received significant support from the Andrews Labor government.

#### **Budget 2023–24**

**Chris CREWITHER** (Mornington) (14:27): We have just had the budget, and for many months I have called for funding for Mornington Park Primary School's and Mount Eliza Secondary School's much-needed infrastructure. These schools have issues like 50-year-old dilapidated buildings, mould issues, asbestos, outdated facilities and facilities not fit for purpose. Again the Labor government committed \$11.7 million, if they were elected, to Mount Eliza North Primary School, and I do not see that in these budget papers either. I call on the government to do the right thing by funding these schools based on need, not based on the colour of an MP or the marginality of a seat.

On the budget, the rising issue of homelessness and housing on the Mornington Peninsula gets worse and worse and is at crisis point, with rough sleepers on the foreshore and other areas now common. Since the Andrews Labor government came to power, the net change in public housing on the Mornington Peninsula is minus 13, with places sitting empty and being sold. We have seen in this budget an increase in land tax for 860,000 Victorians, with \$975 more for those with houses worth over \$300,000. This would then be passed on to renters and will make the situation even worse.

Lastly, I have been calling for funding for our coastal areas – for Shire Hall beach, Hawker, Mount Martha north and south and the Beleura cliff path. Again, I do not see some clear funding there. I do see, though, some funding for Victorian coasts and I hope that the government will prioritise funding for these urgent paths and beaches. This budget is a failure.

### **Visy Packaging**

**Dylan WIGHT** (Tarnet) (14:29): In my inaugural speech I promised to support manufacturing in this state, and I recalled my dad's advice to never, ever cross a picket line. Today I acknowledge the ongoing struggle of workers at Visy Packaging in Shepparton, who have been bargaining for a better pay deal for nearly a year. These workers have been holding firm in taking industrial action for the last 19 weeks, and they are doing it tough. Visy has started a campaign of personal attacks, unpaid entitlements and bringing in labour to break the strike. With corporate greed driving up the cost of living, these workers' wages have gone backwards. Instead of recognising the sacrifice that these workers made during the pandemic by keeping food on our shelves, the workers are being penalised for standing up for their rights. When CPI was low, Visy asked these workers to accept small pay rises. Since the last pay rise on 1 July 2021, CPI has already gone up by 12 per cent. Now these workers are seeking a pay rise in line with that 12 per cent over the next three years. In response Visy has insulted these workers by offering a paltry 8.75 per cent over the next three years while raking in \$7 billion in profit per year. We know corporate greed is driving up the cost of living, so these workers have no choice but to stand together and fight for a decent living. Visy must resume bargaining, respect the right to strike and give these workers the pay rise they deserve.

### **Native forest logging**

**Ellen SANDELL** (Melbourne) (14:30): Today is a historic day. Today it was announced that native forest logging in Victoria will end on 1 January. As a girl who first joined forest protests and blockades in my early 20s, I feel quite emotional standing here today. I know many people at home will as well. This is the reason I am standing here today; it is the reason I joined the Greens and became an MP in the first place. I know that I am only standing here because of all those who have been fighting against logging – and against the odds – for literally decades, so thank you. I want to say a massive thankyou to all of you. Environmentalists, NGOs, scientists, community members – you all worked your absolute guts out to drag Labor kicking and screaming to realise that native forest logging in Victoria cannot continue and is completely unsustainable. There are too many people to thank for their mammoth effort over so many decades. But what is clear is that this did not happen just because Labor woke up one morning and realised that logging was bad, it happened because NGOs, community members, traditional owners, scientists and lawyers brought court cases and did boycotts, relentless campaigning and direct action, and it all worked. Today you stood up for the forests, for the trees, who do not have a voice, and today you won. There are more fights to be had, but today we need to celebrate this win.

### **South Melbourne Life Saving Club**

**Nina TAYLOR** (Albert Park) (14:32): I rise to acknowledge the amazing work of our local South Melbourne Life Saving Club. Last weekend I had the pleasure of attending the club's annual presentation night. Fittingly, the club's presentation night coincided with National Volunteer Week, an important opportunity to celebrate the inspiring work of our volunteers. I would like to acknowledge the wonderful work of Alison Porter, president of the South Melbourne Life Saving Club; Nick Vouk, club captain; the board; and all of the other wonderful club members and volunteers

who keep our beaches safe. I would also like to pay tribute to the late David Porter. David was a life member of the South Melbourne Life Saving Club, and his passion and contribution were paramount to the club's modern success. He was devoted to keeping our community safe. My deepest sympathies to his family. Vale, David Porter.

### **Derek Rollins**

**Vicki WARD** (Eltham) (14:33): Under the lights at the Eltham Redbacks Football Club last Friday night I joined my community to remember and honour the memory of our dear friend Derek Rollins. Derek's passing has left a hole in our community. He was a life member of the Labor Party. He was the last person to leave an event and always ready to stand up and make a difference. He loved to laugh and loved an argument – often frustratingly so – always with the determination to fight for social justice.

A small businessman, Derek gave the ALP decades of his life. He was heavily involved in the party, holding executive positions in local branches and on campaign committees. Derek brought ideas to campaign meetings and his passions to gatherings; he hosted us and regaled us. He told us clearly when he thought as a party we had got things wrong. In recent years having him at a meeting was a rare treat. He would often miss branch meetings so he could be down helping with the Redbacks. We loved his passion, his kindness, his care and his commitment to his values.

It was wonderful to see him remembered in such a special way by the Redbacks, where he was a longstanding volunteer, supporting them with his own brand of fiery Northern Irish passion. My heartfelt thanks to the Eltham Redbacks, led by president Ivan Dalla Costa, and the broader community for their support of this game and Derek's family and friends. Derek understood that not everyone's path was equal, and he was determined to do all he could to step in and help others. He represented the very best of us through his unwavering kindness, care and commitment to his values. We miss him, and it is through beautiful gestures like this from the Eltham Redbacks that we remember him. Vale, Derek.

### **Eltham Football Club**

**Vicki WARD** (Eltham) (14:34): I love joining the Eltham Football Club for their annual Breast Cancer Network Australia ladies lunch. The lunch is an annual event we look forward to with enthusiasm, bringing us together to have a lot of fun and to support the important work of the BCNA.

### **Donnybrook Primary School**

**Lauren KATHAGE** (Yan Yean) (14:35): Last week I visited Donnybrook Primary School, one of the 100 new schools being opened by this government. They opened at the start of this year, and the event I attended was the awarding of the leadership badges to their first ever student leaders: Fatima, Jaiteg, Cooper, Ellie and Agampreet. What a lovely bunch of students they were.

This school is building the community that is popping up around it. The school has become a central hub for this community. That is helped by principal Dave Williams, who greets each student by name as they come through the school gates and who takes a personal interest in every student that is there. The sports facilities provided at the school grounds also draw the community in. At the assembly I was pleased to notice how many parents were attending the assembly – just a normal part of the school week, but the local community takes so much interest. The cheers of joy when each class's student of the week was announced showed the pride that they have in each other's achievements, and I know that this community will continue to achieve a lot, especially with our government's support.

### **Priority primary care centres**

**Jackson TAYLOR** (Bayswater) (14:36): A priority care clinic is open at the Mountain High centre in Bayswater. We have opened 24 free primary care clinics so Victorians can get the care they need when they need it. They will support you if you need urgent care but not with lights and sirens. These GP-led centres can treat patients suffering from mild cuts, burns and infections, and they are staffed by trained GPs operating seven days a week, 16 hours a day. Not only do you get the care you need,

they also free up valuable resources in our emergency departments. This means that our EDs can focus on providing the most urgent care to the people who need it most and people with less serious conditions can get care faster.

#### **McMahons Road–Burwood Highway, Ferntree Gully**

**Jackson TAYLOR** (Bayswater) (14:37): We are not wasting any time in delivering the massive upgrade at the intersection of McMahon's Road and Burwood Highway in Ferntree Gully. We have been out talking to the community about the project, and I am excited to say early works are due to kick off in June, with major construction thereafter and completion currently scheduled for early next year. Long talked about by others, this project is a massive win for locals and will deliver new traffic lights and pedestrian crossings, extra lanes in each direction through the intersection, dedicated right-turn lanes, shared left-turn lanes and through lanes at McMahon's Road and Clyde Street so you can travel safely through the intersection, a dedicated left-turn lane from Burwood Highway into Clyde Street with improved access to businesses and other safety improvements. I will look forward to keeping locals informed about this project and getting out detailed time lines once we move into construction.

#### **Reimagining Blind Creek project**

**Jackson TAYLOR** (Bayswater) (14:37): It was also great to be out with the Minister for Water to plant the first of nearly 700,000 plants at the site of the massive Reimagining Blind Creek project, bringing our waterways back to life. The Reimagining Blind Creek at Lewis Park project is delivering new open space, lots of trees, plants, three new wetlands and over 6 kilometres of new walking paths and will naturalise close to 2 kilometres of waterways, bringing them to the surface for the first time in decades.

#### **Budget 2023–24**

**Iwan WALTERS** (Greenvale) (14:38): I rise to speak on the Andrews Labor government's record investment in education across this great state and what it means for my community in Greenvale. The Treasurer has just delivered a responsible budget that is focused on the future of Victoria, and nothing is more central to that future and to the economic prosperity of every person and the wellbeing of every person than education. Education is what fires my passion for public policy and service, and it is at the core of this budget. The budget includes a new \$2 billion investment in schools across Victoria, building on the more than \$12.8 billion that has been invested in school infrastructure since we came to government.

Today's budget includes transformational investment in schools across my community. I am so pleased to confirm that this budget provides \$10.5 million to Bethal Primary School – a comprehensive upgrade to support learners from incredibly diverse backgrounds – and \$22.38 million to build the second stage of Greenvale Secondary College. The Liberals talked about a new school in Greenvale for 30 years, but this Labor government has delivered it, and I hope that the minister might be able to join me there very soon. We are also investing \$5 million to deliver the next phase of Mary Queen of Heaven Primary School in Greenvale, an outstanding new school in my community that I was delighted to help open just last month. All this ensures that wherever parents choose to send their children they will be in world-class, first-rate educational facilities.

#### **Budget 2023–24**

**Paul HAMER** (Box Hill) (14:39): Last November the Andrews Labor government went to the electors of Box Hill with a clear plan to upgrade local services and infrastructure, and this year's budget delivers on these commitments by investing in what matters to our community. This includes funding to deliver stage 2 of Koonung Secondary College's master plan, which will see an extension of the recently completed two-storey building for years 7 to 9. Funding is also provided to start planning on a new STEM centre at Orchard Grove Primary School in Blackburn South so that local students and their hardworking teachers can get the world-class education they deserve.

Sport is such a big part of the Box Hill community, helping local families to stay active and get engaged. In this budget, the Andrews Labor government will invest \$1.5 million to upgrade Springfield Park in Box Hill North to ensure that our local Whitehorse Colts football and netball club have not only the football training facilities that they need but also the netball training facilities. We will also deliver \$3 million to a pavilion upgrade in Mirrabooka Reserve in Blackburn South and \$6 million to upgrade Box Hill City Oval.

Every community deserves great spaces in which to come together to celebrate and share culture and tradition. That is why we are investing \$2.5 million to deliver a new Chinese community centre in Box Hill and \$150,000 to upgrade the Fo Guang Shan temple in Box Hill and providing \$100,000 per year over four years to help make the Whitehorse Lunar New Year festival an even bigger and better celebration.

### *Bills*

#### **Energy Legislation Amendment (Electricity Outage Emergency Response and Other Matters) Bill 2023**

#### *Second reading*

#### **Debate resumed on motion of Lily D'Ambrosio:**

That this bill be now read a second time.

**David HODGETT** (Croydon) (14:41): It is a pleasure to rise to speak on the Energy Legislation Amendment (Electricity Outage Emergency Response and Other Matters) Bill 2023, and I will put on record at the outset that we are supporting this bill. Whilst I go into a bit of background about this bill – I will come back to the purpose of the bill – I would like to spend a little bit of time talking in particular about the storms of June and October 2021, just setting out the reasons and circumstances for which this bill came about. I look at some of the comments made in the Minister for Energy and Resources' second-reading speech. Members will recall:

In June and October 2021, severe storms caused widespread and prolonged power outages across Victoria. Following the June storms, 68,000 customers were without power after 72 hours and 9,000 customers were still without power seven days after the event.

I will come back to speak about that, not just in some of the areas in and around Victoria – the Mornington Peninsula, the Dandenongs, Gippsland – but even around my electorate of Croydon, which was affected in suburban areas. The speech continued:

Additionally, following the October storms, nearly 24,000 customers remained off supply 72 hours after and just over 2,500 customers were still without power seven days after the event. In both instances, the power outages were more prolonged compared with previous storm events.

So these storms were severe, and I am going to come back to a few articles that were written around that time, just to show the extent of the damage, particularly in my area but also on the Mornington Peninsula. The minister in her second-reading speech also went on to say that:

The experience of these storms highlighted the limits to getting critical information from electricity distribution businesses to support relief activities and programs for customers. A subsequent external review was undertaken to identify priority reform measures and policies to enable distribution businesses to mitigate the risk of, and better respond to, prolonged power outages in the future.

That is a reasonable expectation from anyone in the community when their power goes out. Power is an essential service, a basic service, one expected in our state, and if it goes out you would be expecting it to come back on in a reasonable period of time. The minister continued:

In August 2021, the Victorian Government commissioned the Electricity Distribution Network Resilience Review in response to the devastating storms of June 2021. An Expert Panel was appointed to investigate how distribution businesses can improve their preparedness for, and response to, prolonged power outages caused by storms and other extreme weather events.

The Expert Panel found that the participation of distribution businesses in emergency response and recovery was not delivering positive outcomes for impacted customers. Victorian customers were provided with mixed messaging on power restoration times, insufficient relief measures, and were disregarded during emergency operations.

Therefore this bill is seeking to provide a range of solutions to better prepare and protect consumers in energy emergency situations.

Coming back to the comments I made before, I want to talk about the storms because what occurred at that time is important to how this bill came about. Generally speaking, in the state or in our own area and our electorates we know what causes power outages. A localised power outage can occur for a wide variety of reasons. Severe weather such as lightning, floods or heatwaves – or high winds as in the case of the June storms – is often the predominant cause. Trees interfering with power lines and bushfires we know cut power, as do unexpected technical faults and car accidents, and then there are planned outages for planned essential maintenance works and also to help balance supply and demand during peak periods, which is a topic of debate for another time.

We all know that experience when you are subject to an unplanned outage. You basically quickly check your phone as the first port of call just to check with the provider because you are trying to determine what the problem is and how long it will be out, because then that guides you in your decision-making of what you are going to do. As I said before, for most of us it is reasonable to expect that the power will come back on in a reasonable period of time. Reliable power is a basic service, so if it goes out, you pretty much expect it to come back on in a reasonably short period of time. You check with the provider if it is a major problem, but even then you would expect it to be coming back on in a fairly timely way. Certainly you would not expect to be without it for a long period of time. But depending on the information that is on your app or on the provider's website or whatever information you have got access to, you start to make short-term or longer term decisions.

If the information you get suggests that the power is only going to be out for a short period of time, you might resort to the use of candles, for those that have still got them in their households. You might look at what are going to be your food and cooking arrangements for the next 12, 24 or 48 hours. Everyone starts to worry about the food in their freezer. Your immediate thought when you start to lose power is, 'What have I got in there? How much have I got in there? How long is it going to be? Do I need to relocate it to family or a friend's house or someone to save some of that food?' All these things guide our decisions. If it is going to be longer term, again you would start to look at what is a reasonable period of time, what are you going to do for food, for cooking and for energy supply. If you have a fully electric house, it is no good. Some have access to gas, so they might not have any lighting but they can still cook. You might look at alternative power supplies. I spoke to many people that were able to get a battery and then connect it up to at least have some sort of lighting in their houses, as basic as that was, that allowed them to perform functions in their homes in the night hours. Some people got access to batteries and lighting. Some would look to hire generators or might already have a generator or an alternative supply. Depending on the information you get, you are going to make those short or longer term decisions. Many I spoke to went out during the day and only returned home at night to sleep because they could manage their day that way once they had made some of those other decisions.

You have to remember the times of year that these storms happen. The June storms happened in the winter, so freezing conditions, so things like heating, lighting, comfort and those sorts of things are going to be much different to the October ones. I think reading some of the articles, the October ones were close to Cup Day, and Cup Day that year was about 30 degrees, so it was a much different time of year for people to be planning and making those sorts of decisions.

The other thing that a lot of people spoke to me about during that period was cost-of-living issues back then. If power is going to be out for a number of weeks, people cannot afford to get takeaway every night. In the hills, in the Dandenongs, people might have gone to providers – their local cafes, shops and takeaways – but they might not have been able to provide food because they had also lost power

and did not have the ability to open and serve food. Short term you might be able to go and buy a meal or you might be able to go to a friend's or family member's for a meal, but longer term that might become a bit of an issue.

Basically the point I am making is that people make those sorts of decisions, and when power is going to be out for a number of weeks that starts to put pressure across a whole range there. You cannot necessarily operate in that short-term time frame or environment if your power is going to be out for a number of weeks. I did refer back, in my research to speak on today's bill, to a number of the articles that were written around the time. I am just going to quote from a couple of the articles from the time to remind people of the conditions back then, and then I will come to why we are supporting this bill and what it is trying to achieve. An article in the *Australian* on 17 June 2021 headlined 'Storm-hit Victorians to go three weeks without power, ADF called in' says:

Thousands of Victorians will endure freezing winter conditions for weeks without electricity in the wake of devastating storms.

About 7000 properties are without power more than a week after storms and flooding hit the state, and at least 3000 in the Dandenong Ranges ... are expected to be without electricity until July 10.

The article in the *Australian* quoted a resident in the hills:

"We just huddled in the living room waiting for it to pass over because that's all we could do," he said. "Obviously in the pitch black because there was no power."

He is one of the thousands of residents across Ferny Creek, Kalorama, Mount Dandenong, Olinda, Sassafra, Sherbrooke, The Basin, Tremont and Upwey who have been told power will not return for three weeks.

Again, these were near-freezing conditions in June, so you can imagine – no power, no heating, no cooking, and in some circumstances there were trees through houses, so they were exposed to elements and the wind. From a *Herald Sun* article from 19 June 2021 I am reminded that ADF support was called in to help. Again we thank the ADF, but it shows the seriousness of these storms and the length of time that power was going to be out. The article says:

The soldiers will assist in clearing roads, doorknocking affected households and providing general community assistance.

Electricity may not be restored to some locations for weeks.

More than 5000 houses in the area remain without power ...

... thousands more will remain in the dark until at least July 10.

There is another article in the *Herald Sun* of 19 June by Kiel Egging. Kiel was a local out our way. I might take the opportunity to wish him well. He has just changed career; he is no longer reporting for the *Maroondah Leader* out our way, but Kiel was a very enthusiastic, well-renowned local journalist out our way. We wish him well in his new career. Kiel wrote this article, and I will just quote the first part of it, again to set the scene of these times:

Roxanne Horn surveys her property in the stricken Dandenongs town of Kalorama and says: "It's like a bomb's gone off."

Ms Horn lives in Barbers Rd with her husband and their two sons, and said, "We've just been devastated. I've been crying most days.

"We know everyone else is in the same position, but we've felt stranded – and the only support we've been given has been from locals and charities."

They and other families are bracing for the possibility of another three weeks without power after the June 9 storms. One tree that fell on their land narrowly missed their home.

"There's not a single street that doesn't have trees down, it's like bombs have gone off. It resembles the end of the world," Ms Horn said.

"You can't go 5m without seeing some form of destruction ... there's so much more light coming in because of the trees that came down."

She said she believed her family and about 600 other Kalorama residents were affected by the power outage.

The emergency response should have been similar to a bushfire in the Dandenongs, she said.

“We haven’t felt supported at all by the government, state or federal,” Ms Horn said.

“No one has come to our house or spoken to us, apart from locals to check on us.

“It’s been total isolation, we’ve have been forgotten about ... it’s going to take months if not a year to recover without any help.”

Amber Williams, who lives on Panorama Rd with her young family, said there were trees down “absolutely everywhere” and also called for more aid.

“We needed the army to come in a week ago, the day after the storm,” Ms Williams said.

“I’m not angry, but I’m disappointed that nobody seemed to know what had happened.”

That nobody seemed to know what happened is a point that this bill is attempting to address, so that point will lead into that as I come back to talk about the main provisions and purposes of the bill and why we are supporting it.

Finally, I move to the October storms. There is an article in the *Age* – one of many – and this time I have just plucked out a couple of examples. On 30 October 2021 thousands were without power as the clean-up continued. Some segments of this article talk about how:

About 85,000 Victorians are still without power and could be waiting days for reconnection, as authorities warn wild weather could hit again next weekend ... as the clean-up from Friday’s severe winds continues.

...

Around 5100 calls for assistance were made to the State Emergency Service ... with assistance being rendered in Berwick and ... the Mornington Peninsula.

Full credit to our SES. As I have said, I do not live in the Dandenongs. I live in Lilydale, which is close to the Dandenongs, and I often see the storms and the power outages in and around there and indeed have been affected myself. The SES out our way, and across the state for that matter, do a wonderful job, but to have 5100 calls for help in that period just shows the extent and severity of the storms. Full credit also to the network crews. The energy provider’s network crews endured challenging weather conditions, falling trees and access issues to repair critical infrastructure. I know at the time, with more storms on the way, assessments had to be made about what time they would go in to start to assess the damage and make the repairs, which of course just adds time to the whole thing. But full credit to the SES and the network crews, who did outstanding, amazing work during that time in the conditions that they were confronted with. The article also says:

Around 48,000 people connected to AusNet remained without supply on Saturday morning, while United Energy reported 22,889 properties were without power.

So that just sets the scene of what the storms were like at the time. As I said earlier in my contribution, the expectation of consumers is that their government is taking action to reduce the likelihood of blackouts in the future. I do this to remind people of the circumstances that brought about this bill and, again, why we are supporting it.

Turning to the bill, the main purpose of the bill is to amend the Electricity Industry Act 2000 to provide the Secretary of the Department of Energy, Environment and Climate Change with the power to direct distribution businesses to assist in emergency response and recovery, to mitigate the impacts of prolonged electricity outages and improve community outcomes, and to make technical changes to the Victorian Energy Efficiency Target Act 2007 and the Essential Services Commission Act 2001 to ensure strong compliance and enforcement of the Victorian energy upgrades program.

The bill also amends the Victorian Energy Efficiency Target Act 2007 to enhance its operation and effectiveness by allowing the minister to directly set fees for the Victorian energy upgrades program instead of having those fees prescribed under regulations. The bill also amends the Essential Services Commission Act 2001 to clarify the powers of the Essential Services Commission in relation to proceedings for civil penalty requirement breaches against the Victorian Energy Efficiency Target Act 2007, including civil penalty requirement breaches in relation to the Victorian energy upgrades program.



They are the main purposes of the act, if you like. But if we look back in summary, we recall the storms of June and October 2021. What happened was that the government needed to do something, so as usual they set up a review in August 2021. The review came back, and essentially this bill was creating a directions power for the minister to direct retailers or energy providers on the provision of information, to direct relief activities – an example was given in the bill briefing of what a relief activity might be – and to direct relief payments.

Power companies, or certainly the good ones – most of them – are already doing those sorts of things, and I did seek clarification at the bill briefing on what the difference is, if they are already doing it, between ‘voluntary’ and ‘directed’. The response that was given, which was welcomed, was that this is a ‘just in case’ power. Whilst most of the companies do provide information, provide community meetings – I know from that article the Australian Defence Force was involved in some of those community activities – and provide relief payments, this gives the minister the directions powers in relation to those three things.

