



Hansard

LEGISLATIVE ASSEMBLY

60th Parliament

Tuesday 28 November 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, Wayne Farnham, Bronwyn Halfpenny, Paul Hamer, Michaela Settle, Meng Heang Tak and Jackson Taylor

Leader of the Parliamentary Labor Party and Premier

Jacinta Allan

Deputy Leader of the Parliamentary Labor Party and Deputy Premier

Ben Carroll

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 ²	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 ³	Warrandyte	Lib
Edwards, Maree	Bendigo West	ALP	Southwick, David	Caulfield	Lib
Fowles, Will ¹	Ringwood	Ind	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	Werner, Nicole ⁴	Warrandyte	Lib
Kealy, Emma	Lowan	Nat	Wight, Dylan	Tameit	ALP
Kilkenny, Sonya	Carrum	ALP	Williams, Gabrielle	Dandenong	ALP
Wayne Farnham	Narracan	Lib	Wilson, Belinda	Narre Warren North	ALP
			Wilson, Jess	Kew	Lib

¹ ALP until 5 August 2023

² Resigned 27 September 2023

³ Resigned 7 July 2023

⁴ Elected 3 October 2023

PARTY ABBREVIATIONS

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

CONTENTS

BILLS	
Regulatory Legislation Amendment (Reform) Bill 2023	4631
Introduction and first reading	4631
Service Victoria Amendment Bill 2023	4631
Introduction and first reading	4631
Building Legislation Amendment (Domestic Building Insurance New Offences) Bill 2023	4632
Introduction and first reading	4632
Climate Change and Energy Legislation Amendment (Renewable Energy and Storage Targets) Bill 2023	4632
Introduction and first reading	4632
Control of Weapons Amendment (Machetes) Bill 2023	4633
Introduction	4633
BUSINESS OF THE HOUSE	
Orders of the day	4639
PETITIONS	
Road safety cameras	4639
Sydney Road tram stops	4640
Sydney Road tram stops	4640
Gippsland East health services	4640
COMMITTEES	
Standing Orders Committee	4641
The Inclusion of Sessional Orders and Ongoing Resolutions in the Standing Orders: Interim Report	4641
Public Accounts and Estimates Committee	4641
Gambling and Liquor Regulation in Victoria: A Follow up of Three Auditor-General Reports	4641
Scrutiny of Acts and Regulations Committee	4641
Alert Digest No. 15	4641
Environment and Planning Committee	4641
Employers and Contractors Who Refuse to Pay Their Subcontractors for Completed Works	4641
DOCUMENTS	
Documents	4642
BILLS	
Environment Legislation Amendment (Circular Economy and Other Matters) Bill 2023	4642
Council's agreement	4642
Early Childhood Legislation Amendment (Premises Approval in Principle) Bill 2023	4642
Environment Legislation Amendment (Circular Economy and Other Matters) Bill 2023	4642
Transport Legislation Amendment Bill 2023	4642
Royal assent	4642
State Electricity Commission Amendment Bill 2023	4643
Appropriation	4643
BUSINESS OF THE HOUSE	
Apology for past care leavers	4643
COMMITTEES	
Environment and Planning Committee	4644
Reference	4644
MOTIONS	
Member conduct	4644
BUSINESS OF THE HOUSE	
Program	4644
Notices of motion	4650
MEMBERS STATEMENTS	
Presentation of Our Lady to the Temple Greek Orthodox Church	4650
Chatham Primary School	4650
Christmas card competition	4651
Oakleigh Glendi	4651
Project 365 Ripple Effect concert	4651
Farm public liability insurance	4651
Lloyd Walton	4652
Carrum electorate student leaders	4652
Seaford United Soccer Club	4652
Norman Ross Liebmann	4652

June McCann	4652
Jenny La Marca.....	4653
Katherine Osborne.....	4653
Christmas by the Lake.....	4653
Colac-Ballarat Road	4653
Diwali	4654
Felicitations	4654
Energy Breakthrough	4654
Charlton post office	4654
Murray Valley Aboriginal Co-operative	4654
Josh Waters	4655
South Barwon electorate dog park	4655
Caulfield Volunteer Awards.....	4655
Whittlesea Secondary College	4655
Seismic surveying.....	4656
Pascoe Vale Sports Club.....	4656
Brunswick Juventus Football Club	4656
Brunswick City Soccer Club	4656
Recreational fishing.....	4657
Keon Park Tennis Club.....	4657
Darebin City Brass	4657
Audrey Collins.....	4657
QUESTIONS WITHOUT NOTICE AND MINISTERS STATEMENTS	
Public housing.....	4657
Ministers statements: family violence	4659
Public housing.....	4659
Ministers statements: gender equality	4660
Elective surgery	4660
Ministers statements: family violence	4661
Economy.....	4662
Ministers statements: family violence	4663
State Electricity Commission	4664
Ministers statements: family violence	4666
CONSTITUENCY QUESTIONS	
Croydon electorate.....	4666
Pakenham electorate.....	4666
Gippsland East electorate.....	4667
Point Cook electorate	4667
Eildon electorate	4667
Sunbury electorate	4667
Richmond electorate.....	4668
Wendouree electorate.....	4668
Rowville electorate.....	4668
Pascoe Vale electorate.....	4668
RULINGS FROM THE CHAIR	
Constituency questions	4669
MEMBERS STATEMENTS	
Melton electorate students	4669
Northcote electorate achievements	4669
Greenvale young leaders awards	4670
Pakenham electorate achievements	4670
BUSINESS OF THE HOUSE	
Notices of motion	4671
BILLS	
Biosecurity Legislation Amendment (Incident Response) Bill 2023.....	4671
Second reading.....	4671
ADJOURNMENT	
Bulleen electorate planning	4716
Afri-Aus Care.....	4717
Tomorrow Today a Foundation for Rural Community Development.....	4717
Narre Warren South school cleaning.....	4718
Road safety	4718
Chelsea Australian Garden, Olinda	4719
Shepparton bypass	4720
Better Health Network, Parkdale	4720
Warrnambool boat ramp.....	4721

CONTENTS

Small Business Bus	4722
Responses	4722

Tuesday 28 November 2023

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

Bills

Regulatory Legislation Amendment (Reform) Bill 2023

Introduction and first reading

Danny PEARSON (Essendon – Minister for Transport Infrastructure, Minister for the Suburban Rail Loop, Assistant Treasurer, Minister for WorkSafe and the TAC) (12:05): I move:

That I introduce a bill for an act to amend the Monetary Units Act 2004 in relation to the use of fee units, to amend the Essential Services Commission Act 2001 in relation to various administrative and enforcement matters, to amend the Meat Industry Act 1993 in relation to the application of that act, to amend the Seafood Safety Act 2003 in relation to transport, to amend the Food Act 1984 to modernise certain requirements, to amend the Drugs, Poisons and Controlled Substances Act 1981 in relation to permit exemptions, to amend the Regional Development Victoria Act 2002 in relation to advisory committee membership and other miscellaneous matters, to amend the Environment Protection Act 2017 in relation to the emergency transportation of waste, to make miscellaneous amendments to the Casino Control Act 1991 and the Gambling Regulation Act 2003, to make miscellaneous amendments to the Children, Youth and Families Act 2005, the Social Services Regulation Act 2021 and the Child Wellbeing and Safety Act 2005, to amend the Education and Training Reform Act 2006 in relation to various enforcement powers, to consequentially amend various acts to reflect changes relating to Homes Victoria and for other purposes.

Motion agreed to.

Jess WILSON (Kew) (12:06): I request a brief explanation of the bill.

Danny PEARSON (Essendon – Minister for Transport Infrastructure, Minister for the Suburban Rail Loop, Assistant Treasurer, Minister for WorkSafe and the TAC) (12:06): The Regulatory Legislation Amendment (Reform) Bill 2023 seeks to make 54 amendments across 14 acts and 10 ministerial portfolios to: (1) introduce simple and uncontroversial amendments to various acts to modernise and streamline requirements for businesses and social services without compromising the effective management of harms, (2) support regulators' emergency preparedness through minor legislative reforms, (3) ensure that legislation is technology-neutral and (4) make other simple, non-controversial changes to support effective and efficient regulation.

Read first time.

Ordered to be read second time tomorrow.

Service Victoria Amendment Bill 2023

Introduction and first reading

Gabrielle WILLIAMS (Dandenong – Minister for Government Services, Minister for Consumer Affairs, Minister for Public and Active Transport) (12:07): I move:

That I introduce a bill for an act to amend the Service Victoria Act 2018 to provide for further powers of the Service Victoria CEO and to provide for the delivery of services by or with non-government entities and for other purposes.

Motion agreed to.

Tim McCURDY (Ovens Valley) (12:07): I request further information on the bill, please.

Gabrielle WILLIAMS (Dandenong – Minister for Government Services, Minister for Consumer Affairs, Minister for Public and Active Transport) (12:07): This bill seeks to modernise this act and remove current barriers which prevent Service Victoria from issuing instant digital documents and delivering digital identity for citizens. This bill also responds to recommendations from the

independent review into the Service Victoria Act 2018 tabled in Parliament last year and will make the act more flexible to meet demands in government service delivery and technological change.

Read first time.

Ordered to be read second time tomorrow.

Building Legislation Amendment (Domestic Building Insurance New Offences) Bill 2023

Introduction and first reading

Sonya KILKENNY (Carrum – Minister for Planning, Minister for the Suburbs) (12:08): I move:

That I introduce a bill for an act to amend the Domestic Building Contracts Act 1995 and the Building Act 1993 and for other purposes.

Motion agreed to.

James NEWBURY (Brighton) (12:08): I seek a brief explanation of the bill.

Sonya KILKENNY (Carrum – Minister for Planning, Minister for the Suburbs) (12:09): This bill introduces a set of two new offences into the Domestic Building Contracts Act 1995, to be triggered when a builder receives money from a building owner in relation to the carrying out of domestic building work under a major domestic building contract without having obtained the required insurance for that work. The bill will also make amendments to the Building Act 1993 to ensure that the Victorian Building Authority can enforce and take disciplinary action in respect of the set of new offences in the Domestic Building Contracts Act.

Read first time.

Ordered to be read second time tomorrow.

Climate Change and Energy Legislation Amendment (Renewable Energy and Storage Targets) Bill 2023

Introduction and first reading

Lily D'AMBROSIO (Mill Park – Minister for Climate Action, Minister for Energy and Resources, Minister for the State Electricity Commission) (12:09): I move:

That I introduce a bill for an act to amend the Climate Change Act 2017 to change its title and to amend and bring forward emissions reduction targets, to amend the Renewable Energy (Jobs and Investment) Act 2017 to increase the renewable energy target for 2030, to introduce a new renewable energy target for 2035 and to introduce energy storage targets and offshore wind energy targets and to amend the Planning and Environment Act 1987 to expressly require consideration of climate change when making certain decisions under that act and for other purposes.

Motion agreed to.

James NEWBURY (Brighton) (12:10): I seek a brief explanation of the bill.

Lily D'AMBROSIO (Mill Park – Minister for Climate Action, Minister for Energy and Resources, Minister for the State Electricity Commission) (12:10): The bill will legislate targets for Victorian emissions reduction, renewable energy generation, offshore wind energy and energy storage; expressly integrate climate considerations into land use planning decision-making; streamline key deliverables under the Climate Change Act; and rename the Climate Change Act the Climate Action Act. These reforms provide the economic signals and policy certainty needed to accelerate the transition to a net zero and climate-resilient community and economy.

Read first time.

Ordered to be read second time tomorrow.

Control of Weapons Amendment (Machetes) Bill 2023*Introduction*

Brad BATTIN (Berwick) (12:11): I move:

That I introduce a bill for an act to amend the Control of Weapons Act 1990 in relation to machetes and for other purposes.

In doing so, it is a very important bill to have debated as soon as possible because it is genuinely a bill that lives count on. We have seen too often in our community machetes being used as weapons in areas that they should not be. Too many people in this Parliament represent communities where machetes have been used in vicious and violent attacks on young people by young people, communities where we have seen deaths, serious injuries and armed robberies. That is why I am introducing this today and seeking the government's support that this goes on the government business program as soon as possible. We are talking about young people committing crimes, no longer just using the small knives they used to use but carrying around machetes, carrying around an effective tool that people used to use on their farms or on their properties and that we are now seeing used on the streets in vicious crimes.

We cannot afford to delay this. We cannot afford for the government, who oppose every single idea from the opposition as a bad idea, to then themselves start talking about it in the future. What we have seen recently is the government have now had to come out and say that they are talking about this bill and having it put on the government business program in the near future because the Chief Commissioner of Police has come out and specifically said that they need to work with the government to ensure that machetes can be banned here in our state. When we raised this a couple of months ago and said this is an issue because it was not just in the media but was everywhere you looked, where you started to see crimes happening with machetes, we said we would act, and we did. It is not waiting until such time when it is too late. The opposition have already done the work. The bill is ready to go. Victoria Police have continuously said that they need support from government to have the powers to protect the community. It is this kind of legislation that will give them these powers. We already understand there is a Control of Weapons Act, and a machete is a controlled weapon. What we need is to give the police the powers to make it a prohibited weapon so they can act, so when they see young people or when they see any person walking around on the street with a machete without any reason, they can act and ensure that they can take them off the street.

We have seen this too often, not just out in the northern suburbs but all over this state. I know the member for Brighton can speak of experiences where he has spoken to people from his community. I know I can say I have spoken to people in my community about people having come into homes in home invasions with machetes ready to commit crimes, which actually sends the fear of God through people whilst they are in their own homes. Our streets, our homes and our communities should and must be safe, and the only way to do that, the only way to make sure that we can keep our communities safe, is for this Parliament to debate legislation that gives police the powers to ensure that they can act when they need to, when they see people in the streets with machetes.

We have seen it on channels 7, 9 and 10 and on the ABC. You have seen it in the *Herald Sun* and the *Age*. You have seen it in the *Guardian*. It does not matter what media you refer to. There is no bias in this. When you speak to anyone in the media, they will tell you one of the biggest issues here in this state when it comes to crime is the increase in the use of knives and part of that is around machetes. For anyone in this place who has not read the book – the Deputy Premier and I have both read it – that comes from an author over in America, which is *Fist, Stick, Knife, Gun*, it is about the process of the elevation of effectively using weapons on the street, as we have seen happen over in America. We are in a better position here when it comes to gun laws – hopefully we do not go there – but what we are seeing is a change. Les Twentyman has spoken about this recently: that change from effectively using a small knife to using a machete out on the streets, because they want to react with a bigger weapon to prove their strength and to put fear into those that they are going up against – or what we are seeing

most at the moment, which is many carrying knives or machetes for self-defence. But we know young people do not have the comprehension at the time they pull out that weapon in self-defence that they still can be charged with the offences of manslaughter, murder and other serious injury charges if they use those weapons when they are out and about. It does not matter if it is self-defence.

We need to have this bill debated as soon as possible. We need to send an education message to those kids that it is not okay to carry a machete when you are on a metropolitan street in Melbourne, and we need to give Victoria Police the powers to ensure that they can take those weapons off the street to make our entire community safer.

Darren CHEESEMAM (South Barwon) (12:16): I rise this afternoon to make a very short contribution on this proposed bill by the member for Berwick. The realities in a Westminster system are that political parties have the opportunity to take a set of policies to the Victorian people and to seek a mandate. That is what this government has done successfully in 2014 and 2018 and 2022. One of the great privileges in our state is those that take a thoughtful platform of policies to the Victorian people will always be given that great opportunity to govern in this state and to form the government of the day. If the member for Berwick wants to bring forward bills successfully to this chamber, then what he needs to do with his colleagues is to go and get the numbers. You get the numbers by taking forward thoughtful, considered policies – not scare campaigns as we have seen them do time and time again, election after election, because this has been their consistent approach. Now, when you look at the law and order agenda of this government, we have made record investments into supporting the police of our state to give them the tools that they need and to give them the police officers that they need.

When we look at when the Liberal Party was given that great gift of government, they made \$100 million cuts to the Victorian police budget, and they did not employ one single additional police officer in the state of Victoria – even though through that period of time the Victorian community was growing, and they deserved to have a political party with a thoughtful election commitment. That is what we had. We brought forward significant investment in the Victorian police, and we will continue at every opportunity. When the Victorian police seek from our government things that they would like – further additional tools that they would like – we will consider that, we will reflect on that and we will act on the advice of our Victorian police. That is what the Victorian community expects of this government, and that is what we are doing.

Every single week that we come here to this place, having been given that great opportunity to implement the reform agenda that we took to the Victorian people last election late last year, what we see constantly, time after time, every single week, are juvenile political stunts from those on the other side. At every opportunity they seek to frustrate the government on the agenda that we took to the Victorian people and that was endorsed by the Victorian people. And I must say, when I reflect on the by-election in Mulgrave just a few weekends ago, what we saw was again an electoral test put to this government, and we succeeded.

James Newbury: On a point of order, Speaker, this is a procedural debate, and I would ask you to bring the member back to that debate.

Matthew Guy interjected.

The SPEAKER: The member for Bulleen can leave the chamber for half an hour. Member for South Barwon, I would ask you to come back to the matter before the Chair.

Member for Bulleen withdrew from chamber.

Darren CHEESEMAM: Thank you. As I say, the realities are that the Victorian people endorsed the things that we took to them at the 2022 election. We are going to continue to deliver on the things that we took to the Victorian people.

James NEWBURY (Brighton) (12:21): I rise in support of the member for Berwick's introduction of the Control of Weapons Amendment (Machetes) Bill 2023. I strongly support the member in his

introduction and urge that the house consider that both today and on the government business program. One of the hardest calls that I have made as a member was to speak to a family only a few short weeks ago who had woken in the morning to head out to have their breakfast. It was just before 7 o'clock, and as they walked out to the kitchen, the partner of one of the daughters who lived in the home walked out to have breakfast, get some Weeties, and there were two home invaders in the kitchen with giant machetes. What the member for Berwick has proposed to do is to say we cannot accept that – we cannot accept these types of weapons being used in the way that they are – because every single person deserves to be safe in their home. That is what this bill is about: every single person deserves to be safe on the streets.

So to hear the government talk politics instead of dealing with this important matter of community safety appals me, and I am sure it appals all Victorians. This is an important bill. This important bill goes to the heart of ensuring that we have a community that is safe. We have seen these debates over recent weeks where the coalition has proposed a number of important reforms around enhancing community safety, and every time the coalition has proposed important reforms, the government has said no. Many of these reforms have come at the behest of Victoria Police. Last week we spoke about move-on laws, and the member for Malvern proposed important reforms in relation to those matters. 'No,' said the government.

The coalition is proposing, constructively, important ways to keep our community safe. No family should wake up to find home invaders in their kitchen with giant machetes, and what this bill would do is send an important signal and change the law to ensure that carrying that weapon is equivalent to the crime it deserves to be. That is what this bill is about. Why is it so important to introduce it now? Because this bill should be on the government business program today. Though we will speak to that at a later point in the debate, we know that the government business program that is proposed this week is an absolute shambles. So there is the opportunity to include this bill on the government business program. There certainly is time to include this bill and debate it on the government business program, but instead what does the government say on this important proposed reform? 'No.'

Sadly, it is all about politics; it is not about looking at a proposal and saying to the family in my community 'You shouldn't wake up to two people with giant machetes in their hands as you go out to have your cereal'. This is not right. We need to ensure that this behaviour is stamped out. We need to ensure that the laws send the message to criminals that it is a prohibited weapon. In my community there has been a 578 per cent increase in aggravated home burglaries – 578 per cent. It is extraordinary. And the government have gone very quiet over that, that Brighton has now got more aggravated home burglaries than any other inner-city suburb. These things matter.

Members interjecting.

James NEWBURY: I am being asked by the government about local police, who do a wonderful job. It is a shame that the government has just shut 43 police stations at night, and we have got a missing police minister –

Mary-Anne Thomas: On a point of order, Speaker, you earlier ruled that speakers talk to the narrow procedural motion before us. I would put to you that the member for Brighton is using this as an opportunity to score political points and is not actually addressing the proposed bill by the member for –

The SPEAKER: Order! Leader of the House! The member for Laverton.

Sarah CONNOLLY (Laverton) (12:27): I too rise to join this procedural debate. It is always interesting following the member for Brighton. He talked about quite serious crimes that have been committed in his local community and spoke about that so passionately, and I say to the member for Brighton: I know that you feel that very strongly. I think that when we talk about these things it is certainly not a laughing matter. I note that the member for Bulleen found himself cracking jokes and laughing so hard he was removed from the chamber. The member for Bulleen has gone to an election

twice in this place on being tough on crime, and the Victorian community showed those opposite exactly what they thought –

James Newbury: On a point of order, Speaker, again, this is an important debate around community safety, and it is a procedural debate. I would ask that you bring the member back to that procedural debate.

The SPEAKER: I note the member for Brighton strayed somewhat from the procedural debate. The member for Laverton to speak to the motion before the house.

Sarah CONNOLLY: Well, I know the member for Brighton is an emotional type of fellow. There is nothing wrong with that; I welcome that. But what I do want to say –

Cindy McLeish: On a point of order, Speaker, on relevance, this is a procedural debate. The member for Laverton has twice used this opportunity to attack the opposition. It is a tight procedural debate, and I ask you to bring her back to this debate.

The SPEAKER: Members know that this is a procedural debate, and I ask the member for Laverton to come back to the motion.

Sarah CONNOLLY: I was then going to talk about the seriousness of this matter and the motion before the house and the bill that the member for Berwick is trying to introduce here. I am sure those opposite will not like it when I take a trip down memory lane and talk about the \$100 million they ripped from Victoria Police last time they were in government. But it is no surprise to me that it has taken, what, since the last time those opposite were in government – nine years – to bring before this house a proposed bill at the, I dare say, eleventh hour, in the last sitting week for this year. It cannot be seen as anything else than a political stunt, and it is something I say –

James Newbury: On a point of order, Speaker, this is a procedural debate and one that I am deeply, deeply concerned about, and I would ask you to bring the member back to the issue.

The SPEAKER: The member was being relevant to the procedural motion.

Sarah CONNOLLY: Knife crime and machetes are things that I take extremely seriously as the member for Laverton. As I am sure that you will have read, even in recent days we have had serious crimes and deaths in our local community attributed to knives, machetes and other things. This is a serious problem. I am not laughing about this. What I find so outrageous is that it is a bill that is being proposed and debated as part of a procedural debate at the eleventh if not 12th hour here in 2023. It is an absolute disgrace to stand here and not have what I consider a really serious debate and conversation about these things. People have been seriously injured. It is exactly the reason why, with the Minister for Police, I went and sat down –

Members interjecting.

Sarah CONNOLLY: He is not missing; he is doing things like sitting down with local members at the local police stations and talking about these matters and in all seriousness having conversations face to face about it. We are not a government that is ripping hundreds of millions of dollars out of Victoria Police. We have invested and we have recruited extra police. This is nothing other than a political stunt by those opposite. After the last 12 months, for people who were not here in previous terms of Parliament, it is just another stunt that we have grown so accustomed to – those opposite desperately trying to gain traction here in this place and indeed across their own local communities.

A member interjected.

Sarah CONNOLLY: It is not arrogance. As someone who speaks with an understanding of exactly what happens in the community with this – *(Time expired)*

David SOUTHWICK (Caulfield) (12:32): I rise to support the member for Berwick's bill before the house, the Control of Weapons Amendment (Machetes) Bill 2023, which is a very important bill

at this particular time when we are seeing a rise in serious attacks on our streets using knives and, in particular in this instance, machetes. I want to bring to the house's attention an incident that happened in my electorate on 4 September, where Benjamin, a 14-year-old boy, leaving Glen Eira College with a group of his friends, was targeted by a group of youths wielding machetes, abducted in a stolen vehicle and then tossed out. He hit his head and was in ICU for months, and he is just reacquainting himself back in the school in a very slow but careful way. Benjamin and his family will never, ever be the same. The same group targeted a number of kids on the way to school. A 14-year-old girl was also attacked. Her phone was taken. Three youths were wielding big machetes and using them to scare and traumatised these young kids simply going back home at the end of their school day.

No-one should have these machetes on the streets. There is no reason for them. As the member for Berwick has said, these were used as farming devices, not as weapons against others. I would have thought, having a really constructive piece of legislation like the coalition is proposing, that the government would get on board. It has been months now since that attack, and I commend the member for Berwick for reacting quickly and responsively to get the bill before the house.

We want to work together on these things, and it is disappointing that the government seems to think it is some kind of stunt. I mean, it is appalling and offensive to most Victorians to think that we are trying to be constructive and then the government just dismiss it out of hand. The previous member that was on her feet was talking, again, about how this is nothing but a stunt. The same member was in the Public Accounts and Estimates Committee where the Chief Commissioner of Police –

The SPEAKER: Member for Caulfield, I would ask you to speak to the motion before the house.

David SOUTHWICK: Thank you – said that this was an important measure and that he and the police were working on it with the government. If the government are working on something like this or at least considering something like this, why are they ridiculing the very motion that we want to get before the house today? This is timely. We do not want to wait until the summer. We do not want to wait until there is another knife crime. We do not want to wait until we have to apologise to other parents because this government has let them down. We should not wait for that. This is the responsible thing to do.

Mary-Anne Thomas: On a point of order, Speaker, the member on his feet has strayed from speaking to the narrow procedural motion as has been defined by you, and I ask you to ask him to come back to speaking on this narrow procedural motion.

The SPEAKER: The member for Caulfield was being relevant.

David SOUTHWICK: This is all about timeliness. This is all about bringing this bill on now, not before it is too late, not before another knife crime, not before, heaven forbid, a death. This is about getting on with it and doing something after we have seen the traumatic situation unfolding on our streets already. The member for Laverton has already said that there has been an increase and a spike in this type of thing in her electorate. We sympathise with everybody that has got the same kinds of situations in their electorate. So the time to act is now. Let us get on with it and do it.

This is a very constructive bill that has been put before the house. We do not want to apologise to more families that are being traumatised by those that are using machetes as weapons. I want to be able to go back to Benjamin and his family and say we have actually done something about this; we have worked together constructively with the government and done something about it. Do not ridicule. Do not play politics with people's lives. How about doing something? This is a constructive piece of legislation to get machetes off the streets, and the time to act is now. Community safety should be a priority. It should be the number one priority of this government, but again this government does nothing but play politics.

Michaela Settle interjected.

The SPEAKER: The member for Eureka can leave the chamber for half an hour.

Member for Eureka withdrew from chamber.

Iwan WALTERS (Greenvale) (12:37): I rise to oppose the member for Berwick's motion not because the issues that the motion addresses are insignificant or unserious but because the motion itself is fundamentally unserious and another stunt, as the member for Laverton said. The reason I oppose the motion is because the issues warrant more consideration than just a slanging match and gratuitous interjections from people like the member for South-West Coast and those on the opposition front bench in front of me, because the issues really matter: the home invasions that have been experienced in the member for Brighton's electorate, which the member for Caulfield discussed, and the issues that the member for Laverton discussed. Residents in my community –

Roma Britnell: Frivolous.

Iwan WALTERS: They are not frivolous, member for South-West Coast. These issues are incredibly important. They warrant material consideration. They warrant material and real consideration, not this kind of pantomime performance initiated by the member for Berwick where there is just a slanging match around the issues, not about the issues themselves. The member for Hawthorn, the Leader of the Opposition, sits there interjecting. He has not contributed to the bill. I note he came into the house late, much like his party's submission to the AEC process, but I do not wish to dwell –

Members interjecting.

The SPEAKER: Order! More members will be removed from the chamber.

James Newbury: On a point of order, Speaker, this is a procedural debate, and the current member's contribution is actually quite concerning.

The SPEAKER: Member for Greenvale, I ask you to come back to the motion before the house.

Iwan WALTERS: It is a narrow procedural debate, which emphasises why this kind of topic warrants more considered discussion, not through this kind of motion. As the member for Brighton said, every single person deserves to be safe in their home – I believe it was the quote; I will check *Hansard*. That is entirely right, which is why this government since 2014 has amended the Control of Weapons Act 1990 on so many occasions, because communities across Victoria, including in my electorate, deserve to be safe – unlike, as the member for Laverton said, those opposite, who closed police stations, including in the member for Brighton's electorate; who cut police operational budgets by \$100 million –

Sam Groth interjected.

The SPEAKER: The member for Nepean can leave the chamber for half an hour.

Member for Nepean withdrew from chamber.

Iwan WALTERS: who did not add a single additional police officer.

Brad Battin interjected.

The SPEAKER: Order! Member for Berwick!

James Newbury: On a point of order, Speaker, this is a procedural debate, not an opportunity to talk about the Bracks government's closure of the Brighton police station.

Mary-Anne Thomas: On the point of order, Speaker, there is no point of order. I ask that you allow the member to continue his contribution and that you remind the member for Brighton that points of order are not to be used frivolously in this house.

The SPEAKER: There are no points of order.

Iwan WALTERS: As I say, every single resident deserves to be safe in their home, which is why I am so grateful that the Minister for Police has been with me in my electorate speaking with residents and why the police at Broadmeadows police station and at Craigieburn police station are undertaking such important proactive community policing, because that is what matters in community. It is not stunts like this, which just enable an opportunity for insults to be hurled across the chamber; it is real hard yakka in communities, in police stations and through consultation like the Minister for Police is continually leading with stakeholders and with police and reform processes that have led to this government continuing to reform the Control of Weapons Act 1990 to ensure that the police have the powers and the tools they need to ensure that prohibited weapons are not on our streets, to ensure that families are safe in their home. That is enabled by serious, considered work by people like the Minister for Police, not by people like the opposition leader who just sit there interjecting or by motions like this which do not do anything to keep Victorians safe. The Labor Party is the party that is in government, and we are doing the work that matters.

Assembly divided on motion:

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

Noes (52): Juliana Addison, Jacinta Allan, Colin Brooks, Josh Bull, Anthony Carbines, Ben Carroll, Darren Cheeseman, Anthony Cianflone, Sarah Connolly, Chris Couzens, Jordan Crugnale, Lily D'Ambrosio, Daniela De Martino, Steve Dimopoulos, Paul Edbrooke, Matt Fregon, Ella George, Luba Grigorovitch, Bronwyn Halfpenny, Katie Hall, 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, Natalie Suleyman, Meng Heang Tak, Nina Taylor, Kat Theophanous, Mary-Anne Thomas, Emma Vulin, Iwan Walters, Vicki Ward, Dylan Wight, Gabrielle Williams, Belinda Wilson

Motion defeated.

Business of the house

Orders of the day

The SPEAKER (12:47): General business, order of the day 1, will be removed from the notice paper unless the member wishing their matter to remain advises the Clerk in writing before 5 pm today.

Petitions

Road safety cameras

Brad BATTIN (Berwick) presented a petition bearing 23 signatures:

This petition of residents in Victoria draws to the attention of the Legislative Assembly the secrecy around fixed and mobile speed cameras, rather than seeking motorists to slow down in the first place. This makes them punitive and not aligned to the stated desire to slow motorists down and hence reduce accidents. This petition seeks changes to the way that mobile and fixed speed camera are identified and operated in accordance with best practices and community wishes.

The petitioners therefore request that the Legislative Assembly calls on the Government to introduce parity with NSW: 1. Every fixed speed camera is accompanied by highly visible advance warning signs, 2. The addition of 2 portable signs placed on approach to every mobile speed camera vehicle, and 1 after, being a clear visual cue to motorists to make sure they are sticking to the speed limit and a reminder to drivers to slow down. 3. All mobile speed camera vehicles also have a retractable rooftop sign which operates when a session

is underway and other livery on the cars, clearly identifying what they are. 4. To make these changes within a reasonable time, i.e. 3 months

Sydney Road tram stops

Tim READ (Brunswick) presented a petition bearing 283 signatures:

The Petition of certain citizens of the State of Victoria draws to the attention of the Legislative Assembly that there are no accessible tram stops on Sydney Road between Brunswick Road and Bakers Road, Coburg North – a 5.5km stretch.

Once the Upfield train line is closed to remove the Brunswick level crossings and build Skyrail, there will be NO accessible public transport along the Upfield corridor for at least 18 months.

Under federal legislation, public transport in all states and territories was required to be fully accessible by the end of 2022. At the current rate of progress public transport in Victoria will not be fully accessible until at least 2066 – 44 years away!

As well as people with permanent disabilities, the elderly population, people with prams, and those with temporary mobility restrictions are impacted.

Construction of the Skyrail isn't due until 2026/2027, so there is time to build accessible tram stops before construction begins.

We call on the Victorian government to install fully accessible tram stops on Sydney Road before the Upfield train line is closed for the level crossing removals in Brunswick.

Sydney Road tram stops

Tim READ (Brunswick) presented a petition bearing 564 signatures:

Grievance

This petition of residents in Victoria draws to the attention of the Legislative Assembly there are no accessible tram stops on Sydney Road between Brunswick Road and Bakers Road, Coburg North – a 5.5km stretch.

Once the Upfield train line is closed to remove the Brunswick level crossings and build Skyrail, there will be NO accessible public transport along the Upfield corridor for the duration of the project.

Under federal legislation, public transport in all states and territories was required to be fully accessible by the end of 2022.

Action

The petitioners therefore request that the Legislative Assembly install fully accessible tram stops on Sydney Road before the Upfield train line is closed for the level crossing removals

Gippsland East health services

Tim BULL (Gippsland East) presented a petition bearing 7 signatures:

Issue:

The petition of the residents of Swifts Creek, Ensay, Tambo Crossing, Cassilis, Bindi and Benambra in the Gippsland East Electorate draws to the attention of the House the actions of Omeo District Health as described in their media release on 25 September 2023; the immediate removal of face-to-face general practitioner services in Ensay, Swifts Creek and Benambra that have been active for over 30 years. This action was taken with no consultation with the affected parties and provides no alternative access to face-to-face services other than attendance at the Omeo Hospital in an area with no public transport and an ageing population with limited access to private transport and increasing fuel costs.

Action:

The petitioners therefore request that the Legislative Assembly of Victoria calls on the Government to require the immediate restoration of face-to-face general practitioner services in Ensay, Swifts Creek and Benambra, an assurance that they will not be withdrawn in the future, and access to funding opportunities to support this.

*Committees***Standing Orders Committee**

The Inclusion of Sessional Orders and Ongoing Resolutions in the Standing Orders: Interim Report

Matt FREGON (Ashwood) (12:49): I have the honour to present to the house a report from the Standing Orders Committee on the inclusion of sessional orders and ongoing resolutions in the standing orders, together with an appendix and extracts from the proceedings.

Ordered to be published.

Public Accounts and Estimates Committee

Gambling and Liquor Regulation in Victoria: A Follow up of Three Auditor-General Reports

Sarah CONNOLLY (Laverton) (12:49): I have the honour to present to the house a report from the Public Accounts and Estimates Committee on gambling and liquor regulation in Victoria, a follow-up of three Auditor-General's reports together with appendices, extracts from the proceedings, a minority report and transcripts of evidence.

Ordered that report, appendices, extracts and minority report be published.

Scrutiny of Acts and Regulations Committee

Alert Digest No. 15

Gary MAAS (Narre Warren South) (12:50): Speaker, I have the honour to present to the house a report from the Scrutiny of Acts and Regulations Committee, being *Alert Digest* No. 15 of 2023, on the following bills:

Constitution Amendment (SEC) Bill 2023

Drugs, Poisons and Controlled Substances Amendment (Regulation of Personal Adult Use of Cannabis) Bill 2023

Justice Legislation Amendment (Police and Other Matters) Bill 2023

Land (Revocation of Reservations) Bill 2023

State Electricity Commission Amendment Bill 2023

together with appendices.

Ordered to be published.

Environment and Planning Committee

Employers and Contractors Who Refuse to Pay Their Subcontractors for Completed Works

Juliana ADDISON (Wendouree) (12:51): I have the honour to present to the house a report from the Environment and Planning Committee on the inquiry into employers and subcontractors who refuse to pay their subcontractors for completed works, together with an appendix and transcripts of evidence.

Ordered that report and appendix be published.

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

Auditor-General – Report on the Annual Financial Report of the State of Victoria: 2022–23 – Released on 24 November 2023

Health Complaints Commissioner – Report 2022–23

Independent Broad-based Anti-corruption Commission – Firearm Prohibition Order Biennial Ministerial Report – 8 May 2018 to 31 December 2020

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

Bayside – C187, C200

Cardinia – C268

Greater Bendigo – C269

Kingston – C205

Melbourne – C454

Mildura – C118

Wangaratta – C79 Part 1

Yarra Ranges – C198

Residential Tenancies Bond Authority – Report 2022–23

Statutory Rules under the following Acts:

Associations Incorporation Reform Act 2012 – SR 116

Heavy Vehicle National Law Application Act 2013 – SR 118

Public Records Act 1973 – SR 117

Subordinate Legislation Act 1994 – Documents under section 15 in relation to statutory rules 115, 118, 120.

Bills**Environment Legislation Amendment (Circular Economy and Other Matters) Bill 2023***Council's agreement*

The SPEAKER (12:52): I have received a message from the Legislative Council agreeing to the Environment Legislation Amendment (Circular Economy and Other Matters) Bill 2023 without amendment.

Early Childhood Legislation Amendment (Premises Approval in Principle) Bill 2023**Environment Legislation Amendment (Circular Economy and Other Matters) Bill 2023****Transport Legislation Amendment Bill 2023***Royal assent*

The SPEAKER (12:52): I inform the house that the Governor has given royal assent to the Early Childhood Legislation Amendment (Premises Approval in Principle) Bill 2023, the Environment Legislation Amendment (Circular Economy and Other Matters) Bill 2023 and the Transport Legislation Amendment Bill 2023.

