



Hansard

LEGISLATIVE ASSEMBLY

60th Parliament

Wednesday 29 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

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Wednesday 29 November 2023

The SPEAKER (Maree Edwards) took the chair at 9:33 am, read the prayer and made an acknowledgement of country.

Rulings from the Chair

Public galleries

The SPEAKER (09:34): The Manager of Opposition Business raised a point of order yesterday about access to the public galleries. Members will remember that last sitting week following disruptive behaviour in the galleries I directed that they be closed to everyone but passholders and their guests for the rest of the year. It is my intention that the galleries will return to normal operation next year.

Bill briefings

The SPEAKER (09:34): The Manager of Opposition Business also raised a point of order about the availability of briefings on bills from ministers' departments. Outside the specific requirements for a briefing under standing order 61(3)(b) there is no mention of bill briefings in the standing orders. Therefore the availability, timeliness or quality of bill briefings outside standing order 61 are not a matter for the Speaker to rule on. Therefore I rule the point of order out of order.

Announcements

Photography in chamber

The SPEAKER (09:35): I advise the house that I have given approval for a photographer to take photographs from the public gallery and the advisers seats on each side of the chamber during question time today. Photographs will be used by the Parliament for community engagement purposes.

Petitions

Latrobe Valley police resources

Martin CAMERON (Morwell) presented a petition bearing 872 signatures:

The Petition of certain citizens of the State of Victoria draws to the attention of the Legislative Assembly the rise of anti-social and violent behaviour at shopping centres, bus and train terminals, and in the Central Business Districts of Morwell, Moe, Traralgon and Churchill, endangering traders and the broader community.

The petitioners therefore request that the Legislative Assembly calls on the State Government to increase Police and Protective Services Officer resources across the Latrobe Valley as a matter of urgency.

Ordered that petition be considered tomorrow.

Documents

Consumer Policy Research Centre

Report 2022–23

Gabrielle WILLIAMS (Dandenong – Minister for Government Services, Minister for Consumer Affairs, Minister for Public and Active Transport) (09:36): I table, by leave, the Consumer Policy Research Centre report 2022–23.

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

Auditor-General – Contractors and Consultants in the Victorian Public Service: Spending – Ordered to be published

Australian Criminal Intelligence Commission – Report 2022–23 under s 31 of the *Crimes (Assumed Identities) Act 2004*

Fire Services Implementation Monitor – Report 2022–23

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

Casey – C275

Manningham – GC231

South Gippsland – GC231

Southern Grampians – GC231

Subordinate Legislation Act 1994 – Documents under s 15 in relation to statutory rules 113, 114, 122

Special Investigator, Office of – Report 2022–23 under s 30L of the *Surveillance Devices Act 1999*

Victoria Police:

Report 2021–22 under s 139A of the *Confiscation Act 1997*

Report 2022–23 under s 139A of the *Confiscation Act 1997*

Report 2022–23 under s 31 of the *Crimes (Assumed Identities) Act 2004*

Report 2022–23 under s 42BI of the *Evidence (Miscellaneous Provisions) Act 1958*

Report 2022–23 under s 37F of the *Terrorism (Community Protection) Act 2003*

Yarra River Protection (Wilip-gin Birrarung murrnong) Act 2017:

Burndap Birrarung Burndap Umarkoo: Yarra Strategic Plan 2022–23

Report on the implementation of Burndap Birrarung Burndap Umarkoo: Yarra Strategic Plan 2022–23.

Bills**Corrections Amendment (Parole Reform) Bill 2023***Council's agreement*

The SPEAKER (09:37): I have received a message from the Legislative Council agreeing to the Corrections Amendment (Parole Reform) Bill 2023 without amendment.

Business of the house**Standing and sessional orders**

Ellen SANDELL (Melbourne) (09:38): I desire to move, by leave:

That so much of standing and sessional orders be suspended to allow general business, notice of motion 15 relating to the reintroduction of non-government business time, to be moved immediately.

Leave refused.

Members statements**Diwali and Annakut**

Lily D'AMBROSIO (Mill Park – Minister for Climate Action, Minister for Energy and Resources, Minister for the State Electricity Commission) (09:38): I rise today to speak about my recent visit to the BAPS Shri Swaminarayan Mandir in Mill Park to celebrate Diwali and Annakut. I attended representing the Premier and the Minister for Multicultural Affairs, alongside the member for

Thomastown, the member for Yan Yean and Bernadene Voss, the CEO of Big Group Hug. The Annakut, meaning ‘a mountain of food’, was beautifully presented as a spiritual offering with hundreds of hours of work put in by the community, and children especially, to make this very special occasion possible. As part of this year’s celebration the BAPS donated 50 prams to the Big Group Hug, items that have been in high demand in recent times. This was an amazing display of generosity from the BAPS and symbolises perfectly the victory of good over evil. Thanks to the BAPS committee for extending an invitation and allowing me to be part of this important spiritual day. A particular mention to Pulin Amin and Shital Patel.

Whittlesea early parenting centre

Lily D’AMBROSIO (Mill Park – Minister for Climate Action, Minister for Energy and Resources, Minister for the State Electricity Commission) (09:39): I would also like to mention my recent visit to the new Whittlesea early parenting centre in South Morang alongside the Minister for Health. Starting to take its first parents and bubs in December, the centre will have 10 residential family units and four day-stay places. The centre will give more specialised support to mums, dads and caregivers in the Mill Park electorate and the wider City of Whittlesea. The centre is part of the Allan Labor government’s commitment to investing \$148 million in expanding the early parenting service network, including 12 new and upgraded early parenting centres.

Warracknabeal ambulance station

Emma KEALY (Lowan) (09:40): I would like to raise a matter for the Minister for Health. I recently met with Melanie Bentley and Nick Powell at the Warracknabeal ambulance station, and they gave me a look around. It was very concerning to see what environment our volunteer clinical support officers are working under – our paramedics and all of the supporters, the ambulance auxiliary – in that work environment of the Warracknabeal ambulance station. There are structural issues. There has been a mouse plague in there; mice have got into the sheets and other linen that they use in the ambulances. We have also had an issue where there is no women’s change room in there. With the shower you cannot open the door without squeezing through; it is harder for larger people to get in there. And you actually have to take the ambulances out into the rain on the driveway to refill their consumable supplies. While there was a plan circulated about five years ago in which the government committed to rebuild the Warracknabeal ambulance station, it has since gone silent. I therefore ask the minister to ensure that that funding that was promised is delivered to the Warracknabeal community.

Dunkeld Arboretum public toilet facilities

Emma KEALY (Lowan) (09:41): I raise a matter for the Minister for Environment. The Dunkeld Public Lands Committee are looking for permission to build public toilets at the Dunkeld Arboretum. They already have funding from the Bendigo Bank, the community bank, and they also have funding from the community. They just need permission, and I ask the minister to address that.

Felicitations

Emma KEALY (Lowan) (09:41): Finally, I would like to thank my wonderful staff in my electorate office for all of their support over the year. To Wendy, Helen, Sara, Arlene and Carly, who has been on maternity leave, thank you so much for everything you do for our community.

St Albans electorate schools

Natalie SULEYMAN (St Albans – Minister for Veterans, Minister for Small Business, Minister for Youth) (09:41): It is all about education and local schools this week in my electorate of St Albans. I want to thank Holy Eucharist Primary School, St Mary MacKillop, Sacred Heart primary school and St Paul’s Kealba Catholic primary school, who have supported over 90 students to participate in the annual St Albans Christmas card competition. It was extremely difficult to choose the winners. All designs were unique in every way, and they really reflect the spirit of Christmas. I am very proud today to announce: Isabelle, first prize, Selena, second prize and Alexa, third prize, from Holy Eucharist

Primary School; Ivy, first prize; Charbel, second prize and Denise, third prize, from St Mary MacKillop Primary School; Henry, first prize, Merya, second prize, and Yana, third prize, from Sacred Heart primary school; and Emelia, first prize, Cheryl, second prize and Georgia, third prize, from St Paul's Kealba primary school. The first prize winners' designs are included in this year's Christmas cards for St Albans. Thank you to all of the teachers, principals and students for participating in this fantastic competition.

Felicitations

Natalie SULEYMAN (St Albans – Minister for Veterans, Minister for Small Business, Minister for Youth) (09:42): I want to take the opportunity to thank my electorate staff but also the community of St Albans. I want to take the opportunity to wish everyone a merry Christmas and a very happy, healthy and safe new year.

Country Fire Authority Healesville brigade

Cindy McLEISH (Eildon) (09:43): I recently attended the Healesville CFA annual awards night, which saw recognition of the service and effort contributed by so many of their members, who I also wish to acknowledge. Congratulations go out to Tony Scheaffe and Kyle Smith for 15-year, Damien Beeby for 30-year and Faye Bates for 35-year service awards; also to Darren Adams, Damien Beeby, Brian Earl, Ken Edmunds, Zac Lockwood, Doug Marriott, Cliff Overton, Allan Bryant, Ron Poole, Graham Bates, Ken Glenn and Robin Jeffcott for their national medals and clasps; and, finally, to William Poppins with his national emergency clasp. The highlight of the night, though, was the former long-serving brigade captain Graham Bates having one of the brigade trucks named in his honour. Truck, also known as the BPOS, was a great source of amusement to all. Congratulations to Graham.

Foggy Mountain Music and Arts Festival

Cindy McLEISH (Eildon) (09:43): The Foggy Mountain Music and Arts Festival is promoted as three days of country, bluegrass, folk, art, bush dancing competitions, hot rods and more in Kinglake. It provided a wonderful range of art demonstrations and concerts spread across the community centre, the Songbird Cafe and Larder and John and Helen's Kinglake Pub. There was something for everyone on offer, including the Kinglake art show. I particularly enjoyed the community concert. Talented locals David and Merelyn Carter, aka Carter and Carter, worked with the students at Flowerdale, Toolangi, Strathewen, Middle Kinglake, Kinglake West and Kinglake primary schools to write and produce their own songs and then sing them at the concert. It is such a wonderful initiative, and I congratulate them.

Perridak Burron Early Learning Centre

Michaela SETTLE (Eureka) (09:44): I rise to share some fantastic news from my region. At the recent 2023 early years awards Perridak Burron Early Learning Centre was recognised as one of Victoria's very best educators. The centre won the inaugural Aunty Rose Bamblett Koorie award for services focused on Indigenous perspectives and learning and amplifying Aboriginal voices. Aunty Rose Bamblett was a proud Yorta Yorta and Wiradjuri woman. Aunty Rose was an incredible woman who led Koori early childhood education programs and left an indelible legacy for early years services and educators, and it is fitting that the inaugural award was won by our wonderful Perridak Burron Early Learning Centre, a centre that keeps Koori culture at its heart. I visited the centre last week to celebrate this achievement with the staff and their gorgeous students. This centre, owned and operated by Ballarat and District Aboriginal Co-operative, is a remarkable space for kids. It was evident from the big grins on the children's faces and their excitement as they learned and played that this is an early childhood service which many can and should learn from. It was marvellous to see Indigenous culture integrated into education, from the native gardens to the art on the walls. This centre provides an incredibly nurturing and educational environment for children to play and learn. I want to give my heartfelt congratulations to the centre's staff and – (*Time expired*)

Beaumaris Primary School

Brad ROWSWELL (Sandringham) (09:46): I rise to speak on two matters today. Firstly, the Beaumaris Primary School fete was held just couple of weeks ago, and I took my daughter Abigail and son Charlie to that fete. It was magnificent. They had a great time. If they were here standing in this place right now, they would tell every member of the house just how wonderful the Beaumaris Primary School fete was. They loved the rides, they loved the clowns and they loved the big swings and the big slides, and it cost Daddy a packet. But there you go – all in the name of supporting a great local primary school.

Child sexual abuse

Brad ROWSWELL (Sandringham) (09:46): I also want to raise a much more serious matter, and that is on the back of a call from the In Good Faith Foundation – it was National Survivors' Day yesterday – for the current inquiry into sexual abuse that occurred within Beaumaris Primary School and connected to Beaumaris Primary School to be expanded to include all Victorian government primary schools. The reality is that the sexual abuse that took place within my community, in a state school, is but the tip of the iceberg. The reality is that this is a sin, a stain on our state's history, that has affected every corner of the state. To simply say that this happened just in my community is an absolute furphy, and the government should immediately move, based on evidence given by the Secretary to the Department of Education just 10 days ago to the inquiry, to expand the inquiry to include every government school in the state of Victoria.