As I have said it does amend the Electricity Industry Act 2000. I will not go through that again. I have spoken about the energy efficiency target act and amending the Essential Services Commission Act. I have given the background to where we are. So I wanted to quickly touch on the main provisions. Fundamentally, as I have said, this bill creates a directions power – the bill amends the Electricity Industry Act 2000 to provide the Secretary of the Department of Energy, Environment and Climate Action with a new power to direct distribution businesses where there is an emergency power outage. So firstly, as I had said, there is a direction power in relation to provision of information; secondly, there is a direction power in relation to relief activities; and thirdly, there is a direction power in relation to the provision of relief payments. Failure to comply with a direction could attract a civil penalty of more than \$200,000.

I do not intend to go back over the debate that was had last sitting week about the truncated process for this bill being six days instead of the normal 14, but in terms of trying to have that truncated process, we did go out and consult with stakeholders and certainly no areas of concern were raised or identified with the bill in the feedback that we sought. A couple of points were raised, which with time permitting, I might have time to actually talk about. But we always engage with stakeholders via mail, phone or email just to get their views, because that is an important part of the process. When governments introduce legislation, we want to have sufficient time to go out and seek the views of the community, because they might have some good ideas or allow us to come back in and present some ideas or some alternatives and some amendments. In this case no areas of concern were raised or identified with the bill, and hence that led me to a support position on the bill.

While I am at it, though, as is normally the case when I speak as the lead speaker on a bill, an important part in this process is the bill briefing, and I did want to put on record my thanks to Nick Parry from the minister’s office, just for coordinating that very efficiently – almost as efficiently as your office, Minister for Planning, but probably more so with the truncated process. Nick did very well. But I did want to place on record my thanks to Nick Parry and Holli Smith from the minister’s office. Members will be aware there were two bills introduced last week, so we did a concurrent bill briefing. So I will thank all these people: Samantha Mikus, Barbara Blake, Lisa Opray, Solly Marshall-Radcliffe and Nathan Crombie. I think, if I am not mistaken, the two main departmental officers in relation to this bill were Samantha and Nathan. The others – Barbara, Lisa and Solly – I will take the opportunity to thank next time because we do appreciate the bill briefings. It is often a tight time frame when legislation is put in. Members from different backgrounds on our side of the house are interested in the bill briefing and what is in there, and so it is always welcome in terms of getting that information. So Nick setting up that process and answering our questions and providing that bill briefing in a very timely manner was appreciated and allowed us to form a view and be here speaking on this today.

As I said, we are supporting the bill. In the time remaining, though, I might just touch on a couple of things. At the bill briefing I did ask about using the existing emergency services text messaging service, and again I will put on record that I got a good, detailed response about that. Certainly one of

the department reps was able to provide information about mobile phone towers, backup power, batteries et cetera. So whilst that system is good, if you have got long-term power outages, you could lose that service.

I am certainly aware that Victorian emergency services have a very good system for texting every mobile phone in an area that the emergency services select on a map. Again, it could be considered a better and faster response for the energy minister to simply use that system rather than always getting customers' phone numbers from distributors. It is horses for courses – I understand that. There might be a time when you need both, but in terms of trying to get information out quickly, generally speaking, when there is an emergency, hopefully people have got some sort of power in their phone. It is one of the first devices they turn to to try to get information. We see the emergency services text messaging service as playing a major role in terms of getting that information out. As I said at the beginning of my contribution, when power goes out and people are faced with trying to get information, they are making long-term decisions or short-term decisions, and these are all based on that information. What this bill is trying to do is, where that information might not be there, provide the minister with the power to make directions to get that information.

The other change which I thought was good was the power to direct community relief activities. I think the example that was given at the briefing was the power to conduct a community hub meeting. If there are people in the community, like some of the ones I have mentioned in the Dandenongs – in the hills – that need information, it might be best to have a community hub meeting or go knocking door to door. The power to direct relief activities is a good initiative where it may or may not be getting done or might need to be done more regularly. That is certainly something that we support.

This is not directly related to this bill but is just something that in my research came to mind: in looking at unplanned outages, I certainly think the government needs to do a bit more work. In particular, there was a case in New South Wales that was brought to my attention. Members might be aware of it, or certainly the minister's office would be aware of it – not that it affected Victoria, but it was a serious matter in New South Wales. A life support patient died in New South Wales when the oxygen generator switched off in an unplanned blackout. In New South Wales, companies must inform registered life support patients of planned outages four days before by text message, but there is currently no requirement to alert them of unplanned outages. Whilst this is not the subject of this bill, it struck me as something that we could possibly do some work on, as it would anyone that took the time to read that article, 'Grieving son calls for change after losing mum on life support during power outage'. The lady was on oxygen, from memory. Her son said:

She does have oxygen bottles in the home but at night you rely on the oxygen generator.

He said:

We could have assisted her, we could have got her oxygen bottles to her.

The article states:

The oxygen machine was rented and didn't come fitted with a back-up battery.

If there is a planned energy outage, providers need to give customers using life support four days' notice but in the case of an unexpected blackout –

they do not.

Instead, they urge vulnerable customers when they first sign up to have a back-up battery or generator and to call ...

emergency. They were the details. I will not go into the full article, but it did strike me that in this tragic circumstance, where someone was relying on life support and power and an unplanned outage happened and they had the capacity to deal with it with back-up oxygen bottles, they could have supported that lady. One life lost is one too many. If we can do anything to improve the system, we should. As I said, it is not part of this bill but it is something that I think is certainly worth looking at.

In summary, we are supporting this bill, although, as I have said in my contribution, I firmly believe the power companies are generally doing the right thing. I am not hearing of any examples where they are not. You would expect that when there are long-term blackouts, whether that be in the Dandenongs, in the Mornington Peninsula, in Gippsland or wherever they are, you would be getting these things done – the provision of information on how long and when the power will be back on. You would expect ‘It’s extended; we’ll provide a relief payment’ or ‘You can go here’ and relief activities and certainly relief payments, although these often do not suffice for what people now buy and pack into their freezers – you lose a freezer for a week or so in the warmer months and that food goes off pretty quickly. You often have not got alternative storage. Even if you have family members near and you can take it across and put it in your mum’s or your sister’s or brother’s freezer, they have got food in the freezer as well, so you have not got a lot of space there. So we are all for the relief payments.

Regarding the companies – voluntary versus directed – that is probably a contentious point, a point of debate, but in this case the bill is supported, because we see no harm in essentially creating those direction powers for the minister.

The two other parts of the bill I have not gone to in great length – amending the Victorian Energy Efficiency Target Act 2007 and amending the Essential Services Commission Act 2001. The changes that are being made there we have no concerns with. I know there are a number of people on our side of the house, in particular ones whose electorates were severely affected by the storms, who are keen to make contributions on this and look at ways to improve emergency responses and information when power outages come along. They are bound to happen again. As I said, we live in a time when you would expect power to be a basic service and to be provided, so anything that can be done by the government for the security of supply or certainly to prevent the reoccurrence of blackouts is welcome in this house. I look forward to some of the contributions from people here that have firsthand experience of those severe storms. We are supporting the bill, and I again thank the department for the briefing.

**Bronwyn HALFPENNY** (Thomastown) (15:12): I also rise to speak on the Energy Legislation Amendment (Electricity Outage Emergency Response and Other Matters) Bill 2023, and I note that the previous opposition speaker that we have just heard at no time mentioned the P word – privatisation. This legislation really is a continuing requirement because of the privatisation of the power industry in Victoria, which in fact every single day since privatisation in the 1990s by the Liberal Kennett government of the time has had a detrimental effect on Victorians. This is something that we see and is why we need to continually pass further legislation to regulate.

I note also the previous speaker was obviously backing up their support for privatisation and was a bit of an apologist for the power companies in saying that they think they do the right thing. Also there was the complaint of course, in opposing this legislation being debated today, that the stakeholders – in other words, the power companies – may not have had enough time to consult with the Liberal opposition. But the fact is that, sadly, we need legislation like this today because electricity companies really have to be regulated to do the right thing. It does not come naturally for those businesses. They are guided by the profit motive, not by the people motive.

This legislation, as I have mentioned, along with earlier legislation that we had to pass to ensure that it is fairer for Victorians, is also something that has been required as a result of experience. A number of years ago this government introduced legislation and passed legislation to ensure that the power companies provided options and full information to consumers in order for them to select the best competitive rates and not have people on very expensive rates when there were alternative rates that they could be on for much less. We had to regulate to ensure that that happened – for them to provide the best offer.

Following the terrible experiences that people have had, whether it is with fire, floods or storms, where there is damage to power infrastructure this legislation – or at least one component of it – is to ensure that the electricity networks provide information to the Secretary of the Department of Energy, Environment and Climate Action to ensure that we can respond to those affected by those power

outages in the best way. The requirement is that in emergencies there has to be full and frank disclosure of information, there has to be support and help with mitigating damage and the power companies have to take some responsibility and ensure that people get timely information so that they can plan what they need to do and they are not thinking, 'The power will be on tomorrow, so I guess we'll wait until then' – and then it does not come on for six months.

This legislation is very important. It is a piece of legislation that really shows how this government, the Andrews Labor government, is always on the lookout for continuous improvement, to make sure that the legislation that is introduced to this house, debated and passed actually makes people's lives better, whether it is in power and information after dealing with catastrophes and disasters or whether it is to give people a fair go and support them through cost of living or other services. That is one aspect of the legislation that we are debating today.

There are another two parts which I will not go into in as much detail, but one is to amend the Victorian Energy Efficiency Target Act 2007 to allow the minister to directly set fees for the Victorian energy upgrade program instead of having these fees prescribed under the regulation. There is often a need for a bit of flexibility, particularly, as we know, in terms of inflation that we have not seen for so many, many decades. Again this is legislation responding to what is going on in the world and making sure that we are continually improving and responding to any changes. This legislation will also amend the Essential Services Commission Act 2001 to clarify the powers of the Essential Services Commission in relation to proceedings for civil penalty requirement breaches against the Victorian Energy Efficiency Target Act. This is more of a consequential amendment to bring things in line with legislation that we amended in an earlier term.

Sadly, extreme weather events – flood, fire, storm – are all effects of climate change, and they are not going to go away. In fact the advice is that these events are going to continue to increase and their severity may increase as well, so it is really timely that we ensure that we are bringing in legislation to make sure that when these events do occur – and this is only one aspect of the full response – the department responsible for overseeing the clean-up or the rectification of the damage is provided with the information by right, not because some power company thinks they might give it to them or might not or maybe will not give them everything but because by law it is a requirement and therefore there are no ifs or buts, it has to happen and there is no time lost in debating or negotiating what it is that should be provided and what is not. The bill also ensures that there are pretty specific obligations on power companies in what work they need to do to contribute to the clean-up and assist with the fallout from the outages and the damages to power infrastructure.

In the electorate of Thomastown we talk to the SES, and there are circumstances, even recently, when there have been quite extreme weather events – not to the extent that we have seen across various regional areas of Victoria, but still there has been damage from trees falling over powerlines and that sort of stuff. I would like to give a big shout-out to the SES for all the work they do. They tell us that these things are also happening in Thomastown. In fact I had a similar power outage in my own house due to storms, but luckily it was fairly quickly resolved and the power was up and running pretty quickly.

We need to make sure that legislation does ensure that power companies are doing what they should be doing, and that is servicing the people of Victoria, because when we look at the past history there have been some really frustrating examples of where this did not really occur, as I said, when it came to giving fair and competitive prices for electricity plans. I know of one example in the Thomastown electorate which seems quite crazy, where a number of small or medium-sized businesses had wanted to put solar panels on the roofs of their factories and warehouses and buildings in order to reduce the cost of their electricity by generating their own that they could use within their business, and that of course was going to save a lot of money for those businesses as well as being good for the environment by generating clean energy. However, they were unable to do it because the distribution company basically blocked it and would not allow them to put it into the grid. There had to be a number of negotiations with the state government in order for that to finally happen, and I am very glad to hear that it finally has happened. A big shout-out to those businesses that are doing the right thing by

wanting to use clean energy, but it was not without a lot of heartache to them and a lot of frustration and a lot of time taken in trying to get through to these power companies. But it is very important that they allow that new energy into the grid. Thanks to the Andrews Labor government that has now happened, and I would like to hopefully see more clean, green energy within the Thomastown electorate as we continue with this government's proud record of reducing emissions.

**Danny O'BRIEN** (Gippsland South) (15:22): I am pleased to rise to say a few words on the Energy Legislation Amendment (Electricity Outage Emergency Response and Other Matters) Bill 2023. I do so with a little bit of pride but also a little bit of disappointment in that this legislation is really a response to the very significant storms that we had in Victoria in June and October of 2021, and despite much of the conversation revolving around the Dandenongs and other parts of the state that were certainly very badly hit, very rarely is it acknowledged the damage that was done particularly in South Gippsland on the southern side of the Strzelecki Ranges.

I will say that I rise with a little bit of pride in that it was at the end of June 2021 that I stood here in this place and asked for the minister to undertake a review of the arrangements around distribution and transmission networks – particularly distribution – when it comes to power outages because we saw significant impacts on people throughout my electorate through the power outages that occurred as a result of those storms, and it was good that eventually the government did proceed with the electricity distribution network resilience review. That one had people turning the pages, I am sure. But I say I am a little bit disappointed because, while we support the legislation before us, I am not entirely sure that it is going to make that much difference if these instances happen again.

It was a significant event. I remember we were actually here in this Parliament on I think it was a Wednesday night, from memory, when this storm came through, and it was horrendous here in Melbourne. My colleagues and I did leave on the Thursday morning because flooding had begun throughout our electorates in Gippsland, and indeed the member for Gippsland East and I just got through Traralgon as the Traralgon Creek rose very considerably, and we managed to get home. I spent the next 24 to 36 hours waiting for the Thomson River at Sale to peak, and thankfully it peaked considerably lower than was expected at the time. It was a major flood but no significant damage was done, and the locals who have been around for a very long time will tell me that whilst there was a flood coming down the Latrobe and the Thomson there was not anything really in the Macalister, and that is usually what causes a big flood around Sale and the Sale wetlands. As I said, we dodged a bit of a bullet. There was significant flooding but not significant damage.

However, once the first part of the storm's impact was over, I hit the road through South Gippsland to assess the damage, as I said, particularly on the southern side of the Strzelecki Ranges. What happened in this storm was that we got basically a south-easterly storm coming up from Bass Strait, which is highly unusual. Most of our weather in Gippsland comes from the south-west or the west and in summer from the north-west, and a south-easterly just caused havoc because, literally, the trees were not used to it. It caused extensive damage right across the region for several days afterwards. As I was driving around, seeing where I could help and assist, the sound of chainsaws was just constant wherever I went, even in some of the most remote parts of the Strzelecki Ranges. I remember on the Saturday afternoon I caught up with a local farmer at Dumbalk North and we drove on the Milford Road. Indeed I have got the video. I shot video of it on time lapse, so it is sort of sped up. It was just horrendous – the trees across this road. That was a day or two after it had happened, and the local farmers had actually gone through and cleared a path so you could drive through it. But there were still trees literally from one side of the hill across the road onto the other side of the hill, just dozens and dozens of them, and as I drove around that was the case in many, many places.

Of course the bigger issue in the days following that was the power outages. Again, in that area of the Strzelecki Ranges it was quite significant, and I had people at the time in the Mount Best area in particular, I am sure from my notes and memory, whose power was off for up to 12 days. In some cases they got power back on briefly, but not in others. This is a fairly remote area. Mount Best is north of Toora and Foster. There is quite a population up there, but they are fairly remote. There was

certainly frustration from some constituents obviously about the time it took get power put back on but also about the fact that AusNet did not even know where their powerlines went and where to go and look for a fault. Certainly, there was also frustration from some that simple fuse remedies, which would normally have been undertaken by a local linesman who would know the area, did not occur because a local contractor had lost the contract some time earlier. There was that frustration about power – and the member for Croydon talked about the loss of freezers and of fridges full of food.

There were certainly people who lost contact. One of the frustrations of course is that much of the information about any emergency like this is provided online. After a couple of days people's mobile service went, their power went and they could not check online, and it was very difficult and very frustrating for many of them. There were animal welfare issues, with a number of dairy farmers who did not have backup supplies. I suspect most of them do now. But I remember driving along a road at Devon North or Won Wron – in the Calrossie area, I guess – and meeting a lady who just said, 'What do I do?' She was out the front of her property and literally had cows needing to be milked that had gone at that stage about 36 hours without being milked. In the end she had to walk them to a neighbour's, I think, and have it done.

As I said, I called for a review to be undertaken. I called for there to be better consultation with the community on the review. I must say, from the information that was provided back to me via the minister at the time, I do not know that there was significant engagement from people who were actually affected. There was a public information session or a public feedback session at Traralgon at one stage, and I think six people turned up, which suggests that this was way too quiet and that the people that were most dramatically affected really did not get listened to.

I am a bit perplexed by the legislation. I understand what it is trying to do, but the move for the secretary to compel electricity distribution businesses to provide them information to assist in emergency management operations – well, I am not entirely sure what information we are talking about. Certainly AusNet, which is both the transmission and the distribution provider in Gippsland, did its best. I gave them credit at the time for trying as fast as they could to get people back online. And there was frustration of course about the information provided at the time. In some cases they would say, 'We'll be back on midnight tomorrow night', and then the next day it would be midnight the next night and in some cases days and weeks in advance.

It certainly was a frustration, but I am not sure how having legislation to direct businesses to provide this sort of information is going to make that much difference, because they are trying. They are clearly making an effort to provide information to customers, and in this circumstance June in particular was a pretty unprecedented storm, so it was very difficult for them to gauge exactly how long it would be in some circumstances. And of course being such a widespread event across the state meant that you just could not bring crews in from elsewhere instantly, and I know they were bringing in crews from interstate to try and do that.

The second part of the direction is to compel distribution businesses to support and administer relief programs and payments. Well, again, maybe that is a useful backup plan, but as I recall that is how relief was delivered at that time in 2021, so I am not sure that we are adding a lot of value in this legislation. It is certainly not something to be opposed. We support the attempt to do something better, but I think there are other recommendations in the report as well, though, that could be looked at, and that includes things like the payments for people who are off for seven days. There were many people who were off power for five, six and 6½ days who then did not qualify for those payments and, as I said, incurred significant costs.

Just briefly, there are other aspects of the legislation with relation to fees for the Victorian energy upgrades program and the civil penalties that can be applied that are giving some powers to both the minister and the Essential Services Commission, but I think we probably still could do better with respect to trying to be better prepared and better responding to future major outages events, because I know it did cause significant problems for my constituents in Gippsland South.

**Dylan WIGHT** (Tarneit) (15:32): It gives me great pleasure to rise to speak on this bill this afternoon. This bill is about responding to the recommendations of the second phase of the electricity distribution network resilience review, which found that electricity distribution companies need to be doing more in mitigating the impacts and likelihood of prolonged power outages, including providing better information and providing consistent relief support to impacted customers.

What we do know is that when those opposite privatised Victoria's energy system under the former Kennett government back in 1994, it had several devastating effects on the people of Victoria. It saw energy prices absolutely soar. It has seen consistently those assets that were purchased ageing without that infrastructure being properly upgraded as it should have been. What it also did was strip the Victorian people of a level of oversight that they had when power was in public hands. Now, that is one of the reasons or a large part of why this government is bringing back the SEC. We are bringing back the SEC to drive down power prices and to increase renewable energy in our energy mix but also to bring power back into Victorians' hands, and that is a little bit of what this bill today does. It ensures that Victorians and an elected Victorian government have an appropriate level of oversight of privatised electrical distribution companies to make sure that they are serving the needs of every single Victorian.

This bill has two main components. The first provides a direction for the Secretary of the Department of Energy, Environment and Climate Action to allow them to direct electricity distribution businesses to provide information and contribute to relief efforts following a mass power outage. So when I speak about providing a level of oversight, that is exactly what I am speaking about.

Following a number of storms in 2021 – really devastating storms, I think some of the worst storms the state of Victoria had ever seen – it became evident that we needed better processes and powers to manage the impacts of electricity outages. After that, we had the network resilience review, which is where some of these recommendations came out of. This will mitigate the impact of prolonged power outages on both homes and businesses in the event of another devastating storm event. These storms, which were some of the worst in Victoria's history, exposed the vulnerability of our electricity distribution network, with impacts exacerbated by the privatised electrical distribution businesses' poor response, which was characterised by underpreparedness and inaccurate service restoration times. Indeed I note the member for Gippsland South's contribution. He spoke about the fact that when AusNet, the distribution provider out in the south-east and the east, went to fix some of these faults, they were not even quite sure where or how to identify the faults that existed in their own infrastructure. The experience of these storms and the experience of the inadequate response were a crucial reminder of our electricity grid's fragility in the face of extreme weather. With climate change ramping up and expected to intensify these events, which is obviously the reason that this government is so committed to a renewable energy future, this will further challenge our network, particularly if it remains underprepared, as we experienced under the privatised regime.

The second component of this bill will make technical amendments to confirm the Essential Services Commission's enforcement and consumer protection powers in relation to the Victorian energy upgrades program. The energy upgrades program was originally introduced to help businesses and homes access energy-efficient products and services. It saved Victorian households thousands of dollars, reduced energy use and reduced greenhouse gas emissions. Ensuring consistency between the Victorian Energy Efficiency Target Act 2007 and the Essential Services Commission Act 2001, this bill reaffirms our commitment to delivering energy savings and reducing greenhouse emissions. Strong enforcement and consumer protection will ensure that the Victorian energy upgrades program continues to deliver its benefits effectively, driving down household power bills as well as helping our environment.

This bill has a number of key provisions. I will not go through every single one, but I will name a few important ones in the small amount of time that I have remaining. The bill will amend the Victorian Energy Efficiency Target Act 2007 to improve consumer protection and the functioning of the Victorian energy upgrades program. The VEU program aims to increase energy-saving targets from 6.7 million certificates in 2022 to 7.3 million in 2025, an incredibly important increase. The VEU has

reduced Victoria's greenhouse gas emissions by over 60 million tonnes since 2009, helping over 1.8 million households and 100,000 businesses upgrade appliances and equipment.

The Victorian Energy Efficiency Target Amendment Act 2022 ensures a robust compliance framework for the VEU program, monitored by the Essential Services Commission. Expected benefits of the VEU program between 2022 and 2025 include \$1.3 billion in energy bill savings, 28 million tonnes of avoided greenhouse gas emissions and incentives for households to ensure energy-saving products and services.

This bill allows for full implementation of the 2022 reforms through minor technical amendments, but although those technical amendments are minor in nature, I would suggest that they are incredibly important for the future of Victoria. The bill allows the Minister for Energy and Resources to set fees for regulatory tasks performed by the ESC under the VEU program. Fees will be reviewed according to the Department of Treasury and Finance's *Pricing for Value* guide for appropriate cost recovery. The Minister for Energy and Resources is currently consulting on setting new fees that will ensure full cost recovery for the ESC. The bill makes minor technical amendments to the Essential Services Commission Act 2001 for better implementation of these 2022 reforms. The proposed changes to 10D of the ESC act will ensure the ESC can apply their powers in part 7 and sections 60A and 60B to the VEU program. I commend the bill to the house.

**David SOUTHWICK** (Caulfield) (15:42): I rise to make some comments on the Energy Legislation Amendment (Electricity Outage Emergency Response and Other Matters) Bill 2023.

**Tim Richardson** interjected.

**David SOUTHWICK:** And I thank the member for Mordialloc, who gave me an extension of time before I started. He is expecting a big contribution here, so I better really put the shoulder into it.