State Electricity Commission Amendment Bill 2023*Appropriation*

The SPEAKER (12:53): I have received a message from the Governor recommending an appropriation for the purposes of the State Electricity Commission Amendment Bill 2023.

James Newbury: On a point of order, Speaker – I have two separate points of order, if I may. Firstly, in relation to public galleries, a number of members have sought advice in relation to the opening of galleries to the public, and we would appreciate your advice in relation to your plans for perhaps next year in relation to public galleries being open.

The SPEAKER: I will come back to the house.

James Newbury: On a separate point of order, Speaker, may I refer you to *Hansard* at page 3575 on 15 October 2014. Speaker Fyffe at that time made a ruling that, if I may quote:

Briefings are not only for members of this house. Briefings are also for the wider community, for members of the public who are interested.

In that instance he said:

I do not believe that a substantial or sufficient briefing was given.

I raise that matter in relation to two bills where a minister, despite requests from her department, has refused to allow the opposition to be briefed on either the State Electricity Commission Amendment Bill 2023 or the Constitution Amendment (SEC) Bill 2023. A previous Speaker, Speaker Fyffe, acknowledged the importance of briefings not only to the opposition but to the broader community. I want to draw your attention to the fact that the department has sought to brief the opposition on those two bills but the government has declined the requests from the minister's own department and the opposition. I would appreciate you considering the matters that I have raised and confirming to the house whether or not that ruling still stands.

The SPEAKER: I will come back to the house.

*Business of the house***Apology for past care leavers**

Mary-Anne THOMAS (Macedon – Leader of the House, Minister for Health, Minister for Health Infrastructure, Minister for Ambulance Services) (12:54): I move, by leave:

That the resolution of the house on 15 November 2023 to suspend standing and sessional orders to consider a motion for a parliamentary apology for past care leavers be amended as follows:

- (1) omit 'Wednesday 29 November 2023' and insert 'Thursday 8 February 2024';
- (2) omit '10 am' and insert '11:30 am'.

Motion agreed to.

Mary-Anne THOMAS: I move, by leave:

That paragraph (1) of the resolution of the house on 16 November 2023 to invite Legislative Council members to attend the special sitting for the parliamentary apology for past care leavers be amended as follows:

- (1) omit 'Wednesday 29 November 2023' and insert 'Thursday 8 February 2024';
- (2) omit '10 am' and insert '11:30 am';

and that a message be sent to the Legislative Council informing them accordingly.

Motion agreed to.

*Committees***Environment and Planning Committee***Reference*

Peter WALSH (Murray Plains) (12:56): I desire to move, by leave:

That this house requires the Legislative Assembly Environment and Planning Standing Committee to inquire into, consider and report by 31 December 2024 on Victoria's Aboriginal Heritage Act 2006 (the act) and its impact on Victoria's development. In particular, the committee should consider –

- (1) whether the act is achieving its stated objectives and purposes, in particular:
 - a. section 3(g) of the act in relation to timely processes and efficient assessments; and
 - b. section 3(i) of the act in relation to mechanisms enabling dispute resolution;
- (2) how the act interacts with the objectives and purposes of related legislation, regulations and policy such as the Aboriginal Heritage Regulations 2018;
- (3) the impact of the act on planning and building activities in Victoria, including but not limited to rezonings, subdivisions, planning processes, local government activities, farming and other matters;
- (4) the interaction of the act with legislation, regulations and policy related to matters such as planning and building activities in Victoria, including but not limited to the Planning and Environment Act 1987, the Building Act 1993, the Heritage Act 2017 and *Victoria's Housing Statement* for 2024–34;
- (5) any other related matters.

Leave refused.

*Motions***Member conduct**

James NEWBURY (Brighton) (12:57): I desire to move, by leave:

That this house notes the importance of respecting the community and Parliament by transparently dealing with proposed bills and therefore condemns the Minister for Energy and Resources for blatantly disregarding Victorians in the way she has refused to consult on the SEC and SEC constitution bills.

Leave refused.

*Business of the house***Program**

Mary-Anne THOMAS (Macedon – Leader of the House, Minister for Health, Minister for Health Infrastructure, Minister for Ambulance Services) (12:58): I move:

That, under standing order 94(2), the orders of the day, government business, relating to the following bills be considered and completed by 5 pm on 30 November 2023:

 Biosecurity Legislation Amendment (Incident Response) Bill 2023

 Justice Legislation Amendment (Police and Other Matters) Bill 2023

 Land (Revocation of Reservations) Bill 2023.

Speaker, and to those members of this place, this is our last week for 2023, and it is fitting of course that we end with the debate of a number of substantial bills that have been brought to this place. I know, once again, as I know every parliamentary sitting when I stand on my feet at this time, the interest of members on this side to get up on their feet, to join in the parliamentary debating process and to make a contribution in the many other ways in which there are to make a contribution during the course of a parliamentary sitting.

I want to talk to the bills but also make the point that there is an opportunity this week for members on their feet to talk to a very important motion that I am pleased to have brought to the house in relation to our government's commitment and indeed that commitment in action to make public fertility services available across Victoria and expanding into the regions as satellite hubs. So that will be a

great opportunity. I know that many on this side of the house will look forward to the opportunity to get up and talk about that as well as our commitment to early parenting centres, and they are an absolute game changer when it comes to supporting families across this state.

If I talk to the bills for a moment, the Biosecurity Legislation Amendment (Incident Response) Bill 2023 – as a former agriculture minister I know full well how important this bill is. Biosecurity is a key challenge, and we all have a role to play in ensuring that we keep our state and indeed our nation free, where possible, from a range of pests and diseases that could cause absolute devastation in our state and indeed the nation. So that is a very important bill, and I know that there are many that will want to get up and speak to that. The bill of course ensures a holistic and effective legislative framework for exotic pests and diseases to ensure that our very valuable agriculture sector is protected. We have seen, disturbingly, an incursion of red fire ants from Queensland now into northern New South Wales, and I commend the federal minister for agriculture Murray Watt for the work that he is doing to do everything that is possible when it comes to biosecurity to try and keep these pests out of our state.

In terms of the Land (Revocation of Reservations) Bill 2023, Crown land, as you know, can be reserved either temporarily or permanently. This bill forms part of the process to make sure that land is reserved where appropriate for functions into the future. Again it is one of those bills that is very important. We bring these bills from time to time. It allows for the revocation of permanent reserves at 13 sites across Victoria as well as six corresponding restricted Crown grants.

The final bill to be debated this week is the Justice Legislation Amendment (Police and Other Matters) Bill 2023. Having heard those on the other side speak very loudly about police matters, no doubt they will join in with enthusiasm to speak on this bill. This is about improving Victoria Police's internal discipline process, strengthening their capacity to regulate firearms and expanding the circumstances in which VicPol can deploy a vehicle immobilising device. This is an excellent example of a bill that is supporting Victoria Police with the powers that they need to keep our community safe. I make the point that the Andrews and Allan governments have a proud history of backing in our hardworking police officers, and we will continue to do so.

Finally, if the Victorian Electoral Commission can find its way to conclude the count and declare the new member for Mulgrave, I know that the opposition have already generously made it clear that they will enable the inaugural speech of the member for Mulgrave Ms Eden Foster. What a great note on which to end my contribution on the government business program and this last parliamentary sitting – that we are getting the opportunity to welcome a new Labor member into this house, the member for Mulgrave Eden Foster.

James NEWBURY (Brighton) (13:03): The coalition will be opposing the government business program. Before going into further debate on the program I do think is important to note a couple of things. As the Leader of the House rightly said, this is the last parliamentary sitting week for this year, and one thing that perhaps has gone a bit unnoticed has been the construction work around this historic building slowly coming to a conclusion after the best part of 20 years. Almost 20 years ago restoration works started at this Parliament, and so significant works have been going on for a very long time. In fact there are many people here who have worked here on the restorations who have held over their retirement so that they can stay with the project until completion and new people who have come onto the job and learned the skills of the trade in a unique setting. I think many members will come back to this place next year and notice some differences around the building and Victorians will notice structural differences and less scaffolding around the building, so I think is important that this house notes all of the work that has been done around this building and thanks the companies and the workers that have been involved over such a long period of time. We thank them for their work.

We also thank at the end of the year the clerks, the team and the attendants, who do an incredible job, and all of the staff of this place, who have done an incredible job this year and always do. I think it is important to acknowledge their hard work this year, including my own team in my own office, of Allie

Amey, Elouise Ager and Liz, who has just come on board. All of our staff do an incredible job, and I think it is important to acknowledge that at the end of the year.

In terms of the government business program, as I said, we will be opposing the government business program. I pick up the proposed government business program, noting the difference between what I am holding and what was sent out to the public on Thursday as the proposed government business program. A number of bills proposed for the week's debate are missing. Where are they? The government shelved them, much like a number of other pieces of legislation the government has shelved. The State Electricity Commission Amendment Bill 2023 and the Constitution Amendment (SEC) Bill 2023 have both been pulled from the program that was sent out on Thursday – the program we hold before us. That tells us that the government does not have a strong legislative program this week, and it has confirmed an intention to deal with a motion which, though important – it is an important matter – does say that there was capacity for further legislative debate during the week. But those bills have been removed, much in the same way as the state tax bills have been shelved and the WorkCover bill – who knows where that is at. The government's legislative program is in tatters. We hold a proposed program that is an amended program that is missing a number of bills that were proposed last Thursday. This week we will, as the Leader of the House said, be debating three bills. We could have been debating the SEC bill and the constitution amendment bill.

If you look to the vote that just occurred earlier, we had proposed including a further community safety bill in relation to machetes and had hoped that that would be on the program. Unfortunately, that is not listed for debate. On the division on that debate there were 52 government members in the chamber. You would note that the Constitution Amendment (SEC) Bill would have required 53 government members to be in the Parliament to pass that bill and earlier today there were 52 in the chamber. One would not like to reflect overtly on why the government pulled the bill, but it appears that they could not even get their own members to the chamber this week.

It is embarrassing that the government has completely dropped the ball in relation to their government business program and their broader legislative program. The Parliament is clearly in chaos in terms of legislative reforms. The SEC, being the most important thing the government committed to do at the last election, has been shelved. It is embarrassing, and the coalition will be opposing the program.

Sarah CONNOLLY (Laverton) (13:08): It is a great pleasure to rise to speak on the government business program for this sitting week, the last sitting week of 2023. It is always a pleasure to follow the member for Brighton, because while he talks about the doom and gloom, I am going to talk about some really fantastic things that we are going to talk about this week here in this place as part of our final 2023 legislative agenda as we wind down the year. I will say what a year it has been. As the first year in a new term of government, again so many bills have come before this house that we on this side of the house have debated, talked passionately about and shared experiences on. It has been a remarkable year for legislative reform here in this state, thanks to the Andrews and Allan Labor governments.

It has been one year since we were re-elected to this place, a timely reminder to continue delivering for Victorians, and that is exactly what we have gotten up to over the past 12 months. We have not wasted a day in this place passing legislation. We may have ended the year with a new Premier – again, I will say the second woman Premier that Victoria has ever had, a remarkable achievement – but the work of our government remains the same. We are getting on and delivering for all Victorians.

I am also going to add that I really look forward – along with, I know, the rest of my colleagues on this side of the chamber – to, hopefully, welcoming the new member-elect for Mulgrave Eden Foster to this place. It is a remarkable achievement for such an incredible woman to join this place and our government to continue to deliver for Victorians. What is also incredible about Eden joining, hopefully this week, is that finally in the history of Victoria we are going to reach gender parity here in this Parliament. That is a remarkable achievement. Some of the stories that I have listened to over the five years that I have been here include that when the first ever female member was elected to this place I

do not think they had a female bathroom, and they actually used to travel home to go to the toilet. I remember that struck me, as someone who has had three babies and might be running off to the toilet more often than most – not to have your own bathroom to use because you were the only woman here in the Victorian Parliament. Now we have half-half. That is a tremendous achievement, and indeed it is something we are going to celebrate this week with, I believe, a photo of all the female MPs that represent Victorians here in this place. I know my colleagues are very keen on having the photo taken, but that invite has been extended to those on the other side of the chamber as well. It will be wonderful to have all the women here in this place having a photo taken together to celebrate what could only have been dreamed of and imagined by that first woman who entered this place many, many moons ago.

We have also got another motion by leave that we will be looking at in relation to IVF that will be brought back before this place, and I am really looking forward to making a contribution – I think I am first up to speak on that motion. I have many stories to share. I have not decided which stories to share about that IVF journey. Some of them are very funny. I can tell you, member for Brighton, there would be plenty of laughs here in this place through the stories I could share about the road to parenthood and using assisted reproductive technology. But there are also some really sad, tragic stories along the way, so I am just trying to decide which ones I want to share today, with this being the last sitting week of 2023.

Of course we are also going to be debating another three really important bills that have been talked about by previous speakers here as part of this government business program: the Biosecurity Legislation Amendment (Incident Response) Bill 2023, the Justice Legislation Amendment (Police and Other Matters) Bill 2023 and the Land (Revocation of Reservations) Bill 2023. In the last 20-odd seconds that I have got left I would like to wish members here in this place, if I am allowed to say it, as we approach December a very merry Christmas and give a very heartfelt thankyou to all of the parliamentary staff that make this place function and make it such an incredible workplace to work in. I wish you and your families a very happy Christmas.

Martin CAMERON (Morwell) (13:13): I also rise to talk on the government business program for this our last sitting week. As the member for Brighton alluded to before, we will be opposing the government business program. Of course we do have some worthy items that we do need to discuss – the biosecurity amendments and the land bill and justice legislation amendments. Yes, we do need to be able to stand up and debate across the chamber with each other, but it was a little bit disappointing, as the member for Brighton said, that two of the bills that were going to be discussed today involving the SEC were pulled late last evening. I was certainly looking forward to being able to stand up and talk about them, because the SEC is a topic down in the Latrobe Valley. I am probably a little bit passionate about it because it is the home of the SEC and power generation for Victoria, and it would have been great to have been able to finally talk about and listen to how the SEC was going to be achieved and what outcomes the SEC was going to bring to us, because it is one of the major things that the constituents down in the Latrobe Valley constantly ask me about.

It was 12 months across the weekend since we had that election. Luckily, I won the election down in Morwell and I get to represent my community here in Parliament. It is a blessing that I can stand up in the chamber and speak about the issues that we find a little bit concerning, one of them being bringing back the SEC. It was also 12 months ago, probably a week out from the election, that the jewel in the crown of the Labor government was launched down in Yallourn at the power station there – that they were bringing back the SEC – with great fanfare. The following day – or I think it was actually the day; they might have gone a little bit early – people were handing out how-to-vote cards wearing their SEC paraphernalia, caps and old jackets. And still we wonder what it is that the SEC is going to stand for.

I get to sit in the chamber every single week and listen to the Minister for the State Electricity Commission and Minister for Energy and Resources talk about how many jobs bringing back the SEC is going to give us, what it is actually going to do. At the start it was going to drive down our cost of

living, our out-of-control energy prices, and now it is changing and the SEC is going to stand for renewables, so we would also like to find out the finer details of that.

With this government business program I thought, 'It's finally going to happen. I've been sitting in the chair for 12 months, and I'll be able to get some answers. I'll be able to stand up and debate, with those across the other side, what it is that the SEC stands for.' We know, because we constantly hear, that Victoria voted to bring back the SEC. Well, if that is the case, why aren't they standing up this week and talking about what the SEC is going to do? If the public voted for it, give us the details, please, about what it is going to actually do.

We sit here patiently waiting to hear about how it is going to work, when it is going to work and why we should have it, but most importantly, how much bringing back the SEC is actually going to cost us and the general public of Victoria. These are questions we want to know. I am sure the constituents of the members on the other side of the chamber all want to know as well. They might think they do not want to know, but it is a burning question right across Victoria: what is it going to stand for? They had their opportunity in the last sitting week to come and tell us so that we could tell our constituents. That is why we will be opposing the government business program today.

Belinda WILSON (Narre Warren North) (13:18): It is always an honour and a privilege to speak on the government business program and listen to both sides of the chamber talk about what has been happening in the last 12 months. It has been a big year. I did note that the member for Brighton thanked many of the staff that have helped and assisted all of us throughout the past 12 months. I would like to do exactly the same and say thank you to the clerks, to the security team, to the catering staff and to everybody here who does such an incredible job in this place to help and assist us in our place of work, especially for those who are newer to this place than others.

I have only been here for under 12 months. A few of the new members here with me have put on their crowns many a time through this journey. I look to the member for Mildura, remembering how well she wears her crown in this place – and she will understand that in-joke, which is just between the class of 2022. I know the member for Brighton is dying to know what I am talking about, and he is unsure what that secret little service is. In that little group of us, the class of 2022, we know there are some tigers and some crown wearers. We are all very au fait with what we are talking about – a little secret message that we have on both sides, which I think is one of the great things about this place.

We are very excited about welcoming a new member to our team, which will be happening, hopefully, later on this week: the member-elect for Mulgrave. She is going to make an incredible contribution to our group, and we look forward to having her come into this chamber to be sworn in and to do her inaugural speech, which may happen this week or it may happen next year. Sometimes we have to wait for great things. The SEC is not happening this week, but perhaps we will be holding on with bated breath to let you all know on the other side how incredible and amazing it is. That may have to wait until next year, but don't you worry, you will find out about it and you will see how incredible our program is.

I am also really excited about the 50–50 gender equality list in this Parliament. As the granddaughter of a former member of Parliament I often have a little smile to myself when I see so many incredible women in this place. As I look at you, Deputy Speaker – he did hold the Deputy Speaker's role – I often think about what his thoughts would be on how many women are in this place. He would have, looking down, a little smile of amazement, I would think, at how many women are in this place now, which I think is very exciting. I know that some of the members on the other side said they were not aware of the photo we are planning on doing tomorrow; I will ensure that that information is passed on.

One of the other great things about this week that I am really excited about and I am going to be speaking on is the IVF motion. As a mother of three I am so excited about this, because in my electorate of Narre Warren North, IVF is a program that is very, very expensive and is out of reach for many, many people. I have had a number of conversations with many constituents about the incredible

agenda and program we have for this, and it is really going to make a difference to so many people's lives. I am really, really excited about speaking about this and hearing these stories – and hearing the stories of so many people in this chamber. I think that IVF has touched so many people's lives on both sides of the chamber, and it has made such a difference. Modern science, it is incredible – I mean, really incredible. It is expensive, and for us as a government to be able to offer that to so many people who could not afford that in the past is just, for me, really, really exciting.

We also have our Biosecurity Legislation Amendment (Incident Response) Bill 2023, which I know people have already touched on, and our Justice Legislation Amendment (Police and Other Matters) Bill 2023 too. I am very excited about the government's business program. I am disappointed that the other side do not agree with us, but you know, this is the great thing of politics, isn't it? So I am looking forward to hearing the rest of the contributions, and I would like to commend the government business program to the house.

Roma BRITNELL (South-West Coast) (13:23): I rise to speak on the government business program, but before I do, I want to take the opportunity as it is the last week of the sitting of the Parliament to wish everyone a merry Christmas and thank everyone in the Parliament who helps us here. I would like to send a message to all Victorians, particularly those from metropolitan Melbourne: if you are visiting South-West Coast or regional parts of Victoria, please take care on the roads. Our roads are in a deplorable state. It is with absolute genuineness that I say to you: just take heed and be very careful. You will not be used to it, and you will not realise just how bad it is until you experience it. I do want to see everyone have a happy Christmas with their family, but please take the time to be safe on our roads; they are in a deplorable state.

I stand to speak on the government business program, and I do so to oppose it. I oppose it because it is really disappointing. I saw last week that the government put the State Electricity Commission Amendment Bill 2023 and the Constitution Amendment (SEC) Bill 2023 on the program, and like I do, I sent out to my community that I would be speaking on these bills and looking for feedback. So it was with quite some surprise that I saw on Sunday night, after I had already informed my community, that the government were pulling these bills. It is probably no surprise, but I wonder: is it arrogance or is it chaos? Probably both, I would suggest, because what we know is the government promised prior to the election to bring back the SEC so they could bring down power prices. But what I think we will see in this legislation is that there is no ability for the government to enshrine these assets, because there are not any. It is a concept that they want to enshrine in the constitution, and it is actually nothing more than a con. Victorians are starting to see through this Labor government's con. Pulling the wool over Victorians' eyes can only last so long, and it has come to an end for Labor because that is what people are seeing. They are seeing it in the overspends on the big projects – projects that have cost over \$11 billion more than predicted in the last three years, which came out last week.

It makes me very concerned about projects like the Warrnambool Base Hospital, which is the only significant health build that has not been given extra funding. It makes me wonder what the government will expect to cut from the Warrnambool Base Hospital build if they are not going to extend the funding further than \$384 million. I am very concerned about that build, and I would like the government to come clean and tell us how they are going to build that within the scope from three years ago when clearly building costs have gone up by 30 per cent.

We are discussing a legislative program where the government have pulled their signature pre-election commitment, bringing down power prices by bringing back the SEC – clearly an absolute con to the Victorian community. It is probably very similar to the con that they did with the Commonwealth Games – a promise that they pulled, which has just left the community, particularly in regional Victoria, without any hope for the roads and the sports stadiums that could have been rebuilt and the athletes that have been disappointed. We also should be discussing legislation that will make a difference. During this cost-of-living crisis we should be seeing things that actually help bring prices down, like the SEC. We should be discussing legislation around things like what is happening in Glenelg, where we could have legislation that prevents candidates having to have a countback and

wasting time if they want to say they are not going to be a councillor. We could declare that at the start and change legislation to allow for that. It is costing Glenelg ratepayers \$1200 a day for monitors, and also this countback has to exclude people one by one. They should be given the opportunity to say they are not to take up the role. These sorts of things are costing ratepayers a lot and obviously get passed on to the community, increasing the cost of living. That would be costing a fortune.

This government business program is absolutely appalling because we are not actually able to debate something of substance. We have certainly got very good bills on the program, such as the Biosecurity Legislation Amendment (Incident Response) Bill 2023, which will see us talk about the importance of biosecurity in agriculture, something that has been a long time coming. We have seen trespassers on farms causing biosecurity risks and terrorising farming families for years, and it has been four years in the making and that we have been waiting for this to come into the Parliament – a long time waiting. When you see issues – *(Time expired)*

Assembly divided on motion:

Ayes (51): Juliana Addison, Jacinta Allan, Colin Brooks, Josh Bull, Anthony Carbines, Ben Carroll, Darren Cheeseman, Anthony Cianflone, Sarah Connolly, Chris Couzens, Jordan Crugnale, Lily D'Ambrosio, Daniela De Martino, Steve Dimopoulos, Paul Edbrooke, Matt Fregon, Ella George, Luba Grigorovitch, Bronwyn Halfpenny, Katie Hall, Paul Hamer, Martha Haylett, Mathew Hilakari, Melissa Horne, Natalie Hutchins, Lauren Kathage, Sonya Kilkenny, Nathan Lambert, Gary Maas, Alison Marchant, Steve McGhie, Paul Mercurio, John Mullahy, Tim Pallas, Danny Pearson, Pauline Richards, Tim Richardson, Michaela Settle, Ros Spence, Nick Staikos, Natalie Suleyman, Meng Heang Tak, Nina Taylor, Kat Theophanous, Mary-Anne Thomas, Emma Vulin, Iwan Walters, Vicki Ward, Dylan Wight, Gabrielle Williams, Belinda Wilson

Noes (26): Jade Benham, Roma Britnell, Tim Bull, Martin Cameron, Annabelle Cleeland, Chris Crewther, Wayne Farnham, Sam Groth, Matthew Guy, David Hodgett, Emma Kealy, Tim McCurdy, Cindy McLeish, James Newbury, Danny O'Brien, Michael O'Brien, Kim O'Keeffe, John Pesutto, Richard Riordan, Brad Rowswell, David Southwick, Bridget Vallence, Peter Walsh, Kim Wells, Nicole Werner, Jess Wilson

Motion agreed to.

Notices of motion

Notices given.

Members statements

Presentation of Our Lady to the Temple Greek Orthodox Church

Jess WILSON (Kew) (13:35): Last Tuesday I had the honour of attending the consecration ceremony of the Presentation of Our Lady to the Temple Greek Orthodox parish in North Balwyn. The ceremony was led by the Archbishop of Australia, together with the local parish priest Father Nick. Thank you for inviting me to this very special and historic event for the North Balwyn parish. It is always a pleasure to join with our local Greek community, such a strong and lively community that comes together in faith and in celebration of their tradition with family and friends.

Chatham Primary School

Jess WILSON (Kew) (13:36): Last Saturday my team and I attended the Chatham Primary School fair to run the sausage sizzle for the afternoon. It was wonderful to see this local school community come together to showcase the best of Chatham's inclusive spirit and raise critical funds for the school. I would like to acknowledge all the selfless parents who dedicated countless hours to organising the fair and send a special thankyou to principal Christopher Cotching, deputy principal Georgie Kirwan and fair organisers Kristy McIlvenna, Belinda Dalton, Kate Rippon and Bree Knight for their hard work, which made the Chatham Primary School fair such a successful event.

Christmas card competition

Jess WILSON (Kew) (13:36): It is beginning to look a lot like Christmas, and on that note can I congratulate the winners of my 2023 Christmas card competition: featured artist Cara from Kew East Primary; Alexia from Sacred Heart Primary; Michael from Belmore School; Jason from St Bridget's Primary; the overall runner-up Niann from Deepdene Primary School; and overall winner Charlotte from Chatham Primary School. Thank you to Shelby from QArt Gallery for helping me with the very hard task of judging the award winners from each school and the overall winners, who will feature on my Christmas card. It was very difficult to select the award recipients because we were so impressed with the creativity and effort from many students.

Oakleigh Glendi

Steve DIMOPOULOS (Oakleigh – Minister for Environment, Minister for Tourism, Sport and Major Events, Minister for Outdoor Recreation) (13:37): I have recently had the great pleasure of celebrating the Oakleigh Glendi festival. It was an absolute joy to be part of an event that truly encapsulated the vibrant spirit of the Oakleigh Greek community. Alongside the member-elect for Mulgrave Eden Foster, the member for Bentleigh, the member for Chisholm Dr Carina Garland and the federal Minister for Immigration, Citizenship and Multicultural Affairs the Honourable Andrew Giles, we enjoyed the festival's tapestry of experiences, including the authentic Greek food stalls, captivating dance performances and traditional music. As a representative of this incredible community I take immense pride in acknowledging the unwavering support of our Allan Labor government. The \$100,000 funding per year for four years was instrumental in ensuring the resounding success of this event, a celebration that brings our community closer together. I also want to thank Monash council for its extraordinary support of this festival. Moreover, this festival held special significance as it coincided with the historic Greek national day known as Ohi, a historic moment when Greece courageously said no to the fascism of the axis powers during the Second World War.

This festival holds a special place in my heart as it reaffirms Oakleigh and Melbourne's strong Greek identity. For me Oakleigh embodies a profound sense of community akin to a large Greek village. It is a place where familiar faces abound and meaningful conversations thrive. It is a testament to the multiculturalism of the Victorian community, which our government fully embraces and celebrates through supporting festivals like the Oakleigh Glendi. I extend my congratulations to the Greek Orthodox community of Oakleigh, Chris Damatopoulos, Oakleigh Grammar and the whole community, including Monash council, for putting on this outstanding festival.

Project 365 Ripple Effect concert

Tim McCURDY (Ovens Valley) (13:38): I want to give an enormous shout-out to Peter Rourke, who was the driving force behind Wangaratta Project 365. More than 1700 people attended the Ripple Effect music concert on Saturday. The naming of the event was in reference to a positive community change brought about by awareness of mental health through music. People shared stories about coping with mental health and supporting loved ones. Money raised through the event will go back into the local community.

Farm public liability insurance

Tim McCURDY (Ovens Valley) (13:39): I am continually being called upon by farming families and communities regarding public liability insurance on farms that are next to or in close proximity to solar factories or lithium battery factories. As we move forward with renewable energy and the associated effects on regional Victoria, we are getting more questions than answers. A proposed solar energy factory at Meadow Creek still has locals guessing and concerned about long-term effects on local businesses, and more recently a lithium storage battery factory has been proposed at Dederang, which has locals at breaking point waiting for answers from Mint Renewables. The Victorian government needs to intervene and stop factories being set up on prime agricultural land that jeopardise the safety and wellbeing of local communities. It is unfair to have these solar and lithium

energy factories on land that is zoned general farming and then have the farming communities compromised with environmental concerns, fire risk concerns and public liability concerns should a neighbour be responsible for an accidental fire that reaches these factories. The Victorian government must support these communities.

Lloyd Walton

Sonya KILKENNY (Carrum – Minister for Planning, Minister for the Suburbs) (13:40): I note the sad passing of Carrum Downs local legend Lloyd Walton. Among other things, Lloyd was a life member of the Carrum Downs fire brigade and received a Queen's award for his volunteer service to our local community. I met Lloyd when we opened the brand new Carrum Downs fire station, and he told me how much the brigade was a part of his life. My condolences to Lloyd's family and friends and his extended family, the officers and members of the Carrum Downs fire brigade.

Carrum electorate student leaders

Sonya KILKENNY (Carrum – Minister for Planning, Minister for the Suburbs) (13:40): Congratulations to the newly elected college captains at Patterson River Secondary College for 2024: Emma Borg, Luke Miccoli, Martin Ling and Clavea Suailua-Pati. We are so proud of you and wish you every success in 2024.

Seaford United Soccer Club

Sonya KILKENNY (Carrum – Minister for Planning, Minister for the Suburbs) (13:40): I wish to acknowledge Willie Lynn, who will soon step down as Seaford United's longest serving club president. Willie and his wife Liz have been involved with Seaford United since 1978. Willie has clocked up 26 years as club president. Liz has served numerous terms on the committee and has volunteered in nearly every capacity, including behind the bar. Thank you both for your extraordinary service and dedication to our local community and local club sport and for always making us feel so welcome.

And now congratulations to new Seaford United club president Karyn Pert, the only female club president on the peninsula. Karyn has hit the ground running and will be very ably supported by the committee, including newly appointed club secretary Jacqueline Duncan. I am so excited to see the work they have already done to actively promote and encourage more girls and women at Seaford United, as well as the recent success of their inaugural family five-a-side tournament. Congratulations.

Norman Ross Liebmann

Michael O'BRIEN (Malvern) (13:41): When a man passes at age 100, you do not so much mourn their death as celebrate their life. In the case of Norman Ross Liebmann there was much to celebrate. An athlete, an entrepreneur and a lover of sport, Ross was the life of the party, especially the Liberal Party, where he served as chairman and later patron for the Higgins Liberals. I am grateful to Ross for his counsel to me and his contribution to the Liberal Party over many decades. I pass on my condolences to his family and many, many friends. Vale, Ross Liebmann.

June McCann

Michael O'BRIEN (Malvern) (13:42): I was privileged to attend Immaculate Conception church, Hawthorn, last month to celebrate the life of June Elizabeth McCann, who passed aged 99. A packed church heard of June's love for her old school, Loreto, where she was school captain, for her husband Charlie and for her six daughters, 17 grandchildren and 22 great-grandchildren. Mourners also heard of the wonderful care June was provided in her later years by her loving daughter Trish, supported by her granddaughter Simone. A remarkable woman and a remarkable family – vale, June McCann.

Jenny La Marca

Michael O'BRIEN (Malvern) (13:42): Malvern lost a wonderful lady and civic contributor with the passing of Jenny La Marca on 3 November. I knew Jenny through her involvement with the Rotary Club of Malvern, where she served as president and was recently awarded a Paul Harris Fellow sapphire in recognition of her wonderful service. My sincere condolences to Jenny's husband John and children Rob and Dominique on their loss. Vale, Jenny La Marca.

Katherine Osborne

Danny PEARSON (Essendon – Minister for Transport Infrastructure, Minister for the Suburban Rail Loop, Assistant Treasurer, Minister for WorkSafe and the TAC) (13:43): Katherine Osborne could swim, ride a bike, play chess and badminton, tackle a climbing wall, pitch a tent, cook a meal and play drums, guitar and piano. She was a captain in the school choir. She loved birds, flowers, cats, drawing, singing, talking to people, eating sushi and all things Japanese. She laughed a lot.

Academically she was good at everything but outstanding at science, computing, art and Japanese. She helped others with their homework. She often won prizes and was an all-As student, tracking ahead of the 88 ATAR that would get her into the design course at Melbourne University; she was enthusiastic after the open day.

Although she had started the transition from girl to young woman, she still spent a lot of time with her parents and took a childlike joy in small things. On Wednesdays they would usually walk out arm in arm to eat at one of the local Japanese restaurants she loved, and on the way home she might race them the last 100 metres to the house. On weekends she often went cycling or swimming or played badminton with her dad. On Sundays she made smoked salmon pancakes for brunch. She drew little sketches on her parents' bookmarks for them to find later.

She attended her year 11 formal on Friday 10 March and was so happy on the following morning, when it all stopped. On a sunny Saturday lunchtime a car crashed into her parents' car as it crossed an intersection on Lygon Street, Carlton. She sustained a catastrophic brain injury and spent four days on life support in the ICU before dying. Katherine was 16 years old.

Incorporated in accordance with resolution of house:

To say her parents were devastated would be an understatement and a cliché. She was their only child and their lives were destroyed. Others too – over two hundred people came to her funeral. What's left is a minefield of memories, no-go areas as painful as they are happy.

Christmas by the Lake

Richard RIORDAN (Polwarth) (13:44): I want to just bring the house's attention to a fantastic event coming up in the Colac Otway shire on Saturday 9 December. Of course it is the second year that the community has come together for the wonderful Christmas festival by the lake, proudly sponsored by Colac's very, very patriotic media outlets the *Colac Herald* and Mixx 106.3, the local radio station. Together with some of our larger corporate benefactors in Colac – AKD and Bulla foods – the community will come together. There will be fantastic music and entertainment, and all proceeds from the day are going to the wonderful Colac Area Health. It is, all around, a fantastic community event. The only thing left to chance will be the weather, but all going well, after this lousy run of weather we are having at the moment, we are bound to have a good run in the lead-up to that.

Colac-Ballararat Road

Richard RIORDAN (Polwarth) (13:45): I would also like to bring the house's attention once again to the parlous state of roads in western Victoria, and none is more dangerous and decrepit than the Colac-Ballararat Road. The Colac-Ballararat Road now in many sections, particularly the stretch between Cressy and Rokewood, is nothing other than an accident waiting to happen. There are huge tracts with edges missing. In some areas there is barely a metre and a half from the centre-line to where the edges

have fallen away. Once again, the Colac Otway community, the community in western Victoria and the Polwarth community call on the Allan government to get its act together and supply the necessary maintenance – (*Time expired*)

Diwali

Matt FREGON (Ashwood) (13:46): As we come to the end of November, we also come to the end of another Diwali festival. It has been a fantastic month, starting with the Premier's Diwali festival, which I was lucky enough to attend with many people. I and my colleagues have been to many events. The Diwali festival is something I have fallen in love with. It is not just good over evil or light over darkness, which are universal, but also the fact that we celebrate knowledge over ignorance. I think we can all take something from that to think about education for all of us. I also had the pleasure of co-hosting with my very good friend the member for Glen Waverley our own small festival, and I would just like to thank some of the people who came to that: Dr Sushil Kumar, our very hardworking Consul General of India; Carina Garland, the federal member for Chisholm; and, in no particular order, the South Indian Association of Victoria, the Uttar Pradesh Association of Australia, Hindi Niketan, the Australian Indian Seniors Association, Bharathi Academy, Bengali academy, the Bengali Association of Victoria, the Victoria Tamil Senior Citizens Benevolent Society, Hamro Nepali Pathshala Melbourne, Preet Kriti at IndianCare, Sri Venkata Krishna Brundavana, South Asian Community Link Group, SKGA, Nepali Association of Victoria, Sewa International, the Academy of Indian Music & Cultural Studies and the Federation of Indian Associations of Victoria, to name a few.

Felicitations

Matt FREGON (Ashwood) (13:47): I also, in the last couple of seconds I have got, thank my staff in the office – Lisa, Oskar, Phoebe, Julie, Chunying and Margo – and all the clerks. Happy festibus.

Energy Breakthrough

Jade BENHAM (Mildura) (13:47): Well done to all schools who participated in the Energy Breakthrough challenge over the weekend. Energy Breakthrough has provided opportunities for students, teachers, parents and local industry to work together to design and construct a vehicle, machine or innovation in technology that will represent an energy breakthrough. Well done to Chaffey Secondary College, who entered three teams – one in human-powered vehicles and two in robotics. Donald High School had It's a Goode Thing and St Joseph's College, Mildura, entered four teams. All had excellent results. Well done to the students, teachers, parents and local industry for getting involved.

Charlton post office

Jade BENHAM (Mildura) (13:48): A huge shout-out of support to Russell of the Charlton post office. This historic building burnt down recently – to the ground – which included Russell's home, leaving a small country town without its post office. Local post offices are a vital part of the community, as is their postmaster, so this is devastating. Well done to the Buloke Shire Council for leaping into action to make the local hall a makeshift post office for the time being, and it looks to be a well-oiled machine. Well done, Russell. I know the entire district has rallied around with offers of support, and that extends to anything that my office can do also.

Murray Valley Aboriginal Co-operative

Jade BENHAM (Mildura) (13:48): Given this is my last chance before the end of the year, I want to take a minute to thank the Murray Valley Aboriginal Co-op for the work they do in health, housing programs and early childhood education. Our time with MVAC comes to an end next month, with my youngest starting school – so no more kinder and day care. A sincere thankyou from all our family to MVAC.