Parole reform

Paul EDBROOKE (Frankston) (09:47): The Corrections Amendment (Parole Reform) Bill 2023, recently introduced into the Victorian Parliament by the Allan Labor government, has now unanimously passed Parliament and is soon to receive royal assent and be enshrined in law, meaning that the Frankston serial killer will never be released from jail. The legislation, known as Nat's law, gives the independent Adult Parole Board of Victoria the powers to restrict repeat applications for parole in cases where offenders do not meet the threshold required to be granted the privilege of reintegrating themselves into the community. Our community now has an added safeguard against very serious offenders, such as multiple murderers, murderer-rapists and child murderers. Consultation with the community and victims' families has ensured that these laws reflect community expectations, and I wish to thank everybody in my community that has contributed to this work, because we have required that kind of consultation to have this robust legislation. To the Russell family – Brian, Carmel, Karen, Lisa and Janine – your enduring patience and advice have been paramount in bringing forth these changes in legislation. Nat's law honours both the advocacy of victims' families and the legacies of Natalie Russell, Elizabeth Stevens and Debbie Fream by ensuring people who belong in prison stay in prison, and that has been the overwhelming message that my community and many people in Victoria outside the Frankston community have sent us over the last year. This Parliament has listened, and we have acted on that advice, of course with the advice of people in the justice sector and survivor-victims' families as well.

Traralgon festivals

Martin CAMERON (Morwell) (09:49): Diwali, the festival of lights, hit Traralgon across the weekend, and it was fantastic to be able to attend and enjoy the culture that our Indian community provides – and do they know how to party. There was cultural dancing and also music being played, and at the end they put on a Bollywood extravaganza, which was off the charts. So congratulations to everybody that put that on. It ended up with fireworks also.

On Sunday the Traralgon Christmas parade was on, and it was the first time that I have participated in it. I have been in many a year to watch the floats and everyone go past. I am pleased to say that we overwhelmed – and I do apologise to the parents – the children with a grotesque amount of lollies. I

apologise to all the parents that had to take their kids home on the Sunday – they would have been running around and running amok.

Women's National Basketball League

Martin CAMERON (Morwell) (09:50): Also the WNBL hit Traralgon on Sunday, Melbourne Boomers versus the University of Canberra Capitals. A couple of special mentions: Mon Conti, who won the AFLW best and fairest award this year, played for Melbourne Boomers, but we were all there to see Traralgon's very own Jade Melbourne play for the Canberra Capitals, and did she turn it on. Well done to Jade.

Footscray electorate achievements

Katie HALL (Footscray) (09:50): As we wrap up 2023 I would like to take this opportunity to thank everyone in my community for another terrific year. We are very excited, locally, that we are delivering in health, education and transport. Most importantly the new Footscray Hospital, the \$1.5 billion investment in world-class health care, has topped out this year. The fit-out of the hospital will now commence, and it is on track to open in 2025. I am also really excited that progress is underway on getting next-generation trams for my electorate. We are well on the way to delivering the Metro Tunnel, which will also open in 2025, and the West Gate Tunnel, which will take 9000 trucks off local roads in my community every day. We are well on our way with the Footscray City Primary School upgrade, and I have been able to deliver on election commitments for the Shorten Reserve upgrade – the kids there will be very excited that they will not have to run up the hill anymore when we flatten out that oval – and of course Footscray West Primary School's new gymnasium. I would like to also take this opportunity to thank my amazing electorate staff, who work so hard for our community in Footscray.

St Columba's Primary School, Elwood

James NEWBURY (Brighton) (09:52): St Columba's Primary School year 6 students recently showcased their Sharing the Planet exhibition, a culmination of the primary International Baccalaureate program. The projects explored topics of personal importance. Congratulations to Antonino, Bette, Botao, Clementine, Elle, Eloise, Harry, Immy, Juno, Kaede, Keira, Kirk, Leandra, Luna, Milana, Nathan, Nick, Olivia, Ollie, Paras, Pilvi, Pippa, Quentin, Scarlett, Sidney, Sophie and Tyler. You are all inspirational.

Holloway Bend Scout group

James NEWBURY (Brighton) (09:52): Bayside is a powerhouse for scouting, with eight local groups, including the 1st/14th Brighton, Hampton and 1st Elwood. The scouting family is getting bigger with the formation of a new group at Holloway Bend in Brighton. The formation was announced by district commissioner Reece Shaw at the recent Bayside report and award presentation, Bay Rap. Congratulations and good luck to the new scouting group in Bayside.

Bayside Art Show

James NEWBURY (Brighton) (09:52): This year Bayside celebrates the 50th anniversary of the Bayside Art Show. This show was first held in 1971 in support of the Brighton Recreational Centre, and other than during COVID it has been held since. Over 1100 artworks form part of the show, 400 displayed at Brighton town hall with the remainder online. Congratulations to Brighton Rotary event chair Norm Thomas for the event.

Mental health

James NEWBURY (Brighton) (09:53): As the experts predicted, the sting would be in the mental health tail after Victoria's COVID lockdowns. The coroner's annual report shows 10.5 per cent of deaths last year were caused by suicide: 784 deaths, up from 701 previously and 672 the year prior.

The coroner has described it as troubling. Mental health was not taken seriously enough during COVID, and these increases are not being taken seriously enough now.

Deer Park shopping strip

Luba GRIGOROVITCH (Kororoit) (09:53): I stand to speak about a hidden gem in Kororoit, the Deer Park shopping strip, which is located on the corner of Station Road and Ballarat Road. This strip of shops is absolutely a hidden gem: there are restaurants and cafes – it is an example of how vibrant and entrepreneurial our Kororoit community really is. This gem not only shows how strong the local economy is but also our cultural diversity. Along the strip we have the Good Food Bakery, which is a gluten-free bakery, and let me tell you, the bakery is a blessing for those of us with children with a gluten intolerance. We have got the Roxy Kebab shop, and without being completely controversial, I am told that these are the best kebabs in the west, but I am sure I will hear more about that. The Filipino bakery, otherwise known as Cherry's Bake Shop and Cafe, which is run by Marissa and Richard Rico, has delicious traditional Filipino treats. Then there is Chef Lagenda, which serves up amazing laksa, perfect for a rainy Melbourne day like today, a wonderful butcher, an old-school pharmacy with staff who are incredibly attentive, a charcoal chicken shop and then of course there is Pizza Hut, a family-run Pizza Hut chain, owned by my dear friend Niki. There is so much on this Deer Park strip, and it is absolutely crucial that anyone going to Deer Park or Melbourne's west visits this strip.

Kororoit electorate office staff

Luba GRIGOROVITCH (Kororoit) (09:54): Last but not least, I would like to thank the incredible staff at my electorate office. To JB, Amanda, Rhea, Emily, Jack and of course Lindsay, thank you all so much. It takes a village, and you always there for the community.

Disability inclusion legislation

Gabrielle DE VIETRI (Richmond) (09:55): In the last term of Parliament the Victorian government drafted a disability inclusion bill. Just before the election they went as far as consulting with key groups. Disability advocates, local councils, the health community and legal experts all contributed submissions, sharing their expertise and their lived experience. But since then there has been no sign of the bill – it has been over a year now. This bill would promote inclusion and strengthen rights for the one in five Victorians who are disabled. It would compel government bodies and organisations to do disability impact assessments and disability action plans. It included a proposal for a commissioner for disability inclusion who would make sure that organisations and government departments would be held accountable for disability inclusion, with reporting requirements and consequences for not implementing measures.

The challenges faced by the disabled community are compounded by systemic barriers that non-disabled people just do not have to face. Governments can and should create laws that remove these barriers; I am sure everyone in this chamber agrees. Therefore I implore the government to follow through on their commitment to the disabled community in Victoria and bring the disability inclusion bill to Parliament as soon as possible.

Narre Warren South electorate student leadership awards

Gary MAAS (Narre Warren South) (09:56): Recently I recognised the hard work of inspirational young people who make a significant contribution to their school and also to our community of Narre Warren South. Every year I present the community spirit and leadership awards, which see our local schools nominate our leaders of tomorrow. The recipients have displayed their kindness, enthusiasm, participation, dedication and leadership attributes as well. So for this year I am proud to announce the following winners of my 2023 community spirit and leadership awards: Macey Comer from Hillsmeade Primary School; Harper Neal-Wilson from Strathaird Primary; Isatu Kamara from Hampton Park Primary; Nudara Hassan from River Gum Primary; Lexie Wood from Kilberry Valley Primary; Azzalea Basir from Coral Park Primary; Adrijana Peric from Narre Warren South P-12; Keely Parker from Tulliallan Primary; Tansahib Singh from Lynbrook Primary; James Meier from

Narre Warren South P-12; Elijah Dichoso from Hampton Park Secondary College; and Zoe Baltruschaitis from Lyndhurst Secondary College. I wish to congratulate these very inspirational young people. They are outstanding winners, and they do tremendous work in our community. I thank all the staff and teachers who helped our students this year.

Donvale Christian College

Nicole WERNER (Warrandyte) (09:57): I have had the privilege of meeting with the amazing students and staff at the year 6 class at Donvale Christian College, and I pay tribute to them today. They are watching live from school in Donvale – hello to you all. Since then many bright students have written to me about the issues in our community. Although I cannot raise them all, here are an insightful few. Bethany from Ringwood North raised the intersection of Tortice Drive and Ringwood-Warrandyte Road. To quote her:

The stress of colliding into other cars is more intense than you think, and I'm not even the one driving!

Vivienne wrote to me about the short proximity of school zone signage near her school and across Victoria and emphasised the need for better road signage. In her words:

We need to do this before an accident occurs.

Gabriella from North Warrandyte has addressed one of my top priorities, the threat of bushfires. She rightfully calls for an evacuation plan to prevent potential traffic jams on Kangaroo Ground-Warrandyte Road in the case of bushfire.

Alessandra from Warrandyte has drawn attention to the significant gap in crossings onto Springvale Road from Old Warrandyte Road. She passionately wrote:

Will the government only act once there have been casualties?

Lastly, Meg has highlighted the inadequate bike lanes on Tindals Road, emphasising the need for a segregated bike path on the footpath to ensure the safety of cyclists.

I express my gratitude to Donvale Christian College. It is a wonderful school in my electorate, and I thank the year 6s for their proactive engagement. I will see you guys soon.

David Colgan

Tim RICHARDSON (Mordialloc) (09:59): I rise to acknowledge the life and legacy of David Colgan, who sadly passed away in September. David was a much-loved son, brother and exemplary volunteer of Greater Dandenong SES unit. At this sad and difficult time it is hard to reconcile David's passing, but we are comforted in knowing the positive and lasting impact he had on those privileged to know him and in our wider community.

David had a resilience and determination that many admired. Having been impacted by a golden staph infection at birth, which impacted substantially on his hip, David would be regularly confronting pain and adversity. But he would never let that stop him from chasing his dreams and passions, whether it was becoming a pilot before he was able to drive, enjoying the outdoors with magnificent canoeing trips or, where David shone so brightly, as a dedicated and extraordinary member of Greater Dandenong SES unit.

David would respond to over 150 calls for assistance over a two-year period, and this saw him get the distinguished award of Contributor of the Year in 2022. He was always one of the first volunteers to lead the call of assistance and played a pivotal role in fundraising and community outreach efforts. Through friendship and service, kindness and leadership, our Greater Dandenong SES unit saw in David what his family, friends and community had the privilege of knowing throughout his life. He was a wonderful, caring and generous soul who had so much to give. We extend our gratitude to David and his family and offer our deepest condolences. Vale, David Colgan.