I want to start my contribution by reflecting back to 20 June 2021. One of my residents has been on a journey for a number of years now. Benjy Orwin has been collecting socks to support those that are dealing with a whole range of different situations – emergency issues and homelessness. Benjy established Socks4Support, and over a number of years Benjy and I have been working together to deliver socks to a number of different communities who need them. I know a number of members in this house have spoken about the shocking outages in the Dandenong Ranges. On 20 June Benjy and I took a number of pairs of socks – 800 actually – to the Kallista centre, where a lot of people were getting support. It was a fantastic example of the community really leaning in and helping one another. We saw that this centre was run by volunteers and organised by volunteers, with food, a barbecue, showers and all kinds of things. We got to spend a fair bit of time talking to many of the locals that were really struggling during that period. At the outset I just want to really give another shout-out to Benjy for coming along with me, for dropping those socks off, for chatting to locals and for the continued work that he has done, which led only a week or so ago to him becoming the City of Glen Eira Young Citizen of the Year for the amount of work that he has done in terms of charity. He was 11 years of age at the time, so for somebody who is now at 13, 14 years of age, what he has been able to do is absolutely amazing. At that stage he had collected 15,000 pairs of socks. I am not sure what he is up to now, but it would be 20,000 or possibly 30,000 pairs of socks that Benjy has collected for those that need them. So a big shout-out to Benjy.

When I was up in the Dandenong Ranges talking to a lot of locals – and we have got family there as well, so I do spend a bit of time up in the Dandenongs – I was really taken by surprise, firstly, by the resilience of the locals. You always see during emergencies that the locals always pitch in – it is just amazing – supported ably by our emergency service workers, in this case the SES that do an amazing job and the CFA that also do an amazing job, all really leaning in to help one another. Also as I was travelling through in that particular time I spoke to the SES in Olinda. It was at the Olinda football ground actually. They were getting themselves ready, and there were a whole lot of generators that were being all set to be delivered out to many locals that needed them – because again, this bill does



talk about being able to get better communication and to ensure that the onus is on companies themselves to do more. It is absolutely true – and that is why we are supporting this bill – that these companies need to do more to support many of their customers and many of these residents experiencing outages. You have heard already from our lead speaker the member for Croydon about so many issues, even for those people with health issues, and about how important power is and the uncertainty that that causes many of those communities.

But I have got to say: attending in Olinda at the footy ground to see many of these generators ready to be delivered, I went up to the local SES and I said, ‘That is fantastic. When are they being delivered? They are all lined up; they are all ready to go. When are they being delivered?’ The response by the SES volunteers was that ‘We’re waiting on the minister.’ I was quite taken aback by that. I am like, ‘Right, what do you mean?’ and he says, ‘Well, the minister needs to come up here for a bit of a photo op, and we can’t actually deliver the generators until we get the minister here.’ That was really surprising, and it did take some time before those generators got out. I think certainly everybody should have a collective responsibility to do more when it comes to an emergency, and in that particular instance that was not what you would have expected in terms of people who were experiencing blackouts. They were experiencing no power for days, literally – in the cold, in the wet – and literally had nothing but candles. It was absolutely imperative to get those generators, and it was really disappointing to hear that response that they had generators literally sitting in the footy ground car park not able to be got out into the homes because they were waiting for the minister to have a photo opportunity.

But moving on to this particular bill, some of the issues that this now deals with are to ensure that the direct distribution businesses are able to assist in the emergency response, to mitigate the impact of prolonged electricity outages, to improve community outcomes and to make technical changes to the Victorian energy efficiency target, which we have heard as well.

There are many cases like I have just mentioned in the Dandenongs where there are lengthy outages. Again, many of those residents when it came to the Dandenong Ranges power outages were told this would take days. It took weeks, and then it just got kicked down the road and it took further weeks. It did highlight, certainly while travelling up there, how you were getting one lot of information to say that we were only a week or so away before we would be able to get power restored, but the reality on the ground was very, very different. If you travelled through the Dandenong Ranges and you saw the power poles literally up-ended on the ground, if you saw the cables on the roads for miles – literally miles of it – you knew there was no way that we were going to have the power reconnected in days and have everybody up and running again. There was absolutely zero chance. If you were a betting person, you could have laid any odds; you could have laid literally a home on that not happening. It was never, ever, ever going to happen. So it is about getting communication and getting the right communication.

With these kinds of emergencies there are so many other flow-on effects in terms even of fresh water. I know that Melbourne Water and South East Water set up a number of different areas for people to be able to collect fresh water during that time as well. That was very important. As I said, there are food supplies and a whole range of things that need to be done where people need to kick into action. But you need to have the certainty, and where there was not the certainty certainly the community were the ones that were missing out.

We saw in October 2021 the Australian Energy Market Operator confirm that there were 446,000 Victorians without power due to severe rains and winds across the state, and that challenging weather situation also caused lots of issues. What we need when it comes to these emergencies is to ensure that we get the immediate power connected up and running again – but what happens beyond that? I know certainly, again, after the Dandenong Ranges emergency that 12 months on we still had issues with telecommunications. We had issues where there were literally only backup batteries to allow 4 hours, so we still did not have proper telecommunications with our SES volunteers to be able to have the proper response that they needed. We have got to ensure that we get everything fixed and

everything right so that in a lot of those difficult to get to areas where they really had power cuts those emergency services workers have the support that is needed.

In terms of the last part of the bill, which – very, very briefly – is about energy upgrade agreements, it is very important for energy efficiency. It is something where we should always be looking for people to try and do more. Ultimately, if we have got energy efficiency, it is about reducing our carbon footprint but also reducing bills as well, something that we are all experiencing at the moment. With that, I will leave my contribution.

**Daniela DE MARTINO** (Monbulk) (15:51): I rise today to speak on the Energy Legislation Amendment (Electricity Outage Emergency Response and Other Matters) Bill 2023. I welcome this piece of legislation because it is much needed, especially for the people of Monbulk. I will come to this later and speak to it in greater detail. But first, what will this legislation do? This bill will amend the Electricity Industry Act 2000. It provides the Secretary of the Department of Energy, Environment and Climate Action, DEECA, with the directions and power to compel electricity distribution businesses to assist in response to emergency power outages and recovery, either through the provision of information from emergency operations and/or by assisting with relief programs to reduce the impacts on energy customers of prolonged power outages and to help improve community resilience. If the information that power companies are providing to either customers or the government is not adequate, particularly in relation to restoration times, the secretary can step in to improve the quality and flow of information. And if the distribution companies are required to attend community information sessions to provide information to locals, they can also be directed to do so by the secretary. The secretary, thirdly, can direct the power companies to administer relief payments on behalf of the government. This bill will also amend the Essential Services Commission Act 2001 and the Victorian Energy Efficiency Target Act 2007. These are minor amendments which will support reforms to the Victorian energy upgrades program compliance and enforcement regime.

I would like to provide some context as to why this bill is so important for my district of Monbulk, which covers the entirety of the Dandenong Ranges, as well as for the rest of Victoria. All prior speakers have pretty much mentioned the Dandenong Ranges thus far, and that is because on the night of Wednesday 9 June 2021 – it is nearly two years ago – a storm like no other experienced in Victoria in our lifetimes wrought untold damage across the state. As the member for Monbulk, I speak today about its impact on my constituency of the Dandenong Ranges, and I acknowledge the severe impact it also had in other parts of the state and the two tragic deaths in Gippsland and Warrnambool. There were warnings of wind and rain, but no-one could have predicted – and in fact no-one did – the extent of the destruction that this highly unusual storm caused across Victoria. 271 millimetres of rain fell across the Dandenongs that night. That is a significant amount of water coming down. Although the wind gusts were high, they were not the highest ever recorded, but they did come from an unusual direction, and because apparently trees grow to buffer against the prevailing winds – they adapt to their surroundings – when the winds came from behind they effectively blindsided the trees, and it was a catastrophic result: 25,000 trees fell across my electorate that night across the Dandenong Ranges. They fell on roads, they fell on cars, they fell on houses – they smashed some into unrecognisable collections of timber and bricks and stone. They fell on Mount Dandenong Primary School and destroyed it.

Some people were trapped in their homes for days. One elderly woman was found after six days in her home. Another elderly resident was trapped under her house when a tree came down and sheared a hole into the floor – she slid in with her bed under her home. She described it as being ‘jettisoned’. She was there for 10 hours until emergency services came to rescue her in the morning after a neighbour had alerted them. When they arrived – I have spoken with them – they found her shivering, and she was buoyant. In their words, she was ‘chipper’. She kept their spirits high – can you believe it? They make them tough in the hills.

Others lost their homes entirely. Some are still waiting to rebuild. Some probably never will. Some have left the mountain and they will not return. The trauma stays with them to this day. There is not a

day that goes by when I speak with anyone in my electorate where they do not mention the storm and the trauma. It lives with them every day.

The power outages that followed were unprecedented. That seems to be the word of the last three years, doesn't it? It would be great if we never had to use it again. Some were without power for weeks. That means no heating, it means no lighting – and in the middle of the winter, can you imagine – until the generators turned up, and they were grateful for those. Some refused to leave their homes. They lit their candles and they shivered under blankets in the winter temperatures of single digits, and some were there unbeknownst to anyone else because when the power failed, so too did the telecommunications. Once the mobile towers' battery backups ran dry, there was no way you could get a call out, not even to 000, because there was absolutely no signal.

My business and home lost power for three days, but in comparison to others we were absolutely the lucky ones. Many of my regular customers were noticeably absent from my store for several days. Slowly those who could leave their properties started arriving, and we asked them how they were. Some were stoic and resolute. Some were in shock. Some openly cried, and one customer – a mountain of a man, quietly spoken and with an absolutely wicked sense of humour, who made me laugh every time I saw him – told me that that night he and his partner lay in their bed hearing the trees fall like bombs being shelled from above. They held hands and they prayed that they would both be alive in the morning because nowhere was safe. When I said, 'Gee, where do you go? Do you go into the toilet? Do you go under an archway like in an earthquake – where do you go?' 'No,' he said, 'my neighbour's toilet was smashed to smithereens, so that's not even safe.' Nowhere was safe, and the randomness of it was the most terrifying part, because over that night 15 of his mountain ash fell on his property in the course of a few hours. They could not even see the trees coming down. When the captain of the local CFA tells you that he found that storm event more terrifying than fighting in the Black Saturday bushfires, you know that it is something truly catastrophic.

Following the storm event came the darkness and the bitter cold, which extended for all those people without their power, and, as I have mentioned before, the complete absence of phone reception: 34 of my communities lost NBN internet services and were unable to call 000. As has been stated by others here today, many on the mountain lost power for weeks. More than 3000 homes were without power and internet for more than a month. Problematically, when you went to check on when the power would be connected, initially you were clicking onto the website and it said hours. Then you went back and you thought, 'That can't be right.' Then it said days, and then it was weeks. That lack of accurate information coming from the energy companies made it difficult for people to plan where they would stay. Do you wait it out at home if it is only going to be a day or two, or do you go and seek accommodation because losing power does not just mean no light, heat or cooking – it means no hot shower if you do not have gas, and if you are on a septic sewerage system, think about this, everyone: you cannot flush your toilet. The extent of the damage to the electricity network across the Dandenongs was unbelievable. An almost entire rebuild of the network was required and across incredibly difficult, hard-to-reach areas. This is not a nice, flat place with easy access but steep mountainside and forested areas along difficult bush tracks and with huge trees on the way. All of that was not only hard to manage but dangerous as well.

Unfortunately I am going to run out of time here, but I do need to say that many residents expressed to me their thanks for the prolonged power outage payment of \$1680 for those without power for longer than seven days, which they were able to renew for each additional seven days they were without power. I have had several come and say explicitly that they would like to thank the government for that directly, so I pass on their thoughts today. That payment was successfully administered by the power companies, but this bill will ensure that they must do these things, under the direction of the secretary, if ever this is required again.

I will say that unfortunately this is the face of climate change. It is here. It is real. Many have denied it for far too long. It is absolutely undeniable now. We know that we have to do everything we can to mitigate the effects of future catastrophic storms, and that is exactly what we are commencing doing

as a government here. This bill is part of the solution going forward so that we can ensure that when this sort of event – hopefully never to this extent – or something similar occurs in the future, these power companies will do their part to ensure that our people are taken care of as quickly as possible. I commend the bill to the house.

**Cindy McLEISH** (Eildon) (16:02): The Energy Legislation Amendment (Electricity Outage Emergency Response and Other Matters) Bill 2023 before us now has its origin in the storms that we experienced across the state in June 2021, and I think most of us will remember that time. Those who lived in and around that area experienced much of what happened. We have heard from the member for Monbulk, and Monbulk was one of the centres of the storm. There were parts of my electorate that were also hit quite badly.

The purpose of the bill that we have before us is to provide the Secretary of the Department of Energy, Environment and Climate Action with the power to direct distribution businesses to assist in emergency responses and recovery to mitigate the impact of prolonged electricity outage and improve community outcomes, and a few other things. It is important that those in the middle of outages – power outages, for example – have the most up-to-date information as possible because they will be making decisions. We saw through the storms in June 2021 that this did not exactly happen. There was a review following the storms, a review of the Victorian electricity distribution businesses' network resilience obligations, which was conducted in August 2021. I am pleased that the Yarra Ranges Shire Council were able to feed into that, because they were very clear. They could see where the failures had been because things had not gone so smoothly. They were very keen to see that this was in the best interests of community and that any changes made would be in the best interests of the community. They were also mindful that there were agreed KPIs at the time and penalties that were in place that did not work hand in hand with good community outcomes. I think that is important to remember, because we need to stop and reflect on what did not go so well.

We have heard from most speakers about the absolutely catastrophic events that we had on the night of 9 June. We saw suburbs in the hills – Kalorama, Mount Dandenong and extending further out – that were terribly hard-hit: 122 properties were damaged, 72 of which were destroyed. 25,000 trees fell in a few short days, and many of these trees were enormous. Their girth was so large – we are talking about mountain ash trees that are big and heavy – if they land in your backyard, if they land on your house or your car, they do enormous damage. On top of that, we saw after the events that there was an urgent warning to people who lived or worked in the areas of Kallista, Sherbrooke and The Patch about drinking water because even if it was boiled it could still be contaminated.

So many things happened as a result of the storms. What people had to go through – the insurance hassles, relocation, their houses ruined. Some were displaced for long periods of time; some are still displaced. Some did leave the mountain. The mental toll it took on people was huge. There was no road access so people could be trapped in their houses; they could be trapped in their street and not be able to get out. Twelve months on there were still people living in emergency accommodation.

We saw massive infrastructure damage. It was not just powerlines down and it was a simple fix. It was power poles snapped in half for kilometres and kilometres. I visited the area on a couple of occasions. Cr Eastham escorted me through at one stage, and we went to the relief centres. I saw the work that was being done to help those that had been displaced or had suffered enormously. I looked at the damage and I knew it was a long-term rebuild. It was not going to happen very quickly. We saw parks ruined, with damage to many trails and paths and multiple bridges down.

Businesses that rely on tourists suffered greatly as well, so even if they did not have the storm damage, their livelihoods were impacted. And it is interesting to look at some of the statistics in the Yarra Ranges council's municipal plan, because the businesses had already done it tough with two years of COVID – they had really struggled there – but in June 2021 expenditure within the Yarra Ranges was down by \$13 million or by 8 per cent compared to the year prior. That was led by a significant drop in visitor spending of \$10 million or 17 per cent, so everybody was impacted in different ways.

What is so important is that accurate information is made available, and it should be made available, because at the time, as others have mentioned, when you looked for information on the website about when things would be back open and what they expected, it just did not match with what you were seeing when you were out in those areas. When I saw power poles snapped in half with trees blocking roads, I knew that was not a quick fix. I knew that if it said they expected the power to be back on in another couple of weeks, that that just was impossible. This in turn impacts on the decisions that people make about how long they might stay. Will they relocate? What will they do immediately? Will they get a generator? They could live in their house, but if they have got a generator, can they get fuel? All of these sorts of things are what is required to make good decisions. When you are under stress, it is really difficult if information changes more and more every time you have a look at the internet to see what is going on. That is assuming that you had access to the internet, because we saw that the mobile communications were down as well.

There were a lot of issues because the recovery did not go smoothly. The government was exceptionally slow to release money to the council. The generators, as we heard the member for Caulfield say, could not be released until the minister had done the photo opportunity and they were there. That is just not on. That should not happen. But I look at the legislation that we have here about the provision of information and about the direction of energy companies in these instances, and when I have a look at some of the things that did happen and the processes that were required – the work that was required, for example, to get mobile communications back up and to get power back up – they were not simple tasks. Even during the thick of the storms and the first few days after, once the backup generators ran out of fuel, they were done. When they run out of fuel, they have to be refuelled. That is not an easy task.

A friend of mine was telling me about her son who worked with Telstra, I am pretty sure it was, and the mobile towers. Now, it was wet, it was dark, it was slippery and windy and it was dangerous, so you could not send people in to do some of the work to refill the generators, for example, because it was too dangerous – it was life-threatening. You can direct all you like, but you cannot send people into situations that could have pretty grave consequences for their health. So we need to think about that because we can direct, as I said, all we like, but if it cannot physically be done quickly, it cannot be done quickly. My friend was exceptionally worried about her son having to go out – he was 25, I think, at the time – and she said, ‘This is terribly dangerous for him.’ I think sometimes we forget that, when we are experiencing such things, it is not a quick fix. We all expect power to come back on. We all expect to have the internet straightaway, and there are times when that just cannot happen, because if the diesel generators need refuelling and it is dangerous, that just cannot happen.

The Yarra Ranges council had a huge task ahead of them, because the municipal-wide cost of the storms was expected at about \$60 million and the Yarra Ranges had to stump up \$20 million of that. They were exceptionally worried because they were not having money released from the government. As I understand it, the state government did not get the federal government to release a disaster response as quickly as they could have, and that was a big problem. I have letters that the council wrote to the Prime Minister at the time and to the government to say, ‘You have to release this money; you have to act quicker.’ We all thought at the time it was because the state government did not want to have to match that disaster response money. But the council total spend is \$20 million, and now they have had floods on top of that. They have had continual, accumulative events, so they are trying to get one step ahead, but that just makes it very difficult. Their transition out of recovery keeps being delayed. They have received \$17.5 million to date, so they have only really been out of pocket \$2.5 million, but the other government departments have had an enormous amount of work with the trees over the roads. We had the Mount Dandenong Tourist Road. The Black Spur was closed, and the Maroondah Highway was closed as well.

On top of National Volunteer Week last week, we saw an extraordinary response from the CFA, the SES and of course the council’s own disaster response area. But the State Emergency Service had more than 5000 calls and only 1000 volunteers on the ground. We saw community members helping

each other, and that was really uplifting, because there were so many people that needed support. We need to have learned from that, and I hope that this bill does make that a better process, a smoother process and a quicker process for everybody concerned.

**Tim RICHARDSON** (Mordialloc) (16:12): It is great to rise and speak on the Energy Legislation Amendment (Electricity Outage Emergency Response and Other Matters) Bill 2023 and to follow the second-reading workhorse, the member for Eildon – literally doing half of the work over there. It is good to see, though, when you give the opposition six days notice, they actually put their names to speak on the bill. They have got a massive list today; we might be going through till 8 pm at this rate. So I reckon next time we give them four days and we might actually get the whole crew in. You will not see the Greens rock up though. The Greens put the cue in the rack for a vote. By 2 pm they went off, and that was it.

**Roma Britnell** interjected.

**Tim RICHARDSON**: The member for South-West Coast says it is sarcasm; there is no sarcasm here, it is absolutely fact. I am absolutely ribbing your crew for the lack of contribution you have made for the first six months. When you get elected to this place and you swear an oath or an affirmation, you should actually front up and do some work.

**The DEPUTY SPEAKER**: Order! Through the Chair.

**Tim RICHARDSON**: This bill has gone through some important consultation, and it has been many months in its journey to this point, as the Leader of the House outlined in the debate around the adjournment. But I want to set the tone for what is a really important context on a few levels. There is the incredible emergency services response that our volunteers and emergency agencies go through in such significant disasters, and I will touch on that shortly. There is the extraordinary community outpouring of support, of care and of the true human instinct of looking after one another and that sense of community. One does not have to look very far to see the emotion and passion that were provided by the member from Monbulk, someone who has lived and breathed the Dandenong Ranges. When you see what representation of community means for someone, when you are overcome by that type of feeling for those people in your community that have been impacted – ongoing representation – it just shows. The member for Gippsland South was the same when he was talking about his community and how for 36 hours he was riding every wave of impact and issues. That is a great element of our Parliament we see: members of Parliament representing their communities and doing what they can to really support and be a source of information, of comfort and of stabilisation during really difficult times. That is the best part of our Parliament on display, when everyone comes together like that. The Shadow Minister for Energy and Resources' contribution was 30 minutes; he put his back into it, it looked like. He had a good briefing, and I tell you what, it just kept going. It was good, but it was important in the context of the level of detail on this bill as well.

The SES are an incredible mob. My Chelsea SES unit was deployed during the floods. They were one of 147 units. Some 16,000 calls were answered during that time for assistance. We heard of the impacts across Victoria and through the north and the ongoing challenges. We saw 1.3 million sandbags put together by SES volunteers and communities coming together to try and do all they could to support and protect townships. But we also see those volunteers impacted for many months by what they see and their experience. I was at Greater Dandenong SES, which I share with the member for Dandenong, and heard of their experiences when they attend major events like this. Recently we were able to acknowledge emergency service medal recipients who had been deployed at Mallacoota. They had been on the front line during that time for many days as they were stranded and surrounded. We have heard some of the contributions today about residents being cut off from any sort of contact, or trapped for days, and having to survive as well. They do an extraordinary job, and to be deployed away from your family and community for that extended period of time – I give them a big shout-out during this time.

I touched on the fact that the bill had come through a consultation journey. The minister, in response to some of the challenges that were outlined during that flood period, established the electricity distribution network resilience review. This was an important, multifaceted review in community, and it was stood up by our department across those regional areas. The review, importantly, had two phases that underpinned the changes that we are detailing today. The first considered the immediate changes that would improve any response to mass outages in the short term, and the second considered medium- to long-term reforms. That is important in a number of aspects. It is a moment of absolute trauma and panic, and the changes that need to be made or envisaged during that time require a lot of flexibility, particularly when we are engaged with electricity distributors. Of course there are the emergency relief payments that come from state and federal governments as well. That is important in that activation and support to get people back on track.

That medium- to longer term range, particularly in the Dandenong Ranges context, is really important. We have got residents who might not ever be able to go back to where they lived – people who are still recovering from the impact and trauma of a major emergency incident. As the Parliamentary Secretary for Mental Health and Suicide Prevention, I am always briefed and aware of the impact of disasters and the effect of that on mental health and wellbeing years down the track. It can sneak up on you, that impact and trauma. It needs ongoing work and support locally, and then a statewide message for those communities as they get back on track or experience those challenges for years to come.

There is a multifaceted approach in phase 1, and the focus there is on improving the communications and critical infrastructure operators, just to get things functioning. The chaos that was described during the Dandenong Ranges storms – absolute carnage and noise – is a sensory experience that people will never forget. I experienced this in a previous life and have family that live up through the hills, all the way through to the Cardinia hills, and you always have that feeling of trepidation during storm events or major bushfire incidents, and seasons as well. That will stick with people forever. People have described the noise, the impact and the fear during that time. That is people's place of living and of comfort and their sanctuary for many years. To have that impact, there is the need to get services back up and running, and public awareness and preparedness is really important as well. Getting people back connected to power as soon as possible and getting those emergency works done – if you have got trees down over lines, if you have got fire risk and if you have got ongoing storm risk, particularly around lightning strikes when we are seeing them in bushfire seasons, it is really critical that we act really quickly. That is what these powers and this intervention and support are all about. It is welcome that this is bipartisan. I wish I could say multipartisan, but I do not think I have heard from the Greens on this bill. Hopefully they will add their contributions or even bother to vote or turn up. But we know there is bipartisan support in principle in this chamber as well.