Josh Waters

Jade BENHAM (Mildura) (13:49): Finally, it is the final of the Australian superbikes this weekend. Josh Waters from Mildura is racing for the championship. Go, Josh!

South Barwon electorate dog park

Darren CHEESEMAN (South Barwon) (13:49): Last election I promised to bring a purpose-built dog park to our furry pals of the Armstrong Creek growth corridor. This means the South Barwon electorate will soon have its own dog-friendly spot, decked out with all of the features that our dogs like. In my own household we have Barry Barracuda, our beloved rescue greyhound, who brings so much joy to our household. Dog parks provide an amazing opportunity for our local communities to take their dogs down to a local dog park to socialise their dogs with other dogs.

Of course this dog park, which we promised at the election, is one of a number of dog parks that we took to the election, and pleasingly the last budget secured the funding for that. I am asking that my community support the conversations and negotiations that have happened between our government and the City of Greater Geelong to locate that dog park in the Sparrovale Wetland Reserve. This is a great place to put a dog park – a great place to ensure the families of Armstrong Creek have a dog-friendly park for their pooches.

Caulfield Volunteer Awards

David SOUTHWICK (Caulfield) (13:50): It is a pleasure to rise and speak on our Caulfield Volunteer Awards, in their 10th year. I want to give a big shout-out to the Caulfield Park Bendigo Bank, which has been a partner in this with me. We had last week 63 finalists with nine winners. The night kicked off with a drumming activity from Caulfield South Drum Corps, and I particularly want to give a big shout-out to Sandy Hood, who has been running the drum corps since 1997. We gave him a very special award for his great work.

Our community winners were Susan Wald from CIS Glen Eira and Randi Grose from the Jewish Community Council of Victoria; emergency welfare food relief, Nathan Jones from SES Glen Eira – thank you to you; and sport, Scott Williams from the Caulfield Grammarians. For environment we had Krizia Garrido from Kitty Rescue Squad. For health and spiritual engagement we had Ros Shlagman from the Jewish Museum of Australia; education, Masha Fisher from Leibler Yavneh College, serving a fantastic Vegemite sandwich at the canteen; outstanding youth award, Halli Klinger from Flying Fox; and outstanding achievement award, Sharon and Greg Lowe from the Social Blueprint. This was a fantastic event. It also featured a performance from the Emmy Monash Morning Melodies group. And thanks to Karen Neumann, Lea Teller and Anat Nadler for their work. Caulfield Volunteer Awards – thank you to all of you.

Whittlesea Secondary College

Lauren KATHAGE (Yan Yean) (13:52): In September I was really happy to attend the Whittlesea Secondary College production of *Chicago*. It was fantastic, and it turns out that their production did not just capture audiences' imaginations; it has also captured three nominations for the Music Theatre Guild of Victoria awards: one nomination for lead performer in a male presenting role for Daniel Martin; for lead performer in a female presenting role for Ally Chesswas, who played Velma Kelly; and also for musical direction, which is really a nod to Shaun Geerlings-Parker, choreographer Brittany Holland and of course Kristen Jean.

Productions like these really build the spirit and the joy of attending a local college, and one of the things I am most proud of about their nomination is who they are up against. They are up against some of the private schools with bigger budget productions, and Whittlesea Secondary College is taking it right up to them with their fantastic production of *Chicago*. What a fantastic true testament to how great Victorian government schools can be.

The winners of the awards will be announced at the guild's 36th annual Bruce Awards next month, and I want to take the opportunity to wish Whittlesea Secondary College the very best success. They are already winners.

Seismic surveying

Ellen SANDELL (Melbourne) (13:53): Scientists have just sounded the alarm that we are heading towards an apocalyptic 3 degrees of global warming, but despite that, fossil fuel companies are trying everything they can to get their hands on more oil and gas. To do this here in Victoria, seismic blasting is about to happen off the western coast of Victoria between Victoria and Tasmania. Basically that means that 3D maps of the ocean floor are created by setting off an underwater bomb every 10 to 15 seconds, 24 hours a day for weeks or months. Those maps are then sold to the highest bidder – in this case, fossil fuel giants looking for more oil and gas.

Seismic blasts are enough to deafen whales, and as we know, whales rely on singing and listening to find their way, so a deaf whale is a dead whale. Seismic blasting can also ruin lobsters' balance, just like it does when we destroy our ears. It can severely injure and even kill scallops and zooplankton.

This will be the largest seismic survey in history, but thankfully communities can see this for the disastrous, profit-driven plan that it is. Gunditjmarra First Nations communities and traditional owners have voiced their strong opposition to blasting on their sea country, and tens of thousands of people have made submissions to the regulator in opposition to it. The Greens are joining with these community members to say no to seismic blasting this summer in Victoria.

Pascoe Vale Sports Club

Anthony CIANFLONE (Pascoe Vale) (13:55): On 13 May I had the pleasure of attending the Pascoe Vale football club's presidents lunch at Raeburn Reserve clubrooms. First established in 1918, the Panthers have long been part of the community's fabric and is now comprised of 17 teams, including five female teams. Over the summer of course it is Pascoe Vale cricket club that keeps the activity going on Raeburn Reserve, with the club now comprising 15 teams and a growing number of women and girl cricketers. I commend all the leaders and volunteers of the entire Pascoe Vale Sports Club, including Kelvin Thomson, Brian Campisi, Helen Lazenkas, Leah Lovrek, Tony Parragalli, Liz Mastrogiannis, Georgie McElligott, Andrew Carlton and Alan Kerr.

Brunswick Juventus Football Club

Anthony CIANFLONE (Pascoe Vale) (13:56): As a former bianconero player, on 23 September I was delighted to join Brunswick Juventus football soccer club to celebrate the 75th anniversary at Hyatt Place at Essendon Fields. First established by Italian migrants, the club has always punched above its weight, including winning the 1985 National Soccer League championship, and is now one of the biggest football clubs in the northern suburbs, playing out of the De Chene Reserve in Coburg. I commend the club leaders and volunteers, including Joe Sala, Dominic Montesanno, John Ruffino, Natasha Carlesso and Rob Sturma.

Brunswick City Soccer Club

Anthony CIANFLONE (Pascoe Vale) (13:56): On 17 September I was also happy to attend the Brunswick City football soccer club pink round festivities raising money for the McGrath Foundation. Founded in 1970 by Greek migrants who originated from Sparta, the club has been playing from Dunstan Reserve in Brunswick West for over 50 years and is home to some of the highest rates of women and girls participation in the state, including with 66 per cent participating in junior teams in community competitions being girls teams. I commend the club, including Loui Kastanos, Peter Kyriopoulos and all the others – Heather McGiddy as well.

Recreational fishing

Alison MARCHANT (Bellarine) (13:57): Earlier this month the first of the 95,000 little angler kits were distributed throughout more than 1900 schools. I was very excited to stop by at Point Lonsdale Primary School to see the distribution of the little angler kits to the grade 5 students there. The little angler kits are delivering on a pledge of the Allan Labor government's package to improve fishing, boating, piers and aquaculture and get more Victorians to enjoy the outdoors. I absolutely love this. As a keen fisherperson, it was incredible to see little kids receiving their own fishing rod and reel with a tackle box and a guide to fishing that breaks down all the basics that they need to know. They were very excited. These students, along with other students in the Bellarine who will receive their free kit, can test out their new supplies over summer, get out in the fresh air and perhaps join the family in fishing and travelling around our beautiful waterways across Victoria.

Across the Bellarine we have incredible beaches and beautiful spots to fish, and many locals love using the St Leonards Pier. The St Leonards Pier is a beautiful fishing spot. It has been promised an upgrade as part of the Allan Labor government's budget, and we are following through on that commitment. The draft plan is currently in development with community consultation, and it is expected to open up over the summer. I have many constituents interested in this upgrade and the project. At the last St Leonards market many stopped to talk to me about this upgrade. I look forward to seeing families using the new anglers kits out on the pier for many years to come.

Keon Park Tennis Club

Nathan LAMBERT (Preston) (13:58): Keon Park Tennis Club celebrated its 70th birthday on the weekend, and I would like to congratulate Bruce McCredden, Jacqui Mackertich, Sharon Read, Vicki Powell, the Burns family, the Fielding family and everyone at that club on their significant milestone. I would like to particularly recognise the contribution of Valma Murphy, who helped found the club back in 1953. Valma is in her 90s, and sadly she could not get along to the 70th anniversary. I understand she is in hospital, but she did send a lovely message, which ended by saying, 'Tennis is a great game that teaches life skills as well as tennis skills. May the friendships and memories you make serve you through your life.' Well said, Valma. We wish her the best of luck with her health.

Darebin City Brass

Nathan LAMBERT (Preston) (13:59): I would also like to recognise Chris Lee, who is stepping down as president of Darebin City Brass band. Other members might not know this, but we have the best brass band in the state in Preston. They are reigning A-grade champions, and Chris's leadership has been a key part of their ascension to that rank. I would also like to acknowledge Stuart Alexander from the band, who drives all the way from Traralgon every week to participate, with a shout-out to Stuart, Kathryn and the family.

Audrey Collins

Nathan LAMBERT (Preston) (13:59): Finally, I would like to congratulate long-term Union Street resident Mrs Audrey Collins on turning 100 earlier this month. I am told by her family that Mrs Collins can still remember when Union Street ended in farmland and a little creek. We thank her for her contribution to the community. Happy birthday, Mrs Collins.

Business interrupted under sessional orders.

Questions without notice and ministers statements

Public housing

John PESUTTO (Hawthorn – Leader of the Opposition) (14:01): My question is to the Premier. Twenty-eight-year-old Maddy from Sale is homeless and has been couch surfing for three years. She has been on the priority housing waiting list since early 2021. Ahead of the last election Labor

promised people like Maddy would have ‘the safety, security and dignity of a home’. How many more years will Maddy have to wait, or is the dignity of a home just another broken Labor promise?

Jacinta ALLAN (Bendigo East – Premier) (14:02): I thank the Leader of the Opposition for his question. The example he provided to the house of Maddy, who is currently experiencing the vulnerability of the challenges of being homeless in Sale, is one that concerns the government greatly. Should the Leader of the Opposition want to share the details of Maddy’s circumstances, we would welcome that opportunity to work with Maddy and her local community, because I know housing providers in regional Victoria are working really, really hard to address the many and complex challenges that come with people experiencing homelessness.

I say that we are also working hard, whether it is through the billion-dollar Regional Housing Fund, which is being rolled out across regional Victoria to invest in an additional 1300 social and affordable homes across regional Victoria –

John Pesutto: Will it help her?

Jacinta ALLAN: Yes, Leader of the Opposition, that is an initiative that would help provide more housing across regional Victoria. What we also need to do to help people like Maddy and others across the state is to build more homes and look at everything we can do. We are doing that as a government, whether it is through the work of the planning minister on bringing her tools to the task of building more homes – the tools across government – but we need this place, we need the Parliament, to have in place the supports, whether it is through the passing of legislation, not blocking motions in the upper house –

Roma Britnell interjected.

The SPEAKER: The member for South-West Coast, I would ask you to not provide a running commentary.

Jacinta ALLAN: as we have seen the Liberal Party do too often with the Greens political party, siding up to block housing developments that are about providing support for people like Maddy.

James Newbury: On a point of order, Speaker, the Premier knows not to debate the question.

The SPEAKER: The Premier has concluded her answer.

John PESUTTO (Hawthorn – Leader of the Opposition) (14:04): Maddy says she is in a vicious cycle: she cannot hold down a job without a stable home and she cannot get private accommodation without a job. The government’s target for priority public rental housing is 10.5 months, but Maddy has been waiting 36 months. When will the government meet its housing targets so that people on the priority list like Maddy can find somewhere to live?

Jacinta ALLAN (Bendigo East – Premier) (14:04): I thank the Leader of the Opposition again, and I repeat for the benefit of the Leader of the Opposition: if he is in a position – as we have offered on a number of occasions in this house – to have the personal details of those like Maddy provided, we are more than willing to follow that up with local housing providers, because often the difference between the times it takes to find someone a home has many complex reasons behind it. That is why, whether it is through housing providers in regional and rural Victoria, providing them with additional support; whether it is through – and the Minister for Prevention of Family Violence may touch on some of these matters – having dedicated programs to support victims of family violence; or whether it is Aboriginal housing programs or providing additional disability support programs, we have a range of targeted supports over and above the work we do at a statewide universal level to support people like Maddy.

Ministers statements: family violence

Vicki WARD (Eltham – Minister for Prevention of Family Violence, Minister for Employment) (14:06): Last Friday I joined thousands of Victorians walking to end family violence. Led by Respect Victoria, passionate advocates, dedicated family violence sector workers, community leaders, union members, nurses, teachers, men’s sheds, sports clubs, local government and people from across our state walked together, in the CBD and regionally, to show their commitment to ending family violence and to mark the beginning of 2023’s 16 Days of Activism Against Gender-based Violence.

Family violence happens in every suburb, every community, every city and every town. It is happening in the homes of friends, families, colleagues, sporting clubs and even book clubs. It is pervasive, it is insidious and it can be fatal. We all have a responsibility, individually and collectively, to end this violence. Thank you to the communities who will hold over 125 diverse events across the state, raising awareness about gender-based violence. Overwhelmingly, violence is used by men against women. Thank you to the member for Pakenham who last week invited me to explore the White Ribbon Art Gallery, which features strong, emotive and personal paintings concerning family violence.

The Allan Labor government has worked hard and will continue to work hard in tackling this epidemic head-on. We have invested over \$3.86 billion in supports and prevention, and we have implemented all 227 recommendations from the Royal Commission into Family Violence. We know there is more to do. Over 16 days we will shine a light on changing cultural attitudes, addressing gender inequality and the work that is done daily to support those with a lived experience of family violence. We will keep up the momentum of change because we have to.

Public housing

John PESUTTO (Hawthorn – Leader of the Opposition) (14:07): My question is to the Premier. A single mother with three children who urgently needs a public housing placement was told by the department that if you live in your car, you will have a roof over your head and you will not be added to the waiting list. Why is the Premier failing this vulnerable woman and her young children?

Jacinta ALLAN (Bendigo East – Premier) (14:08): I thank the Leader of the Opposition for his question. If the Leader of the Opposition can provide me with the source of that quote and the person that that quote is attributed to, I will absolutely follow this up. I am appalled that that comment would be made to a person – in this instance a single mother – experiencing housing vulnerability. I am appalled at that claim that has been made. I would ask the Leader of the Opposition to provide further information to the house for this to be investigated.

John PESUTTO (Hawthorn – Leader of the Opposition) (14:09): Bendigo Family and Financial Services have been telling their clients who apply for public housing that they are best not to mention they are couch surfing because this would be viewed as them having a place to stay and therefore not being a priority for housing. Is it government policy that couch surfing is an acceptable form of housing in Victoria?

Jacinta ALLAN (Bendigo East – Premier) (14:09): I note for the record, Speaker, that the Leader of the Opposition did not provide any evidence to the house to substantiate his earlier claim, and I can say this very clearly: the member’s claim about what is and is not a government policy is not correct. I know Bendigo Family and Financial Services well. The member for Bendigo West and I were there earlier this year meeting with Jenny and the team to talk about the cost-of-living challenges that are experienced by people in my community that are replicated in other vulnerable communities around the state. We are proud as a government to have provided support to organisations like Bendigo Family and Financial Services, who do a terrific job supporting vulnerable people in our community. We have provided them with a range of supports to continue that assistance they provide to people in our community, and we will continue to do so in every way we can.

Ministers statements: gender equality

Natalie HUTCHINS (Sydenham – Minister for Jobs and Industry, Minister for Treaty and First Peoples, Minister for Women) (14:10): I rise to update the house on a significant milestone, and that is: our Parliament now has 64 women and 64 men. This means we have reached gender parity in government in this Parliament, and we really look forward to the new member for Mulgrave joining us here in the chamber.

Members interjecting.

The SPEAKER: Order! Members know not to refer to the gallery.

Natalie HUTCHINS: I am proud to be part of a government led by a woman, with 56 per cent of its caucus women and 68 per cent of its ministry women. Unlike those opposite, we know that quotas and affirmative action work, and they lead to better policies and outcomes for all Victorians. Our mission is for a fair and equal Victoria. Our vision for a fair and equal Victoria is embedded in a plan called *Our Equal State*. This is a new gender equality strategy that was released with 110 actions to be embedded across government over the next 10 years to advance gender equality. This morning the Workplace Gender Equality Agency also released its data on the state of workplace gender equality nationally and noted that the national gender pay gap has fallen to a new low of 21.7 per cent. I look forward to when WGEA data can actually include government entities as we do here in Victoria. The Allan Labor government leads the nation in progressing gender equality. On this side we have a plan for Victoria. It is called *Our Equal State*. And we have a plan for our party room. It is called affirmative action. We want to see the girls of today be the women of tomorrow, having every opportunity available to them regardless of their background.

Elective surgery

John PESUTTO (Hawthorn – Leader of the Opposition) (14:13): My question is to the Minister for Health. Ahead of the last election Labor promised that:

Thousands more public patients will soon receive elective surgery ...

It has been revealed at PAEC that 1395 Victorians tragically died while waiting for elective surgery over the past two years. How many more Victorians will have to die before the government honours its promise to fix elective surgery?

Mary-Anne THOMAS (Macedon – Leader of the House, Minister for Health, Minister for Health Infrastructure, Minister for Ambulance Services) (14:13): The Leader of the Opposition has shown once again that they are a party of no integrity. The Leader of the Opposition knows that he is misconstruing data for political purposes.

James Newbury: On a point of order, Speaker, on relevance, this is a very, very serious –

Members interjecting.

The SPEAKER: Order! Points of order will be heard in silence. The Minister for Health!

James Newbury: This is a very serious question about very tragic events that we have asked about, and we would ask that the minister come back to the original question.

The SPEAKER: I ask the Minister for Health to address the question that was asked.

Mary-Anne THOMAS: As was also noted – and as the Leader of the Opposition has neglected to inform the house – there are a range of reasons why people may be removed from the waitlist, and indeed some of those are no longer on the waitlist because they have died. But let me be clear: Safer Care Victoria requires that every person who has suffered a sentinel event or has died as a consequence of not receiving the care in our health system that they need and deserve is reported to them, and they also make the point that there have been zero deaths reported as a consequence of not getting the surgery that people need.

Members interjecting.

Mary-Anne THOMAS: So let me be clear – you asked the question, and you listen to the answer.

The SPEAKER: Through the Chair!

Mary-Anne THOMAS: This is an issue that our government takes very, very seriously. I will also point you to the consistent results of our health data that is released every quarter, which shows that across the year 99.9 per cent of category 1 surgery, which is the urgent, essential, life-saving surgery, is done within the clinically approved time, which is 30 days. What is more, it shows that the median wait time is 12 days. So let us be clear: we have a waitlist, and it is one that we are also driving down – another inconvenient truth for the Leader of the Opposition. However, what we have seen – and I am not surprised at where the Leader of the Opposition has chosen to go with this – is that no-one on our waitlist has died as a consequence of not receiving the surgery that they need.

John PESUTTO (Hawthorn – Leader of the Opposition) (14:17): Ahead of the last election Labor purchased Bellbird Private Hospital in Blackburn with the promise to perform 5700 additional public elective surgeries each year. It was revealed at PAEC that fewer than 900 surgeries were performed before the hospital was closed and demolition works commenced. When will the government honour its promise for an additional 5700 public elective surgeries each year from this facility?

Mary-Anne THOMAS (Macedon – Leader of the House, Minister for Health, Minister for Health Infrastructure, Minister for Ambulance Services) (14:17): This reminds me, this question from the Leader of the Opposition, that when this government purchased Bellbird hospital we were accused of a socialist manoeuvre. What that suggests to me is that, given the chance, they will sell off Bellbird, they will sell off Frankston, they will privatise Mildura – they will sell off Mildura like they did last time.

James Newbury: On a point of order, Speaker, on relevance, this question is an important supplementary asking when the government will live up to its promise of delivering 5700 elective surgeries.

The SPEAKER: A point of order is not an opportunity to repeat the question. The minister was being a little bit relevant. I do ask the minister to come back.

Mary-Anne THOMAS: We were very proud to purchase two private hospitals to turn them into public surgery centres. Those hospitals are on track to continue to deliver the additional surgery that we have committed to the Victorian people that we will deliver.

Ministers statements: family violence

Ben CARROLL (Niddrie – Minister for Education, Minister for Medical Research) (14:19): I rise to update the house about how the Allan Labor government is working with our schools across the state to end family violence. I was pleased to join Minister Ward last week on the steps of Parliament to kick off the 16 days of activism against family violence. We did, as she said, walk in a sea of orange from Spring Street with thousands of others, calling for an end to this national emergency. I was very pleased, though, to see the school students in the audience and the speakers as well. There was no shortage of inspiring speakers, in particular Xiao Telefao, who is a student from Monterey Secondary College in the member for Frankston's electorate, who spoke about the work they are doing with the Rosie Batty foundation in terms of Project O. This is bringing students together to talk about family violence and also to inspire the next group of young women leaders in our state.

We are working very hard, because the next generation are critical to ending family violence. That is why we have invested more than \$80 million in our Respectful Relationships program. This is a program that supports school students and early childhood students too to promote positive attitudes. Nearly 2000 government schools, independent schools and Catholic schools have signed up to this program. We also know that consent is a vital part of the conversation. That is why we legislated

affirmative consent. That is why we mandated age-appropriate teaching of consent in all government schools. It is about mutual communication – that consent can be withdrawn at any stage.

Our healthy masculinity program is making sure that men, all men across the state, know about gender equality and respect wherever they go and whatever walk of life they are in. I was pleased to see so many allies at the march last week, in particular to walk with the member for Preston as well as Minister Ward. Also, many on this side of the chamber signed the banner to reaffirm our commitment to end this epidemic. We know men need to walk side by side with women, because as we heard loud and clear on Friday, the time for action is now. We are taking action. The Allan Labor government is delivering programs right across our schools because that is where the conversation starts.

Economy

John PESUTTO (Hawthorn – Leader of the Opposition) (14:21): My question is to the Premier. Ahead of the last election Labor promised that they would fund their commitments without ‘increasing net debt’. The Auditor-General report released last Friday stated that:

Debt rose again this year at a pace faster than revenue and economic growth.

Why has the government broken its promise of not increasing net debt further?

Jacinta ALLAN (Bendigo East – Premier) (14:21): I thank the Leader of the Opposition for his question. I recall last sitting week answering a very similar question, and I will repeat the information I provided to the Leader of the Opposition last sitting week, which was at budget time the Treasurer laid down, along with a budget, the government’s financial management strategy. That included our COVID debt repayment plan, which of course is necessary, because during the period of the pandemic we understood very clearly that to do things like invest \$11 billion in business support to make sure that business could remain viable through that period of time, continue to employ people during that period of time, we needed to use the strength of the government’s balance sheet to provide that support to Victorian businesses and by extension Victorian workers. We also during that time invested heavily in our health system – billions and billions of dollars. That also included our COVID health plan, which has seen \$12 billion being invested to support our hardworking healthcare workers, to employ thousands more and to continue to provide vital support to our healthcare system.

John Pesutto: On a point of order, Speaker, on relevance, the question was about net debt increasing. That is what the Auditor-General is pointing to, and I ask you to bring the Premier back to the question.

The SPEAKER: The Premier was being relevant to the question that was asked.

Jacinta ALLAN: What we have also seen over the past 12 months or more is the Victorian budget experiencing the same challenges and pressures that are being experienced by people around the country from successive interest rate rises. What we are doing is we are continuing to invest in the services that Victorians rely on. We have had conversations today about the health system. We have had questions today about the support to housing. Well, Leader of the Opposition, every budget delivered between 2010 and 2014 cut funding to the housing budget.

James Newbury: On a point of order, Speaker, can I refer you to the new *Rulings from the Chair* at page 153 and the Speaker Maddigan ruling that a response must address a question rather than responding generally. In this instance I would suggest to you that the Premier is not being relevant to the question, which related to the Auditor-General’s finding. The Premier is now responding very generally.

The SPEAKER: The Premier had strayed somewhat from the question that was asked. I do ask her to come back to the question.

Jacinta ALLAN: I was referring to the ongoing investments that we are making to support our education system and our health system and to keep people in work. The Leader of the Opposition in his question asked me about commitments made last November. Well, I recall commitments made by

some that would result in people losing their jobs – cuts to our major projects, cuts to our infrastructure program, which would have seen people lose their jobs.

We take a different approach. We invest in people, we invest in services – and understand too through the good work of the Treasurer that we have, through the financial management strategy that was laid out in the budget, work to do as we repay the investments that were made to support the Victorian community during the COVID pandemic.

John PESUTTO (Hawthorn – Leader of the Opposition) (14:25): The Victorian Auditor-General's report on Victoria's finances released last Friday said that:

The government have not laid out a plan for when and how the state will pay down existing and future debt.

The government has again proven that it cannot manage money. When will the government finally release a plan to pay down debt?

Jacinta ALLAN (Bendigo East – Premier) (14:26): I will refresh the memory of the Leader of the Opposition for his benefit that – I think I have mentioned it today, I mentioned it last week – we have our COVID debt repayment plan that was set out in the budget, with our financial management strategy that had a focus on stabilising debt over the forward period. All of this was laid out in the budget. I am sure the Treasurer would be happy to furnish the Leader of the Opposition with further information.

John Pesutto: On a point of order, on relevance, Speaker, I quoted the Auditor-General, who said the government does not have a plan to pay down debt. The Premier keeps referring to a very small part of last May's budget without addressing what the Auditor-General is saying, because the Auditor-General is talking about debt of \$256 billion –

The SPEAKER: The Leader of the Opposition knows that that is not the way to raise a point of order. The Premier was being relevant to the question that was asked.

Jacinta ALLAN: For the third time today, I will provide this information to the Leader of the Opposition. Usually it is three strikes and you are out, Leader of the Opposition, but for the third time today: we have laid out in the budget earlier this year our COVID debt repayment plan, the work we are doing to stabilise net debt in the medium term, and we will continue to remain focused on that task.

Ministers statements: family violence

Mary-Anne THOMAS (Macedon – Leader of the House, Minister for Health, Minister for Health Infrastructure, Minister for Ambulance Services) (14:28): I rise today to update the house on the Allan Labor government's work to address family violence through our healthcare system. Family violence remains our state's number one law and order issue, but it is also a significant health issue. We know that intimate partner violence is the leading health risk for women aged 25 to 44 years. This is totally unacceptable. We also know that 80 per cent of victim-survivors will seek help for family violence from our health services, so it is critically important that we give our healthcare workers the tools they need to provide help.

That is why the Allan Labor government has been at the forefront of working to tackle family violence. Led by the Royal Women's Hospital and Bendigo Health, our government's Strengthening Hospital Responses to Family Violence program is equipping healthcare workers across the state with the skills that they need to identify and support people experiencing family violence. Through the program clinicians and non-clinicians receive tailored training to understand the gendered nature and dynamics of family violence, recognise and address barriers that impact support and safety options, respond to disclosures sensitively and prioritise the safety of victim-survivors.

We know that our healthcare workers have embraced these reforms because they want to make a difference. In 2022–23, 82,000 training courses were completed right across the health sector. This includes in settings like maternal and child health and paediatrics. I want to thank and acknowledge our

healthcare workers for the work that they do every day to support victim-survivors of family violence and the way in which they continue to grow their capabilities to meet the needs of victim-survivors.

State Electricity Commission

John PESUTTO (Hawthorn – Leader of the Opposition) (14:30): My question is to the Premier. Ahead of the last election Labor promised that the SEC would ‘lower power bills’. Instead electricity bills have jumped at least 25 per cent this year, a \$352 increase for Victorian families struggling with the cost of living. When will the SEC actually bring down power prices, or is this just another broken Labor promise?

The SPEAKER: Leader of the Opposition, you have asked two questions. Could you rephrase them into one question?

John PESUTTO: The whole question?

The SPEAKER: One question at the end – which question?

John PESUTTO: When will the SEC actually bring down power prices?

Jacinta ALLAN (Bendigo East – Premier) (14:31): It is like the Leader of the Opposition has almost gone all nuclear over there on this question. Of course the answer to the Leader of the Opposition’s question lies in the fact that we have had to bring back the SEC in the first place. Why are we bringing back the SEC in the first place? Why are we bringing back the SEC? Indeed why have we –

Members interjecting.

The SPEAKER: Order! The member for Gippsland South!

Members interjecting.

Jacinta ALLAN: You’d be better, Brad – come on. You don’t want the SEC? That’s a shame.

The SPEAKER: Order! The Premier, through the Chair!

Jacinta ALLAN: We have brought back the SEC. I was proud to be with the energy minister, the minister for the SEC, and I will say this for the benefit of the house: we have a minister for the SEC; the opposition have a shadow minister –

Members interjecting.

Jacinta ALLAN: Hang on. The opposition have a shadow minister for the SEC – the very same person who was in the government that privatised the SEC.

Members interjecting.

The SPEAKER: The Leader of the Nationals will come to order. The house will come to order. I know this is the last sitting week, members, but you are not school students; this is not muck-up week.

James Newbury: On a point of order, Speaker, on relevance, it was a very, very simple question, and I would ask you to bring the Premier back to that question – from a government that pulled its SEC bills this week.

The SPEAKER: The Manager of Opposition Business will not trivialise points of order. I will not call you for points of order unless I hear them succinctly.

Jacinta ALLAN: Indeed I am pleased to have the opportunity to perhaps explain to the Leader of the Opposition and his colleagues that we have brought back the SEC. Before I was interrupted by the Manager of Opposition Business, I was referring to the opportunity where I joined with the minister for the SEC, where we launched the SEC’s 10-year strategic action plan – it was four weeks ago – well and truly acquitting that commitment to bringing back the SEC.

I am anxious that I do not cut across issues that might be on the notice paper, but the reason why we added to that commitment by not only bringing back the SEC but working with the Parliament to explore the opportunity to place that in the constitution was because we wanted to protect it from a future Liberal government. The Deputy Premier and I often talk about how our fathers experienced what it was like to go through the privatisation of the SEC in the 1990s. We also know that workers around the state lost those apprenticeship opportunities to get a trade and have a career, and that is why, as part of the 10-year strategic action plan –

Members interjecting.

The SPEAKER: Order! The member for Eildon can leave the chamber for an hour.

Member for Eildon withdrew from chamber.

Jacinta ALLAN: that was launched a few weeks ago, we are putting people at the heart of that plan. Alongside the investments we are making in renewable energy, we also have a program to employ – from memory it was 57 or 59 –

A member: 59.

Jacinta ALLAN: 59,000 people who will be needed to work in this industry. Do you know where they will be trained? They will be trained in our TAFE institutions, which we had to save from the Liberal chopping block.

Members interjecting.

The SPEAKER: Order! The Leader of the Opposition on a supplementary question, and I would ask the Leader of the Opposition to listen to the answer.

John PESUTTO (Hawthorn – Leader of the Opposition) (14:36): At significant cost to taxpayers, the government has produced mugs, jackets, bags and even jelly beans featuring the SEC logo. Premier, how have mugs, jackets, bags and jelly beans helped reduce energy bills for Victorians? I make available for the benefit of the house this SEC bag as an exhibit of what has been done. How have these reduced power prices?

The SPEAKER: Unfortunately, Leader of the Opposition, you have breached the standing orders by bringing a prop into the house. Leave is not granted. Members know that props are not allowed in the chamber. I expected more from you, Leader of the Opposition. I am very disappointed.

James Newbury: On a point of order, Speaker, I clearly heard the Leader of the Opposition offer the item to the government to make it available to members of the government.

The SPEAKER: That is not a point of order.

James Newbury: It was not a prop!

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

Jacinta ALLAN (Bendigo East – Premier) (14:37): The irony is not lost on those of us on this side of the house. The cheerleaders of privatisation –

Members interjecting.

The SPEAKER: Order! The member for Nepean! The Premier will come to order.

John Pesutto: On a point of order, Speaker, on relevance, it was a very simple question: how have these mugs, jackets and bags helped reduce power prices?

The SPEAKER: You do not need to repeat the question. The Premier was being relevant.

Jacinta ALLAN: I think the Leader of the Opposition is being very brave asking about mugs, but anyway – a bit brave. The point I was making before the Leader of the Opposition made his point of order is: we are proud of our efforts in working with the Victorian community to bring back the SEC – to have brought back the SEC through the good work of our minister for the SEC and the release of the 10-year strategic plan. Yes, from time to time that will involve us talking to the community about why bringing back the SEC is important for that ongoing work to invest in renewable energy. We know those opposite want to block this every step of the way. It is a signal to the community that they will go back and privatise the SEC.

Ministers statements: family violence

Jacinta ALLAN (Bendigo East – Premier) (14:39): At the outset of my ministers statement today I wish to acknowledge every single child, adult and victim-survivor of family violence in Victoria. Last Friday our Minister for Prevention of Family Violence, the Deputy Premier, Rosie Batty, Kate Fitz-Gibbon and thousands and thousands of other Victorians joined together in orange in solidarity to mark the start of the global 16 Days of Activism Against Gender-based Violence. These 16 days are a call to action. They are recognising that family violence and violence against women are not just happening to strangers, they are happening to people in our families and in our communities – our daughters, mothers, sisters, aunties, grandmothers, friends and colleagues – and Victorians are coming together to say we have had enough.

Also, I am pleased to advise the house that the government was earlier this year proud to reach a major milestone in our nation-leading work in this area to end family violence. All 227 recommendations of that groundbreaking Royal Commission into Family Violence have been implemented, and 60 years on there has been more than \$3.86 billion spent, more than every other state and territory combined – comprehensive justice system reforms, 12 new specialist family violence courts, new affirmative action consent laws and new jury directions that address misconceptions in sexual offence trials, just to name a few. But we know that there is more to do, much more to do, and that is why we will continue to listen to victim-survivors, we will continue to educate our kids about affirmative consent, we will continue to partner with our Aboriginal communities to ensure that Aboriginal Victorians can access culturally safe support when and where they need it, and we will continue to build a system that is easy to understand and access and supports the lived experience of victim-survivors in this vital work. We can prevent family violence. Violence against women is preventable, and we will continue that task every day.

Kim Wells: On a point of order, Speaker, I have only two unanswered questions: constituency questions, to the Premier, 322 and 374 – if they could be followed up, please.

Constituency questions

Croydon electorate

David HODGETT (Croydon) (14:42): (440) My constituency question is for the Minister for Health. Minister, can you please advise why the volunteer-run kiosk at Maroondah Hospital was abruptly closed in May this year with no explanation or notice provided to the volunteers that had run this kiosk for 45 years?

Pakenham electorate

Emma VULIN (Pakenham) (14:42): (441) My question is for the Minister for Education. What difference is the *Victorian Autism Education Strategy* making for the students and families in my electorate of Pakenham? I have spoken with autistic students and their parents and carers about how our education system supports autistic students and indeed all the neurodivergence in the school environment. Data shows that around one in 70 Australians are autistic, making it likely that, potentially, in my electorate there is one in every classroom. For many years our education system was one size fits all, but change is happening. Students learn in so many ways, and teaching practice

is now evolving to embrace this. Our government has a nation-first autism education strategy, and I would appreciate understanding the difference it is making for my community.

Gippsland East electorate

Tim BULL (Gippsland East) (14:43): (442) My constituency question is to the Treasurer, and the information that I seek is whether the upcoming budget will include further funds for brumby culling next financial year. We know the Treasurer is trying to save a dollar everywhere he can at the present time because the state is broke, and here is a very, very good place to start. This program should be ended. The money we are spending on trying to eradicate brumbies would be much better spent at the present time in areas like roads, like health and like mental health that are all in crisis. I am not at all comfortable the government has considered that brumbies are a tourist attraction. People come to East Gippsland to photograph them, to paint them. We have brumby sightseeing tours. There is no doubt that controls are needed, but eradication, in my view, is a step too far. We have a number of groups putting up their hands to suggest other methods, so what I would like to see is the government sit down and have a serious discussion with them and remove this funding.

Point Cook electorate

Mathew HILAKARI (Point Cook) (14:44): (443) My constituency question is for the Minister for Health. How will the Point Cook Community Hospital support the community that I represent and those within the broader western metropolitan community? The Point Cook Community Hospital is of course a community hospital in the heart of Point Cook. The government has purchased the land. We have appointed those to start providing the plans, and we are all looking forward to this. Many constituents in my community contact me about how we can get this building going, and we are all looking forward to this.

Eildon electorate

Cindy McLEISH (Eildon) (14:44): (444) My question is for the Minister for Emergency Services. Members of the Healesville CFA are valued community members and constituents in my area and have raised with me the condition of their station. Whilst the new station is probably needed, they want to know: when will funding and works be allocated to implement the recommended safety improvements at the station? Safety issues that have been identified include hazardous access for fire vehicles in and out of the station and associated public risk; engine base space that does not meet CFA safety requirements for safe operations around parked appliances; health and safety risks of turnout gear and PPE in the engine bays exposed to diesel particulates; toilet facilities that no longer support modern gender equity and diversity requirements; and insufficient safe and secure parking at the site. These issues and potential options to rectify them have been presented in a report to the CFA in September 2021, and the brigade have waited two years already for some action. This is an important brigade in my area – *(Time expired)*

Sunbury electorate

Josh BULL (Sunbury) (14:46): (445) My question is to the outstanding Minister for Transport Infrastructure. Minister, what is the latest information on the upgrade of the Sunbury Senior Citizens Centre? Minister, as you would be well aware, the Sunbury and Bulla Neighbourhood Fund, as part of the West Gate Tunnel Project, provided more than \$600,000 for this critical project. I want to acknowledge the work of Sunbury senior citizens. This funding was further boosted by a \$2.5 million contribution from Hume City Council, in essence delivering more than \$3.1 million for this very exciting project within my local community. The Sunbury senior citizens are outstanding people – warm, kind, generous. They are absolutely pumped and excited about this soon to be upgraded facility. I acknowledge Louise and Frank Zambello, who advocated strongly for this project, as did many other members of the Sunbury senior citizens, and again I ask the minister what information is available on this critical project.

