



Hansard

LEGISLATIVE ASSEMBLY

60th Parliament

Wednesday 3 May 2023

Office-holders of the Legislative Assembly

60th Parliament

Speaker

Maree Edwards

Deputy Speaker

Matt Fregon

Acting Speakers

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

Leader of the Parliamentary Labor Party and Premier

Daniel Andrews

Deputy Leader of the Parliamentary Labor Party and Deputy Premier

Jacinta Allan

Leader of the Parliamentary Liberal Party and Leader of the Opposition

John Pesutto

Deputy Leader of the Parliamentary Liberal Party and Deputy Leader of the Opposition

David Southwick

Leader of the Nationals

Peter Walsh

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

Member	District	Party	Member	District	Party
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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Wednesday 3 May 2023

The SPEAKER (Maree Edwards) took the chair at 9:31 am, read the prayer and made an acknowledgement of country.

*Documents***Documents****Incorporated list as follows:****DOCUMENTS TABLED UNDER ACTS OF PARLIAMENT** – The Clerk tabled:

Statutory Rule under the *Corrections Act 1986* – SR 26

Victorian Inspectorate – Report 1 January to 30 June 2022 under s 30Q of the *Surveillance Devices Act 1999*.

*Joint sitting of Parliament***Victorian Health Promotion Foundation****Victorian Responsible Gambling Foundation**

The SPEAKER (09:33): I have received a message from the Legislative Council agreeing to meet with the Legislative Assembly for the purpose of sitting and voting together to:

- (1) elect three members of Parliament to the Victorian Health Promotion Foundation; and
- (2) elect three members of Parliament to the board of the Victorian Responsible Gambling Foundation

as proposed by the Assembly.

*Bills***Human Source Management Bill 2023***Council's amendments*

The SPEAKER (09:33): I have received a message from the Legislative Council agreeing to the Human Source Management Bill 2023 with amendments.

Ordered that amendments be taken into consideration later this day.

*Committees***Joint select committee***Establishment*

Brad ROWSWELL (Sandringham) (09:34): I desire to move, by leave:

That:

- (1) A joint select committee be appointed to inquire into, consider and report to the Parliament by 30 November 2023 on the systemic sexual abuse of children in Victorian government schools, including:
 - a) the practices, policies and protocols in Victorian government schools for responding to allegations of sexual abuse of children, including measures put in place to respond to concerns about sexual abuse in those schools;
 - b) a proposal on how the government should provide an appropriate institutional response to the matters considered.
- (2) In undertaking the inquiry, the committee should not encroach upon the responsibilities of investigatory agencies or the courts in relation to particular cases, nor prejudice the conduct or outcome of investigations or court proceedings.

- (3) Such committee to consist of four members from the Legislative Assembly nominated by the Leader of the House and the Manager of Opposition Business and three members from the Legislative Council nominated by the Leader of the Government in the Legislative Council and the Leader of the Opposition in the Legislative Council; and that the overall composition of the committee should be not more than three government members, three opposition members, and one cross-bench member.
- (4) The members to be appointed by lodgement of the names with the Speaker and President no later than 24 March 2023.
- (5) A message be sent to the Legislative Council requesting their agreement.

Leave refused.

Members statements

Home building industry

Brad BATTIN (Berwick) (09:35): I rise today as I have received an email, as many in this house would have, in relation to Porter Davis and the events that are happening around the Porter Davis builders, where many of the people who have paid deposits or are building their home are now out of pocket due to some of their mismanagement, particularly around Victorian Managed Insurance Authority. I have received one from Prasaanth, who is in the tragic circumstance where because the building costs are going up so much the insurance, even if paid and compliant, will not cover anywhere near the amount that it is going to cost to build and finish the property that he has got. Many are in this same position. This has become a circumstance because the Andrews Labor government have continued to increase the cost of builds, not just through taxes, but because their big build program is in competition against many of these private builders to try and get subsidies to get people to build these houses. The insurance programs that are in place are designed around having a 20 per cent increase, but that 20 per cent increase does not quite come into account now because we have seen the prices go up so much in a short period of time. We are going to have more and more people who are going to be impacted by this, and the government needs to act. We already know the compliance for VMIA was not upheld by the Victorian Building Authority, and we have seen people fall out where they will not find the money for their deposit. I note the government has come on board with some funds for that, but I think we need to start to be considering the overall pattern and how many of these people are going to be caught out and ensure that their dream is not ended because of the Andrews Labor government's failures.

Laurie Larmer

Danny PEARSON (Essendon – Minister for Government Services, Assistant Treasurer, Minister for WorkSafe and the TAC, Minister for Consumer Affairs) (09:36): Just before Anzac Day of this year my community lost a great man and a very good friend of mine, Laurie Larmer. Laurie was one of our last surviving World War II veterans and spent his time in the war piloting Halifax bombers in bombing raids over Germany. Laurie was also the publican of the Doutta Galla Hotel for many years in the 1980s, and Laurie talked with great pride about how he built the business up to be what it has become today – a safe, welcoming pub that is part of the Flemington and Kensington community. Laurie retired up at Strathmore and in his retirement spoke more about his war service. He visited many of the towns and villages he bombed to apologise. In one visit, Laurie gave the mayor a few days notice of his impending arrival. The mayor put on a small service and apologised to Laurie for its small size, observing to Laurie that if Laurie had given more notice, they could have put on a bigger event for him. Laurie, as quick as a flash, said that he gave more notice this time than the last time he visited. The service last week at St Therese's was a beautiful service, which was attended by his three daughters Anne, Bernadette and Margaret. I particularly want to thank Bernadette for taking Laurie to the ALP branch meetings and indeed to my election night party last year. It was so wonderful to have Laurie there to celebrate, and I just want to thank Laurie's family for sharing him with all of us. Laurie was just four months short of his centenary, and while he was virtually blind, you could not put anything past him. He was so bright, so inquisitive and so engaged and connected in the world around him, and I always loved visiting for a coffee and a chat. Laurie lived his values as an honest, decent,

hard-working man who took pride in his work and built firm, long-lasting friendships wherever he went. Vale, Laurie Larmer.

Ovens Valley electorate road safety

Tim McCURDY (Ovens Valley) (09:38): I want to offer my sincere condolences to all of the families of those who died at the recent accident at the Labuan Road and Murray Valley Highway intersection. This infamous road has claimed far too many lives over many years. Significant investment was made back in 2012 to offset one of the dangerous intersections with the Katamatite road, and now another intersection of this notorious road has claimed more lives – five dead in the most recent crash and one dead in last year’s crash. Still there is dash cam footage as recent as last week that shows more cars coming to grief. Offsetting Stokes Road and other safety measures must be implemented immediately before another life is lost. Police have been calling for some time to have this intersection fixed. The community is screaming for a solution.

Cobram District Health

Tim McCURDY (Ovens Valley) (09:38): Cobram District Health is desperate for a major upgrade and the local community, who have been very patient, need a plan – a master plan that will give confidence and encouragement to all the magnificent staff that work there and to all those who use the Cobram hospital. The Victorian government needs to look beyond Melbourne at this coming budget and commit to the master plan that is so desperately needed. The Victorian government needs to commit to investment in health for the Bright community. This iconic town that continues to grow and is the centrepiece for tourism in the north-east is crying out for investment. It simply is unacceptable that residents of Bright continue to be short-changed for their health needs. I call on the Victorian government to look beyond the tram tracks in this year’s budget and commit to investing in the healthcare and aged care needs of Bright.

JT Gray Reserve

Melissa HORNE (Williamstown – Minister for Casino, Gaming and Liquor Regulation, Minister for Local Government, Minister for Ports and Freight, Minister for Roads and Road Safety) (09:39): I was pleased last week to officially open the newly built facilities at the JT Gray Reserve along with Hobsons Bay City Council mayor Cr Tony Briffa. The upgrade of the pavilion will see new female-friendly and accessible change rooms, storage for each club and three new social spaces. It was really touching that the family of JT Gray were there with us, and in fact they described it as a family reunion, coming from all parts of Victoria to be there.

Captain James Taylor Gray was a Williamstown local. He was a talented sportsman and served as the president of both the Williamstown Football Club and the Newport cricket club. He was a decorated officer in the Australian Imperial Force, was a founding member of the Williamstown RSL and served as a councillor for 37 years, including four terms as mayor of Williamstown City Council. He was a real stalwart of Williamstown, so it was a great day to enjoy with Barnstoneworth United Football Club, Williamstown Soccer Club, St Johns cricket club and the Williamstown Congs cricket club, who will all benefit from this amazing investment for decades to come. The Labor government’s investment in this project is through the Victorian Asia Cup 2015 Legacy Fund, and we saw on Thursday that this boost is making a real difference for communities like Williamstown in providing facilities that help inspire more people to play.

Caring for the land

Cindy McLEISH (Eildon) (09:40): Annette Cavanagh and her father Rod, as members of the Yellow Creek–Dairy Creek Landcare Group, have done a tremendous job in creating and then publishing a brochure, ‘Caring for the land: sustainable agriculture’. The brochure explains how combining caring for the environment and good farming practices can bring about positive changes to our environment. Rod and Annette share their expertise in agricultural practices, conservation biology and environmental science together with expert opinions to develop environmental strategies. These

include refraining from clearing natural bush areas, limiting topsoil disturbance, limiting use of chemical sprays and rotating pastures to encourage plant and soil development. Well done to Rod and Annette for identifying opportunities for improvement and being proactive in ensuring those opportunities come to life. I had great pleasure in being involved in the launch of the brochure at Homewood Hall during a rabbit management session. The feral rabbit has a devastating effect on our native biodiversity and agricultural productivity, and local landholders are very keen to learn and implement good control techniques.

Molesworth Easter Bazaar

Cindy McLEISH (Eildon) (09:41): The Molesworth Easter Bazaar and clearing sale has been a local fixture for 42 years, and so it is with great sadness that its time has come to an end. Les Ridd from Molesworth is to be commended for establishing the clearing sale and coordinating the event for the whole 42 years, together with an army of local volunteers and organisations. The Easter bazaar was started by Muriel Perry and Jean Mahoney in 1977 with the purpose of raising funds and improving the hall, which they have done twice over.

Asylum seeker and migrant support services

Gabrielle WILLIAMS (Dandenong – Minister for Mental Health, Minister for Ambulance Services, Minister for Treaty and First Peoples) (09:42): I rise today to acknowledge two important organisations which play a role in my local community, the Asylum Seeker Resource Centre, who are known to many of us, and also Afri-Aus Care. The ASRC has called Thomas Street in Dandenong home now for a year after the opening of their hub in that location, and in that time they have supported nearly 2000 local refugees and asylum seekers by connecting them to a range of different services in partnership as well with a number of other local organisations. I had the great pleasure of being able to meet with the ASRC and some of their partners, SisterWorks and also Multicultural Youth Support Services – Peter Aguto from that organisation – and hearing about both the challenges that clearly exist within our asylum seeker and refugee community and of course the enormous power of work being done by organisations like ASRC and their partners in Dandenong to make sure they are meeting that need through the provision of food in partnership with a range of other food providers and also in terms of assisting with meal programs, employment pathways, mental health supports and a range of other services.

It was really heartening to hear the story of one young man who had been given life-changing support.
(Time expired)

National Domestic Violence Remembrance Day

David SOUTHWICK (Caulfield) (09:43): Today is National Domestic Violence Remembrance Day. On average almost 10 women in Australia are hospitalised or assaulted due to domestic violence from a partner. One woman a week is murdered by a current or former partner. I want to recognise the work that Impact for Women does in our community supporting those women that are dealing with family violence. As a patron along with the member for Albert Park, we really recognise and value of the work that Kathy Kaplan and the team do packing bags of love to support our women.

C Care

David SOUTHWICK (Caulfield) (09:44): I also want to recognise C Care. Too many people are living below the poverty line, and C Care provide valuable support in terms of food parcels, delivering 2000 food parcels a week. I want to thank them and their 500 volunteers. They did a fundraising effort over the weekend and so far have raised more than \$670,000, which is fantastic. Thank you to all of those people that have supported C Care. If you want to donate, go to ccare.org.au. They would really value your support.

Anzac Day

David SOUTHWICK (Caulfield) (09:45): Just finally I want to thank Lola Merrifield, Tom Breimeyer, Leon Rozen and Holly Chandran from Caulfield Junior College, who ran the Anzac Day service – our student leaders. Thank you to them and thank you to principal Chris Chant and Thomas Lewis, who did a fantastic service at Caulfield Park along with the mayor to ensure that those kids learn about the importance of Anzac Day.

Ramadan

Dylan WIGHT (Tarneit) (09:45): With the holy month of Ramadan having come to an end I would like to take this opportunity to extend my thanks to the incredibly warm and welcoming Islamic community in Tarneit and Hoppers Crossing. This past week I had the amazing pleasure of attending Melbourne Grand Mosque's Eid festival. It was so fantastic to see so many families out at that festival enjoying and celebrating the end of Ramadan. Tarneit is a multicultural hub with a strong sense of community, and it is fantastic festivals like this one that make Tarneit such a great place to live. I would also like to personally thank Melbourne Grand Mosque, Virgin Mary Mosque, Golden Wattle mosque, Etesham Picklu, the Dola family, Imitaz Chowdhury and Ishrat Nina as well as Nusrat Islam for inviting me into their homes to celebrate this wonderful month together. Eid Mubarak to you all.

Anzac Day

Dylan WIGHT (Tarneit) (09:46): Last week I also had the opportunity and the pleasure to honour and reflect upon the sacrifices made by our Anzacs at the dawn service held in Werribee. It was so fantastic to see so many local families and veterans there. Their bravery and selflessness will never be forgotten. Lest we forget.

Murray Slee

Kim O'KEEFFE (Shepparton) (09:46): This past week one of my much-loved residents and local legend Murray Slee celebrated his 100th birthday. Murray has a long history serving our community, including being the longest serving councillor of 34 years, elected back in 1956. Murray was also mayor of our great city for three years back in 1976, 1977 and 1978. Murray has contributed significantly to the success of our region, and it was really wonderful to catch up with Murray to celebrate this wonderful milestone with his friends and family.

Shepparton Philippine House Foundation Inc.

Kim O'KEEFFE (Shepparton) (09:47): I also wish to congratulate the Philippine House Shepparton on their 35th anniversary. It was a great celebration, reflecting back on the history, culture and the strong connection and wonderful contribution that they make to our region and community.

Moira Community Achiever Awards

Kim O'KEEFFE (Shepparton) (09:47): I would also like to congratulate all the award recipients of the Moira shire community awards, which are a wonderful acknowledgement of the shining stars within the community. The Eden Farm Multicultural Festival event was one of the community star achiever award winners. Congratulations to Gary and Katherina on providing a wonderful event that was a reflection and celebration of our diverse multicultural community. I also wish to acknowledge the wonderful work that Gary and Katherina do on their farm providing a range of activities, experiences and services, including programs and activities for people with disabilities.

Anzac Day

Chris COUZENS (Geelong) (09:48): It was an honour to attend the various remembrance services on Anzac Day alongside the member for Corio, Minister for Defence and Deputy Prime Minister Richard Marles and the member for South Barwon. I want to acknowledge the RSL and Andrew Hanns for their great organisation. The day started with the Anzac pre-dawn service at the peace memorial in Johnstone Park at 4:15 am. There is something really special and solemn about

remembering Australians who have died or been injured in war at this memorial built in the 1920s to commemorate those who served in World War I.

The dawn service at 6 am at Eastern Beach continues to attract large numbers, as it did again this Anzac Day. It is great to see so many people attending to remember and honour those who have fallen or suffered in war. I attended the 9:30 service at the Geelong RSL in Belmont, followed by the march along Malop Street for the 11 am service in Johnstone Park. This also attracted huge numbers of people. South Barwon and St Joseph's football and netball clubs hosted their annual Anzac pre-match service at 1:30 pm prior to their senior football and netball games at McDonald Reserve. This is a special day to thank, honour and remember those who have served in war and to commit to a wish for peace in our world.

Voice to Parliament

Chris COUZENS (Geelong) (09:49): On another matter, the Geelong region is embracing the yes campaign for the Voice referendum coming up later this year. I join – (*Time expired*)

Anzac Day

Jess WILSON (Kew) (09:49): I rise to pay tribute to the many Anzac Day ceremonies across the electorate of Kew. It was incredibly moving to see the residents of Kew commemorate the Anzacs, their legacy and the courage, service and sacrifice of our fallen service men and women. I would like to thank Kew East Primary School, Kew High School, Xavier College and Kew RSL for their powerful Anzac services and for inviting me to join them to reflect on the sacrifice of our diggers and the freedoms we enjoy today because of their service.

Greythorn Traders Association

Jess WILSON (Kew) (09:50): On Saturday it was terrific to catch up with Greythorn Traders Association and listen to local business owners speak about what issues are affecting them and how I can best advocate on their behalf. Greythorn shopping centre is a bustling local shopping strip thanks to the hardworking business owners, like cutting-edge hairdressers Mario at Wardika and Zac at Bel Air, Farshad and Ardavan's coffee at the Travelling Bandit, Nicole's delicious cuisine at Taipei Delight, Mick's legendary sausages at Chef in a Box, Rita's Yours Now Mine opportunity shop and Gracia's Kobodi Wellness Studio, just to name a few. These small businesses are the backbone of our community, and I would like to take this opportunity to show my appreciation for their hard work, determination and entrepreneurial spirit.

Belmore School

Jess WILSON (Kew) (09:50): Last month I had the honour of presenting the leadership badges at Belmore School. Belmore School is an amazing local school that provides expert education, care and support for students with a range of disabilities. I would like to congratulate the new student leaders: Jed Shelley as leader of the leadership action team, Livian Hunt as leader of the learning action team and Massimo Cilmi as leader of the wellbeing action team. You should all be very proud of your achievements, and I am sure you will be fantastic role models for your fellow students.

Monbulk electorate student leaders

Daniela DE MARTINO (Monbulk) (09:51): I would like to recognise and congratulate some of Monbulk's youngest and newest leaders. Congratulations to the 2023 school captains of Emerald Secondary College – Jackson, Caiti, Hayley and Ethan – who spoke beautifully at the Emerald dawn service on Anzac Day and represented their school so very well.

I have had the pleasure of presenting leadership badges to the following students over the last couple of months. Congratulations to the 2023 school captains at The Basin Primary School: Leah, Darcy, Jessie-Jack and Blake. Congratulations to the 2023 school captains at Upper Ferntree Gully Primary School: Zoe, Max, Luke, Amalia, Owen, Daniel, Amalie and Maison. And congratulations to the 2023

school captains at Belgrave South Primary School Ivy and Eli and vice-captains Summer and Elise. I am so very proud of these wonderful young people. They are already carrying out their duties as student leaders and doing a fantastic job.

Kallista Primary School

Daniela DE MARTINO (Monbulk) (09:52): Last week I had the absolute pleasure of officially opening the Kallista Primary School covered basketball courts on behalf of Minister Hutchins, proudly funded by the Andrews Labor government. We are ensuring our children have the best facilities to learn and play. For anyone who knows Kallista and the local weather, which is very high in precipitation, they would understand how important it is for the school and community to have a covered area for children's outdoor activities.

Monbulk youth advisory group

Daniela DE MARTINO (Monbulk) (09:52): Last year during the campaign I also made a commitment to create a youth advisory group for Monbulk. I am pleased to say that our inaugural meeting will take place this month. This is to ensure that I am always listening to but more importantly truly hearing our young people's voices. I am sure there will be much food for thought generated by this group.

Dr Despina Mouratides

Ellen SANDELL (Melbourne) (09:52): I rise today to pay tribute to the late Dr Despina Mouratides of East Melbourne, Australia's first female psychiatrist of Greek origin, who recently passed away at the age of 72. Despina graduated from the University of Melbourne and practised in my electorate for decades. She was well known amongst the Greek diaspora for providing essential medical care in the Greek language, and her loss is a great one for the Melbourne community. I would like to send my deepest condolences to her family, her friends and the broader Greek community who are mourning her loss.

Rental support

Ellen SANDELL (Melbourne) (09:53): On another matter, people should not be forced to choose between feeding their family and putting a roof over their heads, yet that is the very real choice that so many renters in Victoria are having to make right now. The rental crisis is out of control. Rents are soaring, vacancy rates are at an all-time low, illegal rent bidding is rife and people are being forced out of their homes due to rent increases. The Labor government must act now to stop thousands of people becoming homeless – and they can if they have the will. I urge this government to freeze rent increases for two years to allow wages to catch up, to regulate short stays to get more rentals onto the long-term market, to build more public housing and to put a permanent cap on rent increases to keep them in line with wage growth. Governments must act and they must do it now.

Godfrey Street Community House

Nick STAIKOS (Bentleigh) (09:54): Godfrey Street Community House is now 40 years old. In 1983 Moorabbin council purchased a series of properties along Godfrey Street, Bentleigh, to extend the Bentleigh shops car park. A group of local people then got together to campaign for number 9 to become a community house instead. Forty years later it is still there and thriving. For many years I have been president of the committee of management, and I pay tribute to everyone who has made the community house the welcoming place it is today. To all of the founders – people like former manager Shirley Franklin and former Bentleigh and Oakleigh MP Ann Barker – thank you. Thank you to Helen Howells, who was manager for many years until recently, and to our new managers Allison Connell and Vas Dede; to Tracey Manning, who has passionately managed the childcare centre for many years, making it a centre of first choice in the area for many families; to Russell Nolan Lewis, who introduced a new art program to the house in 2010, which is still going strong today; and to people who are no longer with us – people like Pat Boyd, who ran the childcare centre for many years before serving on

the committee of management, and Sheila Sojka, who started a singing group which still gets together every week. Over 40 years there have literally been thousands of people who have made a contribution to Godfrey Street. That is exactly what a community house is: a place run by the community that responds to the needs of the community. I am very much looking forward to the next 40 years of Godfrey Street, but not as president.

Southern Peninsula Community Support

Sam GROTH (Nepean) (09:55): I recently had the pleasure of meeting Jeremy Maxwell and his team from Southern Peninsula Community Support, who do amazing work supporting some of the most vulnerable in our community. The important services they provide include working with families to secure NDIS support, ensuring that residents facing income and housing crises have the resources they need and providing essential services to those facing domestic and family violence. They also provide regular food hampers for those struggling with the cost-of-living crisis, and their SPLaSh program provides shower and laundry facilities for community members facing homelessness, ensuring they have the essential amenities available to them.

Anzac Day

Sam GROTH (Nepean) (09:56): I also had the honour of representing my constituency at Anzac Day ceremonies. Those I attended include the Anzac Day ceremony at Rosebud RSL and a wonderful lunch at the Rye RSL, and many community members represented me at Dromana, Sorrento, Flinders and Red Hill. I want to express my sincere gratitude to those that have served in our armed forces and put their lives on the line to protect our values and freedom.

Melinda Groth

Sam GROTH (Nepean) (09:56): Lastly, I just want to acknowledge my mother Melinda Groth, who passed away on 15 April, and acknowledge all the members in this chamber as well as everyone else who has reached out with condolences to my family, as well as the members in this chamber who attended her funeral and everyone on both sides who has reached out over the last couple of weeks. May she rest in peace.

Glen Waverley electorate schools

John MULLAHY (Glen Waverley) (09:57): My condolences. Recently I have been visiting my local primary schools. I know I am biased, but I think we can all agree Glen Waverley has the best schools in the state – and I have the NAPLAN results to prove it.

Thank you to principal Con Vellios and school council president Alec Yankos for inviting me to attend the Glen Waverley South Primary School badge ceremony. I would like to say congratulations to everyone there who received a position and congratulate the new school captains Regish Ravichandran and Melanie Yin.

Glendal Primary also had their badge ceremony recently, and it was my pleasure to present badges to the 2023 leaders. I would especially like to congratulate the new school captains Mishti and Dimi and the rest of the leadership team. Thanks to principal Deborah Grossek and assistant principals Paul Whitehead and Kym Robinson.

I would also like to give congratulations to the new student leaders at Camelot Rise Primary School to whom I recently presented badges – Javen, Jayvier, Tegan and Milli – and their principal Matthew Coney. I would also like to thank the students at Camelot Rise Primary School for the wonderful birthday card designs they did for me. These will be used and sent out to my electorate for birthdays with their local students' designs on them. Thanks to everyone who submitted their drawings. I was beyond impressed with all of them.

Anzac Day

Luba GRIGOROVITCH (Kororoit) (09:58): Each year Anzac Day services are held right across the world to pay our respects and remember those who of course have given their all to our country. In my electorate services were held in Aintree at the reflection pond and the walk of honour, and I must say, if you have not been down to see this, you really should. It is a fantastic display of our nation's history, and I am sure that Minister Suleyman would attest to this, as I know she has gone down and visited there also.

Services were also held in Caroline Springs at the remembrance cenotaph by the lake, where I had the pleasure of talking with World War II veteran Allan Godfrey. Allan has many stories from his life – some wonderful and some still very painful stories. One story which he is quite happy to talk about is the medals that he wears proudly. Not only does he wear his own for his services to this country, but he also wears those of his late father, who served in World War I. Allan recently celebrated his 100th birthday at the Caroline Springs RSL with both family and friends, and I want to again wish him a happy birthday and congratulate him on reaching this amazing milestone. It was really wonderful to talk to Allan at the dawn service on Anzac Day and to hear about all of the joy that he has had during his life, and again I thank him for his service.

Walter Velazquez

Ella GEORGE (Lara) (09:59): It is with deep sadness that I rise to speak on the passing of a dear friend and Labor Party colleague, Walter Velazquez. Walter arrived in Australia as a refugee with his mother Gladys Novoa from Uruguay. His family in Uruguay were proud political activists and unionists and, like so many, came to Australia for a better life.

As a community activist Walter established a language school for newly arrived migrants and refugees. As a political activist Walter empowered people and communities to stand up and speak for themselves. As an electorate officer he supported hundreds of constituents over many years in the offices of the Honourable Telmo Languiller and the Honourable Tim Watts. No problem was too big or small for Walter to help with. Walter will be remembered for his support of the Spanish-speaking community. Over the years he supported hundreds of Spanish speakers, particularly older Victorians and newly arrived migrants, to navigate the bureaucracy of government. Walter was incredibly patient and generous with his time, ensuring every single person had the help they needed. Walter loved his job and he loved helping people. I will remember Walter as a kind and gentle man with a positive spirit and a big heart. He always had a smile on his face. Walter is survived by his partner Emilia, his mother Gladys Novoa, stepfather Brian and the extended Baldovino family. I send them all my love. Vale, Walter Velazquez.

Riley Byrnes

Will FOWLES (Ringwood) (10:01): I rise to acknowledge and celebrate the efforts of two fantastic sporting clubs in my electorate which came together in a show of support for young Riley Byrnes, who was sadly diagnosed with leukaemia at just 11 years old. The Mitcham football and netball club, led by their dedicated president Matt McCubbin, led the Great Shave for Riley, raising an incredible \$14,000 for the Royal Children's Hospital Foundation. But that is not all. Riley's inspiring story also motivated the Mitcham Cricket Club to get involved in Lifeblood's local sporting clubs blood challenge. The junior cricketers enthusiastically took part in the 'run for Riley' initiative, and numerous club members stepped up to donate blood. In their very first attempt the club achieved remarkable success, winning the categories of most lives saved and most new donors. They managed to save an amazing 114 lives in just a short span of three months. I cannot express enough just how proud I am of both of these clubs for their unwavering support of Riley and these very important causes.

Laurel Donaldson

Juliana ADDISON (Wendouree) (10:02): Congratulations to Alfredton Primary School principal Laurel Donaldson on celebrating 40 years in education. Over Laurel's four decades of teaching and school leadership she has had a positive influence on the lives of thousands of students and their families across Ballarat and the district. Laurel commenced her teaching career at Mount Pleasant Primary School in 1983, and during her distinguished teaching career Laurel has worked as a classroom teacher at Clunes and a specialist PE teacher at schools in the Bungaree cluster before returning to Mount Pleasant as a leading teacher. Laurel's school leadership roles have included being assistant principal at Woody Yaloak, acting principal at Miners Rest and principal at Alfredton Primary School since 2010. Laurel is a wonderful role model for teachers and students, demonstrating a love of learning, a dedication to teaching and a passion for education. She demonstrates that teaching is a rewarding and enriching career, despite the demanding role of being a principal. Laurel has made and continues to make an extraordinary contribution to public education in our community.

Felicity Driscoll

Juliana ADDISON (Wendouree) (10:03): Well done to Alfredton Primary School student Felicity Driscoll on winning her campaign for a new footpath to her school and local sporting facilities on Windsor Avenue. Felicity is just seven years old and has secured a funding commitment from the City of Ballarat for the footpath. Having grown up in the house next door to Felicity, I know there has not been a footpath for over 45 years in Windsor Avenue. I am truly impressed by her advocacy and what she has achieved. Perhaps she will be a future member for Wendouree. Great work, Felicity.

L'Arte Central

Pauline RICHARDS (Cranbourne) (10:03): I am delighted to have the opportunity to update the house about a terrific visit that was undertaken by the minister at the table, the Minister for Government Services, to L'Arte Central. It is a really important social enterprise in Cranbourne, and what was really heartening was to meet the person who was responsible for bringing this centre together, Anthony Cheeseman. While there, the minister was fortunate to have the Cranbourne chamber of commerce also drop in. It was wonderful to be able to share conversations about how wonderful the Cranbourne community is but particularly our business owners. There is no better place for a cup of tea or coffee than in the several cafes across Cranbourne, and that was demonstrated. The thing about L'Arte Central is that not only is it a surprise when you see how extraordinary it is to have flowers, gifts and coffee, but as a social enterprise it is really supporting the people in our community who sometimes are struggling to get into employment. I am grateful that the minister came to visit, and I commend the work of L'Arte Central. It really is at the centre of our hearts.

Statements on parliamentary committee reports**Integrity and Oversight Committee*****The Independent Performance Audits of the Independent Broad-based Anti-corruption Commission and the Victorian Inspectorate***

Brad ROWSWELL (Sandringham) (10:05): I rise to make a contribution on *The Independent Performance Audits of the Independent Broad-based Anti-corruption Commission and the Victorian Inspectorate* minority report of October 2022. In doing so – and I have done this once before – I do so as a former deputy chair of the Parliament's Integrity and Oversight Committee. In my first term in this place it was a great learning opportunity for me, actually, to work with some really dedicated and hardworking members of the secretariat to delve into areas of policy consideration that I had not had the opportunity to do before. Those new members in this place who are joining committees during the course of this Parliament, I would encourage to fully immerse themselves within the committee process.

Acting Speaker, as you may know, given the history of the Parliament's Integrity and Oversight Committee and the predecessor committee, being the IBAC Committee, for this committee to produce

as part of a report that it delivers to the Parliament a minority report is absolutely extraordinary. From time immemorial, so the member for Rowville, my colleague Mr Wells, tells me, matters of integrity, certainly within the parliamentary committee system, have been largely bipartisan. It was unheard of that there would be a minority report. But the member for Rowville and I felt so strongly about the circumstance that we were presented with that we felt like we had no other option but to expose a little bit of truth about what happened during the course of this particular performance audit. Acting Speaker, I am sure you will join with me in being absolutely flabbergasted by the circumstances that ensued.

We have expressed these views in the minority report, the first and the key one being our concerns with the appointment of the auditor and the conduct of the auditor. Okay, the people who put together this minority report are, yes, both members of the opposition; we are both members of the Liberal Party. If there are some people out there who say, 'Well, of course they're going to have issues with a Labor-dominated committee and the processes that ensued at that committee inquiry', for goodness sake, do not believe us, believe –

A member: We don't.

Brad ROWSWELL: I will come to you in a minute – what is his name?

So do not believe us, believe the former IBAC Commissioner in Robert Redlich KC, who wrote to the Presiding Officers about his own deep concerns about the processes that ensued during this committee inquiry. So, yes, we had concerns with the auditor. We also had concerns with the way in which the auditor was being directed by Labor members of the committee – absolutely unprecedented. Call me conservative, call me a traditionalist, call me a lover of processes, call me whatever you like – and I am sure you will – but I believe in due parliamentary process. I believe that the committees of this Parliament have not only a right, but an obligation to do their work independent of interference from political overlords and certainly the Premier's private office, which is exactly what happened during the course of this inquiry.

As an addendum to this minority report, Mr Wells and I attached an email that Mr Halse actually – one of your former colleagues, member for Mordialloc – sent to the auditor, directing the auditor as to what they should be doing and how they should be doing it. Blow me over, but I would have thought that the obligation of an auditor was to undertake their work free of party-political, partisan interference. The fact that they were actually subjected to that flies in the face of an audit process in the first place, but this is what we were subjected to during the last Parliament in the Integrity and Oversight Committee. Mr Redlich has written to the Presiding Officers. I would hope that the Integrity and Oversight Committee of this Parliament will consider that letter and those matters seriously.

Integrity and Oversight Committee

Performance of the Victorian Integrity Agencies 2020/21: Focus on Witness Welfare

Nina TAYLOR (Albert Park) (10:10): I am very pleased to speak on the Integrity and Oversight Committee (IOC) *Performance of the Victorian Integrity Agencies 2020/21: Focus on Witness Welfare* report of October 2022, respecting the very critical role that our integrity agencies play, and at the same time of course how difficult it is for witnesses as well in any scenario. One cannot overestimate the challenging role that witnesses play, and unlike the opposition I am not going to have a minority report as my claim to fame. I mean, that is kind of a little – I do not know: 'Wow, I did a minority report; I'm fantastic.' If you want to say that, you can say that in the Parliament, but I am not sure that that is incredibly meaningful of itself. But anyway, have a go – put it out there.

Coming back to the report, the report reviews the performance of the agencies during 2020–21. You might wonder why I am reviewing this element, because I think it is always good to come back to the core function of these committees rather than going on these little political tangents. Let us come back to the central focus and what is actually incumbent upon those who participate in these committees. Focusing on their management of the welfare of witnesses and others involved in their investigations,

it represents the culmination of the IOC's monitoring and review activities with respect to witness welfare management, which began with the committee's establishment in 2019. I want to commend the rigour of the committee. In preparing the report the committee closely examined the integrity agencies' annual reports for 2020–21. The agencies also appeared before the committee at public hearings, provided written submissions and answered questions on notice regarding their performance during the reporting period and their management of witness welfare. Finally, the committee received written submissions and other responses from interstate and international integrity agencies, non-integrity organisations with expertise and experience in witness welfare and members of the public relating to the agencies' management of witness welfare – and of course it is nice that it was noted by the committee that it appreciated all the contributions to its review.

I should say on the one hand, while the committee did identify important areas for improvement, the agencies' policies, procedures and practices nevertheless, as it stated, reflect a serious commitment to ensuring the welfare of persons involved in their investigations. So we can see a reciprocated respect, and that is obviously very important in this context when such important investigations are being undertaken. Just as an example, the Victorian Ombudsman's witness welfare policies, procedures and practices were deemed by the committee to be well informed by mental health expertise and reflected the agency's vast experience in dealing with disadvantaged and vulnerable persons. Moreover, it was reflected that the VO had a deep understanding of the distinctive impacts of coercive powers on witnesses – fair enough too, because as I was saying from the outset, it is really difficult to be a witness in any situation. The committee, however, recommended that witnesses who are subject to coercive powers that are more likely to have negative impacts on their welfare be given direct access to the VO's employee assistance program, without the need for a referral from the agency. So you can see an example of some of the very productive and constructive thoughts and recommendations that have come out of this report, which I am sure are respected and will in all likelihood be followed through, I imagine, as a result of the culmination of the incredible work that has gone into putting this report together.

I should acknowledge the work of the committee secretariat through this review: Sean Coley, committee manager; Dr Stephen James, senior research officer; Tom Hvala, research officer; Holly Brennan, complaints and research assistant; and committee administrative officers Maria Marasco and Bernadette Pendergast. Having undertaken and been part of committees myself, I know the rigour that is required. I know how stressful it can be and the respect that is required amongst all committee members and the difficulty, as I said, when you are in this particular nuanced situation, of actually investigating the management of witness welfare as well. So I commend all those who contributed to this report.

Integrity and Oversight Committee

The Independent Performance Audits of the Independent Broad-based Anti-corruption Commission and the Victorian Inspectorate

Annabelle CLEELAND (Euroa) (10:15): Today I rise to speak on *The Independent Performance Audits of the Independent Broad-based Anti-corruption Commission and the Victorian Inspectorate* 2022 – nailed it. As members of this place we have a duty to act with integrity and honesty in our dealings every single day. Sadly, this government continues to be shaded by corruption investigations while members of Parliament on that side of the house blindly follow the Premier. Given the risk of overshooting my speaking time today I will not outline the incredible array of IBAC reports, either published or forthcoming, into individuals involved in the Andrews government.

Of specific interest to me is the minority report on the performance of the Victorian integrity agencies, which was completed by the member for Sandringham and the member for Rowville. From the outset it is important to remember the most recent IBAC report, which made scathing comments about the conduct of people within the Andrews government but was dismissed as merely 'educational' by the Premier. While some are happy to turn a blind eye or simply do not have the courage to speak out against continued improper conduct of those in their own government and their advisers, I am glad the

Ombudsman is not that way inclined. Rather than being ‘educational’, the Ombudsman labelled the report ‘damning’ and stated:

I think it says a lot about the Premier’s views on corruption and integrity.

...

It was not an educational report, it was a damning report about misconduct of ministerial advisers and ministerial responsibility for those advisers ...

...

... Victoria is now a laggard rather than a leader in parliamentary integrity.

The attitude of the Premier is embarrassing for our state. You have all gone rather silent.

Referring to the minority report on the performance of the Victorian integrity agencies, we see some damning indictments of the behaviour of Labor members on the Integrity and Oversight Committee. I quote directly from the minority report:

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

I do not think this is something that could possibly be up for debate. Transcripts of IBAC’s public hearing on 9 May 2022 make this abundantly clear. The chair of the committee resorted to cutting the feed of a public hearing with the state’s own corruption commission to protect her government from questions about integrity. I quote from the chair:

Sorry, again, again, again – can we cut the feed, please.

Good manners. The chair felt so entitled as to continually interrupt the commissioner during his opening statements in an attempt to gag Mr Redlich and narrow the scope of his public address. Thankfully, Mr Redlich is someone of great integrity and not just ‘someone who used to do a job ... written a letter that apparently says a whole bunch of stuff’, as our arrogant and dismissive Premier describes him. Mr Redlich has even felt compelled to state publicly his concerns about the aforementioned report. What is most concerning is that it appears that the chair and the majority of the IOC audit subcommittee seemed intent on casting IBAC in a negative light for what we can only assume were political reasons relating to work undertaken by IBAC. The minority report made it quite clear in saying the committee failed to achieve the expectations it set out for itself but, more importantly, it failed to fulfil its obligations to both the Parliament and the people of Victoria.

Barely a day goes by when I am not stopped by a member of the public concerned about corruption in the Andrews government. The centralisation of power, the complete disrespect for taxpayers money and for our institutions, the gaslighting of Victorians and the downplaying of clear integrity concerns are leaving constituents across my electorate embarrassed to live under this Premier. We live in a state where the Ombudsman and the IBAC Commissioner have felt compelled to publicly state their concerns about corruption in the Andrews government throughout the media and in a letter that the Premier knows exists but apparently will not read. I agree with my constituents. The conduct of this government is embarrassing, and I hope members opposite find the courage to consider these very real issues without their Labor Party sunglasses glued on. They do say sunlight is the best disinfectant and that the fish rots from the head. While government MPs continue to blindly follow the Premier and hide from their duty to call out improper conduct, in his shadow Victoria will continue to be the nation’s laggard in parliamentary integrity, and Victorians deserve better.

Integrity and Oversight Committee*Performance of the Victorian Integrity Agencies 2020/21: Focus on Witness Welfare*

Steve McGHIE (Melton) (10:20): I rise to speak on the report *Performance of the Victorian Integrity Agencies 2020/21: Focus on Witness Welfare*. I have been up on my feet earlier this year in regard to this report, along with the member for Albert Park. I think the member for Point Cook was also up, and he may be following me today, so I was very interested to read his comments from the previous *Hansard*. It was very helpful today.

Clearly, the Integrity and Oversight Committee (IOC) are a very important committee. I will say that I did chair the committee for around about 18 months in the 59th Parliament along with the deputy chair, the member for Sandringham. We had a very good committee, a very productive committee and a very cohesive committee, and I applaud all the members that were on that initial committee in the 59th Parliament for their efforts.

I will go to the secretariat also. I know there have been some changes there, but I cannot commend the secretariat enough for the work that they do. They make the committees work well, and they produce fantastic outcomes. I have got to acknowledge Sean Coley as the committee manager for the assistance that he gave me and the deputy chair during our time and obviously subsequent to that as the committee moved on; Dr Stephen James, senior research officer; Tom Hvala, research officer; Holly Brennan, complaints and research assistant; Maria Marasco, committee administrative officer; and Bernadette Pendergast, committee administrative officer. The work that they do is amazing. In my time I just want to thank them for their efforts and assisting me. Some of the functions of the integrity and oversight committee, and I will read from the report itself, are:

to monitor and review the performance of the functions and exercise of the powers of the Information Commissioner; and

to consider and investigate complaints concerning the Information Commissioner and the operation of the Office of the Victorian Information Commissioner; and

to report to both Houses of Parliament on any matter requiring the attention of Parliament ...

the performance of the functions and the exercise of the powers of the Information Commissioner ...

and obviously, the Independent Broad-based Anti-corruption Commission in regard to overseeing those roles, and also the Victorian Ombudsman. But it has many, many functions. There are pages here, several pages – what, three pages – of the functions that this committee has.

Witness welfare is an important issue, and it was raised in my time as the chair of the committee; some concerns were raised around witness welfare. And I know that the Victorian Inspectorate did their own report on witness welfare and expressed some concerns. There have been 16 recommendations made in this report, and they go to all of the agencies that are overseen by the IOC. One of the recommendations in particular for IBAC was:

That the Victorian Government, following consultation with the Independent Broad-based Anti-corruption Commission (IBAC), the Victorian Inspectorate (VI) and helplines providing telephone and online mental health crisis support services, seek to amend the *Independent Broad-based Anti-corruption Commission Act 2011* (Vic) to permit a person who is subject to an IBAC confidentiality notice to disclose a restricted matter to a telephone or online helpline providing mental health crisis support services ...

and it goes on. I do not know if anyone has been involved in cases under investigation where there have been witnesses and had to give evidence before a tribunal. It is very distressing and demanding, and it does play on people's minds in different ways. I have had some involvement with that in my previous role as the secretary of the ambulance union when some of my members were investigated or asked to present to IBAC. I have seen the mental health concerns that that caused, and it is important that we support witnesses when they are providing evidence to these investigatory bodies of the state.

This is a good report. As I say, during my time I had nothing but cohesion amongst the committee that we had. I commend the committee that has been subsequent to my finishing up at the IOC. But it is a very good report and I –

Cindy McLeish: It went downhill after you, mate.

Steve McGhie: Oh, it might have. It might have gone downhill after me. But anyway, it continues and it will continue. I know they have got a new chair now in the member for Brunswick. I commend the report.

Integrity and Oversight Committee

The Independent Performance Audits of the Independent Broad-based Anti-corruption Commission and the Victorian Inspectorate

Cindy McLEISH (Eildon) (10:25): I too rise to speak on *The Independent Performance Audits of the Independent Broad-based Anti-corruption Commission and the Victorian Inspectorate* that was tabled out of session last year on 31 October, and in particular I will be focusing my attention on the minority report that forms part of that document. IBAC, the anti-corruption commission, was established by the Liberal government when we were last in government in order to deal with integrity matters, because there were very many matters of great concern in integrity, certainly around the government that had been there – the Bracks–Brumby government had been there for 11 years, and I look at what has continued to happen since. In the last four years – the last eight years, probably, since the Andrews Labor government has been in – integrity is just continuing to slide. Never before have there been so many inquiries by IBAC into a government. It is really quite extraordinary.

I want to comment firstly on the chairs, because I have been in this place for three terms now, and one of the things that really surprises me is in all the committees that I have been involved in we have had a consistent chair, but in this four-year term the Integrity and Oversight Committee had five – so four years, five chairs. They did not even get to do a year each, and that is really quite extraordinary and unheard of in itself. The first chair was the member for Melton. He seemed to say just a moment ago that it was all hunky-dory. Well, I can tell you that it absolutely went downhill from there. The member for Altona, who was a former Attorney-General, would have been a good appointment as chair. We had then the former member for Ringwood, who is no longer in this place with this Parliament. Ms Shing in the other place was the fourth chair, and then the one who lasted the distance at the very end was the member for Narre Warren South. So we had five different chairs, which means that there was no consistency. That is pretty extraordinary. But what was consistent was the deputy chair, the member for Sandringham. In his first term he did a fabulous job, and from the outside looking in to the operations of the committee I think it was very good that we did have the deputy chair consistent, as was the member for Rowville and the member in the other place at the time from Derryn Hinch's Justice Party. So there were a few on the opposite team from the government who were consistent there, but not within the government.

With the minority report, this is really quite extraordinary. For something that is on IBAC, on integrity, you would think people would all be on the same page, but no, that was not the case. Within the minority report put by the deputy chair and the member for Rowville was a particular recommendation: that the incoming Integrity and Oversight Committee of the 60th Parliament should review and rewrite sections of the Independent Broad-based Anti-corruption Commission Act 2011 and the Victorian Inspectorate Act 2011 with a particular focus on the framework of integrity agency performance audits. Why has this come up? Why was this recommendation required? Well, we had something that was also unprecedented during an audit. The auditors, Callida Pty Ltd, were appointed by the Parliament of Victoria to audit IBAC and the Victorian Inspectorate. You would expect that an auditor could do their job independently, because that is what an auditor is about, but that was not the case at all because the auditor was directed – not nudged, directed – by one of the Labor members of the committee to change their report. This is something that shows me that the Andrews Labor government does not understand integrity. Their flagrant disregard for the processes of the committee

and for the processes of the audit is just something that I am flabbergasted by. And not only did they direct them to change the content, but they also threatened not to pay for the audit. That is completely low, and it is conclusive evidence that this government does not understand integrity.

Integrity and Oversight Committee

Performance of the Victorian Integrity Agencies 2020/21: Focus on Witness Welfare

Mathew HILAKARI (Point Cook) (10:30): I rise to speak on the *Performance of the Victorian Integrity Agencies 2020/21: Focus on Witness Welfare* report. I too rise a second time along with the member for Melton and the member for Albert Park, and I am so pleased to do so and so pleased to hear an extension of the previous contributions that have been made on this report. It is fabulous to hear. I am also pleased to hear that the committee itself has spent some time working cooperatively together, unlike what we are hearing a lot about today. I would like to acknowledge the previous chair, the member for Narre Warren South; the deputy chair, who is in the chamber right now, the member Sandringham; the former member of the other place Mr Stuart Grimley from Western Victoria; the previous chair and member Dustin Halse, the previous member for Ringwood of course; Mr Jackson Taylor, the member for Bayswater, who was here earlier – and I am sad not to hear him beside the member for Ringwood, who may not be known to all in the chamber but is known to me; the member for Eltham Vicki Ward; and, I understand, the long-term member of this committee, the member for Rowville Kim Wells. I would also like to acknowledge the previous chairs, Harriet Shing from the other place and member for Eastern Victoria, and my predecessor the Honourable Jill Hennessy, the former member for Altona, who was chair until 2022.

As I have previously said, the secretariats play an enormous role in the work of committees. I know this myself as a member of the Public Accounts and Estimates Committee presently. I would just like to read into *Hansard* again Sean Coley, the committee manager; Dr Stephen James, the senior researcher; Tom Hvala, the research officer; Holly Brennan, the complaints and research officer; Maria Marasco, the committee administrative officer; and Bernadette Pendergast, the committee administrative officer. These committees do not run without support from the Parliament.