Phase 2 of that review ran between January and May in 2022 and was led by an expert panel. That panel engaged in a process of deep consultation with affected residents. I should note, though, an important point made by the member for Gippsland South about some changes to a bill that has gone through around changes to regulations that are coming up. It was discussed in the last sitting. I think by 2024 we will move regulations around. This might go to the heart of some of the challenges of engagement when people are under such duress and trying to get their lives back on track in that consultation phase.

I think it was an important point that we reflect on how we can more deeply engage with communities. But obviously the process included surveys of over 800 people affected by the storms, a series of stakeholder round tables and in-person sessions at seven locations, and we really appreciate the thought and contribution of those residents who had been affected but gave their time to this process to contribute and offer their thoughts and views on how reforms could be made into the future.

Sadly, though, this is a context of impact that we will experience, and with heightened concern, into the future. We have experienced three years of La Niña events. El Niño is a caution or a watch warning at the moment, and the likelihood is that we might experience two to three years of El Niño. We have communities at the moment that are flush in their impact with vegetation and growth. Everyone vividly

remembers the few days leading up to Black Saturday. It only takes a few days to really dry everything out with heavy vegetation and that impact. We know that legislative reforms like this in the context of the impacts of climate change – the variability in storm events and their intensity and then bushfire seasons – are something that we are going to have to confront as a state. The risk to assets, to livelihoods, to homes and to lives is something that we need to be prepared for, and our emergency services, our communities and our local government sector play such a critical role in that phase as well. So this is an important bill and provides important context for those emergency relief efforts. It has gone through a significant phase of consultation. I welcome the bipartisan nature of the approach through this chamber and the engagement from the minister's office, and I commend the bill to the house.

**Martin CAMERON** (Morwell) (16:22): I also stand up to speak on the Energy Legislation Amendment (Electricity Outage Emergency Response and Other Matters) Bill 2023. I would like to thank the member for Croydon for, as was just previously said, his standing up and speaking on the bill for 30 minutes. He has done an amazing job. I can tell that you would like me to outline a couple of things again, Deputy Speaker, just so you can get your head around what the bill is trying to achieve. The main purposes of the bill are to amend the Electricity Industry Act 2000 to provide the Secretary to the Department of Energy, Environment and Climate Action with a power to direct distribution businesses to assist in emergency response and recovery to mitigate the impacts of prolonged electricity outages and improve community outcomes and to make technical changes to the Victorian Energy Efficiency Target Act 2007 and the Essential Services Commission Act 2001 to ensure strong compliance and enforcement of the Victorian energy upgrades program.

As we have spoken about, this is going back to the storms of June 2021, so a while ago. But with the outages and people not having electricity in their homes and their businesses for such a long time, it is something that needs to be done so we can move more swiftly as it goes through. The bill amends the Victorian Energy Efficiency Target Act 2007 to enhance its operation and effectiveness by allowing for the minister to directly set fees for the Victorian energy upgrades program instead of having these fees prescribed under regulations. The bill also amends the Essential Services Commission Act 2001 to clarify the powers of the Essential Services Commission in relation to proceedings for civil penalty requirement breaches against the Victorian Energy Efficiency Target Act 2007 – I can tell everyone is engrossed by this – including civil penalty requirement breaches in relation to the Victorian energy upgrades program.

In June and October 2021, severe storms caused widespread and prolonged power outages right across Victoria. I heard the member for Gippsland South speaking about how they were actually here in Parliament and they had to make the mad dash home too with the member for Gippsland East. They got to my electorate, the electorate of Morwell, where I was back then only a humble plumber trying to fix roof leaks because of all of the rain that we had had, and they had to get through to get home to Sale and Bairnsdale respectively.

Following the June storms 68,000 customers were without power after 72 hours and 9000 customers were still without power up to seven days after the event. Additionally, following the October storms nearly 24,000 customers remained off supply 72 hours after and just over 2500 customers were still without power seven days after the event. So this is why these are coming on so that we know that with our linesmen that go out and have to actually assess what is going on and actually carry out the works – one, we need to make sure their workspace is safe, but there need to be some more controls set in place so there can be some clear direction as to what has to happen.

I remember growing up, as a little kid, when we used to have storms and the power went out, the lights would flicker once, they would flicker twice, and if they flickered a third time, the power was out. That is when we would run to look for our torches and our candles, which we used to have back in the day. And it is still the same now: if you have a look when the power is going to go out, the lights will flicker a couple of times and if they go a third time, bang, it drops out. Normally it might be for 20 minutes to an hour. Everyone is on their apps and on their phones, and we get updated as to when the power is going to come back on. With a growing population, when this does happen, we have more and more



people that it impacts, so this is why in major, significant events we need to make sure that it is smooth sailing as much as it can be to get the transmission lines back up and the power back on.

The cost to business and also the family, as I have heard spoken about in the chamber previously, is not only in a monetary sense. If you are a business and there is no power for a couple of days or, as we had back there, for a week, there is the impact and cost of not being able to have your workers come to work and carry out their day-to-day duties. If you have to stand them down, most of the time you are paying for them not to be at work, so it is really something that we need to have a look at, and that is why it is so timely that we are talking about this today.

When the storms of June 2021 came through, as I said before, the township of Traralgon was inundated and flooded, and we had a couple of days where the town was cut in two. We had a lot of homes that were impacted by water up to a metre deep going through their houses, so not only did we not have power, people were out of their homes because the water was so high, and the houses became full of mud and debris as it went through.

I was involved with the Traralgon Football Netball Club at this stage, and once again we had a hundred-year flood – which we have had about 10 times in the last hundred years – come through the club, but this one absolutely decimated the club, and today, a couple of years after this flood event, we still do not have any change rooms down there. Hopefully the build to redo that is coming up, but I did notice there was not all the funding in the budget today, which was a bit of a blow. The footy club and netball club will obviously continue on, but as we speak, as I stand here, the netballers and footballers both male and female get changed in portable rooms, and they do their best to make sure that we can continue on.

For the SES in incident control, the flood moved through that quick with the force of the storm – they had parked their cars at the butter factory down underneath the car park – that by the time they realised that the flood was actually coming through the town, their cars had been inundated with water. It was a week before they could get their cars out.

The experience of these storms absolutely highlighted the limits to getting critical information from electricity distribution businesses to support relief activity programs for customers. A subsequent external review was undertaken to identify priority reform measures and policies to enable distribution businesses – I cannot even get my words out now because it is so enthralling – to mitigate the risk of and better respond to prolonged power outages in the future.

In August 2021 the Victorian government commissioned the electricity distribution network resilience review in response to the devastating storms of June 2021. As we heard before, an expert panel was appointed to investigate how distribution businesses can improve their preparedness for and response to prolonged power outages caused by storms and other extreme weather events. What that is doing is getting all our ducks in a line so that works can proceed quickly and we can get the power back on. The expert panel found that the participation of distribution businesses in emergency response and recovery was not delivering positive outcomes for impacted customers. Victorian customers were provided with mixed messaging on power restoration times and insufficient relief measures and were disregarded during emergency operations.

The bill is seeking to provide a range of solutions to better prepare and protect customers in these emergency situations. Fundamentally, the bill creates direction powers. The bill amends the Electricity Industry Act 2000 to provide the Secretary of the Department of Energy, Environment and Climate Action with a new power to direct distribution businesses when there is an emergency power outage so that we get a process that comes through that we can follow in these emergency events. We do not know when they are going to happen and we need to make sure that, when they do, we take on board and put processes straightaway into action that will once again restore power to the community and to businesses. As we said, we will support this bill.

**Nina TAYLOR** (Albert Park) (16:32): So in thinking about this very important legislation, we can see that there are a number of problems that are seeking to be resolved. One of them is the increasing incidence of extreme weather and the responsiveness or the efficiency of the response to those extraordinary conditions, which unfortunately are not going to go away any time soon. I am speaking specifically to the triggers of the June and October 2021 extreme storm events, which caused unprecedented damage to our electricity network, and further to that, the inadequate response from privatised electricity distribution businesses responsible for the network. So we are really with this legislation seeking to address and mitigate the impact of any such events that may occur in the future.

Part of the solution is giving a directions power to the Secretary of the Department of Energy, Environment and Climate Action to allow them to direct electricity distribution businesses to provide information and contribute to relief efforts following a mass power outage event. It is obviously fundamental that that absolutely should occur. It is very important that the secretary is empowered in this way. In spite of the increasing incidence and pretty devastating impacts of climate change, it is not anticipated that this directions power would need to be used on a very frequent basis. However, it is critical that appropriate mechanisms are in place and ready to go. That is what is really fundamental about the changes that are being strengthened and supported here.

We have already had some very moving and emotional – and rightly so – reflections in the chamber on the devastating impacts of those storms, and I am really grateful that we have members who have had the courage to share those experiences. I think it is important for the members of the community who have been through those extraordinary weather impacts and had terrible damage to their local communities and homes et cetera that we do honour and reflect on these experiences but at the same time, in a very pragmatic way, address the problems that became exposed, so to speak, during those occurrences and mitigate the risk of those experiences for communities to an extent into the future.

I think it is a really important moment also to reflect on what we are doing in this state. I note that Victoria is very much doing the heavy lifting. We had nine years of a former Liberal–Nationals government essentially dragging the chain on anything to do with addressing the increasing weather instability and the need to really move forward in terms of reducing emissions into the future so that we mitigate the impacts and the risks of climate change on our communities.

On that note, I would like to say that our Andrews Labor government is a leader in climate action. While those opposite have voted against every major piece of climate and energy legislation we have introduced, we have been getting on with the job of delivering on climate action. We have more than tripled the share of renewables over the past eight years, after those opposite had effectively strangled the clean energy sector in the four years they had in power. I remember vividly the impact on the wind sector. It was basically reduced to nothing, and it was just such a relief when Labor came back in and gave the necessary boost and support to facilitate renewable energy to really go forward in our state.

We have now set the strongest emission reduction targets in the country, committing to reducing emissions by 75 to 80 per cent by 2035 and reaching net zero by 2045. I am really proud, because I know just how hard it is and how much significant work there is across our state. And we are absolutely backed by the Victorian people. Every day of the week, I have to say, people in my community share their concerns about the impact of climate change and about making sure that there is truly a viable future for their children, so that backs in the very necessary measures that our state is taking to mitigate the impacts of climate change. On that note, we have already reduced greenhouse gas emissions by more than any other state since 2014, and we are backing those emissions targets with ambitious renewable energy, energy storage and offshore wind targets. So again Victoria is doing the heavy lifting, but we are happy to do so. I am happy to say we now have a federal government that actually believes in climate change and is also, I believe, doing their share as well.

By 2035 we will hit 95 per cent renewables supported by 6.3 gigawatts of energy storage and 4 gigawatts of offshore wind, because on the one hand, yes, you want to be able to generate this clean energy, but you also want to be able to have it there and viable when you need it. Therefore there is

the necessity to invest in adequate storage – and we are. We are absolutely investing in adequate energy storage capacity to ensure that we are truly protecting the future of Victorians – futureproofing, you might say.

I was also really excited by some other aspects in terms of what we are doing to help with – coming back to perhaps some of the core elements of this bill – what happens in the event of future storms and unstable weather patterns. In direct response to the storms, we have provided \$7.5 million for crucial backup power systems in 24 towns across the state. I think the member for Gippsland South was concerned about, ‘Oh, will these changes do anything?’ I would like to think those changes – they seem to be very pragmatic – will do a lot in terms of helping to futureproof our state.

Also there was significant consultation, to further allay some of the concerns that may have been raised in the chamber. Working with local councils we have identified communities most at risk of storm-related power outages and are funding systems comprised of batteries and rooftop solar for selected community buildings. Those buildings will act as relief hubs in the event of a prolonged power outage, providing a place for residents to heat food, charge devices and shower when their power is out. You can see that there are very specific and pragmatic solutions addressing many of the aspects that came to light – unfortunately, I have to say – as a result of those very significant and devastating storms that I spoke to earlier.

Of course we are bringing back the SEC, which will invest at least \$1 billion in 4 gigawatts of renewable energy. This will help support 59,000 highly skilled and well-paid jobs across the state. There again you can see Labor. This is what we do; we always look holistically at these solutions. It is not just about talking about stuff and not just about putting it on social media, it is about actually investing in the state. Real buildings, real renewable energy, wind power, offshore wind, solar on roofs – you get the gist. We are actually doing it, but we are also making sure that these investments drive employment in our state, which ultimately is good for the economy. There will be many jobs that are generated through this, particularly for the regions. I know sometimes we hear concerns about how we can find a balance between metro and regional areas, and I am pleased to say that as a result of the SEC this will drive jobs in the regions that were, we could say, smashed by Kennett’s privatisations.

Our record on climate change is one to be proud of, and it is one we have achieved without an ounce of support from those opposite. It is also one that future generations will benefit from as we mitigate the worst impacts of climate change. In any case it is really important that we have significant work underway. We have been doing it for years because we could see, and our government truly has always believed, that climate change exists. Hence we have taken really pragmatic measures to ensure that we mitigate the impacts into the future and reduce emissions significantly but also provide a viable Victoria for future generations.

**Roma BRITNELL** (South-West Coast) (16:41): I rise to speak on the Energy Legislation Amendment (Electricity Outage Emergency Response and Other Matters) Bill 2023. As my capable shadow minister here at the table, the Shadow Minister for Energy and Resources, has already outlined in his long contribution on this very thorough and long bill, the main purpose of the bill is to amend the Electricity Industry Act 2000 and to provide the Secretary of the Department of Energy, Environment and Climate Action with a power to direct distribution businesses to assist in emergency response and recovery to mitigate the impacts of prolonged electricity outages and improve community outcomes and to make some technical changes to the Victorian Energy Efficiency Target Act 2007 and the Essential Services Commission Act 2001 to ensure strong compliance and enforcement of the Victorian energy upgrades program. The bill amends the Victorian Energy Efficiency Target Act 2007 to enhance its operation and effectiveness by allowing the minister to directly set fees for the Victorian energy upgrades program instead of having these fees prescribed under regulation. The bill also amends the Essential Services Commission Act 2001 to clarify the powers of the Essential Services Commission in relation to proceedings for civil penalty requirement

breaches against the Victorian Energy Efficiency Target Act 2007, including civil penalty requirement breaches in relation to the Victorian energy upgrades program.

So what is the background, really, to this bill? Well, in June and October 2021 there were quite severe, widespread storms across parts of Victoria. The result of the June storm was that 68,000 customers were without power for 72 hours, and 9000 of those customers were still without power seven days after the event. Following the October storms we saw nearly 24,000 customers remain off supply for 72 hours after the event, and 2500 customers were still without power seven days after the event. In both instances the power outages were more prolonged compared with what we normally see, and the information that those people got was not always accurate. If they had had more accurate information, which clearly the energy companies did not quite have the capability in their formulas to produce, due to the severity of the storms, people would have been able to make better decisions. Some of them would have made the decision to go and buy a generator if they could afford it, because if you are told the power is coming back on in 48 hours, you would probably rely on that. When it is two weeks later, it is very difficult to manage that process.

The experience of these storms highlighted the limits to getting that critical information from electricity distribution businesses. A subsequent external review was undertaken, and that review identified that we needed to make sure that there was access to the data to be able to reach people and, basically, if it was needed, to be able to direct the companies to make contact with customers and make sure customers had a place to be able to get information from more centrally if they were without power and could not charge their mobile phones and the like.

This bill does seem like a very simple bill that is a result of a review which noted that the companies were actually already doing quite a good job of providing that information in times of energy outages, but we saw that those June and October storms were events that were not managed as well as they would have been normally. This does appear to me to be a bill that is pretty much 'just in case' rather than a bill that has been necessary and needed for a long time. It does seem to be a little bit hurriedly concocted, and that is what we would expect to see from a tired government that needs to have something to talk about. We know that what they will not talk about is the budget that we have had handed down today, which shows that Victoria will be paying more and getting less. We are going to start to see a lot more of that under this very tired government, which is making it harder to live in Victoria because we are paying more.

Why does it appear that we are voting on a bill that is so important that we were given just six days to think about what the necessary information was that we had to share with our community about this bill so that we could make sure it is well and truly debated thoroughly, with the experts who would be affected by it having been consulted properly? We have seen this a lot under Labor. We see the errors and we see the drafting mistakes in bills that require amendments to be presented. We do get unintended consequences, which you would hope, if they were doing their due diligence, we would not be seeing.

Electricity is a very important subject. It is important to all Victorians, and this is why it is important to get bills on electricity right. South-west Victoria specifically is critically reliant on substantial electricity supply. In the south-west we have many, many businesses and heavy industry that rely on power. These include Bega Cheese in Koroit, Saputo in Allansford, Midfield Meat in Warrnambool, Sun Pharma in Port Fairy, ProviCo in Dennington and the Port of Portland, Keppel Prince and Portland Aluminium in the great town of Portland. Portland Aluminium alone uses 10 per cent of Victoria's electricity demand, demonstrating the importance of south-west Victoria to this bill and the key reason we need to have a say.

Not only is Portland Aluminium a heavy electricity user, it is also an important player in providing backup electricity, which many might be surprised to hear, for the Victorian energy network at times of high demand. It pretty much acts as a battery. How does this occur? One way is through the voltage regulation services. This is where AEMO, or the Australian Energy Market Operator, ensures that

there is not an overload of power in a particular area. If you have ever seen a short circuit at home, you would know that the last thing you want in Victoria is for the electricity grid itself to short-circuit from unstable voltages. This ensures that when people in Nelson, Nullawarre, Noorat, Nirranda or Narrawong turn on the lights they know they will have a power supply. Portland Aluminium's participation in reliability and reserve trader services also offers the Victorian community a significant backup electricity supply that can be turned to when the rest of Victoria is short of electricity. Without Portland Aluminium, on a hot day when the power grid is under severe pressure when everyone turns on their air conditioners, the authority that is in charge of the electricity network can turn off users' power. With Portland Aluminium taking on that responsibility through load shedding, less Victorians have their power turned off. It plays an incredibly important part in assisting the grid to manage supply and demand.

We know from 2016 that many of those opposite in the Labor Party wanted to shut down Portland Aluminium, and do not get me started on the Greens. Let me remind you all, and I will make this very clear: aluminium – and it can be anything from a can of Coke to parts of your car, computer or iPhone, which most of us would not be without for too long, to parts of the bike you take a ride on on the weekend – is critical to many parts of our daily lives. If we get rid of Portland Aluminium and have a lack of reliable electricity in Victoria, we will see an end to Portland Aluminium, and where will we get our products from then? Overseas? Really, overseas? Where the environmental regulations are much lower, the labour standards are much worse and the rates of pollution are much higher? Every time a Labor government seeks to shut down an existing baseload power plant, it puts more pressure on the grid, and access to power is critically important to our businesses.

I want to bring to the house's attention another amazing person from South-West Coast. A terrific guy from Tyrendarra has been campaigning for three-phase power in the Tyrendarra region for many years now. This small upgrade to the power network would significantly improve accessibility to power for the Tyrendarra residents, who are let down by insufficient power, which it is hoped this bill will avoid. These residents of Tyrendarra, including Bruce, are prevented from upgrading their dairies and their other businesses by not having a decent energy supply to provide milk products, which so many of you rely on. And there are engineers in that part of the world that are trying to produce work. They do not just turn up at the supermarkets after all, these products like milk, and reliable, consistent power is critical for ensuring that they are able to be produced. Once again we see a government that forgets or, dare I say, does not care about regional Victoria.

Victorians need reassurance that when they flick their switches the electricity is going to be there to power the lights. Under the Labor government there is no longer a guarantee – a sad reflection on a tired, disinterested government. Life is certainly harder under Labor, and we see this rising cost of electricity and more demand than supply. It feels like Victorians are being punished under Labor. Its inability to manage the state of Victoria is certainly evident from the uncertainty Victorians are facing in accessing electricity.

**Will FOWLES** (Ringwood) (16:51): I rise of course to make a contribution on the Energy Legislation Amendment (Electricity Outage Emergency Response and Other Matters) Bill 2023. I do so acknowledging that normally at this point in the debate there has been plenty of meat to grab hold of and plenty of great points that have been made that will just furnish heaps of rebuttal, but I am not sure we find ourselves in that position today, because it would appear that we seem to be in somewhat furious agreement across the chamber today, which is nice; it is refreshing. I want to thank the Shadow Minister for Energy and Resources for his very thorough contribution. I was having a little discussion with some of the people involved in the drafting of this bill, and they noted its thoroughness, to the point where I think we can safely say that we have canvassed the full parameters of this bill over the course of this debate. No doubt anyone suffering the misfortune of following along at home might find some of what is about to follow repetitious.

But can I draw the house's attention to one thing that perhaps has not been canvassed, which is generally the government's approach to resilience reforms. This has not been a government that has

sat on its hands when it comes to making sure that network resilience is front and centre in our capital planning, in our response to events and in response to demand, however it is driven, across the business sector or residential sector, wherever those resilience pinch points are or wherever there are deficiencies identified. We have been proactive in going about it. The network resilience review is actually a cracking read. There are lots of anecdotes in there about the hardships that were suffered, particularly over the course of the storms in June and October of 2021, and also the responses to those hardships. Clearly the hardships were not just confined to 'I had no electricity.' As we heard most eloquently from the member for Monbulk earlier, they were really, really distressing stories in some cases, of people's homes being destroyed, of people being injured and of people suffering the horror of sliding out of their house due to a tree spearing the floor. I mean, it was a pretty extraordinary set of circumstances.

I was – as I am sure you will recall, Deputy Speaker – the member for Burwood at the time of these storms. I was gobsmacked when driving down a side street in Burwood to see a car that had been completely crushed by an entire tree. It was not something I had seen before. I have seen plenty of car wrecks in my family's previous life as auto auctioneers, but I had not seen in situ a car that had been actually flattened by a tree. The entire root ball was hanging out of the ground. The root ball itself was probably 2.5 metres high, and there it was. The tree had just come down on this car. I was there looking at it, trying to make a bit of an assessment of the parts of the tree that were contacting power lines at the time, and I was there for I think the distressing moment when the owner of the car surfaced from his house and realised what had happened. He had to quickly come to grips with the fact that he was going to be offline for a little while both whilst the tree damage was attended to and then ultimately whilst he processed the insurance claim, because the car was most definitely a write-off.

Part of that tree had collapsed into some powerlines. Those powerlines were sparking. Obviously, emergency services, SES, council and every arborist and tree pruner in Melbourne were absolutely run off their feet that day, so a bit of evasive action was taken. I will not go into any of the details, but there were some locals who were happy to get involved in making a couple of strategic cuts to that tree to ensure that the branches no longer were in contact with the powerlines and that the situation in that particular street in Glen Iris was made as safe as it could be – or perhaps the least unsafe it could be.