Stephen Lucardie

Kathleen MATTHEWS-WARD (Broadmeadows) (10:01): Today I rise to pay tribute to Mr Stephen Lucardie, a wonderful local principal who is retiring at the end of the year after 30 years of service at Corpus Christi Primary and 42 years of dedicating his life to the teaching of our children – an incredible contribution. Having attended Corpus Christi as a child, I was fortunate to be able to send my daughters there, and amazingly the school uniform has hardly changed since I and former Premier Daniel Andrews went to school there in the 1980s. Stephen is the most humble and compassionate leader, beloved by both staff and the students. It has been a pleasure to work closely with him over the last decade. I have heard so many stories of him showing great personal empathy and incredible generosity to families facing hard times, including many new arrivals. He has changed so many lives for the better through his kindness, and his compassion radiated down through the whole school. Under his leadership Corpus Christi was one of the most inclusive and caring schools in Victoria. The curriculum not just focuses on academic results but also values generosity, gratitude, kindness and resilience. The cool school rules are all about kindness and respect, and I am so grateful to have such a wonderful school for my children and for the families of Glenroy. Thank you, Mr Lucardie, for your years of humble service, your compassion at all times, your kind leadership and all that you have given the children, staff and parish of Corpus Christi.

Fred Davis

Chris COUZENS (Geelong) (10:02): I want to acknowledge the recent passing of Fred Davis, a great friend and mentor. Fred grew up in Richmond when it was a working-class suburb, with 11 siblings. After leaving school he became an apprentice mechanic; however, he went on to study law and eventually became a barrister. Fred had an interesting career as a lawyer working in Victoria, the Northern Territory and Norfolk Island. I had the pleasure of hearing of many of his experiences working in Aboriginal communities. Fred was a long-time member of the ALP and was always there for support and advice. I will miss our chats. He will be greatly missed by his family and friends. Vale, Fred Davis.

Geelong Revival Motoring Festival

Chris COUZENS (Geelong) (10:03): On another matter, the Geelong region was buzzing on the weekend with major events. On the beautiful Geelong waterfront the Geelong car revival supported by the Allan government was an outstanding success, with timeless classics and modern marvels participating in the speed trials and on display. There were the pits and hundreds of classic cars and motorcycles to check out, the fashion parade with many people dressing up to show off the fashions from the 1920s to the 1960s and the Shannons motor show featuring classic cars. Accommodation was booked out and cafes and restaurants were full. Visitors from around Victoria and interstate, along with locals, enjoyed the two-day event. We have a lot more major events to look forward to over the summer months, including the Cadel Evans Great Ocean Road cycling race and the Royal Geelong Yacht Club Festival of Sails.

Lara electorate health services

Ella GEORGE (Lara) (10:03): Last week I had the pleasure of welcoming the Minister for Health to the Lara electorate. To start the day we headed to University Hospital Geelong to officially open the new world-class public fertility clinic. The new fertility clinic will deliver our government's public IVF, with a range of services including specialist consultations, diagnostic tests and ultrasounds, allowing local women and families to access free fertility treatment without having to travel to Melbourne. We know that private IVF is expensive, and it means people often need to wait and save for fertility care. This new clinic will provide 80 to 100 cycles of fertility care each year, meaning that IVF is in reach for so many more families across Geelong.

The minister then toured the new ear, nose and throat hub at University Hospital, which aims to reduce wait times for patients to see ENT specialists for minor procedures and relieve pressure on the

hospital's main operating theatres. Later on it was an honour to host a women's health round table with the minister at Cloverdale Community Centre in Corio. This forum was a fantastic opportunity for women from Geelong's north to share their experiences and the experiences of their communities of women's health inequities.

We know that gender has a significant impact on health and health outcomes. Even after incredible advancements in medicines, we still understand less about the many health issues that affect women compared to men. I am so proud to be a member of the Allan Labor government, which listens to the voices of women and invests in women's health, whether it is public IVF services, establishing 20 new women's health clinics across the state or establishing a new women's health research institute.

Cranbourne East Secondary College

Pauline RICHARDS (Cranbourne) (10:05): There is a lot going on in Cranbourne – there is always a lot going on in Cranbourne – but sometimes Cranbourne comes to the Parliament. It was really terrific last week for me to have the opportunity to invite and spend some time with the cleverest students that I have spent any time with for a long time, from Cranbourne East Secondary College. These students are our school leaders, and I think that they are absolutely our future leaders. Their insights, their interests, the opinions that they held were incredibly sophisticated and nuanced. I was so impressed with the calibre, as I always am, but particularly impressed with the calibre of the students who came in last week.

Cranbourne electorate community organisations

Pauline RICHARDS (Cranbourne) (10:06): We also had the millennium women's sewing club come in, and to have the time with these women is something that just fills my heart – women who look after each other and support each other, shoulder to shoulder. They certainly were delighted to have the opportunity to spend time here in the Parliament, as it is the people's house. This is an opportunity for me to acknowledge the millennium women's sewing club, the South Sudanese–Australian Academic Society and Apostolic Faith Mission for the achievement awards that I attended on Friday night. We got to really celebrate the best of our community.

BAPS Shri Swaminarayan Mandir, Cranbourne

Pauline RICHARDS (Cranbourne) (10:06): I also attended BAPS Shri Swaminarayan Mandir for their Diwali, and that was a great way for us to be reminded of how important and diverse our community is.

Father Gerard Dowling

Pauline RICHARDS (Cranbourne) (10:06): Finally, I would like to acknowledge the service of Father Gerard Dowling and wish his family all the best on his passing.

Felicitations

Paul MERCURIO (Hastings) (10:07): I wanted to take this time in my members statement to congratulate my fellow class of 2022. I personally cannot believe it is a year now since we were elected. It is definitely the fastest year that has ever flown by in my life, and I would like to congratulate all of the class of 2022 for doing such a fantastic job, for weathering the storms, for helping their communities and for the joy, happiness and support given and shared between us all. I have very much enjoyed working with everyone. I would like to extend my thanks also to MPs on this side of the house. Thank you for your support, for your advice, for your words of wisdom and encouragement. Thank you for nurturing and guiding me and the rest of us when we needed it, when we asked for it and also when we did not. I also extend that to the opposite side of the chamber. I thank you for extending the hands of friendship and for the kind words of support. We all work very hard in this place with one goal, and that is to work and help our communities. Of course I could not have done it without my office staff: my office manager Kathryn Smith, my communications manager Lukas Hogenbirk and also Cath Warnock. Thank you so much for the support you have given me and the

community through our office. Lastly, it has been a very crazy year, and I do not think I would have got through it nearly half as well without the love and support of my wife Andrea. To Andrea I say: thanks, gorge.

Victoria Australia Samoa Seniors

Belinda WILSON (Narre Warren North) (10:08): Don't we all want our husbands to speak magnificently about us, just like Paul did there?

I want to talk about the wonderful time that I had on Monday with the Samoan senior citizens. What fun it was playing games and having the most delightful – *(Time expired)*

The DEPUTY SPEAKER: Thank you, members. And a shout-out to my wife Rebecca as well.

Danny PEARSON (Essendon – Minister for Transport Infrastructure, Minister for the Suburban Rail Loop, Assistant Treasurer, Minister for WorkSafe and the TAC) (10:08): I seek leave to incorporate into *Hansard* the remainder of my members statement from yesterday.

Leave granted.

Statements on parliamentary committee reports

Public Accounts and Estimates Committee

Report on the 2023–24 Budget Estimates

Jess WILSON (Kew) (10:09): I am pleased to make a contribution on the Public Accounts and Estimates Committee (PAEC) report on the 2023–24 budget estimates tabled on 3 October this year. In my contribution today I would like to make some observations about some of the findings and recommendations relating to my portfolios of education and early childhood in this report. The report specifically called out the significant challenges being faced in Victoria when it comes to teacher shortages. Indeed this is an issue right across Australia, but we are seeing here in Victoria the acute situation of many schools not being able to fill teacher roles. It is particularly a problem in regional Victoria, where there are some schools that are on the precipice of not being able to be open next year given the lack of teachers able to fill those positions.

The government has claimed that it has a foolproof plan to ensure that there will be sufficient teaching staff available to meet demand in this state over the coming years, but when I checked today, just a couple of hours ago, there were over 2500 teacher, principal and learning support worker vacancies right across Victoria. We know how hard it is just from speaking to our local principals and principals right across the state. When they are advertising for teacher roles they get very, very few applications. In fact I was speaking to one principal recently who was advertising for prep teacher roles. Usually he would receive hundreds of applications, and unfortunately he is getting applications in only the 10s and 20s, and the applications are certainly not up to the standards that they might once have been.

I was pleased to see recommendation 17 of the committee, which spoke to the Department of Education enhancing its reporting on how it is meeting teacher workforce supply and demand issues, including creating performance measures related to the funding provided for teacher workforce attraction and retention, and creating and publishing a workforce strategy demonstrating what actions will be taken to meet the demand for government teachers over an appropriate period of time – so putting greater transparency and greater reporting metrics around teacher shortages and what programs and policies the government will actually put in place to increase the supply of teachers over the coming years.

The other issue in the space of teacher shortages is not only getting new teachers into the system but making sure we are retaining our current teachers. The Department of Education publishes the *Victorian Teacher Supply and Demand Report*. The last version of that was the 2021 version, which was published earlier this year. A recommendation from the report was that the Department of Education update that report and publish the updated report. It would be very timely to do so,

particularly as we are seeing the number of teacher vacancies increasing across the state. So we call on the government to publish its updated report, particularly when we look at the fact that the number of graduate teachers leaving the profession from the 2021 report is one in five within the first five years. That is a 20 per cent attrition rate. We need to be able to look at what we can do to actually retain those teachers in the system to ensure that not only are we attracting new teachers in Victoria but we are retaining the current teachers and being able to meet demand right across the state. So we call on the government to update that report and publish a revised update of that report.

Another point in the report handed down a couple of months ago was around the Labor government's application of payroll tax on non-government schools. This was an issue that was debated heavily at PAEC, and a number of questions were put to the Minister for Education, to the Premier at the time and to department officials. Originally in the budget a \$7500 fee threshold was put in place. Clearly the government backflipped on that – I suspect because a number of their own members went to the minister and highlighted the fact that many of their own independent and Catholic schools would be hit by this tax – and lifted that threshold to \$15,000. This is a tax that the former minister was not very clear on the application of, backflipping here and there and making different statements within hours of each other. But what is unclear and what this report does highlight is whether or not that \$15,000 threshold will be indexed. Because if it is not, then the Parliamentary Budget Office has highlighted that an additional 18 extra schools, at least, will be added to the payroll tax hit list in the coming years, and that is simply unacceptable.

Environment and Planning Committee

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

Juliana ADDISON (Wendouree) (10:14): I have the great honour to speak to the Legislative Assembly Environment and Planning Committee report that I had the honour of presenting to the house yesterday, *Employers and Contractors Who Refuse to Pay Their Subcontractors for Completed Works*. We are really proud as a committee of this report. The terms of reference for the inquiry asked our committee to examine employers and contractors who refuse to pay their subcontractors for completed works, and that is exactly what we have done with this report.

It was clear from the outset of our inquiry that the focus would be on the payment of subcontractors in Victoria's construction sector. The report makes 28 recommendations to ensure that subcontractors are paid properly for works completed and that this happens in a timely manner, which is so important. We know that payments that are delayed can have very negative impacts particularly on our small businesses, our small contractors and our small subcontractors, who make up the majority of the sector. Following evidence that was received through submissions from stakeholders and experts from across Victoria's construction sector, the inquiry found that we need to modernise Victoria's security of payment laws, making it simpler and easier, and that is what we would like to do through these recommendations.

To do this we have recommended that the Victorian government consider the following: broaden the types of payments that can be claimed, because we heard that was a real issue, the categorisation of those claims; we need to limit the use of unfair clauses in construction contracts; and we need to extend the time that a subcontractor can claim payment for their work within. Currently it is at three months, and we really do need to extend that to six months. That is fair. We know that often families have got their shoebox and they are paying things and they are trying to organise things to keep the business afloat, and sometimes three months can fly past, so we really need to extend that to six months. And we need to make the adjudication process fairer not only for our subcontractors but for our head contractors, and we know that this will improve things.

Of particular significance is the issue of the operation of the Building and Construction Industry Security of Payment Act 2002. The fact that that act is actually 20 years old is a part of the problem. It is not fit for current industry standards. The act provides subcontractors with the right to claim regular payments for their work and establishes an adjudication process to resolve payment disputes

quickly. The legislation is simply known as the security of payment laws. This is not where it needs to be, and that is what a lot of our recommendations really focus on.