The member for Melton talked about the enormous work that the Integrity and Oversight Committee does in covering off the four significant integrity agencies in Victoria, including the IBAC, the Office of the Victorian Information Commissioner, the Victorian Inspectorate and the Victorian Ombudsman. But this particular committee was looking at witness welfare. I am pleased, as was the committee in their report, to identify some important improvements that agencies can make to witness welfare. I think it is always important to think through the reports – in this more than 200-page report – and actually keep to the topic. The majority report has presented some significant findings, 16 in fact. The first that I would like to just acknowledge is the first recommendation, which is about those witnesses being able to disclose to telephone and online mental health and crisis support services some of the matters that they have been discussing, because of course it is difficult, as the member for Melton mentioned, to be subject to any inquiry but particularly these very serious inquiries that are undertaken by our integrity agencies.

The second recommendation I just want to highlight is recommendation 11:

That the Victorian Ombudsman ... ensure that persons –

The SPEAKER: Member for Albert Park, please remember to acknowledge the Chair.

Nina Taylor interjected.

The SPEAKER: The member for Albert Park will not argue with the Chair.

Mathew HILAKARI: I acknowledge the Speaker, who has now taken the chair, and I am so pleased that you have and are keeping this house in order, of course. Recommendation 11, as I was saying, mentions:

That the Victorian Ombudsman ... ensure that persons who are served with a confidentiality notice or summons to appear can directly access welfare support services provided by the –

Victorian Ombudsman's –

... Employee Assistance Program provider, without the need for a referral ...

This again is an important wraparound service that we need for those people who are going through a stressful period in helping to promote Victoria's integrity. I look forward to the progress on the recommendations, and I thank the Chair.

Business of the house

Notices of motion

Mary-Anne THOMAS (Macedon – Leader of the House, Minister for Health, Minister for Health Infrastructure, Minister for Medical Research) (10:34): I advise that the government does not wish to proceed with notice of motion 1 today and ask that it remain on the notice paper.

Bills

Gambling Regulation Amendment Bill 2023

Statement of compatibility

Melissa HORNE (Williamstown – Minister for Casino, Gaming and Liquor Regulation, Minister for Local Government, Minister for Ports and Freight, Minister for Roads and Road Safety) (10:36): In accordance with the Charter of Human Rights and Responsibilities Act 2006 I table a statement of compatibility in relation to the Gambling Regulation Amendment Bill 2023.

In accordance with section 28 of the Charter of Human Rights and Responsibilities Act 2006, (the Charter), I make this Statement of Compatibility with respect to the Gambling Regulation Amendment Bill 2023.

In my opinion, the Gambling Regulation Amendment Bill 2023, as introduced to the Legislative Assembly, is compatible with human rights as set out in the Charter. I base my opinion on the reasons outlined in this statement.

Human Rights Issues

The Bill amends the Gambling Regulation Act 2003 to make changes to the wagering and betting licence framework to permit multiple licences and remove the 'no less favourable' racing industry funding requirement for the wagering and betting licence.

The proposals in the Bill do not engage any rights of persons under the Charter.

The amendments in the Bill will affect wagering and betting licensees, VicRacing Pty Ltd and Racing Products Victoria Pty Ltd. Wagering and betting licensees are required to be corporations under the Gambling Regulation Act.

Hon Melissa Horne MP

Minister for Consumer Affairs, Gaming and Liquor Regulation

Second reading

Melissa HORNE (Williamstown – Minister for Casino, Gaming and Liquor Regulation, Minister for Local Government, Minister for Ports and Freight, Minister for Roads and Road Safety) (10:36): 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 Bill makes important changes to the structure of wagering and betting and will provide the necessary flexibility for government in awarding future wagering and betting licences – in order to yield the greatest benefit for the State.

A wagering and betting licence is issued under Chapter 4 of the *Gambling Regulation Act 2003* (the Act) which allows the licensee to conduct several gambling activities, including:

- pari-mutuel and fixed odds betting;
- simulated racing;
- operating the only off-course wagering and betting retail network in Victoria; and
- establishing and operating a betting exchange.

The current wagering and betting licence was awarded in 2011 and is due to expire on 15 August 2024.

The process for the awarding a wagering and betting licence to operate from 15 August 2024 is underway.

The proposed reforms in this Bill will provide flexibility for the government to ensure that the value of future wagering and betting licences is maximised for the State.

I now turn to the provisions of the Bill before the House.

The Bill amends the Act to enable the Minister to determine the number of wagering and betting licences and any exclusivity periods for future licensing processes.

Currently the Act only permits one wagering and betting licence to be in operation at the same time. This restricts the options that the State can present to the market to attract greater interest in the wagering and betting licence.

The Bill introduces an approach with the option to issue multiple licences and incorporate exclusivity periods within the licence to increase competition for the 2024 wagering and betting licence or licences.

This approach is consistent with provisions for the public lottery licence and Keno licences.

An exclusivity period means that the State would not be able to issue another wagering and betting licence that has effect during the period of exclusivity. For example, the State could issue one wagering and betting licence for a term of 20 years with an exclusivity period of 10 years. After 10 years, the State could issue additional licences.

No subsequent wagering and betting licences could be issued on an exclusive basis until all existing wagering and betting licences have expired.

The Bill also repeals the 'no less favourable' racing industry funding requirement for issuing a new wagering and betting licence.

In simple terms, the 'no less favourable' requirement provides that to award a post-2024 licence, the Minister must determine that the arrangements between the Victorian racing industry and a licence applicant are 'no less favourable' to the Victorian racing industry than the arrangements under the current wagering and betting licence.

Failure to remove the 'no less favourable' requirement will reduce competition, with the likely outcome being the prevention of the State from awarding a post-2024 wagering and betting licence.

Not awarding a post-2024 wagering and betting licence would result in significant foregone revenue for government and would have a negative effect on employment.

The Bill will remove the 'no less favourable' requirement to enable future wagering and betting licences to be issued without being required to determine that the licensee has entered into 'no less favourable' funding arrangements with the Victorian racing industry.

These changes are reflective of the changing wagering and betting environment, with the proliferation of online wagering and lowering demand for land-based wagering.

In conclusion, these are important amendments that provide for a more competitive wagering and betting licence process and greater flexibility for government in awarding the licence(s).

Ultimately, they should also lead to greater financial benefit for the State of Victoria.

I commend the Bill to the house.

Danny O'BRIEN (Gippsland South) (10:36): I move:

That the debate be adjourned.

Motion agreed to and debate adjourned.

Melissa HORNE (Williamstown – Minister for Casino, Gaming and Liquor Regulation, Minister for Local Government, Minister for Ports and Freight, Minister for Roads and Road Safety) (10:36): I move:

That the debate be adjourned for 13 days.

James NEWBURY (Brighton) (10:37): The minister has just sought to adjourn the debate on a new tax that the government intends to bring into this place for 13 days. What a surprise, and what a concerning step the government has taken that every Victorian should be worried about. We know – this chamber knows – that any government and governments for the best part of 100 years have given Victorians time to consider new bills they bring into this place, and to hear that a minister would stand at the table and seek to ram a new tax through this place –

Members interjecting.

James NEWBURY: It is no wonder that the government protest that they want to bring in their 44th new tax – their 44th new tax, a \$125 million new tax – and ram it through this place. What an outrage. Every Victorian should be distressed by what this government is doing, and I hope that every Victorian hears the debate that is taking place today. For 100 years Westminster parliaments have allowed Victorians and Australians the opportunity to consider bills that are brought in to parliaments, and that should be the way that it is. It should be the way that a government brings in a new proposal, so that the community has the opportunity to think about what is being proposed. A government should want to do that. It should not just be because the community wants to spend time considering it. A good government, a government with integrity, should want to bring bills into the community and have them consider those bills. The government should be happy to bring those bills into the community, to talk to stakeholders, to talk to the community about what they are proposing to do – but not this government. This government's natural inclination is not to bring in a bill and allow the community the opportunity to consider it. What this government is doing is pushing through a bill in this chamber, this bill that relates to gambling regulation.

But it is not a surprise, because no government with integrity would want to do that, and yet that is what they are doing – because they lack integrity. When something like that happens probably the first reaction of the community would be, especially considering what we have seen in this chamber recently, 'poor management of this place', and we have seen that numerous times across numerous issues. We have seen a lack of capacity to properly manage this place and filibustering through motions because there is a lack of an agenda – there is no agenda.

So you would look at this bill being pushed forward and you could be mistaken in believing that there is a lack of capacity, a lack of foresight of this government in managing this place, but no, no, no, no. In this case it is not because of a lack of capacity, a lack of preparedness or a lack of planning. This is sneaky. This is very, very sneaky by this government. That is what this government is doing, and we are going to see it more. We are going to see this every week, where the government tries to push through their sneaky agenda and take up the time of this place, because they have run out of an agenda. That is what we are seeing with this. So I oppose, and the opposition absolutely opposes, this dangerous step that this government is proposing to make.

The SPEAKER: Order! I ask the Manager of Opposition Business to refrain from hitting the table.

Darren CHEESEMAN (South Barwon) (10:42): I must say I have not heard more hyperbole in this place for some significant time. Every single sitting week we come here the Liberal Party in this chamber seek to take up valuable parliamentary debating time on matters important to the people of Victoria. On this particular occasion it can only really be described as a parliamentary stunt. I would like to suggest to those that are listening to this chamber's debate on this occasion that this parliamentary stunt introduced today by the Liberal Party, to be frank, is to distract the press gallery from Matthew Guy's witch-hunt of who leaked –

The SPEAKER: Order! The member for South Barwon will refer to members by their correct titles.

Darren CHEESEMAM: the member for Bulleen and his witch-hunt about who –

James Newbury: On a point of order, Speaker, this is a debate over a procedural matter, and the member has outrageously and flagrantly turned this into a slanging match. I would ask you to bring –

Members interjecting.

James Newbury: I didn't hear anyone calling any objection when I spoke.

The SPEAKER: Order! Through the Chair.

James Newbury: I would ask the Speaker to ask the member to return to this very, very tight debate.

The SPEAKER: I made some comments yesterday in relation to procedural debates – they are very narrow. This is about the timing of the return of a bill to the house, and I ask members to stick to that.

Darren CHEESEMAM: Thank you, Speaker. This debate is really just a stunt. The reality is that for a bill that is 29 pages long, that is not particularly difficult to get one's head around, 13 days is more than adequate to consult those that might be interested. An extra 24 hours will make absolutely no difference to the contributions that the Liberal Party make to this chamber. The reality is – and I can predict this – that every single sitting week between now and 2026 the Liberal Party will at every opportunity seek to frustrate the Andrews Labor government's agenda of getting important legislation through. I claim very loudly that this stunt by the Liberal Party to waste a good half an hour of valuable chamber time on this procedural motion is really to simply distract the press gallery from the comments made by the member for Bulleen yesterday.

James Newbury: On a point of order, Speaker, again the member has strayed into mudslinging in what is a very, very tight debate, and I would ask you to return the member back to the debate.

The SPEAKER: I understand your point of order. The member to come back to the motion before the house.

Darren CHEESEMAM: The motion before the house today, Speaker, as you well know, is in regard to whether we give 13 days for people in this chamber, for people who have responsibilities, to consult. The reality is that 13 days is more than sufficient time for parliamentarians to be able to consult, assuming they have the requisite skills to be a parliamentarian. Assuming they have those skills to be able to get out there and do the work that their political party has given them, 13 days is more than sufficient time on a 29-page bill. This is just further evidence that the Liberal Party are not fit to govern this state, because they cannot get the job done in –

James Newbury: On a point of order, Speaker, this is the third time in one contribution I have been forced to raise a point of order in relation to the member being unable –

The SPEAKER: The member's time has expired. There is no point of order.

Danny O'BRIEN (Gippsland South) (10:47): I rise to support the Manager of Opposition Business in opposing this 13-day adjournment, and I say to those over there, you cannot be surprised. Every time in the last Parliament –

The SPEAKER: Through the Chair, member for Gippsland South.

Danny O'BRIEN: Speaker, every time in the last Parliament the government tried to do this in breach of the forms of the house, of the conventions of the house, we took objection. So do not be surprised now when we do it again. It is disappointing to us all that the member for South Barwon has vacated the chamber, but I would like to take him up on the point that apparently we cannot get this

done in 13 days. We are debating this week an entire piece of legislation that was passed in 2021 and was due to come into effect in June this year, 2023. This week we are debating legislation to defer that for another 12 months because the government has not got around to consulting people about it. And you are complaining that we cannot do this in 13 days.

The SPEAKER: Order! The member for Gippsland South, through the Chair.

Danny O'BRIEN: They are complaining, Speaker, that we cannot do this in 13 days when this very week the government is deferring legislation for another 12 months because they have not done the consultation with the community. Yet we get this piece of legislation –

Will Fowles: That's not right.

Danny O'BRIEN: 'That's not right' – the member for Ringwood says that is not right. That is what the bill is. Go and have a look at the bill. Didn't you speak on the government business program this week?

The SPEAKER: Order! Through the Chair, member for Gippsland South.

Danny O'BRIEN: Speaker, I apologise, but it is very frustrating when government members do not know their own business program and do not know their own legislation and they complain that we are taking up valuable time. We have had 14 speakers on the water legislation, which is pretty much about the River Murray. Not one government member represents that area, and we have got 14 speakers on it. The government is so bereft of ideas –

Will Fowles: On a point of order, Speaker, in following the framing set by the member for Brighton, I think this is a very narrow debate. The member for Gippsland South is now spending a great deal of time talking about a bill that is not this bill and talking about a motion that is not this motion. I would ask you to bring him back to the subject of this debate.

The SPEAKER: The member for Gippsland South will come back to the motion before the house.

Danny O'BRIEN: Thank you, Speaker. I would like to talk about this bill, but I do not yet know anything about it. It has just been presented to this Parliament. The conventions and the forms of this chamber are that members of the Parliament and members of the public are given 14 days to consider legislation before it is debated, and there are very good reasons for that. This legislation is 29 pages. It amends four different acts relating to gambling, including the Casino Control Act 1991, the Gambling Regulation Act 2003 and the Liquor Control Reform Act 1998. These are big, important issues, and they involve potentially billions of dollars when it comes to the wagering licence, so these are very, very, very important issues that need to be given full consideration.

I say again the government should not be surprised that we would object. We have consistently objected to the inability of the government to manage its own business program going forward and it having to force the Parliament to truncate the process that has been agreed and accepted for many, many hundreds of years in the Westminster system and certainly for the time Parliament has been operating in this place. It is, as I said, a result of the lack of agenda and a lack of respect that the government pays to the Parliament in giving people the opportunity to fully consider things and the opportunity for me as the Shadow Minister for Casino, Gaming and Liquor Regulation – and potentially the Shadow Minister for Racing and no doubt the Shadow Treasurer might be interested and may want to consult various stakeholders on this. It is a due consideration of the forms of the house and a little bit of respect to the house to say, 'Hey, we haven't got our act together. We'll give it 14 days as we normally do.' Let us not just rush things through for the sake of the government's agenda and make it easier for them.

I say again it is not through there being too much on the agenda. The two bills on the government business program this week are both bills that are basically revisitations of previous bills from last term, and we have got the government putting up motions like the SEC motion to fill gaps. So it is not

like the government has got so much on that it has to rush this through. This should not be supported, this 13-day motion.

Will FOWLES (Ringwood) (10:52): Boy, oh boy, oh boy. The outrage could not be more confected than what we have heard today from those opposite on this motion. There is of course no substantive difference between 14 days and 13 days, because you have the week –

Members interjecting.

Will FOWLES: They well know that they have the week in between sittings in which to do their consultation. I mean, do you pack your sports bag for the whole school week, or do you need to bring it in on the Wednesday or the Tuesday? It does not really make any substantive difference at all. This is a bill with some very important reforms, including to the racing industry, and the opposition have the blinkers on, don't they? They have the blinkers on when it comes to the very –

Members interjecting.

The SPEAKER: Order! Manager of Opposition Business, you have had your turn.

Will FOWLES: Thank you, Speaker. They absolutely have the blinkers on here, because the outrage is being confected about 13 days versus 14 days. For anybody who has the great misfortune of listening to this debate online it will be abundantly clear that the outrage is confected. It makes no substantive difference, because the consultation that the opposition purport to need to do on this pretty slim bill all happens when we are not here, so they do not need the additional day. It is about when it lands in the subsequent sitting week. It is not about whether you have the use of the interregnum or not, it is about whether it lands in that subsequent sitting week.

The member for Brighton has got the bit between the teeth and is very excited about this bill, but he probably should be scratched from this race, because the notion that this is a great affront to democracy is just nonsense. The real affront to democracy in this joint, the real affront to democracy in Victoria, is the complete ineptitude of those over there. That is the matter that –

James Newbury: On a point of order, Speaker, I loathe having to stand up repeatedly –

Members interjecting.

The SPEAKER: Manager of Opposition business, I ask you to state your point of order succinctly.

James Newbury: Speaker, another government speaker has flagrantly failed to debate the question at hand, and I would ask you to bring the member back to the issue at hand.

The SPEAKER: I invite all members to speak to the motion before the house.

Will FOWLES: Thank you very much, Speaker. I think Brighton is more gelding than stallion perhaps. The substance here is that it is a very important debate because it just exposes the flaw in the argument of those opposite that there is some great travesty going on here in relation to when, within the subsequent sitting week, a debate will come on. It is not about whether you have the use of the interregnum or not, it is just about when within the subsequent sitting week this gets dealt with. To be honest, they perhaps ought to be taken off to the political knacker, and they are doing a pretty good job of it at the minute. This is a –

James Newbury: On a point of order, Speaker, again I am disappointed to raise the fact that the member has strayed from the question at hand. It is disappointing that each government member is doing this on a matter of integrity in this place, and I would ask you to bring the member back to the question.

The SPEAKER: There is no point of order this time, but I do ask the member for Ringwood to refrain from straying from the motion before the house.

Will FOWLES: Thank you very much, Speaker. Look, what is abundantly clear in this is that those opposite are seeking to torch another 30 minutes of parliamentary time on a nonsense procedural objection when there is actually no substantive difference whatsoever between 14 days and 13 days, because it is not about whether you have the time in between sitting days. That time is there – that time will almost always be there. But of course we are having a gigantic sook about where in the subsequent sitting week this bill will be considered. I would say, through you, Chair, to those opposite that they should just giddy-up and get on with it. This is an uncomplicated debate in so many respects. They can go off and do their consultation – that is absolutely fine – and we will come back in the subsequent sitting week and we will consider the bill and have the debate, and that is a perfectly reasonable thing for the government to put to this place.

Brad ROWSWELL (Sandringham) (10:57): It is like the member for Ringwood went to the stud farm and was terribly disappointed. I also rise to speak on this circumstance. No-one, absolutely no-one, should be surprised that the opposition is opposing this sleight of hand, this underhandedness by the government, this highway to a slippery slope of a loss in parliamentary standards, which seems to be the topic du jour, the place where the members of this government are most comfortable. By one measure it is true the difference between 13 days and 14 days is but 24 hours, but the principle still remains. The member for Ringwood in his curious contribution made the statement that he was concerned by us on this side of the chamber raising this concern – which no-one, again, should be surprised by – and that we were, quote, ‘torching another 30 minutes’ of time. Well, how about this: if the government actually got a grip on the government business program in this place, we would not need to raise this time and time and time again. If the government actually did have a legislative agenda and timed the legislative agenda in a way that suited the parliamentary sitting schedule, which they set themselves before the parliamentary year actually commenced, then we would not be in this circumstance. But of course we are, for two reasons: firstly, the government does not have a parliamentary agenda, an agenda for their government that is visionary, that builds communities –

Will Fowles: On a point of order, Speaker, the member for Sandringham has drifted well away from this very narrow procedural debate. He is waxing lyrical about the broader aims of the government. This is a debate about parliamentary procedure, not the government, and I would ask you to bring him back –

The SPEAKER: Order! Members will make their points of order succinctly. I do ask the member for Sandringham to come back to the procedural debate.

Brad ROWSWELL: It comes down to the resources of the opposition and the opportunity that we have to consult on very significant matters on changes to the statute books in this state. We take that obligation very, very seriously, and frankly 24 hours could very well make the difference. I know that with this bill and, I am assuming, the next bill that the government wishes to introduce there are stakeholders within my own portfolio and within the members for Gippsland South and Gippsland East’s portfolios that will want to be consulted. Without the opportunity to consult people within those portfolios we are the poorer, the Parliament is the poorer and the community is the poorer, because those key stakeholders who would have otherwise had an opportunity to contribute to the decision-making process in this state have not had that opportunity – and that is not on us. That circumstance is not on us; that circumstance is on the government, who because they are distracted, because they are focused on themselves and not their responsibility and role within the parliamentary system, keep on time and time again requesting 13 days leave instead of 14. We will continue to raise this as an issue as it arises – and I am sure it will again, because there does not seem to be any apparent circumstance in which the government has got its stuff together to be able to manage the government business program in a way that is appropriate for this chamber and for the community of Victoria.

I will finish where I began: the reason why we are raising this – and yes, arguably, the only difference between 13 days and 14 days is 24 hours – is that we are deeply concerned by this and will continue to be in the future, because it is a slippery slope. It is a slippery slope to uncertainty. It is a slippery slope to being driven by a government who are focused on themselves instead of their responsibilities

to this place and outside of this place to the Victorian people, and that is why we believe we on this side should have 14 days to consider the Gambling Regulation Amendment Bill 2023.

Assembly divided on motion:

Ayes (48): Juliana Addison, Daniel Andrews, Josh Bull, Ben Carroll, Darren Cheeseman, Anthony Cianflone, Sarah Connolly, Chris Couzens, Jordan Crugnale, Lily D'Ambrosio, Daniela De Martino, Steve Dimopoulos, Paul Edbrooke, Will Fowles, Ella George, Luba Grigorovitch, 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, Tim Pallas, Danny Pearson, Pauline Richards, Tim Richardson, Michaela Settle, Ros Spence, Nick Staikos, 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 (26): Brad Battin, Jade Benham, Roma Britnell, Tim Bull, Martin Cameron, Annabelle Cleeland, Chris Crewther, Wayne Farnham, Sam Groth, 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.

Debate adjourned until Tuesday 16 May.

Gambling Taxation Bill 2023

Statement of compatibility

Tim PALLAS (Werribee – Treasurer, Minister for Industrial Relations, Minister for Trade and Investment) (11:10): In accordance with the Charter of Human Rights and Responsibilities Act 2006 I table a statement of compatibility in relation to the Gambling Taxation Bill 2023.

In accordance with section 28 of the *Charter of Human Rights and Responsibilities Act 2006* (**Charter**), I make this Statement of Compatibility with respect to the **Gambling Taxation Bill 2023**.

In my opinion, the Gambling Taxation Bill 2023 (**Bill**), as introduced to the Legislative Assembly, is compatible with the human rights as set out in the Charter. I base my opinion on the reasons outlined in this Statement.

Overview

The Bill consolidates the administration of Victoria's gambling taxes by imposing the casino taxes, keno tax, and the wagering and betting tax. The Bill also makes a number of consequential amendments to the *Casino Control Act 1991* (**Casino Control Act**), the *Casino (Management Agreement) Act 1993* (**Management Agreement Act**), the *Gambling Regulation Act 2003* (**Gambling Regulation Act**) and the *Taxation Administration Act 1997* (**Taxation Administration Act**).

The Bill reflects the Government's response to the Royal Commission into the Casino Operator and Licence by consolidating the casino tax provisions from the Management Agreement Act and the Casino Control Act into a standalone Act; and transferring responsibility for collecting casino taxes from the Victorian Gambling and Casino Control Commission (**VGCCC**) to the Commissioner of State Revenue (**Commissioner**) by leveraging the Taxation Administration Act's tax administrative framework. Keno tax and wagering and betting tax are also relocated from the Gambling Regulation Act to the Bill. The Bill will impose wagering and betting tax at a rate of 10% from 1 July 2023 to 30 June 2024 and 15% on and after 1 July 2024.

The Bill amends the Taxation Administration Act to make the Bill a taxation law. The Commissioner will be responsible for administering casino taxes, keno tax, and wagering and betting tax (collectively referred to as the **gambling taxes**) imposed by the Bill. It is therefore necessary to consider the human rights issues raised by the provisions of the Taxation Administration Act to the extent that they apply to the Bill.

The consolidation of the gambling taxes in, and the application of the Taxation Administration Act to, the Bill, will engage several human rights in the Charter which I outline below.

Human rights issues

The human rights protected by the Charter that are relevant to the Bill are:

- Freedom of movement, as protected under section 12 of the Charter which provides that every person lawfully within Victoria has the right to move freely within Victoria and to enter and leave it and has the freedom to choose where to live.
- Privacy and reputation, as protected under section 13 of the Charter which provides that a person has the right to not to have his or her privacy, family, home or correspondence unlawfully or arbitrarily interfered with and not to have his or her reputation unlawfully attacked.
- Property rights, as protected under section 20 of the Charter which provides that a person must not be deprived of his or her property other than in accordance with law. This right is not limited where there is a law that authorises a deprivation of property, and that law is adequately accessible, clear and certain, and sufficiently precise to enable a person to regulate their conduct.
- The presumption of innocence, as protected under section 25(1) of the Charter which provides that a person charged with a criminal offence has the right to be presumed innocent until proved guilty according to law.
- Protection from self-incrimination, as protected under section 25(2)(k) of the Charter which provides that a person charged with a criminal offence is entitled without discrimination not to be compelled to testify against himself or herself or to confess guilt. The Supreme Court of Victoria has held that this right, as protected by the Charter, is at least as broad as the common law privilege against self-incrimination. It applies to protect a charged person against the admission in subsequent criminal proceedings of incriminatory material obtained under compulsion, regardless of whether the information was obtained prior to or subsequent to the charge being laid. The common law privilege includes immunity against both direct use and derivative use of compelled testimony.
- The right to a fair hearing, as protected under section 24 of the Charter which provides that a person charged with a criminal offence or a party to a civil proceeding have the right to a fair hearing. The right to a fair hearing applies to both courts and tribunals, such as the Victorian Civil and Administrative Tribunal (VCAT). Generally, the right to a fair hearing is concerned with procedural fairness and access to a court or tribunal, rather than the substantive fairness of a decision of a court or tribunal determined on the merits of a case.

For the reasons outlined below, the Bill is compatible with each of these rights.

Right to Property – Section 20**Imposition of keno tax and wagering and betting tax**

Section 20 of the Charter provides that a person must not be deprived of his or her property other than in accordance with law. This right is not limited where there is a law which authorises the deprivation of property, and that law is adequately accessible, clear, and certain, and sufficiently precise to enable a person to regulate their conduct.

The clauses of the Bill imposing both keno tax and wagering and betting tax engage the right to property to the extent that a natural person taxpayer may be liable to keno tax or wagering and betting tax.

The imposition of both keno tax and wagering and betting tax is not arbitrary because both taxes are precisely formulated in Parts 3 and 4 of the Bill. These clauses are adequately accessible, clear, and certain, and sufficiently precise to enable affected natural person taxpayers to inform themselves of their legal obligations and to regulate their conduct accordingly. Furthermore, taxpayers will have the protections provided by the Taxation Administration Act including rights of objection, review, appeal, and refund of overpaid tax.

In relation to the casino taxes imposed under Part 2 of the Bill, the Melbourne Casino Operator is a body corporate. Natural persons will therefore not be liable to pay the casino taxes.

Wagering and betting groups – joint and several liability

Division 4 of Part 4 of the Bill provides for grouping provisions to apply to the collection of the wagering and betting tax to prevent the potential erosion of the tax base. The grouping provisions provide for the group to nominate a designated group entity which will register, lodge and pay wagering and betting tax on behalf of the group.

The provisions also provide for the joint and several liability of members of a group in respect of the group's liability for tax; in other words, every member of a group (whether or not that member is a wagering and betting entity) is jointly and severally liable with the other members in respect of any period to pay the tax payable by the designated group entity of that group in respect of that period. Therefore, where a member of a group is a natural person, such as a sole trader or a partner, that natural person will be jointly and severally

liable for tax that is payable by the designated group entity. The payment of tax based on joint and several liability may therefore engage the right to property of a natural person group member.

The purpose of joint and several liability provisions is to ensure the recovery of unpaid wagering and betting tax in the event of a default by the designated group entity. In my view, the imposition of joint and several liability on all members of a group is a reasonable and justified limitation on a natural person's right to property, because this action is likely to be the most effective method of ensuring payment of the wagering and betting tax in the event of a tax default.

Consistent with non-grouped wagering and betting entities that are natural persons, any group liabilities will be assessed and administered in accordance with the Bill and the Taxation Administration Act which establishes the Commissioner's powers and obligations, taxpayers' right of objection, review, appeal and recovery. A person will not be deprived of his or her property other than in accordance with the law.

For the reasons above, in my view the clauses of the Bill are compatible with the right to property under section 20 of the Charter.

Investigative powers of tax officers

As noted above, the Taxation Administration Act will apply to the Bill. Part 9 of the Taxation Administration Act provides authorised officers with investigation powers to administer and enforce taxation laws. Section 20 of the Charter is relevant to a number of powers which provide for authorised officers to enter certain premises, and to seize or take items. These powers are discussed in detail below in relation to the right to privacy.

I consider that section 20 will not be limited by these powers, because any deprivation of property will occur in accordance with law. The circumstances in which investigators/authorised persons are permitted to seize or take items or documents are provided for by clear legislative provisions, and the powers are strictly confined. The items that may be taken or seized will be relevant to and connected with enforcing compliance with the Bill. For instance, a magistrate may only issue a search warrant if satisfied by evidence on oath or affidavit that there are reasonable grounds for suspecting that there is, or may be within the next 72 hours, a particular thing on the premises that may be relevant to the administration or execution of a taxation law. Further, under section 77 of the Taxation Administration Act, a document or thing may only be searched for, seized or secured against interference if it is described in the warrant issued by a magistrate.

The powers of an authorised officer include, under section 76 of the Taxation Administration Act, the power to seize a document or thing where the officer has reason to believe or suspect it is necessary to do so to prevent its concealment, loss, destruction or alteration. Similarly, section 83 of the Taxation Administration Act provides that an authorised officer may seize a storage device and the equipment necessary to access information on the device if the authorised officer believes, on reasonable grounds, that the storage device contains information relevant to the administration of a taxation law and it is not otherwise practicable to access the information on the device.

In my opinion, sections 76 and 83 of the Taxation Administration Act, as they will apply to the Bill, do not limit the right in section 20 of the Charter because they are sufficiently confined and structured, accessible, and formulated precisely such that any deprivation occurs in accordance with the law.

Further, these provisions guard against any permanent interference with property where no offence has been committed. For example, the Taxation Administration Act provides that reasonable steps must be taken to return a document or thing that is seized if the reason for its seizure no longer exists (section 84), and the document or thing seized must be returned within the retention period of 60 days, unless the retention period is extended by an order of the Magistrates Court (section 85).

For the reasons above, in my opinion the provisions of the Bill are compatible with the right to property in section 20 of the Charter.

Privacy and Reputation – section 13

An interference with privacy will limit the right in section 13(a) of the Charter if it is unlawful or arbitrary interference.

Requirement to provide information in returns

Clauses 13, 20 and 36 of the Bill require those liable to pay any of the gambling taxes to register with the Commissioner, lodge returns, and pay the requisite tax. As the Bill will be a taxation law under the Taxation Administration Act, section 10 of that Act provides that a taxpayer must provide in a return all information necessary for a proper assessment of tax liability, including any further information not otherwise required under a taxation law.

It is expected that most returns will be submitted by entities, rather than individuals, and not all the information required to be provided in a return will be personal information. However, to the extent that the collection of personal information may result in interference with a person's privacy, any such interference will be lawful

and not arbitrary. These provisions do not require that a person's personal information be published, and only require the provision of information necessary to achieve the purpose of taxation administration. Accordingly, in my view they do not limit the right to privacy.

Section 92(1)(e) of the Taxation Administration Act permits a tax officer to disclose information obtained under or in relation to the administration or execution of a taxation law to a listed authorised recipient.

Presently, section 92(1)(e)(xv) provides that the VGCCC is an authorised recipient for the purposes of administering the Gambling Regulation Act and any regulations made under that Act. Consequential amendments to the Taxation Administration Act will now extend disclosure to include the Casino Control Act and the Management Agreement Act as a result of casino taxes being imposed by the Bill. Although the imposition, registration and return function lies with the Commissioner for the gambling taxes, there will be instances where a tax officer (as defined in section 3(1) of the Taxation Administration Act) may disclose information protected under section 91(1) of the Taxation Administration Act to the VGCCC to assist in its administration of the Casino Control Act, the Management Agreement Act and the Gambling Regulation Act with regard to such matters as disciplinary action and licence suspension.

The type of information that may be disclosed includes, but is not limited to, information regarding registration, lodgements of returns and payments by taxpayers, taxation defaults by taxpayers, and applications for objection, appeal and review under Part 10 of the Taxation Administration Act by taxpayers.

To the extent that a tax officer's discretionary power to disclose protected information to the VGCCC interferes with a natural person's right to privacy, I consider that interference to be neither arbitrary nor unlawful. These amendments ensure that the Commissioner and the VGCCC can exercise their respective regulatory and law enforcement functions in accordance with legislation. I therefore consider that these clauses do not limit the right to privacy.

Investigative powers of tax officers

The inclusion of the Bill as a taxation law under the Taxation Administration Act ensures that the investigative powers of the Commissioner and authorised tax officers apply to the gambling taxes. The following investigation powers may interfere with the right to privacy, as well as the right not to impart information, which forms part of the right to freedom of expression under section 15 of the Charter:

- Section 73 of the Taxation Administration Act provides that the Commissioner of State Revenue may, by written notice, require a person to provide the Commissioner with information, produce a document or thing in the person's possession, or to attend and give evidence under oath.
- Section 76 of the Taxation Administration Act provides that an authorised officer may, at any reasonable time, enter and search any premises, and inspect, photograph or make copies of any document on the premises.
- Section 77 of the Taxation Administration Act provides that an authorised officer may apply to a magistrate for a search warrant in relation to a premises, including a residence, if the authorised officer considers on reasonable grounds that there is, or may be within the next 72 hours, on the premises a particular thing that may be relevant to the administration or execution of a taxation law.
- Section 83 of the Taxation Administration Act provides that an authorised officer may, or may require an employee of the occupier to, operate equipment on the premises to obtain information from a storage device that the authorised officer believes, on reasonable grounds, contains information relevant to the administration of a taxation law.
- Section 86 of the Taxation Administration Act provides that an authorised officer may, to the extent it is reasonably necessary to do so for the administration or execution of a taxation law, require a person to give information, produce or provide documents and things, and give reasonable assistance, to the authorised officer.

In each provision that permits investigators to exercise powers of entry and search, the powers of investigators and other authorised persons are clearly set out in the Taxation Administration Act and are strictly confined by reference to their purpose. They are also subject to appropriate legislative safeguards. In particular:

- A warrantless search under section 76 of the Taxation Administration Act cannot be conducted in respect of premises used for residential purposes except with the written consent of the occupier of the premises (section 76(6)). An authorised officer may not exercise a power under section 76 unless the officer produces, on request, his or her identity card (section 76(5)).
- A search warrant issued by a magistrate under section 73 of the Taxation Administration Act must specify the premises to be searched, a description of the thing for which the search is made, any conditions to which the warrant is subject, whether entry is authorised to be made at any time or during specified hours, and must specify a day not later than seven days after its issue after which

the warrant ceases to have effect (section 77(3)). Where entry under warrant or pursuant to court order occurs, an authorised officer must issue an announcement and give persons on the premises an opportunity to allow entry, unless the officer believes on reasonable grounds that immediate entry is necessary to ensure the safety of a person, or ensure the effective execution of the search warrant is not frustrated (section 78). The authorised officer is also required to identify himself or herself and must give a copy of the warrant to the occupier of the premises (section 79).

- Further, Division 3 of Part 9 of the Taxation Administration Act includes broad secrecy obligations that prohibit tax officers from disclosing information obtained in relation to their functions, except as permitted under Part 9 of the Taxation Administration Act.

Clause 75 of the Bill also applies section 92 of the Taxation Administration Act, which permits the disclosure of information obtained in the administration of a taxation law. Specifically, section 92(1) permits the disclosure of such information for several different purposes, including in accordance with a requirement imposed under an Act, in connection with the administration or execution of a taxation law, to an authorised recipient such as the Ombudsman or a police officer of or above the rank of inspector, or in connection with the administration of a legal proceeding arising out of a recognised law. As with the search and seizure powers of authorised officers under this Part, permitted disclosures are strictly confined to their legitimate purposes and are subject to considerable legislative safeguards. In particular, section 94 of the Taxation Administration Act prohibits 'secondary disclosure', that is, disclosure of any information provided under section 92, unless it is for the purpose of enforcing a law or protecting public revenue, or a disclosure made with the consent of the person to whom the information relates (or at the request of a person acting on behalf of that person). Further, section 95 provides that an authorised officer is not required to disclose or produce in court any such information unless it is necessary for the purposes of the administration of a taxation law, or to enable a person to exercise a function imposed on the person by law.

Accordingly, to the extent that these investigation powers could interfere with a person's privacy, any interference would not constitute an unlawful or arbitrary interference.

Freedom of Movement – section 12

Section 12 of the Charter provides that every person lawfully within Victoria has the right to move freely within Victoria. As the Bill will be administered under the Taxation Administration Act, the administration of the gambling taxes may involve the exercise of the investigative powers provided in section 73 of the Taxation Administration Act. These investigative powers may also be exercised in relation to the collection of reportable information under Part 9 of the Taxation Administration Act.

If, under section 73(1)(b) of the Taxation Administration Act the Commissioner exercises their power to direct a natural person to attend and give evidence in relation to a matter, a natural person's right to move freely within Victoria may be engaged. Section 73(8) makes it an offence to refuse to comply with a direction made under section 73(1)(b). However, section 73(5) provides that a person required to attend and give evidence orally is to be paid expenses in accordance with prescribed scale.

It is arguable that a person's right to move freely within Victoria may be engaged when the Commissioner exercises their power under section 73(1)(b).

However, although the power to compel a natural person to attend a particular place at a particular time technically limits that person's freedom to choose to be elsewhere at that time, this differs qualitatively from the types of measures that Victorian courts have regarded as engaging the right to freedom of movement, such as restrictions placed on a person's place of residence, or ability to leave their residence, and police powers to conduct a traffic stop.

To the extent that section 73 of the Taxation Administration Act is capable of being considered to limit the right of freedom of movement, I consider that any such limit is demonstrably justified under section 7(2) of the Charter, as the Commissioner's power to compel a natural person's attendance to give evidence will in certain circumstances be essential to obtain the information needed for the proper administration of the gambling taxes imposed by the Bill.

Presumption of innocence – section 25(1)

Defences of Reasonable Excuse

The right to be presumed innocent may be considered relevant to several offences under the Taxation Administration Act that place an evidential burden on the defendant, and which apply to the gambling taxes as a result of clause 75 of the Bill.

As outlined above, section 73 of the Taxation Administration Act empowers the Commissioner to issue a written notice requiring a person to provide information, produce a document or thing, or give evidence. Section 73A provides that the Commissioner may certify to the Supreme Court that a person has failed to

comply with a requirement of a notice issued under section 73. The Supreme Court may inquire into the case and may order the person to comply with the requirement in the notice. Section 73A(4) provides that a person who, without reasonable excuse, fails to comply with an order of the Supreme Court under s 73A(2), is guilty of an offence.

Section 88 of the Taxation Administration Act makes it an offence for a person, without reasonable excuse, to refuse or fail to comply with a requirement made or to answer a question of an authorised officer asked in accordance with sections 81 or 86 of the Taxation Administration Act.

Section 90 establishes a defence of reasonable compliance for offences relating to the investigation powers of authorised officers under Part 9 of the Taxation Administration Act. It provides that a person is not guilty of an offence if the court hearing the charge is satisfied that the person could not, by the exercise of reasonable diligence, have complied with the requirement to which the charge relates, or that the person complied with the requirement to the extent that he or she was able to do so.

Clauses 20, 36 and 48 of the Bill also introduce offence provisions that place an evidential burden on the defendant. Clause 20 makes it an offence for a keno entity that becomes liable for keno tax to fail to apply to the Commissioner for registration under Division 3 of Part 3 of the Bill before the end of the first month in which the entity becomes liable unless the entity has a reasonable excuse for not applying for registration. Clause 36 imposes a similar offence on a wagering and betting entity that fails to apply to the Commissioner for registration under Division 3 of Part 4 of the Bill in relation to wagering and betting tax unless the entity has a reasonable excuse for not applying. Clause 48 makes it an offence for the designated group entity of a group to fail to apply to the Commissioner for registration under Division 4 of Part 4 of the Bill unless the entity has a reasonable excuse.

Although these provisions require a defendant to raise evidence of a matter to rely on a defence, I am satisfied that the provisions impose an evidential, rather than legal burden. Courts in other jurisdictions have generally taken the approach that an evidential onus on a defendant to raise a defence does not limit the presumption of innocence. The defences and excuses provided relate to matters within the knowledge of the defendant, which is appropriate in circumstances where placing the onus on the prosecution would involve the proof of a negative which would be very difficult.

For the above reasons, I am satisfied that neither the Bill's offence provisions, nor those of the Taxation Administration Act as applied to the gambling taxes in the Bill, limit the right to be presumed innocent in section 25(1) of the Charter.

Failure to exercise due diligence

The right to be presumed innocent is also relevant to section 130C of the Taxation Administration Act, which establish the criminal liability of an officer of a body corporate for the failure to exercise due diligence in certain circumstances, and which imposes a legal burden of proof on that officer. Section 130C provides that if a body corporate commits a specified offence, such as giving false or misleading information to tax officers contrary to section 57(1), or tax evasion contrary to section 61, an officer of the body corporate is also deemed to have committed the offence.

Section 130C(3) provides that it is a defence to a charge for an officer of a body corporate to prove that they exercised due diligence to prevent the commission of the offence by the body corporate. The defence in 130C(3) of the Taxation Administration Act imposes a legal burden on the defendant. However, I am of the view that the imposition of a legal burden to rely on the defence of due diligence is compatible with the right to presumption of innocence in section 25(1) of the Charter, as any limits on the right will be reasonably justified under section 7(2) of the Charter. Section 130C applies only to a narrow range of offences of dishonesty, and only to officers of a body corporate as persons who carry on a specific role and possess significant authority and influence over the body corporate. The gambling industry is highly regulated, and special responsibilities and obligations apply to persons who participate in the gambling industry. Courts in other jurisdictions have held that the presumption of innocence may be subject to limits particularly where, as here, the offence is of a regulatory nature. Further, a defence is available for the benefit of an accused to escape liability where they have taken reasonable steps to ensure compliance in respect of what could otherwise be an absolute or strict liability offence.

The purpose of these provisions is to ensure compliance with the Bill by deterring intentional acts of dishonesty in the administration of the gambling taxes imposed by the Bill. A person who elects to undertake a position as officer of a body corporate accepts that they will be subject to certain requirements under the Bill and the Taxation Administration Act and will be expected to be able to demonstrate their compliance with these requirements. This includes the expectation that an officer of a body corporate can demonstrate compliance with a requirement to exercise due diligence to prevent the commission of these offences of dishonesty by the body corporate taxpayer. Moreover, whether an officer of a body corporate has exercised due diligence is a matter peculiarly within the knowledge of that person. Such persons are best placed to prove

whether they exercised due diligence. Conversely, it would be very difficult for the prosecution to prove the matter in the negative. Accordingly, I am of the view that section 130C(3) of the Taxation Administration Act, as applied by the amendment in clause 75 of the Bill, is compatible with the right to the presumption of innocence protected by the Charter.

Self-incrimination – section 25(2)(k)

Section 25(2)(k) of the Charter provides that a person charged with a criminal offence is entitled not to be compelled to testify against himself or herself or to confess guilt. The Supreme Court has held that this right, as protected by the Charter, is at least as broad as the common law privilege against self-incrimination. It applies to protect a charged person against the admission in subsequent criminal proceedings of incriminatory material obtained under compulsion, regardless of whether the information was obtained prior to or subsequent to the charge being laid. The common law privilege includes immunity against both direct use and derivative use of compelled testimony.

Section 86 of the Taxation Administration Act, which will apply to the Bill provides that an authorised taxation officer may, in the exercise of his or her investigative functions, require a person to give information, produce or provide documents and things, and give reasonable assistance, to the authorised officer. It is an offence to fail to comply with a requirement made or to answer a question under this section. Section 87(1) limits the right to protection against self-incrimination by providing that a person is not excused from answering a question, providing information, or producing a document or thing on the ground that to do so might tend to incriminate the person or make the person liable to a penalty. Section 87(2) provides that, if a person objects to answering a question, providing information, or producing a document or thing, the answer, information, document or thing is not admissible in any criminal proceeding other than proceedings for an offence against a taxation law, or proceedings for an offence in the nature of perjury.

In my view, section 87 of the Taxation Administration Act is a reasonable limit on the right to protection against self-incrimination under section 7(2) of the Charter. The ability of an authorised officer to require a person to give information or answer questions will be necessary for the proper administration of the Bill. To this end, I note that the information, answers, or documents obtained are only admissible in proceedings for an offence relating to the proper administration of the Bill, and section 87(2) of the Taxation Administration Act otherwise preserves both the direct use immunity and derivative use immunity.

Further, with respect to the power of an authorised officer to require the production of documents, I note that at common law, the protection accorded to the compelled production of pre-existing documents is considerably weaker than the protection accorded to oral testimony or to documents brought into existence to comply with a request for information. This is particularly so in the context of regulated industry, where documents or records are required to be produced during the course of a person's participation in that industry and exist for the dominant purpose of demonstrating that person's compliance with his or her relevant duties and obligations. The duty to provide documents in this context is consistent with the reasonable expectations of these individuals as persons who operate within a regulated scheme.

I am of the view that there are no less restrictive means available to achieve the purpose of enabling the proper administration of the Bill, as providing an immunity that applies to the offence of perjury or an offence under the Bill or the Taxation Administration Act would unreasonably obstruct the role of the authorised person to investigate compliance with the Bill. Accordingly, I consider that this clause is compatible with the right not to be compelled to testify against oneself in section 25(2)(k) of the Charter.

Fair Hearing – section 24(1)

Clause 79 of the Bill inserts a new subsection (12) into section 135 of the Taxation Administration Act to provide that it is the intention of sections 5, 12(4), 18(1), 96(2) and 100(4) of the Taxation Administration Act, as those sections apply after the commencement of clause 12, to alter or vary section 85 of the *Constitution Act 1975*. These provisions preclude the Supreme Court from entertaining proceedings of a kind to which these sections apply, except as provided by those sections.

A central purpose of this Bill is to alter current taxing arrangements in relation to the gambling taxes and in particular, to bring the casino taxes under the administration of the Taxation Administration Act. Section 5 of the Taxation Administration Act defines the meaning of a non-reviewable decision in relation to the Taxation Administration Act, which will apply to the Bill. 'Non-reviewable' is referred to in sections 12(4) and 100(4) of the Taxation Administration Act.

The reason for limiting the jurisdiction of the Supreme Court in relation to a compromise assessment under section 12 of the Taxation Administration Act is that agreement has been reached between the Commissioner and a taxpayer on the taxpayer's liability, and the purpose of section 12 would not be achieved if a compromise assessment were reviewable.

Section 18 of the Taxation Administration Act establishes a procedure, the adherence to which is a condition precedent to taking any further action for recovering refunds. The purpose of the provisions is to give the Commissioner the opportunity to consider a refund application before any collateral legal action can be taken. The purpose of these provisions would not be achieved if the Commissioner's actions were subject to review.

Division 1 of Part 10 of the Taxation Administration Act establishes an exclusive code for dealing with objections, and this Division will also apply where the Commissioner issues an assessment in relation to any of the gambling taxes. This code establishes the rights of objectors in a statutory framework and precludes any collateral actions for review of the Commissioner's assessment. The objections and appeals provisions of Part 10 of the Taxation Administration Act establish that review of assessments is only to be undertaken in accordance with an exclusive code identified in that Part. The purpose of these provisions would not be achieved if any question concerning an assessment was subject to judicial review except such judicial review as provided by Division 2, Part 10 of the Taxation Administration Act.