But I think it showed a couple of things: one, that the network resilience issues when storms are as broad and catastrophic as those ones are not confined necessarily to the Dandenongs and really heavily treed parts of Melbourne. They can actually really strike, and there were instances of power outages, right across the city, not confined to the leafier areas of the city. But also it showed that the default community response is one of proactivity in these circumstances. I want to thank all those volunteers, particularly, as it was in my patch then, the Boroondara Whitehorse and Monash SES brigades. They did amazing work then. I am sure, in the seat of Ringwood, Maroondah SES did similarly terrific work. It is the case that a very large chunk of the life of an SES volunteer is spent chopping branches, be it by saw or chainsaw or whatever, dealing with fallen trees. I suppose we are lucky as Melburnians to have so many trees around us, which might be in a position to fall, but lucky too that we have got SES volunteers who are on hand and appropriately resourced by this government to make sure that they can deal with those issues as and when they arise.

It is a fact of life particularly as we head out to the Dandenongs that there are some special risks that attach to that area. They are both derived from trees. They are of course power outages and bushfire, and over the course of the 59th Parliament we had significant bushfires in the state of Victoria as well as those significant power outages. What the power outages exposed was a need for government to have an intervention power – that is, a power to direct those businesses, because they are private businesses, to do certain things to assist the government in making sure that people's basic welfare needs are met. That can extend to things like their degree of preparedness for power outages or the turnaround times they are sharing with consumers. In the case of the 2021 storms there was a sort of default initial text blast that went out to affected consumers saying it would be 48 hours, and clearly it was never, ever going to be 48 hours. But on the flip side, when they did provide revised advice, it

was more like six weeks when in fact it turned out to be four. People make a whole lot of decisions about life and schooling and job commitments and accommodation and all that sort of stuff based on these estimates, and it is really, really important to make sure that that is in fact done accurately so that people can make good decisions about how to handle the effects of these natural disasters, which is ultimately what they are or certainly what sits at the core of these issues.

The bill itself creates this directions power. It is only going to be used rarely, but we simply cannot rely on a privatised business necessarily operating in a way that is perhaps not just for a profit motive, and if you are needing them to do things that are non-revenue generating, sometimes you are going to need to compel them to do those things rather than merely encourage them to do it. The directions power is so that if they are not providing adequate information, we can step in to improve that information. If the companies are needed at community information sessions we can direct them to be there, and also we can direct them to administer relief payments. The latter of course is really important. In the 2021 storms there was a \$1680 payment made available to any household that was without power for more than seven days. Certainly one of my cousins – one of the dokey ones I have referred to in here previously – had a significant outage period and was very grateful for that payment, because he was just running on the light of candles and the warmth of fire for I think 11 or 12 days, and it made a big difference in terms of his ability to keep his family warm and safe and make sure that the basics were covered.

It will not surprise the house to learn that at the time every single generator that was available for hire at every single Bunnings in the totality of metropolitan Melbourne and in most of the non-metropolitan east of the state got deployed to these areas to allow people to have electricity in their homes and to avoid things like food spoilage and all that. It was quite a broad-based power crisis. Whilst it was terrific to see communities responding and helping one another out, there is always a need for government to stand ready to step in and to ensure that those companies that have the awesome responsibility of looking after these networks stand ready to step in as and when required. I do commend the bill to the house.

**Annabelle CLEELAND** (Euroa) (17:01): I rise today to speak on the Energy Legislation Amendment (Electricity Outage Emergency Response and Other Matters) Bill 2023, something that I am happy to speak in support of. In its simplest form this bill is seeking to provide a range of solutions to better prepare and protect consumers in energy emergency situations, particularly after severe storms. These storms and subsequent power outages are something that are occurring regularly in the Euroa electorate. In June and October 2021 severe storms caused widespread and prolonged power outages across much of regional Victoria. In the impacted areas 68,000 customers were without power after 72 hours and 9000 customers were still without power seven days after the event. Nearly 24,000 customers remained off supply 72 hours after the storms and just 2500 customers were still without power seven days after the event. In both instances the power outages were more prolonged when compared with previous storm events. The experience of these storms highlighted the limits to getting critical information from electricity distribution businesses to support relief activities and programs for customers. Even in my own electorate we require regular contact with mobile service and power providers for updates to impacted members of the community.

Following these serious storms a subsequent external review was undertaken to identify priority reform measures and policies to enable distribution businesses to mitigate the risk of and better respond to prolonged power outages in the future. In August 2021 the Victorian government commissioned the electricity distribution network resilience review in response to the devastating storms of June 2021. An expert panel was appointed to investigate how distribution businesses can improve their preparedness for and response to prolonged power outages caused by storms and other extreme weather events. The expert panel found that participation of distribution businesses in emergency response and recovery was not delivering positive outcomes for impacted customers. Victorian customers were provided with mixed messaging on power restoration times and insufficient relief measures and were disregarded during emergency operations. In Pyalong, one of the most critically

impacted areas of my electorate, the testimonies of these people really express how serious this matter is. One resident said:

*We could not have hot meals or keep perishable food. Could not restock perishable food supplies as no way to keep cold. No supermarket in Pyalong, 50km round trip to Heathcote or Kilmore. Local store keeps some perishables but lost all their stock.*

Residents said:

*Local General Store/Australia Post was unable to process tracked package deliveries due to online system being down.*

...

*Difficult to circulate information to the community with no phones or internet, most had to drive or walk to find information. People had to drive to other side of town, high points on hills to get any phone service or receive and send SMS messages and phone calls.*

...

*Local hotel was closed as they had no ability to cook or provide food and EFTPOS/tills were out of action. Hotel lost significant perishable food stock.*

...

*A ... (TAFE) Student was unable to complete online coursework or assessment, institution would not accept hand written work. Other local students were unable to complete any online work, during Covid and remote learning students and parents were reliant on online learning.*

...

*Some residents suffered significant damage to houses and outbuildings, not just power outage. Significant numbers of trees down on private land, fences destroyed.*

From these testimonies it is clear the major issues raised were significant. These include communication issues. The lack of phones and internet meant it was difficult for residents to keep in contact with each other, let alone receive crucial emergency service information. Regarding food safety, there was no ability to keep food refrigerated and fit for consumption, yet the town was not able to provide this either. There were technology issues, with people unable to pay for items using EFTPOS and tills, something that impacted both consumers and businesses in the region. Our children were impacted because they were unable to communicate or complete schooling online. There was extensive infrastructure damage with buildings and homes destroyed, and hundreds and hundreds of trees were down. Our local residents responded with petitions calling for change, trying to resolve these serious issues, something that this legislation aims to assist with.

We saw similar issues like this regarding the poor warning systems in place for the October floods last year, something that majorly impacted our regional communities and the emergency response times. We are now seeing the inquiry into these floods trying to mitigate these issues, much like this legislation. Any reforms which reduce the impact of a natural disaster on our communities are ones that I will support. We saw significant losses suffered in the October floods, similar to the storms of 2021. In Seymour, Goulburn Options, a local disability provider, lost several cars, and police also lost vehicles and suffered extensive property damage. Farmers lost their homes, livestock and more, as did several residents of the impacted towns. But this does not even consider the emotional toll suffered by so many in our communities, and we continue to suffer to this day.

To add to this I want to say thank you for the amazing work of our emergency services, who did a fantastic job in trying to mitigate these issues and provide the best support available for our impacted communities. Their consistent and unwavering commitment to serving the needs of the community while in the face of danger is truly commendable.

I am just going to refer to something I prepared earlier. The reason for our wonderful Shadow Minister for Energy and Resources' recommendations is that the storms in June and October 2021 resulted in prolonged power outages and severely impacted consumers. The bill is about providing information and assisting in relief efforts following energy emergencies and associated prolonged power outages.



This bill is about getting critical information from electricity distribution businesses to support relief activities and programs for customers. As such, we are in support of this bill.

**Sarah CONNOLLY** (Laverton) (17:08): I rise to join my colleagues on this side of the chamber in speaking on the Energy Legislation Amendment (Electricity Outage Emergency Response and Other Matters) Bill 2023. As we have heard this afternoon, the purpose of this bill is to shield Victorian households and businesses against prolonged power outages. We have heard some incredible reflections here in the house this afternoon, particularly from the member for Monbulk about her reflections and the impact storms had on her community on the two occasions in June and then again in October 2021.

We have also heard reflections from members about power outages that they have personally experienced and that may have happened in their local communities. It reminded me of a power outage that we had recently. It was not because of a storm but just in our local street; I think Powercor were doing some works. The power was switched off, and we received notification it had gone off and were told that it would go back on at around 7:30 or 8 pm that night. The power went off at about 3 pm, and I had my parents in town visiting me on one of the very rare occasions that they had come to Melbourne from northern New South Wales. They had not experienced some of the colder weather that we have down here, and at 3 o'clock in the afternoon, when the lights went out and the power went off, they were quite comfortable. As the hours went by and the dark started to come on, I had to scramble around the house looking for some of the very few candles that we had, and we had to go out to the camper trailer and get our camping equipment with different lights and lanterns to put around the house. That was perhaps the smallest insight, even on the most minute scale, into what it would be like to be left without power – just for those couple of hours on that particular day – heating, and electricity for a very long time. The member for Monbulk talked about the impact that that had on her community, and it was quite an emotional contribution that she made, reflecting on the impact of that severe weather event that took place.

But we know that in 2021 we had, on those two occasions in June and October, that severe storm weather, and it quite frankly is not exaggerating to say it was the likes of which Victoria has not seen before. As someone who has spent a lot of time in Queensland, up there in Brisbane, when I was attending the University of Queensland, there were some huge, huge, huge weather and storm events that we saw take place. I particularly remember one occasion: my friends and I as young uni students were at the local pub and there was a huge, huge storm, and we walked home. I remember the trees had fallen all across the road and blocked roads. I could only liken it to what it would be like in some kind of war zone, with us trying to walk and get home. We were also in pitch black – in the dark – and this was long before mobile phones. It is not exaggerating to say that in the likes of Victoria, we had not seen a storm event like the one in 2021 before. Both of these events topped the charts with the highest number of electricity outages in our state's history. In June over 250,000 households and businesses were left without power. The October storm even topped this one, more than doubling the number to 525,000 households – that is just over half a million households. Nearly a quarter of all Victorian households were without power. These power outages were unprecedented, and what it tells us is that the grid is unprepared for this kind of extreme weather.

But I want to make it clear that our government, the Andrews Labor government, has a proven record of strengthening our energy grid to go ahead and withstand the impacts of climate change and extreme weather. As of May this year, 44 rapid earth fault current limiters, which were a key recommendation of the 2009 Victorian Bushfires Royal Commission, have been installed. The last one is set to be installed in November this year, just in time for summer. Indeed in working in my previous career before politics at AusNet Services, I do remember the project; we called it REFCL. I worked as part of their customer engagement team that was going out and talking to the community about the importance of REFCL and the impact it would have in local communities, as it came out of that bushfire royal commission in 2009. Up to 700 kilometres of wire and overhead powerlines have been put underground as part of the powerline bushfire safety program. And right in the aftermath of those

storms, we then went ahead and funded \$7.5 million towards backing up power systems across 24 towns in regional Victoria, protecting them against blackouts caused by floods or by bushfires.

Of course all of this really does build upon our commitment and investments into reducing our emissions and taking on and tackling climate change. Victorians know emphatically that the Andrews Labor government is turbocharging our emissions reduction targets of having 95 per cent renewables in our grid by 2035 and net zero by 2045. That is an 80 per cent cut to our carbon emissions, and as of last week, it is officially our new target. Now, this may be a shock to some, but these targets are some of the most ambitious emissions reduction targets in the world. Up until now we have been successful in reducing emissions by 32.3 per cent below 2005 levels, making us the fastest decarbonising state in the country – and with our government bringing back the SEC, we are going to get there that much faster, along with creating 59,000 new jobs. Victorians really can feel proud that we are a national leader when it comes to tackling climate change.

What does this bill actually go ahead and do to prevent further power outages? What it does is it gives the Secretary of the Department of Energy, Environment and Climate Action the power to direct private distribution businesses to provide necessary information, assist in relief efforts and administer government relief payments. That was a key recommendation of the distribution network reliance review that we conducted following the storms. Phase 1 of this review, which was conducted after the June storm, made eight recommendations, and all of those eight recommendations are now underway. The second phase was conducted last year, following the October storm, and the recommendations of this phase inform this change.

We know that we cannot always rely on private distributors to do the right thing all of the time. As I have said time and time again in this house, I spent 13 years working for transmission and distribution network service providers, or DNSPs and TNSPs – it is all a bit of a mouthful. What we know about monopoly businesses is that regulation is so very important. Whether it is through rules and regulations or whether it is through monetary fines, those sorts of regulatory arrangements are only needed when those businesses cannot be relied upon to do the right thing. We know that time and time again in this state that has, unfortunately, not always been the case. What we learned was that those storms in 2021 were actually made worse because the private distributors were unprepared for challenges of this scale, and their response was woefully inadequate. An example of that is where we had distributors provide inaccurate return-to-service times, which meant that residents could not actually go ahead and plan things like, importantly, the alternative accommodation that they needed for their families and nightly accommodation. They could not do that with any certainty. That was something that this government was out talking to people on the ground about, and we heard it time and time again. It was really unacceptable in this day and age for people who were already dealing with the loss of power. Power outages are never a pleasant experience, even in the best of times if they are relatively short or a couple of hours long, like I recently experienced – Powercor did a tremendous job in getting the power back on.

A bill like this makes small changes, but it is equally important to ensure that our grid is better protected against future power outages. We know that our grid is made vulnerable by extreme weather events, and this puts households, businesses and indeed communities at risk. Victorians know that when it comes to their electricity supply, this side of the house – the Andrews Labor government – has their back. Time and time again we have shown that, and this bill really does build upon that record. It is exactly why I stand here this evening and wholeheartedly commend the bill to the house.

**Ellen SANDELL** (Melbourne) (17:18): I will say at the outset that the Greens will be supporting this bill. As other speakers have mentioned, it does two things: firstly, it makes it easier for the government to demand information and support from distribution companies during power outages; and secondly, it strengthens regulation of the Victorian energy upgrades (VEU) program, which is a program to try to encourage businesses and homes to become more energy efficient.

The June and October 2021 severe storms were quite unprecedented – I am sure that is a word that we are all going to get very sick of using as the climate crisis heats up. It caused widespread and prolonged

power outages, and Victoria's distribution companies were simply not set up to respond adequately. Distributors – in fact all energy companies – failed to keep residents properly informed about power outages. They significantly underestimated how long it would take to reconnect power, and people were left waiting for huge amounts of time with no idea and no information about when things would improve. So it was not good enough, and the bill recognises that responses to prolonged power outages caused by storm and other extreme weather events need to improve significantly.

The bill makes some good, if small, changes to the powers of the state government to require these energy companies to provide more information during a disaster like these storms. What we would really like to see and what we actually need is a much bigger conversation about how our infrastructure is going to cope with worsening climate change, because we know that we are going to get more frequent and intense extreme weather and disasters. We have already seen it over the last couple of years. We are going into a probable El Niño. Climate change is getting a lot worse. It is happening faster than we ever thought it would, and infrastructure is going to be severely under stress. Everything from our power network to our stormwater, drainage, transport, train lines, roads and housing is all coming under incredible pressure. It was not designed for the kinds of climate impacts that we are seeing and that we are about to see, and it means it actually puts people's lives at risk and our day-to-day lives will become a lot harder.

I think we all remember how horrible it was in that summer of 2019, Black Summer, when the air, even in Melbourne, was choked with smoke. It was too hot to sleep. People could not breathe. People had to go out and buy air filters, wondering, 'Is this the future that we're walking into?' People were – me included – lying awake at night. I had quite a newborn baby – he was about eight months at that time – sleeping next to me, and I was just thinking, 'Is this the world that I've brought him into? Is this the world that we're expecting for our kids?' And to be honest it is pretty terrifying, but it does not actually seem like our governments at any level but particularly at a state level really understand the nature of the challenge that is facing us.

Adaptation, when it comes to climate change, used to be something that I did not even like to talk about, because sometimes when we talked about adaptation, we almost felt like we were giving up on mitigation. We wanted to talk about preventing the problem rather than just dealing with it when it hit, but we are at the point now that it is hitting, and we need to deal with it. We need to figure out how we protect lives, how we protect our way of life, how we protect our infrastructure but also how we actually live in this new world, how we actually preserve some semblance of the life that we want to live when we are facing these kinds of threats of disaster to people's lives, threats of being, you know, locked in a flooded suburb, threats of not being able to breathe the air that is choked with smoke. These are things we do not like to talk about, and I think everyone here, even, is pretending that these things are not going to happen and maybe that I am overexaggerating or it is hyperbole – but it is not; it is what climate scientists say is happening. We have actually all experienced it. We put it to the back of our minds because we do not want to live in that world. I do not want to live in that world, but we have to face up to the fact that we are going into that world, and we are going to have to figure out what it means for governments to grapple with that: who pays and how do we pay to upgrade infrastructure to protect ourselves?

Local governments are already sounding the alarm on things like stormwater systems not being up to scratch and seeing flash flooding when we get just a single rain event. We have got roads falling into the ocean, literally. We have got beaches literally being washed away. We have got people dying because our housing stock simply was not built to suit extreme temperatures. We have got people with respiratory problems dying because of smoke. This is where we need a whole-of-government response – an emergency response to say this is literally the biggest threat to our lives and what we are going to do about it. Are we going to continue just to respond when a disaster hits by tinkering around the edges like this, like what is in this bill, or are we going to proactively look at it: yes, it is a big challenge, yes, it will cost a lot of money, but if we do not do it, what is the alternative? It just does

not seem like we have a sense of urgency in a whole-of-government response to climate disasters, to preparing us and to making us resilient for what we are about to face.

So the other part of the bill concerns the Victorian energy upgrade scheme, which also needs some pretty serious reform. It was pretty comical reading about the fridges fiasco from last year where we had this system of poorly regulated, highly profitable carbon credits and we saw this quite ludicrous situation. This scheme was set up and because it was so profitable to get an energy-efficient fridge, which was supposed to replace an old fridge, there was this perverse incentive where businesses were just seeing dozens, 20 fridges dropped off at their front doorstep because the installers were getting a credit for that. And it did not actually reduce emissions; it probably increased emissions, I have to say. What an incredible waste to just be throwing away these unwanted fridges. Some of them were even just dumped on roadsides across the state. This bill makes some small changes so the minister can now set the fees in the system and try and prevent this pretty embarrassing situation from happening again.

It has got to be said that there is something in common about these two failures – the failures of the energy companies in the storm situation and the failures in this market-based energy efficiency system – and it is really the failure of the privatisation of the energy system in Victoria. Privatisation of our energy system means we are constantly needing to bring bills before this house to tinker with energy systems to make private companies do the right thing. We are constantly being told that privatising things makes them more efficient, but nothing could be actually further from the truth, and I think this bill is a clear demonstration of that. How much does it cost and how much time does it take for people to write these bills, to figure out how to fix the system and to bring that before Parliament? There is a huge amount of effort that goes into setting the regulations for the private businesses and then fixing them when they go wrong. It is inefficient and it is expensive, and the privatisation of the energy system is actually holding us back from making the transition to clean energy that we know we need to make. I cannot count the number of energy bills that have come before this place that I have spoken on or voted on that are tinkering with the regulations of the energy system – problems that have been created because we set up this private system. There would not necessarily have been those problems if we had not privatised the energy system in the first place. I think governments have really sold Victorians a pup when it comes to privatisation, telling us things would be better, cheaper and more efficient, when in so many cases, especially when it comes to energy, it has been the exact opposite. It makes no sense for transmission and distribution of our energy system especially to be in private hands. These in particular are often natural monopolies that need to be in public hands.

So rather than this kind of constant tinkering with the system of regulation, the Greens would love to see the SEC, which we very much support and very much commend the Minister for the State Electricity Commission for boldly bringing back, expanded to cover all facets of the energy system: generation, retail, transmission, distribution. That would allow us to slash emissions with renewables, sell cheap energy to consumers directly and maintain the system as a social good, because we know that power, electricity, is an essential service. We would not have to have these private companies getting in the way of that aim of providing power as an essential service. And ditto to the VEU system. We believe that this also should be reformed to provide energy-efficient products to Victorians directly instead of via third parties that are motivated by profit and that you have to regulate and that whole system that is creating all these perverse incentives.

We should really be setting rules that require homes to be energy-efficient in the first place. The government actually has the levers of power that it needs to do that. The Greens have had bills before this Parliament for a long time to introduce mandatory energy efficiency standards, particularly for rental properties, and mandatory disclosure or standards for homes at the point of sale. We have seen governments refuse to adopt those bills, but they are sensible reforms that, when we are looking at the scale of the climate challenge, make a lot of sense. I think they would be a lot more efficient and effective than the systems that we are seeing at the moment. Instead we just end up with this market-based system that gives credit for energy efficiency upgrades and is beset by problems and profiteering. We have seen countless rorts. Really, the confidence in that system has been undermined

to the point that people think it is quite laughable. People come to your home and say they are going to give you free light bulbs, and people do not know if it is a scam or whether it is real. It is not even reducing emissions in a lot of cases, because the company is not actually replacing light bulbs, it is just giving away products for free.

We should be putting our efforts into government solutions that work rather than just constantly wishing and hoping and believing that market-based trading mechanisms work when it comes to climate change. Neoliberalism has really taken hold, even in the Labor Party, which is sad to see. We are seeing it also at a federal level now with the nature repair market and this hope that we can create biodiversity credits and that that is going to solve the biodiversity problem, when actually a lot of the time those kinds of credits just offset and allow other projects, other destructive projects, to go ahead. You either get no improvement or a net loss of biodiversity when it comes to those kinds of credits.

*Members interjecting.*

**Ellen SANDELL:** Those kinds of market-based mechanisms just have been shown not to work.

**Michaela Settle** interjected.

**Ellen SANDELL:** We can have people shouting across the chamber –

**The ACTING SPEAKER (Jackson Taylor):** Order!

**Ellen SANDELL:** trying to defend neoliberalism, like many Labor MPs are doing right now, or we can actually sit back and look at what we are trying to achieve. I think we actually have the same goal here. We are both trying to achieve the same thing, and we just need to look at what actually works rather than just crossing our fingers and hoping that the market will solve it and we will not have to pay. Somebody pays in the end. Consumers pay, the environment pays and the climate pays, which actually means all of us pay if we invest in ideologically based solutions that just do not work.

This is a bill that has come before this house in six days rather than the usual 14 days, so we hope that there will be a bit of a chance to do a little bit more consultation with stakeholders before it goes to the other place – and there might be some amendments that we want to look at. There might be some amendments in relation to preventing gas appliances being used in the Victorian energy upgrades program, because gas appliances, as we know, create carbon emissions, and they should not be used as part of this program even if they create slightly less emissions than old gas appliances. We should not be installing new gas appliances in Victoria, full stop. We know that we can be moving toward energy-efficient electric appliances powered by renewable energy. That is the way of the future, and that is the way we are going to become resilient against climate impacts and create fewer emissions. So we will have a look at those things, but overall, as I mentioned at the start, the Greens will be supporting this bill.

**Darren CHEESEMEN** (South Barwon) (17:32): It is with some pleasure that I rise this evening to speak on the Energy Legislation Amendment (Electricity Outage Emergency Response and Other Matters) Bill 2023. I do so as a proud member of the Andrews Labor government, which has a real history of responding to the challenges that we have inherited from a changing climate and the challenges that we have inherited effectively from the Kennett government, who went about destroying the State Electricity Commission and undermining the capacity of the Victorian government – it is over 25 years since the privatisation of our energy generation systems – to be able to regulate our energy markets and to respond to those great challenges of climate change.