This report can be accessed in full via the Parliament of Victoria website, and I am going to talk about it a number of times because it is a really great report. But before I talk anymore about that, I really think it is so important that I acknowledge the individuals, the businesses, the unions, the professional bodies, the government agencies and the adjudicators who gave up significant time to provide evidence to the inquiry. Their expertise has been invaluable in helping the committee form its recommendations. I would particularly, on behalf of the committee, like to acknowledge the contribution and the evidence of Mr John Murray AM, who led a comprehensive review for the Commonwealth government in 2017 and shared all his learnings with us. Mr Murray's depth of experience allowed the committee to ask questions and develop a stronger understanding of what was happening in other jurisdictions and the challenges of different models and approaches.

Very importantly, I want to thank the committee members, including my friend the deputy chair the member for Morwell – what a great support – the member for Bass, the member for Croydon, the member for Monbulk, the member for Nepean, the member for Ripon and our most recent recruit the member for Warrandyte. This is the Parliament working at its best to be able to work together as a group with a really strong focus on delivering meaningful outcomes for Victorian subcontractors. We had genuine interest in the topic, and most importantly we had such a collegiate and respectful approach to our work. This has been an absolute highlight for my first year in the second term, and I really want to encourage people on committees to work closely together to really deliver great outcomes across the Parliament for Victoria.

Public Accounts and Estimates Committee

Report on the 2023–24 Budget Estimates

Tim McCURDY (Ovens Valley) (10:19): I am delighted to rise and speak on committee reports, and I also want to speak on the 2023–24 budget estimates report handed down on 3 October 2023. There are three different areas I want to speak about. First of all, 6.6.1 and 6.6.2: one is 'Road maintenance and repairs package' and the other is on road safety to reduce fatalities. Ovens Valley, my electorate, is 10,500 square kilometres, so there are plenty of roads in that amount of area from Cobram through Yarrawonga, Wangaratta, up to Myrtleford, Bright, Dinner Plain over to Mount Hotham and certainly Falls Creek as well.

So you can imagine that it is a massive network of roads. I have never seen the roads in such poor repair, and people are continuing to tell me that. I look at the Murray Valley Highway, which I travel on every day from Cobram to Wangaratta. It is only half the trip that I do, but there are seven spots along that section from Cobram to Bundalong that are absolutely unsafe and certainly unroadworthy. They are certainly not carworthy, those roads. That is what concerns me about this budget: the reductions and the cuts there have been to road maintenance – not infrastructure but road maintenance.

To put potholes in perspective, everybody who sees a pothole thinks this will be fine, you can avoid a pothole. First of all, in broad daylight, it is great to be able to avoid a pothole. But when you add rain and secondly you add night-time – when you put rain and night-time together – and you are riding a motorbike, it is not a lot of fun. As a motorbike rider myself, I know how dangerous it is on the roads. I do not drive at night if I can help it, but sometimes you get stuck in a predicament and you need to be riding at night, and it is really quite unsafe. I had an incident just recently when I was getting near home on a motorbike. I had a B-double right up the back, and I had to get off the road because I just could not stay in front of him. There was a drop-off on the side of the road by about this much. It was quite frightening. As I say, if it is during the middle of the day, you can avoid a pothole, but at night-time or when it is raining, it is not a lot of fun. We have had 250 people die on Victorian roads this year, and we are only in November. So that is 275 that could potentially die on our roads this year, and that is 10,000 lives that have been lost since 1990. That is a concern. We know the road maintenance

budget has been cut, and I just urge the government to look a little bit closer and really throw some support behind that maintenance.

I want to skip now to 9.5.3, 'Renewable energy generation'. It incorporates storage as well. In yesterday's debate we all spoke about protecting our farming communities and our biosecurity – well, nearly everybody supported them – and we talked about how we can support our communities and make sure that they are safe in what they do. I also want to talk about, as per this report, the definition of a farm. The definition of a farm is 'an area of land and its buildings used for growing crops and rearing animals'. That is why I ask the question: who invented the term 'solar farm'? It is not a farm. It does not grow crops, and it does not feed animals or rear animals. It is a factory – it is a solar factory – and I get concerned that people keep talking about solar farms or lithium battery farms like we are getting in Dederang or they are trying to do in Dederang. And the solar farm in Bobinawarrah – they call it Meadow Creek – is a factory, it is not a farm. Whoever created the definition of a solar farm – it is not right. It is time to call that out because it is not right. People get this assumption it is a nice green environment, a beautiful environment. Well, it is actually not. When you get those renewable energy corporate companies all lined up doing what they do, it is really important that our communities have a say in what is going on.

9.7 in the report is 'Water: key issues'. I want to throw my weight and my support behind the Minister for Water in the other place. I know you might find it hard to believe that I really want to support the minister. She is doing a terrific job in terms of the water buybacks, in saying no to water buybacks, because that will ruin our smaller communities. She is standing up, and I urge her to stand her ground. I think she is doing a terrific job in that respect. We know that 100 gigalitres lost in our community is 500 jobs and willing sellers are just a cop-out. Willing sellers are community cowards. When you have to do a planning permit on a property, you have got to put a sign up to say 'I'm going to build a shed' or 'I'm going to do something on my property'. You do not have to put a sign up – you do not have to tell anybody you are selling the water – and that is just a cop out. So when people talk about 'willing sellers', that is not right, because all I will say it is community cowards who are selling out their water. That community, the whole community, is going to miss out, not just that farmer. I want to just make sure we have got that on the record.

Public Accounts and Estimates Committee

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

Sarah CONNOLLY (Laverton) (10:24): It gives me a great deal of pleasure to rise to speak on committee reports this week, particularly because I tabled and I will now speak on the Public Accounts and Estimates Committee report on gambling and liquor regulation here in Victoria. This report was really a follow-up to three Auditor-General reports, which as I said I had the privilege of tabling earlier this week – yesterday actually. The inquiry aimed to look at three reports that were tabled in the last term of Parliament about the impact of gambling and alcohol harm in our communities and to also look at how the government was tracking in addressing some of these issues.

Over the past five years that I have been here we have had many, many bills come before this house, and many members on both sides of the house have made incredible contributions in relation to their thoughts, their opinions and sometimes their lived experience in relation to gambling and alcohol-related harm. So it was really interesting undertaking this inquiry.

The committee received over 50 submissions from across the community – that is a lot of submissions to receive. We received those submissions from councils, from local support groups, from people with lived experience and indeed from industry participants. We also held three days of live hearings where we had the opportunity to hear directly from a number of these stakeholders, including universities, organisations that work directly with the people affected by gambling and liquor harm, multicultural organisations and local government. I always think – and the member for Wendouree touched on this – it is really great when you are doing committee hearings and preparing reports that the committee works really closely together. I also think it is really important that committee members sit down and

hear from the community and key stakeholders face to face about their lived experience and their shared experience, good and bad – that they are able to speak directly to committee members when we have these public inquiries. It is one thing to read stories, facts and data on paper as part of a written submission. It is certainly something else when someone sits before you to give oral evidence, sometimes sharing quite traumatic experiences of things that they have gone through, as we saw at the youth round table, which I will touch briefly upon in a moment.

I would also like to acknowledge the I am going to say few representatives – because we did invite a lot of representatives from the industry, but it was just a few that I think did a really good job in accepting our invitation to appear and engage as part of this inquiry with committee members. The conversation around gambling and liquor regulation here in Victoria and harm and harm minimisation is not always an easy one to have on either side, whether you are someone that has found yourself in situations where you are addicted to alcohol or gambling or indeed you work for industry bodies that provide these services and encourage the community to use them. But I do want to say that I really appreciated the industry coming and having a full and frank conversation with us. There were not a lot of you. Of the few people that sat before us I think that committee members were able to ask some really serious, robust questions, and they answered frankly and as truthfully as they could. So I do want to thank them again.

This topic is certainly one that I feel particularly strongly about, and for many of the communities I represent in the Laverton electorate gambling risk is something that is constantly raised with me, whether it is by constituents or by local councils. We know that outer suburban communities like Brimbank and Melton in the outer west are some of the hardest-hit areas when it comes to gambling losses, which is commensurate with the number of available gaming venues, whether they are pubs, whether they are clubs or even whether they are our local RSLs. It is why the report recognises that the gambling reforms that we recently passed, including standardising operating and closing times for venues, introducing mandatory precommitments to cashless gaming and reducing load commitments on gaming machines, are all welcome improvements. Like so many things, we have done a lot in this space, but of course there is more that we can and we must do, which is why this report makes a total of 62 recommendations to further address gambling harm, focusing on issues like safeguards for children and young people to protect them from gambling harm and things around advertising and marketing of gambling. This is a great report, and I would encourage all members to take a read.

Public Accounts and Estimates Committee

Report on the 2023–24 Budget Estimates

Wayne FARNHAM (Narracan) (10:29): I am pleased to rise today on committee reports, and I am talking on the Public Accounts and Estimates Committee 2023–24 budget estimates papers, chapter 4, page 49, clauses 4.1, 4.3, 4.4.1 and 4.4.2. We all know education in this state is extremely important, and no more important than in rural and regional Victoria. Having read the report and knowing what is going on in my electorate at the moment, it would seem that rural and regional Victoria are a little bit forgotten. I attended a community meeting on Sunday night out at Neerim, and the residents there are very, very concerned that their school is earmarked for closure. Just last week I heard the Honourable Minister for Education say ‘upgrading all our schools across the state’. I obviously shouted something out and was ejected at that point in time, but the reason I shouted something out is because I have a community here whose school has received a letter from the Department of Education to consult with them on shutting the school down. What concerns me is the process we go to in doing this. I have to say this, because to me this makes no sense.

In 2019 – and this is specific to Neerim District Rural Primary School – the school was de-staffed. In 2020, 2021, 2022 and 2023 they had no increase in their enrolments. Now, let us look at those years: two of those years were COVID, and then we have got 2022–23. What I do not understand is: when you de-staff a school, how can you increase enrolments? The government’s own website says:

Pride and Confidence in our Schools

Making sure every community has access to excellence, in every government school and classroom.

That includes Neerim Rural District Primary School, and the parents out there – I was out there for over an hour at this community meeting – were telling me if there was a principal there, there could be 40 students in that school tomorrow. This school is a viable school. I know many in metro Melbourne will think 40 students is not a big school. You are right; it is not a big school. But these rural schools in rural Victoria are so important because what they actually do is give parents choices. Especially post COVID, some kids now cannot cope with 600, 700 or 800 students in a school, so parents will choose to put them into a smaller rural school to reignite their social abilities et cetera. Closing this school is going to be such a burden on this community, because unlike in metro Melbourne, where you will get a school just around the corner, in rural Victoria you have to travel. If this school closes, some parents will spend 80 minutes a day on the road getting their child educated. I think every community in Victoria deserves to have a school.

In my electorate we have not had one new public school built in the last 50 years. The only new public school has been Warragul specialist school. That is the only new public school. And the problem is Warragul and Drouin are exploding in population, so these small rural schools take that overflow. Labertouche Primary, for example, has gone from 33 students to 66 students in the last two to three years. I appreciate the government's emphasis on education, and I support the government's emphasis on education, but what I want the government to do, as per their report and what the report says, is invest in rural schools.

I went out to Neerim District Rural Primary School and I put my builders hat on, and I reckon for \$3 million you could renovate this school into a first-class facility. It could be a one-stop shop for education with early learning as well, because they have the space. So I urge the government: do what you say you are going to do, keep Neerim District Rural Primary School open and invest in it.

Environment and Planning Committee*Employers and Contractors Who Refuse to Pay Their Subcontractors for Completed Works*

Daniela DE MARTINO (Monbulk) (10:34): It gives me great pleasure to rise and speak on the Environment and Planning Committee's first report for this parliamentary term, *Employers and Contractors Who Refuse to Pay Their Subcontractors for Completed Works*, tabled yesterday by our chair the wonderful member for Wendouree. I would like to begin by acknowledging and thanking the secretariat staff, who worked tirelessly in the background on this report through organising hearings and witnesses and ultimately compiling the evidence in this report. Special thanks also to our chair and the deputy chair the member for Morwell for their work on this inquiry, embodied by a spirit of good bipartisanship and a genuine desire to uncover the truth of the situation.