Richmond electorate

Gabrielle DE VIETRI (Richmond) (14:47): (446) My question is for the Minister for Housing. In the lead-up to the election Labor promised air conditioning in all public homes, but a year later residents in my electorate are yet to see any sign of air conditioning. Elderly residents in Richmond have been told to buy their own units and Homes Victoria will install them – all this during a cost-of-living crisis and in the lead-up to an El Niño summer. Richmond has the largest proportion of public housing residents in Victoria, and these residents have the right to a safe and comfortable home – and yet Labor is treating them like second-class residents. My constituents are worried that this initiative has been scrapped in Labor's deal to demolish public housing and sell off the land to private developers. Minister, how many summers will public housing residents in Clifton Hill, Collingwood, Fitzroy and Richmond have to wait before they can cool their homes?

Wendouree electorate

Juliana ADDISON (Wendouree) (14:47): (447) My question is for the Minister for Transport Infrastructure, who is in the chamber, regarding the Allan Labor government's investment to upgrade Ballarat's historic train station. Last year I was so proud to stand with the Premier to announce that the Labor government will provide \$50 million to upgrade the Ballarat train station, with passenger lifts on both platforms and a connecting pedestrian overpass. This investment will be of great benefit to the community, particularly for people living with a disability and their family and friends, as well as parents with prams, the elderly and passengers with luggage. Would the minister please tell me how this project is progressing? This significant investment continues our commitment to redeveloping the Ballarat train station precinct. Proudly, we have delivered a three-level commuter car park with 405 spaces and a new bus interchange. We have also supported the transformation of our derelict heritage Goods Shed into an asset that the Ballarat community can be proud of, thanks to the Regional Infrastructure Fund.

Rowville electorate

Kim WELLS (Rowville) (14:48): (448) My question is to the Minister for Roads and Road Safety. When will the government make Napoleon Road in Rowville safe for the constituents in my electorate? Currently, Napoleon Road, like so many others in Knox, is unacceptably dangerous, regularly featuring potholes, loose gravel and uneven surfaces all along the road, yet Labor has failed to even spend what was allocated to fix this road. I think we can all agree that \$445,000 to fund repairs for Napoleon Road is pathetic. What is worse, only spending \$198,000 of that over nine years and the 32 casualties that have occurred since then are evidence of that fact. It is absolutely negligent that this government continues to underspend on key local roads that continue to be hazards for all road users, having only spent under half of the allocated amount for Napoleon Road since 2014.

Pascoe Vale electorate

Anthony CIANFLONE (Pascoe Vale) (14:49): (449) My constituency question is for the Minister for Government Services. What funding programs are available to help support the Coburg Historical Society to assist their work in researching and preserving our local history and heritage? The Coburg Historical Society is a dedicated local voluntary organisation that is committed to preserving the history of Coburg. First founded in 1972 as an initiative of the then Coburg council, the society is continuing to protect, promote and preserve the history of Coburg, including following its amalgamation into the City of Moreland in 1994 and now as the City of Merri-Bek.

The society is based at the Bluestone Cottage Museum in the heart of Coburg at Bell Street's oldest house – 82 Bell Street, just east of the Coburg town hall – which was built in 1864 and occupied by the Smith family and their descendants until it was bought by Coburg City Council in 1981 and has gone on to become a local museum. In September I was very pleased to announce a \$2800 grant towards helping it preserve degrading cassette audio tapes, but with the society continuing its work they are really interested in pursuing further funding opportunities with government. I commend

president Marilyn Moore, Tim McKenna, Julie Hogan, Mark Congdon, Glenda Beckley and Dianne Hartley for their work.

Rulings from the Chair

Constituency questions

The SPEAKER (14:50): I have reviewed the constituency questions from Thursday 16 November. The member for Gippsland South sought an action from the Minister for Roads and Road Safety; I therefore rule his constituency question out of order.

Members statements

Melton electorate students

Steve McGHIE (Melton) (14:51): The Victorian youth are the future of not only this state but this country, therefore it is so important that we as members of Parliament engage with youth and seek their input on legislation that will impact them where appropriate. This year for International Youth Day I invited secondary school students across Melton to write to my office expressing the issues that are important to them. We had over 60 students from Kurunjang Secondary College and Staughton College write in to our office. It was remarkable to see so many students wanting to engage with politics, and it is without a doubt that there are some future leaders within the Melton community. I thank all the students for writing to me and sharing their thoughts.

I was also lucky enough to welcome Pulak Gupta from Southern Cross Grammar to my parliamentary office to complete her work experience in the last sitting week. I asked her to write about her experiences over the week, and here is what she wrote:

Parliament is not a scary –
place.

... I found the environment at Parliament to be welcoming to students and guests to learn and engage.

I witnessed Steve providing support during the RSPCA visit training the MPs' dogs, and a cooking class based on benefiting the environment.

There were many presentations she witnessed in Parliament, including from our fishing industry.

During question time I witnessed discussion not too different to some of the discussions I have with my friends, but with a bit more exaggeration.

After this amazing experience I encourage other young people to engage with Parliament as our generation is the future of this country.

I thank Pulak for her joining me in Parliament last sitting week and wish her all the very best for her bright future ahead. I encourage all of my parliamentary colleagues to engage with the youth of their electorates, as they provide insightful perspectives and a willingness to engage with politics.

Northcote electorate achievements

Kat THEOPHANOUS (Northcote) (14:52): As we wind up the year I would like to take a moment to thank my community of Northcote for what we have achieved together. Since the state election we have hit the ground running, securing funding for every single election commitment and kicking off critical projects to make our community stronger. These are not abstract things but real initiatives that change people's lives for the better. We opened a STEAM centre at Thornbury High and a new learning centre at Preston South Primary, turned the sod at Westgarth Primary and drew plans for Thornbury Primary – modern education facilities to see us into the future.

We topped out building 99 new safe and secure homes on Oakover Road for people who need them most and started the critical planning to make our tramlines more accessible. Our waterways are getting more protection with a new Green Links Fund, and we have kicked off the container deposit scheme to divert more waste from landfill. Our early parenting centre and our mental health and

wellbeing local are funded and in the works. Free TAFE and nursing courses are generating pathways for locals to get the skills they need for the jobs they want. Our iconic Eighty-Six music festival went off like a firecracker through our suburbs, delivering much-needed economic uplift for our traders, live music and creative industry workers.

As Parliamentary Secretary for Women's Health I have been proud to propel our landmark reforms, and my electorate office has helped countless residents with everything from housing to health care to protecting local kinders from council cuts. A big thankyou to Sammi, Johanna, Campbell and Marion. There is more to do and there are challenges ahead, but my commitment to Northcote is unwavering and I cannot wait for the next chapter.

Greenvale young leaders awards

Iwan WALTERS (Greenvale) (14:54): The inaugural Greenvale young leaders awards recognise young people in my community who have demonstrated exceptional public service and a deep commitment to their education. I am delighted to inform the house and to announce that the inaugural winners of the Greenvale young leaders awards are: Finn Harvey from Westmeadows Primary for exemplary leadership skills, Joyah Augustus from Roxburgh Rise Primary for demonstrating school values, Grace Angiolella from Mary Queen of Heaven Primary for her compassion and inclusivity, Yashik Bhalla from Keelonith Primary for leadership and care, Reuben Thomas from Aitken College for representing his school with pride, Tepora Etuale from Bethal Primary School for outstanding leadership skills, Christian Motta from St Carlo Borromeo Primary for inspiring his peers, Amjad Wehbe from Meadow Heights Primary for his resilience and values, Chenelle Malhotra from Roxburgh Park Primary for her passion for community, Marina Al Babo from Good Samaritan Primary for her respect and compassion, Zayed El Akoumi from Greenvale Primary for organising meaningful events, Morgan O'Neill from Craigieburn South Primary for academic excellence, Mustapha Zeitoune from Aitken College for his leadership at both school and Hume council, Jasmine Roeschmann from Roxburgh College for her dedication to academia and justice, Laxita Sharma from Craigieburn Secondary College for social and academic excellence and Parasdeep Viridi from Kolbe Catholic College for being an ambassador for his faith and school community. Congratulations to all these worthy winners of the 2023 Greenvale young leaders awards, and thank you to all of their schools for nominating them.

Pakenham electorate achievements

Emma VULIN (Pakenham) (14:55): Here is just a snippet of what we have achieved locally with the Labor government in the Pakenham district this year: we opened the brand new Kurrun Primary School in Officer; funded our election commitment for Pakenham Secondary College's \$11.3 million upgrade; distributed free kinder kits to some of our littlest Victorians as part of the rollout of free kinder; assisted hundreds of constituents applying for their power saving bonus; built another new school, Kurmile Primary School in Officer, opening in 2024; funded yet another primary school in the May budget for Pakenham north-east, set to open in 2025 – this will be the ninth school built in my district since 2014; opened new learning spaces at Lakeside College in Pakenham; opened Kurnboon Child and Family Centre in Officer; officially opened the upgraded cricket nets at Pakenham Upper; turned the sod for the commencement of Officer District Park; made numerous visits to inspect the progress of Pakenham level crossing removals and the two brand new train stations; turned the sod at the groundbreaking start of works at Kaduna Business Park; opened the 2.6-kilometre Princes Highway trail in Officer; attended many cultural events and celebrations across my community and at sports clubs et cetera; delivered the Pakenham roads upgrade; turned the sod at Toun-nun kinder in Officer; opened Creekwood Park in Pakenham; funded a mental health and wellbeing local in Officer – there is so much that I have run out of time.

*Business of the house***Notices of motion**

Danny PEARSON (Essendon – Minister for Transport Infrastructure, Minister for the Suburban Rail Loop, Assistant Treasurer, Minister for WorkSafe and the TAC) (14:57): I advise that the government does not wish to proceed with notices of motion 1 to 3, government business, today and request that they be removed from the notice paper.

Bills**Biosecurity Legislation Amendment (Incident Response) Bill 2023***Second reading***Debate resumed on motion of Ros Spence:**

That this bill be now read a second time.

Emma KEALY (Lowan) (14:57): I rise today to speak on the Biosecurity Legislation Amendment (Incident Response) Bill 2023 – otherwise known as the BLAIR bill, quite conveniently. It is something that has been in the pipeline for some period of time, and there has been wide consultation with the community. We have seen that through Engage Victoria over a period going back to August 2022, and we have got the final legislation before us today. But of course some of the amendments in there started a long time ago, particularly when animal activism was escalating around 2017. It certainly impacted on my electorate in 2018. What was highlighted through a number of incidents across the state was that the laws and the penalties, particularly in relation to trespass onto a property by animal activists, simply were not enough of a deterrent. As a result of a number of initiatives that the Nationals led the debate on, we have been pushing very, very hard to see increased penalties. This includes the inquiry back in 2019 around animal rights activism on Victorian agriculture where there was a minority report put forward, with Melina Bath doing an enormous amount of work on that committee, and I will go into greater detail on that later in my contribution.

There have been two private members bills that the Nationals have put forward. My colleague in this place the member for Murray Plains and my colleague in the other place Ms Melina Bath have both raised private members bills. It is some solace that increased penalties will be put in place through this legislation. However, there has been an enormous amount of grief in the interim and an enormous amount of pressure put on agricultural families in particular and those who live on farm next to their duck sheds, next to their shops, with their stock in neighbouring paddocks where they have been under threat by animal activists, unfairly, and where there have been biosecurity breaches and threats put upon them and harm to their animals and livestock in a way that actually has caused more stress and duress not just to the owners, the farmers and the workers there but also to the animals, ironically; they are the ones who really have suffered from a lot of the stress on property.

I would like to acknowledge, Acting Speaker Farnham, that this is the first time I have made a contribution in this place with you in the chair. I welcome seeing you as Acting Speaker, in that role, and I know that you will be a very fair Chair and a fair Acting Speaker of the house, and I congratulate you on putting your hand up for that role.

I would like to go into some of the details of the purpose of the BLAIR legislation before us today. The main purposes of the bill are to facilitate additional information sharing with the Commonwealth and other jurisdictions; improve control area and restricted area provisions by broadening their applicability and streamlining public notification procedures; improve clarity and efficiency of emergency management provisions, including simplified quarantine provisions; amend compensation payment procedures in relation to exotic animal diseases, including eligibility criteria and valuation processes, to facilitate administrative efficiency; improve enforcement capability by providing for Victoria Police officers to be appointed as inspectors without requiring the declaration of an exotic animal disease outbreak; strengthen the inspector powers by allowing inspectors to direct people and

vehicles during an exotic animal disease outbreak and broadening the applicability of existing provisions; strengthen traceability requirements to improve compliance and enforcement and mitigate exotic animal disease risks; improve compliance processes by broadening permit provisions in relation to the Plant Biosecurity Act 2010; improve enforcement capability by providing for Victoria Police officers to be appointed as inspectors under the Livestock Management Act 2010; and achieve greater deterrence by increasing penalties for offences under the Livestock Disease Control Act 1994, the Plant Biosecurity Act 2010 and the Livestock Management Act 2010.

As we know in Victoria, I think perhaps there is increased awareness and understanding of the presence of exotic animal diseases that could have a catastrophic impact on our Australian livestock industry in particular, but also we have seen it for our bees with varroa mite, we have seen it with other weeds and pests, because we hear more about it and are more informed about what is happening overseas. We also understand the risk of what would happen if we did not manage the threat of an animal disease coming into our country, which could absolutely devastate our agricultural economy.

We saw the impact of foot-and-mouth disease in the UK some decades ago, which was catastrophic, not just for the farmers that were impacted – those who had to destroy their stock or manage their stock through that time – but people were cut off from their friends and family for a long period of time. I actually met with somebody earlier in the year who went through FMD in the UK, and it was very emotional to hear from him what the impact was in his community, of the loss of jobs and the loss of stock which they had taken decades to go through a breeding program to develop – their stock, their cattle. When you talk about, as I said, the emotional impact and the mental impact of having your property and your home in lockdown – we know how hard it was during the COVID lockdowns in Victoria – essentially this was something that was faced over the foot-and-mouth disease outbreaks in the UK over that period of time.

It is something that we know we need to do very, very well. We need to protect the Victorian agricultural industry and livestock industry – the primary production industries – as much as we possibly can because the implications are far too great, not just for our farmers but also for our international reputation of having a safe product for export to the world. Of course we are very fortunate in Australia, and in Victoria in particular and, I would like to think, in my electorate in particular, which is the largest electorate in the state; the reason for that is we have a hell of a lot of farming land with not many people spread out amongst the paddocks in the area. We also have beautiful national parks, which helps, but we are very much in the agricultural sector. We all know – we talk about it regularly – how important it is that we keep pests and disease outside of Victoria and outside of Australia wherever we possibly can. The only way that we can do that is by making sure that we have efficient deterrents in place and proper inspection opportunities to make sure that we can manage our risks appropriately, that we can make sure we have got strong borders at a federal level but also at a state level so that we have everything in place to make sure that if the risk does arrive, we can get going immediately and take action to minimise the impact to a particular area of the country or of the state.

We have seen recently – I mentioned it earlier in my opening remarks – that varroa mites have entered the shores of Australia. The varroa mite of course is a mite. It is a parasite which lives on bees, and it is absolutely devastating for the honey bee industry but also for the pollinating industry. It is very important; we quite often hear about how important our bees are. This is a massive risk to our bee population. While I think all of our apiarists were aware of the threat in New South Wales and they were doing what they should have been doing, there was still some misinformation or lack of information and lack of effective responsiveness when there was a varroa mite outbreak identified very close to the New South Wales–Victoria border. In fact it was right on the New South Wales–Victoria border, on the river in the Euston–Robinvale area.

It was disappointing, and it is something that I made statements about at the time and met with the former Minister for Agriculture about. We really needed to have a responsive public system – a department of agriculture that could make sure we could get information to the apiarists, to the people who were managing the hives, so they could understand what they had to do and what they could not

do and of course manage their bee populations during the end of a pollinating season to make sure that when the bees could not access any food, their increasing aggression would not actually cause further harm to individuals in the community. It was disappointing that it took over a week, I think it was, before there was a formal level of information provided to beekeepers in that area along the river who were directly impacted by the varroa mite outbreak. I understand that this is sometimes because we have a federation of states working together and we have that federal overlay as well of working towards a national plan, but it does reveal that there are vast opportunities for us to strengthen the way that we respond to these types of pests or diseases – in this instance a parasite – that can be absolutely devastating for our agricultural sector.

While I respect the information that was provided by the secretariat of the Public Accounts and Estimates Committee last week, we heard about the 5000 additional staff that would be very quickly required to effectively manage an outbreak of disease, whether it be foot-and-mouth or lumpy skin disease, and avian flu was spoken about earlier in the year. There are many, many different viruses and bacterial diseases and parasites that could cause harm to our communities. While I understand that it is great that there is a plan and that we will need 5000 individuals, 5000 additional staff, to be able to implement those measures and provide that effective response on the ground, I do fear having brand new employees – and I assume they would be seconded from the public sector – with no understanding of agriculture, no understanding of what the implementation plan is and no understanding of what the risks are if it is not managed appropriately. Even just commanding and controlling a new staffing group of 5000 individuals sounds like an enormous task to be able to manage in an effective way.

As I said, while it is good there is a plan, I just question if this plan is achievable, and if we do not get it right, we must also understand what the outcome would be, because it would be massive. It could be catastrophic for our agriculture sector. It would not just be catastrophic for a very, very short window of time; it would be catastrophic for at least a decade, if not multiple decades, on the reputation of Victorian product internationally. It is also about redeveloping that livestock, particularly if it is around breeding livestock and getting the numbers back up to the same quality and quantity that they had when a great depth of stock has to be destroyed. We see that sometimes in a different instance. Following bushfire, we sometimes hear of the catastrophic impact that it has on individual farming families who have lost generations of stock through bushfire. They have to then make that critical decision of how they re-breed and how they secure the genetic materials that they then need to be able to restock their property. It just becomes too overwhelming for many of them to consider; they have to start it all over again after perhaps farming for generations to get to that point, and everything is lost in a moment. In many instances you can see how that exact scenario is comparable to what we would see if there was an outbreak of one of these diseases in the Victorian agricultural community. So we absolutely need to do all that we possibly can to make sure that that does not occur.

I have had some feedback on this legislation. It is not significant feedback, and I note this was provided to us also in the briefing and a response was given to us in the briefing from the minister's office. I would like to thank the minister's office for the bill briefing, which was offered very promptly after the bill was tabled. It is very positive that we are able to ask questions about legislation that is before the house and that we are given a full 14 days to be able to communicate that with our electorates and with our stakeholders and that we can get their feedback and take possible action or talk through any questions with the minister's office. I think this is important for democracy, and I hope this is something that will continue not just with the Minister for Agriculture but with all ministers in this place – having respect for democracy and giving the opportunity for stakeholders to provide feedback on legislation.

The Victorian Farmers Federation (VFF) provided feedback around two elements of this legislation. There was a question mark they had around providing additional powers to Victorian police officers and concern that this may be misused in certain circumstances. However, they have received some comfort that there is a very low likelihood that that will occur, which, given the balance of what we trying to achieve – making sure that, if there is an inspection required, there are not any exotic materials

onsite that could carry disease, pests or weeds that would be a threat to our agricultural sector – on balance, I think the legislation has got right.

I also spoke to the Police Association Victoria about that particular matter, and the police association were very supportive of having additional powers in the belief that it would empower them to better perform their duties in supporting department officers and vets to access certain elements of a property in a rapid time frame, rather than going through a much slower process. So that was very positive also.

The other aspect that the VFF raised that they had some concern about was the opportunity for an emergency fund, grant or money that could otherwise be made available to an individual to be withheld if there was suspicion that they contributed to the outbreak of disease in the state of Victoria. I understand that this is a very difficult line to get right, but we do not want to see any individuals who need emergency grant money just to survive having that funding withheld by the government on the presumption of guilt before being given the opportunity to have their case tested through a normal process. We did receive some assurance during the ministerial briefing that that would be something that would be used very rarely, but it still is something that would be very important to make sure is utilised in a way that is not biased at all and does not presume guilt in an unfair way. I would like to think that if that power was utilised, it would be in absolutely compelling circumstances where there was absolutely no question that there was a direct link between that individual and the outbreak that was present at that time.

Just to summarise, that was the feedback that I received on the legislation. I do note that a large number of organisations were consulted as part of forming this legislation and that it was put through the Engage Victoria process. I believe that a large number of organisations that represent the agricultural sector, whether it is around livestock or the horticultural industries, were certainly well consulted and provided input on this legislation. Again, I always think it is better if an exposure draft is made available to the sector before we bring legislation before the house so there are no surprises, and it often makes for a much more polished piece of legislation and therefore a much smoother pathway through the chambers of this place as it makes its way into legislation.

I would like to take some time just to speak about some further matters, and they are around the history in relation to animal activism and the impact that it has had on our communities and also on our farmers, particularly those that live on farm. With this legislation – and I believe it is clause 96 which is relevant to this point I am making – Victoria will finally bring our penalty units in line with New South Wales. So for an individual the fine would be approximately \$23,000, which is the same as or a similar level to New South Wales. This is a far greater deterrent for animal activists than we have seen in the past. Currently it sits at around \$10,000. That was increased from a very small amount previously.

Roma Britnell interjected.

Emma KEALY: As the member for South-West Coast has just raised, we have seen disastrously low penalty rates imposed through the judicial system with the fines imposed. This was of course in the matter related to John Gommans of Gippy Goat. I would like to acknowledge and pay my respects to Mr Gommans, who is no longer with us but who was a tireless campaigner for fairness through what happened on his property, and that was a property at Yarragon. We had Gippy Goat there – a fabulous little shop. Animal activists broke into the site. They actually stole a goat. It was an incredible breach of biosecurity requirements and caused enormous stress to his staff, his family and all associated with the community. As we know, it is very, very confronting and stressful to go through a court process, and at the end of the day the court awarded just a \$1 penalty. It was a \$1 fine for that individual who was found guilty of breaking into that property.

It was not just about the theft of a goat, it was about the breach of biosecurity, and we all know that our biosecurity requirements for the agricultural sector are increasing all the time. The onus is always on the property owner to ensure that they have full traceability and security of their stock, and that has

been brought in through the national livestock identification scheme. We see other requirements around our border controls and our state controls, and of course we have a strict understanding that all of our farmers need to manage their pigs and make sure that they know exactly who is going on their property, what animals are going on their property and what risk there is to their local livestock to ensure that there are not any exotic diseases or pests there so that if there is an outbreak we can trace it and hopefully contain it as well. When we have biosecurity breaches on properties, it absolutely puts all of that at risk, and that could be, as I have outlined earlier in my contribution, absolutely catastrophic for the agricultural sector. That is why the Nationals and the Liberals have been very, very strong in saying it is not an adequate deterrent to get a \$1 fine for breaching biosecurity regulations and for stealing a goat –

Roma Britnell: Four years.

Emma KEALY: and then for it to take such a long time, as the member for South-West Coast has just said, to ensure that we have a fairer and, more importantly, strong deterrent for animal activists not to go down that pathway.

Through the inquiry into the impact of animal rights activism on Victorian agriculture, there were recommendations in relation to enhancing and increasing the fines related to trespass on property. As I said earlier in my opening remarks, Peter Walsh, the member for Murray Plains and former Shadow Minister for Agriculture, put forward a private members bill around exactly this point to increase penalties and increase the deterrent for animal activists. We have also heard that Ms Bath did an enormous amount of work on that committee and was part of hearings right around the state where they heard from farmers who had been impacted by animal activism. She also put up a similar private members bill. To the last election the Liberals and Nationals took a commitment that we would double penalties for animal farm trespass, which is what we see in the legislation before us today.

But unfortunately we still are seeing the impacts of animal activism. Earlier this year I visited CA Sinclair abattoir at Benalla, which was impacted by animal activists who had gone onsite, who had broken into the property and who had actually locked themselves into the gondola, which is used as part of the process of gassing pigs, which is the recommended way to stun or euthanise a pig. The biosecurity risk was significant for the pigs that would therefore have to go through the abattoir. It cost an enormous amount of money to be able to clean the property in an appropriate way; there was damage to the property. But they were also shut down for a number of days. There was a protest on Mother's Day this year where the intention was to block the trucks coming in on a Sunday, just to stop the flow of traffic and to impact on that business.

More needs to be done around how we manage animal activism. We have still got online the Farm Transparency Project, which has got photos of farming properties and their locations, and often it includes private homes. It is not okay to do that and to target law-abiding businesses in this state who are doing the right thing. If you speak to Sinclair's, they have so many different requirements and audit requirements that they have to meet in order to continue their business. They are the only Victorian-owned pig abattoir left in the state of Victoria. What we are seeing more and more often is an outcome which is worse for pig welfare in that the pigs are being trucked interstate, often to South Australia, they are being slaughtered there and then they are carried back into Victoria, to meat processors, to be made into the pork products that we love. We have actually got activists who are shutting down an industry in Victoria. But it does not mean that it is not still happening; we have then got pigs on a truck for a longer period of time, which is less ideal for the pigs. It is not something that the RSPCA even support. You do question when activism crosses over to the actual outcome of more stress for the animals and more duress for the animals.

Really, we know at the end of the day animal activism is about all of us no longer eating meat or animal products. Coming into this Christmas I know I will certainly be looking forward to tucking into some turkey, some ham and probably some prawns or some yabbies if we can get hold of them. I will certainly be supporting as many Victorian industries as I can by eating meat, because I love meat and

I am not going to give up meat anytime soon. I think it is every Victorian's right to choose whether they eat meat or not. It is not up to anybody to mandate that you must eat meat or that you only eat it infrequently, weekly –

A member interjected.

Emma KEALY: or that you eat every day, three times a day, maybe a caveman's diet – I do not know if Acting Speaker Farnham is on a caveman's diet or not – or whether you choose not to eat meat. I do not mind what that is; I do not mind. But I do not believe that anyone should pass judgement upon that decision. It is an individual choice, and that is where we should be and what we should support, and that is the legislation we should support.

There is also a risk that I would like to briefly address in relation to camping on river frontage Crown land. This is something that again came in the previous Parliament, when there were concerns raised that this would create a biosecurity risk. I do note some signage that was sent through to me just earlier today. There was a stile that had been built to go over a fence line. There were a number of warnings on the sign: beware of snakes and bring your own portable toilet if you are going to camp there. There was a map of the site. But there was nothing on the department's signage whatsoever that had any statement in relation to protecting the biosecurity of the property that they were entering. There was a note on there to be careful of livestock and not to leave out your meat overnight, or any food, because they might come and have a nibble on it. I am not aware of any cattle that would come up and have a nibble on your leftover snags on the barbie. But you cannot do that in those areas if you are camping on river frontage Crown land. I think that this is important enough that if we deliver on what the intention is of this legislation, to improve biosecurity, we need to make sure that we are also protecting our areas where we are allowing camping and people to enter, which may present a biosecurity risk.

I think there should be farmers' choice over whether someone enters their land or not. It is what happens in most instances and has happened for a long period of time, but you simply need to knock on the door, know the owner perhaps or at least have the courtesy of taking the time to introduce yourself. Generally, in my experience, if you build that relationship, people will let you camp on their property. But they will require you to not be in that area at certain times of the year, if there is calving or lambing going on, or they will ask for additional protections. They will ask for you to perhaps not wear the boots that you just wore when you went to Indonesia for a bit of a farm tour. They will ask you to do other things that might be just cleaning up your cans, making sure you do not have a camp fire or keeping it down at this time of year – you might disturb the thoroughbred horses up the road. I do ask the department to focus on that, because (a) I think it is creating a biosecurity risk for our agriculture sector but (b) we are not even bothering to put up any biosecurity warning signage when we are putting up a stile or when we are warning people of other aspects that impact them. Let us think about it a bit bigger than that. Let us think about more than just the people camping there. Let us also protect biosecurity on those properties.

In summary, this legislation will improve some of the elements of biosecurity in this state. It is very good to see there will be increased penalty units, particularly for areas of biosecurity breaches, and as I have said, I have been assured by the minister's office that that will be applicable to animal activists trespassing on agricultural property and abattoirs. I do think there probably is more work to be done in that area. We need to ensure that there is absolutely no opportunity for animal activists to be dominant and allowed to have free rein and breach all biosecurity rules with no consequences for that. We need to make sure that if this legislation goes through the house, and I am confident it will, if people are picked up doing the wrong thing, the charges are laid, the fines are applied, the agricultural sector is finally secure from this threat of animal activists and we have a framework that supports biosecurity.

Michaela SETTLE (Eureka) (15:27): I am very, very happy to rise to speak on the Biosecurity Legislation Amendment (Incident Response) Bill 2023, and I do thank the member for Lowan for her contribution. I am delighted that we are all on the same page on this one. I am really very passionate

about this bill because it is all about protecting our agriculture industry. Our previous minister said at one point that:

Biosecurity is everyone's responsibility, and we all need to help protect our agriculture, our economy and our unique natural environment.

I would like to thank the previous Minister for Agriculture in the other place but also our current minister, and I am honoured to work with both of those wonderful women and to see every day their passion for our wonderful agricultural industry, which is an incredibly important industry for us economically here in Victoria. We are Australia's largest exporter of food and fibre by value, accounting for about 26 per cent of the national total, with our commodities reaching over 170 export destinations around the globe. About 11.4 million hectares, which is about 50 per cent of Victoria's land, are managed by 21,600 agricultural businesses, with a gross value of agricultural production of approximately \$17.5 billion. So it really is an incredibly important sector to the economy in general and of course to those of us in the regions.

This government is very, very serious about biosecurity, and last week I was delighted that we released *Victoria's Biosecurity Strategy*, in which:

Biosecurity is defined as the *collective effort* to prevent and manage the harms caused by plant and animal pests and diseases ...

But it is pretty complex, biosecurity, and the risks are very broad. It requires a collective effort to manage the risks. Our biosecurity system consists of three main pillars, if you like: prevention and mitigation, preparedness and response, and management and control. This biosecurity system plays an absolutely crucial role in protecting what is, as I say, a \$17.5 billion agriculture sector.

This bill amends the Livestock Disease Control Act 1994, the Livestock Management Act 2010 and the Plant Biosecurity Act 2010 to enhance the Victorian government's capability to manage biosecurity incidents, including preparing for, responding to and recovering from. As the member for Lowan pointed out, it is not just when you are in the grip of one of those biosecurity breaches; it has quite a long tail. Not only do we have to manage the immediate crisis but then there are of course the impacts on the industry and the longer tail. The bill supports a public commitment made by the Victorian government to improve exotic disease preparedness and response capability. The bill will provide clarity and efficiency of emergency response and management for exotic diseases and pests and incentivise compliance by increasing penalties for various offences, including tampering with livestock traceability.

The biosecurity risks are intensifying, and it is something that we all need to acknowledge and be aware of. There are a range of reasons for that. We live in a very fast moving and global world if you like – that is saying it twice, 'global world' – but people are moving about much more, and that really does increase the risk. We had nearly 100 biosecurity incursions in Victoria between 2015 and 2023, and sadly, it is now less a matter of if but more a matter of when Victoria will be challenged by its next significant threat. As I say, increasing levels of travel and trade are creating new opportunities for biosecurity incursions. Close to home for me, in 2020 we had an avian flu outbreak in the Golden Plains shire, and I am proud to say that the Golden Plains shire does about 20 per cent of our egg production. It was devastating. Over 460,000 birds had to be destroyed, and that eradication ran for nine months, with over 340 people involved. That is I guess where we talk about that long tail.

We are very lucky in Australia – 'our home is girt by sea', as we proudly sing. That does create a sense of comfort, having an island state, but of course the risks are very real to us here in Victoria. We have not had an outbreak of African swine fever – it has never been recorded in Australia – and foot-and-mouth has not been detected in Australia since the 1800s. But it is very close to our doorstep. We know in 2022 there was an outbreak of foot-and-mouth in Indonesia, and by November 2023 the Indonesian government reported FMD in 27 of their 38 provinces. It is interesting for people that do not necessarily know the agricultural industry well. It is easy to say we will have this outbreak and we will kill the animals and that will be that, but the impacts just go on and on and on. We are an export

country, and very proud. As I say, Victoria is a big exporter of food and fibre, and if we were to have any sort of outbreak of, for example, FMD, that cuts down all of our export markets with really devastating effects across the whole industry. I guess what I am trying to say here and provide the context for is the absolute importance of biosecurity. I would ask anyone listening in at home, when you are asked at the airport about your shoes or where you have been, do not smuggle in that piece of wood, do not think that you can just ignore those questions. It is incredibly important – thousands and thousands of lives rely on keeping our state safe.

As I say, there are three different elements to this bill, including improving emergency response capabilities. Of course timing is of the essence in any sort of outbreak. We know that early detection and rapid control really make the difference, and any delay has really direct consequences in an incursion, so improving that response capability is of the utmost importance. The bill also strengthens the existing enforcement and compliance framework, affording the capability to police officers to effectively investigate farm-related crimes. But it is important to understand that you are operating in a really fast-moving situation, and anything that we can do to make sure we are getting on top of any sort of biosecurity breach is very important.

I think in terms of the increase in the penalties, I absolutely agree with the member for Lowan about making that a deterrent for animal activists. It is terrible when we have those incursions on farms. I know we had something happen a couple of weeks ago in this house, and all of our safety and security were brought into question by people coming into the house. In the same way, every farmer has the right to be safe in their workplace.

I would also support the bill more generally, in that biosecurity, as I said at the outset, is really something we all have to observe. The fragility, if you like, of biosecurity is its absolute interdependency. We need every farmer to comply when there is an outbreak. I know that farmers absolutely are there first and foremost to protect their animals, but we just need to make sure that if there is anyone out there who wants to sit outside the system, they understand that there is an interdependency and we have got to protect each other to protect the whole industry. It looks at financial compensation if there is an outbreak. There is also something in there about how we advertise and get the message out. I know that often regional papers can be a weekly paper, so it is really important that we use as many tools as we can to get any information required out there. As we say, time is of the absolute essence.

This bill goes a long way to securing our farms, our agriculture and our unique environment. As I say, I want to thank both the previous minister and the current minister for all of the work that they have put in. I also would really like to tip my hat to the department of ag. I have had the pleasure to work alongside them, and more passionate people I have never come across. I think that you can see that in a bill like this. People who live and breathe agriculture are absolutely passionate about it. We want to protect it. We used to say that we rode on the sheep's back, but I think we ride pretty much on agriculture's back. It is important for us to stand together and protect that industry. I could not commend more strongly this bill to the house.

Cindy McLEISH (Eildon) (15:37): I am always pleased when there is a bill before the house about strengthening biosecurity, because nothing could be more important from an agricultural point of view, so I am very pleased to speak on the Biosecurity Legislation Amendment (Incident Response) Bill 2023. It covers off on quite a number of elements. Having come from a farming background and currently living on a working farm, these issues are always important, and certainly in the electorate of Eildon I represent such a large area that in the main is agriculture – that agriculture being primarily beef and sheep. The market has just completely fallen out of sheep at the minute. It is heartbreaking to see the cost of sheep, what farmers are getting for them, and the prices for lamb in shops. Also I have a number of orchards, so plants and other diseases there are particularly relevant. Not only that, there are some very, very good vineyards in the Yarra Valley, with some in Mansfield and further north as well as in Murrindindi and Nillumbik, actually, so quite widely spread in my electorate there are a number of great vineyards.

There are some 29,000 farms in Victoria, and with that, in primary production alone, there are about 67,500 employees. So that is fairly significant, and obviously they are in regional areas. There are another 82,000 downstream in manufacturing and production – produce from the raw ingredients – so all up about 150,000 people working there. The value of the food and fibre industry is \$17.5 billion, and these are 2020–21 figures, so they are a little bit outdated. The reason biosecurity is so important is we need to protect this industry. This agricultural industry is what feeds us. It is not just what feeds us; it is also what we export to help feed other countries that do not grow a lot of what we grow. We have got an excellent reputation in Australia and in Victoria for growing very clean and green produce, so it is important that we maintain that reputation.

So when we look at biosecurity, what is it that we are talking about? It is about the mechanisms and processes that are in place to protect our primary producers and protect the farms and the farmland. It is so important for a number of reasons, because we want to know that the food that we are eating is exceptional quality, but it is also about our international reputation. For example, if you are exporting meat and livestock, Australia has certain requirements on what you do and your practices on the farms to make sure that you meet particular standards, so that not only are we growing it but when we are exporting things to another country they can be guaranteed that it is particularly high quality.

Also supporting our biosecurity is the traceability of stock, which is happening more and more. We have got issues around borders and about what can come in and out. Farmers often have signs saying ‘Biosecurity: do not come on here. Come and report to the farmhouse’ or the office that may be there, with the onus being on the farmers to make sure that you follow all that is needed to protect our industry. We have diseases – some are emerging threats, and we have existing animal and plant diseases. For those that are in close proximity we can have lumpy skin disease or foot-and-mouth disease, and these can absolutely wipe out herds, farms and districts if they come in – if they enter our state. We are very, very mindful – across Australia actually – of what practices we have in place. There are other things like bovine Johne’s disease. We have had incidents of bird flu and equine influenza and swine flu. The varroa mite in bees has been particularly concerning in recent years because we know how important bees are to all of our production, and we need to be particularly vigilant because there are times when the number of bees around seems to drop, and we need to make sure that we are doing everything we can to maintain and protect those.