I have just listened for, I think, 20 minutes or thereabouts to the Greens talking about doom and gloom and not acknowledging the very significant reform journey that the Andrews Labor government has been on with respect to responding to those challenges, those dual challenges of climate change and a privatised energy system. We need to decarbonise our economy. That is a significant thing. We are in effect in a global arms race against other modern economies with respect to our energy system, and if we make the bold reforms that are necessary, then we can expect to see our economy remaining

globally competitive. The capacity of this state to be a proud manufacturing state is indeed very much underpinned by our capacity to decarbonise our economy and to generate the energy that our state needs, not just for manufacturing but also, importantly, to drive down the energy costs that the household budget is experiencing. If you look at the reform agenda, we have had a huge number of bills that have come to this chamber over the last eight years, more often than not opposed by the Liberal Party and cynically, as often as not, voted down by the Greens in the other place. In fact it has been a hallmark of the voting behaviour of both the Liberal Party and the Greens to oppose the amendments and the legislative reform agenda that we have brought to this place.

As I mentioned earlier, back in the mid-1990s the Kennett government went about privatising our energy networks and our energy generation system in Victoria, and not only was that terrible for consumers, it was also exceptionally poor for workers in this state. I would argue that if that had not happened we would have a lot more highly skilled, highly trained workers in this state that would be able to be thrown at the Big Build, which we have not had – because the State Electricity Commission and indeed the board of works and many other things that existed back then were huge and very significant drivers for skilling men and women in this state. So many people that I personally know were given that great opportunity of accessing an apprenticeship through those authorities. It has held back our economy significantly.

The Andrews Labor government took to the people of Victoria late last year a very bold and ambitious plan. That bold and ambitious plan saw us setting significant targets to decarbonise our economy and to lift renewable energy generation in this state, to harness those opportunities, to effectively win that global arms race with respect to generating energy and to make sure that our economy remains competitive in a global context for the foreseeable future. But what we have also seen – and it is the purpose really of this particular reform bill – is that in so many ways consumers, the community, have not necessarily been as well informed as they could be or indeed should be when we do have disaster in this state. What we certainly know is, particularly from the consequences of climate change, we are going to see more extreme storm events and we are going to see greater periods of dryness and drought and, as a consequence of that, more bushfires, more flooding and all of the other things that climate change will be responsible for and be driving.

What we have seen is that the private networks have not necessarily been upfront and clear with the Victorian community about how long post these events happening it will take for them to get their electricity networks back and functioning. Mums and dads and households have been left waiting, with unclear information about the steps that they might necessarily take, whether they book a hotel room for the night, whether they head off down to the servo to get an esky and a bag of ice to keep their frozen meat and vegetables cool so that they can consume them or whether they can sit it out for an hour or so until these energy networks are brought back online.

These reforms address a gap in the market where these energy networks have not responded as quickly as they might have, and that could be for a whole raft of reasons. It might be that it is on a weekend; it might be that it is on a public holiday and it could be that those energy companies are not necessarily particularly keen to pay penalty rates and other things, so they drag their heels on delivery of clear and precise information to consumers.

This reform is important. As a consequence of climate change we are going to see more circumstances where the arrangements we are seeking to legislate are used more often. I think that will be useful for consumers, and I commend this bill to the house. I hope to see it have a speedy passage through the Parliament.

**Sam GROTH** (Nepean) (17:43): I will warn you: this will be a very brief contribution on my part. I rise to speak on the Energy Legislation Amendment (Electricity Outage Emergency Response and Other Matters) Bill 2023, and I thank both those on the government side and the member for Croydon for his work in preparing us for the bill. As we have heard for the last couple of hours in the chamber, the main purposes of the bill are to amend the Electricity Industry Act 2000 and provide the Secretary

of the Department of Energy, Environment and Climate Action with the power to direct distribution businesses to assist in emergency response and recovery to mitigate the impacts of prolonged electricity outages. That is what I want to speak on, because for my community down on the Mornington Peninsula, and I am sure for the member for Hastings, who is in the chamber, as well as for the member for Mornington, both in June and in October when those storms came through, our communities were affected quite badly by the power being out. I remember the situation along Point Nepean Road through Rosebud to Sorrento and my wife being at home with the twins and the power being out. When you have got newborn twins in a house during winter, it is not ideal when you cannot get power. But for those communities up through the hills, for example in Red Hill, when they are living on tank water and bores and such they need electricity just to have water, so they need power not just to keep them warm but for water as well. I know my community was deeply impacted by this.

I remember how bad it was and how long it took to clean up. When you look at what happened in June, and looking at the articles in front of me and the memories that they bring back – and I am sure when I raise this it will bring back memories for those in my community as well – some of these houses were out of power for weeks on end. While this bill will mean that the power companies need to get the distribution back, a lot of my community could not, even if that had happened, have gotten power back to their houses because the power meters on their properties had been damaged in the storms. They had to get private electricians out to fix those before they could get power back to their houses.

The Sorrento SES, along with the SES in Hastings and all the CFAs, spent hours and hours and hours on literally thousands of call-outs, calls and welfare checks on people to deliver generators but also water and those essential needs. While we will support this bill, and it is great that it is going to put the onus back onto the power companies to make sure the distribution side of things is taken care of, I more want to take this moment to reflect on what was a tough time for our communities, for those up in the hills as well, and just I guess remember, a couple of years on, the fantastic job that our SES and our CFAs did to get our communities up and running again.

We hope these storms never come along again, but we know that these sorts of things will. When you have areas of your community that are more remote than others you know there are going to be these types of events that will inevitably put our communities under the same pressure, so we will be supporting this bill. I just want to say that when that does happen we know we have some fantastic people on the peninsula, right from the top to the bottom, that will make sure that our communities are taken care of, and while we hope it does not happen again, we will always stand beside and do whatever we can to support our emergency crews and those people who are affected. I thank everyone in the house as well – well, almost everyone –

*Members interjecting.*

**Sam GROTH:** I was going to refer to the Greens, even though they are supporting it. It is great that we can all support and agree on a bill, and we will be supporting it. I just thank those emergency crews once again.

**Steve McGHIE (Melton) (17:47):** Today I rise to contribute to the Energy Legislation Amendment (Electricity Outage Emergency Response and Other Matters) Bill 2023 – the titles of our bills seem to be getting much longer. Time and time again our government has shown how important good energy policy is and how important it is to all Victorians, and I am pleased that those opposite – including the Greens, when they take the time to come into the house – are supportive of this bill. This amendment comes about because of failures of privatised electricity companies – and we know how that has been for the last 20-odd years since Kennett privatised them; it has just been a complete failure – coupled with the devastating storms that have been referred to in many members' contributions. We know that these reforms we are making to this wider sector are going to make a hell of a difference. The disruption and devastating impacts of the storms, as I say, have been referred to in everyone's speeches – about how devastating they were.

Last week the CSIRO handed down a report about the rising sea temperature and the impacts of the El Niño and La Niña effects. So we talk about these storms in the past, but I think we had better prepare ourselves for a lot more into the future, unfortunately. Of course the severe weather events that result in power outages are likely to increase in frequency, as I just said, as a result of climate change, and the increased likelihood of severe storms and resulting power outages makes getting on with this reform so critical. Power outages are not just about power. They are also about people's lives, and I would like to make mention of the passionate contribution from the member for Monbulk and the story that she portrayed in regard to her local area, the residents in her area, and how they were desperately affected and how upsetting it was – her reciting what occurred out that way. It is not easy to get up and tell the stories. Again, as I say, the member for Monbulk did a fantastic job of that, telling us about her community. Ahead of the coming winter storm season 2023 this bill is timely and important. I greatly appreciate the opportunity to contribute to this debate, and I want to thank the Minister for Energy and Resources and her staff for putting this bill forward.

We see privatised electricity distribution businesses, who are directly responsible for the electricity network, providing inadequate responses, incorrect responses and inaccurate information, which makes it harder for communities to get back on their feet, with constantly changing expected restoration times and unrealistic restoration times. Of course it is incredibly frustrating that we need to create legislation to make them do the right thing, to make them tell us the truth and provide accurate information, and unfortunately that is one of the things that comes with privatisation – we do not always get the facts and the real information in real time. So doing this might not be good for their bottom line or profit forecasting, but deliberately withholding information at best helps nobody at all, and at worst it endangers people's lives, and we have heard some of those stories tonight. And we know we cannot rely on these companies to put our communities before their shareholders.

It was only a few days ago – it was in fact on Sunday – that I had the privilege to attend a book launch in Bacchus Marsh with the member for Eureka, who only hung around for about 1 minute after I arrived. She was there for a lot longer, but I arrived and I thought it was me that was the reason why she left – but anyway, no, she had other appointments.

**Michaela Settle** interjected.

**Steve McGhie:** And she is in the house. Yes, she is in the house. I thought if I came into the house, she would get up and walk out, but she did not.

Anyway, there was a book launch on Sunday, and as I said, the member for Eureka and I were there. A woman by the name of Lyn Purcell wrote this book called *Lost in the Gorge and Other Emergencies*, and it is celebrating the incredible work the State Emergency Service teams do out at Bacchus Marsh. It was their 40th anniversary, and it is a fantastic book that includes many, many events that they have attended to over those 40 years. I want to congratulate them for their efforts over the 40 years – the past and the present members and hopefully the new members that they will get. The current members there just do an amazing job, and it was a great day – a great presentation by them and a fantastic book. They are out there protecting our communities when required.

This Saturday night coming is the 50th anniversary dinner for the Melton SES, and again I extend my thanks to both Melton and Bacchus Marsh SES for their great work, in particular last week when we were all aware of that bus crash out at Exford with the schoolkids. Both of the units attended that bus crash and obviously got a number of kids off the bus, so we thank them for their efforts again.

The importance that these volunteers play in our lives and in our communities cannot be overstated, and when the power goes out, they go to work. When it is raining, when it is snowing, if it is flooding, they go to work. They go the opposite way to what most of us would do in incredibly dangerous situations, life-threatening situations, doing dangerous work in dangerous situations time and time again to make it safer for all of us, and of course with these storms they did exactly that. And with the power outages, they are the first out there. So it is fantastic, and again, we cannot thank them enough.



But they are not really greatly supported by the private energy companies, and that is unfortunate given the money that those private energy companies generate, and we would hope that they support our emergency services workers a lot better than what they do.

So immediately after the June 2021 storm – devastating for the localities that were affected – and before the October storms that hit western Victoria, eight recommendations were already implemented, and these included improvements to communications with critical infrastructure operators, enhanced public messaging to support community preparedness and faster and more streamlined support for power-dependent customers. These recommendations and important changes continue to be rolled out, because that is what this government does; it delivers on what we promise – recommendations such as participation in municipal and regional emergency management planning processes and putting companies at the table with the frontline workers that deal with the aftermath of these power failures. So the review that was done saw there were significant out-of-pocket expenses, exceeding \$6000. Half a million homes were affected – a quarter of all Victorian properties – so the administration of a power outage payment to affected customers was one of the recommendations.

In the October storm event across western Victoria, the Mornington Peninsula and the Gippsland region, households and businesses experienced prolonged outages, and the impacts on residents and businesses were made substantially worse by the inadequate response of these privatised electricity companies. Damage to private property was immense, and many stories have been told today by many members in their contributions. We know how unprepared for the power outages the private companies were – the scale of things.

We have heard many experiences raised today. I am not sure how many of the numbers are out, but three days after they lost power in October it appears that there were just under 24,000 homes that still did not have power, and a week after losing power there were still 2500 homes without power. We never prepare ourselves well for power outages. If you think about not having power for a week – your life is turned upside down. I do not know what I would do without power for a week, let alone all the other damage that was outside and around some of these properties. It is pretty hard to think how people could survive in their daily lives. I know you do in hard times, but it would have been absolutely terrible to experience that. I have had power out at home for an hour, and I get a bit edgy, frustrated and concerned, thinking, ‘When is it going to come back on?’ I go out and get the generator and turn the generator on.

This is an important bill. There have been some fantastic contributions, and I commend the bill to the house.

**Bridget VALLENCE** (Evelyn) (17:57): I also rise to speak on the Energy Legislation Amendment (Electricity Outage Emergency Response and Other Matters) Bill 2023. It was interesting to hear the member for Melton say he gets edgy when the power is out at his place for an hour. Well, during the June 2021 storms my place was out of power for three weeks, and we were all pretty edgy.

In this piece of legislation that has been brought before the house the main provision is really to enable a power to direct distribution businesses to assist in emergency response and recovery to mitigate the impacts of prolonged electricity outages and improve community outcomes, particularly during times of severe emergencies. As we know, we have talked a lot about this, and most members have referred to some of the severe storm activities that we have had – even bushfire activities – that impacted our essential services, particularly our power. That is precisely why we will be supporting this bill: to make it simpler. It is not doing too much, but it is one small step to help communities who experience devastation and frustration during times of emergencies.

On the 9 June 2021 storms, I would like to talk mostly about my community. The storms did ravage the Yarra Ranges community right across the Yarra Ranges, from Lilydale, Montrose and Kilsyth right up through the Yarra Valley and also into the hills, the Dandenong Ranges. It started out with floods in Yering, Coldstream and Yarra Glen earlier in the day. Our local Lilydale SES did an amazing

job to respond to that, only then to be called across to the Dandenong Ranges, to places like Olinda, Mount Dandenong and Mount Evelyn, where there were cyclone-like winds ripping through those communities. I went up to Kalorama and Olinda and saw the magnitude of the devastation – these 70- to 100-metre trees clean ripped out of the ground, strewn all over the place in a completely random nature, cutting across roads and cutting across properties. It was completely stressful for those communities. This impacted particularly in my electorate the townships of Mooroolbark, Lilydale, Silvan, Mount Evelyn and Montrose. Those communities were without power – some for a couple of days but many, like my place in Wandin, for three, four or five weeks. Many of those people had a great deal of uncertainty as to when their power would come back on, because they were receiving mixed messages. This bill will go to supporting the government of the day to be able to call upon the power companies to help with that community response.

During the June 2021 storms the homes of around 80 families in the Yarra Ranges were utterly devastated that night. As I have mentioned, many people were without power. In fact tens of thousands of residents right across Victoria were cut off from power, and it was not just the lights. It was not just the electricity in the house but water as well. In my place I am fully on tank water, which only comes into the water through electric pumps. So when you are without electricity at places like mine you are also without water. That is a huge challenge right across the Yarra Ranges and particularly in the Dandenong Ranges. It was a complete disaster zone. This was at a time when our community was just emerging from one of the COVID lockdowns. There were lockdowns and businesses were closed during COVID. They were just coming out of that and a storm hit. So there was just that added stress and complexity in the lives of those families and those small businesses right through our community.

I want to take this opportunity, as others have, to thank the tremendous efforts of the emergency services who responded, including the volunteers of the Lilydale SES, the State Emergency Services; the Emerald SES; the Kalorama CFA – right when it happened, when it hit, no other emergency service vehicles could get up from the foot of the hills, and the Kalorama CFA did a tremendous job to look after the communities and those who had no communication off the hills; many of our other local CFA brigades; as well as the Yarra Ranges police; of course the Yarra Ranges council; and subsequently the Australian Defence Force. Thank you also to anyone in our community who contributed in any way in a volunteer capacity, who offered shelter, who contributed to the foodbank up in the hills; who donated food or blankets; or who just offered residents someone to talk to – someone to be there to listen or to have a cuddle – because there were a lot of tears at that time throughout our community.

The severe storms caused widespread and prolonged power outages right across Victoria, as I have said. I have talked about my community, but it was right across Victoria. Following those storms 68,000 customers were without power after 72 hours. Another 9000 customers were still without power for seven days after that event. Additionally, following a couple of months later, there was again a severe storm in October and nearly 24,000 customers remained off power supply for 72 hours after that storm, and 2500 customers were without power seven days after that storm. It just goes to show that when we have these severe events – and they are not going to go away; we are going to have more of them – we need to be able to provide that certainty. So many families, households and businesses had huge wastage. Small cafes, as an example, had to chuck out so much food. That adds to costs and is very stressful, so we really want to be able to support people the best we can, and this bill hopefully will go a little way in achieving that.

It is also about vulnerable people. You know, these storms happened during particularly cold weather, and there was no way to heat homes. It was a very, very slow response from the Andrews government at the time. I know the member for Monbulk at the time, the Deputy Premier at the time, was pretty much missing in action, and the communities through the Dandenong Ranges and through the electorate of Monbulk were completely astonished about the lack of response, the very slow response and the reluctance to call upon the ADF. The government will say that they came with generators. They came well after the fact. This was after the fact of many households having to go and find their

own generators. The generators that came, came all too late. Pretty much most of the power was coming back online then.

Of course, whilst this bill will enable the power to require power companies to contribute to the effort, I do want to pay tribute to the power companies who put in a pretty remarkable effort. All of these workers in the power companies did everything that they could possibly do in what was pretty much a devastation zone. There were trees strewn everywhere, roads cut off and live powerlines across roads – an unsafe situation – and these workers for these power companies went into that disaster zone to do what they could, in the most timely fashion that they could, to get the power up and running and make it safe for the communities.

What I would also like to say is that obviously this bill goes to enabling a power to deal with power companies, but what it does not talk about is that there was no review of the State Emergency Service's needs. Something that we committed to in the lead-up to the last election was – particularly as a response to the storms through the Yarra Ranges and the Dandenong Ranges in particular – to boost the capability and capacity of the State Emergency Service up in the Mount Dandenong–Olinda area. What we would like to see and what that community would like to see is a new SES unit in the Olinda area, to be able to respond from the hills. The Lilydale SES and the Emerald SES do an amazing job to respond, but they are still some way from getting up to the hill, and this bill and so far the bills that we have seen from the government have failed to address the specific need, as has the government's funding for emergency response. The Yarra Ranges council were required to provide five business cases to prove they needed funding to help with the clean-up, and that is something the government should do much better on.

**Anthony CIANFLONE** (Pascoe Vale) (18:07): I rise to speak on the Energy Legislation Amendment (Electricity Outage Emergency Response and Other Matters) Bill 2023. Power and electricity fuel the aspirations of modern-day life. From the moment we wake up in the morning to the sound of that iPhone alarm to when we make breakfast or when we go to the workplace or the classroom and turn on the respective tools we need to be productive, the correlation between energy and socio-economic progress has long been established and is now very much woven into virtually every aspect of our lives. However, before I turn to the substance of this bill, which will help improve energy certainty and security in times of need for Victorians, I think it is important to just provide some global context with the fact that as we stand in this chamber tonight, many across the globe still, sadly, do not have access to even the most basic energy and electricity supply.

According to the United Nations Department of Economic and Social Affairs, the lack of access to energy globally continues to be a major handbrake on economic and human development. Access to clean and affordable power is essential to the development of agriculture, business, communications, education, health care and transportation, with the UN highlighting that access to energy is fundamental to preventing diseases, supplying clean water and improving basic hygiene. However, as of 2020 it was estimated that 730 million people around the globe had no access to electricity, predominantly in sub-Saharan Africa, with that number only anticipated to be reduced to 679 million by 2030. Across the Pacific, energy poverty has been identified predominantly across three countries, Papua New Guinea, Solomon Islands and Vanuatu, with around 7 million Pacific Islanders estimated to have essentially no access to electricity. So while we in this chamber may regularly disagree on many things, I think it is fair to say that we in Australia and Victoria have long been overwhelmingly the fortunate beneficiaries of the reliable and secure supply of energy to our homes and our communities that millions of others around the globe can only, sadly, remain envious of.

However, while Victorians have enjoyed extended phases of uninterrupted power supply over many respective periods, over the last 15 years there have indeed been many instances when we have had electricity supply seriously disrupted and community safety compromised, including through the tragic 2009 Black Saturday bushfires and the 2019–20 Victorian fire season. While these and other events were subject to respective post-event reviews and commissions instituted by the Commonwealth and Victorian governments, which put forward recommendations to build a better

and more resilient, enhanced state power system, it was the more recent severe storms experienced by Victorians in June 2021 and October 2021 that led to the reforms set out in this bill.

The storms of June and October 2021 caused devastating impacts, as we have heard throughout the chamber and through the various contributions here today, with many, many left without power for prolonged periods. As outlined by the *Electricity Distribution Network Resilience Review*, which was prompted following the June 2021 storms:

At peak, more than 297,000 customers lost power

...

... 68,000 electricity customers remained off supply after 72 hours and 9,000 customers were still without power seven days after the event.

As identified by SES Victoria, the June storms of 2021 impacted many Victorian communities but in particular those in the Dandenong Ranges, as we heard from the member for Monbulk, the Macedon Ranges, the Latrobe Valley, Hepburn shire and many, many other parts of the state. The result was over 10,000 requests for assistance to Victoria SES, with widespread power outages of essential services. Following the October 2021 storms, at the peak over 526,000 customers lost power, 23,900 customers remained off supply 72 hours later and just over 2500 customers were still without power seven days after the event. The October storms also caused significant impacts across the state, including at Mount William in the Grampians, at Melbourne Airport and throughout Melbourne's northern suburbs, as well as even in St Kilda.

The *Electricity Distribution Network Resilience Review*, page 6, which I would like to refer the house to, identifies a wide number of issues experienced by communities as a result of the storms. The review:

... heard from affected residents and whole communities that a key problem was the loss of all phone and internet communications due to these systems having limited redundancy to prolonged power outages. Many were unable to contact services or family and friends to check on welfare, request assistance or receive updates from distribution businesses ... In cold winter conditions, prolonged loss of power affected people's ability to heat homes and keep warm, prepare food, shower and wash clothes. Refrigerated food supplies were lost. For the elderly, those with disabilities and those with young families, these impacts were exacerbated. For businesses and those residents working from home (during COVID lockdown) the lack of access to the internet was a significant issue. Some residents and businesses also lost access to water and sewage services.

A significant frustration for many was receiving insufficient information from distribution businesses on which to base a decision about whether to stay or leave. Many said that information was only being provided via communication systems that had themselves been significantly disrupted. The updates that distribution businesses did provide were often inaccurate and unhelpful, with estimated time to restore power messages being clearly unrealistic and changing frequently through the duration of the outages. People understood that the extent of the damage meant it was a very difficult ... situation for the distribution businesses and greatly appreciated the efforts of their field staff. However, there was a widespread sense of disappointment and even dismay about the poor quality of information provided by distribution business head offices and the dysfunctional internal systems they appeared to be employing ... This resulted in the need for repeated reporting and further delays and inconvenience. Overall, the widespread experience of these communities, both during and outside of extreme events, in seeking to interact with their distribution businesses was opaque, unsatisfying, and disempowering.

The severe windstorms of June and October 2021 highlighted the vulnerability of our electricity distribution network and the impacts that such extreme weather impacts have on local communities and businesses. The review found that electricity distribution businesses failed to provide timely and fit-for-purpose information on request by the former Department of Environment, Land, Water and Planning. Additionally, the review highlighted that electricity distribution businesses did not provide effective support in the delivery of relief activities for impacted communities.

The objective of this bill is to directly facilitate the implementation of a key reform recommended by the electricity distribution network resilience review. The bill will achieve this by amending the following acts: the Electricity Industry Act 2000, to provide the Secretary of the Department of

Energy, Environment and Climate Action (DEECA) with a directions power to compel electricity distribution businesses to assist in emergency response and recovery, either through the provision of information for emergency operations and/or by assisting with relief programs to reduce the impacts on electricity customers of prolonged power outages caused by severe weather events and help improve community resilience; the Essential Services Commission Act 2001; and the Victorian Energy Efficiency Target Act 2007 through minor amendments to support reforms to the Victorian energy upgrades program compliance and enforcement regime.

Providing the secretary of DEECA with a new power to direct electricity distribution businesses where there is an emergency power outage may compel electricity distribution businesses to provide information to the secretary to assist in emergency management operations. As part of this, a direction may compel electricity distribution businesses to support and administer relief programs and payments to their impacted customers during and following a prolonged power outage. Failure to comply with a direction could attract a civil penalty of more than \$200,000, reflecting how serious the impacts of non-compliance can be for affected customers.