A power is provided to the Commissioner under section 100 of the Taxation Administration Act, which provides that Commissioner with discretion to allow an objection to be lodged even though it is out of time, provided the out of time objection is lodged within 5 years after the date of service of the notice of assessment or decision on the taxpayer. This decision is non-reviewable to ensure the efficient administration of the Taxation Administration Act and to enable outstanding issues relating to assessments to be concluded expeditiously.

In this context, I am satisfied that, to the extent that limiting the jurisdiction of the Supreme Court may limit a person's fair hearing rights as protected under section 24(1) of the Charter, any such limit would be demonstrably justified.

The classification of certain decisions under the Taxation Administration Act as 'non-reviewable' is directly related to the particular statutory purpose and context of those particular decisions, and the Taxation Administration Act provides an alternative regime for dealing with objections, which is necessary for the efficient discharge of the Commissioner's functions under the Taxation Administration Act, which will now include the administration of the Bill as a taxation law.

Accordingly, I confirm that the Bill is, in my opinion, compatible with the right in section 24(1) of the Charter.

Conclusion

For these reasons set out above, in my opinion, the Bill is compatible with the rights protected by sections 12, 13, 20, 24, 25(1) and 25(2)(k) of the Charter.

TIM PALLAS MP
Treasurer

Second reading

Tim PALLAS (Werribee – Treasurer, Minister for Industrial Relations, Minister for Trade and Investment) (11:10): I move:

That this bill be now read a second time.

I ask that my second-reading speech, except for the section 85 statement, be incorporated into *Hansard*.

Incorporated speech as follows, except for statement under section 85(5) of the Constitution Act 1975:

The Gambling Taxation Bill 2023 delivers a significant recommendation of the Royal Commission into the Casino Operator and Licence (Royal Commission) to strengthen the casino taxation arrangements for Crown Melbourne. The Bill also consolidates the administration of a number of Victoria's gambling taxes. The Bill also implements 2022-23 and 2023-24 budget measures.

Casino taxes

As the casino operator, Crown Melbourne is required to pay casino taxes to the State under its Management Agreement with the State. The Management Agreement has the force of a statutory enactment through the *Casino (Management Agreement) Act 1993* (Management Agreement Act). The Victorian Gambling and Casino Control Commission (VGCCC) is currently responsible for collecting and administering these taxes.

Casino tax applies to Crown Melbourne's gaming revenue from table games and electronic gaming machines (EGMs) installed at the casino, as well as the gaming revenue from commission-based players or 'high rollers' (predominantly international players). In addition, Crown Melbourne is liable for a 1 per cent community benefit levy on its total gaming revenue, the full amount of which is contributed to the Hospitals and Charities Fund.

Additional casino taxes apply to gaming revenue and commission-based player revenue, which are payable by Crown in respect of a financial year if those revenues exceed a certain amount.

Royal Commission

The report of the Royal Commission, released on 26 October 2021, found Crown Melbourne improperly claimed deductions from gaming revenue over a number of years to reduce its tax bill. As a result, it was found to have underpaid millions of dollars in casino tax to the State. The Royal Commission identified Crown Melbourne's lack of compliance with its tax obligations was emblematic of its disregard of the law, including evidence of persistent efforts to obstruct the regulator. It was a significant instance of misconduct in a pattern that led Commissioner Finkelstein to conclude Crown Melbourne was not suitable to hold the Victorian casino licence.

To remedy this, the Royal Commission recommended that casino taxation arrangements be brought under the *Taxation Administration Act 1997* (TAA). The TAA contains a standardised set of administration and enforcement provisions applying to a number of Acts defined as taxation laws under the TAA, which are administered by the Commissioner of State Revenue (Commissioner) and the State Revenue Office (SRO).

After the release of the report of the Royal Commission on 26 October 2021, the Government has acted decisively – committing to strengthen the casino's oversight so that misconduct of the type uncovered in the Royal Commission cannot happen again. Strengthening tax arrangements for the casino operator is a key area of reform.

The Bill implements the Royal Commission's recommendation by transferring casino taxation provisions to a new Gambling Taxation Act, which will fall under the scope of the TAA from its commencement on 1 July 2023. As all taxation laws under the TAA are administered by the Commissioner, casino tax administration will also transfer from the VGCCC to the SRO from 1 July 2023. As a specialist administrator of tax legislation, the SRO is well placed to provide the strongest level of oversight in relation to Crown's tax affairs. The SRO has the capacity to conduct rigorous compliance, including the ability to impose taxation penalties.

In transferring taxing provisions from the Management Agreement Act, the Bill makes the necessary changes to transfer administrative responsibility for collecting tax from the VGCCC to the Commissioner, such as by imposing the requirement for the casino operator to register with the Commissioner and to lodge and pay its tax liability monthly.

The VGCCC will remain responsible for collecting other amounts owned by Crown Melbourne under the Management Agreement Act and the *Casino Control Act 1991*, such as the annual supervision charge that was recently reintroduced in the *Casino Legislation Amendment (Royal Commission Implementation and Other Matters) Act 2022*.

The Bill amends the *Casino Control Act 1991* to ensure an effective regulatory structure by clearly delineating the regulatory role of the VGCCC and the taxation role of the Commissioner. The Bill expands the grounds for the VGCCC to take disciplinary action against the casino to include any contraventions of the new Gambling Taxation Act or the TAA. Additionally, under the TAA the SRO will be empowered to disclose pertinent information obtained in administering casino taxes to the VGCCC, where disclosure is appropriate and relevant to the VGCCC's regulatory or disciplinary functions.

The Bill amends the Management Agreement Act to cease all tax obligations under the Management Agreement from 1 July 2023 so that casino taxes will be imposed exclusively under the new Act on and after that date. A "no liability" provision will be inserted into the Management Agreement Act to prevent any inadvertent liability to the State from arising due to this change to taxation arrangements.

Equalisation of casino and club tax rates on gaming machines

In line with the 2022–23 Budget announcement, this Bill increases total rates on casino gaming machines from 1 July 2023 so that Crown Melbourne is subject to the same tax structure as venue operators with club entitlements. Crown Melbourne currently pays a lower tax rate on its gaming machines than smaller clubs. This initiative will increase the maximum marginal tax rate for electronic gaming machines operated at the casino from 31.57 per cent to 60.67 per cent (plus the 1 per cent community benefit levy).

Equalising the gambling tax rates between the casino and clubs operating gaming machines ensures the Victorian Government receives a fair share of the super profits Crown Melbourne earns from operating gaming machines, without affecting its economic viability. It will improve taxation equity by ensuring the taxes paid by Crown Melbourne, the largest gambling venue in the State, are not lower than rates at smaller, not-for-profit, community-based venues. Commission-based play on gaming machines will continue to be taxed at 10 per cent (inclusive of the community benefit levy).

Wagering and betting tax and keno tax

The introduction of this Bill provides an opportunity to consolidate the various gambling taxes that are already administered by the Commissioner under the TAA. Under the *Gambling Regulation Act 2003* (Gambling Regulation Act), taxes are imposed on operators offering wagering and betting or keno products, which are administered by the Commissioner and SRO as taxes under the TAA.

From 1 January 2019, the Government introduced a point of consumption framework for the taxation of wagering and betting to level the playing field for wagering operators and better aligns Victoria's tax system with the increasingly digital betting environment. The wagering and betting tax for wagering and betting entities is 10 per cent on the net wagering revenue derived from customers located in Victoria, with an annual \$1 million tax free threshold. The tax is administered by the Commissioner under the TAA, and wagering and betting entities must apply to register with the Commissioner, lodge returns and pay tax monthly. The majority of revenue raised from the tax is paid into the Hospitals and Charities Fund, but a proportion (currently 3.5 per cent of net wagering revenue per month) is paid to the Victorian racing industry to support its viability and competitiveness. An annual contribution is also made out of wagering and betting tax revenue in support of the ANZAC Day Proceeds Fund.

From 15 April 2022 a point of consumption framework has also applied to keno tax under the Gambling Regulation Act. Providers of keno products are liable for a tax of 24.24 per cent on the net keno revenue generated from customers located in Victoria, which is administered by the Commissioner and the SRO as a tax under the TAA.

Given the shared subject matter and administrative aspects of these taxes, the Bill relocates taxing provisions for keno tax and wagering and betting tax from the Gambling Regulation Act to the new Act with minimal changes. Consolidating these taxing provisions together with the casino tax provisions will simplify administration by the SRO.

2023–24 budget measure – wagering and betting tax

The new wagering and betting tax provisions will implement an increase the wagering and betting tax rate from 10 per cent to 15 per cent of net wagering revenue from 1 July 2024, bringing Victoria into line with the rate that applies in New South Wales and most other states and territories. The tax rate will remain at 10 per cent for the 2023–24 financial year.

The new tax rate will enable the Government to lift the amount of net wagering revenue that is paid to the Victorian Racing Industry from 3.5 per cent to 7.5 per cent. The balance of revenue from the tax will continue to be distributed to the Hospitals and Charities Fund and the ANZAC Day Proceeds Fund.

Taxation Administration Act

The Bill amends the TAA to ensure the new Act constitutes a taxation law, allowing its full suite of provisions to apply. The TAA contains extensive provisions to deal with tax collection and refunds, interest and penalty tax on unpaid tax, debt recovery, record-keeping obligations, objections and other administrative matters.

The TAA creates offences with significant penalties for taxpayers who fail to provide all necessary information in lodgements to enable tax liabilities to be properly assessed, to keep proper records or to comply with requirements of the Commissioner or an authorised officer investigating a taxpayer's compliance. There are serious offences under the TAA for the provision of false or misleading information to tax officers, making deliberate omissions of information, engaging in tax evasion or obstructing the Commissioner or an authorised officer exercising an investigatory function.

A key finding of the Royal Commission is that the existing Management Agreement does not adequately provide for the imposition of penalties in respect of Crown Melbourne's underpayment of tax, apart from penalty interest. Leveraging the TAA's administrative framework means a standardised framework for interest and penalty tax will apply to casino taxes from 1 July 2023. Interest on unpaid tax under the TAA applies at a market rate of interest, updated annually, plus a premium rate of 8 per cent per year. The Commissioner may also impose penalty tax on unpaid tax in the event of a tax default. Penalty tax is an additional amount of tax starting at 25% of the unpaid amount; however, it can be varied depending on the circumstances to reflect the degree of the taxpayer's culpability. Penalty tax may be increased up to 90% for the most serious forms of misconduct. If appropriate, the Commissioner may also remit interest or penalty tax.

The Bill acquiesces the Royal Commission's recommendation to introduce an enhanced taxation framework for Crown Melbourne, ensuring a comprehensive range of offences and taxation penalties apply to penalise and deter future misconduct. Extending a more comprehensive range of monetary penalties under the TAA to apply to contraventions of tax obligations by Crown Melbourne, including its senior executives, will strengthen the compliance framework under which Crown operates and ensure Crown's behaviour as a taxpayer is consistent with maintaining a social licence to operate.

Jurisdiction of the Supreme Court of Victoria

I draw the members' attention specifically to clause 79 of the Bill. This clause of the Bill proposes to limit the jurisdiction of the Supreme Court to ensure that the legislative regime under the *Taxation Administration Act 1997* extends to the new Act in the same way as in relation to any other taxation law. Accordingly, I provide a statement under section 85(5) of the Constitution Act 1975 of the reasons for altering or varying that section by this Bill.

Section 85(5) of the Constitution Act 1975

Tim PALLAS: I wish to make a statement under section 85(5) of the Constitution Act 1975 of the reasons for altering or varying that section by the Gambling Taxation Bill 2023 (bill).

Section 85 of the Constitution Act 1975 vests the judicial power of Victoria in the Supreme Court and requires a statement to be made when legislation that directly or indirectly repeals, alters or varies the court's jurisdiction is introduced. Clause 79 of the bill inserts a new subsection (12) into section 135 of the Taxation Administration Act 1997 to provide that it is the intention of sections 5, 12(4), 18(1), 96(2) and 100(4) of the Taxation Administration Act 1997, as those sections apply after the commencement of the bill, to alter or vary section 85 of the Constitution Act 1975.

The bill consolidates the various gambling tax provisions, namely the casino taxes (which include the community benefit levy), keno tax and wagering and betting tax (referred to collectively as the gambling taxes).

Provisions that impose and calculate casino taxes under the Casino (Management Agreement) Act 1993 will be transferred to part 2 of the bill, and new provisions covering registration, lodgement of returns and payment of casino taxes to the commissioner of state revenue are also introduced.

Provisions that impose keno tax and wagering and betting tax under the Gambling Regulation Act 2003 are being relocated to part 3 and part 4 of the bill respectively, and part 5 of the bill permits the making of regulations.

Divisions 1, 2 and 3 of part 6 of the bill make several consequential amendments to the Casino Control Act 1991, the Casino (Management Agreement) Act 1993 and the Gambling Regulation Act 2003 to facilitate the relocation of the gambling taxes to the bill.

Division 4 of part 6 of the bill makes consequential amendments to the Taxation Administration Act 1997 to enable the gambling taxes to be administered under the Taxation Administration Act 1997 as a taxation law.

The Supreme Court's jurisdiction is altered to the extent that the Taxation Administration Act 1997 provides for certain non-reviewable decisions and establishes an exclusive code that prevents proceedings concerning an assessment or refund or recovery of tax being commenced except as provided by that act. It is desirable that the legislative regime under the Taxation Administration Act 1997 applies to the gambling taxes in the bill in the same way as it does to other taxes administered under the Taxation Administration Act 1997.

Accordingly, in order to ensure that the jurisdiction of the Supreme Court is limited in relation to the gambling taxes in the bill in the same way as it is in relation to other Victorian taxes, it is necessary to provide that it is the intention of this bill for the relevant provisions of the Taxation Administration Act 1997 to apply to the administration of the gambling taxes and for the jurisdiction of the Supreme Court to be altered accordingly.

Section 5 of the Taxation Administration Act 1997 defines the meaning of 'non-reviewable decision' in relation to that act, which will also apply to the gambling taxes within the bill. No court, including the Supreme Court, has jurisdiction or power to entertain any question as to the validity or correctness of a non-reviewable decision.

Section 12(4) of the Taxation Administration Act 1997 provides that the making of a compromise assessment is a non-reviewable decision. Similarly, section 100(4) provides that a decision by the commissioner of state revenue not to permit an objection to be lodged out of time is a non-reviewable decision. Decisions may be made under section 12(4) or section 100(4) in relation to the collection of the gambling taxes.

Section 18(1) of the Taxation Administration Act 1997 prevents proceedings being commenced in the Supreme Court for the refund or recovery of a tax except as provided in part 4 of the Taxation Administration Act 1997. As the gambling taxes will be taxes for the purposes of section 18(1), proceedings for their refund or recovery will be similarly limited.

Section 96(2) of the Taxation Administration Act 1997 prevents a court (including the Supreme Court) considering any question concerning an assessment of a tax except as provided by part 10 of the Taxation Administration Act 1997. As the gambling taxes will be taxes for the purposes of section 96(2), proceedings in relation to any assessment of gambling taxes would be similarly limited.

To ensure that the jurisdiction of the Supreme Court is limited in relation to the gambling taxes in the same way as it is in relation to other taxes, it is necessary to provide that it is the intention of sections 5, 12(4), 18(1), 96(2) and 100(4) of the Taxation Administration Act 1997 to alter or vary section 85 of the Constitution Act 1975.

I commend the bill to the house.

Cindy McLEISH (Eildon) (11:17): I move:

That this debate be adjourned.

Motion agreed to and debate adjourned.

Ordered that debate be adjourned for two weeks. Debate adjourned until Wednesday 17 May.

Water Legislation Amendment Bill 2023

Second reading

Debate resumed on motion of Mary-Anne Thomas:

That this bill be now read a second time.

The ACTING SPEAKER (Jackson Taylor): I happily call the member for Mordialloc.

Tim RICHARDSON (Mordialloc) (11:17): Thank you very much, Acting Speaker.

Members interjecting.

Tim RICHARDSON: Not for the Murray; for Mordialloc, member for Gippsland South – but we do have the Mordi creek, Patterson River and Eumemmerring Creek going through. They are great.

It is great to get up and speak on the Water Legislation Amendment Bill 2023. My contribution will focus on a couple of key elements. The reason that this bill has been brought forward is to reduce the pressure on flood-affected communities and revise the transitional arrangements that were amended as part of the amendments to the Water and Catchment Legislation Amendment Act 2021. I think for all members of Parliament as well it is a chance to reflect on the impacts of flood on communities across Victoria in October 2022 and the impacts that are still lasting across those regions. I also want to take the opportunity in my contribution to reflect on the amazing work of SES units across Victoria, who each and every day front up to a range of different major events, and I will take some time to reflect on that.

This bill will extend the default commencement date of the amendment act by a year, from 1 July 2023 to 1 July 2024, to allow more time to implement an improved framework for regulating those place-of-take approvals. It should be noted as well that that passed the Parliament and went through. This is

not a reiteration of those discussions, although those that have existing arrangements in place are carrying on under that legislative framework. It is quite a narrow change, where we are extending those requirements, and rightly so. Communities across Victoria were devastated by the impacts of flood and rain events. Some areas had up to 300 millimetres impacting them in a short period of time. River systems were overwhelmed. Water storage capacity was substantially impacted, and that had huge ramifications across our communities, but particularly in rural and regional communities.

It is important to note as well some of the work that has been done by the Victorian government and the federal government in supporting those communities. We announced straightaway a flood assistance package of \$877 million with the Commonwealth government and the Victorian government, a recovery support package that supported businesses, farmers and not-for-profits to rebuild and to return to trade as quickly as possible. We also note as well that that can be a difficult journey, and we have seen media coverage recently. We have always got to do more to support those communities.

I also want to take this opportunity to note that it is not just the actual dollars and cents and the built form that are so critical to get back on track. It is also, as we see in any time of crisis like this, the mental health and wellbeing impact on these communities, who have already been smashed by previous flood and fire events. We talk about resilient communities in Victoria and our regional and rural communities who are impacted by natural disasters and events, and we see the impact of climate change, the variability in weather, whether that is the La Niña events that we have had over the last three years or at the moment the El Niño watch warning that we have got. The contrast to go from those heavy rain and weather events we saw, so devastating across the eastern states of our nation, to then thinking about just before COVID when we had some extremely devastating fires across those eastern states – we just the other night at the Greater Dandenong SES unit recognised National Emergency Medal award recipients, SES volunteers who had gone and been deployed to support communities and then were impacted by fire during that time. It is so unpredictable for those communities, but it is also a time to reflect that in those moments of crisis we see huge impacts on mental health and wellbeing. That is a big part of recovery. It is a big part of the work that the Minister for Mental Health is doing, so importantly, in building a system of mental health reform that allows for those episodes of crisis where we need to deploy additional support and services, and then in any corner of the state, regardless of your postcode, regardless of where you are, you get that support and assistance, and that is a huge part of our journey.

Just to think about those impacts of those floods in 2022, tens of thousands of livestock were lost. We saw an estimated 12,000 kilometres of fencing destroyed, hundreds of thousands of tonnes of hay and silos destroyed and many thousands of tonnes of grain lost as well. That is a devastating impact on the livelihoods and wellbeing of farming communities who have given everything they possibly can. They have gone through so much with COVID and then been impacted in that way, and we recognise that they are still doing it tough and we have still got so much more to do to support those communities into the future.

So with all that toll and all that impact the last thing we need is more bureaucratic impact on them now when all of their focus and attention is on supporting one another, supporting their communities and getting their mental health and wellbeing journey back on track – literally brick by brick, nail by nail rebuilding communities and supporting their townships to get back on track. The last thing we need is more pressure on those communities by having these reforms implemented and not having the time to really breathe and compartmentalise them and have them implemented under the Water Legislation Amendment Bill. That is an important way that sometimes in our Parliament legislative reform can be considered and we can make it more fit for purpose for communities as well.

I want to take this opportunity as well to acknowledge the work of our SES. Just recently we had the opportunity to open the Chelsea SES unit, a \$7 million investment in our emergency services. It is important that it is recognised that the SES unit statewide has such an integral part when our communities are impacted by flood events. Just to see some of the stats and the call-outs – there were thousands of call-outs during that time from units across our state being deployed to Rochester, being

deployed by communities impacted along the Goulburn and Campaspe rivers. You think in that moment when those local community state emergency services get underway and then there is a statewide deployment – to those volunteers, some of the call-outs that we have got here just in the months of October and November: 16,000 call-outs and the shared effort and determination of 147 units, some 1.3 million sandbags laid and over 370 emergency warnings.

That shows that volunteers in our community do the very best work. It does not matter where you are in our community; if you are impacted by flood or fire events, you know that the SES, the CFA, our Fire Rescue Victoria personnel, Ambulance Victoria, if you are along the coast or along the bay, our lifesavers across Victoria, and Victoria Police do an extraordinary job. But I want to give a big shout-out to the SES, who did so much work during that time in that moment of uncertainty and trauma for communities, particularly as the catchments filled, the rivers swelled and the water was coming down. It was a huge community township effort. The best parts of Victoria's spirit were lived in those communities that pitched in to support one another. We saw those images in Echuca as well of many days of sandbagging and defending townships and communities to the best of people's ability. That is the best part of Victoria's spirit: when we are chipping in to help out one another. I wanted to give a big shout-out to all of those communities as well.

It is just a technical change to this, but it comes on the back of the principles of this government of supporting people in flood rescue and recovery and also looking at some of these time frames of implementation of changes to water regimes and the place-of-take approval framework, when that comes online as well, and making sure that we get that time and that breathing space for consultation. It was acknowledged by some members as well that up to the flood events there was quite a bit of community engagement. There were a lot of sessions underway. Post the impacts of floods people have been doing other things, getting their communities back on track, and they have not been focused on this. So we want to make sure that we can alleviate that pressure, again listen to communities, go back to further consultation and engagement and understand if there is anything further we need to consider as we get that implementation underway.

That is a really important example of the number of ways that the Andrews Labor government is supporting communities. Once again we give a big shout-out to those flood-affected communities. Nearly \$900 million has been allocated. We acknowledge some of the media reports recently. We want to get more and more assistance out there as we support these communities on their journey and on their recovery. This is an important stay of these implementations for 12 months, and then we are back underway with that regulation – that has been agreed to already – and its implementation date. I will say finally as well that the transparency arrangements will come into effect, importantly, from 1 July 2023, but that does not place additional impact on those communities.

Luba GRIGOROVITCH (Kororoit) (11:27): This government heard from water users during extensive consultations, especially those affected by the floods, that they needed more time to understand the new framework changes. This is why it is critical that the Water Legislation Amendment Bill 2023 is supported. The purpose of this bill is to clarify several provisions related to the new place-of-take approvals framework to ensure its smooth operation in line with the intent of the Water and Catchment Legislation Amendment Act 2021 and avoid unintended consequences. It does not introduce the framework; in 2021 the Andrews government passed the Water and Catchment Legislation Amendment Bill 2021, which introduced a new framework for regulating the place, the rate and the time of taking water. Part of this is the place-of-take approvals framework. Place of take provides water users more certainty about their rights to take water from a river during the rare event of a shortfall and more flexibility to manage their own delivery risk. This allows for better management of the system which delivers water to rural water users and so protects existing rights and waterways.

Following the impact of the October 2022 floods here in Victoria it became obvious to the Andrews government that farmers and water users, particularly in northern Victoria, have enough on their minds with the flood recovery and that it would be senseless to push ahead with implementing the place-of-take framework by 1 July 2023 as originally scheduled. Rural and regional Victorians would simply

not be able to understand and adjust to the new framework in the time frame. The bill extends the default commencement date of the place-of-take approvals framework to 1 July 2024. This extended start date for place of take will ensure that Victorians, especially in those flood-affected communities, are given the time to understand the changes to the framework as well as allowing time for additional consultation. The new framework will replace current complex provisions and make it clearer for existing water entitlement holders when they can use water during shortfalls, such as high water demand periods. It will not affect anyone's water share. Existing entitlement holders can be assured that current arrangements will remain in place in case of any shortfall over the summer 2023–24 peak demand period. This legislation simply gives water users more certainty about their water entitlement when demand exceeds the amount of water flowing down the river. This legislation matters because with climate change expected to increase the frequency of hot days and the length of warm spells, peaks in daily water demand are likely to continue to increase.

The River Murray system has seen significant changes over the past 10 to 20 years in both supply and demand for water. Changes within the system and changing demand are making it increasingly difficult to move water to where and when it is needed for irrigation and the environment, which of course can lead to shortfall in delivery. Although such shortfalls in the Murray have been rare, the risk of a shortfall occurring is real and is increasing. While we are coming out of a La Niña weather event at the moment, the Bureau of Meteorology has already declared an El Niño watch. An El Niño event would further increase the risk of a shortfall event in Victoria if we experience lower than average rainfall for a prolonged period of time. As we know, climate change is reducing the overall water in our rivers, with more variable rainfall and hotter than average weather. That is why the Andrews government needs to act now to protect the rights of our water users and the environment.

The legislative reforms form part of the broader program of work, with Victoria working alongside the Murray–Darling Basin Authority and other southern basin states to improve the management of Murray delivery risks and support water users to manage their own delivery risks. I am pleased that Victoria, under the Andrews government, continues to deliver on our obligations under the Murray–Darling Basin plan. Victoria has already delivered 826 gigalitres of our 1075-gigalitre obligations under the plan and will return water to the environment without the need for water buybacks.

The place-of-take approvals framework also accounts for water being taken interstate from Victoria. This is because our water market is interconnected across jurisdictions in Australia, and water from Victoria can be purchased and used in states like New South Wales and South Australia. This demonstrates just how interconnected the southern basin is and why Victoria is leading the way with this critical work to protect water users' rights in a shortfall. This benefits all water users, not just Victorian water users.

One of the most important technical changes in this bill will enable market transparency related amendments to commence separately from the place-of-take approvals framework. This means that the market transparency improvements, which the community have been thoroughly consulted on, can be introduced from 1 July 2023, earlier than the place-of-take framework. This will provide additional time for consultation with water users on the rules and regulations that give effect to the framework without unnecessarily delaying the market transparency improvements. Reforming the transparency of our water market is vitally important work. Water is, as we all know, a limited resource. In Victoria there is climate change, and this will only worsen the challenges we will face. This makes market transparency, compliance and strengthening delivery rights more important than ever. The Andrews government in this way is improving accountability, fairness and transparency in our water market and giving the public access to important information about our largest holders of water. The place-of-take approvals framework, coupled with the transparency measures, will continue to strengthen our water markets and ensure that they are governed fairly for all water users.

The place-of-take approvals framework also strengthens compliance to ensure that if anyone takes more than their approved allocation during a shortfall, they will be punished. This complements the extensive work which has been done in the Victorian water sector to ensure strict compliance measures

are in place. In Victoria we do not tolerate non-compliance with our water laws. Water corporations must undertake a range of measures to ensure their compliance, including water metering, strict reporting, community education and enforcement of these rules.

I know that the Andrews government will continue to consult with affected water users and communities as this legislation comes into effect. Information about the new framework has been published on the Victorian Water Register's website to help water users understand and prepare for these changes. The department has been working closely with our declared system rural water corporations, Goulburn–Murray Water, Lower Murray Water and Southern Rural Water – I think I need some water – and their customer committees to make sure systems and processes are updated for them to manage their customers' place-of-take approvals when the new framework comes into effect.

Taken together with the Water and Catchment Legislation Amendment Act 2021, this water amendment bill provides for a stronger framework for Victoria's water delivery challenges and streamlines – no pun intended on that one – the existing provisions for where water is taken from and how users may store it for use if it is needed and rationed.

I want to reflect on the 1990s, which of course we know were quite wet, the noughties, which were dry, and then the buckets in showers, which I am sure everyone in this house can remember. We do not want to go back to those days. I am really pleased that the Andrews government have got an actual plan of attack. I thank the government for their work in delivering these amendments and particularly the Minister for Water Harriet Shing. I am pleased to support the Water Legislation Amendment Bill 2023.

Meng Heang TAK (Clarinda) (11:36): I am delighted to rise today to join the member for Kororoit and the member for Mordialloc on this side of the house to speak on the Water Legislation Amendment Bill 2023. This is another important bill that will clarify and strengthen water delivery rights for all Victorians, and I thank the minister for bringing it before us here today.

It was around this time last year that we were lucky enough to have the former Minister for Water out in the Clarinda electorate to make some exciting announcements on the Dingley recycled water scheme. The Clarinda district will soon benefit from the new pipeline delivering recycled water to our local businesses, golf courses, sport ovals and parks. I was fortunate to join the former Minister for Water to announce the \$24.8 million of Andrews Labor government funding to construct the \$72 million Dingley recycled water scheme, with the remaining funding coming from South East Water. The water infrastructure project will unlock 1800 megalitres of recycled water each year. That is enough recycled water to fill Albert Park Lake more than 2½ times. The project will generate \$92 million for the local economy. The new 42-kilometre pipeline will deliver recycled water to 46 private and public sites, including 15 local parks, 12 golf courses, three market gardens and 13 nurseries. This is a fantastic announcement for our local community, which has a very proud history and commitment to green open space, particularly the Kingston green wedge. It is also very timely given the government's plan for the sandbelt chain of parks.

It is an ambitious vision – some 355 hectares of parks that offer a wide range of recreational facilities and open space within our green wedge, creating a network or chain of parks – but it is one that the Andrews Labor government proudly committed to in 2018. The member for Mordialloc has already spoken in this place many times about how proud he was being in the neighbouring electorate. It was an amazing commitment and one that I will be checking in on with the Minister for Water this week. That 355 hectares from Warrigal Road in Moorabbin to Braeside Park in Dingley Village, with walking and bike trails and an adventure play area for local kids, is an amazing commitment that we are delivering together with the recycled water scheme. Investing in recycled water infrastructure demonstrates our commitment to building sustainable cities by designing pipes to supply the future water demands of our growing population, saving our drinking water supply. We see the commitment in the Dingley recycled water scheme and other projects that we see in further commitments here in this bill today.

The Water Legislation Amendment Bill 2023 will amend the Water and Catchment Legislation Amendment Act 2021, which upon commencing will amend the Water Act 1989 in order to clarify and strengthen water delivery rights. The bill will also make minor amendments to the Water Act 1989. The bill will extend the default commencement date of the amendment act from 1 July 2023 to 1 July 2024. That will allow more time to implement an improved framework for regulating the place of taking water – that is the place-of-take approvals framework – so that flood-affected water users in northern Victoria have time to consider and adjust to the new reform. The bill will also address the technical matters in the amendment act relating to these provisions before the amendment act commences operation to ensure the smooth operation of water reform and avoid unintended consequences of the reform, including to interstate and water trade arrangements.

Whilst it is technical in nature, it is also an important piece of legislation to clarify and strengthen water delivery rights, and of course this is an important consideration for all Victorians. Relating to this, we have heard from previous speakers that they have seen in the Dingley recycled water scheme project the importance of building the new pipeline to help diversify our water sources – a key objective of the \$56.6 million investment announced in the 2022–23 Victorian budget to support the delivery of the *Central and Gippsland Region Sustainable Water Strategy*. The draft *Central and Gippsland Region Sustainable Water Strategy* brings long-term planning to manage waterway health in the central and Gippsland regions to create long-term water security for the community and improve water health for up to the next 50 years.

I would like to say that investing in recycled water infrastructure will also support Victoria's response to climate change impacts, allow parklands and golf courses to remain green during dry spells, open up new horticultural business opportunities and tourism and provide a better recreational outcome for our local community. Regarding climate change, as we have heard from other speakers, the River Murray system has seen significant change over the past 10 and 20 years in both supply and demand for water. Changes within the system and changes in demand are making it increasingly difficult to move water to where and when it is needed for irrigation and the environment, which can lead to a shortfall in delivery. Although such a shortfall in the Murray has been rare, the risk of shortfall occurring is real and increasing, just like the member for Kororoit said in her contribution. Just on this point, those who remember the millennium drought in the 2000s will know the impact on businesses, parks, sporting fields and the community. So this bill is important, as are our government initiatives that will provide a rainfall-independent water supply.

We have also heard that while there we are coming out of La Niña weather event at the moment, the Bureau of Meteorology has already declared an El Niño watch. That event would further increase the risk of a shortfall event in Victoria if we experience lower than average rainfall for a prolonged period of time. So in general, climate change is reducing the overall average water in our rivers, with more variable rainfall and hotter than average weather, so we need to act now to protect the rights of our water users, including the environment. As such, I am very happy to see this bill here today and to see the important projects such as the Dingley recycled water scheme and other projects helping to address and protect the rights of our water users and the environment.

Just in terms of consultation – and we have heard a lot about this – there was extensive stakeholder consultation for the amendment act prior to and during 2021, and there is broad support for the clarifications of the amendments in this bill. There has also been extensive consultation with the place-of-take consultative committee, which is comprised of the irrigators' representatives. It was heard from water users during this extensive consultation that they needed more time to understand the place-of-take framework changes, and as such, the starting date has been extended.

Again I thank the minister for bringing this bill here before us today and for her continued work strengthening water delivery rights for all Victorians through this bill and through other important projects in our community such as the Dingley recycled water scheme, which is using more recycled water to respond to the needs of our growing populations sustainably by delivering green public space

all year round without impacting our drinking water supply. I am looking forward to working together with ministers on this important initiative and others, and I commend the bill to the house.

Paul EDBROOKE (Frankston) (11:46): It is indeed a pleasure to rise this morning and speak on the Water Legislation Amendment Bill 2023. From the outset can I thank the Minister for Water Ms Shing in the other place and the former Minister for Water the Honourable Lisa Neville for all the hard work they have done in this space. Working with Ms Neville in her office as the Parliamentary Secretary for Police and Parliamentary Secretary for Emergency Services was a real learning curve to see how ministers get to a point where they are 100 per cent – indeed 110 per cent in Lisa’s case – over their brief. Water was definitely something she was passionate about. We did not hear too many questions in this house about water issues because she was all over the facts and figures and made sure that those consultations and negotiations were happening. In speaking to Ms Shing from the other place just before, I note that she actually shares that passion for this portfolio area and has been involved in many negotiations with MPs and stakeholders interstate and federally to ensure that Victoria is well looked after now and into the future.

It was not so long ago that we had the minister Ms Shing in Frankston to celebrate a new pipeline delivering high-quality recycled water to green spaces, including sporting grounds like the grounds of the mighty Frankston Dolphins – I know the member for Mornington would be a life member like me of the mighty Dolphins and would be very excited about that too – and also watering some of our world-class golf courses in Frankston as well. That 2.3-kilometre pipeline will deliver climate-resilient water – a source of 73 megalitres each year to three public sites, including our football, cricket and soccer grounds, the National Golf Club Long Island course, which I believe the Premier might be familiar with, and there are also opportunities in the future to ensure that we are supporting local schools and some other community agencies or stakeholders that might need that support. The investment in these sustainable sources of recycled water is really important, and it is a foundation of a healthy, sustainable, living community, which we are in Frankston. Saving that precious drinking water is important, which I know everyone in this house – everyone regardless of what side of politics or where your views may be – would agree with. That is an important thing.

The Monterey recycled water scheme will cost a total of \$4 million, and that is with water expected to become available by spring 2024. So indeed it is a really, really important investment in infrastructure in our area, from supplying water during dry spells for those open spaces to actually conserving that all-important drinking water. So thank you to the minister for coming down and announcing that funding and making that happen.

The Water Legislation Amendment Bill 2023, which was brought to the house by the minister, will amend the Water and Catchment Legislation Amendment Act 2021, which upon commencement will amend the Water Act 1989 in order to clarify and strengthen water delivery rights, and the bill will also make minor amendments to the Water Act 1989, as we have heard many other members talk about.

The details of this bill are basically twofold when you grind down to it. The bill will extend the default commencement date of the amendment act from 1 July 2023 to 1 July 2024 to allow more time to implement an improvement framework for regulating the place of taking water or the place-of-take approvals framework so that flood-affected water users in northern Victoria have time to consider and adjust to these new reforms. I know there has been some consultation, and I have read about that consultation. It appears that the consultation was good, but it could have been attended better, and I think this allows time for that as well.

The bill will also address technical matters in the amendment act relating to these provisions before the amendment act commences operation to ensure smooth operation of the water reforms and avoid unintended consequences of the reforms, including to interstate water trade agreements, which I know from my conversation with the minister can be very complex at times.

As we have heard many of our regional members on this side of the house talk about, the water that is being spoken about in this bill is very important. It is water that goes to feeding our community, it is water that grows certain export market stocks and certainly it is something that we need to develop legislation and policy around for now and for the future. In the schools that I visit in Frankston nothing is more apparent than the fact that the kids, whether it is primary school kids even from grade 3 up to year 12, are very cognisant of the fact that there are some challenges that governments right now are facing and that they are very understanding and respectful of the fact that there are some governments that are actually taking action on things like climate change by investing in renewables, by bringing back things like the SEC to bring bills down and by promoting those renewable energy sources such as wind and solar.

This piece of legislation might not be so popular in the media, but it is something that I intend to look at and take to my schools and talk about what we are doing in this space, because we do not want to end up like California. We do not want to end up like some of the other examples internationally where there was no vision for not just 10 years down the track but 40 and 50 years down the track and 100 years down the track. The infrastructure needs to be in place now. It will be too late in years to come. We have seen that in California. We have seen the fight to build desalination plants and look at other measures to ensure that their community can survive and thrive in that area without so much as bans on the amount of water that they can use on their gardens, parks and land.

On recycled water, I am old enough, unfortunately, to have grown up in a time when you actually had to apply to the local council to have a tank in your backyard. It always seemed funny to me. I lived on a farm for quite some time too, and we lived off tank water – we showered in tank water – so to be in an urban area where you could not even have your own water tank and be self-sustainable seemed really, really quite bizarre. So it is great to see people – especially in new buildings and with the building regulations – looking at putting in under-verandah tanks, their own domestic tanks, whether they be 5000 litres or 40,000 litres, to ensure that whether it be for drinking water or grey water uses that recycled water that has been treated by our water plants is not going down the drain needlessly but can be used on their gardens, down the toilet, watering their plants and filling their pools, because all this water has to go somewhere, but it is just spilling straight into the ocean.

We have known for years that we can recycle this water. We have known for years that farmers need this water, and it is through action like this that we can actually have a constructive and productive conversation with stakeholders, including interstate and including federal, about how we deal with this so our farmers, whether they be contributing to our domestic product or our international sales, do not have to plough fields of crop back into the earth. This is so important. We know that there have been some real high points and low points in this argument. There have been people that have been incredibly impassioned about this subject, so to know that they have had their say and that they will continue to be able to have their say on this very important portfolio piece really should give everyone peace of mind. I have spoken to some locals in Frankston about this – not farmers, for sure, but people that appreciate that there is that vision, there is that plan for the future and that we are not just going to let things eventuate by themselves and manifest into something we actually had no plan for.

This is a plan for the future, and this bill should go a long way to giving people the confidence they need to know that this government once again steps up. We step up, we consult, we listen to people and we actually provide the legislation that ensures that those thoughts are put into law and, for people who use this water in the various ways, that their rights are protected by the government. That is something that I think rings true. Anywhere you go in Victoria there will be people that might not agree with our style of politics, but the one thing they all say is: when we say we are going to do something, we do it. When we say we are going to get something done, it gets done, and this legislation is part of that. Can I acknowledge Minister Shing in the other place and her departmental colleagues and ministerial colleagues for their work on this. I commend the bill to the house.

Ella GEORGE (Lara) (11:56): It is my pleasure to contribute today on the Water Legislation Amendment Bill 2023. All of us here know that water policy is an incredibly important area of public policy and that it is so important that we have a strong legislative framework to govern water use and water protection across the state. Stronger protections and frameworks are exactly what the Water Legislation Amendment Bill will contribute to. I would like to take this opportunity to thank the Minister for Water and her staff for all of their work in bringing this bill to the Legislative Assembly. I think that this state is fortunate to have such a passionate water minister in Minister Shing in the other place, and I would also like to thank the previous water minister the Honourable Lisa Neville for all of her hard work over many years in protecting Victoria's waterways and water systems.

This bill supplements the place-of-take approvals framework that was introduced as part of the Water and Catchment Legislation Amendment Bill 2021. The place-of-take approvals framework improves our approach to managing the approvals to take water and the delivery rights in declared systems. This gives users clearer guidelines in relation to their rights about taking water from a river during a shortfall and more flexibility to manage their own delivery risks. A shortfall is when water that is entitled to be used, including by irrigators, cannot be delivered when and where it is needed. We often see this when there is an increase in daily demand, such as during a heatwave, or when there is not enough capacity in the river and channel systems to supply all the downstream water needs. These changes, as we know, are significant, especially in areas such as the Murray River downstream of the Barmah Choke, where shortfall risks are increasing. These changes will provide for more effective and consistent enforcement and compliance with the conditions of taking water. What the Water Legislation Amendment Bill does is extend the default commencement date of the place-of-take approvals framework to 1 July 2024. This bill will also make slight amendments to the Water and Catchment Legislation Amendment Act 2021 to ensure that legislation functions as intended when it was introduced. The bill is being brought forward on its own to allow for the short time frame it must pass the Parliament in. It needs to be given assent prior to 1 July 2023 so that the place-of-take framework can come into effect.

It would be remiss of me if I did not reflect on the major flooding events of October 2022 and the ongoing impacts that these floods have had on rural and regional communities. This bill was not considered before the October 2022 floods. The passage of this bill will help ensure certainty for water users, particularly those who dealt with flooding last year. We understand the impact and devastation that these floods caused across the state, particularly in regions and remote communities, and it is not over yet, with many people still dealing with flood recovery, which we know can be a long and difficult process. Many of these people are farmers who are water users in our declared systems, where this place-of-take approvals framework will be implemented. Given the stress load that many of these people already have on their plate, their ability to engage with consultation on the implementation of this framework has been limited. We saw this in January this year when we restarted consultation, which had been paused due to the floods, and turnout to consultation sessions was low. We understand this as a government, and that is why we are delaying the commencement of place-of-take approvals until 1 July 2024. This will give rural and regional Victorians, particularly those affected by floods, the time they need to be ready and to be informed.

I would just like to quickly touch on how this bill supports transparency. Community consultation done by the department since the water and catchment legislation was passed in 2021 highlighted the concern that our community has for certainty and compliance in regard to water. One of the most important changes this bill will enable is market transparency in related amendments which will commence separately from the place-of-take approvals framework.

These improvements, which the community have been thoroughly consulted on, will be introduced from 1 July this year, which is earlier than the place-of-take approvals framework. We all understand the importance of water for all Victorians, and this is a government committed to ensuring that all Victorians have a strong and clean water supply, from clean drinking water in every household to

ensuring Victoria's farmers and producers have the water they need for their livelihoods. Legislation like this is an important part of how the Andrews Labor government is protecting our state's waterways.

But it is not just legislation – this government is investing in protecting Victoria's waterways. This government has invested a record \$222 million into waterway and catchment health. I would like to take the opportunity today to speak to some of the important work being done in the Lara electorate with regard to protecting our water resources. I recently visited Barwon Water's Northern water reclamation plant. It was fascinating to hear about how the plant operates and how it began. Many may not know that in the mid-1990s Barwon Water had begun to develop a sewerage strategy to manage future growth in Geelong. At that same time the Shell refinery, now known as Viva Energy, were looking for ways to improve the quality of their wastewater and reduce the use of drinking water in their operations. This resulted in a collaboration that saw a purpose-built water reclamation plant near the refinery where recycled water is produced for the use of the refinery. The Northern water plant is unique in that it takes both domestic and industrial wastewater for treatment. Re-use of the treated wastewater in the refinery has reduced Geelong's drinking water use by around 2000 million litres a year, or about 5 per cent of the Geelong region's annual demand, and recycled water from the Northern treatment plant is now in use at nearby Stead Park in Corio, saving money for sporting clubs and local council for pitch maintenance. This project is a great example of collaboration between Barwon Water, the refinery and state and federal governments, and it shows what can be done when there is investment in water recycling.

I have also had the opportunity to meet with People for a Living Moorabool, a grassroots organisation advocating for increased environmental flows for the Moorabool River. We talked about the pressure that the Moorabool River is under and the importance of certainty around water capacity. One of the key issues raised with me was the high number of private dams taking water from the Moorabool River. The Moorabool River is one of the most stressed rivers in Victoria, and I thank People for a Living Moorabool for their ongoing advocacy and commitment to seeing the Moorabool River thrive and flourish. This is a government that listens to the community when concerns like the pressure that the Moorabool River is under are raised, and in December last year a planning scheme amendment was gazetted to strengthen planning policies and landscape controls to protect the rivers of the Barwon, the waterways of the west and rivers and creeks across Victoria. Importantly, this amendment acknowledges traditional owner values and custodianship of waterways. It recognises the importance of protecting the living cultural values and heritage relating to waterway systems. Additionally, the Living Moorabool Flagship waterway program is a large-scale restoration project to improve the health of the Moorabool River, from improving native vegetation and habitats to maintaining water quality and ensuring a healthy habitat for fish and platypuses.

Water is incredibly important for all of the constituents that we represent across the state in this place, and people living in the rural parts of the Lara electorate know this all too well. Farmers and producers rely on water for their livelihoods. Their water is not sourced from those water systems covered in this legislation but from water systems like the Moorabool River that are under stress, and to me that reiterates just how important it is to act now to protect the environment and our waterways and support the rights of water users.

This bill goes to the heart of what matters to our government. We are focused on ensuring that we are improving accountability and transparency in our water market, and this bill will be complementing a suite of works and investment which our government has already done across the state to ensure strict compliance measures are in place. As a state we do not take non-compliance with our water laws and regulations lightly. Through our water corporations we undertake a range of measures to ensure compliance, and these include water metering, strict reporting, community education and enforcement of these measures. This bill will mean that we can continue to strengthen water markets while ensuring they are fairly governed for all users. Water is a limited resource in Victoria, and climate change has the potential to worsen the challenges that we face. This makes market transparency, compliance and strengthening delivery rights more important than ever.

We all understand and appreciate the value of water, and that is why we have heard from so many of our colleagues in this place this week making a contribution on this bill. As the member for Frankston mentioned in his contribution earlier, he is going to take this information to local schools in his areas, and that is something I plan to do as well. I am always struck, when I meet with school leaders across primary and secondary schools, by just how focused students are on sustainability, climate change and delivering a better environment for their future. I commend this bill to the house, and I wish it a speedy passage.

Will FOWLES (Ringwood) (12:05): It is always a pleasure to follow the member for Lara, and I thank her for a fine contribution on this, the Water Legislation Amendment Bill 2023. It is a bill that simply extends the default commencement date of the place-of-take approvals framework to 2024 – not particularly complicated. In the debate a little earlier today on frankly unrelated matters, the member for Gippsland South had a crack at saying that this was due to some failure in consultation, but I think what we need to focus on here is that consultation is something that happens around both substance and process – substance and process. The substantive consultation took place a while ago now, and the framework was put in place in fact by the Water and Catchment Legislation Amendment Act 2021. So the framework is in place. But in consultation about the process and the timing the government have quite sensibly said ‘We’re just going to hold off’, and the reason for holding off is a very, very good one. These communities have been through a lot. They have been through a lot. Place-of-take approvals effectively manage drought circumstances, and the irony of these communities being affected by flood is not lost on any members on this side of the chamber certainly, nor I suspect on any members in this place – that we are talking about circumstances where flood-affected communities need to manage a transition to a set of regulatory arrangements that deal with the water that they are able to access when not enough water in fact is flowing down the river. We have sort of had the extreme opposite of that, in effect, in recent times, and we know these communities have been through a really tough time.