The members for Ripon, Bass, Croydon and Nepean, most recently replaced by the member for Warrandyte, and I all worked constructively together to explore this issue with open minds and curiosity. The results of our inquiry are found within the pages of this report and are quite concerning when it comes to non-payment of subcontractors across the construction industry. Across the state of Victoria it is apparent that non-payment and long-delayed payment of subcontractors are widespread, from domestic through to large-scale commercial and civil construction, and our current Building and Construction Industry Security of Payment Act 2002, or SOPA, now 21 years old, is failing to comprehensively address and quash this concerning practice. It is absolutely in need of review and improvement.

We heard from a broad range of witnesses, including departmental representatives, industry associations, unions and individual businesses as well as adjudicators who work in the security of payment field. We also heard from Mr John Murray AM, widely considered to be the foremost Australian expert in SOPA. The Honourable Tony Robinson, who chaired both the industry working group which developed the original Victorian legislation and the 2004 group which made

recommendations informing the 2006 amendment to the SOPA, also provided a submission and evidence which pointed to the need for this SOPA to be reviewed and improved. With the exception of the Housing Industry Association, all other witnesses and submissions were in agreement that non-payment of subcontractors is rife across domestic and commercial construction and has terrible consequences for those affected.

It is important to note that this is not a phenomenon limited solely to Victoria; it occurs across the Australia and beyond. It appears to be a common practice in construction abroad, but this does not mean that we cannot nor should not do something to address this terrible practice, which sees smaller companies collapse or subcontractors lose their family home when those further up the payment chain fail to pay for completed works. Individuals suffer. Small and larger businesses suffer. The Victorian economy suffers.

The statistics on the prevalence of non-payment are breathtaking. The Murray review of 2017 included a survey of 526 Australian construction industry contractors. It found back then that 72 per cent had 40 per cent or more of their invoices paid late and over a third had 60 per cent or more of their invoices paid late. Further, 44 per cent of respondents said that their invoices were unpaid for more than 30 days on average. Others reported not receiving payment until at least 60 days after completing work. More evidence was supplied by the National Electrical and Communications Association, which correlated with the Murray report survey. They indicated that outstanding payments to subcontractors are all too common: 54 per cent of respondents were owed amounts greater than \$10,000, 16 per cent were owed more than \$100,000 and 2 per cent were owed more than half a million dollars. They are extraordinary figures. I do not think anyone out there in retail would ever accept someone not paying for goods that they have walked out of a shop with.

The submission from the Construction, Forestry, Maritime, Mining and Energy Union, CFMEU Victoria, similarly observed that non-payments are so rife that the union has a dedicated team whose principal responsibility is to recover the unpaid wages of union members. So whilst we do have security of payment laws which were once nation leading, they have now fallen behind in their usefulness. They are not widely known and therefore they are under-utilised. They do not apply universally to all moneys owed and across all sectors. Put simply, they require an update to ensure that the construction industry is a fair place to earn and be paid for the satisfactory work that one performs or the goods which they provide.

This is a comprehensive report with much detail, and 5 minutes simply does not do it any justice. I would like to thank once again all of those involved. I am looking forward to speaking on this further along, and I thank you for the time today to do so.

Business of the house

Notices of motion

Mary-Anne THOMAS (Macedon – Leader of the House, Minister for Health, Minister for Health Infrastructure, Minister for Ambulance Services) (10:39): I advise that the government does not wish to proceed with government business, notice of motion 1, and I ask that it remains on the notice paper.

Standing and sessional orders

Mary-Anne THOMAS (Macedon – Leader of the House, Minister for Health, Minister for Health Infrastructure, Minister for Ambulance Services) (10:39): I move:

That, as recommended by the Standing Orders Committee's report on the inclusion of sessional orders and ongoing resolutions in the standing orders, November 2023, this house adopts the proposed amendments to standing and sessional orders as detailed in Appendix A, to come into effect from 1 January 2024.

Deputy Speaker, I thank you, obviously, for all the work that you have done as a member of this committee and in particular for chairing the subcommittee that was tasked with working on points of agreement in terms of sessional orders that could be readily transferred into standing orders. That is

what this report delivers for us. Obviously, there is more work to be done, and the Standing Orders Committee will continue to look at perhaps some of the more challenging areas of the sessional orders, where we expect there to be some debate and consultation with other members in the house. But thank you for the role that you play, to the Speaker as well, to all the committee members and to the staff who have helped us to get to this point. I commend it to the house.

James NEWBURY (Brighton) (10:41): Deputy Speaker, I too thank you for your role in the work that we are considering now and also the other members of the committee and the clerks, who did an incredible job. Reforming the standing orders is a hard job. It is a hard job for the Parliament to come together and work out points of agreement. What we are considering now is what you would probably call the very, very non-contentious parts of the sessional orders that can be included in the standing orders – things that all of us recognise as normal parts of our day and the operation of our day and the operation of subsets of our day. What is being included is not controversial in that regard.

I would note just for the record that there is one inclusion, number 18, in relation to the disallowing of pandemic orders and the requirements for a joint sitting. Just on the record I note that this house of course has autonomy in terms of processes to set up that joint sitting, but the Council is yet to do that and set up that process. A number of Council members have noted that that process does not exist in their place in terms of that joint sitting. So though this house has ultimate capacity to set up its own mechanisms to do things, that is lacking in terms of the Council process.

Again I acknowledge the work of all of those involved and do hope that next year we can start looking further at the standing orders in good faith and that we can actually start to work through some of those standing orders in a non-political way. I am a little nervous about it, but I have a genuine hope that we can do that in good faith.

Motion agreed to.

The DEPUTY SPEAKER: On indulgence, I also thank the committee and the staff for their work on this, and I believe the Speaker is quite happy with it.

Bills

Regulatory Legislation Amendment (Reform) Bill 2023

Statement of compatibility

Danny PEARSON (Essendon – Minister for Transport Infrastructure, Minister for the Suburban Rail Loop, Assistant Treasurer, Minister for WorkSafe and the TAC) (10:44): In accordance with the Charter of Human Rights and Responsibilities Act 2006 I table a statement of compatibility in relation to the Regulatory Legislation Amendment (Reform) Bill 2023.

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

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

Overview

The Bill amends laws across a range of ministerial portfolios to:

- create a mechanism for the Secretary to authorise persons without the requirements to obtain a licence, warrant or permit by amending the *Drugs, Poisons and Controlled Substances Act 1981*;
- amend the *Meat Industry Act 1993* to:
 - o clarify that the Act does not apply to online sale of dried meat;
 - o clarify licensing for the transport of seafood and requirements for licensing of vehicle-based meat processing facilities;
 - o update references to the *Commonwealth Export Control Act 2020* (Cth) to remove duplication of Commonwealth and Victorian regulatory requirements for branded meat;

- o remove audit requirements for export facilities audited by the Commonwealth government;
- o include a power for PrimeSafe to rescind Codes of Practice to help maintain the contemporariness of the codes;
- o remove requirements for poultry or game processing facilities to include information about quality assurance programs in licence applications that are not necessary in determining a licence application;
- o remove an impractical requirement for issuing of licences for vehicle-based meat processing facilities;
- o allow for delegation to the Chief Executive Officer of PrimeSafe to occur through electronic means rather than made under common seal;
- o clarify that Parts 2 and 5 of the Act apply to poultry and game;
- o update references in the Act to reflect machinery of government changes;
- o provide an additional ground for PrimeSafe to refuse applications for licence renewals; and
- o remove redundant provisions and correct typographical errors;
- amend the *Seafood Safety Act 2003* to clarify that only one type of licence is required to transport both meat and seafood, and to provide an additional ground for PrimeSafe to refuse applications for licence renewals where a person has failed to comply with a licence condition;
- amend the *Casino Control Act 1991* to remove a requirement for casino special employees (CSE) licence applicants to provide evidence of certain former employment that is not relevant to the licensing criteria;
- amend the *Social Services Regulation Act 2021* to enable streamlining of mandatory notifications by registered social service providers to the Social Services Regulator.
- amend the *Environment Protection Act 2017* to clearly enable the Environment Protection Authority to authorise transportation of waste in an emergency situation;
- amend the *Gambling Regulations Act 2003* to provide licensees with remote access to keno systems, allow for a single approval for linked jackpot arrangements installed at the same venue, and correct a statutory reference;
- amend the *Essential Services Commission Act 2001* to:
 - o remove burdensome requirements for ESC to provide notice of price determinations to all regulated entities;
 - o remove requirements of Codes of Practice and their amendments to be published in full in the Government Gazette;
 - o update the definition of “civil penalty requirement” to allow the ESC to use its enforcement provisions to improve outcomes for consumers within embedded networks;
 - o ensure that the ESC can use information gathering notices and powers in respect of the *Water Industry Act 1994*; and
 - o clarify the scope of delegated functions and powers;
- amend the *Regional Development Victoria Act 2002* to update the Regional Development Advisory Committee membership and meeting frequency, update references to Melton City Council, and update references to the name of the relevant government department;
- amend the *Children, Youth and Families Act 2005* to make consequential and transitional amendments to account for changed arrangements under the new social services regulatory scheme;
- amend the *Sale of Land Act 1962* and *Land (Goonawarra Gold Course) Act 1988* to update references to Homes Victoria;
- amend the *Food Act 1984* to:
 - o enable orders to be made on additional grounds prescribed by regulations
 - o prescribe infringements for breaches of the Australia New Zealand Food Standards Code, specifically Standards 4.27, 4.2.8 and 4.2.9;
 - o ensure the Minister for Agriculture has adequate regulation-making powers
 - o allow the regulator to issue directions to the proprietor of a food premises to revise a food safety program;

- o clarify and modernise notice requirements to allow for the addition of electronic transmission and publication of closure orders following the recommendations of the parliamentary inquiry into the closure of I Cook Foods Pty Ltd;
- amend the *Child Wellbeing and Safety Act 2005* to update references to restricted information sharing entities, and clarify the Secretary's power to delegate for restricted information sharing entities under the Child Information Sharing Scheme;
- amend the *Education and Training Reform Act 2006* to:
 - o clarify processes where an authorised officer is unable to discover the identity of a person when seizing documents or items;
 - o clarify requirements for commencing prosecution proceedings for offences relating to apprentices;
 - o clarify when the VRQA must notify an affected person of its intention to publish certain non-compliance information on its website and provide an opportunity for a person to make a submission in response and for the VRQA to consider that submission before the decision to publish is made;
 - o clarify when the VRQA must publish certain information;
 - o expand the circumstances in which an application for reinstatement of registration may be submitted to the Victorian Institute of Teaching (the Institute); and
 - o clarify references to Ministerial Orders with respect to the discipline of students in government schools;
- amend the *Monetary Units Act 2004* to:
 - o allow regulations in Victoria to prescribe small fees in the form of fee units; and
 - o clarify that fee units can be used not just for regulations but other types of legislative instruments that may set fees.

Human rights issues

Some of the proposed measures will or may engage one or more of the following human rights under the Charter:

- right to life (section 9);
- right to freedom of expression (section 15);
- property rights (section 20);
- fair hearing (section 24); and
- rights in criminal proceedings (section 25)

For the following reasons, I am satisfied that the Bill is compatible with the Charter and, to the extent that any rights are limited, those limitations are reasonable and demonstrably justified in a free and democratic society having regard to the factors in section 7(2) of the Charter.

Right to life (section 9)

Authorize exempt persons to obtain a license to obtain controlled substances

Part 5 of the Bill includes a proposal to amend the *Drugs, Poisons and Controlled Substances Act 1981* (DPCSA) to create a mechanism for specific classes of person (entities) to be authorised to purchase or otherwise obtain certain poisons or controlled substances without the requirement for a licence or permit to use for a variety of purposes including health or industrial services, or to manufacture or supply by wholesale. Section 9 of the Charter provides that every person has the right to life and has the right not to be arbitrarily deprived of life. The proposed measure engages this right because it safeguards Victorians from harm that might arise from unauthorised access to and use of controlled substances. To do this, it establishes a mechanism for appropriate oversight of entities that are authorised in relation to controlled substances, including a risk assessment before they are legally authorised. The proposed authorisation model would also ensure that those entities are subject to requirements under the Act and Regulations about how those substances are managed (for example requirements relating to record-keeping, storage).