In amending the Victorian Energy Efficiency Act 2007 and the Essential Services Commission Act 2001, the Victorian energy upgrades program will be further strengthened to deliver cost-saving outcomes to Victorian customers and align the program's effectiveness in lowering greenhouse gas emissions from continued use of legacy equipment in Victorian households and businesses.

While these reforms will go some way to improving the resilience of our state's electricity network in the event of storms and emergencies, the reality is that combating climate change will remain crucial if we are to mitigate against the worst impacts and prevent more severe weather events. As stated by the *Electricity Distribution Network Resilience Review*, on page 21:

Historic planning practices have delivered networks that can withstand the typical historic climate conditions. However, climate change has increased the incidence, nature and severity of extreme weather events and natural hazards. We can expect climate change to make weather-driven events such as those experienced in the June and October 2021 storms more frequent and more severe ...

...

At the heart of this urgency is a need to acknowledge the increased likelihood of extreme weather events ...

The incidence of major wind and storm events, such as those that occurred in June and October 21, is expected to increase with climate change and therefore increase the likelihood of disruption to power/energy sources.

We agree –

that is, the review agrees –

that the frequency and severity of these events is expected to increase. Further, our collective dependency on our critical infrastructure has increased, with changes to how and where we work meaning we are more dependent on a safe and resilient power supply than ever before.

These are the views that were put forward to the review by key stakeholders, including the Australian Energy Regulator, the CSIRO, Yarra Ranges council, Ausgrid, CitiPower and many, many others.

That is why, along with the measures contained in this bill, the Andrews Labor government is committed – and I note the Minister for Climate Action is at the table here. We are taking real action on climate change to radically reduce our carbon emissions, which is fundamentally critical, including through bringing back the SEC, which will be a key driver to reducing emissions and bringing down power bills through the \$1 billion initial investment into renewable, government-owned energy. Later this year the government will legislate these emissions targets of 75 to 80 per cent by 2035 and net zero by 2045. Working towards a target of 95 per cent renewable energy generation by 2035, a renewable energy storage target of 6.3 gigawatts by 2035 and offshore wind energy targets will also enable the state to make this historic transition. I commend this bill to the house. It is all about protecting communities and securing our energy supply and I look forward to its passage.

**Pauline RICHARDS** (Cranbourne) (18:17): I move:

That the debate be adjourned.

**Motion agreed to and debate adjourned.**

**Ordered that debate be adjourned until later this day.**

*Business of the house*

**Orders of the day**

**Lily D'AMBROSIO** (Mill Park – Minister for Climate Action, Minister for Energy and Resources, Minister for the State Electricity Commission) (18:17): I move:

That the consideration of orders of the day, government business, 2 to 4 inclusive, be postponed until later this day.

**Motion agreed to.**

*Motions*

**Energy policy**

**Debate resumed on motion of Lily D'Ambrosio:**

That this house notes the overwhelming support at the 2022 election for the Victorian Labor government's plan to:

- (1) bring back the State Electricity Commission;
- (2) reach 95 per cent renewables by 2035 and net zero by 2045;
- (3) install 100 neighbourhood batteries across Victoria; and
- (4) create 59,000 renewable energy jobs.

**Darren CHEESEMAN** (South Barwon) (18:18): It is with some pleasure that I rise this evening to speak on the State Electricity Commission motion that has been brought to this chamber. I must say over the last few sitting weeks I have heard some really outstanding and fantastic contributions from so many government MPs in this chamber.

Those contributions in so many ways have talked about the sordid history of the State Electricity Commission and indeed the Kennett government's privatisation agenda of the mid-1990s, which in so many ways decimated Victoria's energy system and saw it being flogged off to the highest bidder. We saw as a consequence of that our electricity generation system in so many ways standing still for the following, effectively, 30 years. We saw many, many workers, particularly through the Latrobe Valley, lose their livelihoods as a consequence of that privatisation agenda; the profits from our energy networks in fact offshored and that profit going overseas to overseas shareholders; a deskilling in so many ways of our energy system in this state; and the substantial productivity line that enabled training through the State Electricity Commission lost to this state. The reality is, as a consequence of that reform agenda of the 1990s, Victorians ended up paying a lot more for their energy. That drove up costs in household budgets, and that saw the carbonising of our economy becoming much more profound, challenging and difficult.

Very pleasingly, the Andrews Labor government has had a real zeal for reform in this space. We have that zeal for reform, because we ultimately want to see a bunch of things achieved simultaneously. The first is to see energy generation in this state, where possible, owned by Victorians, and then it is to see Victorians benefit from a jobs perspective and to decarbonise our economy and transition to a renewable energy future. That journey is important for households and it is important for our climate, but I think most importantly, it is tremendously important for maintaining our competitive advantage. Our competitive advantage historically has been that we have had in a global context relatively secure and relatively cheap energy, which has underpinned our economy, underpinned manufacturing and

underpinned our household budgets. But in responding to the challenges of climate change, we need to of course transition to renewable energy, and we are in a global arms race in so many ways to do that.

I very much want to commend the Minister for Climate Action for driving this reform program and providing really profound and strong leadership in establishing an election commitment that we took to the people last year, which was that we would bring back the State Electricity Commission. Doing this enables us to transition far more aggressively to a renewable energy future than what we would have otherwise been able to do. It will mean that we will be able to in a more aggressive way move to offshore renewable energy, which of course is globally proven technology but relatively expensive. For that sector to go down that path with the Andrews Labor government – an important component to that is the re-establishment of the State Electricity Commission. If we do that and we do that well, Victoria going forward will be able to maintain its competitive advantage, a competitive advantage that it has had effectively since the 1930s, which is stable, safe, reliable and affordable energy in this state. That is why this reform is so important.

We also want to have a new reality where the employment opportunities for Victorians are met. We want to have well-paid jobs. We want to have those workers with the best skills available to drive that reform with us. Again, the State Electricity Commission, the re-formation of it, will enable us to train the workers that we need to move to a future where not only 85 per cent but 100 per cent of demand, if not higher, can be achieved and where we become ultimately an energy exporter from Victoria into other states and potentially into international markets. But for us to be able to realise those opportunities and those benefits, we need to re-establish the State Electricity Commission and we need to move as aggressively as we have sought to do.

I have no doubt that the Liberal Party in this state will continue to hold onto their historical ideology of privatisation. I have no doubt that they will maintain that rage in this place and in the other chamber. And I have no doubt that the Greens, where they can, will seek to frustrate our ambition and our agenda in this place. This is profound and bold reform. It is profound and bold reform that I know many people who were elected to represent the Andrews Labor government in this place never thought possible. It is bold and profound reform that we dreamed about, but we never thought it could be achieved. I very much am pleased to see my friend the Minister for Energy and Resources sitting at the table, who had the courage to drive this through the Andrews Labor government, drive it into our election commitments to start that profound journey that will provide the energy security that our state needs. It is responding to those modern challenges of climate change and responding to those challenges of making sure that we are training the workers of the future and making sure that profits made via this venture are owned by Victorians and that Victorians can get a strong job out of this and have an opportunity to be a part of the energy security that our state needs and our country needs to make sure that we maintain our competitive advantage going forward. This is bold reform, it is necessary reform, and I commend this motion to this chamber.

**Wayne FARNHAM** (Narracan) (18:28): I am pleased to rise today on the State Electricity Commission motion, and I wish the member for South Barwon was staying, because I would like to have a conversation with him about some of his commentary that we have just gone through. I think what we need to do – and probably given that I am the only person in this chamber that has actually worked at the SEC at Yallourn – is maybe go back in time to see what a future SEC will look like. A lot of you may not know, but the acronym of the SEC when I worked there was for ‘slow, easy and comfortable’. It was an inefficient beast under Labor government. It had billions and billions and billions of dollars of debt. That is why Joan Kirner sold 51 per cent of Loy Yang and that is why Joan Kirner started the privatisation of the SEC – because she recognised that under government control it was inefficient. It is interesting when we hear about the Liberal Party being the monsters of privatisation, the devils of privatisation.

**Juliana Addison:** Yes, you said it.

**Wayne FARNHAM:** We are the devils. We privatise everything.

**Juliana Addison:** Wayne, you are the worst.

**Wayne FARNHAM:** I tell you what, there are a few skeletons in your closet too. Let us go to privatisation, shall we, under a Labor government. Let us start with the Kirner government. Fifty-one per cent of Loy Yang – Labor. The State Bank of Victoria – who can forget that little chestnut – sold to Paul Keating, who then sold it to the Commonwealth Bank – Labor. Let us keep going; there are more here. \$9.7 billion lease of the Port of Melbourne – Labor.

**Juliana Addison:** Leased! Leased! Not sold.

**Wayne FARNHAM:** You still sold it. The sale of the Land Titles and Registry office – Labor. You sold off the Snowy Hydro scheme – Labor. Federation Square – Labor. Partial privatisation of VicRoads – Labor. You cannot sit there and accuse a Liberal government of being the devils of privatisation, Jeff Kennett with his horns running through the place privatising everything. This government is just as guilty of privatisation. You love it just as much as we do.

Let us get back to the SEC and let us get back to jobs lost by Jeff Kennett. What about jobs lost by Labor? What about the closure of Hazelwood? Thousands of jobs in the valley gone – thousands. And just recently Opal because of hardwood – another 200 jobs gone. What about today and the disgraceful behaviour of this government to stop the native timber forest industry, which will turn communities into ghost towns – more jobs lost under this government. Before we start throwing mud, we need to look in the mirror, because you guys are just as guilty as we are.

But what I am curious about is the new SEC. We have talked about the old one. What is the new one going to look like? I am pleased the minister is here today because she may be able to answer some of my questions. Today the minister hopped up in Parliament – I am confused, so I am happy for the minister to clarify this for me today here – in question time and said it is going to be 100 per cent owned by state government. Is it going to be 100 per cent owned? Is it going to be 51 per cent owned? Is the government going to be the wholesaler or the retailer or the whole lot? I am not sure.

We heard through the election ‘We’re going to bring back the SEC; big business has ripped billions out of Victoria and taken it away.’ A lot of people invested in that big business through their super funds. They got the benefit through their super funds of those big businesses making money. Business has to make money; there is no problem with that. But what is going to happen with the other 49 per cent? That has got to go to business. I assume it is going to be 49 per cent. That is what is being said. That is going to go to superannuation funds. Superannuation funds have to make money for their members – that is legislated. So how are all the profits going to go back to Victorians when you are going to have private investment and they will want a return on their investment? It would be great for the government to clear this up, to make more clear what is actually going to happen with that. At the moment I cannot see 100 per cent of the profit being invested back into Victoria when you have private investment. It does not make sense to me at all.

We are all for a better planet. I do not think there is anyone in this chamber that says ‘We want to pollute the planet and make it worse’, all right? We do not. But what concerns me with this is that it is a bit of what we would call a nimby situation: not in my backyard. All of the renewables – all of the solar panels, the wind farms, the solar farms – go out into regional Victoria. It does not happen in the city. I have a planning application on my desk at the moment back in Warragul for 250 acres of solar panels on prime dairy country. Is this going to be the norm going forward? Are we going to have solar panels taking up prime agricultural land that feeds the state? That is where your milk comes from, down our way. That is where your beef comes from, down our way.

**Lily D’Ambrosio:** Doesn’t your dairy farmer agree with it? If it’s on private land, they’ve got to get agreement from the farmer. They’re getting a nice income.



## MOTIONS

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**Wayne FARNHAM:** I tell you what, though, if it is going to be 51 per cent Victorian owned, I do not see the Victorian government on the planning application. How is it going to work? How are you going to do this going forward? This is where the government –

**Dylan Wight:** On a point of order, Acting Speaker, I have been guilty of this –

**The ACTING SPEAKER (Paul Hamer):** The member for Tarneit is not in his seat. If the member for Tarneit is in his seat, he can raise a point of order.

**Dylan Wight:** On a point of order, Acting Speaker, I have been guilty of this many times in this place, but I think the member for Narracan has been afforded sufficient leeway. Multiple times now in his contribution he has made reflections on the Chair, and I would just ask you to get him to direct his comments through the Chair.

**The ACTING SPEAKER (Paul Hamer):** Thank you, member for Tarneit. The member for Narracan shall continue and not make reflections on the Chair by referring to ‘you’.

**Wayne FARNHAM:** My apologies. I had not realised I had said that. What I want to see from this government is absolute clarity on how this SEC is going to work, because at the moment I do not see clarity. I do not see the Victorian public actually seeing clarity. I know they say to us, ‘The Victorian public voted for us because we’re going to bring back the SEC’, but it is actually interesting that the member for Morwell is not on that side of the chamber. He is sitting right over here in this seat. If it was so shiny, so bright and so wonderful, you would think the people of the Latrobe Valley, the heart and soul of the SEC, would have voted for Labor, but they did not. And why didn’t they? Because they are used to so many promises from this government and so many broken promises from this government that they see through it. The Greens up in Melbourne, in Richmond or wherever do not see it. They do not live there. They are not living the lives of the people in Morwell, who have been totally sacrificed by this government for the green agenda. That is what this government does. It is all about the Greens. It is not about governing for all Victorians, because if they did govern for all Victorians, they would not have shut down the timber industry today. You cannot sit here and tell me ‘We govern for all Victorians’ when you have just decimated an industry today. What I am asking the minister and the government to do is to provide clarity on the SEC and how it is going to work. Are you the wholesaler? Are you the retailer? How does the whole thing work? And how is energy going to be –

**The ACTING SPEAKER (Paul Hamer):** The member for Narracan should stop using the word ‘you’ because ‘you’ reflects on the Chair.

**Wayne FARNHAM:** Sorry, my apologies. How is it going to be cheaper with double the workforce that the energy sector has now? How are prices going to come down with twice the amount of labour: 59,000 jobs – well, 59,000 CFMEU jobs, let us be accurate. How is that going to be cheaper? When the government clarifies this, I would love to hear the answer. I would love to know how it is going to work. Yes, we want a clean environment and, yes, we want cheaper power, but we also want absolute transparency on how this SEC will work.

**Jordan CRUGNALE (Bass) (18:38):** I rise today to speak on our government’s plan to take decisive action on renewable energy and net zero. It is a topic close to my heart and one I speak to today. This is something that should matter for all of us, no matter what party we sit with. Our Andrews Labor government is bringing back the SEC, the State Electricity Commission, to reach 95 per cent renewables by 2035 and net zero by 2045. We will install 100 neighbourhood batteries across Victoria and in the SEC mix create 59,000 renewable energy jobs across the state. These are much-needed initiatives that will have a positive benefit for the wider Victorian community – all Victorians – and see Victoria become a leader in energy and renewables in Australia. There is an irresistible global movement towards clean energy, and the science of climate change is settled. We need to move to renewables, and we are moving to renewables. In a world where cost-of-living concerns are front and centre, our plan for neighbourhood batteries, thousands of new jobs and a State Electricity Commission, or SEC, will ensure Victorians are well prepared for the ongoing transition. Many new

renters and home owners may not remember the last one. After all, it was privatised almost 30 years ago, so an entire generation has missed out. But what is clear to Victorians is that bringing it back will deliver cheaper power bills and lower emissions and put power back in the hands of Victorians. We are so proud to begin putting these plans for our future in motion.

I want to spend a moment talking about renewable energy, which is a topic of course that we never get sick of talking about on this side of the chamber. It is also something that is really important to the people of Bass, the electorate I represent. If you have ever been down that way, you would have seen the juxtaposition of the old state coalmine in Wonthaggi, which now has new energy with a lot of solar on site, backdropped by the turbines of the Wonthaggi wind farm standing tall and proud over our beautiful landscape. That wind farm is a symbol of the fact that in my area we are already seeing so much progress towards cleaner energy and a greener world. Our community gets it – they know that the world is moving on from dirty coal power, and they are embracing the clean energy future.

More recently, early works on offshore wind energy, just off the Gippsland coast, have seen millions of dollars spent in the Gippsland region, creating work in areas such as local boat operations, construction and marine maintenance. This is keeping locals in jobs close to home and doing what they love. This will only grow as offshore wind moves forward in development, creating trade jobs for everyone from electricians to construction workers and jobs for engineers, technicians, crane operators, radio operators, truckies, drivers – the sky is the limit. Then there is the supply chain and also the many opportunities created by the energy being produced – that is anything from manufacturing to food and fibre production. Of course there will be huge opportunities for our local training organisations, such as Gippsland TAFE and Federation Uni, to train up the workers of tomorrow. Having a clean energy curriculum in our schools means that we can create these pathways early and skill up our kids for good, secure and intergenerational jobs, preparing them for the world of tomorrow. That is exciting. In fact I should probably take my kids out of school and get them into trades at the moment. However, I will wait a couple of years so they can maybe finish high school.

But back to the SEC, plenty has already been said here about the SEC in other contributions, and we know that the first project will be delivered by the end of this year. It will be in Victoria and will power around 60,000 homes. We know that the publicly owned SEC will deliver 4.5 gigawatts of renewable power, which is equivalent to replacing Loy Yang A, and we know this will bring down energy prices, making life more affordable for thousands of Victorians and reducing the stress they have around paying their energy bills, a major concern for my constituents. It is also a key part of our plan to decarbonise Victoria, a plan we are already well advanced on, having already cut emissions by more than any other state since our government was elected in 2014.

As well, plenty has already been said here and in other places about the move to clean energy and climate safety. The latest Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change report was very clear: we must drastically cut emissions if we are to have any chance of saving the world we live in and limiting warming to 1.5 degrees. Our plan for Victoria – the one we are talking about right now, including batteries, onshore wind, solar farms and all the stuff that we are doing with the Solar Homes program, the SEC and our commitment to reaching 95 per cent renewables by 2034 – will help the people of this state to play their part in limiting global warming and climate change.

There has been some criticism of our plan from members within the chambers. They have argued that the SEC has no date. That is not correct. As we have said, the first SEC project will be delivered by the end of the year. The minister at the table is the Minister for the State Electricity Commission. We have released the SEC Pioneer Investment Mandate, and I would say that is a pretty comprehensive action for something that supposedly has no date. We have already announced the interim expert advisory panel, which will provide the government with the expert energy and financial advice that is needed to steer the SEC. Their advice on the 10-year strategy and ongoing investment mandate for the SEC will be released later this year. Meanwhile the SEC will see this government partner with industry and co-investors to drive renewable energy production in the state because, as the sayings go, many hands make light work and it takes all of us to make a change.

As for the question of where the jobs will come from, that is also shortly to be addressed, with an SEC energy jobs forum to be held by the end of the financial year, bringing together unions, industry and training providers to ensure we have a strong and sustainable pipeline of workers coming through in safe, secure and meaningful jobs. The SEC has been described by those opposite as a con job and a sham, and that is not true. We have clearly set out a path for Victoria's energy transition, and we have already taken steps on that journey. We have the backing of the people of Victoria. Now is the time, and let us channel that will, that momentum and, if you pardon the pun, that energy and get this nation-leading project underway.

Totally Renewable Phillip Island and a recently formed Totally Renewable Tenby Point are well on the way, so I am just going to talk about some of the things in my electorate. Supported by government, it is a partnership that brings change for the positive. Totally Renewable Phillip Island was formed during a public forum attended by more than 200 people. A unanimous decision was made to set an ambitious renewable energy target and a net zero carbon one as well. We have got a battery which will offer greater reliability in electricity supply for the island. It will be switched on soon and will provide a new world of renewable energy opportunities.

Looking at the Casey side of Bass, top of the pops with the Solar Homes program, we also have the Gippsland Community Power Hub that has already seen community centres from Venus Bay to Corinella outfitted with solar power. I might end with the words of the mighty Electrical Trades Union, who said this in a tweet in November last year:

Government-owned renewable energy, secure, stable jobs, and guaranteed apprenticeships, all while driving down power prices.

It's time to bring back the SEC ...

and we are.

**Jess WILSON** (Kew) (18:47): It is a pleasure to rise to speak on this motion as it presents an important opportunity to speak about the importance of managing our transition to net zero emissions while also making sure that Victorians can afford their electricity bills. We heard the Premier's promise to the voters at the November election: 'I'll keep your electricity prices down and the lights on.' Sounds pretty good to me. I think it probably sounds pretty good to the member for Narracan as well. Who is not in favour of cheaper and more reliable energy while also reducing our emissions? But how we actually achieve this transition will be very, very important. We have seen an incredible acceleration in our energy transition over a short amount of time, but we have to acknowledge it is going to get harder from here. It is the responsibility of government to take the least cost, most efficient pathway, not the politically convenient one. The back-to-the-future, unfunded election thought bubble that is the Andrews government's reinstatement of the SEC should be seen for what it is: a political stunt that risks costing Victorians more in their power prices and more in their taxes and sees their hard-earned superannuation being funnelled into projects that the private sector was prepared to build.

This is all being done at a time when the Victorian Essential Services Commission has confirmed that energy prices are set to increase by more than 30 per cent for households and more than 33 per cent for small businesses – the largest energy spike in the nation. For an average Victorian household this represents a \$426 annual increase. For an average small business this represents a whopping \$1738 increase. On top of this, double-digit increases in gas prices are confirmed for 2023. Residential Victorian customers face increases of up to 26.7 per cent, which come on top of an average increase of more than 13 per cent since 2022. This is more than a \$300 increase for the average household just to continue to cook dinner, heat their homes and have hot showers.

We know that Victorians are in the midst of a cost-of-living crisis. Cost of living is the number one issue that is raised with me in my electorate. Whether it is energy prices skyrocketing, the cost of sending your kids to school getting higher or just going to the supermarket to buy basic groceries, it is getting harder and harder to make ends meet. We are paying more and getting less, and Victorian families are getting ripped off. We have seen that today with the Andrews government handing down

its budget. Just when you think things cannot get worse, we have seen a brutal budget from those opposite, with debt set to increase by 47 per cent to \$171 billion and tax revenue forced to increase by 28 per cent by 2025–26.

And in the context of this budget of rising taxes, of services falling, of energy bills rising, Victorians are entitled to know how this government intends to make their lives just a little bit easier and ease the cost of power prices in their household budget. They also deserve to know how much the rebooted SEC will cost them. With no independent costing of this election policy and a so-called initial investment of \$1 billion in capital from those opposite, how can Victorian taxpayers know that this will not result in them paying higher taxes as they watch another major cost blowout from this government? We have seen today the budget handed down with no clarity when it comes to the funding for the SEC. We see around \$44 million over the next 12 months in operational costs but this \$1 billion investment bandied around that is not in the forward estimates. It is not spelled out how this is going to be funded in the longer term. So when we are looking at the deficit and the debt, we do not understand how this government's signature project is actually going to contribute to that.

The member for Narracan made this point earlier, but there are so many unanswered questions about the SEC. We talked about the proposed ownership structure of the SEC and how it is going to work with the so-called 51 per cent government ownership and 49 per cent private equity share. Now, as the Grattan Institute says:

... no sane investor (industry super fund or otherwise) is going to go into partnership with an organisation whose decisions are made on political whim.

How is this government planning to intervene in the retail energy market, a finely tuned 40,000 kilometres of transmission lines and cables supplying about 200 terawatt hours of electricity to businesses and households each and every year – about 9 million customers? Who will be allowed to invest? What will the rate of return be on these projects? Will taxpayers underwrite the rate of return, particularly in those early loss-making years? What sources of energy will be included? Surely government intervention is limited to instances of market failure, so sources of energy are not being built by the private sector such that the SEC needs to step in. With record investment in renewables, will the SEC be limited to firming technology to stabilise the grid as we transition? But the ultimate question for the Premier and the Minister for the State Electricity Commission, who is at the table tonight – and the government fails to answer this time and time again – is: how much will the SEC plan lower power prices?