The floods were substantial last year. They impacted communities directly. They impacted local economies. They impacted the delivery of core government services like health and education. They even impacted the delivery of the election services. In my work as chair of the Electoral Matters Committee, Acting Speaker, I know you would be interested to learn that a couple of thousand people registered from those communities to vote by telephone in the last election. We had some evidence from the Victorian Electoral Commission on that, and I think that is one clear indicator that we have got people in these communities who have a sufficient level of civic engagement that they are determined to take part in the election and be enfranchised in the political process but acknowledge that they have got some limitations in moving around and in dealing with all the great many things they have to deal with. On that basis they determined that the best option for them, for their participation, for their enfranchisement in the 2022 Victorian state election, was to vote by telephone.

So this is a government that is listening to those difficulties and those requests. We have listened to these communities on process, and we simply say that what we are going to do is we are going to push back the start date on these changes. It is a perfectly reasonable thing to do, and of course the reason this bill comes before the house is because the scheduled start date was 1 July 2023 and we are seeking to push it back to 2024. That does not mean that the changes are not important – not at all. It simply reflects the lived reality for those communities, making sure that we are hearing from them the challenges and responding to them appropriately. The government stands by its reforms but is simply making sure that communities that are dealing with enormous difficulties – communities that are frankly still dealing with repairing fences and gates, doing work on their farms and spending huge days trying to get through the aftermath of these floods – do not have to deal with yet another change. The changes are good changes. Make no mistake, these are good and sensible changes. But we accept that every change requires some effort on behalf of stakeholders who are affected by it, whether it is a good change or not, and we understand that these communities are kind of maxed out. Their capacities are limited because of everything they have been through, and on that basis it is just entirely reasonable for us to offer them a bit more time to make these changes.

I am pleased of course for any opportunity to talk about water, and I do commend the minister in the other place Ms Shing for bringing this bill to this chamber and for all of the fine work that she is doing in her portfolio. I am always pleased to talk about the water portfolio, not least because of the work I have done both in my current role as the member for Ringwood and previously as the member for Burwood in relation to KooyongKoot, or Gardiners Creek, as it is perhaps more commonly known – at least for now. Gardiners Creek runs from Blackburn Lake in my electorate of Ringwood through the Box Hill, Ashwood, Malvern and Hawthorn electorates and what was formerly the Burwood electorate, following the Monash Freeway all the way down to the Yarra. The catchment for Gardiners Creek includes Scotchmans, Damper and Back creeks, and it is a serious bit of public open space. It is a cycling route, it has got ovals, it has got golf courses. There is lots and lots happening along Gardiners Creek. It is a very, very important part of the natural infrastructure and the natural environment in the eastern suburbs of Melbourne. The challenge historically has been that there are more than a dozen stakeholders involved in the management of that creek, and that means it is piecemeal and it means that the collaboration is sometimes there and sometimes not. You have actually got circumstances where you have got local governments, environmental groups, sporting groups, government agencies and water authorities all doing their separate bits in relation to this creek, historically with no overarching infrastructure.

I want to commend Graham Ross for kicking off the KooyongKoot Alliance, which was a very important environmental group that basically brought some of the principles from this government's very good reforms around the Yarra Riverkeeper Association to the management of Gardiners Creek. That was a very, very important inception bit of work, and it has ultimately led to the creation of what is known as the Gardiners Creek (KooyongKoot) Regional Collaboration. That was launched just a month ago. It was a great day, as I know the member for Box Hill will attest. It was a great day because it showed that it is possible to bring together disparate working groups, disparate stakeholders, and get them ultimately all onto the one page. This one was an absolute monte for bringing together the sheer number of stakeholders. The local governments with a stake in Gardiners Creek are Whitehorse, Monash, Stonnington and Boroondara. Try getting four local governments to agree on anything, let alone something where there is interface with a whole bunch of other stakeholders and government agencies. You have got the environmental groups, KooyongKoot Alliance in particular – and I will come to the work we did with them in their inception phase – but there is also the Yarra riverkeeper, because of course the KooyongKoot feeds into the Yarra, and the Field Naturalists Club of Victoria. We have got sporting groups like AFL Victoria, Golf Australia, Cricket Victoria and even the Bicycle Network that all have a stake in this. Importantly we have got two separate Victorian government agencies in both Melbourne Water and Yarra Valley Water, who have different responsibilities, one as the catchment management authority and one responsible for a bunch of the infrastructure, like the stormwater infrastructure, that feeds into Gardiners Creek.

Does it sound complex? You had better believe it is complex. That is why I was so pleased as a member for Burwood to secure \$250,000 to help the KooyongKoot Alliance bring all these stakeholders to the table. There had simply never been a meeting with all of the stakeholders of Gardiners Creek in one place at one time, and through Graham Ross and KooyongKoot Alliance we were able to deliver that, which was just outstanding. \$250,000 was provided to bring them all together to create these lasting and sustainable improvements. It was provided for the KooyongKoot Alliance and for the traditional owners, the Wurundjeri Woi Wurrung people of the Kulin nations, to make sure that they had a voice in the protection of this very important natural asset and also very important cultural asset for the Indigenous people of this area.

It is difficult to overstate how challenging it is to get groups of stakeholders like this all together on the one page all working to a common purpose. I think it is probably the first time I have been to any event with multiple LGAs represented where there was such harmony between the various LGAs represented; there was a genuine sense of commonality and purpose despite the differing political complexion of each of those fine local councils. It spoke to that unanimity of purpose around the very, very important work of protecting Gardiners Creek, which is of course very diverse in terms of its

water sources, developing it and making sure it is a natural asset that will continue to deliver for the eastern suburbs of Melbourne – the eastern suburbs that I am very pleased to say are not wholly and solely but by and large represented by fine members of the great Australian Labor Party. With those comments, I do commend this bill to the house and say that the work of the minister continues to be outstanding. I wish her every success in it.

Ben CARROLL (Niddrie – Minister for Industry and Innovation, Minister for Manufacturing Sovereignty, Minister for Employment, Minister for Public Transport) (12:15): I move:

That the debate be now adjourned.

Motion agreed to and debate adjourned.

Ordered that debate be adjourned until later this day.

Statute Law Amendment Bill 2022

Second reading

Debate resumed on motion of Danny Pearson:

That this bill be now read a second time.

Martin CAMERON (Morwell) (12:16): I rise to speak on the Statute Law Amendment Bill 2022. The bill seeks to make minor and technical amendments to a number of acts and to make sure the meaning of those acts is clear, accurate and reflects the intentions of the Parliament. There are a few points that I would like to highlight in the bill. The bill makes amendments to the Sex Offenders Registration Act 2004 in order to give effect to an amendment to schedule 2 of the Sex Offenders Registration Act 2004 that section 8(2) of the Justice Legislation Amendment (Police and Other Matters) Act 2022 sought to make but was not effective in making due to a typing error caused by section 34(1) of the Firearms and Other Acts Amendment Act 2021 commencing earlier than the Justice Legislation Amendment (Police and Other Matters) Act 2022. It removed a relevant reference in the Sex Offenders Registration Act 2004, which resulted in the amendment to be made by the Justice Legislation Amendment (Police and Other Matters) Act 2022 being unable to take effect. In addition, the amendments seek to repeal previous amendments made by section 8(2) of the Justice Legislation Amendment (Police and Other Matters) Act 2022 in readiness for its 2025 automatic repeal date, ensuring that the Sex Offenders Registration Act 2004 and statute books are clear and transparent for the Victorian public.

The bill amends the Sex Offenders Registration Act 2004 and further supports Victoria Police in actively monitoring registrable sex offenders and also reducing the risk of reoffending. Not only does it require registrable offenders to report to Victoria Police at the commencement of their registration period, but it also enables periodically over the registration period Victoria Police to record the personal details of a registrable offender. The Sex Offenders Registration Act prescribes four classes of offences for the purpose of the act. Standing up here, I would not have thought in my former role only a few months ago that these words would be rolling off my tongue as I try and articulate the legislation prescribed, but I will continue to go on. I did not need it if I was unblocking toilets or changing tap washers, so bear with me.

The bill seeks to make amendments to section 8(2) of the Justice Legislation Amendment (Police and Other Matters) Act 2022 to list as a class 2 offence the Commonwealth offence of using a carriage service such as the internet or a mobile phone to prepare or plan to cause harm to, engage in sexual activity with or procure for sexual activity persons under 16, except if the offence does not involve an act in preparing or planning to engage in sexual activity with a person under 16 years of age or an act in preparing or planning to procure a person under 16 years of age to engage in sexual activity. A person sentenced for a class 2 offence is automatically registered as a registrable offender and must comply with the reporting requirements under the sex offenders act. In addition, this offence is already established in section 474.25C of the Commonwealth Criminal Code Act 1995. The bill excludes

conduct constituting an offence against paragraph 474.25C(a)(i) of the Criminal Code Act 1995, as the conduct is not a sexual act in nature.

I also note the bill corrects minor ambiguities, omissions or errors in the Aboriginal Heritage Act 2006, the Domestic Animals Act 1994 and the Housing Act 1983 and updates a reference in the Terrorism (Community Protection) Act 2003 to ensure the meaning of these acts is clear and accurate. It makes minor amendments to the Competition Policy Reform (Victoria) Act 1995 to reflect the renaming of the Trade Practices Act 1974 to the Competition and Consumer Act 2010 by the Trade Practices Amendment (Australian Consumer Law) Act (No. 2) 2010, which was effective from 1 January 2011.

Luba GRIGOROVITCH (Kororoit) (12:22): I am pleased to speak in support of this bill. As my colleague the Honourable Danny Pearson said in his second-reading speech for this bill, the Statute Law Amendment Bill 2022 is a regular mechanism for reviewing Victoria's statute books and making a range of minor amendments to acts to ensure the orderly management of the state's statutes. It will correct inadvertent technical errors, make minor updates and implement Parliament's intention to pass an amendment to an act that was ineffective due to a typographical error. The bill will make amendments to update references in the Competition and Policy Reform (Victoria) Act 1995 to reflect the renaming of the Commonwealth legislation; correct minor errors in the Aboriginal Heritage Act 2006 that would have been addressed in the lapsed Statute Law Revision Bill 2018; correct and clarify minor points in the Domestic Animals Act 1994, the Housing Act 1983, the Justice Legislation Amendment (Police and Other Matters) Act 2022 and the Terrorism (Community Protection) Act 2003; and implement Parliament's intention to pass an amendment to the Sex Offenders Registration Act 2004 – in the justice amendment act a similar amendment was ineffective. A purely technical bill like this one appears rather boring to most readers of *Hansard*, and I have got to say it is my first time in this place that I am speaking to a piece of statute law amending legislation like this one. But what I am happy to do is talk a little about some of the topics related to the laws that this amendment bill touches on and the work that the Labor government has accomplished in its lifetime so far in these areas.

Firstly, housing is something which we all know has been very topical this week, and it is a pity that our colleagues from the Greens are not here to hear what I have to say. Housing is also very dear to my heart, and I know it is to many of those on my side of the house. The Housing Act 1983 introduced the office of the director of housing and abolished the old housing commission almost 40 years ago. In 2022, amendments to the Housing Act supported the evolution of the director of housing, with the formal establishment of Homes Victoria and its CEO. As a contemporary housing agent, this act provides Homes Victoria with the powers it needs to grow Victoria's supply of social and affordable housing. The Andrews Labor government is delivering more homes for people who need them most, because Labor knows that a safe and secure home is a foundation to a good life. This is why the Andrews government committed \$5.3 billion to the Big Housing Build, which is the biggest single investment in social housing out of all of the states and territories in Australia's history. The Big Housing Build will deliver more than 12,000 homes, including 2400 affordable homes, for Victorians who need them most. This will boost Victoria's social housing supply by 10 per cent, providing a stable foundation for thousands of Victorians. The benefits will also flow to the regions, with 25 per cent of funding allocated to regional Victoria. The Big Housing Build will create an average of 10,000 new jobs each year, creating new employment opportunities for local communities, including Aboriginal Victorians, people with disability, social housing tenants and, would anybody believe, renters – something that has been topical, as we know, and potentially might come up in question time today. It will also help people from diverse backgrounds and include them.

The other topic that I thought it might be good to touch on is the Aboriginal Heritage Act. As recently as December last year the Minister for Treaty and First Peoples the Honourable Gabrielle Williams welcomed 18 new graduates who had completed the certificate IV in Aboriginal cultural heritage management, a course that is funded by the Andrews government and is delivered in partnership with Victorian Aboriginal communities at La Trobe University. The yearlong tertiary course provides

students with on-country, classroom and skills-based learning by fusing formal, traditional and industry knowledge with hands-on experience in a culturally appropriate and safe manner. The Aboriginal Heritage Act empowers traditional owners as protectors of their cultural heritage and the world's oldest continuing culture, a fact which should be a matter of pride for all of us. There is no more important measure of social justice and progress in Australia today, for government and for the community alike, than delivering self-determination and reconciliation with justice for Indigenous Australians. This work is very far from easy, but it is work that is important and needs to be done. That is why I strongly encourage all of my constituents in Kororoit and all Victorians to follow the ongoing work of the Yoorrook Justice Commission, the first formal truth-telling process into injustices experienced by First Peoples here in Victoria. The Yoorrook commission's work will be vital to delivering a treaty for First Peoples in Victoria based upon respect, justice and real sovereignty, and I look forward with interest to the Andrews government continuing work to deliver such a treaty.

This amending legislation also relates to the Domestic Animals Act. I want to make mention of the Andrews Labor government's continuous work on modernising the state's animal care. The individual pet rehoming grants funded by the government were provided to pet rescue groups so that more dogs and cats can find their forever home. The first round of the grant program provided 464 grants that contributed to the rehoming costs of more than 4000 cats and 1400 dogs. Through works like this we recognise the significant role pets have in the lives of Victorians and encourage responsible pet ownership – and I know that there are many members in this house today who dearly love their pets. The government also supported all recommendations from the *Taskforce on Rehoming Pets* report. Through the investment in last year's budget, works have been underway to improve collaboration and information sharing between shelters, council pounds and rehoming groups.

In conclusion, it is appropriate for a bill of this nature to be passed periodically as part of the Victorian Parliament's regular housekeeping arrangements. Amending legislation like this helps to ensure that Victorian statutes are updated and clear and improves the ease of administering Victorian laws. I commend the Statute Law Amendment Bill 2022, and I look forward to it coming back to the house again.

Annabelle CLEELAND (Euroa) (12:29): This is gripping. I rise to today to speak on the Statute Law Amendment Bill 2022. From the outset I would like to indicate that it could be a struggle to fill the allotted time, despite the engaging nature of this bill.

The ACTING SPEAKER (Paul Edbrooke): Take a nice deep breath, member. We are all here for it.

Annabelle CLEELAND: Yes, and my fitness levels are there too. Given this bill is of a technical nature, we will not be opposing this bill, as it seeks to ensure legislation works in the manner in which it was intended. Our lead speaker on this bill, the Shadow Treasurer and member for Sandringham, did have a difficult task in attempting to speak on this piece of proposed legislation for 30 minutes – which is incredible. It is an achievement which is remarkable, and I am sure I can be inspired by that.

The Shadow Treasurer did outline the process of this bill coming to our house here in our last sitting week before the recess and outlined some issues with its introduction and the consultation process. I should have a gym membership soon. He also indicated in his second-reading speech that the bill was heading to the Scrutiny of Acts and Regulations Committee to make sure there were no funny buggers or funny business in this piece of legislation. With the bill originally being introduced in the Council before Christmas before its referral to SARC for reporting, it seems as if this is not the case, as indicated by the report, which has thankfully been tabled in this house.

The general purposes of this bill are of a minor nature, including the revision of the – oh my gosh, I should have read through.

Will Fowles: On a point of order, Acting Speaker, I would like to just give the member for Euroa an opportunity to draw breath and perhaps talk about the importance of points of order more generally.

I think it is important always in this place that we conform here to the norms of the house and arrive fit and ready to debate important matters like this Statute Law Amendment Bill 2022.

The ACTING SPEAKER (Paul Edbrooke): Thank you, member for Ringwood. There is no point of order, and the member for Euroa can judge the syncopation of her own speech.

Annabelle CLEELAND: Teamwork makes the dream work. Now, this bill is incredibly technical, and there are some small amendments that ensure that other legislation works as was originally intended, including through a substantive amendment to the Sex Offenders Registration Act 2004. The chief parliamentary counsel certified that the original amendment made to the sex offenders act was ineffective, with the Firearms and Other Acts Amendment Act 2021 frustrating the operation of the original amendment. A person sentenced for a class 2 offence will be automatically registered as a registrable offender and must comply with the reporting requirements under the sex offender register act. Bear with me. This bill includes the offence relating to carriage services as a schedule 2 offence, which is based on the Commonwealth legislation.

The bill does make a minor amendment to the Housing Act 1983. One of the major issues facing our region and the state more broadly is a lack of housing supply and extreme waitlists for both public and social housing. This is where I hit my strides. This is something the Leader of the Nationals expanded on with his contribution to the bill in our last sitting week. He outlined that while the Big Housing Build has been well marketed, \$2.8 billion has only got us 74 new dwellings in our state. New figures released by the Victorian Housing Register confirm 67,120 Victorians were on the public housing waitlist as of December 2022, an increase of 3376 people over the previous 12 months.

Right across the region in the Euroa electorate we have waitlists for housing completely out of control. There are hundreds of people urgently waiting for housing in towns right across our region, including Seymour, Benalla and the Broadford district. I am regularly contacted by people who are in desperate need of housing, and they are continually being told there is simply no supply to house them. Recently I had the member for Kew – welcome – Jess Wilson visit my electorate to meet with key stakeholders across the housing industry, including real estate agents, builders, developers and contractors, to discuss the hurdles facing increasing the housing supply. We need to revamp the planning system and ensure obstructive councils speed up approval processes and allow people to buy homes close to where they have grown up. This bill is not one that addresses the housing crisis facing regional communities, particularly in the wake of widespread flooding in October of last year, but I hope this is something the government is conducting serious work on and engaging with all relevant stakeholders on to make sure solutions are not just focused on pressing issues in our suburbs but are developed with our regions in mind.

Since the beginning of the COVID-19 pandemic the median house price across regional Victoria has increased by over 45 per cent. The median value of a Kilmore home has increased from \$470,000 to \$600,000 – a rise of 28 per cent – while the median price of homes in Broadford has increased by \$145,000 over the same period. Prospective regional home owners are being hit with a double whammy of increased prices and exponentially rising interest rates. I want locals to be able to grow up, raise their family and own a home in their own community without having to save for decades. While it is always a great honour to stand in this house and debate legislation, I remain hopeful that as the term of this government continues we are able to debate more substantive matters rather than the recycled bills we are dealing with at the moment.

Will FOWLES (Ringwood) (12:35): If I had known where the member for Euroa was going, perhaps I would not have been quite so generous in my offer to allow her to restore the O₂ levels there. I thank her for her contribution, though, and I share her great apprehension about the ability to fill 10 minutes on this scintillating piece of legislation, but having spent 13 or 14 solid minutes getting my head into it, I am sure the next 9½ minutes are going to be a treat for not just people in this chamber but people right across the globe, who I know are all Zooming in, really, really engaged with the nitty-gritty, with the detail work. This is the granular work. This is the hard work. This is where the rubber

hits the road, statute law amendment bills. I mean, these are the absolute humdingers, the ones that get all our constituents up and about, all excited, all revved about the minor updates and inadvertent technical errors. They are the things that really excite the masses, I know. I am very pleased to be speaking on this bill. It is a bill that amends a range of acts, and there are of course a number of portfolios that are touched by those acts, I guess, or a number of portfolios under which those acts fall. It gives us I guess an opportunity to talk a bit about that.

The member for Euroa was kind enough to raise public housing and public housing waiting lists, and I think that is a very good entree for me to say that I spoke in my inaugural speech about the importance of public housing. I said then that I simply do not accept that a city and a state and a nation as wealthy as ours should have such high levels of homelessness and housing stress, and I am delighted to have been part of a government that has actually responded to that challenge. We did take a policy to the 2018 election for new housing. It was not particularly ambitious. It was for a thousand new homes. But boy, did we respond to the opportunity that COVID presented in going hard – the largest single investment into social housing of any state or territory, any government, in the history of the nation: \$5.3 billion for 12,000 homes for Victorians, including 2500 affordable homes. Twelve thousand was the stated ambition of that \$5.3 billion, but I understand that the net result will actually be higher, that we have been able to do well in buying developments under a degree of economic stress throughout the pandemic, both assisting those developers and ultimately allowing the government to deliver more social and affordable housing stock. Overall it is a 10 per cent boost to Victoria's social housing supply. It creates 10,000 new jobs each year. It supports our most vulnerable Victorians.

It is extraordinary, given all of that, that the debate this week by the Greens, if and when they turn up to the chamber, has been so focused on rent caps when it is the Greens political party in the federal Senate who stand against the federal Labor government's – the Albanese Labor government's – \$10 billion package for social housing in this country.

Mathew Hilakari interjected.

Will FOWLES: The member for Point Cook is right. It is absolutely shameful that you would come in here and criticise the government for failing to introduce rent caps but at the same time – speaking out of two sides of their mouths, they are – stand opposed to a \$10 billion increase in federally funded housing stock. It is sort of breathtaking, but in a sense it is not that breathtaking, is it? Because we know the track record of Greens councillors right across the state, that in local government areas right across the state Greens councillors do their level best to stand in the way of good and well-considered social housing projects. They are all about talking a big game – always, always talking a big game – but the absolutely failed councils of Yarra and Merri-bek have simply not got any runs on the board when it comes to delivering social housing projects, because they are too pious and too precious by half.

These projects are important. They are important not just because they deliver people the security and the safety and the certainty of having a place to call home. They are important because you can then deliver all the wraparound services that go with that, because trying to deliver employment services or education services or other forms of social support to people sleeping under a bridge is nigh on impossible. And the Greens – despite their purported stance in wanting to support people in those sorts of circumstances – when push actually comes to shove, deliver absolutely nothing. They are opposed to federal Labor's public housing money in the Senate, opposed to social housing projects in the City of Yarra, opposed to social housing projects in the City of Merri-bek and, I will bet, opposed to social housing projects in other parts of the universe. These social housing projects are so important. Right now in Mitcham at the old Mitcham RSL site we have got a development application afoot for 62 new high-quality dwellings, all funded as part of the Big Housing Build. It is in a terrific location: Mitcham train station, bus services, the shopping strip, the supermarket and Halliday Park playground are all within a 10-minute walk. It is an absolutely brilliant location for this sort of project. There is also the Box Hill to Ringwood bike path, Koonung Creek bike path, Nunawading shops, Eastland and Nunawading Aqualink all within a 15-minute bike ride.

Now, some of the objections I have heard locally have been absolutely well intentioned but with a bit of a misunderstanding about what the make-up of these developments typically looks like. There is a set of assumptions about public housing tenants that is largely ill founded or almost entirely ill founded, and there is a set of assumptions about the composition of these developments that is just plain wrong. These developments are built with an eye to the waiting list. On the public housing waiting list right now, relative to community perceptions, are not a whole bunch of families with 17 people in them. There are actually a whole lot of single, middle-aged women on that list. Now, there is a whole gender equality piece here which this government has been happy to take on that goes to the heart of why it is that so many middle-aged women find themselves on these lists – the economic disempowerment, the lack of superannuation paid, the work at home – so many issues, and we are getting to that. We are. But I am helping my community to understand that we are building these projects to reflect the composition of the list. The list does not look the way people perhaps expect it might, and these developments need to have, for example, a lot of one-bedroom stock in them because there are lots of single people living without kids on those lists.

One of the other misnomers has been about the need for car parking. Because of the way the middle and outer ring suburbs of Melbourne have grown since the dawn of the automotive age in the 1950s, there has been an active and operating planning assumption particularly in the middle and outer ring suburbs that people would have a car or perhaps two cars for every household. That is an assumption that frankly held right up until about the turn of the century, but what we see now is a whole lot of people making very sensible decisions to use hire cars or taxis when they need them but actually do most of their travel on public transport or by walking or riding a bike. So the need for car spaces in these developments is actually much, much lower than the perception that many in my community – and many in communities right across Victoria I am sure – have.

This is not just a piece of political convenience. It is not a matter of us saying that, well, there is a need for less parking and that is going to make it cheaper to deliver the project. It is actually more that we simply are not going to build a whole bunch of car parks that do not get used. The lived experience tells us this. Studies have been done on existing developments that were built with car-parking capacity that has remained not just underutilised but unutilised – car-parking capacity that simply has not been required. If we can repurpose the money that would otherwise be spent on building car parks into building homes, well surely that is a better public policy outcome than building a whole lot of what are effectively overengineered or overcapitalised developments with a bunch of car-parking capacity that simply does not get used. I am very, very pleased that by and large my constituents have been receptive to the data, to the discussion, to the arguments and to the education around the nature of these projects, the composition of them and what it is that we are trying to deliver with the Big Housing Build. It is such an important piece of work.

I want to take the opportunity to commend my great friend the former member for Richmond and former housing minister Dick Wynne. We miss him in this place. He was such a tireless champion for social housing tenants over the course of a storied political career, and I want to take the opportunity to thank him for everything he did over his journey as Lord Mayor of the City of Melbourne and as a member and a minister in this proud Andrews Labor government.

David SOUTHWICK (Caulfield) (12:45): I rise today to make some comments on the Statute Law Amendment Bill 2022. Largely this bill is a tidy-up bill dealing with a number of small amendments when it comes to legislation. I am going to spend my time talking about the Housing Act 1983 and the tidy-ups there. I would say right at the outset that this is a missed opportunity, because whilst housing is mentioned in this statute bill, it does not go to the very core of what we have got to do to make housing more affordable and housing more attainable. What we are seeing here in Victoria is stress when it comes to housing at all levels, whether it be social housing or whether it be those that want to one day realise the great Australian dream of owning a house, and at the rental end, right across the board the system is broken. We are in a housing crisis here in Victoria, and the

government is doing very little to fix it. In fact what one would argue is the government has actually caused the problem.

Members interjecting.

David SOUTHWICK: I hear the government interjecting about all the wonderful things that they have done when it comes to, particularly, social housing. The Andrews government should be ashamed of themselves, quite frankly, because in four years they have contributed a net 75 homes into social housing – 75. It is an absolute disgrace. I was with the member for Polwarth only last week in Surrey Hills, and we went along to an auction in which three houses – three social houses – were being sold.

Members interjecting.

David SOUTHWICK: It is a disgrace, and it is a shame that the government should be interjecting at this point. They should be listening, because they have let down those people that are really struggling, that are on the poverty line and that do not have a roof over their heads. When I went with the member for Polwarth to Surrey Hills to look at this we were accompanied by a gentleman that was sleeping in his car. He went and had a look at these units to have a look at what was being sold. The reason why they were being sold was that the government said, ‘You know what, they can’t be fixed. They can’t be fixed, so we’re not going to spend any money on them. So we’re just going to get rid of them.’ Cannot be fixed? This guy that came and looked, who was sleeping in his car, said, ‘I would be in it tomorrow, with nothing, with not a thing – maybe a bit of a clean, and that’s it.’ If you wanted to, you could paint the walls and add some carpet. Three-bedroom apartments – three of them – all being flogged by the government for \$1.9 million – where does that go? Straight into government coffers to pay for their debt, to pay for their disgraceful debt – that is what this government is doing.

Ben Carroll: On a point of order, Acting Speaker, on relevance, we are discussing the Statute Law Amendment Bill, and if the Shadow Minister for Major Projects wants to look through the explanatory memorandum, it is very clear that we are dealing with domestic animals, consumers, Aboriginal heritage and other matters – sex offender registration. We are not dealing with the matters that he is going to in his debate, and I ask him to come back to the bill.

Sam Groth: On the point of order, Acting Speaker, this bill has been debated across a number of sitting weeks now here in this place and it has been a wideranging debate, and I think if you went back over *Hansard* you would actually be able to see that what the member for Caulfield is speaking about has been touched on by all sides of the house. Social housing has been brought up right across this debate, and I would ask you to rule the point of order out of order.

The ACTING SPEAKER (Paul Edbrooke): This genuinely is a wideranging bill, but I will bring the member back to the actual bill and the substance of the bill.

David SOUTHWICK: Right, so I will return specifically to the Housing Act 1983, which talks about particularly issues and changes in terms of Homes Victoria and about creating stock in the market, which the government is clearly not providing. The government has spoken. I say to you, Acting Speaker, there have been speakers before me that have spoken about the big build and they have spoken about housing and they have spoken about what so-called housing stock this government is creating. A 75 net increase of social homes over four years is not creating that stock. It is letting down vulnerable Victorians. The government are not doing their job.

Members interjecting.

David SOUTHWICK: And the interjections that the government are doing show that they are clearly worried about the truth – about the government’s failure.

Juliana Addison: On a point of order, Acting Speaker, my concern is that the member for Caulfield is being untruthful in this house, because in my electorate of Wendouree 130 new dwellings are being built in Delacombe; we have got 16 new dwellings almost finished in La Trobe Street, Redan; and we

have got 25 new properties also being delivered by Centacare. What he is saying is not true, and I wish for him to be guided – he should not mislead the house.

David SOUTHWICK: On the point of order, Acting Speaker, the member's point of order is not an opportunity to attack, and on relevance, the actual government's own data talks about 74, 75 – I have actually given you an extra one – net homes that have been created. So although there may be additional homes created, with the ones in Surrey Hills, the three that have been closed down, that gives you a net 74, 75 homes in four years.

Members interjecting.

The ACTING SPEAKER (Paul Edbrooke): I will rule on the point of order. Thank you, member. Your point has been made. I would like to bring the member for Caulfield back to the bill. I would just advise him that he should make certain of his facts, but no caution there, member for Caulfield. I also advise other members in this house that while lively debate is healthy, we should all be certain of our facts so there are no accusations of untruths in the house.

David SOUTHWICK: On the point of order, Acting Speaker, I take issue with the Acting Speaker raising issues and facts. It is the government's own data that I am quoting. So I would ask the Acting Speaker to be fair and reasonable when I am quoting the government's own facts back to them.

The ACTING SPEAKER (Paul Edbrooke): Just to clarify, there was no counselling on the facts you have given. It was just an awareness of the facts you might give. You have the call.

David SOUTHWICK: Thank you very much, Acting Speaker. It is obvious that the government today are very, very touchy about their failure when it comes to delivering housing to vulnerable Victorians. The government has clearly failed when it comes to delivering this housing. Unfortunately we are seeing it in a number of different instances. I have just spoken about social housing. The ability to own the great Australian dream has been put under pressure, along with the government's ability to ensure that the Victorian Managed Insurance Authority, the government's own insurance body, has the ability to cover those people that invest in building a new home. We have seen the issues with Porter Davis. We have had the issue raised, certainly during question time, where other people have lost their deposits. This is certainly creating a whole lot of anxiety amongst those people that want to own homes. The one thing Victorians want is certainty and confidence, and that is something that this government is not providing. They are not providing Victorians with the confidence to invest. They are not providing Victorians with the ability to understand that should there be a problem they will be supported.

The other element of housing which is very, very important is the fact that we are seeing the costs absolutely skyrocket. Infrastructure Australia's last two market capability reports clearly make mention that the two issues are labour shortages and materials. They are the two key issues in terms of where the current market is at. We are seeing, very much, that a lot of those materials have been diverted through the government's own projects. We have seen a \$30 billion blowout of the government's major infrastructure projects. It is little wonder why there is a shortage of materials when they are being diverted at twice the price for the government's own infrastructure projects, let alone building housing stock that is more affordable and more attainable.

The same thing applies with labour hire. What we are seeing is that a lot of labour hire is being diverted out of the private sector market to build homes in the government's own big build, and then all we are seeing is, number one, big blowouts and, number two, big costs when it comes to people being able to afford and purchase a new home. It is becoming less attainable under this government because of issues with costs spiralling, just as we heard from Infrastructure Australia. It is something that we need to get more of a focus on. Others who have spoken in this house before me have talked about what we can do to fix things. Planning needs to be one of those, to be able to ensure that there is less red tape, there is more certainty and there is more ability to invest. More people are investing out of this state when it comes to developing, building and providing more stock and supply, and that is what we need to do to ensure we get more affordable and attainable housing.

Ben CARROLL (Niddrie – Minister for Industry and Innovation, Minister for Manufacturing Sovereignty, Minister for Employment, Minister for Public Transport) (12:55): I move:

That the debate now be adjourned.

Motion agreed to and debate adjourned.

Ordered that debate be adjourned until later this day.

Disability and Social Services Regulation Amendment Bill 2023

Second reading

Debate resumed on motion of Ros Spence:

That this bill be now read a second time.

Tim BULL (Gippsland East) (12:56): I will make a few short comments on this bill before we adjourn for lunch. As we know, this legislation is very similar to what we saw come into the chamber last year, and that legislation lapsed with the end of that Parliament. There are some additional reforms included in this bill which I will touch on a bit later, but I put on the record that we will have a not-oppose position on this legislation. I also thank the departmental staff who provided a briefing to me on this and got back to me in a very timely manner on the outstanding questions that I was seeking responses to that could not be answered on the day.

In summary, this bill makes changes, which I spoke about in this place last year when we saw this bill largely presented in a very similar form, but it also remedies some oversights of previous legislation that the government is revisiting after not quite getting it exactly right on the first occasion. One point I will make is on the timing in relation to the reintroduction of this legislation. As we know and as we saw in the second-reading speech, a large component of this bill relates to safeguards, and it has come into this chamber for discussion and debate six months before the Royal Commission into Violence, Abuse, Neglect and Exploitation of People with Disability hands down its findings, and that report will be handed down in September this year. I would imagine it is likely and there is a fair chance that a royal commission that is looking into issues like abuse in the disability sector may come up with some recommendations around safeguards in the sector and maybe even hand down new safeguarding requirements. So it is interesting that this legislation that largely relates to safeguards in the disability sector has been reintroduced in this time frame rather than waiting and seeing what is going to come out of that royal commission and the recommendations that it presents.

It will certainly be, I guess – maybe embarrassing is too strong a word – interesting if the royal commission's recommendations do not align with what is presented in this bill. Even if it does align but further amendments are required to disability safeguards, we will find ourselves with yet another disability amendment bill up for discussion in this chamber. Those living with a disability are among the most vulnerable in our community. I think every member in this house would agree that they do deserve absolutely the highest levels of protection. At the same time those working in this sector also need a regulatory system that is not overly burdensome or requiring duplication of administrative requirements.

Sitting suspended 1:00 pm until 2:01 pm.

Business interrupted under sessional orders.

*Members***Minister for Housing****Minister for Veterans****Minister for Police***Absence*

Daniel ANDREWS (Mulgrave – Premier) (14:01): I rise to inform the house that today the Minister for Planning will answer questions for the portfolios of housing and multicultural affairs, the Minister for Prevention of Family Violence will answer questions for the portfolios of veterans, small business and youth, and for the remainder of this week the Minister for Casino, Gaming and Liquor Regulation will answer questions for the portfolios of police, crime prevention and racing.

*Questions without notice and ministers statements***Transport infrastructure projects**

David SOUTHWICK (Caulfield) (14:02): My question is to the Minister for Transport and Infrastructure. The minister was advised on 14 June 2022 by Major Transport Infrastructure Authority IR director Darren Driscoll about the impact of illegal CFMEU activity against Indigenous firms on the state's infrastructure projects. Why did the minister disregard this advice and fail to take any direct action to address alleged illegal CFMEU activity against Indigenous firms on projects that she is directly responsible for?

Jacinta ALLAN (Bendigo East – Minister for Transport and Infrastructure, Minister for the Suburban Rail Loop, Minister for Commonwealth Games Delivery) (14:02): Apologies in advance for croaking just a little bit today. The Andrews Labor government is absolutely proud of the fact that we have more Indigenous Victorians working on our transport infrastructure projects than ever before. We have more Indigenous-led firms working on our transport infrastructure projects as part of the supply chain than ever before. And do you know why we have this situation? The reason why we have the situation is, first and foremost, we have an infrastructure pipeline – an infrastructure pipeline that those opposite would have preferred to scrap and not only not see the projects delivered but not have Indigenous Victorians work on these projects.

James Newbury: On a point of order, Speaker, on standing order 58 in relation to relevance, the question related very specifically to illegal activity on sites under the purview of the minister, and I would expect and I would think that Victorians would expect an answer to this question. This is not funny, Minister.

The SPEAKER: Order! There is no point of order. The minister was being relevant to the question.

Jacinta ALLAN: In answering this question, and I am being entirely relevant to the preamble that was put by the member for Caulfield, it is important to remember why we are talking about this topic. We are only talking about this issue because the Andrews Labor government has a pipeline of infrastructure projects. Let us remember that this was a pipeline about which those opposite took to the Victorian community and said, 'We want to scrap this pipeline. We want to scrap these Indigenous opportunities. We want to scrap these Indigenous employment opportunities.'

Members interjecting.

The SPEAKER: Order! Members will be removed from the chamber without warning.

David Southwick: On a point of order, Speaker, the minister is now debating the question. I would ask you to bring her back to the actual question that was asked.

The SPEAKER: The minister was being relevant. She was referring to Indigenous infrastructure works.

Jacinta ALLAN: Thank you, Speaker. I was getting to my second point, of course, which is: not only do we have an infrastructure pipeline, but we very deliberately require the construction companies that work with us on the delivery of these projects to make sure that they have Indigenous employment targets, to employ more women on our construction projects and to make sure that there is a requirement of apprentices, trainees and cadets working on these projects.

James Newbury: On a point of order, Speaker, standing order 58 requires the minister to be direct. The minister has not even gone to the substance of the question directly or at all. She has not been direct to the question, which was in relation to illegal activity.

The SPEAKER: Order! I cannot direct the minister how to answer the question, but from my perspective the minister was being relevant.

Jacinta ALLAN: Thank you, Speaker. As I was saying, it is because of these deliberate policy settings that the Andrews Labor government has written into each and every one of our contracts that brings us to the point that we have now today 3 million hours worked by Indigenous people on our projects and 116 –

Members interjecting.

The SPEAKER: Order! Leader of the Opposition!

Jacinta ALLAN: 68 level crossings –

Members interjecting.

The SPEAKER: Order! This is unacceptable. The minister to continue in silence.

Jacinta ALLAN: Thank you, Speaker. That is the approach we take when it is about delivering projects. We do not just want these projects delivered for better infrastructure connections. We want to drive that benefit deep into the Victorian community. That is why we now – today – have 3 million hours worked, \$116 million invested, and we continue to expect our construction partners to deal with matters of industrial relations within their supply chain as is set out under the requirements.

Members interjecting.

The SPEAKER: The member for Frankston is warned.

David SOUTHWICK (Caulfield) (14:07): Minister, how many state transport infrastructure projects have been impacted by alleged illegal CFMEU activity against Indigenous firms?

Jacinta ALLAN (Bendigo East – Minister for Transport and Infrastructure, Minister for the Suburban Rail Loop, Minister for Commonwealth Games Delivery) (14:07): I am happy to answer the question; however, I am slightly challenged by the reference to the word ‘alleged’. That just presents a little bit of a challenge, but what I can say is thanks to the Andrews Labor government’s unprecedented transport infrastructure pipeline of 165 projects and over \$100 billion of investment we have Indigenous people working across all of these projects – and indeed that is Indigenous firms. Let us look at the Suburban Rail Loop –

James Newbury: On a point of order, Speaker, on standing order 58, this is an abuse of the procedures of the house. The minister is purposely avoiding answering serious questions that relate to illegal activity. She is refusing to answer and obfuscating –

The SPEAKER: Manager of Opposition Business, that is not a point of order.

Jacinta ALLAN: There are 15 Indigenous firms working right now on the Suburban Rail Loop project early works. None of those 15 companies would be employed on the Suburban Rail Loop if those opposite had had their way –

Peter Walsh: On a point of order, Speaker, in the 12 seconds that is remaining I would ask you to bring the minister back to actually answering the question. If she is unable to she may want to refer to the email from Mr Driscoll that says there is –

The SPEAKER: Order! That is not a point of order. The minister is being relevant to the question. I cannot direct the minister how to answer the question. She is being relevant to the question.

Daniel Andrews interjected.

Jacinta ALLAN: As the Premier has just reminded me, they would have been lucky to have seen nine projects during their time in office, let alone one. We will continue to work with our construction industry partners to deliver these projects and support Indigenous Victorians. *(Time expired)*

Ministers statements: mental health funding

Gabrielle WILLIAMS (Dandenong – Minister for Mental Health, Minister for Ambulance Services, Minister for Treaty and First Peoples) (14:10): I rise to update the house on the Andrews Labor government's unwavering support of workers on the front line in our mental health system. From peer workers to psychiatrists, allied health staff to nurses, we are building a workforce that meets the needs of Victorians, whether they are experiencing mental health challenges for the first time or indeed if they are dealing with chronic illness. That is why we are delivering on our promise to double the mental health workforce by 2031 from 8700 to 17,400 full-time employees. We have so far invested some \$600 million in Victoria's mental health workforce so far, so that supports about 2500 new jobs.

This morning I met with Sandra and Dee, two of the 400 recipients of our mental health and wellbeing workforce scholarships, backed by some \$6 million of investment. Sandra and Dee outlined that the scholarship program had provided them with financial security as they completed their studies and also the opportunity to hone their craft and pursue a fulfilling career pathway. The commitment and experience of Sandra and Dee and every other worker in our mental health system is key to our promise to transform our mental health system. This is all of course part of our ongoing commitment to implementing all recommendations of the Royal Commission into Victoria's Mental Health System, backed by more than \$6 billion of investment so far – more than every other jurisdiction. Just like Sandra and Dee, our hardworking mental health workforce know that only the Andrews Labor government can be trusted to deliver much-needed reform of our mental health and wellbeing system for all Victorians and will provide the opportunities for people to carve out for themselves a fulfilling career in a system that is dynamic and innovative and ultimately there to serve those who rely on it.

Jarrah Resource Management

David SOUTHWICK (Caulfield) (14:12): My question is to the Minister for Transport and Infrastructure. It has been revealed that labour hire firm Jarrah Resource Management has been contracted as part of Major Road Projects Victoria's Mickleham Road upgrade project. Jarrah Resource Management is a company with links to underworld figure Mick Gatto. Does the minister consider it appropriate for this Gatto-linked company to be involved in taxpayer-funded projects that she is responsible for?

Jacinta ALLAN (Bendigo East – Minister for Transport and Infrastructure, Minister for the Suburban Rail Loop, Minister for Commonwealth Games Delivery) (14:12): I thank the member for Caulfield for his question. If the house could perhaps give me a little bit of an opportunity to provide some context – I feel the member for Caulfield could do with the assistance of some context in answering this question. Of course, to deliver projects we have contractors and we have subcontractors.

John Pesutto: And you have rules.

Jacinta ALLAN: Yes, I am getting to that. Just wait. It is not your party room, mate. It is not your party room where you get to speak over women. It is not your party room.

The SPEAKER: Order! Minister, through the Chair.

Jacinta ALLAN: We have contractors and we have subcontractors.

Members interjecting.

The SPEAKER: Order! I would like to hear the answer.

Jacinta ALLAN: And just as there are settings around requiring contractors to work with Indigenous firms to support Indigenous Victorians to get more opportunities on our projects, it is a requirement of contractors to engage with their subcontractors to deliver these projects and ensure that they comply with all the relevant provisions – workplace provisions, industrial relations provisions – and this is entirely consistent with how projects have been delivered for a very, very long time.

Now, of course, if you have never delivered a project, if you wasted those four years in government and did not deliver a project, if you spent your –

Members interjecting.

Jacinta ALLAN: Oh, you are so predictable.

James Newbury: On a point of order, Speaker, on standing order 58 again, relevance, the question related to whether the minister considered it appropriate for the government and taxpayer funds to be linked to Mick Gatto, and I would ask you to ask the minister to return to that question.

The SPEAKER: The Manager of Opposition Business knows that a point of order is not an opportunity to repeat the question. The minister was being relevant to the question that was asked. I rule the point of order out of order.

Jacinta ALLAN: As I was saying, there are requirements for all companies that work on all projects. It does not matter whether they are government projects, private sector projects, projects for the federal government, projects for the New South Wales government – there are requirements around the workplace and requirements around industrial relations legislation, and we expect our companies to comply with and meet those requirements. This instance is no different. What is different is that we have a pipeline of infrastructure projects in our state that is supporting tens of thousands of Victorians. These tens of thousands of Victorians rely on these jobs and rely on these pay packets. These are the jobs that were at risk of course if those opposite had had their way. They were going to audit every single project and cut the infrastructure program in this state. They were going to cut into that.

Members interjecting.

Jacinta ALLAN: Mate, this is not your party room where you get to scream over women, okay? This is the floor of the Parliament.

The SPEAKER: Order! When a question is asked, I expect silence so we can hear the answer.

Jacinta ALLAN: We are proud of this pipeline. We will not be shouted at by those opposite, who delivered nothing, who promised Avalon rail, Rowville rail, Doncaster rail. We will keep on delivering for Victorian communities.

James Newbury: On a point of order, Speaker, again on standing order 58, for two questions the minister has been abusing the forms of the house.

The SPEAKER: Order! I ask you to state the point of order.

James Newbury: I ask you – on relevance – to ask the minister to come close to answering the question.

The SPEAKER: The minister was being relevant to the question. There is no point of order.

David SOUTHWICK (Caulfield) (14:17): Minister, last month Major Road Projects Victoria published a promotional video featuring Jarrah Resource Management on social media. After questions were raised with the government about the ownership of Jarrah Resource Management, the promotional video was immediately removed – it vanished. Was Major Road Projects Victoria instructed to remove the promotional video from the government’s social media platforms as a result of the Gatto link?

Jacinta ALLAN (Bendigo East – Minister for Transport and Infrastructure, Minister for the Suburban Rail Loop, Minister for Commonwealth Games Delivery) (14:17): Do you know what vanished? Rowville rail, Doncaster rail, Avalon rail, the Metro Tunnel – all these commitments that were made –

James Newbury: On a point of order, Speaker, on standing order 58, the minister knows better than to debate the question. This question related to the government advertising a Gatto-linked company. I would ask you to refer the minister –

Members interjecting.

The SPEAKER: Order! The minister has just commenced her reply and answer. If you ask a question, I expect that you want to hear the answer. The minister had just commenced. I ask her to finish her answer.

Jacinta ALLAN: Thank you, Speaker. And do you know what would have vanished if those opposite had their way? The Suburban Rail Loop and all the other projects in our pipeline – and not just those projects but jobs. This is a question that fundamentally at its heart is about jobs – jobs for Victorians that exist because the Andrews Labor government has a determination to support a pipeline –

James Newbury: On a further point of order, Speaker, this is an abuse of the forms of the house. Clearly the response from the minister is not even remotely relevant. This related to the minister’s department advertising a company owned by Mick Gatto. I ask you to ask the minister to return to that important question of integrity.

The SPEAKER: Order! The minister will come back to answering the question.

Jacinta ALLAN: Thank you, Speaker. Whether it is a road project, whether it is a rail project, we will continue to make sure that the jobs on these projects are providing support to Indigenous Victorians, women across the community, people working in small business – a program that would not exist if you had your way.

David Southwick: On a point of order, Speaker, the minister is ignoring your ruling. She is not being relevant to the question. I ask you to bring her back to the question. This is not about Mick Gatto’s jobs, this is about the website that vanished, the social media website that vanished under the minister’s –

The SPEAKER: Order! Can I ask members who are raising points of order to be succinct. There is no need to extrapolate on points of order. The minister has concluded her answer.

Ministers statements: healthcare workforce

Mary-Anne THOMAS (Macedon – Leader of the House, Minister for Health, Minister for Health Infrastructure, Minister for Medical Research) (14:20): I rise to update the house on how the Andrews Labor government is investing in our healthcare workforce by making it free to study nursing and midwifery here in Victoria for more than 10,000 students. A further 7000 nurses and midwives will be supported to upskill through scholarships that are available to them in areas of critical need for our health service, all through our government’s \$270 million project.