Closing loophole on licence renewals

Parts 11 and 13 of the Bill promotes the right to life by the inclusion of a proposal to remove a loophole in the *Meat Industry Act 1993* and *Seafood Safety Act 2003* where applicants that are refused a licence renewal can obtain a licence by instead applying for a new licence. Section 9 of the Charter provides that every person

has the right to life and has the right not to be arbitrarily deprived of life. This proposed measure may engage this right as it improves the health, wellbeing and safety of Victorians. This is because the measure will prevent applicants that may have been in breach of various health, wellbeing and safety related legislation from obtaining a licence for the handling of meat or seafood. This can result in reducing the risk of Victorians consuming meat or seafood that is not safe for human consumption.

Right to freedom of expression (section 15)

Clarifying and modernising notice requirements under the Food Act 1984

Part 9 of the Bill includes a proposal to clarify and modernise notice requirements in the *Food Act 1984* to allow for the addition of electronic transmission and publication of closure orders. Section 15 of the Charter provides that every person has the right to freedom of expression which includes the freedom to seek, receive and impart information and ideas of all kinds. This proposal engages this right as it will provide for additional ways that the regulator can provide notice to relevant parties including via posting on the internet, serving by email and affixing an order to the physical premises.

Clarify when the VRQA must publish non-compliance information

Part 6 of the Bill includes a proposal that clarifies when the VRQA must publish non-compliance information on its website. Section 15 of the Charter provides that every person has the right to freedom of expression which includes the freedom to seek, receive and impart information and ideas of all kinds. This proposal engages this right because it will require the VRQA to follow a specific and consistent process for publicly publishing information. A consistent public approach to publication will provide for an improved opportunity for relevant persons affected by decisions of being informed of the publication.

Property rights (section 20)

Clarify the requirements and processes authorised officers who seize documents must follow

Part 6 of the Bill includes a proposal to amend the *Education and Training Reform Act 2006* to clarify the requirements and processes which authorised officer must follow when seizing documents or items in the custody of another person when they are unable to discover the identity of the person. The proposal will create a requirement for the authorised officer to leave a receipt of the document or thing they have seized from a person at the premises if they cannot identify the lawful owner or person who has custody of the document or thing.

Section 20 of the Charter provides that a person must not be deprived of that person's property other than in accordance with law.

These measures comply with section 20 of the Charter as the proposal does not deprive a person of their property other than in accordance with law. This is because the seizure of any item is for investigative purposes and will be in accordance with laws permitting seizure of property. Further, any seizure will require officers to leave a receipt for the item at the premises it was seized from allowing for persons the ability to retain their property at a certain time. This proposal will also be consistent with similar provisions in other legislation which requires a receipt to be left if the owner of the property cannot be identified at the time of seizure.

Fair hearing (section 24)

Clarify when the VRQA must notify an affected person of its intention to publish certain non-compliance information on its website and provide an opportunity for a person to respond before the decision to publish is made

Part 6 of the Bill includes a proposal that clarifies what the VRQA must do before it decides to publish non-compliance information about an affected person on its website. The VRQA currently conducts an informal show cause notice process before making a decision on whether to publish such information. The proposal will amend the *Education and Training Reform Act 2006* so that the VRQA is formally required to give an affected person notice of the intention to publish such information (along with the proposed reasons and an opportunity to respond) before the VRQA decides whether to publish the information. Section 24 of the Charter provides for a right to a fair hearing including that all judgments or decisions made by a court or tribunal in a criminal or civil proceeding must be made public.

This proposal engages this right because it will explicitly provide a process to follow after an adverse finding against a person is made and when the VRQA intends to publish this information. This ensures that a person affected by a decision to publish non-compliance information will be informed of the intended publication, the reasons for the decision and a time frame in which they have an opportunity to make a submission in response, before publication. The VRQA will be required to consider those submissions before making the decision to publish.

Rights in criminal proceedings (section 25)

Ensuring that the Commission can use information gathering notices and powers in respect of information the Commission may require from a person under the Water Industry Act 1994

Part 8 of the Bill includes a proposal to allow for the Essential Services Commission to use the information-gathering powers under the *Essential Services Commission Act 2001* instead of the *Water Industry Act 1994* for the investigation of Water Corporations.

Section 25 of the Charter provides for rights to individuals in criminal proceedings including that an individual cannot be compelled to testify against themselves or to confess guilt. This proposed amendment will engage this right because directors of Water Corporations will now be subject to clearer protections against self-incrimination in the *Essential Services Commission Act 2001* compared to *Water Industry Act 1994*.

The Hon. Danny Pearson MP
Assistant Treasurer

Second reading

Danny PEARSON (Essendon – Minister for Transport Infrastructure, Minister for the Suburban Rail Loop, Assistant Treasurer, Minister for WorkSafe and the TAC) (10:44): I move:

That this bill be now read a second time.

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

Incorporated speech as follows:

The Regulatory Legislation Amendment (Reform) Bill 2023 (the Bill) before the House today is not just a collection of more than 50 opportunities to reform regulatory legislation across 14 Acts and 10 ministerial portfolios. While they may appear to be a collection of relatively simple and straightforward reforms, continuous finetuning of legislation is essential to the Victorian Government's vision of a high-performing state and local regulatory system that supports increased productivity, makes it easier to do business in Victoria, and protects consumers, community health and safety and the environment.

The Department of Treasury and Finance estimates that the reforms will provide over \$2.6 million in annual savings to businesses in Victoria by removing licensing and permit fees and making regulatory compliance easier.

Regular omnibus bills on regulatory issues help modernise legislative frameworks, reduce regulatory burden on businesses, and make other improvements to regulation. This particular Bill, following on from the *Regulatory Legislation Amendment (Reform) Act 2022*, is an example of collaborative efforts across government to finetune regulatory systems, including amendments across fourteen Acts – and ten ministerial portfolios. The Bill has many more benefits which can be found across the four main objectives of the Bill.

Firstly, the Bill will modernise and streamline requirements for businesses and social services providers – without compromising the effective management of harms.

Currently, under the *Drugs, Poisons and Controlled Substances Act 1981* there is no general mechanism for the Secretary of the Department of Health to authorise a health service or another entity type to obtain, possess or otherwise deal with medicines, where this is considered appropriate and does not create a risk. The Act currently requires each entity to apply for and be granted a licence or permit. The Bill will amend the Act to create a mechanism for the Secretary to authorise a class of entity. In doing so the Secretary will be required to make a risk assessment as set out in the proposed provisions, and authorised entities will still be required to comply with provisions in the Act and Regulations, including medicines requirements relating to storage, record keeping, access and administration. This streamlined mechanism will reduce unnecessary regulatory burden on entities and allow regulatory oversight to appropriately focus on high-risk entities. It will also support safe and timely access to medications for Victorians. For example, Victorian Residential Aged Care Facilities (RACFs) cannot currently be supplied or possess antiviral medicines from the National Medicines Stockpile unless they hold a permit.

The Bill will also reduce regulatory burden for businesses to sell dried meat online. The Bill includes an amendment which will clarify that the *Meat Industry Act 1993* does not apply to the online sale of dried meat, which the Act was never intended to do, ensuring that online retailers are treated the same way as bricks and mortar retailers – both being of low risk to consumers. It won't mean that dried meat sale will be unregulated – it will still be regulated under the *Food Act 1984*.

Other amendments to the *Meat Industry Act 1993* include updating Commonwealth and Victorian licencing and inspection requirements to avoid duplication and making it easier for Prime Safe to rescind outdated Codes of Practice allowing for a more efficient way to keep them up to date.

The Bill will also streamline licensing requirements in the *Meat Industry Act 1993* and *Seafood Safety Act 2003* to recognise that refrigerated vehicles are often used to transport multiple commodities. Issuing one type of licence to transport meat and seafood will reduce the regulatory burden on businesses transporting both products. The Bill will also amend the *Meat Industry Act 1994* to remove a requirement that poultry and game processing facilities provide information to PrimeSafe and that PrimeSafe does not actually need or use to assess licenses and license conditions. The Bill will also remove an impractical requirement in the *Meat Industry Act 1994* for PrimeSafe to refuse a licence for vehicle-based meat processing facilities where an application is inconsistent with applicable planning schemes.

The Bill will amend the *Casino Control Act 1991* to remove a requirement for casino special employees (CSE) licence applicants to provide evidence of certain former employment that is not relevant to the licensing criteria, ensuring that there is appropriate alignment between the application process and legislative criteria.

Currently under the *Social Services Regulation Act 2021*, registered social service providers must notify the Social Services Regulator about changes to information provided on registration. The current notification requirement is broader than necessary and may unintentionally result in an over-capture of information being required to be provided to the Social Services Regulator. In addition, the *Social Services Regulation Act 2021* requires registered social service providers to notify the Social Services Regulator of any “serious incident” that has occurred or may pose a serious risk to service users during the delivery of a social service. The Social Services Regulator may exempt a provider or class of providers from this requirement if they are required to give notice of the incident to another body. However, the exemption provision in the *Social Services Regulation Act 2021* is unintentionally broad, as it only enables the Social Services Regulator to exempt a provider from notifying about all rather than some, serious incidents.

The Bill will amend the *Social Services Regulation Act 2021* to enable the streamlining of mandatory notifications by registered social service providers to the Social Services Regulator. The amendments will ensure better targeting of information provided to the Regulator, by only requiring providers to notify the Regulator of changes to information provided on registration that “materially impact service delivery.” The amendments also enable the Regulator to exempt a provider from notifying about particular types of incidents, rather than only having the option of exempting providers from all notification requirements, which is unlikely to be workable in practice. By ensuring the exemption provisions work as intended, this is expected to reduce the notification burden on registered social service providers.

The Bill will improve food safety compliance – and improve food safety for Victorian consumers – by amendments to the *Food Act 1984* to ensure that the Secretary of the Department of Health and local councils can direct a business to undertake improvements to an inadequate food safety program prepared for a specified food premises.

The second objective of the Bill is to improve emergency preparedness. It will do this by amending the *Environment Protection Act 2017* to clearly enable the Environment Protection Authority (EPA) to authorise transportation of waste for the purposes of meeting a temporary emergency, providing for the temporary relief of a public nuisance or community hardship, or enabling the commissioning, repair, decommissioning or dismantling of any item of plant or equipment. This amendment will assist the EPA in emergency response contexts, such as in an emergency animal disease situation, floods or fires and allow the EPA to set proportionate regulatory requirements relating to the transportation of waste in these circumstances.

The third objective of the Bill is to support technology neutral legislation. It will amend three Acts to do this.

Keno licensees will be able to authorise remote access to Keno systems under the amendments to the *Gambling Regulation Act 2003*, reflecting the advancements in technology that mean that access is not required to be physical. The Bill will also make amendments to that Act so that only a single approval is required for linked jackpot arrangements installed at the same venue. A linked jackpot arrangement is two or more gaming machines linked to a device recording a winning result. Currently such arrangements require both the monitoring licensee and the venue operator to obtain approval for one arrangement. This amendment will mean the monitoring licensee can obtain approval for both which keeps the level of regulation but reduces the number of applications.

In line with the recommendations of the parliamentary Inquiry into the Closure of I Cook Foods Pty Ltd, the Bill will amend the *Food Act 1984* to clarify and modernise notice requirements to allow for electronic transmission and publication of closure orders. The Act will also be clarified so that such orders can be given or served by email.

The Bill will also amend the *Meat Industry Act 1993* to allow for delegation to the Chief Executive Officer of PrimeSafe to occur through electronic means rather than made under common seal, ensuring more practical and modern governance processes.

Last and certainly not least, the Bill seeks to make simple and uncontroversial amendments to support an effective and efficient regulatory system through amendments to a variety of Acts.

The Bill will remove an unnecessarily burdensome requirement for the Essential Services Commission (ESC) to serve price determination notices to commercial passenger services resulting in ESC needing to send over 8,000 notices to individuals, resulting in a significant administrative burden that absorbs time that could be devoted higher-value activities. The original policy intent was for these notices to be sent to water and energy businesses where the number of notices that needed to be sent was relatively low. The Bill will amend the *Essential Services Commission Act 2001* (ESC Act) to remove this requirement whilst still requiring the ESC to provide determinations should any regulated entity request it.