But also with plants – as I said, I have orchards and we have fruit fly – fruit fly has been penetrating from north of the state down through areas of Yarck and the Murrindindi shire down into the Yarra Valley. I want to recognise the efforts of Bronwyn Koll, who is the regional coordinator for fruit fly in the Yarra Valley. She has been battling away for years doing her darnedest with not enough funding to help her to get as much done as she would like to get done – because she could always do more, but Bronwyn is always out there at fairs and festivals making sure that she is talking about fruit fly.

Not only that, but we have also got phylloxera, which attacks grapevines and destroys the grapevines. It can go root to root. These little insects can crawl along the ground, and because of this it is very easy for it to move from one area to another. The insects can attach to boots, clothes and equipment. We have got a wine industry in Victoria that also supports about 1200 jobs and \$380 million in exports. \$114 million is the value of the wine grape product, and Victoria is the third largest wine exporter in Australia. As I said, I have got some particularly good vineyards in my electorate. But we have diseases that do infiltrate every now and again, and the financial impact of the phylloxera in the Yarra Valley is estimated to be around \$1 billion. If you have to replant nearly the whole region, replace the rootstock and cover losses during the production lag – and this is some information that has been shared by Rob Sutherland, a viticulturist at De Bortoli in the Yarra Valley, who was at a ‘taking tech to the regions’ workshop in McLaren Vale, because people on the ground are working really hard to protect this – and if you need to dig up and replace all of your vines there is an enormous cost to it. It is really important that some of these biosecurity measures that are coming in are taken very seriously.

I want to touch on trespassing, because we have typically had some very low penalty rates for farm trespass. We have had some dreadful incidents, and some of them were animal activists getting into

chicken sheds, and we had the incident at Yarra Glen with the Gippy Goat Cafe. The trespassers – the activists – got a \$1 penalty, and that is just extraordinary. It was not just about the theft of the goat. There were huge biosecurity issues, because people bring onto farms diseases that they may not realise are on their clothes or their shoes. This sort of incident is exceptionally distressing. It is not just distressing for the farmer but also for staff to know that somebody has come into sheds, sometimes at night, to take animals, and it is really distressing for the animals. I find it quite hypocritical that the animal activists are there protecting the animals when all they are doing is absolutely making the animals distressed, and that fear impacts on egg production, it impacts on quality of milk, it impacts on so many different things. So I am pleased to see that this bill does give rise to greater penalties for trespassing.

I want to mention with this – and the Shadow Minister for Agriculture mentioned it – camping on licensed river frontages. This is a big biosecurity threat. I am disappointed that the government has not tackled this. In fact they have let it go full steam ahead. Campers do bring in diseases. They do not take notice, as they should – some do, some do not – of biosecurity signs. We have had incidents not terribly far from us where campers have actually gone through the gate that says ‘Don’t come in here – biosecurity. You need to go there’. They have ignored that, and they have gone onto the property, through private property, to get to where they can camp. That is just not on. I wish the government would have a look at this and review it in coming years. It has not taken effect fully at the moment because most of the river frontages in my electorate for the last 12 months and maybe a little bit more have been flooded quite significantly and there is a lot of damage. The land has been quite wet, and we have had ongoing floods, not just those in October 2022. Some farmers in and around Thornton, Whanregarwen and Molesworth have had three lots of flooding of their flats, and it has wiped them out in terms of hay production and even the stock that they can put on those paddocks. But these are areas that will be opened up for campers, and I implore campers, if they are looking to do this and there is a biosecurity sign, to take it seriously. Here we are in Parliament debating the importance of biosecurity and at the same time the government has its own policy that flies in the face of this. I just do not think that is good enough. They really need to have a look more broadly at these issues.

Daniela DE MARTINO (Monbulk) (15:47): It gives me great pleasure to speak on the Biosecurity Legislation Amendment (Incident Response) Bill 2023. As a government we have committed to improve disease outbreak and control capabilities, and this bill serves to fulfil our promise. The bill amends the Livestock Disease Control Act 1994 and Plant Biosecurity Act 2010 so that we have a greater capacity to respond to biosecurity incidents and improve efficiencies within the system.

This bill holds great importance for our state. Agricultural security ensures our food security and our economic security and provides protection for our environment too. An exotic disease outbreak across our livestock or plants could have disastrous consequences if not properly managed. In order for good management of an outbreak to occur, we need robust legislation which provides for both swift and decisive action in the event that measures need to be taken, as well as clear and proportionate penalties for imperilling our state’s biosecurity. This bill will improve clarity and efficiency of emergency response and management for exotic diseases and pests. It will incentivise compliance by increasing penalties for various offences, including tampering with livestock traceability. It will improve enforcement capability by providing for Victoria Police officers to be appointed as inspectors without requiring a declaration of an exotic animal disease outbreak. Importantly, this will not require extra training for the police force, but it will expand the circumstances under which they can exercise their inspector responsibilities.

Biosecurity is a matter that is actually quite close to my heart both personally as a former organic greengrocer and also as the member for Monbulk, which just happens to be the horticultural centre of Victoria and, dare I say it, Australia. I was therefore delighted to join the Minister for Agriculture last week at Auravale Alpacas in Belgrave South, when the minister launched the Allan Labor government’s biosecurity strategy. We were joined by David Reid, the policy and technical manager for Nursery & Garden Industry Victoria, and Danyel Cucinotta, the Victorian Farmers Federation vice-president, both of whom had worked on the biosecurity reference group.

The biosecurity strategy was formed through extensive engagement with traditional owners and nearly 450 stakeholders covering all aspects of Victoria's biosecurity system, from farmers and industry groups to land managers and emergency management agencies. The biosecurity reference group worked closely together to develop recommendations for our state's biosecurity which are practical and effective and will help protect our agricultural sector from potential biosecurity threats, such as exotic diseases like foot-and-mouth – I was about to say 'hand, foot and mouth', but no, that is what our children all get from care when they are about five. But I digress. Auravale Alpacas was a great location to launch our state's biosecurity strategy, and their controls for disease prevention were clearly on display. We were all required to wash our shoes in a disinfectant solution upon arrival. Simple yet effective controls such as decontamination of shoes, equipment and transport vehicles make a significant difference in preventing potential pests or pathogens from spreading from one farm to another. It is in all of our interests here to ensure good biosecurity exists across our agricultural sector.

We do understand Victoria will face growing risks as a result of climate change, increasing movement of people and stock through trade and travel and changing land use. So this comprehensive statewide strategy, which was launched last week, was developed to ensure that as a state we continue to protect our \$20.2 billion agriculture industry. It is a key priority for our Allan Labor government, and in this year's budget we have actually invested \$17.4 million to continue strengthening our emergency animal disease preparedness, bringing our total investment since 2022 to \$43 million.

This bill strengthens our capacity as a state to safeguard against pests and disease. I mentioned before foot-and-mouth disease. I was in the United Kingdom back in the early 2000s when that outbreak occurred. The damage which that disease wreaked upon the agricultural industry of the United Kingdom was extraordinary. It is actually estimated that that outbreak cost the country £8 billion 20 years ago. I do not even want to think how much that would be today. Not only is our proactive approach to preventing diseases such as this from taking hold – effectively nipping it in the bud, so to speak – the best way forward, it is the only way forward.

I have a keen interest in growing food. As a greengrocer in organics for nearly seven years, through weekly conversations I came to understand the challenges which farmers face. The weather is one such challenge. We cannot control the hailstorms, the floods or the droughts any more than we can hold back the rising tide, but another challenge which growers and farmers face which we can mitigate is disease and pestilence. Farmers know how to manage their established pests through a variety of methods, but an exotic disease outbreak brings with it many unknowns and great risk. It therefore calls for quick and decisive action, and the legislative framework must allow for such measures to be taken, which is precisely what this bill achieves.

My electorate of Monbulk, as I mentioned before, is a horticultural centre of Victoria, and Victoria is the horticultural centre of Australia, so to say biosecurity is important to my electorate is an understatement. The Victorian horticultural industry is a sector worth over \$2.5 billion which employs more than 24,100 people and engages with over 4000 stakeholders. From small family-based organisations all the way through to multinational companies, they are represented by Nursery and Garden Industry Victoria, NGIV. One-third of their membership resides across the Dandenong Ranges. They conservatively estimate that in my electorate of Monbulk, or across the Dandenong Ranges, over \$600 million of economic worth is generated per annum, and 250-plus employers are employing thousands of people there. It is a significant industry.

Monbulk has a very long and proud history of plant growing. It is famous for Tesselaar – you would be hard pressed to find someone who has not heard of their tulip festival – but it is also the home of Garden Express, which is Australia's largest online nursery and mail-order garden supplier. I had the wonderful opportunity last week to actually tour that nursery and a number of other nurseries. I was astounded by the industry. Some people think that growing plants is a lovely, romantic, nice thing to do – and it is beautiful – but I tell you what, the processes, the science involved, the scale, the detail and the innovation were astounding to behold. I have got to say it was marvellous. I am looking forward to my next tour of some other growers.

I was just going to say that really at the end of the day we have to protect our agricultural sector. Be it livestock or green growth, which includes obviously fruits and vegetables as well as ornamental plants, it is critical to our food security and economic health.

This bill, as has been mentioned by the speakers before me, including the member for Eureka and members for Lowan and Eildon, significantly increases penalties for offences for the contravention of provisions related to exotic animal diseases and livestock traceability requirements, which gives a really clear signal about how serious these offences are. Hopefully, this will deter potential offenders, because these offences can inflict real harm on the community, the environment and the economy. For example, the penalty for breach of a restricted area order is going to increase from 360 penalty units to 1800, and if I tell you that a penalty unit at the moment is \$192.31, it means that a breach of this will go from \$69,231.60 to \$346,158. That is a significant jump, and hopefully that will do enough to deter people from breaching in this way. We are aware of the importance of encouraging farmers to promptly report any suspicion of disease on their properties as timely reporting is crucial for effective disease control and prevention, and the amendments focus on clarifying and broadening provisions related to the payment of exotic disease compensation in the event of such a detection or outbreak.

As the member for Eureka stated, Victoria is a significant food and fibre exporter. In 2021–22 Victorian food and fibre exports equalled \$17.9 billion and had actually increased by \$4 billion on the previous year. Victoria at that time had 26 per cent of the national total in food and fibre exports, so we basically led the nation. This is a really significant industry for us. These penalties that we have introduced bring us closer into line with Queensland and New South Wales, where we had fallen short. In fact we have now leapfrogged them when it comes to penalties such as the one I mentioned for the breach of that.

As I mentioned, as the member for Monbulk, the horticultural sector is incredibly important to my electorate, but as Victorians in general our agricultural sector is absolutely significant for all of us. I commend this bill to the house for ensuring that these protections are there for our industry.

Roma BRITNELL (South-West Coast) (15:57): I rise to speak on the Biosecurity Legislation Amendment (Incident Response) Bill 2023. It always gives me pleasure to speak on the subject of agriculture as agriculture was a very, very big part of my life, and probably one of the reasons I ended up here is the advocacy work that I did in the region, because I am very proud of what our agricultural community do. It is so important to understand and value the importance of food production and fibre production.

This bill actually brings in some extra powers for police, and it strengthens some of the biosecurity rules and communications – all sorts of things that I think will be a great improvement, because when I was milking cows, which I did for 20-odd years, one of the biggest concerns was the threat of foot-and-mouth disease. I can remember going to buy our third farm, and one of the guys who we bought hay from said ‘Why on earth would you do that? The risk of foot-and-mouth is so horrifically close’. Obviously, when you are buying farms, it is very, very big debt and very big money, and you do not sleep very well at night because of the amount of debt. He had got to a point in his life where he thought the risk was too great. So that is how much of an impact this has on farmers – we have it in the back of our minds at all times.

It always concerns me when I see cuts by the government to areas such as the Victorian agricultural budget, and even now we have got a department that does not even have the word ‘agriculture’ in the name. It makes me worry about the lack of understanding of the importance of food production. Why do I worry? I worry because without food we really cannot survive. We in Victoria do so much to contribute to the challenge we have as a world of producing very good quality, clean food. Now, that is an important challenge, and do you know why? Over the last 500 years we put fences up and started becoming organised farmers – and that is what I refer to farming as; it is not intensive farming, because that has connotations that we do not care, and I will go into that in a minute. It is called organised farming in my mind.

Since we did that and created herds, we have produced a huge amount of food, but we have to produce that exact same amount that we have produced over the last 500 years in the next 50 years. Just think for a minute about that challenge. We have got a population heading towards 9 billion; we have only got 7 per cent of the earth's crust to actually farm on and to produce food from, and that is a challenge that a lot of people are putting their minds to: 'What are we going to do to be able to do this?' To be able to improve our ability to increase food we have to invest in the research, and it often takes 15 years to take a concept and make an actual product.

I always have such great, deep respect for a man called Norman Borlaug, who was a scientist from the USA, who invested his intelligence into making the wheat plant less tall so it would go to ear quicker. This was in the 1950s, and he is credited with saving many lives because post war the threat of starvation was very real. And here we are again as a society very much facing a similar challenge. Just 2 per cent of the world's population actually grow the food we all eat, and of that 2 per cent only 25 per cent have a qualification or make the management decisions. Let me tell you, as the member for Monbulk talked about with the science involved in farming, it takes a lot to grow an apple; it does not take as much to pick an apple. That is why I say there is a big challenge ahead of us and we need to make sure we invest, because we have a lot of work to do to be able to make sure we can feed the population.

You can probably tell that I am very passionate about agriculture, because it is a very important industry. When we see the government backing out of research, it worries me no end. With the risk of foot-and-mouth disease in the last few years, with it being very close in Indonesia, I think we should be investing in more ag scientists and more people. I remember having a conversation with an ag scientist who said we just would not have the capability. So we need to have police engaged to put more capability around an intense surge. We are going to need people in the event – and it is not if, it is when – that we have one of these outbreaks. I am looking forward in the future to speaking more with some of my English counterparts from my dairy days, who I hope to visit in the next few years, about their learnings so we can bring some of those back. But some of these stories about what England faced in 2011, I think it was, were quite horrific.

I am also really pleased that this bill actually increases the penalties for trespassers on property. These are animal activists mainly but sometimes also people in other sectors. We are seeing a bit of that with the renewables sector, where they think they have the ability to just walk onto farms and not consider the fact that it is somebody else's land that has some biosecurity processes and protocols in place that should be respected. We have also got trespassers who think that they are saving the world. Let me state right now that farmers are environmentalists and they also care about their animals. Just like some parents – there are horrific stories – abuse their children, we see the same thing with animals, and that gets the headlines. But we have laws in this state, and farmers 99.9 per cent of the time are law-abiding businesspeople that respect their animals and understand the environment and are absolutely scientific in every decision they make. You know, they understand the soil science and they understand the animal nutrition. I have often said I knew more about my cows' diet – how much fibre, how much energy and how much protein they consumed – than I did my children's. I literally worked it out every single day. I hoped my kids were not eating too many lollies, but I never worked it out to see what the sugar content was, like I did with my cows. It is incredibly scientific, and I am always disappointed when I see people thinking that they know more and taking themselves onto farms.

I was on farm when our farm was under threat by animal activists, and the police were calling me, saying 'Where are you? Because we're quite concerned that your farm is going to be targeted'. For the children it is scary. For the staff who have children as well, it is very confronting to have people threatening them in their workplace, which is their home. So to have a penalty that is now in line with New South Wales is absolutely fitting. It should be a penalty that deters people, not a penalty that is so insulting. The \$1 fine that was given to an activist after a court case a few years ago sent a very damning message to farmers that they were not valued.

I think the Labor government should be seeing far more priorities in how they can support – and I did not say subsidise; I said support – and enable policies they can put in place to actually grow agriculture and protect farmers, and penalties is definitely one. We need to see a lot more of it, though, and certainly increasing research is where we need to go, not decreasing.

I take great pride in the farming community of South-West Coast. We contribute the largest area to food production in the state of Victoria, coming from western Victoria. We have great diversity, with dairy, sheep, beef, abalone and crops. We are the biggest dairy area now in the nation, and the farmers that I talk with regularly are great contributors to the environment. That is absolutely their first priority, because they understand that unless you work with nature, nature will not allow you to progress. Nature is far smarter and far harsher than any farmer can contend with, so they actually work with nature. You understand the balance, you understand the ecosystem and you are constantly trying to improve so that the land you work will be handed on to your children and your grandchildren, and this has been happening for centuries.

This is why farmers, particularly in Victoria and Australia, do invest in research by putting their hands in their own pockets and paying the levy that invests in the research. We are very proud in south-west Victoria to be great contributors to the world's food needs. We have got so many good farmers. It is getting harder and harder. I mean, when I started in agriculture many years ago, there were 3000 dairy farmers in northern Victoria, and now with the buybacks of the water – and it is happening again this week – there are, I think, about 500. That is a great shame, because we cannot keep taking water and not realising that we are compromising our own food capability and compromising the future. Farmers are not the enemy; they are the answer. In south-west Victoria we have natural rainfall and we have great soils that we look after, and we need to find ways to support that, not punish that. I have said it for 20-something years now, since I began in agriculture, because I was so impressed by the scientific nature of farmers. They take every decision onboard to use the science to make a decision that is in the best interests of their animals, the best interests of the environment and the best interests of community.

Darren CHEESEMAN (South Barwon) (16:07): It is with some pleasure that I rise this afternoon to make a contribution on the Biosecurity Legislation Amendment (Incident Response) Bill 2023. In reflecting on this bill and the briefings that I have been able to secure with respect to it, I very much want to just acknowledge and thank some tremendous Victorian scientists who work for the CSIRO animal research laboratories in Geelong, who have been doing some magnificent work in researching the risks associated with viruses and bacteria being transmitted from animals to humans. Of course we have seen globally over the last decade or so an increased risk, where we see a disease burden that has increasingly migrated between species, particularly between pigs, birds and bats, across to humanity. This has caused significant health and safety risks globally and indeed the death of many, many hundreds, if not thousands, of people throughout the globe.

I also want to take the opportunity to thank and acknowledge the many Victorian scientists over the decades who have worked for the department of agriculture under its various name changes, particularly through the research institutes that exist and that very much do a deep scientific dive into the productivity of horticulture and agriculture across Victoria to assist our fantastic Victorian farmers in producing for our state the biggest export by value to a global economy. Again, I want to just acknowledge and thank those research scientists who I think in so many ways have assisted and ensured Victorian farmers are globally exceptionally productive with the goods that they produce for an export market.

In thinking about biosecurity and in an Australian context, in so many ways we have had a massive advantage in that Australia has been in a biosecurity sense isolated from the global community. What that has meant for a very, very long time is that pest plants and diseases have found it much more difficult to make their way onto Australian farms as a consequence of that distance from other global countries where pest plants and diseases have been a significant problem. That has given us a significant advantage in so many ways. However, with increased globalisation, with increased

movement of people across the globe, with climate change and the realities of what that might mean for the migration of disease burden, what we are now seeing is that those significant advantages that we have had are very quickly dissipating. What that means is that right throughout our nation we need to see further emphasis, further legislative reform, put in place to ensure that we can protect our farming communities – not only that we can protect those farming communities but that we can protect Victorians and Australians from the consequences of disease burden coming from our primary production sectors and in fact disease burden making its way into our farming communities and creating the economic consequences that would flow from that.

In a Victorian context and indeed in an Australian context we do have when we look at the history of agriculture in this country some significant own goals, to be frank, where people thinking they were doing the right thing have introduced pest plants or animals into this country. Indeed as a Geelong-based MP I am very, very conscious that just down the road at a small town between Geelong and Colac we had for the first time some 150 years ago now the rabbit introduced into Australia. That rabbit was introduced because that community at that point in time wanted to see a bit of England in the landscape and they thought the introduction of the rabbit would be a good thing. We have also seen in Australia the introduction of the cane toad. In Queensland it was thought that the introduction of the cane toad would eliminate the cane beetle and that, by eliminating the cane beetle, the production of sugar for a global market would increase because those farms would be so much more competitive as a consequence of being able to grow more cane without having that pest doing damage to sugarcane.

When we look at the global risks, a number of contributions have been made already on this bill where we have seen mad cow disease and what that meant particularly for the British cattle industry, and we have seen the varroa mite and what that meant for the production of honey in many parts of the global economy but of course now creating real consequences in the Newcastle region of New South Wales. Despite the intervention of the New South Wales government and the federal government and a national taskforce being put in place, the opportunity to eliminate that mite has been lost to us. We are now in effect managing its advancement as opposed to stopping it and eliminating it from the landscape. We have also seen – and people have made fleeting reference to this – an increased global population. We are seeing the need to have more intense agriculture as a consequence, and all of these things lead to a greater risk profile in the landscape. The more animals you have in a landscape, the more capacity there is for the advancement of disease through that landscape. All of these things lead to risk.

We have also seen climate change, and climate change will see some diseases able to reside in different landscapes where they have not in the past. This legislation I think will set up Victoria to have a new, modern set of arrangements to be able to ensure the biosecurity of our community and of our farmers, working in the landscape to ensure that we can continue to be a global leader in the production of food and fibre and we can continue to be seen as a clean, green place to produce food and fibre. That is why I very much commend this bill. It is pleasing to see that there is bipartisan support for it.

Chris CREWTHOR (Mornington) (16:17): I rise today to speak on the Biosecurity Legislation Amendment (Incident Response) Bill 2023, which makes several amendments to the Livestock Disease Control Act 1994, the Livestock Management Act 2010 and the Plant Biosecurity Act 2010. Many years ago, when I was a senior legislation and legal services officer at the federal Department of Agriculture, Fisheries and Forestry, I worked on the federal government's biosecurity legislation to replace the Quarantine Act 1908, as well as numerous other pieces of legislation and regulation relating to quarantine and biosecurity, as well as providing legal services and advice in the quarantine and biosecurity space. So it is fantastic to return to another piece of biosecurity legislation in the Victorian Parliament.

In recent years the threats of emergency animal disease, pests and weeds have received increased media interest, particularly following the incursion of foot-and-mouth disease and lumpy skin disease in Indonesia and the varroa mite in New South Wales. Since 2022 the government has been reviewing Victoria's biosecurity laws, including seeking stakeholder feedback. This legislation acts upon that feedback and makes some limited changes to biosecurity legislation. Overall the bill will make

amendments that are calculated to enhance the Victorian government's capability to manage biosecurity incidents, including preparing for, responding to and recovering from an exotic animal disease or plant pest or a disease detection and outbreak. Other amendments are mainly miscellaneous and technical, relating to the administration, operation and enforcement of the aforementioned acts.

The bill also represents a public commitment to improve exotic pest and disease preparedness and response capability, aiming to do so through amendments to ensure a holistic and effective legislative framework that protects Victoria's valuable agricultural and horticultural sector and mitigates the potential risks to market access from trade disruptions associated with an exotic animal disease or plant pest or a disease detection and outbreak. Furthermore, the bill strengthens the existing legislative framework available for the reduction of biosecurity risk caused by unlawful entry onto agricultural premises. The bill will ultimately see the highest penalty for unlawful entry onto agricultural properties increased from around \$11,000 to around \$23,000 for individuals and from around \$57,000 to \$115,000 for organisations. On-the-spot fines will also increase from around \$1300 to \$2300 for individuals and from around \$8700 to \$11,500 for organisations. The new laws also include the introduction of offences for damaging, defacing or removing biosecurity signage displayed by farmers that ensures that trespass fines apply to their properties; new penalties for those who remove or replace identification tags or livestock or those who fail to follow biosecurity and traceability requirements; and provisions to allow Victoria Police to be recognised as livestock inspectors.

Now, there are of course some concerns that these stringent measures further infringe upon animal activists' right to demonstrate against animal cruelty, but it is important to note that the fines for trespassing on farms were introduced in the Livestock Management Amendment (Animal Activism) Act 2021 in response to incidents like the one at the Gippy Goat Cafe in West Gippsland, where several animal activists turned up and stole three goats and a lamb. While that piece of legislation and the legislation before us today will hopefully protect farmers from such deplorable intrusions into their personal properties and farming operations, it is also extremely important for biosecurity purposes. There is the need for even more stringent fines than the ones that were introduced last year, especially given that certain animal activists and protesters do not seem to be deterred from trespass and damage. Just earlier this year, in April, some 30 animal activists stormed a Benalla slaughterhouse facility, completely halting operations by chaining themselves to machinery, locking themselves into the gondola that is used to lower pigs and so on. The full force of the law should come down on this intimidating and criminal behaviour. Law-abiding Victorian and indeed Australian farmers should not be subject to such behaviour. While I of course support everybody's right to protest, and I believe that we need to ensure animals are being slaughtered in the most humane way possible, there are processes and procedures for such matters, and the law is and should never be the law of the jungle.

I also note that the Victorian agricultural economy is worth about \$18 billion. We are the powerhouse of Australian food and fibre exports. Our state is the biggest exporter by value nationally, and with over half the value of Victoria's agricultural industry derived from livestock, we must do everything we can to protect farmers and to protect their livestock from biosecurity breaches and so on. Trespassing in any livestock facility is inherently dangerous, posing significant biosecurity, animal and human safety concerns.

This bill also further reinforces the government's capabilities in relation to exotic plant pest or disease detections and outbreaks, improving the clarity and efficiency of emergency response and management provisions related to plant pests and diseases. All in all, these provisions strengthen the plant biosecurity act, with the original main purpose being the preventing, monitoring, controlling and eradicating of plant pests and diseases, amongst other purposes. It is essential that we make sure the biosecurity of Victoria's plant industry is maintained and that we keep out particular pests and diseases that could be a huge cost to our industry and put at risk our export market.

One of the strategic advantages for Victorian and Australian agriculture more generally is our clean, green, high-quality, stable economy and sector – or at least that is what we should be aiming for, as in most cases we cannot compete internationally on price due to wage costs, regulatory costs and so forth.

So we should be looking to add value to what we produce here to sell at higher prices based on higher quality and value-added goods. These are the types of produce and types of products I used to market at places like Seoul Food during my time as the CEO of Mildura Development Corporation many years ago, which sparked a lot of interest from the South Korean market afterwards in the Mildura region, which I understand has continued to this day. By protecting our plant agricultural sector, where we can add value, we are protecting the thousands of businesses specialising in horticulture, nursery, wine, grains and more and adding value to our agricultural production in Victoria.

It would be remiss of me not to also discuss agriculture in the Mornington electorate and broader peninsula. This is an issue that I am passionate about, having been surrounded by farms growing up in Horsham and coming from a farming background on both sides of my family at Ellam, near Jeparit, and Carwarp, near Mildura. That is where my grandmother Dawn Simmons grew up, who was my dad's mum, who unfortunately passed away aged just 23 years old when my father was three. She grew up with my Aunty Marlene on that farm. My Aunty Marlene was like my grandmother, growing up. Unfortunately, she has just passed away, in the last couple of hours – I heard before this speech, coincidentally, because I was actually writing this speech and mentioning the farm earlier today. I thought I would note that on the record. She was an amazing person and a grandmother to me for a long time. Also, having worked in many roles involving agriculture and on farms, including working in the wheat breeding team of the then Victorian Institute for Dryland Agriculture and the canola breeding team at Bayer Crop Science, both in Horsham, during my university years, I have got a passion for this area.

I note on the Mornington Peninsula we have a significant agricultural sector and play a pivotal role. We have many local producers of note, and tourism on the Mornington Peninsula also benefits from the agricultural and horticultural production that we do have. For example, we have Benton Rise Farm, which has a fantastic community farm gate, and even George Calombaris has sourced from their farm. We have Sages Cottage Farm, which highlights the local produce from the Mornington Peninsula and has a great cafe with local produce that incorporates people with a disability and of different abilities to work on that farm. We have Tuerong Farm, which grows, mills and bakes heritage, ancient and modern grains in the Mornington electorate. They also breed beef cattle and offer boutique accommodation. We have cattle breeders like Southfork Angus and Milparinka Belted Galloways in Moorooduc, and Pure Peninsula Honey, who have a range of honey products. We have many nurseries, tree farms and orchards like Atlanta and Shepherd's orchards; farm tourism providers like the Big Goose; Heritage Farm, who do duck eggs; more in Moorooduc – Miralana Alpacas, Cripps Family Fish Farm, Somerville Egg Farm in Moorooduc, the Christmas Tree Farm in Moorooduc, Moorooduc Christmas Tree Farm; and many other family and other agricultural endeavours in the electorate.

I also note there are many more wineries and cellar doors in the wider electorate, including Vintina Estate, Underground Winemakers, Morning Star Estate, Dromana Estate, Moorooduc Estate, Phaedrus Estate, Barak Estate Winery, Mornington Peninsula wineries, Stumpy Gully winery, Yabby Lake winery, Mr Velvet Ears wine company, Barmah Park wines, Jones Road wines, Kooyong Winery, Dexter wines, Robinson Vineyard, Barrymore Estate, Chirping Bird Wines, Marengo Redoubt, Turtle Rock wines and more. Plus there are breweries like Tar Barrel, Devilbend Farm Beer Co., Pure Peninsula Honey's ciders, Ten Sixty One apple ciders and more, and we have the Victorian Farmers Federation Peninsula branch, headed up by Stephen Todd, who do a terrific job as well.

Lauren KATHAGE (Yan Yean) (16:27): Condolences to the member for Mornington from all of us here. We are sorry for your loss.

I want to start with something the member for Eureka mentioned, which was also one of the first things I thought of in relation to this bill, and that is Australia's history of being built by riding on a sheep's back. It is a funny saying that we heard growing up, and often only as you get older do you understand the true meaning of it. Our family was one of the families to have the game Squatter in the games cupboard. I do not know if anybody else here had the Squatter game, but certainly sheep empires were

built and fell at my home, and perhaps that was good political training – who knows. Maybe I am the sheep.

Farmers hold a place in the Australian mythology. They are somehow beyond just a job or just someone who lives in a rural area. They are part of our mythology, and that regard is very well earned. Our most basic need is fulfilled by farmers. They feed us and they clothe us. I am really lucky to have great producers in my area. I think of Stokes Orchard, where I recently got a beautiful punnet of strawberries, which was greatly enjoyed by my three-year-old. There is this fantastic, magical ability to conjure food from the ground. And we know that members on all sides here take great pride in the produce from their region. We heard from the member for Mornington – and for some reason it has stuck with me, the passion the member for Mildura had for avocados and how proud she was that the avocado that people were eating on toast in the city came from her region. So we all have reason to be proud of the produce from our areas.

One of the other things that makes farmers so remarkable is that for them each year, each crop is a calculated risk. They are constant risk takers. They have to take into account the weather, the timing of the rain and how much rain – all of these things that are within and beyond their control. They have to face fate each time. I guess it is no wonder that where my family's farm is, the paddocks in that area are dotted with churches, because people would go there and pray for a good result, and then they would take some of their produce to church for harvest Sunday to say thanks when it all worked out.

Now on farms I do not know if there is as much praying, but there is certainly such a strong focus on science. We have got the long-range weather forecasts shining out of phones and the like while they plough along in their combine harvesters. Just as the member for South-West Coast said, farmers are natural scientists. I remember my grandfather, who had sheep and wheat, and his record keeping. The detailed record keeping of a farmer is like a scientist's. And it did not wear off. After retirement he kept every score of the AFL, every week of every season, and we found those records after he passed on. I also saw that in farmers in my previous role in international development. Working with farmers overseas, you need to demonstrate things in a demonstration plot, because this is really important stuff that cannot just be left to pens and paper and chalkboards and chalk. Farmers know how things work, and they need to have a go and see how it works for themselves. There is a lot at risk, so you cannot get it wrong.

I remember that in Jared Diamond's book *The World until Yesterday*, which I am certainly not recommending people read, there is a story in there about PNG cropping. In Papua New Guinea the department of agriculture from country X went to teach these farmers over there how they could increase their yield and improve the way that they did their farming. They said to the Papua New Guineans, 'Look, you've got your different plots spread out all over the place, and that's a really inefficient way of doing farming. You need to bring them altogether in one spot, then you don't have to walk that long way up the mountain. It will be a lot quicker, easier and better.' So then they did that. They tried that. They brought all the crops together in one spot, and lo and behold, all the crops got wiped out in a single incident. The Papua New Guinean farmers knew to separate their crops and spread them out far and wide so that if there was a bad incident, there would be some fields and some crops left for people to survive on.

Farmers deal in risk and things beyond our control, so when we do have things in our control, when there are things that we can be involved in and influencing, then we should do that to the best of our ability if it is going to improve what our farmers are able to produce and what they are able to do. Farmers already do this. I do not know if you are a pink lady person or a royal gala person, but the way we have it now in Australia is that if you buy an apple from the supermarket, it is going to be crunchy. Farmers – the whole sector – worked together to make sure that what was being offered to customers in the shops was crunchy, because a floury apple from one producer impacts the sales going forward for a long time for all apple producers. So they worked together; there was a collective benefit for them to have crispy apples. Farmers know how to work together to support not just their livelihoods but also all other people in the same sector and then for the benefit of the community.

I am really glad to speak to the Biosecurity Legislation Amendment (Incident Response) Bill 2023, because this is about supporting farmers, and the way it does that is with the biosecurity measures that are spelt out really clearly in the bill. We have got an increase in penalties for contraventions. We have got the power of the minister to declare control areas and restricted areas rather than the way it was previously. I think it is really important to stress that the changes to the compensation framework that are being introduced in this legislation make things quicker and more consistent for farmers. That certainty that we are providing through this is really important, and it will be well received. It is only fair that when somebody has received compensation that they should not have, there are opportunities for that to be taken back.

There are many benefits of this bill. There are benefits of this bill to nature by protecting our unique ecosystem here. There are benefits to the community – if we can keep our food and fibre as it should be, without this mass wastage when there is an outbreak, then we can keep up supply, which will help us in this cost-of-living situation by making sure that we are not paying more. I think of bananas after cyclones in Queensland – you know, bananas were worth more than my wedding ring at those stages. So it is good for the community to keep the supply up. This bill is also good for our economy to make sure that our exports can continue to flow at the rate that they are, as well as for our domestic agriculture sector.

Farmers understand risk. We have seen the ways that farmers have managed what is in their control to protect their harvest. We need to do our part as legislators to do what is within our control, so that is why I am really proud to speak to this bill. I thank all of the producers in my area for the way that they add so much to our community, because we know that farmers are some of the busiest people, but if you go to, for example, the Whittlesea Agricultural Society, they are also the people that give back so much to their community. So I am really lucky to live surrounded by farmers. I commend this bill to the house.

Peter WALSH (Murray Plains) (16:37): I rise to speak on the Biosecurity Legislation Amendment (Incident Response) Bill 2023, and in starting out can I commend the previous speaker for her comments around our farmers, our food producers and our fibre producers in this state. This bill is very much about that issue. This is about maintaining our ability as a nation, as a state, to produce food and to produce fibre and to make sure we keep pests and disease out of this country or out of this state if they get into other parts of Australia. So the member for Yan Yean I think very well articulated the importance of the bill and the importance of our farmers producing food.

I think that is why there is heated agreement on this piece of legislation. The Liberal and National parties will be actually supporting this legislation. It is something that we believe is necessary. Some of the measures in this legislation are measures that, in the previous Parliament, we actually introduced in private members bills to try and achieve, particularly around the increases in penalties. If you go back in recent times to the issues around Gippy Goat and the invasion of that farm down in Gippsland by 60-odd protesters at about 6:30 in the morning and the pressure that put on John Gommans and his family at that time with protesters stealing animals from that establishment there, that just was a stark reminder to us as legislators, who have a responsibility to keep industry safe and to keep people safe, that protesters just should not have freedom to go and disrupt and to cause havoc for farmers and particularly to steal animals or cause stress to farmers' staff or animals. In that case one of those protesters actually stole a goat and took it home to live in her house with her, which was not appropriate at all for the goat or for the person doing that. At that time there was some change to the legislation, but what we see with this particular piece of legislation before us today is the increasing of the penalties around those sorts of offences – doubled – so that they come in line with what we believe should have happened at that particular time, which puts us in line with New South Wales.

People I do not think necessarily know where their food comes from, and they probably do not necessarily have to know where their food comes from. But we do produce some of the best food in the world here for our population to consume, and keeping diseases like foot-and-mouth out of Australia and having the capacity to contain and eradicate an outbreak if it does happen is just so

important to our industries. The numbers no-one really knows, but the estimation is that if we had a serious foot-and-mouth outbreak in this nation, it would cost the economy of Australia north of \$50 billion. Its impact would be huge. For those that are old enough to remember the foot-and-mouth outbreaks in the UK back in the 1990s, Dr Bill Sykes, who was a former member for Benalla, was a vet who spent time over there as a consulting vet through that particular outbreak. He told us the harrowing stories that he went through as a consulting vet going onto properties where there were generations of breeding in livestock, and that livestock actually had to be destroyed as part of the containment. Just the smell in the wider community of all the animals that were being burned to stop the spread of foot-and-mouth is something we do not want to have here in Australia. We do not want farmers to have to go through that trauma themselves, we do not want the animals to have to go through that sort of trauma and we do not want the economy to suffer with an outbreak like foot-and-mouth.