In early April the Premier and I visited Monash University to talk to some of this year’s nursing and midwifery students. It was great there to meet young Ashlyn. Ashlyn is an intelligent, enthusiastic young woman who is going to make a great contribution to our healthcare system. Now, Ashlyn is from

Tassie, and she received four offers to study nursing and midwifery in Tassie, in Queensland, in New South Wales and in Victoria. But where did she choose? She chose Victoria, and we welcome Ashlyn –

Members interjecting.

Mary-Anne THOMAS: Yes, a young First Nations woman, as the Premier has reminded me. So our government will be providing Ashlyn \$3000 every year for the first three years of her degree and on the completion of her degree and two years in our public health system another \$7500. What we know is that this initiative is making Victoria the place to be if you want to study nursing and midwifery and work in our fantastic healthcare system.

Since we came to government the number of nurses in our system has increased by more than 10,000 to 46,000, but under these initiatives we are adding more than 20,000 nurses and midwives to our healthcare system, and unlike those opposite, who relentlessly attack our healthcare workers at every opportunity, we will always stand by them.

Melbourne Airport rail link

Peter WALSH (Murray Plains) (14:22): My question is to the Minister for Transport and Infrastructure. The Andrews government has stated in relation to the proposed Melbourne Airport rail that:

No matter which train line you use, you'll be able to easily catch public transport to the airport in 2029.

It has now been revealed that the project will not be delivered as promised by 2029. The project has been the responsibility of the minister since its inception, and I ask the minister: Minister, when will the Melbourne Airport rail now be completed?

Jacinta ALLAN (Bendigo East – Minister for Transport and Infrastructure, Minister for the Suburban Rail Loop, Minister for Commonwealth Games Delivery) (14:23): I do think the Leader of the National Party is being a little brave asking a question about the airport rail project, given that when he was a member of government, when he was in cabinet, all he and his government did was print pretend tickets to a pretend train line to the airport.

James Newbury: On a point of order, Speaker, standing order 58: 'succinct'. The minister was asked when the project will be delivered, and I would ask you to direct the minister back to that question: when?

Mary-Anne Thomas: On the point of order, Speaker, the minister was being entirely relevant to the question, which of course asked her about airport rail, so I suggest that you rule the point of order out of order, and we would all benefit from less time wasted on these pointless points of order from those on the other side.

David Southwick: On the point of order, Speaker, the minister was asked very, very simply when the airport rail would be completed. Question time is not the time to actually criticise the opposition but to answer the questions.

The SPEAKER: Points of order are not an opportunity to repeat the question, member for Caulfield. I ask the minister for transport to answer the question, but I cannot direct her how to answer the question.

Jacinta ALLAN: Sorry, I was just having all those fond memories of those fake tickets that were being handed out. I could not help myself. My apologies.

As the member has referred to Melbourne Airport rail, this is only a project again that can be talked about in these terms because the Andrews Labor government have made it firmly part of our agenda to deliver better transport connections and also deliberately deliver it in a way that means it is connected into the suburban train network through the Metro Tunnel, another project that was left languishing for four long years under those opposite.

Peter Walsh: On a point of order on the issue of relevance, Speaker, the minister has now very clearly said that it is part of their infrastructure pipeline. Could she now answer the question of when it will actually be built?

The SPEAKER: There is no point of order.

Jacinta ALLAN: Not only have we made sure of that by connecting it through the Metro Tunnel, a tunnel that we have had to deliver on our own because of the failure of the former federal Liberal government to even give one dollar to the Metro Tunnel project, we have also made sure that it is being delivered through Sunshine so that passengers from Geelong in the south-west, Ballarat in the west and Bendigo in northern Victoria can connect to the airport. This is a project that is being delivered in partnership with the federal government and also in partnership with Melbourne Airport, the private owners of the airport. We have been working progressively, and as a number of colleagues know already, early works are already happening out on the ground to support the delivery of this project. We are continuing to work through the delivery of the airport rail project, because to deliver a train line to the airport we have to deliver a train station at the airport and into the environment of the airport, and as I already said publicly indeed the best part of 2½ weeks ago, those discussions that we have been having with the private owners of the airport have been a little challenging and have caused some delays to the project.

Members interjecting.

Jacinta ALLAN: I have just answered your question.

The SPEAKER: Order! The Leader of the Opposition will come to order.

Peter Walsh: On a point of order, Speaker, in the last 30 seconds remaining could I please ask you to ask the minister to actually answer the question that was asked?

The SPEAKER: I cannot direct the minister how to answer the question. The minister is being relevant to the question that was asked.

Jacinta ALLAN: Also, as has now been clearly signalled by the federal government, as part of cleaning up that absolute mess that was left behind by the former Morrison Liberal–National government, the airport is a project –

Members interjecting.

The SPEAKER: The member for Frankston can leave the chamber for 1 hour.

Member for Frankston withdrew from chamber.

James Newbury: On a point of order, Speaker, standing order 58 does require the minister to be direct, and I do not think anyone could argue the minister has been even remotely direct in answering when the project will be delivered.

The SPEAKER: There is no point of order.

Jacinta ALLAN: Perhaps if the member spent more time listening and less time auditioning for the seat of Goldstein I would be able to provide him with the answer that he is seeking.

Peter WALSH (Murray Plains) (14:28): It has also been revealed by a government minister that the Geelong fast rail project is no longer a priority for the Andrews government, and I ask the minister: when will the Geelong fast rail project now be completed?

Members interjecting.

The SPEAKER: Order! The member for Berwick can leave the chamber for 1 hour.

Member for Berwick withdrew from chamber.

Jacinta ALLAN (Bendigo East – Minister for Transport and Infrastructure, Minister for the Suburban Rail Loop, Minister for Commonwealth Games Delivery) (14:29): I will pick up from where I was interrupted by one of the many points of order from the member for Brighton. The answer to this question is also similar to the answer on the airport project in that the federal government have clearly identified significant challenges with the vast range of projects that were more about press releases for the former Morrison–Barnaby Joyce-led government than they were about delivering projects. As a consequence they are undertaking a review of the national infrastructure pipeline, and we are going to work with the Commonwealth –

Peter Walsh: On a point of order, Speaker, in the last 17 seconds remaining could the minister please show some respect to the people of Geelong and actually tell them when this project will be built?

The SPEAKER: There is no point of order.

Jacinta ALLAN: This is a review that the federal government have indicated will be carried out over the 90 days starting from Monday. We will seek further advice from the Commonwealth government as to the content and process of that review as it unfolds.

Ministers statements: teacher workforce

Natalie HUTCHINS (Sydenham – Minister for Education, Minister for Women) (14:30): I rise to update the house on this government's commitment to our teacher workforce. Over the past five years we have seen an 11 per cent increase in the number of teachers – that is double the national average. This is a direct result of our initiatives to ensure teachers have world-class professional learning and facilities. Just last week I was proud to officially open the Victorian Academy of Teaching and Leadership centre in Moe along with a member for Eastern Victoria in the other place. Teachers across Gippsland and Latrobe Valley now have a new hub where they can engage in a range of programs and events dedicated to leadership and excellence in teaching and also collaborate at a local level. This government has invested over \$148 million to establish this academy and seven regional centres. Moe is now the third academy in the regions to open, followed by the opening of Geelong – with the member for Geelong – and also Ballarat has opened its doors, but it is yet to have its official opening. We are ensuring that regional and rural teachers have access to the best educator resources to deliver for local kids, because we know that no matter where you live every Victorian kid deserves the very best education on offer. On Monday this week I announced the first placement of teachers in training in Tallangatta and Wangaratta as part of the Teach Rural program. This program supports up to 200 teachers in training to undertake their placements in government schools in rural and regional Victoria. As of this year teachers across Victoria are benefiting also from an additional hour outside face-to-face teaching. This is an allowance to increase their time to plan for lessons. This is a fantastic investment of \$779 million, an investment of 1900 more teachers.

Government integrity

John PESUTTO (Hawthorn – Leader of the Opposition) (14:32): My question is to the Premier. *Operation Daintree: Special Report* stated:

A culture that permits improper political interference to occur magnifies the risk that it will lead to corrupt political behaviour.

Premier, by meeting personally with the Health Workers Union and promising them millions of dollars without proper processes, isn't this the corrupt political behaviour that IBAC is referring to?

Daniel ANDREWS (Mulgrave – Premier) (14:33): The answer is no, but again I think the Deputy Premier described the Leader of the National Party as being 'fairly brave'. I would have thought the Leader of the Opposition was a bit brave to be lecturing anybody on personal behaviour today of all days. If I were you, I would stick to abusing women in your party room.

Members interjecting.

The SPEAKER: Order! Leader of the Opposition, do you have a supplementary question?

John PESUTTO (Hawthorn – Leader of the Opposition) (14:34): I am addressing it to the Premier. Premier, very brave, very brave. On a supplementary –

Members interjecting.

The SPEAKER: I will not tolerate this. I need to hear the opposition's supplementary question in silence.

John PESUTTO: Thank you, Speaker. The Daintree report also found:

... ministerial offices giving privileged access and favourable treatment to special interest groups to the detriment of the public interest ...

Victorians are suffering from higher taxes and poorer services. Is it because, as IBAC has found, your government is giving favourable treatment to special interest groups – a government of mates, for mates, by mates?

Members interjecting.

The SPEAKER: Order! The Assistant Treasurer is warned. The Premier to answer the supplementary question.

John Pesutto interjected.

Daniel ANDREWS (Mulgrave – Premier) (14:35): Apparently he is closing in on me. To see yourself as others see you is the rarest gift and one that has evaded you, my friend. Have a look at them behind you. They cannot even summon the snoring. They cannot even snore, they are so bored, mate.

Members interjecting.

The SPEAKER: Order! The Premier and the Leader of the Opposition are warned.

Daniel ANDREWS: The Leader of the Opposition is completely wrong in the assertions he makes, unfounded as they are and, it would seem, so uninspiring are his efforts, so confected is his outrage and so amateurish is his performance, that not only those on this side of the house but those precious few that sit behind him are equally unimpressed by him as an outstandingly unimpressive person.

Members interjecting.

The SPEAKER: Leader of the Opposition, you asked the question. If you ask a question, Leader of the Opposition, I expect you want to hear the answer.

Ministers statements: renewable energy

Lily D'AMBROSIO (Mill Park – Minister for Climate Action, Minister for Energy and Resources, Minister for the State Electricity Commission) (14:36): I rise to update the house on how Victoria's renewables revolution is creating thousands of jobs while lowering power bills and of course reducing our emissions. In 2022, 35 per cent of our state's electricity came from renewables – three times what we inherited in 2014. We have created more than 5500 jobs, building large-scale renewable energy projects in every corner across this great state. In fact just last month we saw more than 700 jobs get a kickstart with the massive Golden Plains wind farm, which I was so delighted to turn the sod on in the member for Eureka's electorate. It is a fantastic project delivered by people who understand that they have got a government that has got a clear agenda to grow jobs and grow renewable energy in the state, and people are coming and investing and creating those jobs as we speak.

Our Solar Homes program has created 4400 jobs installing 217,000 solar systems, and our Victorian energy upgrades program continues to support a further 2200 jobs and will create 5600 jobs in Australia's first offshore wind energy industry, because we have got the best offshore wind energy resource in the country.

We are also creating the next generation of energy workers through a \$424 million commitment to energy skills and training, including the SEC centre of training excellence and our SEC energy jobs forum, which will bring together the unions, investors and businesses to plan our renewable energy jobs future. Just last week I released the *SEC Pioneer Investment Mandate*, which will deliver the first project by the end of the year. And of course our jobs bonanza does not happen by accident. It happens because you have got ambition and you have got a plan, and that is why we are bringing back the SEC, creating a further 59,000 jobs, meeting our renewable energy target – *(Time expired)*

Government integrity

John PESUTTO (Hawthorn – Leader of the Opposition) (14:38): My question is to the Premier. The Operation Daintree report outlines concerns from former minister Jenny Mikakos about the payment of funds to the Health Workers Union by the Andrews government. The report states:

She volunteered her opinion in concluding her evidence that with the benefit of hindsight, it appeared the contract had only been entered into to placate Ms Asmar during the election period, and looked like a ‘way ... of injecting funds into the HWU’.

Given the HWU donated almost \$100,000 to Labor in the same financial year, was the payment to the union a way of laundering taxpayer funds to the Victorian Labor Party?

Members interjecting.

The SPEAKER: Order! I ask the Leader of the Opposition to rephrase his question. It was relating to party politics. Can you rephrase the question to relate it to government administration?

John PESUTTO: There are any number of ways to rephrase this.

Members interjecting.

John PESUTTO: Danny dividend. You, dividend Danny?

The SPEAKER: Order! Does the Leader of the Opposition wish to rephrase his question or will I sit him down?

John PESUTTO: Thank you, Speaker. Given the HWU, the Health Workers Union, donated almost \$100,000 to the Australian Labor Party, which the Premier leads and has said he leads, in the same financial year, was the corrupt payment to the union a way of laundering taxpayer funds to the Andrews Labor government?

Members interjecting.

The SPEAKER: Order! Members on my right!

Daniel ANDREWS (Mulgrave – Premier) (14:41): The question is addressed to me I think in my ministerial capacity as the Leader of the Labor Party.

John Pesutto: This is serious.

Daniel ANDREWS: Well, then you would think you would have drafted your question.

John Pesutto: On a point of order, Speaker, on the question of relevance, the Premier says he does not understand. That is because he has multiple hats and multiple faces. I am asking him –

The SPEAKER: This is not a point of order.

John Pesutto: To clarify the question, the question was –

The SPEAKER: What is your point of order?

John Pesutto: about the donation of \$100,000 –

The SPEAKER: Leader of the Opposition, you cannot repeat the question in a point of order.

Daniel ANDREWS: I will tell you what, mate, there are few long faces behind you. They have never been more interested in their shoes, I do not think, ever.

Members interjecting.

The SPEAKER: Order! Members on my right! The Member for Sunbury can leave the chamber for 1 hour.

Member for Sunbury withdrew from chamber.

James Newbury: On a point of order, Speaker, on standing order 58, the question clearly related to a decision about the contractual payment of taxpayer-funded money, and the Premier should return to that question.

The SPEAKER: Order! It is not an opportunity to repeat the question. The context of the question is well understood.

Members interjecting.

The SPEAKER: Leader of the Opposition, do you wish to have your question answered? Then I would ask you to cease interjecting.

Daniel ANDREWS: The real question is who drafts these questions. Seriously.

James Newbury: On a further point of order, Speaker, the Premier is now defying your ruling.

The SPEAKER: There is no point of order.

Daniel ANDREWS: To the extent that the question relates to the activities of the government, I reject all the assertions made in the Leader of the Opposition's borderline incoherent question. As for political donations that are made, they are a matter of donation law – which you voted against, by the way.

John Pesutto interjected.

Daniel ANDREWS: You do not get a fifth go at it, John.

The SPEAKER: Order! Leader of the Opposition!

Daniel ANDREWS: We could sit here all afternoon till you get an orderly question out your gob. Honestly, this is embarrassing. Brad Battin would never do this. Michael O'Brien never did do it.

Members interjecting.

The SPEAKER: The Premier will resume his seat. The member for Lowan will resume her seat. I ask the Premier to come back to the question.

Daniel ANDREWS: The government behaves appropriately, and I reject the assertions made by the Leader of the Opposition to the extent that any reasonable person could follow what the imputations in that absolutely muddled, confused, incoherent excuse for a question actually were.

Cindy McLeish: Crystal clear.

The SPEAKER: The member for Eildon can leave the chamber for 1 hour.

Member for Eildon withdrew from chamber.

John PESUTTO (Hawthorn – Leader of the Opposition) (14:45): With IBAC saying it has become:

... concerned that the apparent increase in the level of improper conduct in Victoria ... is increasing the risk that such behaviour will lead to more serious abuses of power ...

how many other payments of taxpayer funds have been made to unions by the Andrews government which subsequently benefit the Victorian Labor Party?

Daniel ANDREWS (Mulgrave – Premier) (14:46): Apparently the Leader of the Opposition is now sharing with me what he would like to hear. Honestly, you need to draft your questions a little better, I would have thought, but leave that to one side. The Leader of the Opposition is essentially alleging –

John Pesutto: No, I am alleging.

The SPEAKER: Order! Leader of the Opposition, do you want your question answered? If so, please stop interjecting.

Daniel ANDREWS: Well, it is hard to know what you are alleging, actually, because you are all over the shop.

The SPEAKER: Premier, through the Chair.

Daniel ANDREWS: The Leader of the Opposition is, for the record, all over the shop, and I reject each of his borderline incoherent, rambling assertions in each of these quite pathetic questions.

James Newbury: On a point of order, Speaker, under standing order 58 I would ask you to bring the Premier back to the question.

The SPEAKER: The Premier has concluded his answer.

Ministers statements: Victoria's Big Build

Jacinta ALLAN (Bendigo East – Minister for Transport and Infrastructure, Minister for the Suburban Rail Loop, Minister for Commonwealth Games Delivery) (14:47): The Andrews Labor government –

Members interjecting.

Jacinta ALLAN: Hang on – just wait. I know it has been a good day for the National Party when you look like the grown-ups in the room. I know it has been a very good day for you.

Members interjecting.

The SPEAKER: Order! I feel like I am on repeat today. Deputy Premier, through the Chair.

Jacinta ALLAN: And without assistance from the National Party, Speaker.

The Andrews Labor government's Big Build is not only investing in the vital transport connections our city and state need, it is not only supporting tens of thousands of jobs on construction sites and throughout the supply chain, it is also providing young Victorians the opportunity to get the training they need to go on and get a job on one of our many, many terrific projects. Recently we were at the Victorian Tunnelling Centre of excellence at Holmesglen TAFE, where in an Australian first virtual training will be used to give workers on the North East Link hands-on experience operating and staying safe below ground, supporting our skilled workforce – and a safe workforce as well. Building up our workforce is a vital part of our work. As we have a pipeline of tunnels, we also need a pipeline of workers and a pipeline of jobs and careers for young Victorians.

Another terrific example: in another Victorian first girls studying science, technology, engineering and maths subjects –

John Pesutto interjected.

The SPEAKER: Leader of the Opposition!

Jacinta ALLAN: He just cannot help himself, can he, Speaker, when it comes to talking over women. He just cannot help himself.

Members interjecting.

The SPEAKER: Order! Members on my right will come to order. The member for Ringwood can leave the chamber for 1 hour.

Member for Ringwood withdrew from chamber.

James Newbury: On a point of order, Speaker, personal imputations are clearly out of order, and I would ask you to ask the minister to return back to her statement.

The SPEAKER: I ask the minister to come back to her ministers statement.

Jacinta ALLAN: I was wanting to talk about girls in years 11 and 12 who are getting a chance to go and get a job on the Suburban Rail Loop. That is what I was wanting to talk about before the Leader of the Opposition decided to continue with whatever performance art he is confecting here in the house today. This program will give these girls hands-on experience, training and on-the-job experience to come and work on projects like the Suburban Rail Loop – a project that only exists because the Andrews Labor government is determined to get on and deliver vital projects like these for Victorians.

The SPEAKER: Order! The house will now move to constituency questions.

Roma Britnell: On a point of order, Speaker, I have several unanswered questions: question 113 to the Minister for Roads and Road Safety due on 23 March 2023, question 210 to the Minister for Roads and Road Safety due on 7 April 2023, question 209 to the Minister for Planning due on 7 April 2023, question 70 to the Minister for Housing due on 8 April 2023 and question 90 to the Minister for Housing due on 21 April 2023. If those ministers could take the time to give my constituents an answer, it would be greatly appreciated.

Tim Bull: On a point of order, Speaker, I too have some overdue questions. I have 36 in total. I will not read through them all. I am attempting to get to the Warrnambool racing carnival this arvo –

The SPEAKER: Member for Gippsland East, you can pass the list to the Clerk.

Tim Bull: so I will not be reading them all out in full. They relate to the portfolios of mental health, the Attorney-General, emergency services, agriculture, housing, public transport, environment, energy and resources, planning, roads and road safety, housing, government services and health. I will provide a copy to the clerks. There are a number of issues that are very important to people in my electorate. It is the second time I have raised some of these, and I would really appreciate your efforts to get some answers.

The SPEAKER: They will be followed up.

Jade Benham: On a point of order, Speaker, I too am seeking some answers to expired questions: question 250 to the Minister for Environment, question 212 to the Minister for Ambulance Services, question 106 to the Minister for Roads and Road Safety, question 93 to the Minister for Health Infrastructure, question 91 to the Minister for Health, adjournment matter 91 for the Minister for Environment and adjournment matter 23 for the Minister for Treaty and First Peoples. Again I would ask for follow-up on these actions as soon as possible.

Sam Hibbins: On a point of order, Speaker, I have got a number of overdue and unanswered questions and adjournment matters that I seek to be followed up with the relevant minister. That is adjournment matter 27 to the Minister for Housing, adjournment matter 107 to the Minister for Public Transport, constituency question 96 to the Minister for Public Transport and question on notice 97 to the Minister for Housing. I appreciate your assistance.

Constituency questions

Caulfield electorate

David SOUTHWICK (Caulfield) (14:53): (120) My question is to the Minister for Transport and Infrastructure. Glen Huntly traders are on their knees at the moment. We have been advocating strongly for the removal of the Glen Huntly level crossing, and I am glad that is being done. Unfortunately, many of those traders, some of which have been there for 15-plus years, have never seen it so bad because of the interruptions. The minister has been ignoring calls to actually meet and to talk about how they can be supported through this. This is a very unique infrastructure project because it is a tram being removed at the same time as a train, and the actual street has been closed off pretty much for 10 weeks. Many of these traders are saying that this is worse than even COVID in terms of what they are seeing and the impact on those small businesses. These small businesses are on their knees. They desperately need the support. The last thing we need is these small businesses to close, and I ask what will the minister be doing to assist these small businesses, and will she meet with them to help support them through these very difficult times?

Bass electorate

Jordan CRUGNALE (Bass) (14:54): (121) My question is for the Minister for Housing, and the action I seek is a Bass electorate update on the Big Housing Build and for the minister to visit and meet with local advocates and innovative builders. Our government recognises that homelessness comes in a myriad of forms for a myriad of reasons, and to begin to address this, our government's landmark \$5.3 billion Big Housing Build investment is delivering 12,000 new homes right across the state. This program is changing lives. Housing availability, however, continues to be a major challenge right across my electorate but also in the Bass Coast, where we have committed a minimum of \$25 million towards addressing this. There are currently six projects progressing, 34 homes underway and \$13.5 million of investment so far. I look forward to the minister's update on these projects and the supports our government is delivering for our community members in my electorate and taking up my offer to visit and discuss these important investments with local advocates. Everyone deserves the security and stability of a home.

Gippsland East electorate

Tim BULL (Gippsland East) (14:55): (122) My question is to the Minister for Environment in the other place, and the information I seek is when the Nyerimilang boardwalk, which fell into disrepair last December, will be fixed. Nyerimilang park is a beautiful little area between Lakes Entrance and Metung on the Gippsland Lakes. In December a really popular boardwalk which leads to one of the more popular lookouts fell into disrepair. It was reported by the volunteers at the park who are seeking that it be fixed. The tape was very quick to go up to block off this boardwalk and the access to the lookout, but they have not been so quick in getting there to fix it. Parks Victoria do not have a great record in fixing stuff in my electorate. There is a lot of bushfire infrastructure that is still not repaired two years later. I do not blame the parkies on the ground – this is the bureaucracy higher up – but I ask the minister to please provide a date when this will be fixed.

Yan Yean electorate

Lauren KATHAGE (Yan Yean) (14:56): (123) My question is for the Minister for Mental Health, and it relates to the Victorian suicide prevention and response strategy. Minister, I understand that the public consultation on this strategy recently ended and that the government has now received over 240 submissions from a range of individuals and organisations. Each submission is an invaluable insight into the unique needs of so many Victorians. Research indicates that people with disabilities, including neurodiverse individuals, are at a greater risk of suicide than the general population. Can the minister advise how the Victorian suicide prevention and response strategy will support people with disabilities?

Rowville electorate

Kim WELLS (Rowville) (14:57): (124) My question is to the Minister for Tourism, Sport and Major Events. Minister, when will you commit funds to fix the Knox Park car park and driveway to create a safer traffic environment for the constituents of Rowville? Knox Park is currently home to Knox Churches soccer club, which boasts 12 teams this year, as well as providing space for the Knox Obedience Dog Club, Knox Churches cricket club, Knox Athletics Club and Knox BMX. And the local CFAs conduct a lot of their training there. The traffic conditions in the park are just dangerous. The current gravel car park has been known to create potholes in the winter months and bog cars in the unstable surface. Additionally, when motorists attempt to exit the car park, they are faced with a dangerous intersection that lacks adequate road infrastructure, such as 'Keep clear' signs and slip lanes. Knox Park is an amazing centre point of the Rowville electorate community. It is about time the state government recognised this fact and came to the table to find a workable solution to the frankly inadequate facilities.

Kororoit electorate

Luba GRIGOROVITCH (Kororoit) (14:58): (125) My question is for the Minister for Transport and Infrastructure. With 23,000 vehicles passing through each day and boom gates down for up to 60 per cent of the morning peak, it is no surprise that the level crossing at Mount Derrimut Road simply had to go. The roar and cheers of excitement from my constituents could be heard for suburbs when the new 1.2-kilometre elevated rail bridge was put into place, seeing the end of those dreaded boom gates that had been there for over 40 years. Now that the boom gates are gone and number 68 of the 110 promised dangerous and congested level crossings has been removed, can the minister please provide a time line of when works are going to start on the level crossing removal at Hopkins Road in Truganina? It is something very dear to the constituents of Kororoit, and we are very much looking forward to this happening.

Shepparton electorate

Kim O'KEEFFE (Shepparton) (14:59): (126) My question is to the Minister for Roads and Road Safety. On 20 April we had a horrific accident at the intersection of Labuan Road and the Murray Valley Highway in which a truck and two cars were involved. Tragically, the accident claimed the lives of five people. My condolences go to the families and friends of the deceased; my thoughts are with them, the truck driver, the community and the emergency responders as we all deal with this enormous loss and tragic event. This is a very dangerous intersection, with a rise before the intersection from an old railway line only a very short distance from the intersection. This rise blocks visibility of the intersection ahead, resulting in vehicles not getting enough warning that there is a 'Give way' sign and that there is a major intersection ahead. Will the minister take the steps necessary to make this intersection safe as a matter of urgency?

Sunbury electorate

Josh BULL (Sunbury) (15:00): (127) My question is for the Minister for Energy and Resources. Can the minister please provide the latest information on the current round of the power saving bonus and its uptake and benefits across the Sunbury electorate? As we know, the cost-of-living pressures for Victorian households is something that is raised both with me as the local member and with my office. The Andrews Labor government has of course taken significant and important steps to assist households, and the power saving bonus is just one of these measures. My office has already assisted hundreds of people across the Sunbury electorate to fill out their applications, and local residents are extremely grateful for the \$250 payment. I look forward to hearing from the minister on this matter. We know that the power saving bonus is something that is very warmly welcomed by the Victorian community, and I acknowledge and thank the minister for her hard work in her portfolio.

South-West Coast electorate

Roma BRITNELL (South-West Coast) (15:01): (128) My constituency question is for the Minister for Ambulance Services, and the information I seek is for the minister to provide a detailed explanation of why Ambulance Victoria helicopters have ceased landing at Portland hospital helipad and for the risk analysis documents to be made available for public scrutiny and community consultation. Instead of landing on the helipad right in front of the hospital, Ambulance Victoria helicopters are now landing either at the Portland airport, some 14 kilometres from the hospital, or on the oval at Hanlon Park, well over a kilometre from the hospital. We all know that when an Ambulance Victoria helicopter is involved, the stakes are high. Travel times can impact on outcomes, and people can and will die from delays. Minister, can you explain to the South-West Coast community why you have made the alarming decision to ban Ambulance Victoria helicopters from landing at the Portland hospital helipad without adequate stakeholder engagement?

Wendouree electorate

Juliana ADDISON (Wendouree) (15:01): (129) My question is for the Minister for Housing, about the progress of the number of big build projects that are underway in my electorate of Wendouree. I am so proud we are delivering more social and affordable housing in my community and creating jobs in the building industry. As well as the \$50 million Delacombe revitalisation project, we are building 25 homes in two Delacombe locations, to be delivered in partnership with Centacare Housing Service. These properties will provide long-term housing to support people on the Victorian Housing Register. We are also building 16 homes in Redan, delivered in partnership with the Haven Foundation, for people living with mental illness. Statewide our investment of \$5.3 billion will deliver more 12,000 new social and affordable homes and transform lives. Significantly, 25 per cent of this investment is occurring in regional Victoria, and Ballarat is guaranteed a minimum local investment of \$80 million.

Bills**Disability and Social Services Regulation Amendment Bill 2023***Second reading***Debate resumed.**

Tim BULL (Gippsland East) (15:03): I will resume where I left off just prior to the lunchbreak. Our disability service providers are now operating in what is quite a competitive world under the national disability insurance scheme. It is important that governments do all we can, whether it be at the state level or the federal level, to avoid duplication and support viability of the service providers, particularly supporting them in areas of narrow markets and thin markets. It is very common to have these thin markets in rural and regional areas, where service providers certainly are not growing on trees.

As stated earlier, this is largely the same bill as we saw in 2022 apart from some additional reforms to support the functions of the new Social Services Regulator when it comes into operation in 2024, and I will touch on a few of those changes a little bit later in my contribution, but I am happy to say up-front that they are changes that we do support.

Just on the changes or the amendments that have been made to the bill that was presented to this chamber last year, there are also three minor technical amendments, and they seem to be errors that have just been tightened up or fixed. Unfortunately, over recent years we have seen a number of bills come into this chamber in a range of portfolios and then we have seen amendment bills coming back a matter of months later to fix up errors that should have been sorted out in the original amendment bills. So all up, this bill makes changes to a number of acts. It amends the Disability Act 2006, it amends the Residential Tenancies Act 1997 and the Disability Service Safeguards Act 2018, as well as the Social Services Regulation Act 2021, which is what I just touched on a short time ago. There is no major policy change in any of these amendments, and it appears to be based on continued transition

to the NDIS – so aligning rules and regulations in the state jurisdiction to those which exist under the NDIS and streamlining those processes.

The changes to the Disability Act 2006 clarify that the secretary is only responsible for the services that the secretary funds. In this regard there is no change to the bill that we saw in this house last year. When the Social Services Regulation Act 2021 commences, the majority of providers registered as disability service providers will not be providing services that are funded by the secretary and the amendments that are before the chamber today in this bill will reduce any overlap of legislative responsibility and ensure that there is clarity regarding the secretary's responsibilities here in Victoria. It clarifies that the secretary can acquire, hold or dispose of land for the purposes of being a specialist disability accommodation provider, and amendments are also made to enable the secretary to dispose of or deal with land with or without consideration in certain circumstances. I thank the departmental representatives for getting back to me on the queries that I had there, and there are no major concerns in relation to that.

The bill importantly improves information-sharing arrangements. There are currently concerns that there is a lack of a safety net in relation to some situations to enable people to carry out their functions under the act and that a person may be found guilty of a particular offence if there is an unauthorised disclosure. The amendments will ensure that important and critical information can indeed be shared when it is necessary and that the appropriate safeguards are in place. That is an alteration that we certainly support. It is often a tightrope when you are working with these information-sharing arrangements: you need to put in place a framework where information can be shared freely and safely for the benefit of people, but you also have to weigh that up against respect and privacy for the person who you are sharing that information about. I use the term 'walking a tightrope', but it is often just an area where a good dose of common sense is required when dealing with these matters.

The bill clarifies residential services rights for disability residents whose accommodation is exempt from the Residential Tenancies Act. It clarifies the services being provided, the rights, the duties and the requirements of residents, what they may be subject to within that service and the roles and responsibilities of service providers delivering residential and treatment services.

Restrictive practices is an area that can be a contentious matter in the disability sector and also in the senior Victorians sector, and this bill further aligns the restrictive practices guidelines with that which exists under the NDIS. Some amendments were made in 2019 when we had a bill in this chamber, but they did not completely fix the issue appropriately. So we are revisiting this, and we hope that the government has got it right this time around and that alignment with the NDIS has been made appropriately. The second-reading speech indicates that these amendments are required to remove the uncertainty around the application of existing parts and divisions in the act. What this goes to the heart of is better aligning the requirements and responsibilities for NDIS- and state-funded disability providers, basically giving them one set of rules and ensuring that there is some consistency. But on top of that consistency is accountability in the use of restrictive practices, which, as I said, is a contentious area, and we need clear overarching guidelines. It ensures that the existing offence that relates to the use of unauthorised restrictive practices and service providers also applies to registered NDIS providers and that registered NDIS providers must meet the requirements for authorisation of restrictive practices in the Disability Act. That is for people accessing services funded through the Commonwealth disability sector or the older Australians program. It will also expand the role of the senior practitioner – this is an important element – to include the promotion of the reduction and the elimination of the use of restrictive practices where possible.

As I said, this is certainly a contentious area, but these additional powers to provide directions to providers about the use of restrictive practices and also about the appointment of authorised program officers is very important. Restrictive practices should only be used as a last resort. I think all members in the chamber would agree with that. It is a less than ideal scenario, but in some of the more complex and serious situations it is certainly required. They are often not pleasant, and it is important that we keep these restrictive practices to a bare minimum. We accept that the intention of this change is to

provide consistency in their application and to ensure these practices are used only when all other options and alternatives have been exhausted.

The bill will also dissolve the Disability Services Board, and the reason given by the minister for this in the second-reading speech is the majority of disability services have transitioned to the NDIS – that I agree with. The role of the disability services commissioner and the board has certainly been significantly reduced – that cannot be argued – and the board is no longer required. I just would not like to see this board being dismantled while it still has some role to play, but I take the minister on trust that the timing is right there. It is inevitable that the board will not be required at all at some stage, but it will not lead to a reduction in safeguards, because the appropriate safeguards will still be in place courtesy of the national disability insurance scheme.

The bill also allows the minister to declare new types of accommodation at which persons receive disability services to be subject to the community visitors program. The community visitors program is a really important service in this state. It provides enormous oversight for people who are living in disability accommodation – the various forms or modes of disability accommodation. Our community visitors provide that great level of oversight for those who may not have family or friends who are able to fulfil that role. The expansion of the number of facilities that our community visitors can go to is something that we strongly support, because it will certainly enhance safeguards. Properties approved by the senior practitioner as suitable to provide treatment will also be subject to the community visitors program as part of that expansion, and again that is something that we support.

The next amendment is to the Residential Tenancies Act 1997 in relation to specialist disability accommodation (SDA) enrolled dwellings, and the bill removes barriers for residents of group homes provided by disability service providers from receiving rights under the Residential Tenancies Act. This was an element of the bill that we spoke on at length last year and supported. It amends the Residential Tenancies Act to ensure residents in group homes meet the definitions of the act and residential rights and protections are indeed afforded to them. The bill will provide for transition of existing group homes to specialist disability accommodation residency arrangements. Now, this was the original objective of the previous amendments made to the Residential Tenancies Act earlier in the last term that were not realised, which the government said was ‘due to unanticipated impediments for persons to access specialist disability accommodation provided under the NDIS’. I think that is a fancy way of saying, ‘We forgot about it. This was an oversight and now we’re going back to fix the problem we created.’ But nevertheless it is in there, it needs to be in there and it needs to be fixed. So what this does is introduce a new concept into the Residential Tenancies Act of an SDA dwelling to encompass people living in that form of accommodation under that umbrella. This will extend high-level tenancy protections beyond SDA-enrolled dwellings, which is the current legislation, to include any other permanent dwelling that provides long-term accommodation and where daily independent living support is provided to one or more residents with a disability, funded by a specified entity or program. It appears on face value that one of the clear intentions here is to pick up supported independent living clients.

One of the challenges here that the government will face and the department will face, I guess, is making the community, the people who are living in these facilities, aware of those changes. So there needs to be a really thorough campaign to ensure that all people living in supported independent living units are identified, contacted and communicated with in relation to these changes and these safeguards that are being put in place. I will be interested to see how the government and the department go about that.

While on disability, housing and tenancies, I must add it would be good for the minister to explain the increase in disability housing since the Big Housing Build, as the government refers to it, commenced. It was not long ago – I think it was probably in November or December last year – that we saw a lot of ministerial backslapping about the fact that the big build had reached the halfway mark of creating 12,000 new homes. I was told by the minister last year under a question that of these 12,000 new homes 5 per cent would be allocated to the disability sector and built along the disability guidelines. Now, 5 per cent of 12,000 is 600, so therefore the disability sector would have been quite right in thinking that they were going to get 600 more homes delivered. However, the recent revelations show

that public housing has only increased by 74 homes in the last four years – 74 homes. If 5 per cent is going to the disability sector, 5 per cent of 74 is about four homes that have been a net gain for the disability sector thus far under the Big Housing Build. So it would be good to get some specifics off the minister on just how many homes have been built under the Big Housing Build and just how many have been built for the disability sector, because they are expecting 600, and I reckon at the moment, judging by figures and percentages, we are sitting on about four and we do not look like we will be getting to 600.

The bill also amends the Disability Service Safeguards Act 2018 in relation to registration requirements. We support this. The only question I would ponder is: have we gone far enough in relation to streamlining processes? The amendments will allow the Disability Worker Registration Board of Victoria to accept NDIS clearance in lieu of criminal history checks when disability workers voluntarily seek to register, and we strongly support that. The screening checks for NDIS-registered disability workers are currently quite duplicative, and service providers will tell you this every time you meet with them. The amendments that are here before us will reduce some of that red tape and duplication for disability workers who are seeking registration, but I still firmly believe there is much, much more that we as a Parliament – a government and a Parliament more widely – can do to streamline the processes to encourage more disability workers to work in that sector. Now, we have got to have the oversights we do and you have got to walk this line again. You have got to have appropriate oversights, but it seems to be more burdensome in Victoria for a disability worker to enter that sector than it is in other states, and I would like to see us doing more and working harder on streamlining those processes to get workers into that sector.

Amendments to the Social Services Regulation Act 2021 – this is the new part of the bill that we never saw in the version that came forth last year, and it appears to be the only major change. As we know, a new regulatory scheme for social services will take effect from 1 July 2024, and we are told by the government that it aims to strengthen protections for those accessing social services. One of the new powers is allowing an authorised officer to enter – as we read in the second-reading speech – the bedrooms of those that they may be investigating or that may be involved in an inquiry into whether appropriate actions or behaviours have taken place. Again, you are walking this line. We agree with the government that this amendment is necessary to ensure that the service provider is complying with the appropriate standards and has the appropriate safeguards in place, but we also are aware that residents need protections around their privacy and their rights.

This new power is subject to a number of safeguards, including that the authorised officer believes that it is certainly necessary – which you would take for granted would be the case – but also that there is no other less intrusive way to get the answer or to investigate what they are trying to do as a result of the inspection. Given some of the practices that have been publicised over recent years and will no doubt be coming forth in the current Royal Commission into Violence, Abuse, Neglect and Exploitation of People with Disability, having read this I am confident that the government has got the balance right between those strong investigative powers and also looking after the rights of residents around privacy and safeguards.

In summary, the bill makes a number of amendments. It aligns state services better with the NDIS. It removes some discrepancies that had existed between state processes and NDIS processes. It improves practices around supervised treatment orders in relation to getting some consistency. It updates information-sharing opportunities to improve safeguards, disbands the obsolete Disability Services Board, expands the role of the community visitors program, improves tenancy safeguards, clarifies the role of the secretary, provides greater oversight and inspection powers for those living in special residential services, allows the disability worker registration board to accept NDIS clearance in lieu of criminal history checks and removes barriers for residence and group homes provided by the disability service providers from receiving rights under the Residential Tenancies Act.

As I said, some of these are correcting oversights and some are new initiatives. I am sure I am speaking for everyone in the chamber in saying that there would not be a member here that does not support

strong and robust protections and safeguards for the most vulnerable in our communities, but there remain service providers in this state who believe that whilst that is a paramount priority, perhaps we have not got, I guess, the alignment with the NDIS right in relation to streamlining processes around worker registrations. They are seeking better alignment, and they do not want the new process that is coming into play next year to create more overlap and more administrative burden over and above what is required.

The bill addresses a small number of areas in relation to duplication. If the royal commission presents its findings in relation to safeguards later this year, we may then find another situation where the government is introducing another safeguards amendment bill potentially, depending on what the royal commission hands down, so it is interesting timing that we are discussing this now, a few months before that final report comes down. But if it does come down and it does require further updates, it would be good for the government to continue to work with service providers in the sector who I am sure are telling the government the same story that they are telling me – that they want those administration services more refined and less burdensome for not only service providers but also those working in the sector. The government has got to ensure that we do not add unnecessary duplication and costly administrative burdens to the sector. One of the main reasons for that is we have seen that some service providers have disappeared altogether and some are facing extreme difficulties in remaining viable, and when we have in place administrative burdens that are not required or that are duplicative, we are running into the area of more hours of administration and office work, and then that affects the viability of the disability service provider. We are seeing some reducing their services. Some have actually folded, but others are now, because of that viability around financial burden, reducing some of the important services they provide to communities, and I am even seeing that in my own electorate of East Gippsland.

So we are not opposing this bill, as the amendments generally relate to changes that align with the NDIS, improvements in streamlining some of the processes – but we want to go further – and improvements in standards for people with disability around tenancy and communication around treatment plans and treatment orders. But we call on the government to continue to look at ways it can avoid duplication, streamline processes and ensure that the new scheme introduced next year reflects this.

Lauren KATHAGE (Yan Yean) (15:24): I rise to speak in favour of the Disability and Social Services Regulation Amendment Bill 2023. This bill reflects the Labor government's commitment to creating an inclusive, accessible and safe Victoria that upholds the rights of people with disability, celebrates diversity and pride and expands opportunities to belong and have autonomy. This is the vision set out in our four-year state disability plan *Inclusive Victoria*. In the plan we have committed to taking action and creating long-lasting change for people with disability. This bill is part of our efforts towards that end.

The development of that plan and indeed this bill reflect our commitment to heeding the righteous cry of people with disability across the world: nothing about us without us – having people with disability at the table when policies, programs and services are designed. I am passionate about this principle. Working overseas with people with disability I saw firsthand how this leads to better outcomes.

I wish to emphasise that I do not speak today as a representative of people with disability but simply from the perspective of a family member, a standard Victorian. My brother has an intellectual disability acquired at birth. Through the ups and downs of his life I have seen the impact that government policy and community attitudes can have. Famous in our family is the story of my brother, through a policy of former Prime Minister Tony Abbott, having to be marched off to the GP to see if he really still did have a disability if he wanted to keep his disability support pension. This brings to mind the story of my nephew who has Down syndrome, who after turning 18 and when discussing voting with his parents asked them, 'Which party supports people with Down syndrome?' I am sure you can guess what my answer was to that.

So I am pleased that this bill is a result of thorough consultations during the development of the Disability Amendment Bill 2022. The consultations included the public consultation process in 2021 and input from the expert Disability Act review advisory group, which was formally led by Graeme Innes AM, a former disability discrimination commissioner for Australia and someone I am pleased to have met in my lifetime. I am proud that we have incorporated the insights and feedback from these consultations to ensure that this bill is comprehensive and effective.

The bill will increase residential protections for Victorians in disability accommodation. Firstly, it establishes clear rights and duties for people who are under civil or criminal orders while residing in disability residential services. It also sets parameters for service providers to follow while delivering residential and treatment services. Secondly, the bill ensures that individuals residing in specialist disability accommodation which does not meet the current definitions outlined in the Residential Tenancies Act 1997 are provided with appropriate protections for their residential rights. This is important because we firmly believe that all Victorians should enjoy rights and protections.

In a family meeting a couple of weeks ago we were discussing the support services and activities my brother accesses and what we could do to make sure he was getting the most out of them. My eldest sister said, 'We want him to have an ordinary life. That's all we're trying to do.' To an outsider that might seem like a callous statement, that we are aiming too low, but in fact it is a reflection of the fact that disability is a normal part of every community. When we say we want my brother to have an ordinary life, we mean that we want him to have that same experience of being an active and valued member of his community, and chief among those experiences, we want him to enjoy the same rights as everyone else – the right to a safe home, the right to certainty of tenancy, the right to have limited rent increases. It is what is right. We want him to have appropriate additional strengthened protections against eviction and for information to be communicated in a way that he understands.

Another welcomed aspect of the bill is how it will reduce duplication and improve coordination. It does this in two ways. Firstly, it will strengthen and clarify the provisions for sharing critical information between service providers by removing unnecessary barriers that may hinder the process. There is an incredible amount of paperwork associated with disability. I have had many conversations with people bemoaning the seemingly endless need to procure another specialist report. I spoke recently with a mother in Yan Yean whose son has acquired a spinal injury, who explained to me that, with all the paperwork, she felt like she had a new part-time job.

The information-sharing provisions in this bill will make it easier for people with disability and their families, reducing the need to source and transmit information between different service providers. Reducing the ferrying of paperwork will be a welcome relief for people who just want to focus on their wellbeing or just want to focus on supporting their family member.

This bill will strengthen quality and safeguards and services for Victorians with disability. One of the most significant amendments in this bill will allow authorised officers to enter bedrooms in supported residential services and disability residential services without consent in limited circumstances, whilst several safeguards will ensure the powers are only used when necessary. The Royal Commission into Violence, Abuse, Neglect and Exploitation of People with Disability and key stakeholders, notably the public advocate, have focused on the need to guarantee proper safeguards for vulnerable residents. Several media reports have surfaced about poor care standards for vulnerable people living in supported residential services in particular.

My brother only moved out of home 18 months ago, having lived more than 50 years under the care and protection of our parents. In his life my brother has experienced physical abuse by members of the public and has been tricked out of money and possessions. So for my family there was of course trepidation when he moved out of home, out of our care and into the care of others. It would be comforting for many people that these increased safeguards are being introduced. I know full well the agony and the guilt felt by family members when their brother, sister, father or mother is abused. I know full well how important this amendment is, and I am proud to speak in support of it. The bill

also provides greater access for community visitors in additional categories of disability accommodation, and I fully support this futureproofing of safeguards as well.

This bill has been introduced to ensure that the use of restrictive practices is consistent and accountable for both NDIS and state-funded disability service providers. It eliminates any unnecessary duplication and aligns the approval requirements. My brother phones me for a chat multiple times each day. We discuss dinner plans, the weather, what trip he is going on that day. In fact he phones me and each of my four sisters and my parents multiple times each day. His phone is his link to us. But when my brother is not well, the phone is a problem. When he fervently believes there are bombs in the roof or people coming to get him, he uses that same phone to call the police at all hours of the day and night. Removing my brother's phone would be a restrictive practice. You can see from what I have described that careful and thorough thinking is needed to make sure that the help you are trying to give someone through a restrictive practice does not end up harming them. This bill clarifies the process that service providers must go through before using a restrictive practice. It reduces uncertainty and duplication, allowing efforts to be focused on finding the best solution for the person with disability.

There are many benefits for people with disability, their families and disability workers within this bill. This government has worked faithfully on ensuring our legislative frameworks are fit for purpose, are contemporary and create meaningful change for people with disability. What will not change is this government's commitment to people with disability. This government has provided \$3 billion worth of investment for inclusive education, including an upgrade to every single specialist school in our state. It has also provided \$5.4 million to construct 30 Changing Places facilities so that people with disability can enjoy community facilities and tourist destinations just like everyone else. The list goes on, just as our commitment will go on. For families like mine, this bill is further proof that this government listens, this government does what is right and this government does what matters.

Danny O'BRIEN (Gippsland South) (15:34): I am pleased to also rise to say a few words on the Disability and Social Services Regulation Amendment Bill 2023. I was not going to make it personal or about me, but the member for Yan Yean's contribution reminded me of some of my own experiences. Indeed I do not want to make light of it for a second, member for Yan Yean, but the commentary about your brother's phone just had me thinking of *Love Actually* and the American brother and sister in that situation, where the phone was a crucial link for the brother, who had mental health issues more than disability, but I understand the circumstance.