Another reduction in administrative burden for the ESC is an amendment to the ESC Act to remove the requirement that entire Codes of Practice and their amendments to be published in full in the Government Gazette. The ESC has been remaking and amending Codes of Practice with compliance to this provision resulting in a significant number of pages being published in the Gazette at a large financial cost to the ESC. Instead, the ESC will be required to publish notice of the change in the Government Gazette with the full changes published on ESC's website. This is also practical for regulated entities and the public noting that the Government Gazette primarily has a more legal or technical audience.

The Bill will make some changes to the ESC's enforcement provisions and its information gathering notices and powers. Currently the definition of "civil penalty requirement" under section 3 of the ESC Act does not include any orders made under section 17 of the *Electricity Industry Act 2000* nor under section 24 of the *Gas Industry Act 2001*. Consistent with recommendations from the Embedded Networks Review, the amendment will allow the ESC to use its enforcement provisions to improve outcomes for consumers within embedded networks. The Bill will also amend the ESC Act to clarify that the delegation power under section 26(1) extends to powers or functions that are set out in orders as well, thereby clarifying the ESC's scope of delegated functions.

Another amendment will allow for the ESC to use the information-gathering powers in Part 4 of the ESC Act rather than rely on section 4G of the *Water Industry Act 1994*. This helps to support compliance while ensuring better checks and balances for licensees against self-incrimination. This will also allow the ESC to exercise a consistent set of information-gathering powers across all its regulated sectors.

The Bill will amend the *Regional Development Victoria Act 2002* to update the membership numbers and meeting frequency of the Regional Development Advisory Committee (RDAC). An increase to the membership of RDAC from nine to 10 people ensures that each region is formally represented. The current model, which includes nine Regional Partnerships chairs and an independent chair, has been managed by requiring one member to temporarily stand aside from formal appointment, including voting rights. A reduction in the number of required RDAC meetings from six to four per year aligns RDAC meeting arrangements with other similar advisory groups.

The Bill will include consequential and transitional amendments to the *Children, Youth and Families Act 2005* arising from changes to the *Social Services Regulation Act 2001*. The amendments relate to definitions in the *Children Youth and Families Act 2005*, such as the definition of "community-based child and family service" to reflect that from 1 July 2024, these providers need to be registered under the *Social Services Regulation Act 2021* rather than the *Children, Youth and Families Act 2005*. Without these amendments, there may be a lack of clarity about the ability to place children at existing services, such as out of home care services.

The Bill will improve information sharing arrangements in respect of the Child Information Sharing Scheme under the *Child Wellbeing and Safety Act 2005* by updating references to restricted information sharing entities and clarifying the power to delegate for restricted information sharing entities under the Child Information Sharing Scheme. The Bill will enable regulations to be made empowering restricted information sharing entities to delegate their powers and functions by instrument in the same way as information sharing entities, which will be administratively more efficient and timely.

The Bill will make several amendments to the *Food Act 1984*. It will update the *Food Act 1984* to enable orders to be made on additional grounds prescribed by regulations to address food safety risks. The Bill will also update the *Food Act 1984* to prescribe infringements for breaches of the Australia New Zealand Food Standards Code, specifically the horticultural primary production and processing standards 4.2.7, 4.2.8 and 4.2.9 approved by the Food Ministers' Meeting later in 2022. The Bill will allow implementation of these standards by providing the Minister for Agriculture with adequate regulation-making powers to enable a registration framework for horticulture businesses.

The Bill will amend the *Meat Industry Act 1993* to clarify that Parts 2 and 5 of the Act apply to poultry and game processing. This will simplify the legislation and help ensure consistency in regulatory requirements.

A loophole currently found in both the *Meat Industry Act 1993* and the *Seafood Safety 2003* will be amended by this Bill. Currently, licence applicants under both Acts that are refused for a licence renewal can obtain a licence by instead applying for a new licence. The Bill will close this loophole and allows the regulator to refuse licence applications where a person has failed to comply with a licence condition.

The Bill will amend the *Education and Training Reform Act 2006* to improve the operations of the Victorian Registration and Qualifications Authority (VRQA) and the Victorian Institute of Teaching (VIT). The amendments will improve the efficiency of investigations, prosecutions, registrations and notification functions. The amendments will:

- simplify the process of reinstating expired teacher and early childhood teacher registrations;
- ensure that requirements for commencing prosecution for offences relating to apprentices are consistent with other provisions in the legislation;
- ensure that provisions in the legislation that relate to Ministerial Orders function properly;
- ensure that authorised officers are able to appropriately seize documents or other things as required by their roles; and
- clarify that the:
 - o VRQA must notify an affected person of its intention to publish certain non-compliance information on its website and provide that person an opportunity to make a submission in response and for that submission to be considered by the VRQA before the decision to publish is made; and
 - o VRQA must publish the original date on which that information is published.

The Bill provides greater flexibility under the *Monetary Units Act 2004* in fee setting. This is achieved through amendments to allow regulations in Victoria to prescribe small fees in the form of fee units by removing an unnecessary prohibition that means a fee less than the equivalent of one fee unit (currently \$15.03), cannot be fixed in fractions of a fee unit. This change will ensure that fee units can be set for small fees and thus indexed annually to keep up with inflation, contributing to more sustainable regulatory systems from a cost recovery perspective. The Bill will also clarify that fee units can be used not only for regulations but other types of legislative instruments that may set fees, thus recognising that fees are set not only by regulations by other instruments.

Finally, this Bill will make minor ‘housekeeping’ amendments to correct inaccurate or outdated legislative or machinery of government references to the *Sale of Land Act 1962* and the *Land (Goonawarra Golf Course) Act 1988* to update references to Homes Victoria, *Regional Development Victoria Act* to update references to Melton City Council and reflect machinery of government changes and the *Meat Industry Act 1993* to remove redundant provisions, reflect machinery of government changes and correct typographical errors.

In summary, this Bill covers a wide range of matters but its objectives are clear and focused on supporting regulatory clarity, flexibility, and sustainability. This includes reductions in regulatory burdens and inefficient processes, where appropriate. As noted earlier, the Bill provides over \$2.6 million in direct savings to businesses, but these direct savings are in addition to other benefits that more difficult to estimate – such as clearer, more modern laws, enhanced food safety and improved outcomes for consumers with embedded electricity networks, and easier access to medications for residents of aged care facilities.

I commend the Bill to the House.

James NEWBURY (Brighton) (10:44): I move:

That debate be adjourned.

Motion agreed to and debate adjourned.

Ordered that debate be adjourned for two weeks. Debate adjourned until Wednesday 13 December.

Service Victoria Amendment Bill 2023

Statement of compatibility

Gabrielle WILLIAMS (Dandenong – Minister for Government Services, Minister for Consumer Affairs, Minister for Public and Active Transport) (10:46): In accordance with the Charter of Human

Rights and Responsibilities Act 2006 I table a statement of compatibility in relation to the Service Victoria Amendment Bill 2023.

Opening paragraphs

In accordance with section 28 of the *Charter of Human Rights and Responsibilities Act 2006* (the Charter), I table this Statement of Compatibility with respect to the **Service Victoria Amendment Bill 2023** (Bill).

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

Overview

The Bill amends the *Service Victoria Act 2018* (Service Victoria Act) to enhance Service Victoria's capacity to act as a central point of access for end-to-end government services by making it easier for more government services to be provided online; enabling simpler, faster and easier access to government services; simplifying and modernising the identity verification process; and improving administrative efficiency throughout the public sector.

The Bill also supports the role of Service Victoria in furthering the digital transformation of the Victorian public sector by ensuring government services can readily adapt to technological changes. The Bill implements a number of recommendations made in the final report of an Independent Review of the operation of the Service Victoria Act, which was undertaken under section 57 of that Act and was tabled in Parliament in June 2022 (Independent Review).

Key reforms to the Service Victoria Act include:

- clarifying the purposes of the Service Victoria Act in recognition of its role of providing a central point for public access to government services and of supporting the digital transformation of government services;
- clearly authorising partnerships between Service Victoria and non-government entities to deliver services jointly or on behalf of one another and other service agencies;
- harmonising the information management and privacy requirements applying to Service Victoria under the Act with those applying to the whole of Victorian government;
- enabling a delegated instrument, the Identity Verification Standards, to deal with the processes governing identity verification so that they are easier to keep up-to-date and in line with modern technology; and
- making a range of minor and technical amendments to support the operation of the Service Victoria Act.

Human Rights Issues

The Bill engages the following human rights under the Charter:

- privacy and reputation (section 13);
- recognition and equality before the law (section 8); and
- taking part in public life (section 18).

For the following reasons, and having taken into account all relevant factors, I am satisfied that the Bill is compatible with the Charter and, if any rights are limited, the limitation is reasonable and able to be justified in a free and democratic society based on human dignity, equality and freedom in accordance with section 7(2) of the Charter.

Right to privacy (section 13 of the Charter)

Section 13 of the Charter states that a person has the right not to have their privacy, family, home or correspondence unlawfully or arbitrarily interfered with.

Subsection 13(a) of the Charter recognises that the right to privacy is only affected if the interference is unlawful or arbitrary. Section 13 therefore permits lawful and non-arbitrary interferences with a person's privacy. An interference will generally be lawful where it is precise and appropriately prescribed in law; it will generally be arbitrary only where it is capricious, unpredictable, unjust, or unreasonable, in the sense of being disproportionate to some legitimate aim being sought. Section 7(2) of the Charter recognises that while an interference with privacy will engage the rights contained in section 13, it may still constitute a reasonable limitation on those rights.

A number of the reforms in the Bill engage the right to privacy, each of which is discussed below and has been assessed as consistent with the right to privacy in the terms of section 7(2) of the Charter.

Removal of minimum standards

The Bill repeals the minimum standards in the Service Victoria Act, which currently specify the circumstances in which the Service Victoria CEO can collect, use, disclose and retain different categories of information under the Service Victoria Act (clause 28 and 29). This reform is consistent with recommendation 9 of the Independent Review. The Bill also repeals consequential provisions to the minimum standards that would be made redundant by their repeal.

The minimum standards were originally intended to provide additional assurance to stakeholders in relation to the management and use of personal information. However, these requirements are duplicative of and, in some instances, more restrictive than the whole of Victorian government privacy legislation. As a result, the minimum standards can be unnecessarily complicated or restrictive and inhibit the efficient and effective delivery of government services to the community.

In repealing the minimum standards, this reform engages the right to privacy, but does not limit it as Service Victoria continues to be subject to the same rigorous privacy requirements of other Victorian government agencies, being:

- the *Privacy and Data Protection Act 2014* (PDP Act) in relation to the collection, use, disclosure, and retention of personal information, as well as the data security requirements under the Victorian Protective Data Security Standards made under the PDP Act;
- the *Health Records Act 2001* (HR Act) in relation to the collection, use, disclosure and retention of health information;
- the *Public Records Act 1973* (PR Act) in relation to the retention of information. The PR Act incorporates Retention and Disposal Authorities made by the Keeper of Public Records. This includes the Service Victoria Retention and Disposal Authority, developed in 2021 with minimalistic data retention periods to minimise personal information held by Service Victoria;
- the right to privacy in the Charter (section 13);
- the Payment Card Industry Data Security Standards (PCI-DSS);
- oversight mechanisms in relation to the Information Commissioner and the Health Complaints Commissioner;
- additional requirements of the Commonwealth for National Police Checks under Service Victoria's agreement with the Australian Criminal Intelligence Commission; and
- potentially in the future, Commonwealth legislation regarding the Trusted Digital Identity System.

This reform is not arbitrary, but rather is reasonable in ensuring Service Victoria's information management requirements are harmonised with those applying across government. It removes any unnecessary duplications of the privacy requirements outlined above and any additional complicated and restrictive barriers that prevent Service Victoria from delivering its services as quickly as it could if it were subject to the same standards as other government agencies.

Further, existing offence provisions in the Service Victoria Act (sections 50 and 51) will be retained, which provide an additional layer of privacy protection by creating offences for the unauthorised access to, use of or disclosure of data or information obtained under the Service Victoria Act by any person.