The provisions in this bill strengthen quite a few of the compliance issues to assist the department in managing an outbreak if it happens and containing it and making sure that those farmers within the industry that is affected are held to account to do the right thing. I think the overwhelming majority of farmers will always do the right thing, but this makes sure that that will happen, and if it does not, there will be severe penalties for those farmers, including the withholding of compensation if there is a view that they may have been involved in or contributed to the bringing in of a particular disease or pest or the spreading of a particular disease or pest. So it is important in the context.

I suppose the most recent outbreak that is very fresh in everyone's minds here in Victoria, and particularly in northern Victoria, is varroa mite. We were very fortunate in Australia that we were one of the few nations in the world that did not have varroa mite here. We had an export industry of queen bees because our industry was varroa mite free, and there was an export industry particularly into North America for queen bees, because they do have varroa mites. The fact that now we are no longer varroa mite free is very sad for agriculture. What a lot of people in this house would not know is that probably in excess of 50 per cent of our food crops are actually pollinated by bees. The biggest example in one single place is the almond industry across northern Victoria, where there are tens of thousands of beehives shipped in effectively for a three- or four-week window, and that has been disrupted because of the varroa mite outbreak and what restrictions were put on at that particular time.

Can I put on record that I thank Gayle Tierney, who was the minister at the time, and more recently the member here in our house who is the minister. I thank them for the cooperative way they worked with industry and across the chamber to deal with this particular issue, because it is just so important and it was so disruptive. When you have an industry that is on the Murray River and goes on both sides of the river, there are some challenges sometimes between the two states, but I know Victoria worked very hard in making sure that varroa mite outbreak was contained. Unfortunately, the white flag has gone up, and it is now about how it is managed rather than eradicating it, which is unfortunate, but we accept that was the case, because as I understand it maybe some people in New South Wales did not do the right thing. But if that happened in the case of this legislation being in place, there would be the rules and there would be the penalties to hold those people to account.

The other thing is it is not just about farmers and agricultural suppliers. We had an incident a number of years ago where one of the major suppliers of horticultural products sold what turned out to be a weed. That was quite embarrassing for that particular company but also an issue for home gardeners who all of a sudden found they had a noxious weed that was actually prohibited in Australia in their gardens, and there was a major recall. This puts in place some rules and some penalties that would make sure that major suppliers of garden plants would be held to account and have some quite substantial fines if that happened in the future.

We see in the wider landscape serrated tussock, particularly around Melbourne and the fringes of Melbourne and some of the areas that are hard to get to to control it. That was something that was brought in as a garden plant years ago and now has gone wild out in the environment. Prickly pear was a huge issue through northern New South Wales and Queensland a couple of generations ago, with no known control measure at that particular time. There were thousands and thousands of acres

of agricultural land effectively turned useless by prickly pear until the CSIRO actually found a small parasitic insect – the cactoblastis – that laid its eggs in it and ate the prickly pear. That was a huge thing at that time. People had spent years trying to eradicate it with mechanical means and with poisoning, but it was finding a parasite that actually stopped that plant, which then opened up huge tracts of land that had been affected with prickly pear. I suppose the reason I raise it is because we do not want a repeat of those sorts of things, we want to have the rules, the regulations and the appropriate powers for the department. This legislation also increases powers for the police to be involved, which I think is a good thing. We want to make sure that those sorts of examples do not happen in the future.

As I said when I started, this legislation is very much about maintaining Victoria's ability to produce food and fibre for the state and for our own consumers but particularly for our export markets. It just generates so many jobs in this state. There is conjecture about which is the biggest exporting industry out of Victoria, but if you actually put together all the different foods – the red meat, the dairy and the grains – and wool, agriculture is one of the single biggest exporters out of this state. In recent times it has been the single biggest exporter out of Melbourne port with container traffic and with what goes out of there. This is about protecting that for the future, and we wish the bill a speedy passage.

Steve McGHIE (Melton) (16:47): I rise to contribute to the Biosecurity Legislation Amendment (Incident Response) Bill 2023. As I am from a peri-urban interfacing council and electorate area, I am acutely aware of the importance of farm biosecurity. As we work towards safeguarding Victoria's interests and fortifying our resilience in the face of what feels like a growing biosecurity risk, of course out in my area we have many food producers, particularly in that Bacchus Marsh area, but there is still a lot of farming district around the Melton electorate. I am pleased to say that that continues and the production out that way is very good, and we need to keep it safe.

Our biosecurity system is recognised worldwide as being very strong and bringing benefits to our community, and previous speakers have spoken about that. Of course in our unique environment and in our way of life it is important to keep our biosecurity system safe and free from infestation and things like that. So we do try to stop as many pests and diseases as possible coming into this country, and hopefully people are doing the right thing. I should declare, even though people will not believe it, with me being such a young bloke, that back in the late 1970s I was a quarantine officer at Tullamarine airport. I was one of those –

Members interjecting.

Steve McGHIE: Oh, yes, yes, it was just another one of those jobs for me in the late 1970s. I was one of those guys that used to walk down the aisle with the pressure pack cans spraying the planes as first-port aircraft. Primarily it was to kill the bugs that were on the plane – sometimes it was probably for some of the humans that were on the plane too. But you would be shocked to see what was brought into this country in first-port aircraft.

The other role that we had was when people came through the airport terminal – they had to declare anything that they were carrying that could have been a prohibited item – we would check their baggage. We would also check their shoes if they had been on farmland overseas, and if their shoes were dirty, they had to be cleaned in very powerful wash. As I said, you would be shocked to think what people try to bring into this country, whether that be plant material, seeds, animal products or dead animals themselves, and they bring them in for their own particular reasons, whether they are religious reasons or whether they feel that it is something that is going to help them with their health. It is quite interesting to see what is stopped at all the ports – the airports and even the shipping areas – and what people try and bring into this country. I have just got to say thank God we are so stringent in what we do to try and stop that coming into the country, because as previous speakers have said, if that got out into our food production and into our farming areas, it would be devastating for this country. I lasted 18 months there and then moved on to become a paramedic after that, so I went from insects to other things.

Anyway, through this bill we are clearly ensuring our government's capability to manage any biosecurity incidents, including preparation for responding to and recovering from any exotic animal disease, plant disease or pest. The way of dealing with detection or outbreak is reinforced and enhanced. The essence of the bill is to empower Victoria with the strength and capability to adeptly manage biosecurity risks, because our primary goal is to establish a robust and comprehensive legislative framework that safeguards Victoria's valuable agricultural and horticultural sectors, mitigating any potential risk associated with market access and trade disruptions resulting from the detection or outbreak of these threats. The vulnerability facing Victoria is very real, and we have seen that. Again, the Leader of the Nationals spoke about some of the infections that have affected the bee industry and what is happening there. It is disappointing that it has come into Victoria. We certainly tried to prevent it, but unfortunately there are always some people that do not do the right thing and abide by the current laws and current practices that keep the state and the nation safe.

The Victorian Farmers Federation tell us that Victoria makes up I think 25 per cent of the Australian gross value of agriculture and 42 per cent of sheep and lamb meat production and is responsible for about 62 per cent of milk production, so we know how important producing in Victoria is not only to this state but to the nation. Again, previous contributions have referred to foot-and-mouth disease and what happened in England, in the UK, back in the 1990s and the damage foot-and-mouth disease coming into this state and country would do. We saw foot-and-mouth in Indonesia back in May of 2022, and of course it spread across to Bali by July of that year. And then we saw lumpy skin disease in both Indonesia and Singapore, and we saw the things that were put in place in particular, say, in somewhere like Bali, where Australian tourists travel to and from, and the things that had to be put in place to stop the possibility of foot-and-mouth and lumpy skin disease coming into Australia. So it is important to have these biosecurity measures and to tighten up the legislation, and that is what this bill does here.

The proposed amendments in the bill enhance the functionality of the Livestock Disease Control Act 1994, the Livestock Management Act 2010 and the Plant Biosecurity Act 2010. Their aim is to mitigate disease risk by streamlining a swift and effective response to an incursion of exotic animal diseases or plant pests in Victoria. The amendments improve traceability processes, and they fortify compliance and enforcement mechanisms. It is through these measures that we can bolster our preparedness and response capabilities, ensuring the safeguarding of Victoria against the looming threats posed by those exotic diseases. Of course they will improve the clarity and efficiency of emergency responses to it and the management provisions for exotic diseases and pests that have the potential to, as we have said previously, adversely affect the agricultural and the horticultural industries, including broader information-sharing powers.

We know how important agriculture and horticulture are to this state but also to this nation and how many people are employed in those areas of food production and plant production. As I say, not only is it about the spread of the disease and how it would decimate food production, but it is about the jobs that it would cost also and the tragic circumstances if something like foot-and-mouth came into this state or country and animals were killed, unfortunately, due to that disease. Again, we saw that example in the UK back in the 1990s, and as I say, the Leader of the Nationals referred to that issue: the killing of thousands of heads of animal in response to it to try and eradicate the big problem.

Recently – and I know I have not got long to go – Ag Vic conducted a new initiative, the Great Biosecurity Quest, across Victoria through October, including in Melton, and of course it was a great success, encouraging children and families to play their part in protecting Victoria's precious environment and agriculture by keeping an eye out for some of the state's highest plant and pest risks. Participants could download or print a citizen science toolkit. They grabbed a magnifying glass or a phone with a zoom, and they got out into their backyard or park or garden and documented what they could find. It was a great exercise for many in our communities, and I know many people in the Melton electorate took up that exercise. It was fantastic to see our kids involved in those sorts of things and getting a greater understanding of what is around them and what can affect their environment.

This is a really important bill, and I am pleased to say that both sides of the chamber are supporting the bill. I commend the bill to the house.

Jade BENHAM (Mildura) (16:58): It is my absolute pleasure, as it is every time in this place, to talk about our food and fibre producers, because without them we would be in quite a spot of bother. One thing that I do bring to this place is firsthand experience in a lot of stuff, and farming and agriculture is one of those things, having grown up on a stone fruit and vegetable farm and married a food producer, who I have been madly texting during the day to get some stats on things like beehives and how many almonds we actually produce and things like that – and I am sure he is sick of me, so I will leave him alone now.

I will talk mostly about my firsthand experience with the varroa mite outbreak that occurred in Euston earlier this year. It was a bit of a panic, it really was. I cannot stress enough how important this bill is. I have seen it on Instagram reels a little bit recently where comedians make jokes around having to take their shoes off at the airport when they have been to Indonesia or when they have been to other parts of the world. Sorry, honey, this is not a joke. This is going to cost our entire economy \$50 billion if foot-and-mouth disease gets in. Sorry, not a joke. I love stand-up comedy, but that ain't funny. The tightening of this legislation through this bill is so, so important, and we saw the need for this during the varroa mite outbreak earlier this year.

Just to give you context, I do call myself the member for Australia's food bowl. I know that the member for Shepparton may challenge that, particularly lately, but in the electorate of Mildura we are the largest almond-producing region in Australia. We are the second-biggest table grape producing region in Australia, second only to the Riverland – third is the Riverina in New South Wales; we will not worry about them. We are producing a third of Australia's carrots on supermarket shelves, and barley – we are putting beer in bottles as well – wheat, chickpeas, lentils, pulses and all sorts of other things, and we are getting innovative in those spaces through the likes of Mallee Sustainable Farming and Birchip Cropping Group.

This bill broadens the information-sharing powers. We saw that this was an issue during the varroa mite outbreak, given that we knew that there was a varroa mite infested hive on the New South Wales side of the Murray River. I do not know if you know this, but bees can actually fly across a river. Some people would have you believe that they do not. The rules were very strict, so hopefully this will help ease that up so that the Commonwealth can share and states can share information.

It will clarify and improve compensation provisions. This is one thing that the apiarists, or beekeepers, were quite concerned about, given that in the Sunraysia region alone during almond pollination it is the biggest livestock movement in the country. We bring 200,000 hives into the Sunraysia region on both sides of the river, so if these provisions were not there – you can imagine that someone's entire business could be on a single farm or it could be scattered around the region – if the apiarists were unable to move their hives out if permits were unable to be obtained, what would the compensation for that be if the business in fact went under? It was a real concern.

The bill also significantly increases the penalties and strengthens infringement provisions to further deter non-compliance with the act, including new offences relating to livestock movements and vehicle movement in quarantine areas. It would be great to see New South Wales follow suit here given the whole movement through Queensland and New South Wales into Victoria – that is generally the corridor of this particular livestock movement. Like I said, I will speak from experience because I know a lot about the varroa mite outbreak and a lot about beehives, and they are fascinating. Again, I cannot stress how important bees are to the entire ecosystem, not just the food industry.

The bill strengthens enforcement and compliance by recognising police officers as inspectors. Now, this will actually help. There has been a little bit of concern around this, but in rural areas, where it might take a day or so to get inspectors into the area, being able to have Victoria Police step in as inspectors I think could be a good thing. It does strengthen the powers of inspectors as well. It improves

the clarity and efficiency around emergency management provisions. We heard the Leader of the Nationals speak about how when the varroa mite outbreak first occurred it was an eradication strategy, and like he said, it has moved to a 'white flag' movement now, where we are moving to management, which is what we are realistically going to have to do. I have heard a lot of speakers talk about foot-and-mouth and the burning of animals et cetera, but that is what occurred with varroa mite recently – there was the burning and eradication of hives, and thousands of them. We do not want to see that. Like I said, we love bees and we need bees, so we do not want to see that, but we want to be able to manage that. We want to be able to make sure that we have the resources to deploy strips for the hives and to manage the pests and the infestations, and we want to make sure that we can manage the people to deploy them as well.

The bill will also expand powers to request land information from councils. It is very important that everyone works together when this kind of thing happens. Whether it is varroa mite, foot-and-mouth, lumpy skin or whatever it might be, everyone needs to work together for the greater good of our food industry, because without it food security all of a sudden becomes a very real problem for everyone, not just for those of us who are producing the food and fibre, once it has trouble getting to the supermarket shelves. We saw last year lettuce at \$12 each. I do not know about you, but that is too much to pay for a lettuce, and I am sure the farmers probably were not getting that either. So I cannot stress enough – and I know I bang on a lot about it in this place – how important it is to protect our food and fibre producers, make sure that when an emergency breaks out they have clarity on what the strategy is, whether it is eradication, whether it is management, what the compensation will be, who is inspecting and how you get a permit, and to make sure it is a quick process.

I spoke before about how much food we do grow in the north-west of this state. Like I said, I do sometimes refer to myself as 'the member for Australia's food bowl', and I will continue to do that because I think I am. We are, like I said, producing a third of Australia's carrots. We are the biggest almond-producing region in the country. At the moment we have headers out, we have people driving chaser bins –unfortunately I do not get to again this season – and we have what are affectionately known as 'harvest widows' taking care of duties, and I become one in February when the almond harvest starts.

A lot of people have finished in the north, so it is very diverse from one end of the electorate in Millewa – lighter crops to a point in the north. Some of those finished before the rain hit last week, so it seems like a good opportunity to thank them for their harvest. But those in the south of the electorate – I was talking to farmer Will yesterday, and he had had a really good run until the rain hit. I am getting alerts on my phone now that thunderstorms are coming through, and I know some of the chickpea growers got hit with hail last week as well. It had been a very good run, but it seems like we will be going well into mid-December; let us hope we get Christmas off. But I thank our food and fibre producers and I thank those that are keeping the drivers and the labourers fed at the moment for harvest. The stone fruit harvest is also going on at the moment, and the grape harvest and almond harvest will start in the new year.

I do want to finish with another reel I saw – because that is where I get all of my information, obviously – the other day. It certainly rang true, and I really quite enjoyed it. It said: 'Without farmers, you'd be naked, hungry and sober'.

Iwan WALTERS (Greenvale) (17:08): What an act to follow! The member for Mildura knows these issues well as a representative of one of our great farming areas – the food bowl of Australia indeed. While government can work collaboratively to address some of the impacts of climate change, the vagaries of the weather will always be with us. I am mindful of those farmers up there who are worried about thunderstorms today, looking at those fronts coming through.

Government can also work to address and mitigate risk from biosecurity issues. That is why it is such an important bill that we are considering today. There have been some great contributions to the debate so far, but I want to begin by thanking the new Minister for Agriculture and her team for the exhaustive

consultation that they have undertaken with the sector, with producers themselves, with peak bodies – and of course the minister’s predecessor in the role – to ensure that the measures captured in this bill wherever possible mitigate the impact of outbreaks of disease, because we know they can have an absolutely catastrophic impact not just on farmers but on farming communities, on the downstream economies that rely upon primary production. It is such an important part of our state and indeed our country as a whole.

We are in a privileged position as a continental nation to be able to establish prudent measures and barriers at airports and at other points of entry, as the member for Mildura alluded to – those footbaths that some people will experience when coming into the country – and it is shocking to hear that some people laugh at them and pooh-pooh their importance. They are incredibly important, as we know, because they have the practical impact of preventing the ingress of some really nasty pestilence.

We can do certain things at the border, but you cannot unfortunately restrict everything from getting in. I am minded that in 1877 phylloxera made its way into Australia via Geelong and had a catastrophic impact on vineyards across south-eastern Australia. It never got into South Australia, because they had prudent quarantine measures even then, but it speaks to the real risk of harm that can occur when there is a breach of those national quarantine standards. So it is the responsibility of Victoria and all state governments to always be vigilant and always be working with farmers and supporting our primary producers to reduce the risk wherever possible of biosecurity threats. That is exactly what this bill does: it responds to a public commitment made by the government to improve exotic disease outbreak and control capabilities. The primary purpose of course is to improve our state’s capacity to manage biosecurity risk.

In addition to thanking the minister and her team for undertaking, as I say, exhaustive consultation with bodies like Apple and Pear Australia, Australian Eggs, Australian Pork Limited, Citrus Australia, Nursery & Garden Industry Victoria – great people – the Victorian Farmers Federation, the Australian Livestock & Property Agents Association and the department’s own livestock industry consultative group, I also want to acknowledge the work of the Agriculture Victoria team in my own electorate of Greenvale for the work that they undertake at the Ag Victoria facility in Attwood, which plays a really important role in our state’s defences against these kinds of risks. The work that they do, the measures that are captured within this bill, are in my mind all about, really, pandemic preparation and response and minimising the catastrophic risk of harm when such measures are not in place.

We have all been really well aware of debates over I suppose the precautionary principle of investing in pandemic safeguards before such a pandemic can take hold because of the outbreak of COVID-19 around the world and its impact in Victoria and Australia over the last few years. Investment in precautionary risk management can sometimes be difficult to justify, because you are investing in things which do not necessarily have a visible impact, because the counterfactual is not provable, but in this instance we know about the catastrophic risk of harm. It is really not an abstract threat. As other members have alluded to, an outbreak of foot-and-mouth disease was reported in cattle in Indonesia, spread to Bali and was there on the doorstep of Australia and obviously Victoria. Just next to my electorate of Greenvale we have Melbourne Airport, with many direct flights into and out of Indonesia every day. They are really important trade routes and people-to-people connectors so that Australians can have holidays in Bali, but they also by their very existence create a threat from a biosecurity perspective.

I was in the chamber earlier for the member for South-West Coast’s contribution, and I note that she is a former, perhaps current, dairy farmer. The risk of harm from foot-and-mouth disease is not an abstract one. Many years ago as a much younger man I lived in a rural part of the UK. The adjacent village was a place called Heddon-on-the-Wall, which is where the first reported outbreak of foot-and-mouth disease in 2001 took hold, I think on a pig farm where swill was being used with infected produce that was able to get into the animal food chain. Before it was known by the ministry of agriculture and food, it had taken root. Those who have mentioned that episode in this debate will recall the enormous piles of animal carcasses, which were then burnt. There is something incredibly

powerful and visceral about that, but it was not just the harm to individual farmers and their families and their livelihoods; it devastated the entire rural economy of the UK for years afterwards, with hikers prevented from walking through fields because of the risk of spreading that disease.

Once something takes hold it becomes so much harder to remove and to eradicate, so prevention is the best approach in these kinds of scenarios, which is again why these measures in the bill are so important. They support farmers, hopefully, before this kind of risk actually takes hold within farms and on the land. As we have seen in the UK and in other jurisdictions around the world, once something is there in the food chain, in the agricultural system, removing it becomes so much harder and is very difficult to do without a catastrophic impact upon agricultural economies.

In Victoria it is so important that we support our agricultural economy and our agricultural communities not just because they are incredibly special places to live and to work – and I say this as somebody who spent many years living in the Wimmera and has deep connections with family and friends in other farming areas of Victoria – but because of the economic contribution they make that underpins the work that we all do here because of the tax revenue it adds and because of the export income that it generates. It is a relatively small number of farms that are producing that income – I think 22,000 at the most recent measurement – but they create so much value in the form of export income. Our farmers are increasingly diversifying away from those classic staples of fibre and grains into really high value things like the member for Mildura talked about in the stone fruit industry and honey and of course the wine industry.

There are many members who represent some fantastic vineyards and wine areas around Victoria; the member for Ripon is not here, but I think of especially the Pyrenees and the Grampians and Great Western. As I said at the start of my contribution, phylloxera is an existential threat to our winemakers and to our vignerons – on a day where we celebrate the establishment of the Parliamentary Friends of France it seems appropriate to use that. Phylloxera represents a real and acute threat to these communities. As I say, it entered Australia in 1877, spread progressively around parts of Australia and remains there endemic today. Vinehealth in 2019 estimated the cost of phylloxera to the Yarra Valley region alone is \$1 billion in the form of replanting and other mitigation measures, so keeping it out of other areas is essential to preventing economic damage of a similar scale. Those signs you see on roads like the Sunraysia Highway, the Hume Highway and others entering into very high value, really high productivity areas of our agricultural space within Victoria matter. It is really important that people respect those signs.

It is really important that we have a consistent, clear approach to biosecurity management. I am really glad that this bill also seeks to harmonise the biosecurity measures that exist across jurisdictions within Australia so that the penalties for breaches are clear but also the information base for farmers, for producers, is stronger so that – and I am sure I speak for the whole house – we can avoid seeing instances like in the UK in 2001 and other forms of biosecurity hazard breaking out here, because we all want to see our agricultural and our rural communities thriving.

Ellen SANDELL (Melbourne) (17:18): I am also speaking on the Biosecurity Legislation Amendment (Incident Response) Bill 2023 today. Obviously, biosecurity is something we should take very seriously, as many other speakers have mentioned, and it is something that I have spoken about many, many times in this chamber over my years in this place. I think one thing that we have not heard as much about today is that not only is it important to keep our agricultural industry safe from pests and outbreaks that could affect industry and jobs, cost the state millions and millions of dollars and destroy our food systems but biosecurity is also really important to protect our native plants, animals and ecosystems from pests and invasive species, which can decimate threatened species.

As other people have mentioned, we have seen some pretty scary near misses and growing threats recently, including the varroa mite, where there was an infestation just on the other side of the river in New South Wales, in Sunraysia; the looming threat of foot-and-mouth disease, which other speakers have spoken about; and one of the scary ones, the red imported fire ants. A queen was found in a

Victorian nursery just this year in February, and that is a pest that would have really devastating outcomes not just for agriculture but for the environment and for human health as well; it is quite a nasty bite that that ant can give you. They are just a few examples of some of the growing threats that we are seeing and some of the outbreaks that we have seen and why it is important to have biosecurity laws and measures, and the Greens absolutely support efforts to stop outbreaks, to improve biosecurity and for all levels of government to work better together, improve communication and streamline responses – some of the things that this bill looks at.

I did want to also say that we need to go further than just those communications measures or streamlining responses. Sometimes biosecurity actually needs a greater investment than what is currently on the table. For example, Victoria is still not committing the level of funding required to contribute fairly to the national plan to eradicate fire ants. We are committing a small amount, the initial agreed amount, but not what experts say is necessary to actually deal with the problem. Victoria seems to be pushing it off to other states in a way in saying ‘Well, look, it’s a problem in Queensland currently, and so Queensland should be putting up more of the funding’, which they are, and the federal government is. But this ignores the fact that if there is an outbreak in Queensland or a problem that is not contained in Queensland, if we do not eradicate it in Queensland, inevitably it will make its way to Victoria. It is really only a matter of time, and we saw that scare back in February. We have even more recently than that, just in the last few weeks, seen an outbreak in New South Wales. Fire ants obviously do not respect state borders. We all rely on each other to contain pests, to stay safe. We saw that through COVID – the same kinds of principles apply. So Victoria needs to be doing its fair share to step up and contribute the money that is necessary to eradicate fire ants in Queensland and northern New South Wales to avoid them coming down to Victoria and becoming a huge, huge problem for us.

We have also been consulting with stakeholders on this bill, and they have told us there are a few other opportunities they would have liked to see taken up in this bill – more of a whole-of-ecosystem approach, a holistic approach that really improves the coordination across the public and private land boundaries, because we know that we cannot just deal with public land. Private land is most of Victoria, and we need to make sure that we are doing control and biosecurity on private land as well. Promoting and better resourcing agricultural conditions for livestock plays a big role, and improved protections for wildlife and threatened species play a big role as well. To its credit, the Department of Energy, Environment and Climate Action in their briefing with us have indicated there are a range of complementary pieces to this bill at work and underway, which we are pleased to see.

One thing that I want to focus on is that we are concerned – and it is something that has happened a little bit over the last few years – that the government and the opposition, the Liberals and Nationals, often use biosecurity as an excuse or a smokescreen to crack down on people who are seeking to draw attention to what is happening in animal agriculture – that is, using biosecurity as an excuse to crack down on activists who are trying to prevent animal suffering by exposing what is happening in places like sow stalls or chicken farms or other horrific situations across Victoria.

Members interjecting.

Ellen SANDELL: I am hearing Nationals members saying it is criminal behaviour, but actually this is whistleblowing behaviour. Again, Labor has decided to crack down on activists as part of this bill. Part of this bill is doubling the maximum penalty units for a whole suite of infringements, including extreme fines for activists that are already the worst in Australia. These penalties were only introduced for animal activists last year, and now the government is saying they need to be doubled. So now unlawful entry onto agricultural property would cost individuals over \$23,000 and over \$100,000 for organisations.

We asked the environment department to clarify why this was and why they thought it was necessary, and they said that the change was needed, the doubling of penalties was needed, to deter people. But there has actually been no evidence presented to suggest that unlawful entry by activists or whistleblowers in Victoria onto agricultural properties has ever resulted in a disease outbreak, so I do

not think that the evidence really backs it up. I understand the fear, and I do not think that we can take biosecurity lightly. It is a very real threat. It is something that we do need to take seriously. But we also need to make policy based on evidence, and there has been no evidence that that kind of going onto agricultural property has ever resulted in a disease outbreak. I think biosecurity is being used as a smokescreen or an excuse to whip up fear, but actually what is being done here is trying to squash whistleblowers from exposing what is happening in some places.

It was only 18 months ago that I stood in this chamber to oppose those initial draconian changes. That was the Livestock Management Amendment (Animal Activism) Bill 2021. Huge fines and penalties were introduced for people who are whistleblowers. Let us remember what these people are doing – they are seeking to shine a light on some really poor practices that are happening to animals that are causing a huge amount of suffering, and I think Victorians really care about that. I think Victorians really want to see animals treated fairly and well here in Victoria. It is something that people care a huge amount about. Part of why people care about it and why people know about these practices happening and why they are not happening behind closed doors anymore is because whistleblowers – people – have exposed these practices. If you look at things like live exports, that created a huge outpouring of care in the community, and the only way that that came to light was people being willing to expose that and talk about what was happening. What is happening here is the government is protecting those who are perhaps doing the wrong thing and protecting those who are causing animal suffering instead of protecting the defenceless animals that are suffering, and I do not think that is exactly what the Victorian community would expect of a government.

We do not need deterrence of this whistleblowing. What we need is an increase in industry oversight and an improvement to animal welfare standards, and if we had that improvement to animal welfare standards – if we did things like banning sow stalls and cage hens and ensuring that animals are able to live a life free of suffering – then you would not have people seeking to go in and expose that behaviour and be whistleblowers. I think that is a win-win for everyone. If we had higher standards for animal agriculture, then I do not think you would need these kinds of laws that criminalise this behaviour.

The Law Institute of Victoria pointed out at the time when we were discussing the other bill, the livestock management bill, that harsh financial penalties do very little to deter anyone seeking to expose disturbing or cruel activities taking place on farmland. All they are going to do is bankrupt whistleblowers who are trying to make a change. The thing is that, as I mentioned before, I am very sympathetic to those who want to make sure that we are not doing anything to threaten our biosecurity, but these penalties do not even make sense when you look at the evidence. We asked the government for data on the new laws and penalties and how often they have been used, and data provided by the government shows there have actually been zero official warnings and zero infringement notices issued to activists since these offences were introduced. That to me seems a little baffling – that all of a sudden we need to double the penalties for an offence that is not being committed. It does not seem to make a lot of sense. It is more of a political move, I would say.

In fact in 2022, just last year, the Liberals and Nationals Shadow Minister for Agriculture stood up and tried to introduce a plan to double the penalty units for trespass and activist-related offences. At the time Labor rejected that proposal. They said, ‘No, we don’t need them. We already have the harshest penalties against activists in this country,’ which is true but which is a problem in its own right. But at the time Labor said ‘No, we don’t need this, because we already have harsh penalties and laws – we don’t need to double them’. Now Labor has backflipped and has decided to double the penalties. So all I can see has happened is that they have caved in to the Nationals and a scare campaign from the Nationals, which I do not think is the right way to make policy. I think we want to make policy based on evidence and based on the goals that the Victorian community have rather than on a scare campaign.

Members interjecting.

Ellen SANDELL: I am hearing Nationals say things like what about the risks. I have talked about that – there have been no offences committed under these acts since those offences came in. There is a scare campaign being run by the Nationals saying that there is this huge risk to our biosecurity. It is just not backed up by the evidence. If it was backed up by the evidence then I think that Victorians would expect the government to look at that, but it is actually not backed up by the evidence whatsoever, and Victorians expect us to make policy based on evidence rather than on scare campaigns.

In terms of those elements of the bill, the Greens cannot support them. Today I will be circulating some amendments to get rid of the doubling of penalties for activists, so to omit clauses 96 to 98 from the bill. Under standing orders I wish to advise the house of these amendments to the bill and request they be circulated.

Amendments circulated under standing orders.

Ellen SANDELL: I urge all MPs to vote for these amendments, particularly the Labor MPs in this place who got up just last year and said that these penalties are not necessary. Labor was very clear last year: we already have the harshest penalties in Australia. We do not need to double the penalties. It is not backed up by evidence, it is not backed up by data. No offences have been committed. This is simply bowing down to a scare campaign by the Nationals, so I very much hope that Labor goes back to that position and votes for these amendments to remove those penalties from the bill.

I hope that we are able to have a really mature conversation about biosecurity, because I think it is something that everyone in this place can agree on. It is something that the Nationals and the Greens can agree on, that biosecurity is important. But doing something that just looks like you are doing something, that is actually whipping up fear, that is penalising activists and whistleblowers who seek only to lessen the suffering of animals that we rely on – I think that it would be much better to focus our energies on biosecurity measures that really make a tangible difference and that are so desperately needed given the growing threats and outbreaks that we are seeing rather than just bowing down to a scare campaign.

Anthony CIANFLONE (Pascoe Vale) (17:32): I rise to speak on the Biosecurity Legislation Amendment (Incident Response) Bill 2023. In doing so I would like to commend Ros Spence, the new Minister for Agriculture, and her team and department for bringing this bill to the house, but also the minister at the table, the Minister for Jobs and Industry, a portfolio which this bill relates to just as strongly in terms of jobs and economic development.

Victoria is Australia's agricultural heartland, with Victorians relying on our farmers and producers every day for their food and produce. Our state's agricultural sector is also critical to supporting the socio-economic wellbeing of our regional communities and economies. The Victorian Labor government recognises that our farms and agribusinesses are an essential part of a thriving Victoria, particularly for our rural regions but also our suburban communities, because it is across Melbourne's suburbs that much of Victoria's farm produce comes to the plate and this is where much of Victoria's agricultural produce is transported to, processed and on-sold for domestic, national and international markets to consume and enjoy. A healthy and vibrant regional Victorian agricultural sector also means healthy and vibrant local economies and local jobs across Melbourne's suburban cafes, restaurants, food processors and manufacturers, including across the northern suburbs of Melbourne and my communities of Pascoe Vale, Coburg and Brunswick West, which I will touch on soon.

That is why the Labor government understands that we must continue to strengthen, grow and protect the agricultural sector, namely, by maintaining its world-leading reputation, health and vibrancy, including through Victoria's internationally renowned high-quality beef cattle, dairy, sheep, horticulture, cropping, fresh fruit, vegetable and food industries. That is why this bill is so important. Protecting our agriculture sector from exotic pests, diseases and biosecurity risks is fundamental to securing the wellbeing of the sector for both our regional and suburban communities. Whilst Australia and Victoria have long had the luxury of distance and being surrounded by vast oceans when it comes

to protecting us from foreign pests and disease, our increasing connectedness with the globe via trade, freight and tourism, including via Melbourne Airport as the member for Greenvale pointed out, means that we must remain ever vigilant to protect our pristine environment, which is the envy of the world, and in doing so protect our various sectors.

This bill strengthens Victoria's capability to manage biosecurity risks, including preparing for, responding to and recovering from the detection or outbreak of an exotic animal disease, plant disease or pest. The bill supports a public commitment made by the government to improve exotic disease preparedness and response capabilities by ensuring a holistic and effective legislative framework to protect our valuable agricultural sectors. The bill seeks to achieve these outcomes via a number of measures to strengthen emergency management, traceability and enforcement measures, including through amendments to the Livestock Disease Control Act 1994, amendments to the Livestock Management Act 2010 and amendments to the Plant Biosecurity Act 2010.

The amendments to the Livestock Disease Control Act 1994 contain a number of measures, including significantly increasing penalties for offences for the contravention of provisions related to exotic animal diseases and livestock traceability requirements to underscore the seriousness of these offences and the potential harm that can be inflicted on the community, the environment and the economy. The reforms also clarify the emergency management provisions to enhance the efficiency of preparedness and response activities by broadening the delegation powers of the minister to declare controlled and restricted areas and the sharing of information between jurisdictions and departments.

The amendments to the Livestock Management Act 2010 also double the penalties for offences relating to non-compliance with prescribed biosecurity measures and strengthen the existing framework available to mitigate against biosecurity risks caused by unlawful entry onto agricultural premises. The amendments to the Plant Biosecurity Act 2010 confer the power to the minister to declare a control area, rather than the Governor in Council, in the event of a plant, pest or disease outbreak to help facilitate a timely response to mitigate against any potential risks. When combined, these measures will help us to continue to protect our state's agricultural sector and natural environment from many exotic pests and diseases.

As set out in the government's *Victorian Agriculture Industry Overview* of January 2023, the sector continues to play an increasingly major role in terms of economic and jobs production. The agriculture sector contributes \$17.5 billion in production to the state. It contributes \$17.9 billion in total food and fibre exports for the state. It is made up of 21,600 farm businesses and supports a total of 150,100 agricultural, food and beverage and manufacturing jobs across the state. Overall the sector does contribute \$16.5 billion directly towards the gross state product, which makes up 3.5 per cent of our state's gross state product. Victoria is also the number one producer in Australia of table and dried grapes, making up 70 per cent of our production; the number one producer of milk, with 5.65 billion litres or 64 per cent of our national production; the number one Australian producer for sheep meat, making up 47 per cent of national production; Australia's number one producer for fruit and nuts, making up 35 per cent of national production; and also Australia's number one producer for vegetables, making up 22 per cent of national production. We are proudly also the number one food and fibre exporter in Australia, making up 26 per cent of national exports, which consist of dairy products – 73 per cent of our dairy exports come from Victoria; skin and hides exports and wool – 51 per cent of national exports; animal fibre, contributing 47 per cent of national exports; horticultural exports, with 46 per cent coming from Victoria; and finally prepared foods such as prepared milk formulas and the like, making up 36 per cent of national exports.

As I said from the outset, while rural and regional Victoria may be the heartland of Australia's agricultural sector, it is our state's manufacturing sector which has long been the vehicle through which the value of our agricultural sector has been leveraged and maximised. Of the 150,000 jobs associated with the sector, over 82,400 jobs – more than half – are directly associated with the food and beverage manufacturing sector. With our state's overall manufacturing sector home to 30 per cent of the nation's manufacturing output and consisting of a \$31 billion industry and more than 23,000 firms and

employing 260,000 people, the health and wellbeing of agricultural food and fibre producers are playing an increasingly important role in the future prosperity of the overall manufacturing sector, particularly across the northern suburbs.

I am glad that the Minister for Jobs and Industry is at the table at the moment to hear a lot of these stats that I am about to run through. North Link is a regional economic development and business network group that was established in 1995 and has long advocated for the manufacturing sector across the north. Executive director Chris James, who I have spoken with in preparing for this contribution, has informed me that the state's agricultural produce is increasingly playing a major role in driving manufacturing output across the north. He stated:

Melbourne's North is fast becoming Australia's premier food manufacturing and exporting region, with over 400 manufacturers turning over \$1 million or more, nearly 10,000 of Victoria's 34,000 food manufacturing workers plus a significant supply chain ...

being located in the north.

This includes significant transport and logistics infrastructure such as Melbourne Airport, Melbourne Market, the Hume Freeway, the ... Ring Road, the Calder Freeway ... two proposed intermodal freight terminals at Somerton and Beveridge, two food research universities including the La Trobe University ... two TAFES – the Melbourne Polytechnic and Kangan Institute, Melbourne Innovation Centre's FoodINC kitchen ...

and many, many other organisations primed and ready to support the sector to grow.