I think, if I am right, you mentioned that you had a nephew with Down syndrome. Mine is the reverse – I had an uncle with Down syndrome. I guess debating this bill is showing to some degree how far we have come. When my uncle was born in the early 1940s my grandmother was told that he would not survive beyond about 20 years of age and they probably should put him in a home. Nothing could have been further from their minds. They were determined to raise the youngest of six, my father's younger brother. Brian became an absolutely crucial part not only of the family but of the entire community in far east Gippsland where they lived, as many people with Down syndrome do; they often are the heart and soul of communities because they get to know everyone and they love everyone. So I am pleased to follow the member for Yan Yean and her heartfelt comments on this bill, which, as the Shadow Minister for Disability, Ageing and Carers the member for Gippsland East indicated, we are not opposing. Indeed the bulk of the bill is something that we support, although we put the clarification in there that some of the things that are intended sound good in theory and sound good in a piece of legislation, but whether they work in practice is the question.

The bill will amend the Disability Act 2006 to clarify that the secretary is only responsible for services that the secretary funds – in other words, that are taxpayer funded. It clarifies the ability of the secretary to acquire, hold and dispose of land for the purposes of being a specialist disability accommodation provider, and I am going to come back to that in a moment on an issue in my electorate. It improves information-sharing arrangements and clarifies residential services rights for disability residents. It further aligns the restrictive practices to facilitate transition to the NDIS, and much of this legislation is about the continuing NDIS transition. It dissolves the Disability Services Board and expands the

properties that community visitors can visit. It also then goes on to amend the Residential Tenancies Act 1997 in relation to SDA-enrolled dwellings and amends the Disability Service Safeguards Act 2018 in relation to registration requirements. The addition to this bill compared to the previous bill in 2021 is an amendment to the Social Services Regulation Act 2021, but essentially better aligning services and streamlining things is the intention of the bill, and that is why we support that intention. As I said, though, it is always a little bit of a concern as to whether these things will be delivered in practice, because certainly this is a complex area.

I would not for a second suggest that I fully understand the disability services sector at all. Indeed I am following the member for Gippsland East. He has got lived experience and long experience as the shadow minister so understands this area far better than most of us in this chamber. I do know, though, from feedback from families, from people needing access to disability services and from those working in the sector that it is complex, that it is confusing and that the transition to the NDIS has been difficult for some. I must say, having come into Parliament at about the time that the NDIS was coming into being, I did expect it to be far more complex. Maybe I just got lucky in Gippsland South, but I really have not had that many constituents coming to me with issues. Hopefully, perhaps, they are going to the federal members who are dealing with it, but I have been pleasantly surprised at how it has transitioned across.

Indeed the experience generally that I have had with constituents is that the NDIS packages have been a godsend for many. Problems, though, I am sure are out there. The federal minister indicated as much recently, and certainly the growth in the cost of the scheme is one thing that the current federal government will be grappling with over coming years, because it is certainly an issue. But I know one, and I will name her, because she is very famous in Mirboo North. Julie Trease is an NDIS client who is loved by everybody in Mirboo North and very well known as she wanders up and down the street, helps at the op shop and everything. I know her parents were very grateful for the package that was provided to them under the NDIS, and she now has a collection of girls, as she calls them, who assist with her package and take her out each day and take her to different activities. Julie is just a treasure in Mirboo North.

I did want to come back, as I said, to the issue of disability accommodation, an issue I want to raise in passing, because the bill does go to the issue of the secretary being able to acquire, hold and dispose of land for the purposes of being a specialist disability accommodation provider. I note the comments of my colleague the member for Gippsland East that those living with a disability deserve the highest levels of protection, and that is something that most of our disability providers do very well. The issue I wanted to mention in passing is with respect to Mirridong Services in Yarram, which has been a wonderful provider of disability services, particularly day services but now accommodation as well for some time. I was very frustrated to learn earlier this year that a problem that I thought we had solved a number of years ago continues to persist due to what I would call bureaucracy at its best. This is a situation where Mirridong has clients in a couple of units in Lawler Street in Yarram. They are built on council land. They were originally funded by a grant that was delivered way back in the 1980s – I think it was in fact 1988 – so these are 35-year-old units. The Wellington shire agreed to transfer these units to Mirridong because they were in need of an upgrade – 35 years old, they desperately needed an upgrade – and were prepared to do that for the sum of \$1 because they know Mirridong provides these services. But because the department provided the grant way back, 35 years ago, the department would not agree to the transfer. Firstly, they wanted additional land in lieu from the shire, which the shire was not in a position to do, and then it put all sorts of restrictions on Mirridong in actually taking on this land. I thought we had dealt with it. Indeed the previous Minister for Housing had written to me with some changes, an agreement way back in 2020, and then earlier this year I find it still has not been transferred to Mirridong. It is that sort of bureaucracy that we are trying to address here, partly in this bill, but we need actually some common sense from our departments to ensure –

Tim Richardson interjected.

Danny O'BRIEN: Well, that is exactly right, member for Mordialloc. Sometimes you do say, 'What is that?' This is a situation where the property had never been part of the public housing suite. It had always been disability accommodation with Mirridong. There was zero loss to the taxpayer or to the Victorian government by transferring this because they did not use it for public housing at the time. It had never been, I think apart from the first year or two, anything other than disability accommodation. So transferring it across to Mirridong so that they could invest in it and actually make sure that it was appropriate for the current tenant – there is, I believe, a 25-year-old man in one of the units now, but it desperately needs an upgrade. I have written to the Minister for Housing again – the current minister – and I am hoping that that will be resolved soon.

This legislation has, as I said, a number of elements to it. I think the member for Gippsland East went into great detail on what those issues are. We are not opposing this legislation, and I look forward to it moving through the Parliament.

Chris COUZENS (Geelong) (15:44): I am pleased to rise to contribute to the Disability and Social Services Regulation Amendment Bill 2023. With over 1 million people with a disability in Victoria, we also have large numbers of people with a disability in Geelong. I am really privileged to have the opportunity to work with many of those people, who have often been active in the introduction of the NDIS, having that head office located in Geelong. So we have a very strong, active group of people with lived experience – people like Linda Blake, Lynne Foreman, Christine Smith and so many more – who have been active for many, many years, who have lived experience and who understand the needs of people with a whole range of different disabilities.

This bill makes important amendments to enhance services and safeguard rights and protections for people with disability, and we are talking about some of the most vulnerable people in our community. People with disabilities have the right, just like all of us, to an inclusive and accessible community, and that is what my community in Geelong are really actively working towards – making sure that somebody who requires a Changing Places facility, for example, can actually go out for dinner, go to an event or go shopping and have that facility there within a reasonable distance. Up until this government came into power and really put a great focus on Changing Places facilities, we did not have those in Geelong. We now have three Changing Places facilities within the CBD area, at Westfield and at Kardinia Park, and I understand we are putting a second one in Kardinia Park so people can actually go and watch the football but also have the facilities that they need. Also, we have one going in at the Royal Geelong Yacht Club on the waterfront, which is really exciting for people that rely on that facility, because presently, if they go to the waterfront, they are restricted. In fact some of them do not go because they do not have that facility there right now. So we are really excited about the future of that and that that will be there so that those people can enjoy a quality of life just like every one of us expects to have.

People with disabilities should feel safe and secure in their own community, and that is a really big focus in my community. People want to know that they are safe in their home whether they are in residential care or supported care. It is a really important issue, and I think this bill goes to addressing some of the issues that people with disabilities have experienced over a very long period of time. I do want to take the opportunity, though, to acknowledge and thank disability workers and carers for the great work that they do. We know that during COVID they have been under enormous pressure to protect not only themselves but the people they work with and their family members. It is really important that we understand just how hard those people have worked and acknowledge and thank them for what they do. Also, the Health and Community Services Union, the union that looks after those people, does a mighty job in representing their members and raising the sorts of issues that impact on carers and disability workers right across this state.

I also want to mention the great work of Wathaurong Aboriginal Co-operative in the disability space and the work that they do. We talk about people with disabilities being really vulnerable – well, Aboriginal people are even more vulnerable, and we know that. We know the issues that they face every day, and if they have got a disability, they become even more vulnerable in our community. In Victoria

I am really proud of the fact that we are working towards treaty and that some of those issues will start to be resolved, and there is the Voice at a federal level. It is not just as simple as saying 'We're going to have the Voice, and all these problems will be solved' because we know that this is a long journey, but hopefully if that Voice referendum is passed and we have a yes vote, the journey on to treaty, truth and justice will be part of that process. I would hope that we would start to see a closing of the gap that we know statistically is still a major issue for First Nations people in this country, including in my electorate and including across Victoria. So these are really important reforms.

I think we are lucky in Geelong to have some great services. One of those would be the Barwon Disability Resource Council, which advocates for and supports people with a disability whether they are living in supported accommodation or whether they are living at home with their family or independently. They do a mighty job in providing services to people with disabilities in my community, as does GenU, which is an organisation that has been around for about a hundred years or something. It started off as Karingal and has now morphed into GenU. They do tireless work. I have had the opportunity to talk to a lot of those workers, a lot of the carers and a lot of the clients of GenU and the BDRC, and I hear their stories and their experiences of what happens to them and where things are not right for them. So I know that they will be really pleased to know that these changes in this legislation will help protect people and their vulnerabilities, particularly in supported accommodation.

We have heard from the Royal Commission into Violence, Abuse, Neglect and Exploitation of People with Disability at a federal level. I was involved in the parliamentary inquiry into abuse in disability services, and we heard horrific stories. I think we all have a responsibility to ensure that we are doing everything possible to address the issues and that people with disabilities – some of the most vulnerable people in our community – are getting the protections and the services that they need. So this is really important, and any legislation that provides that protection will obviously always get my support but also the support of my community in Geelong. Having worked closely with them I understand 100 per cent the issues that they are raising and what their needs are. This is really important legislation for them.

As I said, we all have a responsibility to make sure the National Disability Insurance Scheme delivers on its promises to provide a better deal for people with disabilities and their families. The strong advocacy that has come out of my community around the NDIS is incredible. The people I mentioned earlier plus a lot of other people with lived experience – carers and parents of people with disabilities – have all been active in pursuing the National Disability Insurance Agency but also having the headquarters in Geelong. So that was a fantastic campaign.

We now have 150,000 people in Victoria who are active participants in the scheme. The government has worked really closely with the disability sector and advocates to develop our state disability plan, with \$15.1 million allocated in the 2022–23 state budget, so I think Victoria has shown that it cares about vulnerable people, particularly people with disabilities. We have put the \$5.4 million of funding that was provided towards constructing 30 Changing Places facilities, and as I mentioned earlier, they are so important. It might not seem like much to us, but people were in tears when we opened the Changing Places facilities at Kardinia Park, because it meant they could go to the football; they could participate just like everyone else in our community.

I cannot stress how much this bill means to my community of Geelong, and I am sure others across Victoria, so that we continue to improve protections, providing safe and secure environments for people wherever we can, and we have heard other contributions today reinforcing the same sorts of views in their communities. I think this is really important. Geelong has received the three Changing Places facilities and a number of other facilities, so I commend the bill to the house.

Martin CAMERON (Morwell) (15:54): I rise to talk on the Disability and Social Services Regulation Amendment Bill 2023. As my colleague the member for East Gippsland previously said, the bill is very similar to legislation that was proposed in 2022, which was allowed to lapse by the government. As we know, those living with a disability are among the most vulnerable in our

community and they deserve the highest levels of protection, while at the same time those working in the sector need a regulatory system that does not require duplication of administrative requirements.

All up, the bill amends the Disability Act 2006, the Residential Tenancies Act 1997, the Disability Service Safeguards Act 2018 and the Social Services Regulation Act 2021 and makes some consequential amendments to other acts. The bill improves information-sharing arrangements – there are currently concerns there is a lack of safety net in relation to some situations – to enable people to carry out their functions under the act and so that a person may be found guilty of an offence if there is an unauthorised disclosure. The amendments will ensure that important and critical information can be shared when it is necessary and that the safeguards are still in place. It is often a tightrope to walk around information sharing, for good reason, and respect for privacy, and often a good dose of common sense is needed and required when dealing with all these matters. Some amendments that were made in 2019 did not fix the issue of alignment appropriately, so this is being revisited with further alterations. The second reading indicates these amendments are required to remove uncertainty about the application of existing parts and divisions in the act, to better rely on requirements of responsibility for NDIS and state-funded disability providers, and to ensure there is a consistency and accountability in the use of restrictive practices.

I may just take a moment to talk about some of our providers down in the Latrobe Valley and how some of these amendments will be well received, especially with the safe sharing of vital information that will allow for a better quality of care they can provide to their clients. When speaking with different providers down at home the same issues seem to be commonplace: the ability to deal with different services and share information in a timely manner is a real bugbear with them, as is providing different services to a range of clients. Cleaning up some of these common issues will hopefully make a huge difference to both providers and clients. Some of our providers are, in no particular order: Aurora, Melba Support Services, Interchange Gippsland, Headway Gippsland, Yooralla, Scope, Coinda Hill, Statewide Autistic Services, Simba Support Services, Elite Life Care, Daily Living Disability Services, TLC Disability Support Services, Gippsland Support Services and Latrobe Valley Enterprises, who I must say have a fantastic ground crew, maintenance crew, that head around keeping everything – all the lawns and ovals – spick-and-span.

The bill will dissolve the Disability Services Board. As the majority of disability services has transitioned to the NDIS, the role of disability services commissioner and board has been significantly reduced and the board is no longer required. As such, the removal of the Disability Services Board will not lead to a reduction in safeguards for people, as these safeguards are covered under the NDIS. We hope that the board will still stay in place until this rolls over to the NDIS. The bill also allows the minister to declare new types of accommodation at which persons receive disability services to be subject to the community visitors program. This will enhance safeguards and protections for people with disability. The bill will amend the Residential Tenancies Act 1997 in relation to specialist disability accommodation enrolled dwellings. It amends the Residential Tenancies Act to ensure residents in group homes meet the definitions in the act and that residential rights and protections are afforded. Like everyone else around the state, we are in need of public housing to accommodate our most vulnerable people and provide them with a safe and secure environment to receive the best care and day-to-day life learnings. The way – *(Time expired)*

The SPEAKER: Order! The time has come for me to interrupt business for the grievance debate. The member will have the call when their matter is next before the house.

Business interrupted under sessional orders.

Grievance debate

The SPEAKER: The question is:

That grievances be noted.

Government integrity

James NEWBURY (Brighton) (16:01): I grieve for the people of Victoria. Corruption is now the new normal in Victoria. Last week we saw a red-letter day in Victoria when the Ombudsman in an unprecedented way spoke about the character and integrity of this government and its Premier. The Ombudsman said in relation to her recent report around corruption in Victoria:

It was not an educational report, it was a damning report about misconduct of ministerial advisers and ministerial responsibility for those advisers.

We know that the Ombudsman was forced to intervene in a way we have never seen before – in a way that Victorians have never seen before – because the Premier casually disregarded a report that had found what we are sadly coming to see as grey corruption in Victoria. But let us not call it ‘grey corruption’. It is a mistake to diminish it in terminology. The Ombudsman has found corruption in Victoria – and not for the first time, but I will come to that. Her work and her comments publicly – her unprecedented comments – come on the back of other findings and other comments from eminent people, very eminent people like the then IBAC Commissioner, the Parliamentary Budget Officer, the former Chief Commissioner of Police and former Supreme Court judges. The findings go to the heart of the operation of the government of Victoria and the way that it uses taxpayer money, the way that it operates – the kickbacks, the favours, the mates deals – and we have now seen report after report uncover that behaviour and a Premier who so flippantly disregards that behaviour. So I grieve on behalf of Victorians for what we are now seeing, in that corruption is now the new normal in Victoria.

Only this afternoon, when these issues were raised with the Premier and he was asked for an update on the Ombudsman’s recent report, he brushed away timeliness of acting upon them. He brushed it away in typical style, saying that ordinary, hardworking Victorians do not care about implementation of corruption findings. How extraordinary it is to have an Ombudsman reflect so damningly on a government and damningly on the Premier, in questioning his views on corruption and integrity, but then for the Premier to double down on those findings and brush away any need to implement changes in the way this government operates this afternoon – only today. It is outrageous. So I grieve for Victorians and what we are living through – a government that will be only too happy to see the back of Daniel Andrews, the Premier of Victoria.

The Ombudsman’s intervention follows, only at the end of last year, the IBAC former commissioner writing to the Speaker and President of this place to allege very, very serious allegations of corrupt behaviour and call for urgent attention. We are now some six months later and sadly, despite a number of attempts to take on board the proposals, suggestions and improvements that have been put by these eminent people, they have been disregarded time and time again. But the Ombudsman’s calls come on the back of the commissioner’s unprecedented letter. So we have got an Ombudsman who has made an unprecedented intervention calling into question the character of the Premier and an IBAC Commissioner who has effectively said that corruption is real in Victoria and in this government.

There are other instances which many in this place will have read much about: Operation Lansdowne, an IBAC report into corruption in relation to V/Line contracts – serious corruption; Operation Watts, which was an investigation into Labor branch stacking; Operation Clara into the Victorian Planning Authority – I will leave that there; Operation Daintree, into procurement processes, which I have just spoken about; corruption risks associated with major transport infrastructure projects; Operation Richmond, on government dealings with the United Firefighters Union; Operation Sandon, on serious corrupt conduct in relation to planning and property development decisions at the Casey council; and a second United Firefighters Union probe. There are eight examples from just one body, IBAC, and their reports into corruption in Victoria.

And though words are used, adjectives are used, to describe that corruption and eminent people have talked about the need to lower the threshold of what is corrupt, Victorians know that in those instances corruption was found. Victorians know that the government has allowed wrongdoing. That is why I grieve for Victorians and for the behaviour of this government, because corruption is now the new normal in Victoria. Further to those reports, the Ombudsman has delivered the investigation into red shirts, which I am sure every Victorian has heard about, and the Auditor-General released a report in April 2020 in relation to advertising campaigns that breached legislation – self-serving reports that breached legislation. The Auditor-General in September 2021 obviously released their report into hotel quarantine, which I will speak to later. But that is 11 examples – 11 quite recent examples – into corruption in this state. The litany is long and that is not exhaustive, but those are 11 serious, real examples when it comes to taxpayer money and decisions that have been made by this government and by staff – their behaviour – with taxpayer money.

But Victorians have most recently heard of the Daintree report, which the Premier dismissed as soon as he possibly could, but what did it find? We have heard a lot about the Daintree report, but what did it find? What it found is the health minister's office exerted pressure on the department staff to award a contract. It also found that an adviser in the office of the then health minister and an advisor in the office of the Premier intruded into the department's management of the contract in ways favourable to the union and against the public interest. Well, that is corruption by any definition. It may not meet the current legislative threshold, but what we are seeing is out-and-out corruption in this state.

The report found a number of other things. It was not an educational report. It talked about the continuing decline in standards. It talked about the phenomenon of grey corruption. These are direct quotes. It talked about engagement in conduct that is inappropriate at best and corrupt at worst: 'A culture that permits improper political interference'. It rightly pointed out that the Premier is accountable to this Parliament for that improper conduct, and that is why we are here today: to grieve for the people of Victoria for what they are witnessing from this Premier and the behaviour that they are seeing.

The report found a number of important recommendations, and the opposition was swift in developing a bill to implement those important recommendations, because we strongly believe that when a person of impeccable character and expertise provides insights into ways that government can work better, the first thing that we would do is read through those recommendations and work out how we can bring them into operation in Victoria as quick as we can. The Leader of the Opposition has been the first to ensure that we have a plan to provide people in Victoria with the confidence that we will take up those recommendations and implement them – in stark contrast to a Premier who has today dismissed any need to implement those changes in any meaningful or timely way.

But does it surprise us? The Premier has form in the way that he deals with these issues. We saw in the Daintree report a number of instances where the Premier's integrity was called into question, and if you refer to the report itself, there is the usual instance of the Premier having no recollection or not being aware of activities. In fact when asked about behaviour like being part of meetings where decisions were being made – that he was in – he had no recollection. Of course he did not. I do not believe him and I do not think anyone believes him, but he had no recollection – another instance. When I got the report the first thing I looked for was the first instance of the Premier having no recollection, because I knew that the Premier would respond in that way. And it is not the first instance where he has used the 'I can't recall' when his integrity is in question. He did it with Operation Sardon, which was a report into land dealings and the allegedly corrupt property developer John Woodman, who might be known to the former health minister, who provided him a property – the former health minister provided him the renter. The Premier had dinner with property developer John Woodman and, when asked as part of the IBAC investigation, could not recall having any discussion at his dumpling dinner. He also could not recall whether he gave over his phone number. That was not the only instance. Operation Richmond – what did he do when he was talking about the firefighter union boss Peter Marshall? What did he talk about? 'I can't recall.' Over 800 people died as a result of hotel

quarantine. Was he part of the decision-making process to have private security? Almost 30 times: 'I can't recall'. In every single instance where meaningful decisions were made that he was part of, he cannot recall.

What we saw today that was most terrifying was that the behaviour of the Premier has now bled into who would be the next Premier of Victoria. When asked serious questions of integrity about having illegal activity on certain government contracts and having associations with known standover men, the Minister for Transport and Infrastructure refused to even respond. So we have the Premier-in-waiting sitting at the table and we know that that member has the same character issues, the same issues of integrity, and Victorians deserve to have that probed. They deserve to know that the person that the Premier has anointed is dealing with crooks and the department is advertising the businesses of a crook. It is outrageous. So I grieve for the people of Victoria, and I grieve for the behaviour and character of both its leader and its Premier-in-waiting.

Cost of living

Katie HALL (Footscray) (16:16): There is a bit of auditioning going on over there. I am pretty sure some of those contributions would not be made outside this place, but I am pleased to make a contribution today about something that is real. I grieve for the families who are experiencing real cost-of-living pressures in Victoria at the moment, including in my community of Footscray. With another interest rate rise yesterday, I know that families are doing it really tough, and I know that my electorate office has been working really hard to support families in applying for the power saving bonus. We were at the public housing flats in Footscray just last week assisting people in making those applications to get that all-important relief.

But as the Parliamentary Secretary for Early Childhood, one initiative that I am particularly proud of that will provide real support to families is the initiative of free kinder, which is the biggest social and economic reform this state has seen. It is going to be transformative for the future, for the little learners, for the people who are participating in free kinder, but also for the parents, predominantly the women, who will now be able to return to work and have the savings of around \$2500 each year for their child in kinder.

Over the last 12 months, as I noted, the cost of living has risen exponentially. I am proud to be supporting a government that is introducing some of its most ambitious reforms to ease pressure on Victorian families. Every night hardworking Victorians and people in my community are going home after a day at work wondering how much longer their stagnant wages are going to have to survive the rising cost of everyday essentials. As I mentioned, we have the \$250 power saving bonus, we are re-establishing the SEC and we have slashed the cost of public transport regional fares, which I know some of my colleagues are enjoying. I will get to that later and how that is benefiting my mother up in Yackandandah. And now we have the implementation of free kinder for three- and four-year-olds.

We know that 90 per cent of a child's brain development happens by the age of five and early education has a profound impact on their later years. Every child deserves the best start in life, and the Labor government is committed to removing the barriers associated with that. We know that high-quality universal public education, accessible education, is the great leveller.

Just prior to walking into the chamber I received an email from my son's early learning centre, where today they have been learning about First Nations culture and cooking damper and participating in outdoor experiences and learning more about our local Wurundjeri culture out in Footscray. All of this feeds into why we are investing \$9 billion over the next 10 years to not just make our early years learning the best in the country but make it affordable and accessible for families who need the support the most. This program is committed to not only increasing the quality of early learning and kinder in Victoria but slashing the cost of living for Victorian families. For families, free kinder means more choice, more flexibility and more money saved. Already the Labor government has invested a massive \$270 million to provide free kinder this year to approximately 140,000 eligible children who need it most. A 15-hour-per-week program is available to four-year-old children in a sessional service and a

5- to 15-hour program is available to three-year-old children each week. But we are not stopping there. This is a kinder program for everyone, and by 2025 we are starting the rollout of a 30-hour-a-week program for play-based learning for all four-year-old children in Victoria as they transition to pre-prep before starting school. These reforms will keep being rolled out on a needs basis, tackling regional community cost-of-living pressures and lower socio-economic areas where we know that there are childcare droughts – areas where it is harder to access child care in the places that we need it most.

All early childhood education and care providers who deliver a funded kindergarten program in Victoria will be eligible to receive free kinder funding starting from this year, saving families \$2500 per child per year. For too long Victorian families have needed to make difficult choices about when to turn the heater on because they are living pay cheque to pay cheque. Families are sitting around the table wondering if they have the means to buy those new shoes their growing child desperately needs. I know in my community cost-of-living pressures have been a constant source of concern for people coming into my electorate office seeking assistance. I know that those opposite probably have no idea what saving \$2500 a year would mean to some of the families in Footscray, but for those families it is almost two times the weekly take-home pay of someone earning the minimum wage. We also of course have people who have been struggling to purchase groceries, the basics that you need to feed your family and to support your children in their education.

All of this aside, this is a huge amount of relief that we are providing to Victorian families at the same time as providing a critical investment in our children's education. These reforms are also going to offset the cost of children accessing a kinder component in long day care settings for children who require longer care. This perfectly complements the increased rebates that the federal Labor government are implementing to further provide support for families that access early learning. Once again Labor is demonstrating that they are the only party that will walk the walk when it comes to supporting working families.

One of the things I speak to people most about when I am out and about in my capacity as Parliamentary Secretary for Early Childhood is that this absolute transformation in early childhood education will benefit women the most. It is so much more than having a saving of \$2500 per child per year; it is actually allowing families the flexibility and choice for both parents to re-enter the workforce on their own terms if that is something that they choose to do. These reforms afford parents the choice of when and how they would like to re-enter the workforce. It is a groundbreaking economic reform that will increase productivity in Victoria right now. Caring for children still remains the number one barrier for women's participation in the workforce in Australia. That has been the case for a number of years now, and without active steps to change that the Victorian economy will suffer from that loss of productivity. Of those who are looking to increase the hours they work but cannot, over 25 per cent say that childcare responsibilities are the reason, and by alleviating the burden of caring responsibilities we are about to increase Victoria's productivity and economic output. This means more businesses can stay open and Victorians can stay employed. As we are rebuilding after the pandemic and rebuilding our economic capacity, these reforms are vital in ensuring that we are supporting all Victorians, especially women, to participate in the workforce in any way they wish.

This reform is going to be supporting not only 11,000 new teaching and education jobs in the sector but countless infrastructure projects as the government builds 50 new early learning centres in the childcare deserts that I spoke about before. These centres will be co-located with schools. I am fortunate enough as the parent of a kinder kid to be able to have my kinder co-located with the school, and I know that that makes a huge difference to all of the families at our service in Footscray, because it ends the double drop-off. It means that you can drop your kids off at school and at kinder and get off to work, and that is just another improvement we are making as a result of our big kinder build.

Last week I was fortunate enough to visit the construction site of what will soon be a new kinder in Maribyrnong, supporting 66 new places for three- and four-year-olds, and I cannot relay to you the level of excitement that came from council and the community in Maribyrnong about this project. My electorate of Footscray has one of the fastest growing populations in Victoria, and by 2050 the

population of Footscray is set to rise by over 50 per cent. So we are building the new infrastructure our little learners need and making sure that there are more places in areas where we have long day care and kindergarten shortages.

I would also like to reflect briefly on an experience my mum had recently with her seniors card, catching the train down from Albury–Wodonga. This is a cost-of-living reform I think that many people in Victoria are now using to access places in the regions or come down to Melbourne for weekends, or in my mum's case come down to see her grandchildren. A trip that used to cost \$73.20 now only costs \$9.20, or \$4.60 in my mum's case because she uses her seniors card. This means that pensioners and people who are perhaps doing it a bit tough in the regions can come to Melbourne or vice versa and that there is equity in our public transport system in Victoria.

I would also like to speak about the importance of the power saving bonus in easing the cost-of-living pressures on people in my community. I would like to thank my electorate office, who have supported hundreds of people to apply for the power saving bonus so far in this third round of the power saving bonus. I know that for the people I have spoken to in community centres, in my electorate office and at public housing flats in Footscray the extra \$250 in their back pocket is helping them pay for things like groceries and pay the rent, and of course many of them have found a better deal on their power bills as a result of us supporting them through the process of checking that they are getting the best deal possible.

As part of the reforms in the electricity market, bringing back the SEC is a hugely popular thing in my electorate of Footscray, because really this is about putting power back in the hands of people. For too long the electricity companies under a privatised system have, frankly, been ripping people off. We have introduced the default offer. I spoke to someone who lives in an apartment block in Footscray this week, and the default offer means that at least he has some safeguard for what he is being charged in a centralised system. There are many people in Footscray in that situation in apartment blocks. Bringing back the SEC – government-owned energy – is going to be transformative in terms of easing cost-of-living pressures. Not only will it be a totally renewable system, but it will be much more affordable, and it will take pressure off families who for too long have been held to ransom by some of these power companies who have made billions off this essential service.

So there is a range of supports available to my community in Footscray, but I wanted to acknowledge in today's grievance debate that I know that a lot of people are doing it really tough, and yesterday's interest rate rise has not helped. But free kinder is here, the power saving bonus is here, cheaper tickets to the regions are here and there is a whole range of supports available.

Government integrity

Peter WALSH (Murray Plains) (16:31): I grieve for the system of government in Victoria – the fact that corruption, nepotism and governing for mates have become the norm in this state and the fact that any form of Westminster accountability has been lost. As I go through my contribution we will hear about the ministers that in any other state or in any other Westminster system would actually have to resign for the things they have done wrong, and that is just not happening under the leadership of the Premier – and it starts from the top. The Premier is the worst at this, and we have seen that in recent times. It started with a Premier who broke his biggest promise of the whole lot after the 2014 election. He stood on the steps of Parliament on election eve, talked to Peter Mitchell on the news camera and said, 'Peter, I promise all Victorians I will not introduce any new taxes and I will not increase taxes.' And we have got 40-something new taxes and increased taxes – 44 in that particular time. So the Labor Party has a culture of promising everything before an election and then crab walking it back over the next four years, and we see that all the time. We are seeing that now with this pipeline of major infrastructure projects, that what was promised before the election is being walked back because, surprise, surprise, the state has actually run out of money. Debt is at a record level and expenditure is at a record level, and who is going to pay for all this? The taxpayers of Victoria. So on those 'no new

and no increased taxes', come the end of May when we get a budget, I am sure that that promise will be broken even more in the future.

The Labor Party has actually lost its way when it comes to the reason to be in government. It is not a right of the Labor Party to be the government of Victoria. It is a privilege to be the government of Victoria and it is about serving all Victorians, rather than what the Leader of the Opposition said about it being for mates, by mates so they get the advantage out of being in government. It is not about the people of Victoria getting into government. In 2014 the Premier was supposedly elected on a commitment of accountability and transparency for the Victorian community. That could not be more wrong if you look at the history over the last eight and a bit years. This government is mired in secrecy and corruption. You just have to –

A member interjected.

Peter WALSH: The minister on the other side keeps talking, but you only have to go to the most recent report, the Daintree report. If you look at that report, it started with the Ombudsman. It was referred to the IBAC because the Ombudsman felt it was more serious than her remit, and we have a report there that says that:

A culture that permits improper political interference to occur magnifies the risk that it will lead to corrupt political behaviour.

And I think we see that every day here in Victoria now. The report also found:

... ministerial offices giving privileged access and favourable treatment to special interest groups to the detriment of the public interest ...

and I think for a regional Victorian there is no greater example of that than the former minister for environment's office.

Members interjecting.

Peter WALSH: The former minister for environment in the last government – 2018 to 2022, if someone else is feeling more guilty – when MyEnvironment, Sarah Rees and those groups effectively had a key to the office. And we see what happened with the timber industry over that particular time – that minister and the Andrews government have actually destroyed the native timber industry of this state. They have destroyed the communities that rely on that industry, and all those jobs will be lost and all those dollars will actually leave the state in importing timber rather than growing timber here in this state. Last week I went to the Barmah Muster, and for the first time ever there was no woodchop. There will be no woodchop at the Melbourne show, because you cannot get logs to chop wood because of those decisions that have been made by the Andrews government. It is an absolute disgrace. It takes just five trees to get a whole woodchop event going, and they cannot get access to five trees to have a woodchop.

Danny O'Brien: Have those groups paid their money back yet?

Peter WALSH: Those groups still owe the government more than \$2 million, and as I understand it the minister's office has effectively said, 'Don't pursue that money into the future.'

Apart from the Operation Daintree report, which has been well canvassed in the last few weeks, this year as I understand it there are still at least two more reports to be tabled from the IBAC. Operation Sandon is investigating corrupt conduct involving councillors and property developers in the City of Casey, and there was some byplay in the previous contributions. I suppose the key question that I want to know is: how much did the dumplings at the Flower Drum actually cost for the lunch with the Premier? How much were the dumplings worth? The dumplings were probably worth a lot of money to the Labor Party in donations, but obviously the member for Mordialloc was not invited to those particular things. You have got Operation Richmond investigating corrupt negotiations between the Premier and the United Firefighters Union and Peter Marshall. Everyone I talk to in regional Victoria asks me, 'What has Peter Marshall got on the Premier of Victoria so that he could get such a good deal

out of the Premier to destroy the volunteer side of the CFA and enrich the paid firefighters of the CFA? What has Peter Marshall got on the Premier of Victoria that would enable that to happen?' Both those IBAC cases, as I understand it, are held up in the Supreme Court, and I wonder how much money is actually being spent on legal fees to make sure these reports are not released into the future.

We have the Assistant Treasurer, the wolf of Spring Street, sort of mired in this 'I'm not sure if I'm doing my share transactions or I'm actually running the state.' The two lines have got so blurred, and I think that is a culture of this –

Danny O'Brien: It's the same job.

Peter WALSH: It is the same job. It is the culture of this government, where the Assistant Treasurer owns shares in quite a few companies – and good luck to him being prosperous and having those shares. But to own the shares and make decisions about where taxpayers money goes, make decisions to put the Future Fund in the Commonwealth Bank, make decisions around other Commonwealth Bank accounts, make decisions about the awarding of contracts to Telstra and make decisions about government money going to Beach Petroleum and to CSL – that is corruption. That is just straight corruption when the Assistant Treasurer cannot understand that if you are a minister of the Crown, you should not be in the room when decisions are made that actually benefit a company that you hold shares in.

The Premier has led the Labor Party since 2010. Back in September 2015 the Premier actually said he takes responsibility for each and every thing that happens under his leadership. It is a good refresher for people. In 2015 the Premier said he takes responsibility for everything. For those that watched the Coate inquiry – and some of us did that; I sat there and watched it in my office – 27 times the Premier said, 'I don't recall'. That is not an example of someone who is taking responsibility for everything that happens under his watch. The Coate inquiry, for those that have dulled this out of their mind because of the COVID lockdowns, was about the decisions that were made for hotel quarantine. About \$80 million of taxpayers money was spent on the hotel quarantine program, and as questions were asked about who made the decisions, who effectively signed the cheque, no-one knew. A new part of the vernacular in the politics of Victoria came into place where decisions were made by a 'creeping assumption'. So you had \$80 million of taxpayers money spent on a creeping assumption, where supposedly no-one made a deliberate decision to actually spend that money and no-one made a deliberate decision to actually employ private security guards that did not have the appropriate training, which led to more COVID cases there. That to my mind, again, is not someone that takes accountability for the things that happened on his watch. That is someone who is obfuscating about true leadership in this state.

Operation Watts has also been mentioned, about the misuse of public funds by the Labor Party and branch stacking there. The red shirts was very well canvassed. Supposedly the government did no wrong, but the Labor Party actually paid the money back. Well, why would you pay the money back if you had done no wrong? Again, no-one took responsibility for those particular actions. For those that have forgotten the shameless partisan Our Fair Share ad campaign, it was actually supposed to get Bill Shorten in the Lodge – \$1.7 million of Victorian taxpayers money was spent deliberately campaigning for a federal Labor leader to be in the Lodge. I think fortunately for Australia – for Victorians, for everyone – that campaign failed, and we did not end up with Bill Shorten as the Prime Minister of this country.

The other issue that impacted severely on my community, and there are a number of MPs in this house who have border communities, was the horrendous decisions around border closures. The Victorian Ombudsman found that they were unjust and some of the most questionable decisions that she had ever seen. The classic example of that was when the Premier-in-waiting, who was the Acting Premier at that particular time, on New Year's Eve, absolutely botched the decision-making, as the member for Ovens Valley has said. At about 11 o'clock that day she did a press conference and did not say anything about the borders being closed. At about 3 or 4 o'clock in the afternoon she said the borders

were closing at midnight. People were hours and hours away in New South Wales. There was a panicked reaction to try and get back to Victoria. The queue at Moama was about 6 hours to get across the bridge. The queue at Genoa was I think 70 kilometres long to get the cars back into the state.

Mary-Anne Thomas: On a point of order, Speaker, I draw your attention to standing order 118. Throughout his contribution the member for Murray Plains has proceeded to impugn a number of members in this place. The Deputy Premier acted at all times on health advice. I ask you to advise the member – counsel him – to stop impugning both the Deputy Premier and the Premier and indeed the Assistant Treasurer.

The SPEAKER: Order! I will not take the point of order at this point because the Leader of the Nationals has referred to actions that he believes were taken, but I do remind members that imputations – I am listening very closely – will not be allowed.

Peter WALSH: Thank you, Speaker. Obviously some people were not in this house when the former member for Melton let loose on everyone in this particular place, which brings me to probably some of the most corrupt behaviour we have seen in this Parliament, the fact that we had a Speaker and a Deputy Speaker of an Andrews government in Parliament that actually had to resign after rorting their entitlements as Speaker and as Deputy Speaker. I think that was just one of the lowest points I have ever seen in Victorian politics. Those two officers of the Parliament who were here to uphold the integrity of the Westminster system actually rorted it. I think that was a disgrace. That was an absolute disgrace. We saw the issues in the upper house with some actions around printing allowances and other things.

Danny O'Brien interjected.

Peter WALSH: That is on my list, but I will probably go back to what I was saying at the start: that the Labor Party has lost its way when it comes to morals and how you actually govern a state, how you actually treat taxpayers money, how you actually make decisions on behalf of all Victorians rather than just your union mates. I think that is the issue that has been lost on those that sit on the other side, because there has been a creep. It is not a creeping assumption; it is actually a creep to corruption, to nepotism and to a reduction in standards. It is actually a blight on our society. The Westminster system has stood, in the parts of the world that have used it as a government system, well for over 700 years. If you look around, we have become a Third World country when it comes to the standards of government. We have become a Third World country. You may as well be in a South American republic or the middle of Africa when it comes to standards of government in this particular state – because it is not just about winning elections, it is about serving Victorians.

Opposition performance

Tim RICHARDSON (Mordialloc) (16:46): Today I rise and grieve for Victorians who are facing substantial cost-of-living pressures and who would suffer severely if the divided and destructive coalition were ever to be responsible for these policy areas. I want to just address the Leader of the Nationals and some of his contributions. It is like today he picked up the talking points of October 2022 and was doing a doorstep not realising that Victorians have voted – Victorians have decided once again. That was probably the golden era for the Leader of the Nationals, back in 2014. The Office of Living it Up was just seeing the exit there. He is talking about things back in 2014. It is extraordinary, absolutely extraordinary. So he has gone through a bit of a litany of the talking points from October 2022 in his contribution. It just shows that they are arguing the toss, thinking Victorians did not get it right, that it is the Victorian people's fault for overwhelmingly increasing the margin of the Andrews Labor government, for wanting us to deliver in fairness, in education, in health, in mental health reforms, in infrastructure and in cost-of-living relief.

I think some of this has been a bit more of a diversion today, some of the questions that were put forward. We have had a really serious incident in this Parliament today. A member of this Parliament in the other place has stood up and made some serious allegations about treatment in this place, and I

think they need further consideration. The things that have been reported by *Sky News* are troubling for all of us, and they reflect the standards of this place and how we treat other members of Parliament and how they feel safe and secure in their place of work. I want to read a little bit of what this email said and put forward:

I once again feel completely stitched up and misrepresented by the leadership ...

I am upset. Very upset. The way I have been treated and the way other conservative women in this party are treated is nothing short of bullying.

Bullying has been alleged today in that conduct.

Cindy McLeish: On a point of order, Speaker, I refer you to the previous point of order that was raised about impugning members, and I think that the member for Mordialloc is actually doing exactly that now.

The SPEAKER: The member for Mordialloc has not mentioned any members by name. The member for Mordialloc to continue. There is no point of order.

Tim RICHARDSON: So it goes to the heart of the distraction that the Liberal Party face at the moment, not so much the Nationals. You will remember the member for Gippsland South had a cheeky little reference where he said, 'Oh, well, maybe we need to review the coalition agreement and maybe go it our own way.' He has not said anything like that since – very quiet now about that. They did get nine members of Parliament in the most recent election, so they increased their representation and have substantially more representation in the shadow cabinet. They have more female representation in this place, which I think is really important as well. Our party has led that way in government boards, in representation of women in Parliament, and more than half of our cabinet are female ministers. It goes to the heart of treatment in this place and the distraction. The Leader of the Opposition talked about new standards, setting a new course. We saw this question time that already the Leader of the Opposition I think is now up to 50 or 60 times where he has asked for the Premier to resign.

We heard the member for Bulleen talk through how distracted – the leaking and the undermining that was going on, the destructive leakers. I am sure the 58 minutes that the member for Bulleen – I mean, literally the member for Bulleen was in the moment, shadow cabinet, shadow policy, the leader of the coalition, putting that forward. He sat down for a significant tell-all, and it is a really important description and overview of just how divided and destructive the Liberal Party is. You see those actions, what has been put forward and how the policies that they come forward with are really populist, really in the moment and trying to get a grab in the moment because they are so distracted, destructive and internally divided that they are not focused on serving the people of Victoria but on serving themselves and getting the next hit. So if you hear the member for Bulleen's contribution, it is quite a telling representation of not being focused on outcomes.

A lot of the policy issues that were obviously debated and put forward we disagree with as a party, but I remember driving in this morning and him talking about the fact that they were already leaking as we entered the campaign period at the end of October. So they were more interested in leaking, being divided and going after one another than responding to the challenges that Victorians were facing. The cost-of-living pressures that Victorians are under now are unprecedented. The Premier today talked about another interest rate rise hitting working people who do not have any more to give. They are not the source of the challenges that our nation faces in inflation but yet have to pick up the slack each and every day as another interest rate rise happens, and they feel that pressure each and every day.

The mental health and wellbeing impacts that that has and the pressures we hear about coming through from Lifeline; people talk about cost-of-living pressures being one of the telling things. Luckily they have got a government here who is investing. We are investing in the recommendations of the royal commission. We have a levy that was supported by this government but opposed by the coalition to guarantee and ring-fence funding for mental health and wellbeing support. The Minister for Mental Health today talked about a massive increase. I think it was a doubling of mental health and wellbeing

practitioners, mental health workers, who do an extraordinary job in mentoring and in supporting mental health and wellbeing outcomes. That is what we are focused on: supporting and delivering for Victorians, supporting the Victorian people with our election commitments, our positive plan that we took forward for fairness, investment in education and health and supporting our nurses and our paramedics – not some of the divided, nasty, low-road politics that we have seen from the Liberal Party and defined by them.

When you see members of their party who are under significant duress today and who do not feel safe in their place of work, in the Victorian Parliament, and who have today said that they have been bullied, it needs to be taken seriously. So we can have a diverted conversation about reports that do not find things, but when this is straight from the mouth –

James Newbury interjected.

Tim RICHARDSON: The member for Brighton might have a chuckle about this. The member for Brighton might audibly laugh about these things. He might audibly laugh about these things, but there is a member of your party today –

James Newbury interjected.

The SPEAKER: Order! The member for Brighton!

Tim RICHARDSON: who is on the record as saying that they are very upset; they are to the point of distress. I think some of those opposite should be checking in on this member of Parliament who then said that this is nothing short of bullying and in a desperate action sent an email to every member of the Liberal Party today. So their distraction and their diversion – and this is apparently the new era of the Liberal Party. This is the new way under the Leader of the Opposition: no more negativity, no more division and being conciliatory with government.

We are not even five months in and the Leader of the Opposition, the member for Hawthorn, is 10 times more negative than the member for Bulleen ever was, has nowhere near a constructive policy and has asked for the Premier to resign on 50 or 60 occasions. He is angry at the table, raising his voice towards the Deputy Premier and the Premier. We have not seen this since probably the first-term leadership of the member for Bulleen, that audible, visceral anger that is played out. Maybe this is the cultural pressure of a party that is divided, that is destructive and that is having a culture war in its own house rather than focusing on the outcomes and the needs of Victorians.

So that is the challenge today. Rather than diverting away from grievances and shopping lists that the Leader of the Nationals – I mean, seriously, we have heard that speech like 50 times in the grievance. He gets up and reads the same thing. It is like, seriously? He is arguing the toss, like did Anthony Rocca kick that point for Collingwood against Brisbane Lions. Was it touched on the line? Steve Silvagni in the Essendon and Carlton grand final – I mean, the Leader of the Nationals is prosecuting the 2014 campaign. That is just the inability and the disrespect – the inability to accept the election outcomes and the disrespect towards the Victorian people who resoundingly voted 47 seats in 2014, 55 seats in 2018 and 56 seats now. That is just the fact of the endorsement of our positive and optimistic plan about doing what matters rather than doing in each other like they do in the Liberal Party at the moment. That is the challenge today: will the coalition today, and will the Nationals. Obviously the member for Gippsland South has talked about rewriting the coalition strategy. Maybe that needs to be looked at – it is 19 members in here and nine – and the representation in the upper house. Are they feeling that this is reputational damage? Do the Liberal Party members get around their member of Parliament today?

James Newbury: How's the low road?

Tim RICHARDSON: The member for Brighton did not want to cover any of this, and when the interjections were coming across today there was no discussion. Eyes were down. It was very obvious where the questions went today and who was not asking questions until the back end of this. But I

think today is an opportunity to set new standards. In May, today, in 2023, in the 60th Parliament it is not too late for the Leader of the Opposition to rule a line under this conduct. He has had a rough start and gone down the negative road. It will not track well in an electorate like Hawthorn, where positive, optimistic, inclusive leadership is the only way to go. In our local communities, that is what Victoria is defined as. We accept all. We love and respect all – not some of the nasty politics of negativity and division that we see time and time again. But then we see today a line-in-the-sand moment. Maybe there is still time before the grabs at 6 pm. I think the Leader of the Opposition needs to go out and explain tonight whether the member of Parliament that has detailed her grievances and concerns is safe in her workplace. Is she safe in her workplace today? Has anyone else –

Ryan Smith: Why hasn't Dan made you a minister? You're very good.

The SPEAKER: Member for Warrandyte, you are not in your seat.

Tim RICHARDSON: He has got a pulse, the member for Warrandyte. He has been a bit quiet this term. The member for Warrandyte is not a fan of the member for Hawthorn. We remember when the seating plan came in and he was put up in the back row near the member for Benambra.

James Newbury: You know what that's like, mate. Come on.

Ryan Smith: At least I've been up the front. You haven't been there yet.

The SPEAKER: Order! Member for Warrandyte, you are warned.

Tim RICHARDSON: I do not have an ego the size of Brighton, my friend. I am very happy being on the backbench in here. But the member for Warrandyte said, 'No, not back row, I need middle row, John. If you want me to be a team player, member for Hawthorn, you've got to put me on the second row. I'm not copping that.' We do not see as many points of order from the member for Warrandyte, so it is good to hear his voice. I had forgotten what he sounded like, genuinely, so it is good to hear that he is up and about. He is ready to go. His good mate – they ran against each other, but they were not really; I think he was a feeder for preferences – the member for Berwick here is in the number one slot, isn't he. When you see the train wreck of the member for Hawthorn's contributions in question time, everyone sort of looks down, or there is this audible gasp or holding the mouth. We group-text and go, 'What's going on there?' It looks sad and depressed over there. It looks very low. But there is a twinkle in the eye of the member for Berwick, who knows it is just a matter of time. Play line and length, look like the team player and then the member for Warrandyte and the member for Berwick will finally get their day. It will come.