We are at a pivotal time in our transition to clean energy. We must support the clean energy transition and reduce our emissions across the economy as fast as possible to mitigate the effects of climate change. And we have seen that incredible transition in a short amount of time. The electricity grid cannot be rebuilt overnight, but the good news is that the private sector is currently installing renewable energy faster than at any time in history, and without the help of the SEC. But we need to make sure that investment is maintained every year to 2030, and then we are going to need to double it again to 2040 and double it again to 2050. It is a huge task; it is a complete transformation of our energy grid. And it is the role of a responsible government to put in place policy settings to actually drive the transition as fast as possible while Victorians can continue to afford their electricity bills; the reinstatement of a state-owned electricity operator will not do that. Now, we know that those opposite like to paint a nostalgic picture of the SEC, but again in the words of the Grattan Institute:

Just booting up the old SEC will be about as successful as trying to use Tik-Tok on a Nokia.

The energy market in 2022 is very different to what we had in the 1990s: instead of large, government-owned, monopoly energy providers in each state, the system from Cairns to Hobart to Port Augusta is physically connected in one of the longest power systems in the world. There's an evolving mix of new renewable generators trading energy across borders, small and large retailers servicing different customer needs, and the legacy coal generators are gradually finding they can't compete. Financing is more sophisticated, and so are consumers. If you've got solar panels on your roof, you're part of this dynamic market too.

This is why how we transition to a net zero economy actually matters. The SEC risks crowding out commercial projects that would otherwise be built. It risks a chilling effect on investment confidence and less capital flowing into Victoria. In Victoria there are more than 150 energy investment projects in the pipeline, more than 1500 megawatts of committed projects and gigawatts and gigawatts of proposed investment across solar, wind, gas and battery storage – a significant pipeline of private investment worth billions of dollars that makes the SEC's mandate of delivering 4.5 gigawatts of power seem out of step with what is actually happening in the industry.

Just finally, we hear a lot from those opposite and they get very, very animated about privatisation, but as the member for Narracan pointed out, let us get the facts clear on Labor's record. It was Joan Kirner who began the privatisation of Victoria's power assets when her government sold 51 per cent of Loy Yang B in 1992, and at the same time the then SECV chairman Mr Jim Smith said:

... the rapid introduction of competition is the best way to quickly reform the electricity supply industry.

That is a key reason why SECV board and general management want to sell Loy Yang B power station and have it privately operated ...

And that is just one example of those opposite privatising. We have seen across Labor governments privatisation as a hallmark of what they do, whether it was the Gillard government selling Telstra shares or whether it was the Andrews government that entered into the billion-dollar lease of the Port of Melbourne. In fact it was the Andrews government that entered into an arrangement around the sale of the Victorian share of the Snowy Hydro scheme. So let us be clear: energy privatisation was a key part of this state's economic and fiscal recovery from the severe 1990s recession as a result of the Cain–Kirner governments. It feels like we are repeating history again. The state's finances have collapsed.

**Vicki WARD** (Eltham) (18:57): Firstly, it is great to see the Minister for the State Electricity Commission here in the chamber with us, and I congratulate her office and her department for the fantastic work that they have done in terms of helping us rebuild the SEC. Now, I do have to make a comment about the idea from the member for Kew that the SEC is a whim. We are not the Greens. We actually do things in the Labor Party. We get things done on this side of the chamber. We make things happen: we invest in people and we actually achieve. So this is far more than a whim. It is actual policy, and it is policy that has got funding behind it. So, for example, we see that in the budget we have got \$116 million invested in the new tech schools. Why is this important for our SEC? Because they are going to be a vital part of the pathway for us to begin the retraining for workers in the SEC. You have got to be kidding me.

**Jess Wilson:** Deputy Speaker, I just draw your attention to the state of the house.

**Quorum formed.**

**Vicki WARD:** It is pretty sad that those opposite do not actually want to hear about the investment that we are putting into the SEC and how we are putting together the foundations to make the SEC a reality – because it goes beyond a whim. It goes beyond wanting to restructure how energy is created in our state. It goes to creating a new economy, an economy that is focused on clean energy.

**The DEPUTY SPEAKER:** Order! The time set down for consideration of the government business program has arrived, and I am required to interrupt business. The member will have the call the next time the motion is before the house.

*Bills***Energy Legislation Amendment (Electricity Outage Emergency Response and Other Matters)  
Bill 2023***Second reading***Debate resumed on motion of Lily D'Ambrosio:**

That this bill be now read a second time.

**Motion agreed to.****Read second time.***Third reading***Motion agreed to.****Read third time.**

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

**Business interrupted under sessional orders.***Adjournment*

**The DEPUTY SPEAKER:** The question is:

That the house now adjourns.

**Jewish day schools**

**David SOUTHWICK** (Caulfield) (19:01): (191) My adjournment tonight is for the Treasurer, and the action that I seek is for Jewish day schools to remain exempt from payroll tax. After a decade of mismanagement, blowouts and overspending, the Andrews government wants to claw back \$420 million from independent schools over three years to foot the bill. There are a lot of assumptions when it comes to many of these independent schools, and for this particular adjournment I am focusing on many of the Jewish day schools because the assumption, particularly when it comes to many of those Jewish students at the Jewish day schools, is that these kids can afford to pay. Nothing could be further from the truth. We have 11 Jewish day schools throughout Victoria and about 5000 kids that go to these Jewish day schools, and if you take a school like Yeshivah-Beth Rivkah, which has 900 kids, 85 per cent of those kids are on fee relief.

We know that many of these families are doing it tough, and recently we had a report from the Jewish Education Foundation that suggested that many of our schools would have to amalgamate because many of the kids are leaving the Jewish day schools and going to other schools because the parents simply cannot afford to pay. We have seen from the last census to this census the number of Jewish kids going to Jewish primary schools drop by 5 per cent. This is something particularly concerning for a lot of these kids. It is not by choice: many of the parents that were surveyed actually have said that when choosing between buying a house and paying these school fees, they have chosen to pay the school fees because they know that particularly around faith, particularly around culture and particularly around what these kids are learning, it is very important to invest that money into their Jewish education at the expense of many of their livelihoods.

I do ask the Treasurer to actually look at exempting these particular schools. I would be happy to make available many of the parents and many of the principals in a discussion forum to talk firsthand so he can hear from these kids. I just received a text from one of the parents today that said:

The removal of Payroll Tax concessions to non-Government schools is a pretty low act. Higher costs will be passed on to parents.

This government simply assumes that all parents can afford to pay more in school fees. This simply is not reasonable. It is absolutely concerning today that many of the families scramble to put money together to be able to put their kids through Jewish education. It is the Latham hit list mark 2; there is no question here. This is what Mark Latham did – target those schools. We need to absolutely ensure that these schools can afford to exist.

#### **Pakenham ambulance station**

**Emma VULIN** (Pakenham) (19:04): (192) My adjournment is for the Minister for Ambulance Services, and the action that I seek is for the minister to join me to visit the Pakenham ambulance station to meet with local paramedics who look after my community so well. Pakenham's \$1.1 million state-of-the-art ambulance station was delivered by the Andrews Labor government after many months of investment and reform to fix the crisis and neglect our ambulance services experienced under the former Liberal government. This ambulance station was and remains a critical piece of infrastructure for my growing community, giving local paramedics the facilities that they need to respond to local medical emergencies. I know that like in many jurisdictions across the country and around the world, the coronavirus pandemic continues to place unprecedented and sustained pressure on our hospitals and ambulance services. Our paramedics and entire health workforce continue to do an extraordinary job caring for Victorians, and it is important that we continue to support them.

#### **Morwell food-manufacturing precinct**

**Martin CAMERON** (Morwell) (19:05): (193) My adjournment matter this evening is for the Minister for Regional Development in the other place, and the information I seek is an urgent update on the status of the Morwell food-manufacturing precinct. Two weeks ago I wrote to the minister seeking an update on the project slated for Princes Drive – a significant development for Morwell which has attracted investment of over \$100 million and will provide 3250 direct and indirect jobs but has come to a grinding halt. The first stage of construction is relying on infrastructure upgrades which were meant to be provided by Regional Development Victoria under a \$10 million promise made more than two years ago. The now Minister for Regional Development said construction would begin in late 2021 and proudly proclaimed at the time:

Morwell is moving ahead – investments like this build momentum and create a future of new and emerging industries with a spread of jobs and opportunities. I look forward to seeing the Food Manufacturing Precinct take shape and businesses moving in.

With a promised time frame for delivery and the need to start the building phase of the development, we rightly ask the question: what is the hold-up? For the last six months the developer has sought updates from the Andrews government and has been ignored time and time and time again – no response, no update; nothing. The people of Morwell have very real and valid concerns about whether this hugely significant and important project will actually materialise or if it will amount to nothing under the Andrews government, just like the electric vehicle manufacturing facility and the Lake Narracan housing development. Minister, what is going on with the Morwell food-manufacturing precinct, and why has Regional Development Victoria ignored all requests for updates?

#### **Veterans support**

**Martha HAYLETT** (Ripon) (19:07): (194) My adjournment matter is for the attention of the Minister for Veterans. The action I seek is for the minister to join me and members of the veterans community in my electorate of Ripon to outline how the Andrews Labor government is investing in projects that support and honour our veterans and their families.

Recently the minister announced more than \$1.4 million in funding for 55 projects across the state offering practical support for veterans and commemorating their incredible contributions. One of these important projects is at the Maryborough RSL sub-branch. The Maryborough RSL are seeking to revive their hall by completing painting and plumbing works and upgrading the bathroom and kitchen as well. They will receive over \$44,000 to get this done through the veterans capital works program.

The work that the Maryborough RSL does is essential to veterans and their families in our community. I want to give my deepest thanks to their committee, including the hardworking Danny McIver, Steve Braunton, Ben Holscher and all other committee members. The work you do is tireless, and our whole community is proud of the way you honour and support veterans and their families.

So many veterans make up an important part of the Ripon electorate, and this funding is just one of the many ways we commemorate the service and sacrifice of our veterans. I invite the minister to come and see firsthand the investment this government is putting into supporting veterans in our rural and regional communities.

### Budget 2023–24

**Sam GROTH** (Nepean) (19:08): (195) My adjournment is for the Premier of Victoria, and the action I seek is for the Premier to explain to my community why major infrastructure needs for Nepean were ignored in this year's state budget. Today we saw the handing down of the 2023–24 Victorian budget. This budget reveals that under Labor Victoria is broke and residents in Nepean are being punished for Labor's incompetence. Labor's cash grab through increased land tax will hit the constituents of my electorate, who already carry a disproportionate land tax burden, harder than most. This tax increase will also further squeeze the tight rental market in my community, exacerbating the already serious housing and rental crisis.

In part this budget has been a win for my community on the southern peninsula, with funding for schools, water infrastructure and other facilities. However, while these victories are great for Nepean and demonstrate what strong local advocacy can achieve, there are still many vital projects that have gone unfunded in this budget. I welcome the investment of \$200,000 in Rye Primary School for the desperately needed upgrades to their playgrounds; however, only \$42,000 of this will be delivered this year. That raises concerns about how long this important project will take to be completed. Similarly, Eastbourne Primary School has been allocated important funding for planning around upgrades to their existing school facilities, but planning is not enough. These schools need real action from the government: investment in the capital works they have been crying out for. I am glad that progress is being made on these important projects, but I am saddened to see some vital projects completely left out by the Andrews Labor government.

Rosebud Hospital continues to be a project of immense importance to my constituents, a key development in the health and wellbeing of residents on the southern peninsula. This government may think Victoria ends at Frankston, but I assure you it does not. Fifteen years after the issues of Rosebud Hospital were first raised the government has again failed to come to the table with funding.

We have also seen a significant investment in a Frankston basketball stadium while similar facilities like the Dromana College stadium, which I have fiercely advocated for in my constituency, have been ignored, just like the Jetty Road and the Mornington Peninsula Freeway sound barriers, another project deprived of state government support that is pivotal for community safety in my electorate. While I welcome the funding that we have secured through strong advocacy as a community, I continue to call on the Andrews government to do more to deliver vital projects for those people living in Nepean.

### Roxburgh Park Primary School

**Iwan WALTERS** (Greenvale) (19:11): (196) My adjournment matter is for the Minister for Education. The action I seek is for the minister to inform me how the Victorian government is supporting student wellbeing and equity to ensure that every child reaches their full potential, particularly students at Roxburgh Park Primary School in my electorate. I recently had the extraordinary pleasure of visiting Roxburgh Park Primary School, and it is difficult to fully capture just how enthusiastic and welcoming the culture and atmosphere of this school are. I was blown away by the engagement and passion of students at every level of the school, from preps who were working on their numeracy skills with dedicated and passionate teachers to the middle years classes I joined,



who were developing their artistic and musical skills – although I must confess that my rhythmic skills, or that lack thereof, were really exposed by the claves that morning.

I was also so pleased to be immersed in some of the extension projects that students have been working on, including robotics, 3D printing and interschool challenge car competitions, which involve great creativity and fantastic applied science. Thank you to students Ishaq, Rawan, Rayann and Mina, who gave such incredible presentations describing their work and their achievements. The engagement and enthusiasm for learning that students at Roxburgh Park Primary displayed is a great tribute to the learning culture that has been instilled by the school's leaders, teachers, support staff and parents. I am grateful to acting principal Samantha Kenely for her great leadership and to all the teachers and support staff – including the maintenance staff, who keep the yard looking immaculate – for the amazing work they do. I want to particularly acknowledge the student leaders, who represent their school with such pride and grace – school captains Alexis and Jasmine and vice-captains Retal and Mina – and acknowledge every student at Roxburgh Park Primary School.

### Air pollution

**Tim READ** (Brunswick) (19:13): (197) My adjournment matter is for the Minister for Roads and Road Safety. The action I seek is for the minister to create a low-emissions zone in the City of Maribyrnong and in the parts of Hobsons Bay and Brimbank with the heaviest truck traffic, allowing only trucks that meet the Euro 5 emissions standard or higher to enter the zone. Over the past few years, we have learned more about the health impacts of PM 2.5 air pollution from cars and trucks. These particles, measuring 2.5 microns or smaller, can get into your home even when the doors and windows are closed. They cause lung disease, but they are also absorbed into the bloodstream, where they can cause cardiovascular disease, including stroke, and even adverse birth outcomes. Nitrogen dioxide is another pollutant from trucks and cars and an important cause of asthma and lung cancer. University of Melbourne researchers recently concluded that rates of disease due to air pollution have been underestimated in Australia. In fact they estimated that vehicle emissions account for more than 11,000 deaths annually in Australia, 12,000 cardiovascular hospitalisations and 66,000 cases of asthma.

Last week the City of Maribyrnong declared a health emergency due to vehicle emissions, particularly from heavy trucks using local roads. Rates of asthma and lung cancer in Maribyrnong are both significantly higher than corresponding national averages, so a low-emissions zone would act as an incentive to upgrade trucks and would encourage participation in this government's scheme for the modernisation of trucks, which received \$15 million in today's budget, by the way – and I look forward to hearing more details from the government of how this scheme will work.

Dozens of cities around the world, like London, Tokyo, Beijing, Barcelona and Madrid, all have low-emissions zones, and they work well. In fact some set even higher standards than the standard I have requested, requiring trucks to meet the higher Euro 6 standard. More than a quarter of Australian trucks are more than 20 years old. The average age of trucks in Australia is double that of the average age of trucks in Europe. These trucks are the most polluting, and the 14 per cent of our trucks sold before 1996 emit 60 times more fine-particle pollution than newer trucks and eight times more nitrogen oxides. So I encourage the minister to respond to the health emergency in the inner west by keeping the older, more polluting trucks out of this area and in doing so drive the modernisation of Victoria's truck fleet to the benefit of us all.

### Willum Warrain

**Paul MERCURIO** (Hastings) (19:16): (198) 'Willum warrain' in local Boon Wurrung language means 'home by the sea'. It is a gathering place where Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islanders come together to explore their goals, ideas and identity. I have had the opportunity to visit and spend time at Willum Warrain and found it to be an incredible space of First Nations spirit and place. The action I seek is for the Minister for Treaty and First Peoples to join me on a visit to Willum Warrain to experience the amazing space and to meet with the elders, uncles and aunties and the team that make it such a wonderful place.

The gathering place was established in 2014 in Hastings with support from Mornington Peninsula shire and funding from the Closing the Gap program. Willum Warrain is a whole-of-organisation charity that relies on a combination of volunteers, philanthropic funding and government support to keep its doors open. Over the last few years Willum Warrain has established the only Aboriginal community-owned and run bush nursery specialising in local Indigenous plants from the Mornington Peninsula. They are the only Aboriginal-run retail and wholesale nursery south of Melbourne open to the public.

I would also like to let the community know about Willum Warrain's reconciliation walk on Sunday 4 June, where you can join the Aboriginal community of Mornington Peninsula for a leisurely stroll in the spirit of reconciliation. Willum Warrain would welcome the opportunity to share their space with the minister as it does with the whole community, and I look forward to welcoming her.

### Native forest logging

**Wayne FARNHAM** (Narracan) (19:17): (199) My adjournment this evening is to the Minister for Environment, and the action I seek is that the minister actually leave Melbourne and travel out to the Gippsland timber communities to meet with the families and operators who are set to lose their jobs thanks to the minister's decision to close the industry. I actually do rise in sadness today that the native timber industry has been effectively shut down, and I know the member for Morwell, the member for Gippsland South and the member for Gippsland East will feel just as much sadness as I do. This was an industry that generated \$24 billion a year, and I would have thought, with the state of the budget today, that the government would have done everything to support it and get its workers back working again. What is going to happen now is the \$200 million package to transition them out of the industry will not be enough. In 2003, when the government shut down 30 per cent of the industry, they spent \$200 million, so I do not see how in 2023 this is going to be substantial enough for these families to move on from a practice that they have been practising for over 100 years.

What is even more frustrating is the fact that native timber hardwood is one of the best forms to reduce carbon. It captures carbon. It is all around us in this chamber; everything you see is carbon captured from native timber. The government could have changed the code of practice; they could have saved this industry. My predecessor Gary Blackwood spoke about this many times in this chamber, and I am sure, Deputy Speaker, you were here when Gary was talking. It just beggars belief that because this government is beholden to the Greens they did not save this industry. We could have changed the code of practice, and we could have saved thousands of jobs today, thousands of families that are now going to be left out in the cold. My fear is now that in these smaller communities around regional Victoria people will have no reason to stay, and they will become ghost towns. So, Minister, will you meet with these families and communities face to face and explain your decision to shut down the native timber industry, potentially destroying these towns and families?

### Point Cook Road—Central Avenue, Altona Meadows

**Mathew HILAKARI** (Point Cook) (19:20): (200) The matter that I raise is for the Deputy Premier in her role as Minister for Transport and Infrastructure. The action that I seek is for the Deputy Premier to provide an update on the status of and next steps for the Labor government's positive plan to fix the intersection of Point Cook Road and Central Avenue. I am very pleased to see that in today's budget we delivered on the commitment that we made to the community I represent at the last election. This project is being funded by the \$674 million road blitz to get people home more quickly and safely. This is a stunning result for our community, and the community knows that only Labor delivers in Melbourne's west. The Labor government has been committed to improving safety and shortening the travel times for all Victorians through Victoria's Big Build. Victoria's Big Build has greatly impacted the lives of countless Victorians through over 160 projects, both road and rail, and by employing over 20,000 people. One of these projects we have seen was the improvements to Dunning's Road and Palmers Road, roads I use very often, which makes them more reliable and safe. It is a great link to the Princes Freeway, it removes the bottlenecks and it introduces bus lanes down Palmers Road. Investment in transport and infrastructure is something that everybody in Point Cook agrees with. It is

of the utmost importance: it gets us home to our family safely and it gets us home to our family more quickly. Now that the funding has been committed in today's budget, I call on the Deputy Premier to outline the next steps.

### Responses

**Anthony CARBINES** (Ivanhoe – Minister for Police, Minister for Crime Prevention, Minister for Racing) (19:22): I will kick off with an adjournment matter from the member for Caulfield, who is no longer with us –

**David Southwick** interjected.

**Anthony CARBINES**: Oh, he is here. I am used to seeing him at the table. He is a very stubborn and determined member, so I would not expect him to leave before I did. We joined this place at the same time. The member for Caulfield raised a matter for the Treasurer. He wants to see Jewish day schools remain exempt from payroll tax. I am aware that the Treasurer and the Minister for Education do have some discretion in relation to those matters. The member for Pakenham raised a matter for the Minister for Ambulance Services. She wants the minister to visit Pakenham ambulance station and the crews there, who care for her community so very well and do an amazing job as first responders. She is keen to see the minister out there in the Pakenham electorate.

The member for Morwell raised a matter for the Minister for Regional Development in the other place in relation to the Morwell food-manufacturing precinct, a \$100 million investment opportunity there in Morwell, and what the latest is in relation to that project and what is happening at the Morwell food-manufacturing precinct. The member for Ripon raised a matter for the Minister for Veterans, seeking her to visit veterans in her community to discuss how of course there has been investment in the veterans to support them, particularly around the Maryborough RSL sub-branch – the very significant activism and work of the Maryborough RSL and the work the volunteer committee has been doing to support veterans across her electorate.

The member for Nepean raised a matter for the Premier, in particular in relation to major infrastructure needs across his electorate and the perhaps differing priorities that have been applied across the Nepean electorate that he alluded to: schools, water infrastructure and other local matters. He did touch on investments at Eastbourne Primary School and other schools, but he was interested in some action with regard to infrastructure needs in his electorate. The member for Greenvale raised a matter for the Minister for Education, particularly seeking action in regard to how the Victorian government is supporting student wellbeing, particularly with respect to the mighty school of Roxburgh Park in his electorate and the advocacy and work the member for Greenvale has done there.

The member for Brunswick raised a matter for the Minister for Roads and Road Safety, particularly about creating a low-emission zone in the City of Maribyrnong, around air pollution from trucks and the like, and he went into quite some detail in relation to those matters. He is a longstanding practitioner-expert around public health matters. I will refer those matters to the Minister for Roads and Road Safety in the contribution from the member for Brunswick. The very hardworking member for Hastings raised a matter for the Minister for Treaty and First Peoples to visit the Willum Warrain First Nations people in relation to the work that they are doing in leading so much First Nations peoples' work there at Willum Warrain. In particular, the member gave a shout-out to the reconciliation walk on 4 June in his electorate, and he is looking for the Minister for Treaty and First Peoples to head out to his electorate in Hastings.

The member for Narracan raised a matter for the Minister for Environment in the other place with regard to visiting Gippsland to talk to timber communities and those families there who have had a very challenging time with announcements that were made today regarding the Gippsland region. I know I worked very closely with the previous member for Narracan, who was a very strong advocate for the timber community and the timber industry in his electorate, and certainly the member for Narracan today has followed through on that advocacy, particularly around the future of those

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communities and those families in relation to announcements made by the government today. The member for Point Cook has raised a matter for the Deputy Premier in her role as Minister for Transport and Infrastructure – for her to update him on the processes and the next steps that will deliver on the upgrade at the intersection of Point Cook Road and Central Avenue. I am sure that the Deputy Premier will be keen to visit the member for Point Cook to work through the next steps in relation to that significant project for his community.

I commend all those matters to you, Deputy Speaker.

**The DEPUTY SPEAKER:** The house now stands adjourned.

**House adjourned 7:27 pm.**