In this respect I would particularly like to highlight the work, research and development being led out of La Trobe University in Bundoora, which has over \$300 million in assets specifically devoted to agriculture. The Brumby government funded the construction of the \$288 million AgriBio facility, which co-houses Agriculture Victoria and La Trobe Uni researchers and students. The facility undertakes world-leading research to protect Victorians from any range of agricultural threats to this vital industry.

This year La Trobe also self-funded the establishment of the Institute of Sustainable Agriculture and Food, with the university making a \$25 million strategic commitment over five years to leverage further matched funding and support. But it is the key piece, the proposed Australian food innovation centre at La Trobe University, which would see the CSIRO co-locate with the Bundoora campus and join with the significant research assets already onsite. The food innovation centre would see the farm-to-plate capacity develop, with everything located in one place and collaboration on basic research into seeds and grains all the way through to the production of food. With La Trobe's world-leading expertise spanning from soil to seed research all the way through, again, to food manufacturing, which has a strong and long presence across Melbourne's north, there is no better location to consider than La Trobe Uni for this future centre.

But along with these future opportunities, there are also current businesses and workers who do an amazing job across my community to value-add to the agricultural sector. On 20 November last week I had the absolute pleasure of visiting Visy's food can manufacturing factory in Charles Street in North Coburg. Visy's food can facility in North Coburg manufactures 1 billion – that is 1 billion – food and drink can ends each year. So when you go to the supermarket and pick up a can of Australian- or Victorian-manufactured drink or food, it is more likely than not that in your hands or in your pantry is a can that has been made – the top of it – by Visy workers in Coburg North. I really want to thank the local workers, including Andrew, Tony and Grant, who provided me with a comprehensive tour, walking the respective assembly lines, which they are very proud of, to meet with many of the 130 workers. Visy Coburg North also particularly does provide a lot of can tops for producers in Shepparton, namely.

Building off our rich cultural manufacturing history in my community, we are increasingly becoming home to or destination for more food and beverage manufacturers. Earlier this year, for example, I visited Wonder Pies in Newlands Road in North Coburg, one of the newest additions to Coburg's growing food and culinary experience at the new Newlands Quarter. They source their incredible

produce from Provenir, who are located in Gippsland and recognised as ethical producers. Wonder Pies does an amazing job of producing handcrafted, exceptional pies, employing 100 local workers, and even producing for and supplying to the Australian Grand Prix, the Australian Open and other events. I commend Ray Capaldi, the chef, and Jodi Crocker, the CEO. I commend the bill to the house.

Tim McCURDY (Ovens Valley) (17:42): I am delighted to rise to make a contribution after that fine contribution from the member for Pascoe Vale. In fact I have heard some fine contributions throughout the day from both sides of the chamber. I have heard some wonderful contributions, with everybody trying to protect biosecurity, trying to look after our farming communities – and then the Greens spoke. Now I was having a bad day. I just could not believe what the Greens were trying to say at the end of the day. They are trying to water down the trespass laws. They are trying to say let us protect whistleblowers, which is just disgraceful. Their amendments are just not worth the paper they are written on, and I do hope they will just get thrown out as quickly as they came in – make a paper plane out of them. Really this bill is about protecting farming and protecting communities and all the businesses and the flow-on effects that go with farming, and we have already heard from so many people.

The Leader of the Nationals spoke about the \$50 billion it could cost Australia if we had foot-and-mouth come in. And it is not far away; it is only over in Indonesia. When we talk about these fools who are trespassers that come onto our properties, what is to say somebody does not take that into their own hands and see that the biosecurity is risked in Australia – and foot-and-mouth could come in. That is something that we have to protect ourselves against, because that would just cost us all. We saw what happened in England many years ago; others have spoken about that and the cost and the pain that that caused in England when they had foot-and-mouth disease.

Just to put it in context so you understand I am not speaking without experience here, I grew up on a dairy farm not far from the member for Frankston – just down there at Koo Wee Rup – and 20 years our family spent over there as dairy farmers. Then we moved to Cobram, and I was a dairy farmer for 25 years up there. So I reckon I can safely say I am well embedded in the dairy industry. It is a rewarding industry. And it is a tough industry, I have got to say – seven days a week, and it does not go away. You first become a grass farmer and then you become a dairy farmer, because it all comes in together.

Michael O'Brien: The Greens are grass farmers too.

Tim McCURDY: Yes, the Greens are grass farmers, but they smoke it, member for Malvern; they do not actually feed it to animals. No, they do different things. But anyway, that is an aside.

In terms of being a dairy farmer, we would milk 1300 cows, and if you look at the logistics of 1300 cows, you end up with 1300 calves. Trying to rear those calves and manage all those – the member for South-West Coast certainly understands where I am coming from because she is a large dairy farmer herself and understands the care and the knowledge that you need to have in animal welfare. Rearing animals from conception to birth, rearing the calves, managing the sickness and obviously the death – it is the full circle of life. Dairy farmers – and not just dairy farmers, but a lot of beef farmers and sheep farmers – know all about that full circle of life and how important it is to protect that. This bill is all about protecting the cattle industry – dairy and beef – and sheep and other industries, and the economic and the flow-on effect of this bill will help and certainly improve the control area and the represented provisions there. It will also amend compensation payout procedures for exotic diseases.

We have heard about varroa mite today and what damage that has done to our regions. It first came in I think in Newcastle a couple of years ago, and they thought they had it under control. But before we knew it, it spread right down to the border, and now we have got it. It has been handled well now. I mean, we have accepted that it is endemic – it is here, and we just have to deal with it. But with something like foot-and-mouth we would not be so lucky. There would be a lot of death, a lot of

destruction, a lot of pain should that come across our borders. That productivity would certainly be reduced. The member for South-West Coast also spoke about suitable land around the world. We actually do not farm on that much land around the world. With the water available to us and the suitable land, the growing and harvesting of food is so important, and protecting that is absolutely paramount.

I mentioned that I wrote down the increased penalties in my notes before, and then hearing from the Greens that they think the penalties should be reduced rather than increased – it is just staggering that that is how they think. I do get frustrated when single-minded groups think that they are the fount of all knowledge when it comes to animal welfare. The member for South-West Coast said farmers are environmentalists, and they genuinely want to look after their animals, because it is self-interest; it is in their best interest to look after the animals and the environment they work in, and it is just so important that they do that. We do not need trespassers and others who think they can make decisions on someone else's behalf. They literally are trespassers.

The bill will also improve enforcement capability for Victorian police officers. It basically puts more hands on deck in the event of a disaster. I heard the member for Lowan talk earlier, and she mentioned that there could be up to 5000 extra bodies needed in the event of an outbreak of foot-and-mouth, and that is people to help manage biosecurity – to help in all sorts of areas. That is why if you can empower the Victorian police to have other skills and other opportunities to help out in that department, it will certainly fill that void, or help fill that void, if that time was to ever come. When we say 'ever', I think we have to assume in this day and age, with the amount of backwards and forwards that happens across the world and around the world, at some stage something like foot-and-mouth could come into Australia and we just have to be very well prepared. It is about having good systems in place, but it is also about having the right penalties to try and send those right messages. As the member for Melton said, having worked at the airport, it is amazing how many fools do come in and do not understand how important things like biosecurity are – where you have been and where you have walked with the shoes you have got on. The bill will also strengthen traceability requirements to improve compliance and enforcement and will improve compliance processes by broadening the permit provisions in relation to the Plant Biosecurity Act 2010, which is important there.

I will expand on the power to request land information from councils, one thing I would have hoped that this bill could have gone a little bit further on. I know we are talking biosecurity, but when we talk about protecting farmers and farming communities, I have got a couple of issues up in my patch. One is at Bobinawarra or Meadow Creek, where there is a solar farm, a solar factory going in. Again, one or two people sell off their land to an international corporate, and the other 50 that live around it say, hang on a minute, what are the risks for us? That concerns me. A whole community is at risk from what two farmers can do. The same thing is happening at Dederang. There is a lithium battery factory from Mint Renewables. They are trying to put 100 lithium batteries in. Think of 100 lithium batteries – they are as big as a shipping container – and what that will do to the environment, what that will do to that community and the risks associated with that.

To think of a risk in that circumstance, your public liability insurance – if you accidentally have a fire start in your wheat farm because your head have caught on fire, which is not good news for you, but then that fire goes into one of these solar factories or a lithium factory that is a half-a-billion-dollar project or in that vicinity, you simply do not have a public liability policy that will go that high, and you will just be walking away from the land. So they are the concerns that we have. I am moving a little bit away from the bill, I do respect that, but I am saying there is still more we can do to protect those industries.

Like nearly everyone in this chamber, I do thank all food producers and fibre producers in Victoria, whether they produce dairy, beef, sheep, goats – everything. I mean, in my electorate – I live in Cobram – we have got peaches, we have got apricots, we have got nectarines, all those stone fruits, and apples and pears, and if you move across to Yarrawonga, we have got cereals and beef, and then we have got the Kelly Brothers, who produce for the Melbourne market, and in Wangaratta and

Myrtleford we have got beef and blueberries and chestnuts. So, I mean, there is nothing you cannot grow – obviously that is not tropical of course – in our region, and it is being grown.

It is a very delicate balance that we walk when we talk about protecting biosecurity, having that balance between being viable in an industry and being able to do the right thing by animal welfare but at the end of the day being able to make a profit and be reasonable about what you do. It is a delicate balance that I say that we walk. It is a tightrope that we tread, and taking risks with food and fibre is just simply not on. I am delighted to see both sides of this chamber in unison today, because my communities will be rapt to know that both sides of this chamber and nearly everybody is supporting this legislation wholeheartedly, because it is so important to our communities.

Nina TAYLOR (Albert Park) (17:52): Just zoning in on the actual purpose of the bill – I think there may have been a little flavour over there, the inference that somehow it is pernicious and there is penance and it is somehow here in a destructive format, which in fact is not the case. Broadly speaking there has been unity insofar as really identifying what this bill is all about, and it is about strengthening the way we manage biosecurity risks. So that is the good and proper rationale, and that is absolutely what is sought to be delivered here, because fundamentally so much is at risk were we not to advance and to continually revise and strengthen the protections in this space. We have already had many in the chamber discuss the drastic, terrible ramifications when you have a biosecurity outbreak and how devastating it can be, whether it is for the bee population or our precious livestock or otherwise or plants, native flora and fauna. So there is a really good underlying rationale for bringing about these reforms today, and that is the way that I think is right and proper that this bill should be spoken to, because that is the underlying purpose that is driving these reforms.

Fundamentally, it is also about encouraging particularly farmers to come forth – not inferring that they would not, and in fact past experience identifies that farmers have been, on the whole, very forward in terms of allowing the authorities to be able to intercept and to deal with those risks when they are identified, because I think nothing could be much more frightening to a farmer than having a devastating outbreak on their property, whether it is in crops, livestock or otherwise. So there certainly is a good imperative for our agricultural community to be on board with identifying and not in any way concealing the traceability of identified biosecurity risks, and really that is the impetus around the enhancement of the penalties that are being brought about through this bill. It is again really just encouraging in a pretty strident way, because of the ramifications if we were not to strengthen these protections, people coming forward as soon as they identify that there is a biosecurity risk.

So fundamentally, whilst we see a strengthening of penalties, it comes back to that underlying good and proper rationale of protecting our precious livestock and protecting our plants across the country. Of course this bill here is zoning in on Victoria in particular, but I say ‘across the country’ because we know that biosecurity risks, as has been stated in the chamber, do not necessarily stop at the border, so it is also upon us to do the right thing and protect our local flora and fauna to the best of our ability. You know what, I was thinking about the incredible quality of our produce. Before my first trip to Europe – that was many a moon ago, I should say – I remember I almost took for granted the quality of our lamb and dairy. It was not until I went over to Europe – and they have some beautiful produce as well – that I suddenly could see clearly the high calibre and the quality of the produce that we have here. Sometimes you need to travel for that purpose – so that, if nothing else, you realise what a great country we live in and how hard our farmers work to deliver such tremendous produce.

I want to also acknowledge, as we are speaking to this bill, their incredibly long hours. I think it has been spoken about that it is a seven-day-a-week job. We have an increasingly unstable climate. They have global pricing and other challenges that make it extremely difficult and delicate. It is a high-risk job, let us face it, and we all rely on it. I certainly am not growing my food at home. I live in an apartment, and I am very grateful for the farmers and all the hard work that they do to deliver beautiful fresh produce every day – day in, day out. That is certainly something I am extremely grateful for – and the risks that they take to be able to deliver that for the benefit of all of us.

I should say my great-aunt and great-uncle – my great-aunt is still alive today, she is in her 80s, but my great-uncle passed away a few years ago – used to own a dairy farm. They got up at about 3 am. It was pretty hard work, day in, day out, but I tell you what, it has made her resilient. To this day she still builds fences and all sorts at 80. It is incredible. It has made her incredibly resilient, and she would not think of actually hiring anyone to do the job, though we might suggest it, because although she is very resilient I do think in her 80s she could get some help. But it is that incredible resilience that perhaps many farmers have. They get used to doing everything themselves. They do not necessarily have a lot of help on hand. That gave me a bit of a better understanding about what it takes to work the land and then to deliver produce on time and to meet the calibre and quality the community have come to expect. I would like to think we do not take it for granted. I think there is a united sense of gratitude for that hard work, but at the same time I am grateful that that was able to be imparted to me as well. I will give a shout-out to my great-aunt Lois; may she live on for many a year. Bless her for her hard work. She is certainly an inspiration.

I distracted myself a little bit there, didn't I? But coming back to the purpose of the bill, really, we are aware as a government of the importance of encouraging farmers to promptly report any suspicion of disease on their properties, as timely reporting is crucial for effective disease control and prevention.

A member interjected.

Nina TAYLOR: Yes. This is what the bill is about. It is not about attacking any one individual, to be honest, in community or otherwise. I think it should be taken in that vein and with the purpose for which it was designed, because it is in all our interests to do everything possible to mitigate the impact of any particular biosecurity outbreak and better manage any situations should they unfold at any particular point in time.

I did want to just speak a little bit to the issue of compensation. I should say the bill enables the minister to evaluate a broader range of situations when deciding to reduce or deny compensation. On that point, out on a further limb, I did want to say: it is expected that the minister deciding to reduce or deny compensation would be a rare occurrence. I think that is important because we do not want anyone to be alarmed by the particular provisions, which are just allowing for a broader range of contingencies, which is of course important when we are looking to strengthen the way that we manage biosecurity outbreaks. The reason why it has been a rare occurrence – and this comes back to a point that I was seeking to make earlier – is that livestock producers have commendably followed requirements and assisted in successful exotic disease responses in the past. They are to be commended for that; however, it is just allowing for the contingency where, in the event that a person's compensation payment is reduced or denied, the applicant will be notified of the decision and the reasons and will be able to apply to the Victorian Civil and Administrative Tribunal for a review of that decision. I am just clarifying one of the elements that could arise but is not likely to be a common occurrence because we have such good precedent in terms of farmers actually coming forth and being open to alerting authorities and identifying where there have been biosecurity outbreaks on their properties.

We want to continue this good practice to make sure that we keep our beautiful state healthy and look after our flora and fauna as best we can, because it is in all our interests, isn't it? At the end of the day, we all need food and we also just want to be supportive of our beautiful environment. It deserves to be protected. Certainly when we are looking at precious species, particularly things such as bees, we really cannot afford to put them in jeopardy, so these protections are very important.

Annabelle CLEELAND (Euroa) (18:02): I rise today to speak on the Biosecurity Legislation Amendment (Incident Response) Bill 2023, a bill that I am happy to support. This is a bill with widespread support across the relevant sectors, including farmers, the wider agricultural and horticultural industries, police and our government departments – all bar the Greens.

In recent years the threats of emergency animal disease, pests and weeds have received increased media interest, particularly following the presence of foot-and-mouth disease, varroa mite and

Japanese encephalitis, as well as lumpy skin disease in Indonesia. Victoria's biosecurity laws have been under review for some time now by this government, and this included seeking stakeholder feedback. This piece of legislation today acts upon this feedback and makes some changes to the existing legislative framework in order to better manage the risks associated with exotic pests and disease. This will primarily be achieved through a series of amendments to current biosecurity legislation, such as the Livestock Disease Control Act 1994, the Livestock Management Act 2010 and the Plant Biosecurity Act 2010. These changes are predominately based on increased penalties or creating new offences, information sharing, allocation of powers and issuing of notices and information electronically.

This legislation will also improve Victoria's preparedness and response capability to biosecurity threats and provide further protection for Victoria's agricultural and horticultural sectors. Biosecurity threats to our local farms and primary producers have seen an uptick in recent times. Benalla Abattoirs, a meat processor within my electorate, has been one of these producers who has been threatened and whose biosecurity protections have been significantly under threat recently. The Farm Transparency Project – which I am reluctant to mention – formerly known as Aussie Farms, has held multiple protests at this processor, disrupting animal arrivals by approaching delivery trucks and interfering with livestock. I visited Benalla Abattoirs with the Shadow Minister for Agriculture and was able to understand firsthand the massive operational toll these threats were having on both business staff and animal welfare.

Last year the Nationals proposed increased biosecurity protections and harsher penalties for trespassing activists, something rejected by the Labor government. Victoria's maximum farm trespass fines are currently half the maximum in New South Wales. Increasing the maximum penalty would have sent a strong message to anyone considering trespassing on private property that we will not tolerate illegal invasions of strong local businesses. Due to weak laws we are seeing groups like the Farm Transparency Project feel comfortable enough to repeatedly disrupt businesses with criminal behaviour.

I was appalled by the Greens member's earlier contribution where she called this a scare campaign by the Nationals. I have sat with Colin Sinclair and spoken to him repeatedly and understood firsthand the personal toll, the emotional toll on staff and the animal welfare risks, and you can kind of start to understand why 70 per cent of our ham and bacon is actually imported when it becomes impossible to operate in Victoria. Benalla Abattoirs contribute a significant amount to the local community, both economically and by putting food on the table for families across the electorate. Producers like them deserve to run their business without threats to the biosecurity of their product, as do all the consumers in our region. With this bill, through amendments to the Livestock Management Act 2010 within it, there are increased powers for strengthening enforcement and compliance by recognising police officers as inspectors able to exercise any power of inspections under the act, and further deterring non-compliance with the act by significantly increasing the penalties for offences related to prescribed biosecurity measure provisions. While this will not directly resolve the issues faced by businesses like the Benalla abattoir, it is pleasing to see a large focus on general threats to biosecurity and the ability of police to act upon them through this legislation.

Sadly, we are seeing biosecurity threats come from a variety of different angles, and addressing all of them does remain a difficult task. At areas like the Winton Wetlands and its surrounds, the overabundance of kangaroos is causing issues and concerns about the biosecurity of the area. The Winton Wetlands, located within my electorate, is an 8750-hectare site that features 32 distinct wetland zones and is home to a huge variety of native flora and fauna, including over 180 species of birds. With a growing population of kangaroos, threats to the wider wetlands ecosystem and its neighbours have increased. When found in excessively high numbers, like in the Winton Wetlands, kangaroos become pests, and farmers need to keep them off their properties. Under the government's kangaroo harvesting program and authority to control wildlife, permits are given to property owners to manage this. Yet we are not seeing enough issued.

In questions to ministers, information about the number and rate of permits being issued under these plans has been hard to come by. What I am hearing from my community is regardless of how many permits have been issued and how many kangaroos have been harvested, they are still running rampant and destroying the local area. Like any traditional livestock industry, the kangaroo harvesting sector faces very similar risks of disease and pest incursions, many of which have the capability to impact entire livestock industries. It is imperative that this issue be managed effectively, yet this Labor government is failing to adequately support the Winton Wetlands and its surrounds to safely manage biosecurity threats. Funding for Winton Wetlands is set to expire at the end of this year, with no plans yet made to continue support in the new year. With this being such a massive environmental project, full government support is imperative.

Another concerning area of biosecurity for our state revolves around the capacities of our veterinarians and their ability to respond to outbreaks. Sadly, in my electorate and across many rural communities, the veterinary profession is not in a strong position. Rural private vets are short of staff and struggling to meet the needs of clients, and there has been progressive downsizing of the animal health division at the department of agriculture. This notion has been reinforced by recent inquiries into vet shortages in New South Wales. Having spoken to a local vet in Euroa, Dr Andrew Jacotine, he was able to provide me with some further information:

I think the breaking point probably happened last year.

The industry is now in contraction and has permanently changed to a new normal.

Last year we wanted staff – now I am not sure we do – we have changed from providing services over 168 hours of the week to now just 45 hours a week.

We don't have the total workload as we did.

Another person in the industry I have spoken with recently has been the former member for Benalla who was a vet for 30 years in disease control at a state and national level, spending time in the UK during the FMD outbreak in 2001. Here is what Dr Bill Sykes said:

When we had the nervousness of the FMD in Indonesia, I asked questions about the Victorian department of agriculture's resourcing and ability to respond in the first couple of weeks of an outbreak.

It was difficult to get objective answers and I was given repeated assurances that things were all under control.

He did not buy it, though, and instead suggested some questions were raised about how our state would handle a biosecurity threat. What is the level of preparedness and resourcing of the department's animal health division when it comes to an outbreak as serious as FMD? Do they have contracts to employ vets and other skilled professionals at short notice? Do they have a list of suitable vets and other skilled professionals to contact? Within the government services, what training has been done for staff to be part of the massive team response that is required?

He also talks about biosecurity being a multitiered risk management exercise. Firstly, and this is primarily a federal concern, we must reduce it coming into our state from overseas.

A member interjected.

Annabelle CLEELAND: I am saying we do not have 5000 vets employed right now. This is achieved with high-security quarantine requirements for both passengers and goods.

The second tier is early detection and rapid response. This is where the state government must come in. This tier requires having livestock owners aware and willing to report as well as having capable staff at field-lab level. Farmers wear a high level of responsibility for maintaining biosecurity on their enterprises on a day-to-day basis, not just for concerns about exotic diseases. That is why we have whole-of-life identification of livestock, the protection of our properties and certification on animals that come onto our property, the same as with feed and contractors. You may have a high level of biosecurity if the risks or consequences are high, such as intensive poultry or pigs, where you have limited access and people going in to have contact with the animals. In essence, we must continue to find ways to help our farmers and protect the biosecurity of our state, and I am pleased this bill achieves this.

A quick shout-out to Toot Morgan and the Hill boys of Colbinabbin, who let me ride their header this week, as they go through harvest, which is a really wonderful time for our region. I am very proud of all of our agricultural producers, including my husband.

Paul MERCURIO (Hastings) (18:12): I rise to speak on the Biosecurity Legislation Amendment (Incident Response) Bill 2023. The bill makes amendments to three separate acts: the Livestock Disease Control Act 1994, the Livestock Management Act 2010 and the Plant Biosecurity Act 2010. I would like to thank everyone who worked on this bill. It is not a big bill – it is only 58 pages long, with about 100 clauses – and I dare say it is not the most exciting bill that I have read. In fact it is a very dry and somewhat dense bill. However, it is an immensely important bill for the future of our state and for our children's future. At its core, this bill is to strengthen our state's capability to manage biosecurity risks, better prepare Victoria for outbreaks and disease, ensure that we have efficient legislative frameworks in place and mitigate any potential risk of disruptions amongst the industry due to an outbreak or a potential outbreak.

In doing research, I went onto the Agriculture Victoria website, and I found the biosecurity statement for Victoria. Part of that statement outlines its vision. It is quite a beautiful piece of writing, and I just want to read that in the chamber today:

Our vision

We look toward a future where Victoria's communities are healthy, our farms are prosperous, and our culture and wellbeing are supported by a vibrant and whole natural environment.

A future where everyone in our state understands the threats posed by harmful pests and diseases and acts to protect and enhance their communities and the environment around them.

Where Victoria's food and fibre industries are sending clean and safe produce around the world, setting a standard for safety, efficiency and sustainability.

Where all Victorians can align around a vision of what's right for Victoria, and act confidently in support of that vision, informed by evidence and the knowledge of Traditional Owners.

Where we can pass Victoria along, unique and enriched, out of respect for the people who cared for it before us, and for the sake of the people, plants, and animals that will live in Victoria in the future.

I just thought that was quite a beautiful piece of writing.

Jordan Crugnale: If we could hear it.

Paul MERCURIO: If you could hear it. I will repeat it again later. But to me that writing –

The ACTING SPEAKER (Juliana Addison): The speaker himself is having difficulty hearing. Could we please show him the respect he deserves while he gives his contribution.

Paul MERCURIO: Thank you, Acting Speaker. As I said, I thought that was a beautiful piece of writing, and for me it encapsulates perfectly what the biosecurity legislation amendment bill of 2023 is about and what it wants to achieve, and that is a positive, prosperous and safe future for our community, for our state, for our plants and animals and for our agricultural businesses for a healthy and thriving economy.

There is far too much at stake to not do this properly, to not look after our future and to allow, maybe through laziness, inaction or apathy, diseases to sneak into Australia and indeed Victoria and infect our animals and plants and our economy. What is at stake? Agribusiness in Australia brings in revenue of over \$300 billion, employs over 650,000 people across more than 180,000 businesses and pays wages of almost \$30 billion. That is at stake. In Victoria agribusiness is worth over \$17 billion and employs over 70,000 people across more than 21,000 agribusinesses. Victoria is Australia's largest food and fibre exporter for value, accounting for 26 per cent of the national total, and exports to over 170 destinations around the world. That is at stake. Down my way, on the Mornington Peninsula, agribusiness is worth \$1.3 billion, employs thousands of locals and drives a thriving tourism industry. That is at stake.

The bill is kind of like the invisible force field that is designed to keep Victoria safe from outside threats of animal and plant disease, and the way this invisible force field works is by focusing on three key areas: prevention and mitigation, preparedness and response, and management and control. This bill speaks to these issues through the changes made in the amendment of the three acts: the Livestock Disease Control Act, the Livestock Management Act and the Plant Biosecurity Act.

In terms of prevention and mitigation, the amendments to the Livestock Management Act create a much stronger legislative framework regarding the biosecurity risks caused by unlawful entry into agricultural premises. A lot has been said about this, and I agree with it. We have all seen on the news images and videos of protesters or individuals that trespass on farms in order to push their point of view about alleged animal cruelty or the fact that we should not be farming animals at all. Not only does this cause immense stress and anxiety to farmers, their families and their animals, but it is also a huge biosecurity risk, and therefore it puts at risk the farmers' businesses and those surrounding businesses. To this end the Livestock Management Act has significantly increased fines for unlawful entry to a property. Additionally, on-the-spot fines have been increased for individuals and for organisations. Penalties have been increased for damaging, defacing or removing biosecurity signage that has been erected to notify people of their responsibilities before entering a biosecure property.

The bill also seeks to recognise police officers as inspectors under the Livestock Management Act and the Livestock Disease Control Act. I know that our police force do an amazing job and are overworked to some extent, but I am very glad for this change. I think it is a very positive outcome.

Coming under the preparedness and response theme, another important measure this bill introduces is the modernisation of how we notify the public about notices under the act, such as control area and restricted area orders, and facilitating the electronic service of documents. With more and more people opting to receive information electronically, this just makes sense.

Regarding management and control, this bill also removes some administrative red tape by allowing the minister or their delegate to declare a control area in the event of a plant, pest or disease outbreak rather than having to go to the Governor in Council. Any time delay can lead to further costs to businesses and industry, so this bill will allow for that important administrative change to occur.

I met earlier this year with representatives from the Nursery & Garden Industry Victoria, and I also attended their AGM, which was amazing and was held in Tyabb at Australian Growing Solutions. They do amazing work, and this is just another showcase of how important agriculture is in my electorate. This bill will ensure that places like Australian Growing Solutions and others are protected from exotic plants, pests or diseases that would severely impact their business and industry. This is done through improving the efficiency of emergency response and management provisions that are directly related to plant pests and diseases but also by significantly increasing penalties for offences. Having increased fines creates a greater deterrence for non-compliance and reinforces to the industry and broader community that biosecurity is not to be taken lightly. Increasing the fines and penalties is necessary when comparing them to the costs of a potential outbreak and the losses that could be incurred by businesses.

I would also like to take a moment to say how fantastic the Agriculture Victoria website is. It has such a massive amount of information and guidance in regard to biosecurity and other things. In some ways it is quite a frightening read to see how large the numbers of potential diseases are for animals and plants and also the large number of potential and devastating threats from introduced pests that our farmers and producers are facing every minute of every day, and again I say that is why this bill is so important. If anyone listening is interested in reading more about this issue, then jump onto the agriculture.vic.gov.au website. It is great, and the fact is we are all responsible for doing the right thing and playing our part.

In closing, while researching this debate I reflected on one of my earlier careers as a television chef travelling around Australia and some parts of the world visiting large and small farms and getting to

know producers and farmers and getting a better understanding of the trials and challenges of working on the land, and I have to say that each and every farmer producer that I met loved what they were doing. They cared deeply for their land, they cared deeply for their animals and they cared deeply about producing only the best that they could. I saw firsthand what these amazing people were doing not just to make safe their animals, their land and the produce that they were growing but also to keep safe the quality of their life, their business, the Victorian economy and our food future. I thank them for their amazing work. I commend this bill to the house.

Danny O'BRIEN (Gippsland South) (18:22): I am very pleased to also rise to say a few words on the Biosecurity Legislation Amendment (Incident Response) Bill 2023, and I am not sure that I have or expected to ever say this, but I fully endorse the last comments there from the member for Hastings. It is about time that this chamber more often, more members in this chamber, recognised the work that our farmers do and more so – exactly the points that the member for Hastings just made – that farmers know in the main, with a small minority which is always an exclusion, that they need to treat their animals right, they need to treat their land right, they need to treat their water right and they need to treat their environment properly to hand on their farms to the future generations to make sure that we continue to feed and clothe the nation. One of the reasons, frankly, that I am in this place is to stand up here and support country people but in particular, and as part of that, our farmers, and I think we have become, unfortunately, so good at farming in this country that we are taken for granted. I look around the room on this side in particular and I see the member for South-West Coast; the member for Murray Plains, a former producer; the member for Ovens Valley as well –

Michaela Settle interjected.

Danny O'BRIEN: The member for Eureka – what does she produce?

Michaela Settle: Sheep and crops.

Danny O'BRIEN: Sheep and crops. I acknowledge the member for Eureka and the member for Euroa. But it is absolutely true, I think, that in this country we do not value our food production enough, and unfortunately, as one of the most urbanised countries in the world, we do not understand our food production enough. We see that, sadly, in the amendments and the commentary made by the Greens on this particular piece of legislation.

From my perspective, everyone will say their area is the food bowl, but what a beautiful food producing region Gippsland is, with over 9000 food and fibre businesses in Gippsland employing 16 per cent of the workforce in the region, with around three-quarters of the workers engaged on the farm and roughly 25 per cent in value-added production, much of that in Gippsland South of course, particularly in the dairy and beef industries – and I will fight the member for South-West Coast over who produces more or perhaps who produces better, because we know it is indeed Gippsland South. Gippsland is a dairy powerhouse producing 22 per cent of Australia's dairy, including milk, milk powder, butter, cheese, yoghurt and other value-added products. And I might add, following the Nationals' media drinks two weeks ago, where the press gallery was invited along to come and have a drink and each member of the Nationals brought a cheese from their electorate and that was then judged in a cheese tasting competition by the members of the fourth estate, it was of course the Riverine Blue from Berrys Creek Gourmet Cheese in the beautiful Fish Creek area of Gippsland South that was adjudged the winner. Now, that is not really that important, and it is probably not the biggest prize that they have ever won – indeed not even close, because Barry and Cheryl from Berrys Creek Gourmet Cheese were in fact named the world's best artisan cheesemakers this year. That is not an exaggeration. They literally produce the best artisan cheese in the world.

We also produce 25 per cent of the beef in Victoria, wool and prime lamb, as well as 27 per cent of the vegetables, and that is often not understood about Gippsland. I cannot provide a source for this statistic, but I am told that nine out of 10 top salad growers in the country are in Gippsland.

A member: And good asparagus.

Danny O'BRIEN: And there is asparagus at the western end of Gippsland as well. But I highlight again that the importance of this legislation, the importance of having our biosecurity right, comes from the fact that we do need to do more to value our food producers. As I said, I got into politics because I have always thought country people get a raw deal, and one of the things that always annoyed me was the distortions in the global trade markets when it comes to food and the fact that Australian and New Zealand producers do our production with virtually no government support, with very little protection in terms of subsidies or tariffs versus many of the other countries of the world, particularly the EU, Japan and the US.

I had the pleasure of being an adviser for the trade minister. It was, until this job came along, probably my dream job. It was fantastic because it was actually going in and supporting and fighting for Australia's farmers to get a better deal on world markets. It was in those discussions once on a particular trade negotiation that we were having a discussion with the Europeans, and one of the European delegates made a point that stuck with me forever. He said, 'You Australians don't understand, because you've never gone hungry. We went hungry after World War II and during World War II, and so we look after our farmers.' As much as I disagree both economically and from a patriotic perspective, from an Australian perspective, with what the Europeans do – and it is ultimately self-defeating in many respects – they do value their farmers and they understand the value of food production. Unfortunately, as I said, Australian farmers I think have actually got too good at it – so good that we produce good-quality food and fibre, we do it at a good price and we largely do it with minimal impact on the environment, with some of the harshest regulations in the world in terms of the environment, chemicals and of course animal welfare. We do it very, very well, and as a result, unfortunately, it does get somewhat taken for granted.

That is why it is so important to us to have these strong laws for biosecurity in the unfortunate event of an outbreak of some sort of disease or incursion. I know the member for Euroa just talked about the former member for Euroa going back two members ago, Bill Sykes, and thankfully I have not had the experiences that Bill did when he went over as a vet to deal with the UK BSE outbreak – or mad cow disease, as it is known. Listening to Bill talk about the devastation that was wrought, not only the economic devastation and the environmental devastation but the social and mental devastation wrought on entire UK communities and particularly the farming communities of that outbreak, was just heartbreaking, and may it never happen here.

I know the news earlier this year that foot-and-mouth disease had arrived in Indonesia caused many of my farmers to be very concerned about what we are doing. Thankfully, the early panic, if you like, that 'Oh my God, it's on our doorstep; it'll be with us any moment now', has not yet eventuated, touch wood, but we must be eternally vigilant. So this legislation brings in some tweaks to the existing laws about what will happen, but it also increases penalties for breaches, which I think is very important for us to do. That is why I have a good understanding of the concerns here.

The other one that I just want to mention and touch on is varroa mite, which was a big issue when I used to work at the Rural Industries Research & Development Corporation in Canberra. That is where I first met the member for South-West Coast, actually, when she became the Rural Women's Award winner at the time I was there. Varroa mite was a big concern in the bee industry that we had at the time. It was probably one of the first times I saw some mainstream news on biosecurity issues when *60 Minutes* did a story at the time on the threat from varroa mite. Sadly, the inevitable has happened. We always said that inevitably it would come to Australia, and indeed it has.

I think it is absolutely important, though, that we also tackle the issue of farm trespass and the potential impact it has. I was not surprised to hear what the Greens have had to say about this and that they do not want to increase the penalties, because they really have no understanding of anything that happens outside the city – despite the fact that one of their MPs now apparently comes from western Victoria. Whatever they might say, they just seem to not understand anything. There is no better example of that than this week, when they circulated a proposed inquiry about food security. It is 22 lines in total, it has three main points, it has 13 subclauses – and nowhere in it does it mention farmers. Nowhere

does it mention food producers. It simply talks about food production and food security. I think that highlights where the Greens are and their fellow travellers in parties like the Animal Justice Party, who have absolutely zero idea how the world works. Food apparently appears by magic in a carton in the fridge or under the plastic in the meat section. They are to be condemned for their lack of understanding and for their pathetic, misleading statements on this sector. I support this legislation. I support our farmers, and I wish them all the best.

Paul HAMER (Box Hill) (18:32): I too rise to speak on the Biosecurity Legislation Amendment (Incident Response) Bill 2023. As has been said, this is an important bill to enhance our biosecurity measures. One of the things I have been drawn to, listening to a number of the speakers to date, is just how much of our society, even in Australia, has been shaped by biosecurity incidents. The first one that came to mind was the potato famine in Ireland back in the 1840s, one of the causes being the potato blight. It triggered the great migration from Ireland. Many migrated to Australia, including your ancestors, Acting Speaker Addison, as you are indicating. I am sure there are many other members in this chamber who can trace their family roots back to then. It is an example of just how biosecurity impacts on plants, animals and farming in general and on our society and how society turns out.

As has been mentioned, the primary purpose of the bill is to strengthen Victoria's capability to manage biosecurity risks, including preparing for, responding to and recovering from the detection or outbreak of an exotic animal disease, plant disease or pest. It also supports the public commitment made by the Victorian government to improving exotic disease preparedness and response capabilities. The bill ensures a holistic and effective legislative framework for exotic pests and diseases to protect Victoria's valuable agricultural and horticultural sectors. This will mitigate the potential risk of market access and trade disruptions associated with detection or outbreak.