It is an extraordinary moment, the performance today. We were looking sideways at the member for Hawthorn, the Leader of the Opposition. He came into this place, and the first speech he gave was about lifting standards. It was a big press conference. He loves the sound of his own voice. It went for about 2½ hours. It was long, but you thought, 'Okay, maybe this is a new era.' The member for Brighton had some things on Facebook and Twitter, a bit of relevance deprivation, and just wanted to be out there as well. But you thought, 'Oh, maybe Victorians are going to get a coalition, a Liberal Party, that now is setting the tone and standards for what they expect, representing good values.' We saw this in New South Wales with Chris Minns and Dominic Perrottet. You could not get a more different standard to what we see in Victoria. Literally, Dom and Chris are very friendly – amicable. I think they are friends, from all reports. Then on election night you thought, 'Maybe this is the new era. Maybe the member for Hawthorn has taken that.' But it has just been low road after low road.

Victorians will be focused on the outcomes and supporting the cost-of-living pressures with the power saving bonus. I will say those opposite originally thought that was a waste – we should not do it. Now they have DLs out on it. That is an amazing thing: 'We'll help you apply for the power saving bonus.' That is importantly what it is. It absolutely is important that everyone gets around it and makes sure that we are helping Victorians – but they opposed that. They opposed that initially and then came on board. The sick pay guarantee – they vehemently opposed supporting working people; they were

completely opposed to that. You get sick, and it is not a choice between fronting up to work or putting food on the table – we will back you with the sick pay guarantee. And then of course there are the fairer V/Line rates and the fairer rental housing reforms.

When it comes to supporting Victorians, we are focused on getting the job done. It is why the Victorian people resoundingly endorsed an Andrews Labor government. It had never been done before on the Labor side – and we have increased the margin beyond that as well. Rather than the health and safety risks and the impacts that are going on in the Liberal Party – that is what defines them: negativity, bullying, intimidation, particularly of female members of Parliament. It is terrifying space that the Liberal Party find themselves in, but luckily Victorians have an Andrews Labor government.

Government integrity

Brad BATTIN (Berwick) (17:01): A definition of the Labor Party that could well and truly be added onto that is ‘corruption, crooks, crime, theft’ – the list goes on, and it does not even have to be us saying it. You can go on about what we are saying, but you have got to listen to the reports from those people that you have signed contracts with and put in place to uphold integrity here in this state. The Ombudsman on more than one occasion has had to come out and slam this government for behaviours that are inappropriate and would not be accepted in our community.

Listening to the contribution then from the member for Mordialloc, it highlighted one thing. When he said ‘Stop talking about 2014’, it is evidence of something I have been saying for a long time: the standard you walk past is the one you accept. And it is continuous – the Labor Party walk past this and start to see that the corruption and culture is now spreading not just within themselves but throughout the entire public sector. And how does it get into the public sector? It gets there because Daniel Andrews has appointed 90 of his own staff from his office to senior roles in the public sector. That is how you spread corruption. That is how you keep control. That is how you ensure that you can control everything that is happening throughout the entire system. A lot of it would be people who would not, should not and could not get a role like that ever but then have to do what they are told by the Premier to ensure that they can keep the pay cheque that is well and truly above their pay grade.

The Ombudsman slammed the Premier’s response to the damning IBAC report. When Daniel Andrews came out and said that Operation Daintree was an ‘educational report’, they came out and stated clearly that this was not an educational report, it was a damning report into the government on how they dealt with the Health Workers Union and had given funds to them before the last election. At the same time the Health Workers Union were making donations – sizeable donations – to the Labor Party. The question has to be: was that money from part of the grants that went through? It is a question that fairly should be raised, investigated and found out: what was the level of corruption that was involved in those deals?

Again, the member for Mordialloc is not going to like this part when we go back to 2014 and we talk about the red shirts rorts. The red shirts rorts I will continue to talk about because it absolutely makes me irate that anyone, including Victoria Police, could turn around and say that someone signing a document which allows a person to get paid to not do their job is not obtaining financial advantage by deception. To prove obtaining financial advantage by deception, you have got to prove the identity of the person, you have got to prove they dishonestly appropriated – that is pretty obvious; they signed documents. Some of them signed it without even knowing who they were signing for. They signed those documents. There has to be a financial exchange, and someone ended up with a financial advantage at the time. This went through the process of the Ombudsman. The Ombudsman referred it on to IBAC. It went through the Victoria Police. At the time no Labor person other than the Premier, who said they were going to all comply with this, said that they would comply with the full investigation. The Premier of this state said everyone should comply with that investigation and no-one did. It made it more and more difficult, and they intervened and stopped that investigation going through.

Then when it came out later on you had more whistleblowers come out, and before the 2022 state election you had a whistleblower come out with more evidence saying people needed to be

interviewed, people needed to make sure that they were put on record – go through emails, look at some of the police data, look at some of the issues of who was investigating and how it happened. At the time – it is on record – that it was decided by the Office of Public Prosecutions to not proceed, who was the solicitor for public prosecutions at the time? John Cain Jr. John Cain Jr was there. It also went through to Victoria Police, and Shane Patton came out and went on record and said that there would be no further investigation from Victoria Police. It had been referred to the north-west metro region assistant commissioner, who had made a recommendation to not proceed with any more charges and not proceed with an investigation. Now, it will not surprise people – but it worries me, because I am a former police officer and I would hate the fact that there would be corruption in Victoria Police – but the assistant commissioner at the time who recommended that was Brett Curran. Brett Curran used to be the chief of staff in the Premier's office and is now in Victoria Police. I cannot fathom that he did not step back from this at all and say, 'I will have nothing to do with it.' I cannot understand how Victoria Police can continue to come out and state that there is nothing to see here. A constable walking out of the academy tomorrow, I guarantee, could look at this investigation, look at the evidence, and people would be charged. There is nothing surer in my life. A constable who is just graduating could find this evidence and ensure someone is charged. Yet in Victoria we just walk past it, and we cannot continue to walk past this kind of behaviour. It is just simply not on.

As I have said continuously, and I will say again, we cannot continue to misuse people's money, Victorians' money, and expect them to believe that there is no corruption happening here in this state. In the time I have been here I would have to say this is one of the worst lots of corruption I have seen in this place – again, washed under the carpet: if anyone in this place makes a mistake on any of their finances, there is a 25 per cent penalty. Why? Because we had a Speaker and a Deputy Speaker whose corrupt behaviour stole money from this government, stole money from the taxpaying people. It was \$113,000 to Don Nardella as the Deputy Speaker at the time, who was claiming to live in a caravan down in Ocean Grove – claiming to live in a caravan. He was not representing an area down there; he was representing Melton. So not only was he admitting that he would prefer to live in a caravan in Ocean Grove than live with the people he was supposed to represent, he was charging them an extra \$113,000 on top of his wage for the privilege that they did not have to have him there. He was not even living in Melton. This man did everything he could. He got every rule in the book and broke them. And what was the outcome? What was the answer from the Premier? Apart from defending him for a long period time, when he eventually could no longer defend the indefensible, he sent him up to the backbench and he said, 'You're a naughty boy and we're going to make you pay some of it back. But you don't have to pay it all back straightaway – we don't want to send you broke or anything. We'll let you pay it off over time with zero penalty.' Zero penalty. How can you reward corrupt behaviour like that and expect people to think there is not corruption in this state?

The Speaker took nearly \$40,000. The corruption in that role – the person who is supposed to uphold the rights of this place, uphold the standards in this place, was the one that was breaching them and stole nearly \$40,000. And do you know what frustrates me? It is after, when he turns around and he says, 'I have a mental health issue.' You stole money. Your problem was you got caught. The problem was not before, the problem was the day you got caught. And no person in Labor, Liberals, Nationals, independents or Greens can defend the behaviour of those two. No-one. Yet they both left this place quite happy with their lifetime pensions. They are still getting fully supported. They are still getting paid as much as probably us in here because they were in executive roles. Where is the fairness for all Victorians that the two people that stole \$150,000-plus through corrupt behaviour, that Labor Speaker and Deputy Speaker, are not held to account? It simply does not make sense.

That is why Operation Daintree is so damning, and it is not an 'educational report'. Operation Daintree highlights issues, major issues, within the government. It highlights them. You are calling it an educational report because it is the easiest way to push under the carpet the issues that you are continuing to have within government. Continually as these issues come up, the easiest way to solve them is to deny them and tell the community, 'We're going to do the right thing, and then we'll bring in new penalties in the future.'

Then the newest one: grey corruption. What a crock! It is corruption or it is not. There is no grey corruption; it is corruption or it is not. Daintree highlights the fact of this so-called grey corruption. I think by admission that means there is corruption. Again, why isn't this being investigated? Why is this not now going? Why isn't IBAC following through on this? Why aren't Victoria Police looking at some of the corruption allegations that are in there? I mean, it just does not make sense to me. I look out into the community and I hear some, and I know – we are not silly – that there are some conspiracy theorists out there that will come up with some wonderful things about what has or has not happened in government, but there has got to be a time when eventually the community turn around and say, 'Why aren't these people being investigated?'

I also want to go back to another one that I know, Operation Richmond. Operation Richmond is an investigation into dealings between the Victorian government, the Premier's office, Peter Marshall and United Firefighters Union management. I think it is really important that we do highlight it is United Firefighters Union management, because there are a lot of United Firefighters Union members who do not trust Peter Marshall. There are plenty of them, because they have managed to speak to us a fair bit now. It is a huge concern that the Victorian government signed an enterprise bargaining agreement and signed away powers that you should never hand over to a union, and no-one knows what the impact of that is long term. Peter Marshall gets what he wants when he wants. People say, 'What have they got over him? What is it?' I do not believe Peter Marshall has got anything over Daniel Andrews. I think Daniel Andrews enjoys giving away to some of his mates the power that they can then use to the best of their ability to win him elections in the future.

The ACTING SPEAKER (Juliana Addison): Please refer to members by the correct titles rather than by their names.

Brad BATTIN: The Premier. So the Premier enjoys giving away to his mates the powers that were gifted to him by the Victorian people so they can use them for evil rather than good. Peter Marshall over his time and the union management over time, I do not think anyone can argue, have achieved some amazing outcomes in relation to safety. I do not think anyone could argue with that. But when they start putting in place things like 'consult and agree' and removing the power from management of the fire services, what do we end up with? We ended up with a fire chief who came over here from the United Kingdom who was absolutely outstanding in his role. Peter Marshall did not want him here, so he made sure that when they changed from CFA–MFB through to FRV he could no longer apply for a role that he already had in writing was going to be for five years. So the minister had said, 'Here's your contract. Five years. At one point in time you're going to change to FRV. We're going to make sure that you're all good, no dramas at all.' Peter Marshall said, 'No, don't like that. Consult and agree clause. We won't be sticking with that one. Please move him on.' And we lost a genuinely good fire chief.

Then we got Ken Block. I do not know Ken Block personally, but let me assure you, Ken Block was not here for the fire services. He was here because he was Peter Marshall's mate. He was pushed into that role, and he came across from Canada. He has now gone home. He has obviously resigned or retired – and I know he has got family issues with his wife over there, so I am going to be a fair bit nice on it – but whilst he was here, let me assure you, Ken Block did nothing to stop the power that was there from Peter Marshall. He got out of the way to allow Peter Marshall to do what he wanted – and he hated it. He hated it. He hated the fact that he came here to run a fire service and he could not do it because he had no power, he had no authority.

That is what happens when you end up with corruption in the government services, and it starts from the top. You have got a Premier who simply does not care. He is so power driven – and I will go back to the member for Mordialloc, who I cannot believe defended him – he did everything he could to destroy one faction of the Labor Party so he could have absolute power in the Labor Party. And with absolute power not only is he destroying the Labor Party, the impact is across our entire state, and the costs are going to be horrendous. We see it in Big Build projects – cost blowouts. We see it in some of the prices it is now costing to run the fire services. We are seeing how much it costs – \$5000 a day – to keep a kid in youth detention. Why? Because the costs are out of control because this government

do not know how to control them because they are now absolutely out of control with the corruption they have started at the top.

Daniel Andrews – I do not care if he resigns, to be honest. I really could not care less. But what he does need to do is come out and admit that his corruption is the reason that Victoria is heading down the path it is heading, and it is not a good goal at the end that he is aiming for. We need to make sure these investigations take place, and the only outcome that will be a positive one is when someone on that side is eventually charged.

Opposition performance

Lauren KATHAGE (Yan Yean) (17:16): I rise today to grieve for the people of Victoria and the increased cost-of-living pressures they would face if the Liberal Party were in government. I feel especially for people in casual roles. People in casual roles can feel pressured to work even when they are sick so that they do not miss out on the money they need to support themselves and their families. To address this issue and make sure people do not have to choose between their health and their back pocket, this government introduced the sick pay guarantee. In the first 12 months that it was available it supported 93,000 claims from casual and contract workers, paying 1 million hours of sick and carers pay. When I think about the difference that money has made to families, the hard choices they did not have to make because of this funding and having an income while they were sick, I feel very proud to be part of this government but worried for the people of Victoria if those opposite were to be in government. We have not seen from them the energy, ideas or commitment needed to govern in a way that eases cost-of-living pressures for Victorians.

My daughter is in three-year-old kinder, and this has made a difference to our finances, having the introduction of free kinder. One of the really important parts of this policy is that it applies to kinder programs in day care centres. Sessional kinder hours do not suit everyone, including people who are working jobs with changing rosters, like nurses and casuals, and people who work long days. By including day care centres in free kinder, it means that more people, usually mums, can work more hours if they choose to pick up some more shifts. This helps with the cost of living.

Comparing my day care costs now with this time last year, there is a marked difference, a real difference. This policy is all about supporting kids and supporting families. Families are up to \$2500 per child better off under this policy. That money is in the pockets of families, and it is a significant sum of money that families will be able to put to good use. Best Start, Best Life is a \$9 billion reform. It is providing our youngest Victorians like my daughter with socialisation and play-based learning at a time when we know the majority of brain development is occurring. We want kids to have the best possible start in life. We all want the best for our kids. That extends beyond kinder and into the school years.

At the root of all our desires for our children is that they remain healthy, but it is not always easy to deal with unexpected costs. I know when my toddler was diagnosed with a vision problem we had to figure out how to pay for the special frames and lenses she needed. I am glad she was diagnosed early, but for some kids vision problems are not picked up until they are in school. That is why the Labor government has invested more than \$2.4 million to deliver the Glasses for Kids program, which is removing vision impairment as a barrier to students engaging in their learning. More than 32,400 prep to year 3 students have had their vision screened since the program began, and 5000 students across the state can now see more clearly and concentrate better at school without creating as much difficulty for their parents' budget.

That is the eyes sorted, but getting my daughters to let me brush their teeth each day is a bit of a struggle. I have bought every type of cartoon and unicorn toothbrush that is available. I am so fastidious about it because I know that good oral health from an early age gives children the best chance of maintaining it into adulthood and I know that many parents do not feel that they can afford to take their child to a private dentist. There are families who feel they have to make the choice between their kids' teeth and their kids' dinner. That is not okay. That is why this government has delivered the Smile Squad, providing free annual oral health check-ups and free follow-up care needed for all

children attending government primary and secondary schools in Victoria when fully implemented. This is in stark contrast to those opposite, who for the young children who need health in school, cut Fresh Fruit Friday.

The cost of school uniforms can be prohibitive for families. Kids do not want to stand out – certainly not my little preppy. For kids that are from families that are doing it tough, we do not want them to feel uncomfortable at school or that they do not belong. That is why the Victorian government has invested \$27.1 million over four years in the affordable school uniforms program, which supports financially disadvantaged students through the provision of necessary school items. These items include uniforms, school shoes, stationery – including STEM calculators – workbooks and schoolbags.

Getting kids on their feet running around and being active, learning to be part of a team and learning how to lose gracefully are some of the reasons we want our kids to play sport, but sometimes the cost can put it out of reach for families. That is not okay. The Get Active Kids voucher program was established by Labor in 2020 to reduce cost-of-living pressures for Victorian families and make sure that kids who want to play sport can play sport. The vouchers of up to \$200 can be put towards uniforms, equipment and registration. The current round of the program, round 6, has been an absolute success, with around 35,000 vouchers already covered. More than half of voucher recipients in previous rounds said that their child would not have been able to join the netball team, the soccer team or the gymnastics squad if this program did not exist. All those kids would not have had the chance to experience the benefits of playing sport if this government was not around to provide cost-of-living support such as this. So from their eyes all the way down to their toes, the Labor government is supporting children to have the best life possible and making it affordable for families to provide the kind of life for their children that they want to.

Often when we picture the life we want, we see a house and yard. It remains the great Aussie dream. In Yan Yean we have many, many first home buyers who were attracted to the natural beauty and affordable homes of the area. The security of owning your own home can feel out of reach for some people. That is why we are supporting Victorian first home buyers with millions of dollars in grants and concessions to help them realise their dreams. This Labor government is helping first home buyers by providing stamp duty concessions and exemptions and offering first home owner grants of \$10,000. We know that Victorians are using this much-needed support. The first home owner grants topped \$1 billion, and there were 51,000 stamp duty concessions and exemptions last year. Further to this, this government is supporting Victorians into home ownership through the \$1.6 billion shared equity Victorian Homebuyer Fund. This fund has approved investments of more than \$400 million, enabling 2500 Victorians, more than half of them first home buyers, to move into their properties. This fund will ultimately support up to 10,000 Victorians into home ownership.

There are costs, though, when you have a home – for owners and renters. We have all felt the pinch of rising power prices. On this, Victorian Labor is addressing the root cause of the problem as well as providing power bill relief for families. A proven way to drive down household bills is with a solar power system. Evidence shows us that households can save over \$1000 a year when they install solar panels, but in the past, set-up costs have been a financial barrier for so many Victorians. So our government is making it easier to install them, with a \$1400 rebate through the Solar Homes program. Already 4000 people in the electorate of Yan Yean have claimed this rebate and started saving on their bills. Since this program was established, Solar Victoria has estimated that Victorians have already saved over half a billion dollars.

In recent months this government has helped take the pressure off 1 million households, with \$250 straight into their pockets through the power saving bonus. I have been out and about in my community helping people claim the new round of the power saving bonus since it opened in March. I am absolutely driven to make sure as many households as possible use the Energy Compare website to make sure they are on the cheapest deal and receive their \$250 bonus. Last Thursday morning I got up in the dark really, really early so that I could be down at Mernda train station early enough to see plenty of commuters and raise awareness of the power saving bonus. I probably felt a bit grumbly about it on

that cold morning, but any tiredness I felt evaporated when I met a local bus driver who told me that he was not seeing his kids as much as he would like, as he was working longer hours so that he could provide for his family. He had not heard of the power saving bonus. I was so happy to share the information with him, knowing that cheaper power bills and a \$250 bonus would make a real difference for that family. He said thank you and left. He had walked probably 20 paces away when he turned around and shouted out, 'Hey, really, thank you.' At a Mernda community centre recently an older woman recently came in for help with the power saving bonus. I was very happy to complete her application for her. She was happy too. Once she saw how straightforward it was she phoned her daughter and told her to get down to the community centre so that I could help her as well. The daughter was doing it pretty tough, so I was really glad to help out.

In my electorate of Yan Yean over 11,500 households have claimed the power saving bonus. Across the state since 24 March over 1.2 million Victorian families have applied for the power saving bonus. This support is on top of the support provided to 1.85 million Victorian households in the last round. Together that is \$500 of support since last July and two opportunities to get onto a cheap power price. We know that 40 per cent of people are finding a better deal when they claim their power bonus. That is 40 per cent of people who, when their next power bill shows up in their letterbox or their emails, will have real, tangible cost-of-living relief. This is in stark contrast to what people experienced when those opposite were last in government, with retail electricity prices soaring 34 per cent and many, many families – near record levels, in fact – having their power disconnected.

We are helping people in the here and now with cost-of-living pressures, but we are also bringing down power prices in the future through investing in cheaper, more reliable renewables and renewable energy through the SEC. This is while those opposite, when they were last in government, were anti-wind farm legislation proposers. And here we are with the SEC. The State Electricity Commission will initially invest \$1 billion towards delivering 4.5 gigawatts of new renewable energy projects by 2035, the equivalent replacement capacity of Loy Yang A. The new SEC will become an energy market proponent under a 10-year plan to deliver cleaner and cheaper energy, with all profits invested back into the system to help drive down power bills. The SEC will help deliver our nation-leading renewable energy and emissions targets of 95 per cent renewable energy by 2035 and net zero by 2045, creating 59,000 jobs and increasing gross state product by about \$9.5 billion. We have committed to establishing an SEC centre of training excellence backed by a \$424 million energy and training package to help workers upskill and creating 6000 positions for apprentices and trainees, giving families more money in their back pocket through good, decent jobs that create a healthy, happy planet for all Victorians now and in future generations.

Government integrity

Wayne FARNHAM (Narracan) (17:31): I rise to grieve today for the state of Victoria and the absolute lack of integrity, transparency and honesty from this government. It was actually good to see when the government started in 2014 they set the bar very low, because they have been keeping it there ever since. In 2014, if we remember red shirts, over \$300,000 of taxpayers money – over \$300,000 – then \$1 million in legal fees to defend it, and then they paid it back, but there was 'nothing wrong'. There was not a problem, there was nothing to see here – 'We did nothing wrong'. I have found in my life experience that if you spend \$1 million in legal fees to cover something up you have actually done something wrong. So right at the start this government set the bar low.

Now what I want to get onto is actually what the government says when they say, 'We govern for all Victorians.' That statement in itself is disingenuous. Those of you here that probably heard my inaugural speech would have found out the deficiencies that my electorate of Narracan has. I constantly hear from this government 'We're doing what matters; we govern for all Victorians', and it does not happen. My electorate, the fifth-fastest growing electorate in Victoria, is ignored – absolutely ignored. We need new schools, new roads – we desperately need roads – we need infrastructure right across the board – sporting facilities, schools and the list goes on and on. There just

is not the investment in that, so when you say to me 'we govern for all Victorians', please build our electorate new schools. Then I actually may start to believe what you are saying.

If this government truly wants to lift the bar on integrity, let us talk about some election commitments and have some conversations about those. I am glad the member that has just left the chamber brought up the SEC. It astounds me that in this place where we stand, where we represent Victorians, the place where honesty and integrity should set the standard for all Victorians, I constantly hear, 'Jeff Kennett privatised the SEC.' We know that is a disingenuous representation of historical facts. We know in 1992 it was the Labor government's Joan Kirner that started the privatisation of the SEC and in fact passed the sale of Loy Yang into legislation. So you sit there as an apprentice fitter and turner at the SEC in 1989 and you think you have got your whole life ahead of you in that industry, but you get told you are not going to have a job at the end of it because we are going to sell Loy Yang and we are going to privatise the SEC under a Labor Kirner government. It would have been nice if the representation of that in this house was factually correct. I would urge everyone if they believe in integrity and honesty to actually start representing it that way.

But let us now talk about the announcement of the new SEC. The Premier got up through the election, hands held high, and said, 'We are going to bring back the SEC.' Everyone cheered – that was great. He said, 'I am sick of big business taking all the profit out of Victoria.' They were his words, 'Big businesses has taken the profits out of this state for too long, so we're going to bring back the SEC.' Then he said, 'We're going to own 51 per cent; 49 per cent is going to come from private investment.' And the member that has just left the chamber actually just stated that all the money will go back to be invested into Victoria. Some of the investment proposed has been from superannuation funds. Superannuation funds are legislated to give their members a return, so does the Premier have a superannuation fund I do not know about that is benevolent? If my superannuation fund, Cbus, invested in the SEC, I would change superannuation funds, because 'all the money is going back into Victoria'. That is not an honest representation of what is actually going to happen.

I have been in business a long time – and I am glad that the Shadow Treasurer is here today, because if I get the math wrong, he can pull me up. At the moment there are 20,000 to 30,000 people that work in the energy sector in Victoria. So when you double the workforce to 59,000 people, how does that end up making power cheaper? Call me naive, but to me it does not add up. So I would like this government to give us a true representation of what the new SEC will actually look like and what it will actually cost Victorians. We have to upgrade the whole system to go to renewable – billions and billions and billions and billions of dollars. For this government, with its track record on infrastructure, you can times whatever that cost is by another – just double it; it is easier, because this government cannot run an infrastructure project to save itself. In 30 years of building I never went over on budget the way this government does. It totally amazes me. So when we talk about integrity and honesty, I would love to see honesty come back into this house.

Let us talk about the hotel quarantine debacle – the absolute debacle. Now, everyone in this chamber, I would say at some point in your life you have had a significant event – everyone has. And you will remember that significant event from the time you woke up in the morning to the time you went to bed at night. It could have been when your kids were born or it could have been your first day in Parliament, but you will remember that. I would have thought the Premier, being a career bureaucrat and in charge of the biggest health catastrophe that we have seen in 100 years, could remember the hotel quarantine. Twenty-seven or 30 'I do not recalls' and 'I don't remembers' do not add up. It just does not add up, and the Victorian public know that it does not add up. There are former ministers I believe that were here that could have shed light on the subject, but they are not here anymore. But it would have been nice for the Premier to be more honest with Victorians about what happened in hotel quarantine that caused 800 deaths when they had the inquiry into it, the Coate inquiry. \$4.8 million the Coate inquiry cost, and \$15 million in legal fees. Again, when you do nothing wrong you do not spend \$15 million in legal fees. It makes no sense. It just does not make sense to me that that is only

the departments. We never got released the costs of the Premier and the ministers and their defence. It would be nice, again, to see transparency and what that cost.

Brad Rowsell: Good luck.

Wayne FARNHAM: Yes, I know. I do not have a lot of luck, but we will see. You never know.

Integrity gets thrown around a lot, and unfortunately this government has not shown it in its whole time. When we talk about Robert Redlich as ‘some bloke that used to run an agency’ – it is an ultimate insult to call a man of absolute integrity ‘some bloke’. If the government had nothing to hide, why didn’t Mr Redlich get invited to the upper house to talk? Both sides could have thrown questions at him. He could have sat there. He could have delivered his answers with no fear of repercussion. But you either talk about integrity or create integrity – this government has not created integrity. For Robert Redlich to be referred to as ‘some bloke who used to run an agency’ is an absolute insult. It is unfortunate that the Greens did not come on board with us and actually get Mr Redlich in there to talk. But even when Robert Redlich was talking at one of the committee hearings – we had a live feed; Mr Redlich was in there talking – a minister stopped the feed. Why? If you have nothing to hide, why stop the feed? What are you hiding? Why would you do that? Victorians deserve better. Victorians deserve transparency. We are not mushrooms. People out there are a lot smarter than I believe the Premier gives them credit for.

A test of integrity for this Premier and this government will be coming up in the next budget, and the test will be the West Gippsland Hospital. I will tell you again: it is the fifth-largest growth area in Victoria. A hospital is badly needed, and it should have been built by now. We should have been opening a hospital by now, we should not be building it. We have been told the hospital will start in 2024 and will be delivered in 2028. So this budget will be a test of integrity, because as far as election commitments go there is a track record with this government of not delivering. It is even happening in this Parliament as we speak. There is deflection – they play it off the back foot – but there is history. For my community I hope they can actually keep their promise, because they did not keep their promise on Melton, they did not keep their promise on Geelong and they did not keep their promise to the 10 communities they never delivered for.

A member: Eltham.

Wayne FARNHAM: Thank you. So let us hope this time they keep their promise to the people of West Gippsland, because it is sorely needed. When you walk your father up to the hospital and he says to you, ‘I would rather be in a box than do this’, you know that that is a problem, and that is what my father said to me. If this government has got one ounce of integrity, this hospital needs to be delivered, because no-one should have to hear that from their parent when they are trying to get them into a hospital that is not fit for purpose anymore. My leader has seen the hospital and I am sure many people have seen the West Gippsland Hospital, and it is an absolute shambles. Every time they do something they have to shut theatres down. It is long overdue. So I urge the government to show one ounce of integrity and honesty. If you want to lift that bar from where you have set it – so low – you will deliver this hospital for my community and actually regain maybe a skerrick of integrity.

Liberal Party

Paul EDBROOKE (Frankston) (17:45): I rise to contribute to the grievance debate this afternoon, and I grieve for the current state of the Liberal Party. We will throw barbs at each other, we will have the cut and thrust of politics, but I would like to start by saying that a shadow has been cast over Parliament today. I would like to think that Parliament is a safe workplace for everyone that works here and for visitors. I would like to think that when accusations of bullying and bringing women to tears are made they will be investigated, and we have not heard that today. It is truly ironic that we would stand here today wearing ribbons that signify Domestic Violence Awareness Month, and in the same day we would have Peta Credlin coming out and using her editorial today to talk about or reveal that a junior member, a female member, of the opposition was reduced to tears by the Victorian Leader

of the Opposition during the party room meeting yesterday. This is a really slippery slope. Apart from the whole argument about a safe workplace, it is –

Members interjecting.

The SPEAKER: Members who are not in their allocated seats will cease interjecting.

Paul EDBROOKE: Apart from the argument about a safe workplace and OH&S and that everyone deserves a safe workplace, it is a very, very slippery slope to be on the other side of that chamber wearing a purple ribbon and not calling this out. Do we accept zero bullying? Do we have zero tolerance, or do we just accept a little bit when someone is in tears? Do we work further down the line? It is a very slippery slope. It is very dangerous, and it affects every one of us in this room. It affects every person that is working here, and those members opposite who are new might want to just rewind the history books and think that there was a person over there –

James Newbury interjected.

The SPEAKER: The member for Brighton!

Paul EDBROOKE: There was a person over there, a former member, that was being investigated in the last Parliament for the way they were treating people who are staff in this Parliament – in this house. I think that that casts a real shadow over our whole workplace – not just you as Liberals, not just us as Labor. We need to know that this is investigated. We need to know that these allegations – these accusations – are looked into and investigated and that the opposition leader will make a statement on this, because accusations have been made that are very, very serious. This side of the house stands for zero tolerance of bullying. We have got a huge record to go through on what we have done in the prevention of family violence, but to stand here today and be wearing purple ribbons and hearing that a member of this Parliament at a caucus meeting –

A member: Stop comparing it to domestic violence.

Paul EDBROOKE: We generally call it ‘family violence’, but ‘domestic violence’ – we will go with it.

A member: You will go with it?

Paul EDBROOKE: Well, we will accept it. That a member has been brought to tears in a meeting is totally unacceptable.

Now that I feel we have aired that, and I think we should – I think it should be taken very seriously – we will get into a couple of things that have happened locally in Frankston. The Liberal shadow cabinet came on a jaunt down to Frankston. I think it was a bit of a listening tour, which is great. That is politics, and we accept everybody no matter what their views on LGBTIQ people in Frankston are as long as they do not come out and tell us. They had their shadow cabinet there. We heard the Leader of the Opposition shouting out today ‘What major projects have you finished?’ Well, let me tell you. The opposition leader was sitting in the Frankston football clubrooms, which were built by the Labor state government. He was sitting in the clubrooms of a club, the VFL Dolphins, that was saved by the Labor state government. He looked out onto the oval, and he saw lights that were paid for by the Labor state government. He could throw a tennis ball in any direction, and it would bounce back and hit him in the face, rebounding off a project that the Labor state government has built and finished in Frankston. And that goes for all of Victoria.

When we hear ‘What major projects have you finished?’, the Premier put it pretty well today. Have a look at those level crossings for an example. When the shadow cabinet visits – they came to speak to some people – I would say to them, if you really want to hear from people in Frankston, go on a walking tour. You know, I would love to have you. You could come to my office. But you could walk around Frankston and see all the things that this government has done – stage 2 of TAFE has now been built, a \$1.5 billion hospital, a new station. We would take you on a street art tour and you could

actually speak to people in the street who might not necessarily engage you in conversation by coming to a football clubroom and are wanting you to listen to them. Ask people how they feel, because I know in Frankston and in many other parts of Victoria people feel like their communities are progressing, their livability is up, things are being built that they have wanted for years, things are progressing in the direction they want.

You could even talk to the local constituency and your constituency about things like free kinder. As I said yesterday, free kinder – albeit three- and four-year-old kinder being the subject matter – has been an issue in Frankston for many a year. We love knowing that as part of our actions to increase the savings for people and really address the cost of living, from this year each family in Frankston and across Victoria will be two and a half grand better off per child through the free kinder program. That includes a kinder kit, which many people are seeing, and then we have got sports vouchers. We will do some quick maths here – we can make a meme later – but two and a half grand. Keep that in your mind; that is free kinder if you have got a kid. If you have got an older kid, it is \$200 worth of sport vouchers. These are to address the cost of sporting gear so we can make sure that, whether kids be in Mildura or Frankston or Shepparton or Tarneit, the superstars of the future – the AFL superstars, the netball superstars of the future – have what they need right now.

We have got in our schools – apart from the massive school building program, which is just unprecedented – the free Glasses for Kids program, with free dental as well. I know there have been 32,000 eye tests done in Victorian public schools and 5000 sets of glasses handed out to kids, with a spare pair as well, because you know what happens with glasses. As a former teacher I can tell you this is one of the most crucial things in education besides free kinder, because when you go to a classroom and you see a kid who might be disruptive, who might have some bad behaviour issues, who might just not seem to be concentrating, they get an eye test and all of a sudden we get a diagnosis. We get diagnoses quite often that they cannot either hear what is being said or see what is being done, and all of a sudden that door is open through the Andrews state government's program, where we have tested 32,000 kids. I talked about free dental – the Smile Squad vans are everywhere, saving parents a lot of money, from root canals to fillings. It is a very, very good initiative and very appreciated. Those are two things. You cannot put a monetary value on that. I do not know what a root canal is worth these days, and I do not want to know either.

We also announced the early parenting centre located down in Hastings on the Mornington Peninsula the other day with my great friend the member for Hastings and the Minister for Health, the minister at the table – again, something without a cost imposed on parents. They can learn and their kids can learn how to sleep properly. We can get them in a rhythm and avoid all sorts of other issues. We have got the priority care centres. Again, the health minister has been down to Frankston and the Mornington Peninsula a couple of times, and we love having her there. The priority care centres – we have rolled out 21; four more are on the way and one is in Frankston, saving people up to \$40 above the Medicare cap out of pocket every time they go. That is for things like cuts, broken arms, this, that and the other – those minor things that you do not need to be sitting at triage centre at an emergency department for 4 hours for; you can actually go to this doctor.

I am going to just touch on the power saving bonus for a minute – pretty popular.

Mary-Anne Thomas: Great initiative.

Paul EDBROOKE: A great initiative. One million Victorians have claimed that. We have had members who have had the *Charlie and the Chocolate Factory* golden ticket where they actually had not claimed the \$250 before; they claimed it before the cut-off and then got the other \$250 – 500 bucks in your pocket like that. Those people are very, very happy. We had a day where my office hired a table at Karingal Hub shopping centre, the doyen of fashion in Frankston. We have got some good shops in there. But people actually came for the power saving bonus. We had a table set up. I was a bit afraid, to tell you the truth, member for Mordialloc. I had the management come up to me and we had a line out the door, and the Minister for Energy and Resources walked in. I was a bit nervous, you

know, we were disrupting this shop. The manager came up to me and said, 'We're going to put some cones out because we want to have these people in a zigzag fashion like at the bank, but can you come back? Because these people are getting 250 bucks and then they're going shopping.' I went, 'Okay. Well, it is to save them money on bills or to spend however they want', but 40 per cent of these people are having a look at their bill and saying, 'I'm going to move providers because I'm going to save a hell of a lot of money there.'

It would be remiss of me not to talk about the support package we also put out for the LGBTIQ community. When some of those opposite were attaching themselves to a terrible debate, there were some people in this government that, as Shakespeare said, 'screwed their courage to the sticking place' and said, 'We will actually put the rainbow flag outside of 1 Treasury Place, outside the government offices, because we are proud of these people. We are proud of you. At the same time we will put a funding boost into the budget for the mental health of LGBTIQ –

The SPEAKER: Member for Tarneit, you need to acknowledge the Chair when you pass by the mace.

Paul EDBROOKE: community.' Sorry, Speaker, I thought you were going to kick me out.

The SPEAKER: Do not tempt me.

Paul EDBROOKE: We have also got the solar panel program, and I note that 130,000 people have enrolled – sorry, no, they are not quite the numbers. But there are many, many people who have enrolled in free TAFE and free nursing. My daughter is one of those. I am not sure if she got the free side of it, but certainly nursing is one of those industries that this government has always supported. Labor governments always support; we do not give them the bird.

We have also seen a huge uptake of the V/Line cap. Now, the V/Line cap means that you can spend only \$9.20 a day, capped, to go basically anywhere in the V/Line rail pattern. We heard a story of a gentleman on Facebook that said, 'You know, why not? I'm going to go from Melbourne to Merimbula in a day.' He got off shift, he packed his bags and off he went on a day trip. I have got to say, I am very attracted to that. I might do that sometime.

We have also got the free licence tests, the paid sick leave and 30 million breakfasts have just been served at state government schools. That is kids who are getting dental fillings, glasses, GP checks. They are getting free breakfast. They are getting free kinder. They are starting their day off right, and that is going to pay dividends in the future. That is going to pay dividends in the way that we are going to have a smarter, more engaged population in 10 to 20 years because these kids can learn better, and that is just a fact that I think is well acknowledged.

So if you go through a couple of those things, we have got the \$2500 for free kinder. Add a \$200 sports voucher to that. That is \$2700. Free glasses and the power saving bonus – you might have got the golden ticket of \$500. You are saving \$40 every time you go to the GP at a priority care centre – well, up to \$40. You have got the V/Line cap. You have got free TAFE. You have got the solar panel program, the breakfast clubs and free licensing –

A member: Sports vouchers.

Paul EDBROOKE: Sports vouchers as well. Thank you very much. Someone has been listening. Well done. You know, you can add that up –

Jackson Taylor: Boronia station.

Paul EDBROOKE: I love this guy. He slipped Boronia station in. I love it. But what we are getting to is the point that as far as cost of living goes, we know cost of living is rising. We know there are pressures on families. But realistically, potentially right here there is \$3000 to \$4000 of savings for your average family. Some of these things you do not even have to apply for. Things like free dental and the glasses for kids you do not have to apply for. Those power saving bonuses we are helping

people apply for on Friday at another shopping centre. We will probably be overrun with people wanting to apply for that power saving bonus, also knowing that on top of the \$250 40 per cent, 40 out of 100 people we serve, will possibly change their provider and save more cash than ever on their power bills, which is really, really powerful and helps with that cost-of-living pressure that we are seeing now.

There are some things that we cannot control with that. We have just seen the interest rate rise – thank you to Reserve Bank governor Philip Lowe – and there are things that we cannot control at a federal level, but what we can do is take action to make sure that families in communities like Frankston across Victoria get what they need from a supportive government who listens, who makes sure that we act on what people are saying and who makes promises and commitments and actually rolls them out. That is what this Labor government has done, and that is why people vote for this government.

Question agreed to.

Bills

Disability and Social Services Regulation Amendment Bill 2023

Second reading

Debate resumed.

Martin CAMERON (Morwell) (18:00): Hopefully I am starting where I left off. Like everyone else around the state, we are in need of more public housing to accommodate our most vulnerable people and provide them with a safe and secure environment to receive the best care and day-to-day learning. The waiting time for such housing is blowing out, and the big build is only providing a fraction of the disability housing that it intended to bring online.

The bill will also amend the Disability Worker Registration Board of Victoria to accept NDIS clearance in lieu of a criminal history check when disability workers voluntarily seek to register. The screening checks for NDIS-registered disability workers are currently duplicative, and the amendments will reduce red tape for disability workers seeking registration. As we know, a new regulatory scheme for social services will take effect from 1 July 2024, which aims to strengthen protections for those accessing social services. The amendments will enable an authorised officer to enter the bedrooms of those that live in supported residential services and disability residential services without consent or a warrant. This amendment is necessary to ensure that a provider is complying with requirements aimed at ensuring the service user is safe, providing greater protection for residents in these particular services. It is subject to a number of safeguards, including that the authorised officer believes it is reasonably necessary for the purpose of monitoring compliance.

In summary, the bill makes amendments to align state services better with the NDIS, remove discrepancies with the NDIS, improve practices around supervised treatment orders, update information-sharing opportunities to improve safeguards and expand the role of the community visitor programs as well as many other vital changes to make the system work better for everybody.

Finally, I would like to again take the opportunity to thank all of the services in the Latrobe Valley for their ongoing commitment to the disability sector. Day to day you can walk down any street in the Latrobe Valley and you can see the providers actually out with their clients, teaching them, taking them into the supermarkets, taking them into the banks, teaching them what we take for granted in day-to-day living. So we really do thank our providers down in the Latrobe Valley, and we will not be opposing the bill.

Martha HAYLETT (Ripon) (18:03): I rise tonight to speak on the Disability and Social Services Regulation Amendment Bill 2023. This bill reinforces the Andrews Labor government's deep, deep commitment to empowering Victorians of all abilities. It introduces critical amendments to enhance services, safeguards and protections for people living with disability. It will also amend the Residential

Tenancies Act 1997 to promote residential rights in specialist disability accommodation and the Disability Service Safeguards Act 2018 in relation to worker screening and make several amendments to the Social Services Regulation Act 2021 to ensure that it operates effectively to protect the safety of social service users.

Over 1 million Victorians today live with disability. As a community we are making vast improvements to strengthen their rights and treatment, but there is always more to do. Australia's national disability insurance scheme provides essential services, supports, equipment and more for participants, with over 150,000 people relying on it every day in Victoria. Introduced over a decade ago by the trailblazing Prime Minister Julia Gillard, it is now an integral part of the way we support and protect people living with disability in this country.

Our government acknowledges that we all have a role to play in making sure Victorians living with disability are well supported, with inclusive, appropriate and sustainable supports in place that enable them to live full lives. We have seen what happens when it goes wrong; the Royal Commission into Violence, Abuse, Neglect and Exploitation of People with Disability laid it out very clearly over the course of their public hearings. While the final report is not due to be handed down until later this year, the lessons are already there to be learned and acted on. It is clear that when a system does not protect the most vulnerable, the results are devastating. That is why this bill exists: to strengthen the protections for people living with disability and to make sure supports are in place so that the types of issues that the royal commission exposed cannot happen again.

The key amendments that are dealt with in this bill include increasing rights and protections for people living with disability, improving services, providing better service coordination and ensuring the system works as intended. It achieves these aims in a few key ways by clarifying residential rights for people in disability residential services that are subject to criminal and civil orders. This bill seeks to better address the requirements for service providers when delivering residential and treatment services, which is extremely important. It will also ensure accountability and consistency of approval requirements for the use of restrictive practices for NDIS and state-funded disability providers, making sure that we get them right and use them only when deemed necessary. It will enable service providers to better share critical information by removing barriers, and it will ensure that at the heart of the system vulnerable service users are protected first and foremost. This will be enshrined in circumstances where authorised officers will be able to enter rooms in private supported residential homes without consent in limited circumstances. This may be deemed necessary where, for example, a person is intimidated or influenced by the provider, but an inspection is deemed necessary for their welfare. These powers will be subject to a series of checks and balances that will aim to make sure people living with disability are adequately supported. Ultimately it will enhance the regulator's ability to ensure the safety of service users through increased ability to monitor compliance in accommodation services. This bill goes a long way to improving disability services. It is part of a broader picture of delivering for people with disability in this state.

Now, we are walking the talk in Victoria when it comes to making sure people with disability are at the forefront of decision-making, and this is reflected not just with this bill but in the policies that this government has put forward over many, many years. An example of that is the \$1.6 billion of investment to make sure every student of every ability thrives at school. The disability inclusion program has begun rolling out in Victoria's government schools from 2021 to 2025, and this funding is for schools to implement practices that support inclusive education for students with a wide range of learning needs. Whether it is through hiring new disability learning staff, funding new interventions and equipment, professional development, technology or so much more, it allows schools to implement the best possible solutions for students based on their needs, and so many students in my electorate of Ripon are benefiting from this already.

Late last year we also announced a \$39 million Pathways to Home program to help patients with disability who are stuck waiting in hospital while their NDIS plan kicks in to transition to home or home-like accommodation. This not only helps them get home sooner but means that they are not

stuck in limbo waiting for their accommodation plans to commence, freeing up more hospital beds and helping Victorians who need it most.

We all know on this side of the house that a centrepiece item from the Andrews Labor government's agenda has been free TAFE. Reflecting the high demand for skilled workers in this space, we have made it free to study support at TAFE campuses across the state, which includes and fills gaps in key areas across the disability sector, including welfare support workers; disability carers; nursing support; care workers; welfare, recreation and community arts workers; and education aides. It will make sure that we have the workforce of tomorrow ready and willing to address the workforce shortages and support that many people with disabilities need. Our many unpaid carers across Ripon, of whom I have met many in recent months, devote so much time, energy and love to their family members, friends and loved ones with disability, and their work too often goes unrecognised and unpraised. That is why I am particularly proud that this government provides respite and funding for unpaid carers to give them the time and support they need to look after themselves.

In my electorate of Ripon we are so lucky to have so many wonderful community disability service providers who do a power of work each and every day to support people with disability in our region. I have had the pleasure of meeting with many of them, and I am looking forward to meeting many more in the future. One of those is Grampians Disability Advocacy, who through some of the toughest times supported over 300 clients with NDIS appeals and advocacy, and they supported clients through the disability royal commission. It was a pleasure to meet with them last year at their annual general meeting, where I heard about all the hard work they do for locals in Ballarat, Ararat and beyond, and I know that the member for Wendouree has a very strong relationship with them as well. The members for Wendouree and Eureka and I also recently met with McCallum, who are in the process of moving their employment businesses, including McCallum Industries, McCallum Linen and Ballarat Regional Industries, to the Ballarat West employment zone, or BWEZ. Supported by the Andrews Labor government, McCallum is the largest social enterprise in western Victoria, employing over 300 people with disability. When the move is complete, they will have room to expand, creating 275 jobs.

I have also had the great pleasure of meeting with staff from Grampians Community Health, who do so much incredible work across our region with people with disability. They reach over 200 postcodes across the Grampians and Wimmera regions and have supported over 5000 new clients since January 2019 alone. They do tireless work supporting locals through disability support, carer respite, counselling, family violence support, drink drive programs and so much more.

Everyone in Maryborough knows the legends behind Asteria Services, one of Maryborough's biggest employers. They are a registered NDIS provider and deliver personalised support and employment for locals with disability. They offer respite services, commercial services and employment opportunities. Their participants grow plants for Landcare groups, pack drills for Sutton Tools, place stickers on books for McPherson's Printing, mow lawns, wash cars, clean houses and more. Their services are so valuable for the people who rely on them, and I cannot wait to see what the future holds for them.

While we are well serviced with providers in some parts, of course there is always more to be done, and I will always be a passionate supporter for more and better services in rural and regional communities. Importantly, this bill will provide greater support for Victorians living with disability and will make it easier for service providers to do their jobs.

The Disability Act 2006 is being reviewed in stages, with this bill forming part of phase 2 of the reform agenda by promoting the rights of people residing in residential services and improving treatment practices, among other measures. I will always jump on every single opportunity to work with organisations and groups that are building a more inclusive and accessible community. I am dedicated to working hand in hand with disability advocates to make sure that the needs of people living with disability in Victoria come first, which is what this bill sets out to do. I am thrilled to be a part of a government that is coming to the table once again. We are walking the walk and we are getting it done. I commend this bill to the house.