As has also been referenced by a number of speakers, the agricultural and horticultural industry in Victoria is incredibly valuable. Our farmers and everybody who works in food production right through the food supply chain do enormous work. It is at times a thankless task. As the member for Ovens Valley was referencing, it is a 24-hour, seven-days-a-week job. Just to identify some of the scale of the value of the agriculture sector to the Victorian economy: \$17.5 billion gross value of agricultural production in 2020–2021; Australia's second-largest agricultural producer after New South Wales, contributing about 25 per cent of the entire agricultural produce in Australia; \$17.9 billion of total food and fibre exports; and of all Victorian goods exported, 55 per cent of those are accounted for by food and fibre exports. So when we think of a lot of the other jurisdictions in the country which have very large mining bases, obviously Victoria does not have that economic base to a large degree so we rely on our other natural resources which are the climate, the soil conditions and the hard work of farmers and the food production sector to generate those huge values and exports that are bringing in economic growth to the state. There are over 21,000 farming businesses and 11.4 million hectares of land which is used for agricultural production in a combination of grazing, cropping and other purposes; 67,600 people were employed in agricultural production in the 2020–21 year; and there were 82,450 jobs in food and beverage manufacturing and production in 2020–21. Of all the agricultural, forestry and fishing jobs, 75 per cent of them are located in regional Victoria. So as a culmination as an industry it is making a huge impact on the Victorian economy, which is why it is so important that we do what we can to protect the industry against biosecurity risks.

The threat of animal and exotic pests does loom large, as a number of members have referenced. Indonesia, which is obviously very proximate to Australia, officially declared foot-and-mouth disease as endemic recently, which means that our commitment to fortify our preparedness against exotic diseases has become even more critical than ever. Just this month the Indonesian government has reported uncontrollable cases of both lumpy skin disease and foot-and-mouth disease affecting more than half the provinces in the country. A number of speakers talked about both foot-and-mouth disease and also the mad cow disease outbreak that occurred in the UK, and it was not just the scenes of devastation for the individual farmers who had to have their cattle destroyed, but as the member for Gippsland South said, it was the social impact that this had. I remember that the news articles showed

that shops and consumers in other European countries would refuse to stock and would refuse to buy meat sourced from the United Kingdom even if it was healthy, simply because it had the stigma attached of there having been a mad cow disease outbreak.

We are so proud in Victoria and Australia to showcase our product as clean and green and pest free, and it is a big selling point, particularly in the growing emerging markets in Asia which have a huge demand for Australian food products. Disease brings great risk, not just to the individuals and the meat or fibre or food that is affected but to the broader marketing chain and the social chain that will be impacted by a disease outbreak in Australia or in Victoria.

I also want to reference the varroa mite outbreak and just give a shout-out to our local bee industry. Obviously, being in a metropolitan seat, there is not a lot of agriculture that goes on, but there is a thriving bee industry, particularly in the suburbs of Blackburn and Surrey Hills, that uses the quite diverse array of flora that is found in that area to locate hives and have individual suburban-based honey. I want to give a shout-out to Ben Moore, who is a Blackburn South local. He runs Ben's Bees and is quite a well-known suburban beekeeper and honey producer. Bees are big business, as has been mentioned by a number of contributors today, not only in terms of making products such as honey and beeswax but particularly for commercial pollination of many of our crops.

The top 10 most dependent horticultural industries require around 645,000 honey bee hives for successful levels of pollination, and that is estimated to grow to 867,000 hives over five years and almost 1 million hives in 10 years time. So the work that we are doing to try and protect and manage the varroa mite outbreak is going to be crucial in ensuring that this industry survives and the associated industries thrive. I commend the bill to the house.

Alison MARCHANT (Bellarine) (18:42): It is a pleasure to rise to speak on the Biosecurity Legislation Amendment (Incident Response) Bill 2023. This is the first time in this place I have been able to speak on a bill that is related to agriculture specifically, and that is quite exciting for me, with a farming background myself – it is not just that side of the house that engage in farming. I also have a long history of farmers in my family.

Before coming to Parliament, though, my main career was as a primary school teacher. But we all have careers along the way when we are studying or jobs that we first do, and my very first job as a teenager was at a berry farm. I was a strawberry picker in the hot sun in the summer, picking strawberries and working in the cafe. It was a pick-your-own type of berry situation. They had trout in the dam and they had stone fruits, and it was just a wonderful experience to see how farming and agriculture worked, horticulture particularly, and the amount of hours and hard labour that farmers did – and I was only a teenager. But my grandparents' farm was just around the corner. They had sheep, cattle and cropping. It was good fun being a kid growing up on a farm or seeing and being part of a farm, but you did not really see all the hard yakka that goes on behind the scenes – it is 24/7. My grandparents certainly worked very hard.

I loved that job. Little did I know that I would be doing a full circle eventually – that when my kids were very little and I had not gone back to teaching full time a friend and I would start our own boutique farm. We called ourselves 'One Goose Farm' – and I think I was the goose in that – but we would sell garlic and berries, a little bit of stone fruit or eggs and honey. We would go to farmers markets and we would sell at the farm gate. The best experience I had was actually talking to people about where their food was coming from and the amount of work that was going on behind the scenes to create this wonderful produce that people were buying. There is a bit of education that needs to be there; people do not understand where their food may come from or the amount of hours that go on behind it. It is a great experience to do that, but it also makes you understand that food is quite expensive. People say why are your garlic or berries so expensive, but I think the question is why the food at the supermarket is so cheap. That is really the question. It was a great experience. Biosecurity was always front of mind when we were doing that. We called ourselves boutique farmers because we did not own a tractor. Everything was done by hand – shovels and blisters on the hands at the end of the day. But we thought

the best way to create the most high-quality food was to literally have our hands in the dirt and make sure that we were watching it daily. Biosecurity was really important – who was coming onto the farm, who was leaving the farm, what materials, hay or mulch we were bringing into the farm – to make sure that we were creating the best produce.

But an outbreak of disease can be absolutely devastating to farmers, particularly in our agricultural sector. Having those biosecurity measures does ensure that we are producing safe food, because contaminated livestock and crops do pose a health risk, and I have heard contributions today talking to that. But it is about the environment – invasive species, disease and pests can also have that negative effect on the environment. We need to implement those biosecurity measures to help prevent the introduction of, for example, non-native species that can really disrupt the local ecosystem. There is a reason why here in Victoria we do protect our agriculture so fiercely; it is because of that clean and green agriculture that we have. We are the envy of the world. Markets across the world want to buy our produce, and we should be very proud of that, but that is the reason why we are also very protective of that.

As I have mentioned, farming and farmers really ensure that seven days a week, 365 days a year, we have healthy, locally grown food in our supermarkets, and we should be very grateful for that. Another reason why this bill is very important is that the gross value of Victorian agriculture is that \$17.5 billion which has been discussed today. But farmers also manage 50 per cent of our state's total land area, which is absolutely incredible. That is also across the nation: farmers manage 51 per cent of Australia's landscape. Every day those farmers are creating positive environmental outcomes on behalf of Australia. They really are the caretakers. Every farmer I know wants to leave it better than they found it to pass on to the next generation.

I will talk a little bit about the bill itself. The bill does amend the Livestock Disease Control Act 1994, the Livestock Management Act 2010 and the Plant Biosecurity Act 2010. It enhances Victoria's capability to manage those biosecurity incidents, including preparing for, responding to and recovering from exotic animal disease or plant pest or disease detection or outbreak. This is a commitment that the government made to improving the management of exotic disease outbreaks and control capabilities and to enhancing our ability to respond to biosecurity incidents and improve those efficiencies within the system. The consequences can be significant, and these include economic impacts associated with eradicating a pest or disease, loss of access to national and international markets and impacts on productivity, jobs, employment and the natural environment.

I will just talk a little bit about how this relates to the Bellarine. This bill actually is very important to the electorate of Bellarine. We not only have a really strong agriculture sector but we also have a really strong and thriving aquaculture sector. Managing these biosecurity risks on the Bellarine is really fundamental to the prosperity of Bellarine farmers and residents. It is part of our history on the Bellarine. It is the social fabric of the Bellarine and will continue to be that really important part of our local economy. When you go to Bellarine markets and farmers markets on the Bellarine, they will be lined with Bellarine produce from honey, fruit and vegetables, baked goods, olive oils, wines and seafood to all those value-adding agrifood businesses and products that will be there as well. But of course there are challenges and there have been challenges on the Bellarine, mainly with housing developments really sort of aligning themselves right up against active farming and active farms. We need to ensure that we are protecting that heartland and that agricultural land on the Bellarine, and I am so pleased we have been able to do that with the distinctive area and landscape planning policy, which really did draw a line in the sand to say, 'This is where the township boundaries will be' and protect the agricultural land to ensure that future.

A member interjected.

Alison MARCHANT: And then they lock the gate. They do lock the gate. The best way that we can support that is to address those challenges, particularly locally on the Bellarine, of the movement of people coming in and out. I know farmers really focus on that, on who is coming in and out of farms, but a lot of people who visit the Bellarine do not realise that. They enjoy the beautiful views as

they travel around, but they do not realise that they are very much active farms in the middle of the Bellarine. We can all play a role, so we should all be mindful of that.

In conclusion, this bill is really going to improve the clarity and the efficiency of emergency response management of exotic diseases and pests and does significantly increase those penalties for offences relating to exotic animal disease and livestock traceability requirements as well. It does improve that management provision to enhance efficiency and preparedness and those response activities, with the delegation of powers of the minister to declare control areas and restricted areas. We must do all that we can to protect our agriculture sector. We rely on it every day of the week. I want to see a thriving agricultural sector on the Bellarine. I support wholeheartedly our farmers, who work hard every day. I want to see Bellarine's agricultural future continue to grow, to be celebrated and to be, going forward, part of our local economy, and I commend the bill to the house.

Dylan WIGHT (Tarneit) (18:52): It gives me great pleasure this evening to rise and speak on the Biosecurity Legislation Amendment (Incident Response) Bill 2023, and just before I begin my contribution I would like to acknowledge the member for Bellarine's contribution just previous to mine. I remember the first time we met we were speaking about One Goose Farm, and I remember the garlic and then having conversations about that farm. I know how passionate she is about Victoria's agriculture sector and I know how much it means to her electorate, so I just thought I would acknowledge that.

It might seem odd for somebody from one of Melbourne's growth areas to stand up and speak about Victorian agriculture, but as a son of a wheat and sheep farmer from the New South Wales Riverina I thought that it was my duty to do so, and Mum would love me doing so. But it is not just that; my community of Tarneit and Hoppers Crossing is actually surrounded by a thriving agricultural sector, which I think a lot of people seem to forget. Whether it is vegetable growers just across the road in Werribee South growing a significant percentage and a significant portion of lettuce and broccoli and vegetables consumed by Victorians – particularly if you buy those vegetables at Coles, you have probably eaten vegetables from Fresh Select – or whether it is grain producers or graziers on the outskirts of Tarneit West, my community in Wyndham, Tarneit and Hoppers Crossing is surrounded by a thriving agricultural sector. In fact the agricultural sector in Wyndham contributes \$112 million of economic activity to Victoria each and every year.

I mentioned the vegetable farmers across the road in Werribee South – they contribute 72.2 per cent of that economic activity – but we have got livestock and we have also got nurseries and cut flowers, and I will note this government's commitment to a horticultural centre of excellence in the future. But that is just a small portion of what this sector means to Victoria. In fact this sector contributes \$20.2 billion worth of economic activity each and every year and employs 150,000 Victorians. It is a sector that is so incredibly vital to Victoria's economy, but not just Victoria's economy; it is so incredibly vital to things like food security as well.

But there are certain things that put that economic activity and that food security at risk, and that is exactly what this bill intends to fix. Biosecurity risks like exotic animal or plant diseases and pests are a significant threat both to the Victorian economy and to Victorian food security as well. If we were to have an outbreak of something like foot-and-mouth disease, for instance, throughout our agricultural sector, we would see Victoria's economy suffer, but we would also see Victorians suffer. There would be less food, meaning there would be higher prices, inflation would be higher, the cost of living would be higher, and Victorian lives would be worse for it. If these threats are not taken seriously, they could result in a dramatic disruption to the supply of groceries and fresh produce to Victorian families. That is why it is so important that this government is committed to enhancing Victoria's exotic disease preparedness and response capability, and I know that those workers and those businesses in the agricultural sector out in my patch of Wyndham are incredibly supportive of this legislation. When I went and consulted with them over the last couple of weeks they told me how their livelihoods would be at risk if there was a biosecurity breach, if there was a disease that went through their farms, that went through their properties.

Just to go to the bill momentarily before I wind up, it makes amendments to the Livestock Disease Control Act 1994 to strengthen emergency management, traceability and enforcement provisions. The bill will increase penalties for offences for the contravention of provisions related to exotic animal diseases and livestock traceability requirements and improve and clarify emergency management provisions. I do not want to go as far as to say that it is a big stick, but it will significantly disincentivise people from doing the wrong thing by significantly increasing the penalties – and I think it is increasing them threefold – if you are to do the wrong thing, because we understand how important this sector is to the Victorian economy and to households in general. It will do this by broadening the delegation of powers of the minister to declare control areas and restricted areas, allowing the sharing of information related to exotic diseases with other government departments and agencies and other states and territories and refining the existing exotic disease compensation framework to ensure compensation is more equitable and fairly paid.

This legislation will bring us into parity with other jurisdictions around Australia. The biosecurity legislation amendment bill represents a significant and necessary shift in the legal landscape regarding the management and control of exotic animal diseases and livestock traceability in Victoria. The inadequacy of current penalties under the Livestock Disease Control Act 1994 has become increasingly apparent, highlighting the need for a more robust deterrent mechanism. These penalties as they stand fail to reflect the severity of the offences and are outpaced by comparable penalties, as I said, in other jurisdictions around the country.

I have said on numerous occasions how important the agricultural sector is to Victoria's economy and to Victoria's households both through employment and through the delivery of secure and, we hope, cost-effective food. I note the bipartisan support that this bill has, I thank the new Minister for Agriculture and her office for putting it together and I commend it to the house.

Business interrupted under sessional orders.

Adjournment

The DEPUTY SPEAKER: The question is:

That the house now adjourns.

Bulleen electorate planning

Matthew GUY (Bulleen) (19:00): (461) My adjournment tonight is for the Minister for Planning, and it concerns an apartment building in my electorate in Bulleen that unfortunately, like so many, has disgraceful defects, some of which may threaten the integrity of the building, the structure of the building, in the long term. 168 Manningham Road is not old. It is on the corner of Thompsons Road. It is a very prominent building, about three or four storeys high and circular in design – one part of it. The permit was issued in September 2013. Construction was through 2015 to 2019 or so. It is a nice building – a modern building, as I said – and not terribly old. The surveyor issued the permit around 2017. The occupancy was issued in May 2019. However, the issue with the building nowadays – as the owners' corporation have contacted me – is that there is horrendous flooding throughout the basement of the building and the facing of the building is falling off. There are structural and cosmetic issues throughout the building that are quite prominent.

As a former Minister for Planning and former Shadow Minister for Planning, I have seen many, many examples of poor-quality workmanship in relation to apartments of this kind and issues which I previously referred on to the building commission as a minister and shadow minister. But this is certainly one which I do believe requires intervention. The residents themselves have spent tens of thousands of dollars on legal fees trying to rectify the circumstance themselves and find a way to rectify the situation themselves. As I said, there are cosmetic issues, internal structural issues and facing issues. But I just want to come back to where I started: the most important is of course the drainage issue in the car park, because that could potentially lead to structural issues. Where there is water and water through concrete, that is the only thing, as you can imagine, that can weaken concrete.

There are times where residents getting out of their cars literally could get out into 6 or 7 inches of water. It is completely untenable. So tonight I respectfully ask the Minister for Planning to have the building commission examine this property, to look into the actions of the surveyor and the builder of the premises and to see if we can give some surety to the owners that these issues will be rectified and rectified in a prompt time frame.

Afri-Aus Care

Meng Heang TAK (Clarinda) (19:02): (462) My adjournment matter is for the Minister for Employment, and the action I seek is for the minister to join me in visiting Afri-Aus Care, located in the Clarinda district, to see the amazing work taking place there under Jobs Victoria's mentor program. Founded by Selba Gondoza Luka, Afri-Aus Care does a power of work providing assistance and support to individuals through primary mental health intervention and intensive support programs and by counselling families. There are a host of exciting and important initiatives, many of which I have had the privilege of witnessing firsthand: Black Rhinos, south-east community leaders youth engagement, ubuntu peer support and the Empowering African Mothers Project: Ubuntu in Practice – to name just a few. They also do great work in community engagement, legal support, emergency support – really holistic programs for the community – which of course includes their employment pathways to work.

TaskForce have partnered with Afri-Aus Care to deliver a mentor program for mentees, including support with résumés, interview preparation, enrolments for training and qualifications and support for workers throughout the first six months of their new jobs. This includes services tailored to support migrants and people from multicultural backgrounds.

I understand from the minister that Afri-Aus Care has placed over 330 culturally diverse jobseekers into employment, helping many to grow their confidence, develop new skills, engage in community life and secure employment, which is an amazing achievement. I commend this achievement, and I commend the Allan Labor government's commitment to creating new job opportunities and more opportunities for all Victorians of all backgrounds. I hope the minister can join me in visiting this amazing local organisation, and I look forward to her response.

Tomorrow Today a Foundation for Rural Community Development

Annabelle CLEELAND (Euroa) (19:05): (463) My adjournment this evening is for the Minister for Education, and the action I seek is for the minister to publicly confirm funding the Tomorrow Today foundation in Benalla for at least the next three calendar years. The Department of Education recommends recurrent funding in the next budget, and the community are calling for recurrent funding, so it is time the minister act. Tomorrow Today is driving transformative change in the region, addressing intergenerational disadvantage and supporting more than 1500 children and families annually. There is no debate over their credentials and positive impact in our community. Just recently they were recommended at the Victorian Early Years Awards for a program that addresses gaps in the pre-literacy and pre-numeracy skills of preschool-age children to ensure Benalla's children are ready to learn when they start school.

I would like to list a few of the real changes that we are seeing in our region thanks to their remarkable work. Since 2018 Benalla has seen a decrease of 9.9 per cent in the number of children who are considered developmentally vulnerable at school commencement. The community achieved 100 per cent completion rates for year 12 in both 2021 and 2022. There has been an increase in the proportion of young people who go on to employment and a decrease of 19 per cent in the proportion of disengaged people aged 15 to 24 years. There has been a dramatic reduction in the levels of child vulnerability in Benalla and improvements in school preparedness, communication skills and social competence.

You can listen to those who participate in Tomorrow Today's programs to learn more about how important they are to the local community. Bree Kotvas, the mother of young child Samuel in the foundation's parents early education partnership, said one of the things Samuel has really progressed

in is dealing with his own emotional competence. Star, a student that was part of the hands-on program, said she learned how to build and grow her skills. Sarah, in the same program, said she had grown more confident to reach out and speak and have her own voice through the program.

To finish, I want to thank Rosie Koop, the outgoing CEO, for her continued advocacy in the role. She is truly an inspiration, and it has been a pleasure to work with her and advocate alongside her. While it is incredibly sad to see such an important figure departing from the foundation, I welcome incoming CEO Jodie Fleming, who I have no doubt will be a force in our community. Long-term funding will help Tomorrow Today increase its impact in our community and continue to deliver positive change for those who need it. While the growth thanks to Tomorrow Today has been absolutely incredible, Benalla is still very much a work in progress, and I implore the minister to continue to back this essential service and support his department's endorsement of such a life-changing program.

Narre Warren South school cleaning

Gary MAAS (Narre Warren South) (19:07): (464) The adjournment matter I wish to raise is for the attention of the Minister for Education, and it concerns our school cleaners. The action that I seek is that the minister provide more information on how the state government is improving conditions for school cleaners in my electorate of Narre Warren South. There are 14 government schools in my electorate, where school cleaners play a crucial role in maintaining clean and healthy working and learning environments for students, teachers and staff. The state government's Victorian school cleaning review working group has now completed its comprehensive review to ensure all government schools receive consistent high-quality cleaning services, and we all know that our school cleaners work hard and deserve respect. They are indeed an integral part of our community.

For many years I have been a strong advocate for the efforts of our school cleaners, particularly the efforts of their union, the United Workers Union, as well as the Australian Education Union and the Parenthood, who have been really terrific over the last few years in bringing together all the various stakeholders, including parents, teachers, principals, cleaners and members of Parliament, to address the wages and conditions of school cleaners.

I know that the Allan Labor government is focused on reducing casualisation and insecure work and providing school cleaners with great levels of job certainty, training and support, and I acknowledge what this government has done to stamp out wage theft and poor labour hire practices. So it is this government that will keep striving to provide the cleanest schools possible while supporting school cleaners and the work that they do. I would appreciate if the minister could provide more information on how the state government is improving conditions for school cleaners in my electorate, and I look forward to sharing the minister's response with my community.

Road safety

Brad BATTIN (Berwick) (19:09): (465) My adjournment is for the Premier. The action I seek is the reinstatement of the roads and road safety committee, and here is the reason why:

I am writing this sitting in a bedroom with dirty clothes on the floor, an unmade bed, six drinking glasses lined up on the bedside table, an empty KFC box next to the glasses, wardrobe doors left open and a row of skateboards leaning on the wall – it is a mess and it's perfect. This is where 101 lived.

101 arrived on the 28th of April 2005 and changed our lives forever. The last of five – he was different. Cheeky, intense and funny – a lovable ratbag from the moment he could talk. He was as frustrating as hell, but he was also the kid who would look after others, befriend the lonely, and help those who were struggling.

Intensity shone through as 101 committed to each new passion – Lego, BBL, scooters, footy, cricket, basketball, surfing, downhill, Fortnite and his skateboard – it was all or nothing and it was always all.

101 hated cheese because his brother did. He was a master of the airfryer, the nutrabullet and the steamer. He loved his mum's curried sausages but he didn't know where the dishwasher was.

His favourite pastime was pushing mum's buttons – although a different name is on his birth certificate, "f** off Charlie" was what you would hear most in our house, followed closely by "put a shirt on" and "take your hat off at the table".

101 loved footy. He loved the Cats, he played 100 games for the Mitcham Hawks, then the Jets, the Goody Saints, the Camels and Westies, he just wanted to play and be part of the team.

It was 101 who taught us you can't shower unless you have your bluetooth speaker fully cranked so mum and dad can't hear themselves talk in the kitchen. 101 never wanted for soap, shampoo or shavers – someone else in the house always has it – even a used towel!

His enthusiasm for school saw no bounds – except start time and school work. But his enthusiasm for his family and his mates was real.

101 has a circle of friends the rest of us could only dream about. He loved his mates and they loved him. His friends' parents liked having 101 in their homes. He was mates with his brother's mates. Living with him meant waking up on weekend to four or five extra bodies in spare beds and on couches. It meant the family garage being transformed into a man cave where things parents did not know about (or probably permit) could happen.

The only time we saw 101 truly angry was when he was forced to cut his precious hair for his sister's wedding in 2021. He never went back to a hairdresser again.

Being 101's alarm clock was a role his mum and I took up when he left school and started his apprenticeship. "Get up mate, "get up mate", "mate, get up", "are you not going to work today?", followed by "drive safely and don't speed" becoming the morning mantra.

101 thrived at work, he loved working, loved his job and he idolised his boss. It meant he had money for TA Tuesdays and Wednesday Wings at the Feathers.

101 was adored by the sausage dogs Gracie and Zoe, who would sneak into his bed at night.

On a good day, we would be lucky to see 101 for half an hour between him getting home from work and heading out with his mates, but it was enough.

101 is Charlie Hinchliffe Stevens – Charlie, Charlie boy, Chas, Links, Steve. You have lived life and gave so much to so many. You were a force of nature and we will never forget your beautiful, cheeky, disarming smile.

Son, brother, grandson, uncle, nephew, cousin, friend, workmate, team mate. So much more than just a number on a tragic tally.

And we have got 260 of those here in Victoria, where there are actually names and lives behind the numbers on the road toll here in Victoria.

Chelsea Australian Garden, Olinda

Daniela DE MARTINO (Monbulk) (19:12): (466) My adjournment matter is for the Minister for Environment, and the action I seek is that the minister join me in my electorate to visit the Chelsea Australian Garden in Olinda to discuss priorities for the full realisation of the Olinda precinct plan.

This stunning botanic garden made possible through a \$3.8 million investment from the Allan Labor government along with a \$2.2 million investment from the federal government and \$340,000 raised by the People and Parks Foundation stands as a remarkable achievement in environmental stewardship. Built from the ground up on a section of the former Olinda golf course, this expansive garden supports biodiversity and habitat creation for native plants and wildlife. Its features include a cascading waterfall and billabong, winding paths leading to remarkable vistas and a towering waratah sculpture standing at an impressive 9 metres high. With over 15,000 plants representing more than 400 native Australian species planted across various microclimates, this garden promises hours of exploration for garden enthusiasts. It is a living, breathing testament to the original Australian Garden exhibit created by designer Phillip Johnson, horticulturalist Wes Fleming and the Trailfinders team, which made history by winning gold and best in show at the London Royal Horticultural Society Chelsea Flower Show 10 years ago, in 2013.

This project is just part of the \$11 million investment to deliver the Olinda precinct plan. Already we have seen the completion of a new sporting oval and nature-based playscape, and further upgraded visitor and sporting facilities are in the pipeline. This garden is the flagship of Victoria's great gardens and shows the importance of sustaining such green spaces for the wellbeing of our community. Therefore I respectfully request the minister's presence and participation in this visit to the Chelsea gardens at Olinda.

Shepparton bypass

Kim O'KEEFFE (Shepparton) (19:14): (467) My adjournment matter is for the Minister for Transport Infrastructure, and the action I seek is that the minister meet with me and the Greater Shepparton City Council to discuss the future of the Shepparton bypass. This would be an opportunity for the minister to see the design of stage 1 of the Shepparton bypass and to come to the region to get an understanding of the desperate need for this critical project for the region.

On 16 November the federal infrastructure minister released findings of the federal government infrastructure review announcing that stage 1 of the Shepparton bypass project funding would be removed. \$208 million had been committed by the former federal coalition government. The Victorian government already committed \$10.2 million of taxpayer money in the 2017–18 Victorian budget for early works and finalisation of the business case, and the 2023–24 Victorian budget allocated \$1 million for planning of the Shepparton bypass and improving links to Shepparton. This is an active project that the state government have supported and financially committed to.

It was outstanding to hear the federal infrastructure minister state the project has not demonstrated merit. This is astounding also considering 25 per cent of the state's trucks are registered in the Greater Shepparton region and the Shepparton region is the only major regional city across the state that does not have a bypass. We are one of the largest and most successful agriculture, manufacturing and industry suppliers, with both national and global success. I would have also thought that community safety would have been a merit. We have a constant convoy of trucks belting through the CBDs of Shepparton and Mooroopna and vehicles having to navigate daily on a primitive, unsafe road network.

Having lobbied for the bypass for more than three decades as a community priority project and seen how critical the need was during the October 2022 floods, when our only river crossing was shut down, disconnecting the towns of Shepparton and Mooroopna – which was also raised by many in the flood inquiry – the local council have the Shepparton bypass as a community priority project. It is critical the minister has a full understanding of the importance of stage 1 of the Shepparton bypass, and again I ask the minister to meet with me and the Greater Shepparton City Council.

Better Health Network, Parkdale

Tim RICHARDSON (Mordialloc) (19:16): (468) My adjournment this evening is to the Minister for Health Infrastructure and Minister for Health, and the action I seek is for the minister to join me at the Central Bayside Community Health Services site, which is now the Better Health Network, in Parkdale to officially open the new building upgrades as part of the Metropolitan Health Infrastructure Fund investment. Central Bayside Community Health has for more than 30 years supported our local community. It started in humble beginnings in a converted church out the back of Mentone and is now a service that provides support for our community in their tens of thousands.

I want to acknowledge some of the people that have contributed to that story. The former member for Mentone and Heatherton Peter Spyker, who was a former minister in this place, and his family have done an extraordinary amount of work for Central Bayside Community Health. Another person well known to this chamber, Janice Munt, a former Parliamentary Secretary for Health and member for Mordialloc, who is a wonderful community representative, is now the chair of Better Health Network, which came together when Central Bayside Community Health, Star and Connect merged together to make sure that they could support so many more in our community and really bring together their expertise. The metropolitan health fund's journey started before that merger but has continued under the Better Health Network's leadership.

It was former minister Martin Foley who joined me to make that announcement with our federal member Mark Dreyfus at the time – a \$2.7 million investment that would provide new multi-use rooms, better waiting areas and telehealth-enabled rooms and, importantly, a patient therapy and wellbeing space to make sure people could access that critical support they need. There are GP services, support for our communities – our disability communities as well – and dental as well as a critical frame. One

of the first things I did as a member for Parliament was with former Minister for Health Jill Hennessy, where we gave over investment for eight dental chairs. Public dental health is so critical. Those are just some of the things that Central Bayside is known for and has done for so long.

I had the opportunity to host Minister Thomas, the Minister for Health and Minister for Health Infrastructure, recently during progress upgrades and works and to check out the progress with the CEO of Better Health Network Damian Ferrie, who does an extraordinary job leading Better Health Network. Catching up with them recently to hear their plans around mental health and wellbeing and investment in our community was really inspiring. They are doing some really state-leading if not nation-leading work, and now those works are concluded, the benefit that this will provide to the City of Kingston region will be outstanding. So I am really looking forward to having the minister there to join Damian Ferrie, the CEO, and the chair Janice Munt to celebrate another milestone in Central Bayside and now Better Health Network's storied past and really exciting future.

Warrnambool boat ramp

Roma BRITNELL (South-West Coast) (19:19): (469) My adjournment manner is for the Minister for Outdoor Recreation, and I ask the minister to visit the Warrnambool boat ramp site and see for himself the logistics of the ramp and speak with the commercial and recreational fishers who are unhappy with the new boat ramp, which has proved often to be unusable. Minister, your government has spent millions upgrading the boat ramp after many years of advocacy by commercial and recreational users. Dangerous surges often cause boats to be damaged and people's safety to be put at risk.

Unfortunately the local boat ramp users tell me that not only has this problem not been addressed but a new problem has developed, where sand is now being deposited at the bottom of the boat ramp, rendering it useless, particularly at low tide. I am told also by the older and disabled members of the community that the boat ramp design makes it inaccessible for them as a ladder must be used to access their boats. I find it quite odd that they have included a ladder to access the boats, because many of the boat users are retired and over 50, and in this day and age you are not supposed to climb a ladder after 50.

Commercial fishers have advised me that due to the inability to launch their boats on a regular basis they must seek out alternative boat ramps to launch. This is a great loss to the Warrnambool economy and a great disappointment after such an investment. At a time when we should be growing our visits to the region to recover from the pandemic, we should be celebrating such an asset and having everyone talk about it for the right reasons. Unfortunately that is not the case. It is such a waste of Victorian taxpayers money, but additionally the local council are left to deal with the silting up of the boat ramp and on a regular basis have to pay to engage an excavator to dig out the bottom of the ramp. This is just another example of this government's utilisation of taxpayer funds so poorly that the council are actually left with the extra cost due to the government's mismanagement and cost-shifting approach. The ratepayers of Warrnambool are rightfully angry. Surely the state government is obligated, people say to me, to pick up the cost of this maintenance that has been created by the poor design approved by the state government, not a decision by the local council.

Concerningly, this is not an issue isolated to Warrnambool. During my shadow visits to coastal regions and waterways around Victoria I received similar complaints all over the state, the most recent being the example of the Cowes boat ramp. Recently this boat ramp was launched by the state government. Two million dollars was invested in upgrading the Cowes boat ramp, but users tell me the outcome is no different and in some situations is worse than before, due to the silting up of the bottom of the ramp. So I ask the minister to come to the community of Warrnambool and share with the fisher community the plan to address this. I am told a number have tried to make contact with the department but have not had any response, so we would like to see the minister come and have a look for himself.

Small Business Bus

John MULLAHY (Glen Waverley) (19:22): (470) My adjournment matter is for the Minister for Small Business. The action I seek is for the minister to visit the Glen Waverley district to see the Small Business Bus when it visits Brentford Square in Forest Hill in December. The Small Business Bus is a great service run by the Victorian government. The buses travel to locations all over Victoria, from metropolitan Melbourne to the regions, providing support and advice for our small local businesses. Partnering with the professional services training organisation the Monarch Institute, businesses have the opportunity to climb aboard and receive one-on-one and confidential advice. Furthermore, people wanting to establish their own small business can receive advice on how to start and build their business. People are also able to walk in and receive broader information on the support services provided by Business Victoria. It is great to see the Allan Labor government doing the work to support small businesses in Victoria. As someone who used to run a small business, I know just how important these government programs are in setting up a small business for success.

With the Christmas holidays coming up, now is the perfect time to support your local businesses. From buying unique gifts for loved ones to buying produce for the festive celebrations, our local businesses have plenty to offer. In my electorate we have so many small businesses, from Vermont to Glen Waverley, that provide excellent customer service and products. I will be shopping locally this Christmas, and I encourage my constituents to do the same. Furthermore, I know that shopping during the season can be stressful, but remember it does not cost a single dollar to be kind to the workers in the retail, hospitality and service industries. Nobody deserves to be abused by customers at work, and kindness is the best gift that you can give.

I am looking forward to the Small Business Bus visiting Brentford Square on 7 and 8 December – the 8th is the second day that got booked in because of how popular it was for 7 December. So I hope the minister can join me when the bus stops in my district.

Responses

Anthony CARBINES (Ivanhoe – Minister for Police, Minister for Crime Prevention, Minister for Racing) (19:24): I am pleased to follow up on several matters for members, including the honourable member for Bulleen, who addressed a matter to the Minister for Planning about apartment buildings in Bulleen, particularly defects at 168 Manningham Road on the corner of Thompsons Road, and flooding and drainage issues. He is seeking action from the minister in relation to the building commission investigating the status of those matters and complaints from residents, as well as investigations of the building surveyor and others. I will refer those matters to the Minister for Planning.

The member for Clarinda raised a matter for the Minister for Employment, particularly seeking that the minister join him on a visit to Afri-Aus Care in his district to see the work they do in the local community. I know the member for Clarinda is a strong advocate for that community work locally and will welcome a visit from the Minister for Employment.

The member for Euroa raised a matter for the Minister for Education, in particular seeking confirmation of funding for Tomorrow Today in Benalla and the great work that they do for young children and families in her community, including new CEO Jodi Fleming. I will request that of the Minister for Education.

The member for Narre Warren South did raise a matter for the Minister for Education, particularly around our schools, and the action he sought was around the conditions for school cleaners in his electorate and the high-quality cleaning work that is being done. The Allan Labor government has done much work around inquiries into labour-hire practices in supporting cleaners. As we all know, in our schools they are the hardest working people. They may not be teaching our kids, but they make sure that our students and our teachers have appropriate and clean facilities to work in. We need to make sure that our school cleaners are supported – not only that our principals are supported to be able to resource them to effectively do their job but that they also understand that the employment practices

need to meet particular standards in the community. And we know that had been a struggle, until it was held accountable by the former minister and former Deputy Premier, the former member for Monbulk, who led a lot of this work previously. I will certainly raise those matters on behalf of the member for Narre Warren South, who has provided advocacy for both those union members and also the many cleaners in our community who do great work but need the support of the government and the Department of Education to be appropriately resourced to do that work, not just through their pay packets but through their rights in the workplace.

The member for Berwick raised a matter for the Premier, in particular about the reinstatement of the road and road safety committee here in the Parliament. He did go on to cite a matter that I am very familiar with in relation to Commissioner Grant Stevens, the Commissioner of Police in South Australia, and the very significant loss of his son Charlie. I do commend the heartfelt words as relayed by the member for Berwick.

We had a Police Ministers Council meeting last week and we did reflect also our condolences on behalf of the Parliament and the people of Victoria, not only to the South Australian chief commissioner for the loss of his son – and, as the member for Berwick mentioned, the road toll here in Victoria is heading toward 300, sadly, and that is nothing to be proud of – but also more broadly on the loss of a member in the line of duty in much the same week in South Australia. It has been a very tragic and difficult time. But it is a reflection too – as in the chief commissioner’s reflections on the loss of his son – that the road toll touches us all, regardless of state borders, and of the desire that we all have to bring everything to bear to reduce the trauma and the toll here in our own state.

The member for Monbulk raised a matter for the Minister for Environment, and the action that she sought was that the minister join her at the Chelsea Gardens in Olinda to look at further plans and investment that are possible there. I will commend this matter to the minister.

The member for Shepparton raised a matter for the Minister for Transport Infrastructure seeking in particular that the minister meet with her and the Greater Shepparton City Council in relation to the Shepp bypass, a very significant issue in her electorate, where government funds have been committed, and she will be keen to see how that matter can be progressed.

The member for Mordialloc raised a matter for the Minister for Health Infrastructure seeking that the minister join him at the Central Bayside Community Health Service for the opening of new building upgrades, which I am sure have been part of the great advocacy of the member for Mordialloc. He touched on what a great history of service the Central Bayside Community Health Service has provided to his community and the advocacy of those who have gone before him in Mordialloc, particularly former members the Honourable Peter Spyker and Janice Munt.

The member for South-West Coast raised a matter for the Minister for Outdoor Recreation in regard to the Warrnambool boat ramp – the renovations and infrastructure works that have been done there. There are some concerns from locals in relation to how those works have affected them and whether they are fit for purpose. I will be sure to pass on those matters to the Minister for Outdoor Recreation.

The member for Glen Waverley raised a matter for the Minister for Small Business seeking that the minister join him in the Glen Waverley electorate to see the great works of the Small Business Bus, providing services and support to small businesses in his electorate. I was pleased to join the member for Glen Waverley at the police academy just last Friday to welcome the new complement of recruits, our protective services officers that graduated last Friday in his electorate. It was great to join him there to congratulate and welcome those new PSOs, who serve and protect our community in Victoria, and we wish them well.

The DEPUTY SPEAKER: The house now stands adjourned until tomorrow morning. Stay classy, Victoria.

House adjourned 7:31 pm.