Annabelle CLEELAND (Euroa) (18:13): I rise today to speak on the Disability and Social Services Regulation Amendment Bill 2023. This bill is based on recommendations requested by the disability sector and does not propose major policy changes or the introduction of new policy, instead clarifying and streamlining existing processes. While it was before my time in Parliament, I am aware that this bill does hold several similarities to the legislation proposed in 2022 that was allowed to lapse by the government. There have been some additional reforms from the bill put forward last year, which includes the tidying up of some technical mistakes. While we support these changes and want to ensure all legislation is error free, it does not surprise me to see this government failed to get the bill right in the first place. We still present a stance of no opposition to this bill, a bill that introduces changes that have been proposed by the disability sector with good intentions towards people with disabilities.

There are some key points made throughout the amendments in the bill, many of which serve as improvements on current operations. This includes improving NDIS effectiveness by removing discrepancies, improving accreditation and creating a better alignment with state services. The NDIS is a fantastic program and one that has improved the quality of life for so many Australians. I welcome the conversation that is currently occurring at a federal level around ensuring the scheme remains sustainable and effective into the future. We need to make sure this works in the best interests of the people it is intended to support and does so in a responsible manner. This is something I have recently discussed with the federal member for Nicholls and disability service providers in my electorate. There is also its role in improving safeguards, particularly through updating information-sharing opportunities and creating protections for tenancy options for people with disabilities. People with disabilities are among the most vulnerable in our community and deserve the highest levels of safeguarding and support we can possibly provide for them.

While on the topic of the disability sector, I want to thank the disability service providers across the Euroa electorate for all the excellent work they are doing in our communities: Goulburn Options and Scope in Seymour, Yooralla and Wellways in Benalla, Simply Helping in Euroa and Atlas Disability Support in Kilmore, just to name a few. There are so many more doing such an important job and caring for some of the community's most vulnerable people. Disability service providers in the Euroa electorate are currently doing a fantastic job. However, we must still look at ways to improve their operations and effectiveness, particularly when there are recommendations coming from inside the disability sector. Listening to their feedback, recommendations and knowledge of the ins and outs of the NDIS system is crucial to moving in the right direction. These services do so much for our communities and people with disabilities, providing a sense of independence, improving skills both recreationally and for independent living, and so much more. These services alleviate pressure on families and extend participants' care to entire communities.

A lot of the most successful disability services come from the community and are for the community, ensuring participants are well supported in their local areas. Just in this past week I have had the chance to see the outstanding services that disability providers in my electorate can offer. Goulburn Options is a major disability service provider in Seymour that offers services to people across my electorate from Kilmore to Nagambie. Dating back to 1981, they were formed when a group of parents, carers and members of the public first put forward the idea for Seymour's very own centre for adults with disability. For the past 42 years Goulburn Options has gone from strength to strength, growing exponentially and having the ability to purchase residential units, an op shop and a hub in the heart of Seymour. They currently operate a successful studio arts program called GO Art, which offers a welcoming environment where participants can express their individuality and create beautiful artwork.

I recently met with these artists with the federal member for Nicholls to discuss housing support and needs in the region as well as the need to better protect people accessing these services across the entire electorate. It was an opportunity for me to meet with some of the artists in the Goulburn Options GO Art program as they were all getting prepared for a pop-up art show that coincided with Seymour's Tastes of the Goulburn festival, a major event for our region. I am proud to say I am now the owner of some wonderful paintings by the incredibly talented Lucinda Donnelly. Sadly, we are not allowed

props in this house, otherwise I would show it all to you, but I would like to briefly quote Lucinda, who is rightfully so proud of her paintings and described them so perfectly:

My canvases have to do with Black Saturday fires. And it goes to show how powerful Mother Nature can truly be. It helps us to smile and to laugh. You can also learn to appreciate what we have in this country of ours and also just how lucky and truly fortunate we really are.

They are magnificent pieces of work and proudly hang in my office here at the Parliament of Victoria. Not only do they look stunning with their vivid colours and strong message, I particularly love the acknowledgment of the country's extraordinary landscape. The sale of these paintings raises money for the GO Art participants as well as Goulburn Options, whose shopfront on Tallarook Street was severely impacted by the October floods, like much of the Seymour community. It was amazing to see the community rally behind them. These were not just locals from Seymour but individuals across the Goulburn Valley and visitors to the region.

To understand the joy that these services provide to the people with disabilities you only need to speak to some of the artists who were on show at the exhibition. One of these artists was Susan Meadows, who has been with the program for the past five years. Susan has built a loyal following on social media and has exhibited and sold her paintings in several group art shows. She is never without a smile and truly has a deep passion for art. The GO Art program gives her an opportunity to safely pursue this dream with the support of caring workers. In the words of Susan, 'Art is my dream job.'

Rosemary Sheppard is another of the talented artists thriving due to the work done by Goulburn Options. Rosie is a very enthusiastic painter with a passion for mark-making, using countless layers of thick paint in her bright and colourful compositions. Like Susan, Rosie's paintings have been in many group exhibitions, and she has sold work all over Australia. Link in bio – no, I am joking. Rosie's fan base is huge, with people from all over the world following her on social media. I am also looking forward to Robbie Wales's upcoming Seymour exhibition, where he highlights our wonderful natural landscape, because he guaranteed me I could not purchase any of his work on the weekend. These are just a couple of people from one program at one regional provider.

Across the electorate the number of lives being positively impacted by our disability providers is immense, and I thank them for their work. My time with the GO Art team was incredibly rewarding and truly demonstrated the necessity of these providers and the need to assist them in any way we can. The art program is just one of the many services that Goulburn Options offers, all of which have the intention of appreciating the individual capabilities of the people they serve. They offer a range of other services, including day programs that assist with independent living skills, vocational skills, recreation and leisure, health and wellbeing, social connections and community access, often through the form of fun activities. I am so appreciative that I was invited to witness firsthand the exceptional amount of care and service being provided by these local organisations.

Other service providers such as Yooralla are also doing amazing work across communities in my electorate. Yooralla has a community hub established in Benalla that has a strong educational and skill development focus, with links to the local community and surrounding areas. At their community hub Yooralla offers classes in creative arts, gardening, mindfulness, IT, drama, independent living skills and health and fitness, all of which we could probably do with here. These providers go out of their way to offer brilliant services to people with disabilities, catering programs to the individual and ensuring that the best possible service is provided. They work with customers to provide safe, supportive and interesting programs and work closely together with the NDIS. Projects like this are essential to our communities, particularly for those in regional areas without the same luxuries and accessibility as some metropolitan areas. Continuing to work to improve the operations of these providers is a priority for me.

In concluding on this bill today, I offer my wholehearted support for our amazing disability support workers and will continue to provide my backing for any piece of legislation in this house that will streamline and improve outcomes for those living with a disability in our region.

John MULLAHY (Glen Waverley) (18:22): I rise to speak on the Disability and Social Services Regulation Amendment Bill 2023. Firstly, I would like to thank the Minister for Disability, Ageing and Carers Lizzie Blandthorn in the other place and the department for all the work that has been done to bring this bill to the house. I would also like to acknowledge the earlier contribution from the member for Yan Yean and her passionate advocacy for her brother and her actions in supporting people with a disability. We know that disabled Victorians are some of the most vulnerable community members and deserve to have protections in place that work for them. That is what this bill is about.

Since 2018 we have engaged in a consultative process to review the Disability Act 2006. We are committed to making sure that our laws are fit for purpose, particularly that they are contemporary, so they can provide meaningful change for disabled Victorians. The Disability Act review has been progressed over three stages. The first stage was completed in 2019, and the second stage is currently being undertaken. This stage focuses on addressing the unintended gaps in legislative safeguards and is also looking at how to strengthen the rights and protections of those living with a disability.

I would like to acknowledge the importance of the stakeholder consultation that has occurred for this bill. This bill was informed by extensive community engagement, including the public consultation period in 2021; discussions with the expert Disability Act review advisory group formerly chaired by Graeme Innis AM, Australia's former disability discrimination commissioner; and of course a wide range of groups across the disability sector and government.

This bill will amend the Disability Act 2006, the Residential Tenancies Act 1997, the Disability Service Safeguards Act 2018 and the Social Services Regulation Act 2021. All this ensures that we can strengthen the rights and protections for people living with a disability. This bill will increase safeguards and ensure better service coordination. There are now over 150,000 Victorians who are active participants on the NDIS. These Victorians are often vulnerable and already face difficulties and inequalities. That is why we have a responsibility to make sure that the NDIS delivers for Victorians and that it is able to provide a better deal for people with a disability and their families in Victoria.

There are over 1.1 million Victorians living with a disability. Last year we launched *Inclusive Victoria: State Disability Plan 2022–2026*. The government worked closely with advocates and the disability sector to develop a plan that makes Victoria more inclusive and accessible. In last year's budget we allocated \$15.1 million towards our state disability plan. This included \$5.4 million which went towards the construction of 30 Changing Places facilities. Each of these Changing Places has a height-adjustable adult-sized changing bench, a tracking hoist system and enough space for two people. They are such great facilities that since the budget we have announced an additional 19 new fully accessible Changing Places bathroom facilities. These Changing Places are designed to make community spaces, including events and tourist locations, more accessible and inclusive for people with a disability. We know how valuable this is, which is why earlier this year, in March, we launched a new round of grant programs for these. I note that the grant applications are currently being assessed for the Changing Places.

I would also like to mention that as part of state disability plan we launched our public funding campaign Change Your Reactions. This campaign is aimed at promoting better attitudes and behaviours towards people with autism in our community. And of course we announced \$2.4 million towards a new universal design grant program. This is to provide accessible infrastructure for people with a disability, which can help improve community and shared facilities. We know how important these services are to Victorians with a disability. In my local area we have seen the great results that great support can provide. The specialist school Glenallen provides incredible support for students from age 5 all the way to adults, and it has a huge range of services, including music, occupational and speech therapy as well as physiotherapy. I would like to give a special mention to principal Michael Cole, who is a great advocate for his students. I would like to thank the school for inviting me to present the badges to this year's school leaders. I would also like to congratulate those leaders, Grace Lambrick and Alexander Gilbert, as well as the new vice school captains Destiny Pepper and Joshua Bond. The Andrews Labor government has invested in a three-stage upgrade to the school over the

last four years that is due to open very soon. We have seen at this school the real-world impacts that this support can have, and that is why this bill is so important.

People with a disability deserve to live with respect and dignity and be able to access services. That is why the Andrews Labor government has been so committed to furthering protections for people with a disability. This bill also improves the services we provide by ensuring accountability around things like the NDIS and state-funded disability service providers. It will allow for additional categories for disability accommodation to be declared by the minister. This will increase transparency in allowing community visitors to inquire into the quality and standards of services provided by supported residential services to residents. The bill also amends provisions relating to restrictive practices for Victorians on the Commonwealth disability support for older Australians program.

An important element of this bill is amending the new social services regulatory scheme to ensure that it is properly protecting people living with a disability. I would like to especially note the need for safeguarding for our residents with a disability. We have all seen media reports about poor standards and care within supported residential services for older Victorians and Victorians with a disability. These stories are sickening and truly disheartening. Every Victorian deserves to be treated with respect, kindness and compassion. More safeguards will help address this and will hopefully make it a little easier for people living with a disability. One of these safeguards includes permitting authorised officers to enter bedrooms in supported residential services and disability residential services without consent in very limited circumstances. I would like to note that while this is important, there are several safeguards to ensure that this only happens when it is truly necessary. These amendments to the Residential Tenancies Act 1997 and Social Services Regulation Act 2021 will make important changes to the lives of people living with a disability. This is about fairness and making sure every Victorian has the right to feel safe and secure. There are also several changes to make processes more efficient, such as removing the duplicative process that current workers have to go through. This now allows national police checks to be recognised for workers as part of the NDIS delivery. These amendments to the Disability Service Safeguards Act 2018 are so important.

Another organisation in our electorate that does invaluable work for people living with a disability is the Cerebral Palsy Education Centre, CPEC. CPEC provides a range of speech pathologists, physiotherapists and occupational therapists, who make a huge difference in people's lives. CPEC supports members by providing a location for sessions as well as catering to care at home, at child care, kindergartens, schools, universities and other community settings in order to –

The ACTING SPEAKER (Paul Hamer): Order! The time has arrived for the joint sitting to elect three members of Parliament to the Victorian Health Promotion Foundation and to elect three members of Parliament to the board of the Victorian Responsible Gambling Foundation. I will now ask the Clerk to ring the bells to call members to the joint sitting. The Assembly will resume after the joint sitting has concluded, and the bells will ring again at that time.

Sitting suspended 6:30 pm until 6:35 pm.

John MULLAHY: As I was saying, it was great news that CPEC received a \$65,000 grant from the Suburban Rail Loop community grants project. This grant has been put to good use to create more disability mobility equipment storage, a specialised disability equipment library for families and pathways providing a covered outdoor sensory education area for children with cerebral palsy. Back in February I attended the sod turn with the Parliamentary Secretary to the Premier. I would like to give a special mention to their CEO Claire Cotter and the whole team at CPEC. On International Women's Day I invited Claire to be at Parliament House to thank her for all the amazing work that she does.

Our community is better off when all levels of government – federal, state and local – are all working together with common goals in this policy area, so I would like to note the importance of the work that is currently being undertaken by the Royal Commission into Violence, Abuse, Neglect and Exploitation

of People with Disability. This is looking into how we can better protect people with a disability from experiencing violence, neglect, abuse or exploitation. It is also looking more broadly at how we can promote a more inclusive society that supports people with a disability to be independent. This is an extremely important process, and I would like to note that the royal commission has already had over 8000 submissions and over 1700 private sessions have been held.

The Andrews Labor government has undertaken important work in protecting people with a disability; however, there is always more to do. This bill is another important step, and next year we will consider more significant and complex areas of the Disability Act 2006 as part of the next step in the Disability Act review. It will also ensure that there is further detailed consultation and ensure the review takes into consideration the recommendations from the disability royal commission, which are due to be released in September 2023. All of these are part of a larger plan by our government to help protect and promote accessibility for people with a disability. This bill is an important step in this journey towards a more inclusive Victoria. I commend this bill to the house.

Kat THEOPHANOUS (Northcote) (18:37): Today I rise in support of the Disability and Social Services Regulation Amendment Bill 2023. Those in the last Parliament would recall the Disability Amendment Bill 2022, which was introduced towards the end of last year but which lapsed before the election. At the time, that bill received bipartisan support in the Legislative Assembly, and I hope its revival here will be met with the same. Certainly, I was very happy to speak on that bill in the last term and lend my voice to the important reforms within it. I will do so again now, because as a government I believe we must do everything we can to build in better safeguards for Victorians living with a disability to improve the quality of services and supports and to take a leading role in changing attitudes towards disability.

The truth is that for centuries very little consideration has been given to disability inclusion, and the impact of that has been that it has effectively blocked out huge numbers of Victorians from wholly participating in our society. Things have started to shift. They started to shift around the introduction of equal opportunity and disability discrimination acts across the nation, but there is still a long way to go to embed the change that is needed to give people living with a disability the autonomy, respect, dignity and access that they deserve. As a government we comprehend the magnitude of that effort, and as the Andrews Labor government we will confront it.

People often make the mistake or have the misconception of thinking that disability is a niche issue only impacting a small proportion of people and not really affecting them personally. Yet around 20 per cent of our population, or 1.1 million people, are living with a disability in Victoria as we speak. That is one in five people. This bill is one of the key outcomes of the Disability Act review that commenced in 2018. It may not be a flashy piece of legislation that gets on the front page of the papers, but it is a priority reform for this government because its purpose is to ensure our legal frameworks remain modern, suitable and effect substantial change for individuals living with disabilities.

Through this bill we are amending several acts, including the Disability Act 2006, the Residential Tenancies Act 1997, the Disability Service Safeguards Act 2018 and the Social Services Regulation Act 2021. It incorporates all the amendments that were previously included in the Disability Amendment Bill 2022, notably clarifying the parameters for service providers in delivering residential and treatment services. It also ensures residential rights and protections for people living in specialist disability accommodation that do not meet the current definitions in the Residential Tenancies Act. The amendments also strengthen and clarify information-sharing provisions, reinforce safeguards and oversight for treatments and placement in residential facilities, clarify the roles and functions of the Department of Families, Fairness and Housing secretary and reduce duplication between the NDIS and the state-funded disability services. Like I said, they are nothing that will make the papers but are critical reforms that nonetheless are vital as we work to improve the system for the people who rely on it.

The bill also has some substantive amendments to social services regulation which are designed to better protect residents living in supported residential care. Sadly, we have heard, through the Royal

Commission into Violence, Abuse, Neglect and Exploitation of People with Disability and through our stakeholders and advocates, of instances in which vulnerable people are living in very poor standards of care, and this is not good enough. These residents are some of the most at-risk individuals in terms of abuse and in terms of maltreatment and neglect, sometimes with very little capacity to speak up for themselves. We have to do more to embed preventative safeguards, so this bill includes measures which will make it easier for authorised officers to inspect supported residential services and disability residential services to ensure people are getting the care they need in the safe and clean conditions that they deserve.

It is worth noting that these reforms have come about through extensive consultation and actively listening to people with lived experience, the sector, stakeholders, unions, advocates and carers, and I do want to take a moment to acknowledge those people in our community who dedicate their lives to supporting people living with disabilities. The disability support workforce do an extraordinary job caring for some of the most vulnerable people in our community, and I acknowledge the role of the Health and Community Services Union in fighting for better wages and conditions for these workers. I also want to reflect on the over 700,000 Victorians who provide care and support to someone they love every day in our state. These are Victorians who are nurturing and caring for a family member, a friend or someone close to them. They are giving of themselves with love and compassion, and they deserve recognition.

On that note I want to give my deep thanks to the work of a very special organisation that I have had the opportunity to get to know over the years, and that is Syndromes Without a Name, or SWAN for short. Heather Renton and her team do remarkable work supporting families with a child with an undiagnosed or rare genetic condition. These are situations where there is very little understanding of the child's condition and there are no well-established treatments or support networks. SWAN works to guide families through an extremely difficult time in their lives, providing peer support, practical information and advocacy, and I cannot commend that organisation enough.

Our work to improve disability inclusion and disability equality is far from over and will require changes to our legislation, to our systems, to our infrastructure and, critically, to our attitudes. The Andrews Labor government has not wasted a moment in leading this change. Across education, health, transport, jobs and skills we are embedding reforms that will dramatically change the way our society approaches disability.

In my own community of Northcote our investments into inclusive schools have had a tangible impact as we work to make the physical infrastructure of our local schools accessible to every student, no matter their abilities. This year both Thornbury Primary and Westgarth Primary opened brand new inclusive play spaces, and it has been so heartening to see the students enjoying exploring and interacting with these spaces. Looking at these facilities, it is not obvious that they are anything other than just kids play spaces, but for the many children in our school system who do have a disability, they mean they do not have to sit on the sidelines watching their friends play.

Just a few weeks ago I was immensely proud to welcome the Premier to Northcote to show him around Croxton School. This specialist school, one of 80 in the state, has just wrapped up a \$7.8 million major upgrade and is looking absolutely magnificent. I introduced the Premier to principal Bev Fegan, an outstanding leader in our community, and some of the senior students, who each told us about their studies and aspirations – everything from dance to hospitality. Students are now enjoying their new performing arts spaces, physical therapy areas, new bathrooms and a food tech cafe and kitchen for learning hospitality skills. They are a fantastic complement to the food forest garden we invested in at this school, now lush with fresh seasonal produce that the students use in their new kitchen. Their excitement is palpable, and we could not be prouder to support this exceptional school and every other specialist school across the state, each and every one of which we are upgrading. That kind of investment is unprecedented, and together with our \$1.6 billion investment in disability inclusion across all schools it is transformative. Make no mistake, it only happens under a Labor government.

Free TAFE courses in Auslan only happen under a Labor government. Changing Places facilities only happen under a Labor government.

There are too many projects and initiatives to speak about in detail, but I just want to note a couple more local ones for our community in Northcote. It is no surprise that the accessibility of our transport system can be a big barrier to people living with a disability. Across the Northcote electorate we are fortunate to have two train lines, two tramlines and lots of bus routes. Making them more accessible has been a priority for me, and I am very pleased to let the house know that the Andrews Labor government has significant commitments to introduce more level-access stops along the 86 tramline on High Street north of Separation Street, and we have funding commitments to upgrade both Merri and Thornbury train stations to deliver improved accessibility features. We have also wrapped up major projects like our level crossing removals in Preston, where two brand new stations offer full accessibility for commuters. For the many people living with disabilities or with low mobility, these kinds of upgrades will make the difference for them between staying put or getting to where they want and need to go.

But it is not just education and transport where we are reforming our state, we are investing in programs that provide tailored support and skills development and we are working to ensure new residential developments incorporate universal design principles. All of these things coalesce in our government's work to make our state fairer for people living with disabilities. This legislation is absolutely part of that program of work, and I commend it to the house.

Dylan WIGHT (Tarnet) (18:47): I too rise to speak on the Disability and Social Services Regulation Amendment Bill 2023, and it gives me quite great pleasure to do so. I know I and those on this side of the house, and indeed I think everyone throughout this place and this Parliament, put it as an absolute priority to support people in our communities with disabilities, to support their rights and to create more services, and that is exactly what this bill aims to do.

The government previously considered these changes in 2022 to revise the Disability Act 2006, which lapsed at the end of the parliamentary sitting in 2022. The amendments to the Residential Tenancies Act 1997 (RTA) address urgent issues raised by stakeholders during consultation, including the residential tenancies commissioner and Victoria Legal Aid. People with disability who do not meet the Disability Act or Residential Tenancies Act definitions currently have no residential protections, and that is something that we think is incredibly important to change and something that we believe cannot continue.

As the previous speaker said, this bill amends three different acts – the Disability Act 2006, the Residential Tenancies Act 1997, the Disability Service Safeguards Act 2018 and the Social Services Regulation Act 2021, and it does so to bring about critical amendments that will increase rights and protections, strengthen safeguards, bring about better service coordination and clarify functions and responsibilities whilst eliminating duplication. The fundamental changes as part of this bill are a clarification of rights and duties for people subject to civil or criminal orders in disability and a clarification of parameters for service providers – our fantastic service providers in this space – so that they can better deliver their services, and it also ensures residential protection for people living in specialist disability accommodation (SDA) that does not meet current definitions in the Residential Tenancies Act. So it gives people out there living with a disability the rights that others already have and protects their rights as residents and tenants. There are some incredibly important changes, and some incredibly important work has gone into this bill.

There are several ways that the bill will aim to do this. It will clarify and strengthen the minimum standards of accommodation, maintenance and support that residents in specialist disability accommodation are entitled to. It will support staff, which is incredibly important. I would also like to give a shout-out to the Health and Community Services Union, the union that represents a lot of those workers, and acknowledge the fantastic work that disability support staff do in our great state of Victoria and indeed in my part of the world in Tarnet and Hoppers Crossing. It will also ensure

hygienic living standards and adequate levels of equipment. In short, as I said before, it will give people living in disability accommodation the same rights as other tenants in Victoria.

The bill will also outline the process for resolving disputes between residents and service providers. The amendments will strengthen and clarify important information-sharing provisions by removing unnecessary barriers that hinder the sharing of critical information between service providers. It will also provide a clearer legal framework to protect the rights and interests of people with disabilities living in specialist accommodation, ensuring they receive the same level of protection and support as any other tenant.

The bill specifies that a disability service provider must provide support to a resident regarding the implementation of any plans and community access and provide advice and information and assist a person to comply with a direction, order or condition. It addresses gaps and clarifies the criteria and processes for compulsory treatment and placement in residential treatment facilities to support client and operational safety and strengthen clinical oversight of admission and extensions of admissions.

There are changes to key supported disability accommodation definitions that currently exclude people with disability from residential protections under part 12A of the RTA. The redefinition of 'SDA-enrolled dwelling' to 'SDA dwelling' will enable situations where SDA funding is not available for residents or where it is not possible for providers to enrol dwellings to be covered by the residential rights protections. The definition of 'SDA resident' is also being amended to include people who do not receive funding but are residing in group homes in SDA-enrolled dwellings and those who have specialist support and accommodation needs and are unable to access SDA funding, including those in group homes receiving TAC funding. The definitions of 'SDA provider' and 'support plan' are also proposed to be amended to reflect non-NDIS providers and support plans provided under non-NDIS funding agreements.

Of course, as you can imagine, this will have an incredibly significant benefit for so many people in my electorate of Tarneit, indeed in the suburb of Hoppers Crossing in Tarneit, that are living with a disability and that unfortunately at the moment may not be receiving the same residential rights as every other tenant. It means that in my electorate of Tarneit disability accommodation sites will have clearer guidelines and requirements to ensure that they provide the necessary support and protections to residents with disabilities, which is something that is incredibly important to me and I know will be incredibly important to my community as well as a whole.

The amendments in this bill also aim to ensure that there are no gaps in residential rights protections for people living in specialist disability accommodation. It will strengthen and clarify information-sharing provisions between service providers to ensure that critical information is shared effectively, which can help improve coordination and services for residents in disability accommodation sites.

Service providers like Scope, service providers like Claro, do fantastic work across both Victoria and my electorate of Tarneit. They make sure that supported independent living arrangements can be made for those with a disability. I would like to give a particular shout-out to those two organisations that do such fantastic work across Hoppers Crossing and Tarneit. Thanks to the amendments in this bill, we will be able to do even more fantastic work in supporting people with a disability in my electorate. They provide really high level support to residents in their group and individual homes in supported independent living. These arrangements are made in SDA dwellings across Victoria, including Melbourne's west.

As I said, the proposed amendments will make sure there is clarity for both providers and of course residents of supported disability living. These services allow for independent living. Scope has helped so many people, including Jenny in my electorate of Tarneit, to live where they want. She sells her arts and crafts in the city now after being supported to be able to expand her hobbies. It is people like Jenny who benefit so much from this SDA support. This is why we need to make sure that we have

every protection possible for those living in supported disability accommodation. I commend the bill to the house.

Kathleen MATTHEWS-WARD (Broadmeadows) (18:57): I rise to speak in support of the Disability and Social Services Regulation Amendment Bill 2023, a much-needed piece of legislation that will improve the lives of people living with a disability throughout Victoria. Out of the 6.5 million people that live in our great state, more than 1.1 million of them live with a disability. That is at least one in six people. Of these 1.1 million, one-third of them require assistance with at least one core activity – that is, self-care, communication or mobility. In fact the Broadmeadows electorate has over 7000 people who require assistance, the highest number in the state. People with disabilities are some of the most vulnerable members of our society. They often face significant barriers, including prejudice, to participation in many aspects of life, including education, employment, housing and social activities. They are at higher risk of poverty, social exclusion and discrimination, and I have seen this firsthand with family members with a disability and many friends with children with a disability.

As an adviser I had many conversations with carers and carer advocates and peak organisations across the state. I know that particularly for parents of children with a disability their number one concern is always, ‘What will happen when I’m gone?’ For this reason, and because it is the right thing to do and because Labor cares about people with disabilities, it is imperative that we seek to safeguard their protections and their rights, and this bill does just that. It will make sure that children with a disability can move into safe and dignified homes as they become adults, where there are safeguards in place to prevent abuse and neglect.

The Disability and Social Services Regulation Amendment Bill 2023 is the second part of a multistage approach to the Disability Act review, which has been underway since 2018. This bill will make several amendments to the Disability Act 2006 that will enhance access to services, safeguards, rights and protections for people with disabilities. Several proposed amendments to the Disability Act resolve to clarify the functions and powers of the Secretary of the Department of Families, Fairness and Housing. The functions of the secretary in relation to screening workers must be removed from the Disability Act, as the responsibility for screening NDIS workers –

The SPEAKER: Order! I am required under sessional orders to interrupt business now. The member may continue her speech when the matter is next before the house.

Business interrupted under sessional orders.

Adjournment

The SPEAKER: The question is:

That the house now adjourns.

Croydon train station

David HODGETT (Croydon) (19:00): (141) My adjournment is for the Minister for Transport and Infrastructure, and the action I seek is for a pedestrian ramp to be installed as part of the Croydon railway station upgrade. I am informed that the current standard design of a modern railway station is to have a combination of lifts and ramps for the public to access the railway platform, and an access ramp is a requirement under the Disability Standards for Accessible Public Transport 2002, the DSAPT code. This code is now the standard for all new railway station construction, and the concept plans that have been released for the Croydon station do not show that a pedestrian ramp is being considered.

Minister, I understand that the concept plans indicate that stairs and a lift have been incorporated into the station upgrade; however, there are local resident advocacy groups who would like the installation of a ramp. Stairs are not a viable option for all commuters for various reasons, and a lift can pose issues for those with claustrophobia or if the lift is out of order. However, a ramp does not generate the same challenges and would be a suitable option for commuters at all times.

I note that the Mooroolbark and Lilydale station upgrades did not include ramps as part of their design. I would hope that Croydon is not a copy-and-paste design and that real consultation and consideration will be afforded to Croydon residents at this stage of planning. Minister, I again request that a pedestrian ramp be installed as part of the Croydon railway station upgrade.

Bass electorate schools

Jordan CRUGNALE (Bass) (19:01): (142) My adjournment matter is for the Minister for Education, and the action I seek is for the minister to visit Clyde Creek Primary School and its specialist campus, due for completion this term. This fabulous school in the Eliston estate opened just two years ago to a very proud collective cheer. It is led by principal Jodie Bray alongside her dedicated, caring, professional and all-heart team, who are exemplary in every aspect of their education offerings and teachings and support to students and their families and are totally committed to providing an inclusive environment and creating lifelong learners.

They are all about connecting their school community within the school grounds, and in fact they have what they call a 'civic heart'. What I also love is that they go beyond the bells and into their local area too. They have Mothers and Special Others morning teas, the Diversity Dash – families welcome – Easter hat parades and Vic State School Spectaculars. They communicate important happenings, like the Clyde Secondary open nights; the Little Demons Day at Casey Fields; City of Casey community events, like Kaleidoscope of Cultures; and also the Casey Aboriginal Gathering Place school holiday programs.

With the minister in the Clyde area it would be opportune to also visit our now two-year-old Clyde Secondary, three-year-old Ramlegh Park Primary and also our over 100-year-old Clyde Primary, where our \$23 million investment sees a lot of 'new', including a competition-grade gym; admin, art, STEM and classrooms completed; works to refurbish their gorgeous 1910 building into a new library; and more classrooms, courts, ovals and so much more. I know the schools will welcome the minister, and it would be a wonderful opportunity to meet the students and also thank their principals, teachers and support teams personally.

Cultural heritage management plans

Peter WALSH (Murray Plains) (19:03): (143) My matter tonight is for the minister for Aboriginal affairs. I am asking her to review the dysfunctional process surrounding the management of farming areas impacted by cultural heritage overlays. In this instance I have two northern Victorian farmers who need access to water year-round for their livestock, but the channels which supply them suffer from serious silting issues – channels which have a cultural heritage overlay on them by the Yorta Yorta Indigenous corporation.

After more than 12 months my constituents have given up trying to get any kind of engagement, let alone a solution, from the Yorta Yorta corporation. The specialist they were originally told to talk to about their area has never even been there to see the challenges and understand the likely solutions. It took them 27 phone calls to get someone to come and see them, and that person failed to show up on the first three occasions. When they finally fronted on the fourth appointment, my constituents tell me the conversation never even got started and they were left exactly where they started.

These farmers need Goulburn Murray Water to bring in its machinery to clear the silting or they will be in serious trouble again when the water season ends in 11 days time. But my constituents tell me Goulburn–Murray Water cannot bring in the heavy machinery without the approval of the Yorta Yorta corporation, approval which does not seem to be forthcoming. And here is the heart of the problem: handing Indigenous corporations control over large swathes of land is one thing; having them accept the responsibility which comes with such a decision is proving to be an entirely different matter.

These rights are not a one-way road. Surely the corporation in this case has a legal as well as a moral responsibility to care for all the people covered by the cultural overlay in a timely, fair and equitable manner. Apparently not, according to not just these constituents but many others in a number of

different locations. The two farmers I have been talking with are concerned they will be without water, as they nearly were in 2022, because their silted channels will restrict the flow of water still available after Goulburn–Murray Water ends its water season. There should be benchmarks for service delivery in cases such as these, where the corporations involved have control over genuine economic outcomes. What do my constituents in this case do when all their best efforts are met with silence? They have businesses to run, employees to pay and contracts to deliver agreed amounts of produce at set times. They are working in the real world. They deserve to be treated in a professional and respectful manner so they can continue to run farms that have been operating successfully for generations. Protecting cultural assets is obviously a significant and important issue, but it is not an excuse to use an overlay to simply burden other people also trying to go about their lives.

Northern Geelong Rental Housing Co-operative

Ella GEORGE (Lara) (19:06): (144) My adjournment matter is for the Minister for Housing, and the action that I seek is that the minister visits the Northern Geelong Rental Housing Co-operative. The co-op has provided community housing since 1983 and currently manages 58 properties, delivering safe, affordable and long-term rental housing for the residents of northern Geelong. The co-op are doing some amazing work in the local community, supporting and encouraging their residents to get involved in the co-op. They also have a high ranking with the housing registrar when it comes to member satisfaction and maintenance services. Given the current climate, where the cost of living is placing real pressure on our community, places like the Northern Geelong Rental Housing Co-op are more important than ever. But like many housing and community organisations, they too have some challenges that they are managing, such as ageing properties, ageing membership and capacity-building of their volunteer team. I look forward to welcoming the minister to the co-op. I know that they would appreciate the opportunity to discuss the important work they are doing within the community and also some of the challenges they are facing.

Great Ocean Road Coast and Parks Authority

Richard RIORDAN (Polwarth) (19:07): (145) My adjournment debate tonight is for the Minister for Environment, and the action I seek from the Minister for Environment is that she come and join me – and I would be more than happy for her to join me on 12 May, when the Leader of the Opposition John Pesutto comes with me – along the Great Ocean Road to visit some of the communities in the Colac Otway shire, the Corangamite shire and the Surf Coast shire who are continually being hampered, held back, frustrated and ignored by the current government about the development of the Great Ocean Road and the Great Ocean Road Coast and Parks Authority.

The Great Ocean Road Coast and Parks Authority in essence was something that initially had a bit of bipartisan support, and that is not something that comes easily in this place. But back when it was first proposed there was a general agreement that we can manage this great natural asset for the state of Victoria in a much more constructive way. However, the implementation of this authority has been nothing short of catastrophic along the ocean road. The Torquay Rotary motor show, which has been on the foreshore at Torquay for some 20 or more years, has been hampered. The Anglesea Motor Yacht Club has had funds put aside and is desperate to get some critical erosion work done to help protect its marvellous clubroom and assets. Of course the Point Grey development in Lorne has just stalled for years and years and years. You have got the fishermen's club down there. They have literally got the money in the bank to do the development, yet they cannot get the approvals. Only in the lead-up to this budget this government has decided to cut the funds from the very long awaited Skenes Creek boardwalk into town so the people from Skenes Creek can walk and commute safely into Apollo Bay without being run over on one of the busiest tourist roads. That funding is being cut. That community is furious about that. They are furious that their caravan park, which has provided a coffee stop and a bit of a community hub in Skenes Creek, has been closed up. The 'We're closed now till November' signs have reappeared, and that community has been robbed of that great little community hub. We have got the Point Bunbury walk which goes around the Apollo Bay golf course. That has been closed to the public. It has been there forever, and we have now got people wanting to

access the sea having to walk across a golf course, threatened with being hit by golf balls, rather than safely walking around the outside.

But most egregious is the compulsory acquisition of the land at the Twelve Apostles. This government have trumpeted they are going to be spending \$108 million, and I have it on great authority that the compensation to the landowners will roughly be between \$50 million and \$60 million, which means there simply will not be enough funds to get that development up and going. I ask the minister to come down, visit us and see what the concerns of the locals are.

Pentridge entertainment precinct

Anthony CIANFLONE (Pascoe Vale) (19:10): (146) My adjournment matter is for the Minister for Tourism, Sport and Major Events and Minister for Creative Industries. The action I seek is for the minister and Visit Victoria and Creative Victoria representatives to visit the newly opened Pentridge visitor entertainment precinct in Coburg. First established in December 1850, Pentridge went on to become Victoria's main remand and reception prison until its closure on 1 May 1997. As one of the state's oldest institutions, predating Victoria's recognition as a colony, the establishment of the Victorian Parliament and Victoria being declared a state of the Commonwealth, Pentridge's iconic bluestone walls have long been a defining feature in the story of our state's character and of Melbourne's north. After years of sitting idle following its closure, its purchase in 2013 by the Shayher Group saw Pentridge undergo a landmark \$1 billion revival as Victoria's newest and most unique destination and a major site of cultural significance.

As the local member for Coburg and as a lifelong local resident who grew up while Pentridge was still operating as a prison, I was honoured to officially open the new Pentridge precinct earlier this week on 1 May – 26 years to the day since Pentridge was originally closed. I am very excited to say that the new Pentridge precinct will be a game changer for Coburg, Melbourne's north and tourism in this state. Contrasting with and respecting the site's 170-year history, the new Pentridge is home to some remarkable anchor tenants, including the 106-bedroom Adina hotel; the one-of-a-kind Interlude accommodation and wellness experience, where guests can stay in one of the 19 magnificently converted former B division cells; the North & Common bistro; and Chapter Place, the former prison chapel turned wedding reception centre, which the member for Preston may want to consider for his wedding reception potentially. There are the new Palace Cinemas, a BrewDog brewery and the National Trust's immersive new prison tours. Whether it is accommodation, wellness, entertainment, history, culture or tourism, all of this will mean a growing visitor economy and more jobs for my community, with 1200 jobs supported during construction and at least 150 ongoing jobs to begin with. While it is genuinely hard to describe the exceptional experience this destination has to offer, it is still not as hard as a real night that many would have experienced in the original B division.

The new precinct has done a magnificent and respectful job in ensuring the stories of the past have been captured for future generations. Along with the state Labor government's new Coburg station, Moreland station and the Upfield level crossing project, unlocking the new Pentridge will act as a catalyst for the revitalisation of Coburg as a future jobs hub for Melbourne's north. Situated between Melbourne Airport and the CBD, easily accessible by the number 19 tram, Upfield rail line and Tullamarine Freeway, Pentridge will attract a whole new market of international, interstate and intrastate tourists to Coburg, which will have a flow-on effect to local small businesses along Sydney Road. Already, during March, the Adina hotel was at 100 per cent occupancy.

Opening the doors to Pentridge means tourists will also now have a seventh wonder to add to their list when they visit Victoria: the Twelve Apostles, the Great Ocean Road, Sovereign Hill and the goldfields, the penguins at Phillip Island, the MCG, the NGV and now Pentridge. This precinct truly is a one-of-a-kind destination, unlike anything that exists anywhere in the world. It really is hard to describe. I encourage all members to come to Coburg and spend the night at Pentridge, but this time not at the Governor's pleasure.

Mildura Base Public Hospital

Jade BENHAM (Mildura) (19:13): (147) My adjournment matter this evening is for the Minister for Health, and the action I seek is for the minister to visit Mildura to release the Mildura Base Public Hospital (MBPH) master plan. On 6 May 2022 there was a media release from the then health minister, stating:

... the Government is progressing a Master Plan which is on track to be completed in mid-2022.

Now that it is almost mid-2023, the people who live within the Mildura Base Public Hospital catchment area across three states are running out of patience. I know the health minister will say that we are attacking healthcare workers, and that is simply not the case. Our healthcare workers are doing an exceptional, marvellous job in a system that is broken and begging for a long-term vision or a master plan in Mildura.

I have spoken with CEO Terry Welch on a number of occasions. In fact he called me this afternoon, Terry, to again ask the minister to visit Mildura not only to see the challenges firsthand, like the urgent need for 30 new emergency department beds, but also so he can showcase some of the positive stories coming out of Mildura. Mr Welch has briefed me on several occasions on some of the positive stories coming out of MBPH, such as the Mildura base foundation and the clinical trial centre. He would very much like to brief the minister on these good news stories himself so he can illustrate the immediate and long-term challenge we face. The foundation is holding a fundraising lunch this Friday, and I am looking for a plus one. So if you would like to come, Minister, I will shout.

When I talk to communities within my electorate and I ask a simple question which requires a very simple answer – ‘What are the top three issues for you?’ – the answer is consistently the same: ‘Health care, roads and housing’. We took a commitment to the election of a \$750 million new Mildura hospital because we know that we deserve adequate health care. With the demise of Tristar health care over 15,000 people have been left without a GP – much less a GP who bulk bills. In that same media release I referred to earlier, the then health minister Martin Foley said:

Everyone deserves access to quality health care facilities and services – we’re ensuring Victorians living in Mildura and the Mallee region have exactly that close to home.

This is simply not true. Accident and emergency urgently needs 30 new beds. We desperately need a CAT lab. Did you know that in a regional city like Mildura you cannot get an angiogram, and it is costing lives. The cost is too high. This is a three-state catchment of about 100,000 people, and you cannot get an angiogram. We often hear the government speak about how postcode does not dictate health care and your health care outcomes, but apparently if your health care is around 3500, it certainly does, and the community are feeling it. So I invite the minister to visit Mildura and our hospital to release the long-awaited Mildura Base Public Hospital master plan.

Casey Hospital

Belinda WILSON (Narre Warren North) (19:16): (148) My adjournment matter is directed to the Minister for Health in regard to the Casey Hospital in Berwick, and the action that I seek is for the minister to come to visit the hospital for a tour. In the 2022–23 budget it was announced that the Andrews Labor government will redevelop and expand the emergency department at Casey Hospital. This follows from a major expansion of the hospital that was completed in 2020 to meet the soaring demand for health care in the outer south-east. I know people in my electorate are excited to see these upgrades delivered, and alongside the major redevelopment of Dandenong Hospital it will provide world-class health care for residents in Narre Warren North. So I invite the minister to come and visit Casey Hospital, to tour the site and to provide an update on the investment in health care in the south-east.

Drug rehabilitation services

Wayne FARNHAM (Narracan) (19:17): (149) The action I seek today is from the Minister for Health, and the action I am seeking is some commonsense support for recovering drug addicts. It is quite a sad story. Earlier this month I had a constituent come into my office and tell me about the struggles she has had with her daughter. From a very young age her daughter started to self-harm and was bullied at school. For 13 years now this mother has had struggles with her daughter, and eventually the daughter became addicted to drugs. It was pointed out that just recently her daughter obviously – but thankfully – got to a point in her life when she wanted to get off drugs. If anyone has ever lived with a drug addict, you will know you have a small window of opportunity when they decide it is time to get off drugs, and they need support. The problem here is that you need three negative urine tests before you can be admitted to a rehabilitation service at a cost of \$150 each. The mother of the child, who is now 25, had to beg family and friends to raise money to enable her daughter to get into rehab.

It seems the government has the ability and the budget to keep people addicted to drugs with funding for injection centres but lacks the funds to support those who are seeking to stop using. While we need more funding in regional Victoria for many services, including drug rehabilitation centres and beds, not being able to afford access to urine tests to qualify for a bed is incredibly concerning. We should be working to remove the barriers for those who are willing to seek help given the narrow window a drug-addicted person gives us to assist them. I call on the minister to investigate what can be done to reduce the cost of urine testing so we can reduce the barriers that exist for locals in my community who want to stop using and start living again.

Truganina North education precinct

Sarah CONNOLLY (Laverton) (19:19): (150) My adjournment is for the Minister for Education, and the action I seek is that the minister update me on the works currently underway at the Truganina North education precinct. As the minister knows, this site is one that is held very dearly by the Truganina community. It is situated in the Elements estate. During the previous term the community banded together to prevent this 9.6-hectare site from being turned into a major housing estate after the Catholic Education Office of Victoria walked away from building a school at the site. Thanks to our government, the Andrews Labor government, this site will be home to a brand new school. In fact it is going to be two schools: Truganina North primary school and the junior campus for the Truganina North secondary school. And of course adjoining the primary school location is an onsite kindergarten. What this means is that families living in Trug North will be able to make a single stop when it comes to the morning drop-offs and the afternoon pick-ups. And what is the silver lining of this, you may ask. By splitting the Trug North secondary school into two campuses, we are providing more capacity for school students in Truganina – in fact overdelivering when it comes to schools in this suburb. The benefits of this site are immense, which is why I know residents would greatly welcome an update from the minister on how these works are progressing.

Responses

Ben CARROLL (Niddrie – Minister for Industry and Innovation, Minister for Manufacturing Sovereignty, Minister for Employment, Minister for Public Transport) (19:21): Can I first thank all the members for their adjournments but begin with the member for Croydon, whose adjournment matter was for the Minister for Transport and Infrastructure concerning a pedestrian ramp with disability access at the upgraded and underway upgrade of the Croydon railway station. The member outlined it was not in some of the documents and plans he had seen, and he would like to see that added to it.

The member for Bass's was to the Minister for Education concerning Clyde Creek Primary School and many other schools in her electorate where we are building the Education State – to have the Minister for Education come visit there. The Leader of the Nationals, the member for Murray Plains, asked the Minister for Treaty and First Peoples concerning the process concerning cultural overlays

and its impact on farming communities and farmers in particular. The member for Lara had a matter for the Minister for Housing concerning the northern Geelong housing cooperative.

The member for Polwarth's was to the Minister for Environment concerning the Great Ocean Road, in particular the Twelve Apostles and some of the issues concerning development, and to meet with the local shire councils. The member for Pascoe Vale, who is very passionate about his community, asked the Minister for Tourism, Sport and Major Events and Minister for Creative Industries concerning Pentridge precinct and its 170-year history – and the jobs, the wellness, the work that is going on out there is truly remarkable. I think I might even join the minister if I get the opportunity, given the way he sold it tonight.

The member for Mildura's was concerning health and the master plan for the Mildura Base Hospital; I will certainly pass that on, member for Mildura. The member for Narre Warren North had a matter for the Minister for Health concerning the Casey Hospital in Berwick and the important investment that will make for health care in the south-east. The member for Narracan's was also for the Minister for Health concerning a constituent and support for urine testing, harm minimisation and drug recovery in his electorate – that will be passed on. The member for Laverton had a matter for the education minister concerning Truganina North education precinct and getting an update on that 9.6-hectare site and what that means for her community and her electorate. All those matters will be passed on in due course and responded to.

The SPEAKER: The house now stands adjourned until tomorrow.

House adjourned 7:24 pm

*Joint sitting of Parliament***Victorian Health Promotion Foundation****Victorian Responsible Gambling Foundation**

Members of both houses met in Assembly chamber at 6:31 pm.

The CHAIR (Maree Edwards): We will begin proceedings with the election of members to the Victorian Health Promotion Foundation. I advise members that the rules set out in joint standing orders 19 to 22 and 24 now apply. I invite proposals from members with regard to three members to be elected to the Victorian Health Promotion Foundation.

Daniel ANDREWS (Mulgrave – Premier): I propose:

That Bridget Vallence, Kathleen Matthews-Ward and Tim Read be elected to the Victorian Health Promotion Foundation.

They are willing to accept the nomination.

The CHAIR: Who seconds the proposal?

John PESUTTO (Hawthorn – Leader of the Opposition): I second the proposal.

The CHAIR: Are there any further proposals? As there are only three members proposed, I declare that Bridget Vallence, Kathleen Matthews-Ward and Tim Read are elected to the Victorian Health Promotion Foundation.

We will now proceed to the election of members to the board of the Victorian Responsible Gambling Foundation. I advise members that the rules set out in joint standing orders 19 to 22 and 25 now apply. I invite proposals from members with regard to three members to be elected to the board of the Victorian Responsible Gambling Foundation.

Daniel ANDREWS (Mulgrave – Premier): I propose:

That Kim O’Keeffe, Luba Grigorovitch and Michael O’Brien be elected to the board of the Victorian Responsible Gambling Foundation.

They too are willing to accept the nomination.

The CHAIR: Who seconds the proposal?

John PESUTTO (Hawthorn – Leader of the Opposition): I second the proposal.

The CHAIR: Are there any further proposals? As there are only three members proposed, I declare that Kim O’Keeffe, Luba Grigorovitch and Michael O’Brien are elected to the board of the Victorian Responsible Gambling Foundation.

I now declare the joint sitting closed.

Proceedings terminated 6:34 pm.