Removal of other information privacy requirements

The Bill also repeals other provisions in the Service Victoria Act that restrict and do not accurately reflect the operational practices and requirements of Service Victoria. This includes repealing:

- the requirement that the Service Victoria CEO cannot collect, use or disclose information in a service agency database except for certain listed purposes (clause 30), which are overly limited. This reform addresses concerns raised in the Independent Review. Note that the disclosure of this information will continue to be restricted by privacy legislation except where the disclosure falls into new disclosure categories provided for by the new disclosure provision described below;
- the requirement to establish and maintain a Service Victoria database (clauses 26 and 27). This requirement is not necessary as establishing a database to support Service Victoria's activities is an operational matter and it is not standard practice for the establishment of a database to occur through legislation; and
- the requirement that information in a service agency database be kept separate from other databases, including other service agency databases (clause 31). This reform will offer more operational flexibility for Service Victoria in performing functions for service agencies by removing unnecessarily complex administrative requirements that are more appropriately dealt with at an operational level.

These reforms do not limit the right to privacy as Service Victoria will continue to be subject to rigorous information privacy requirements and oversight mechanisms consistent with those applying to other government agencies.

New disclosure provision

The Bill introduces a new provision (clause 32) to ensure that the Service Victoria CEO can, for the purposes of performing a function under the Act, disclose information:

- to the entity ('entity' is defined to include a person under section 38 of the *Interpretation of Legislation Act 1984*) to whom the information relates or on behalf of which the Service Victoria CEO is performing the function, for example, in pre-filling a form with information the person has already provided to Service Victoria;
- with the express or implied consent of the entity to which the information relates or who provided it, for example, to update a customer's address across multiple services when they move;
- to an entity on behalf of which they are performing the function, or to any entity to whom that agency would be permitted to disclose the data under any other law, for example, an employer verifying a Working with Children check; and
- to allow for unforeseen circumstances, to a entity prescribed in regulations for prescribed purposes.

This reform provides greater clarity on how Service Victoria is authorised to disclose information under law (that is, in accordance with Information Privacy Principle (IPP) 2.1(f) and Health Privacy Principle (HPP) 2.2(c)) for the purposes of whole of Victorian government legislation, while explicitly enabling use of information in certain circumstances as necessary for the effective delivery of Service Victoria's services, as outlined in Recommendation 10 of the Independent Review.

Service Victoria's stakeholders require confidence and certainty in the circumstances in which Service Victoria expects to disclose information. The new provision will provide this by clarifying the express circumstances in which Service Victoria may disclose information.

While these reforms engage the right to privacy under the Charter, they do not limit it. Any interference with privacy is not arbitrary, as the reforms have the legitimate purpose of allowing for the disclosure of information where necessary to deliver government services to Victorians. The interference is also not unlawful. The new circumstances in which the Service Victoria CEO may disclose information will be clearly stated in the Service Victoria Act; are generally consistent with the IPPs under the PDP Act and the HR Act; and Service Victoria continues to be subject to Victoria's legislative information privacy framework to handle information for clear, tailored purposes that are necessary to enable the delivery of public services to individuals choosing to transact with Service Victoria.

Entering agreements with non-government entities

The Bill makes it clear that Service Victoria may enter into agreements with non-government entities in relation to the delivery of 'customer service functions', 'identity verification functions', or other functions related to the delivery of government services (clause 15). This reform ensures there are no barriers to creating external service delivery partnerships, and partly implements recommendation 2 of the Independent Review.

This reform will not limit the right to privacy under section 13 of the Charter as it is neither unlawful nor arbitrary. It is not unlawful because these new agreements will be set out in the Service Victoria Act, and the agreements themselves with non-government entities will be subject to current Commonwealth and State privacy laws as set out in the relevant agreement. It is not arbitrary because it is reasonable and necessary to allow Service Victoria's operations to support the legitimate, defined purpose of providing effective and efficient public services to Victorians by partnering with non-government entities.

In addition, the reform may promote the right to privacy by driving privacy and data security improvements in the private sector so that a non-government entity may comply with the terms of an agreement in circumstances where its existing processes or systems do not adhere to current best practice principles.

Depending on the particular service being provided and how it is being provided, non-government entities may be required under sections 4, 6 and 38 of the Charter to act in a way that is compatible with human rights under the Charter when delivering public services under agreements with Service Victoria, where these functions are or include functions of a public nature, or are being exercised by the non-government entity on behalf of the Victoria Government or 'public authority' (e.g. a government service agency). This is because a non-government agency may constitute a 'public authority' under section 4 of the Charter when entering an agreement with Service Victoria. *Expanding Service Victoria's customer service functions*

The Bill will amend the definition of 'customer service function' so that it explicitly recognises Service Victoria's ability to issue an authority or official information document and to receive or make a payment (subclauses 4(2) and (3)). While Service Victoria can already perform these functions if they are prescribed

under the Service Victoria Act as ‘customer service functions’, this reform clarifies Service Victoria’s increasing role as a deliverer of end-to-end services, as well as simplifying Service Victoria’s operations by removing the need to make regulations to perform particular functions.

Although performance of these functions may have the effect of increasing the scope of information that Service Victoria has access to, this reform will not impose any new limitations on the right to privacy given Service Victoria can already perform such functions, and must continue to adhere to other privacy obligations under other laws.

For these reasons, I consider that the Bill is consistent with the right to privacy in section 13 of the Charter.

Right to take part in public life (section 18)

Section 18 of the Charter states that every person in Victoria has the right, and is to have the opportunity, without discrimination, to participate in the conduct of public affairs (directly or through freely chosen representatives), and every eligible person has the right to have access, on general terms of equality, to the Victorian public service and public office.

The right to access the Victorian public service is not defined in the Charter and there is limited Victorian judicial consideration of the full scope of the right (which is modelled on Article 25 of the International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights). It is likely that this right is intended to only apply to a person’s ability to be appointed to or employed in a public service role or public office, and does not extend to accessing public services provided by the Victorian public service. This means this right is unlikely to be engaged by the Bill.

However, if the right does extend to accessing services provided by the Victorian public service, in my view the Bill will enhance Victorians’ right to take part in public life by:

- enabling a faster, more flexible and more seamless digital delivery of services by Service Victoria by removing legislative and operational barriers, including the minimum standards (clause 28) and complex administrative requirements for matters, such as the closure or transfer of a service agency database, that are better addressed at an operational level (clause 8);
- making it easier for Service Victoria to deliver a wider range of services by enabling Service Victoria to enter into agreements with non-government entities (clause 15); and
- supporting Service Victoria’s aim of providing end-to-end service delivery by removing any legal ambiguity, including by amending the purposes of the Service Victoria Act so that it recognises Service Victoria as a ‘central point for public access to Government services’.

In my view, the reforms are reasonable and generally enhance, and do not limit, the right to take part in public life under the Charter, as they seek to support the delivery of accessible, equitable and fair services for Victorians by increasing the scope of services that Service Victoria can deliver and the way in which it can deliver them. Therefore, the Bill is consistent with the right to take part in public life in section 18 of the Charter.

Recognition and equality before the law (section 8 of the Charter)

Section 8(3) of the Charter establishes what is generally known as the right to equality, stating that every person is equal before the law and is entitled to the equal and effective protection of the law without discrimination. This right ensures that all laws and policies are applied equally, and do not have a discriminatory effect.

Discrimination, for the purposes of section 8, means discrimination within the meaning of the *Equal Opportunity Act 2010* (Equal Opportunity Act), on the basis of one of an attribute set out in section 6 of that Act, such as age, disability, employment activity, gender identity, personal association, political belief or activity, pregnancy, race, religious belief or activity, sex or sexual orientation, or status as a carer. Measures that assist or advance persons or groups of persons disadvantaged because of discrimination do not constitute discrimination.

Discrimination against a person can be direct or indirect, and consists of impermissible differential treatment that is less favourable based on one or more of the attributes listed in section 6 of the Equal Opportunity Act. Under that Act, indirect discrimination occurs where there is a requirement, condition or practice that has, or is likely to have, the effect of disadvantaging a person with a protected attribute, and the requirement, condition or practice is not reasonable. Discrimination may be justified if the criterion for differentiation is reasonable and objective, and has the aim of achieving a legitimate purpose.

However, the right is not absolute and can be subject to reasonable limitation under section 7(2) of the Charter.

It is possible that the Bill engages the right to recognition and equality before the law by enabling or increasing the delivery of digitised services to the public, for example by:

- broadening the scope of functions that Service Victoria can perform by expanding the definition of ‘customer service function’ (clause 4), and consequently the scope of functions that might be performed digitally;
- making it easier for service agencies to engage with Service Victoria and for the Service Victoria CEO to perform functions on their behalf, by removing administrative and information management requirements that are better dealt with at an operational level (clauses 8 and 28);
- allowing Service Victoria to enter into agreements for non-government entities to perform all or part of a function on behalf of Service Victoria or a service agency (clause 15); and
- providing for a fully digitised, more streamlined and more accessible means of identity verification which is better aligned with modern technology by removing provisions creating complex and prescriptive legislative requirements regarding electronic identity credentials and placing these into a delegated instrument, the Identity Verification Standards (clauses 19 and 20).

These reforms could indirectly discriminate against people if they cannot access or use, or have difficulty accessing or using, digital technology due to a protected attribute, as this may result in people having difficulty accessing some public services. These potential barriers will be addressed by Service Victoria and service agencies administratively, such as providing alternative, non-digital means of accessing those services and additional guidance and support for vulnerable Victorians seeking to engage with government. Nothing in the Bill requires or has the necessary effect of any government service becoming exclusively available digitally.

On the other hand, these reforms will enhance the right to recognition and equality before the law by making it easier for people with reduced mobility to access a broad range of government services online.

In my view the reforms are reasonable and do not constitute direct or indirect discrimination under section 9 of the Equal Opportunity Act, and therefore do not breach the right to equality under the Charter. They have a legitimate purpose of making government services more efficient, accessible and convenient by supporting the digital transformation of services across the public sector. In my view, this does not have the effect of preventing Victorians from accessing government services but rather supports the delivery of equitable and fair services to all Victorians (including disadvantaged or vulnerable Victorians) by increasing the efficiency and general accessibility of government services.

Therefore, the Bill is consistent with the right to recognition and equality before the law under section 8 of the Charter.

Other human rights considerations

Non-government entities may be required to comply with the Charter when delivering public services under agreements with Service Victoria by constituting a ‘public authority’ under the Charter, so will need to ensure where this is the case, that Charter rights are not unlawfully limited or interfered with in delivering public services with Service Victoria or State entities.

Finally, the Bill’s reforms may also provide opportunities for the promotion by Service Victoria and government of the Charter’s freedoms and rights through improved digital public service delivery.

Gabrielle Williams MP
Minister for Government Services

Second reading

Gabrielle WILLIAMS (Dandenong – Minister for Government Services, Minister for Consumer Affairs, Minister for Public and Active Transport) (10:46): I move:

That this bill be now read a second time.

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

Incorporated speech as follows:

I am pleased to introduce a Bill which will support the government’s continued focus on delivering high-quality public services.

The government established Service Victoria to deliver modern government services designed around people’s needs, and to make it easy for customers to transact with government online at a time and place convenient to them. Now, the government has strengthened its focus on the delivery of government services by creating the new Department of Government Services early this year.

Customers have completed more than a billion transactions through Service Victoria. This includes QR code check-ins during the COVID-19 pandemic, car registration payments, ambulance subscriptions, vouchers and cashbacks to help reduce the cost of living.

Customer satisfaction with Service Victoria is consistently high with a customer satisfaction score of more than 95 per cent. The most common word used by customers in their feedback is ‘easy’.

The Service Victoria app includes a digital wallet where Victorians can securely store and show a digital Working with Children Check Card, Veterans Card – Victoria, Seniors Card, and more. The Service Victoria app has been installed on more than 7 million devices. The government continues to make more digital services available through Service Victoria, such as a Digital Driver Licence.

As we work to deliver more and more innovative services, we need to keep applicable legislation up-to-date, ready to support the delivery of services that Victorians want.

Background of the Bill

Legislation can create unique challenges with establishing one place for customers to go for government services. For example, legislation can:

- Allocate functions and powers to specific agencies or officeholders and limits the scope for another agency to support delivery of those functions.
- Set out application requirements for customers to fulfil that use older hard copy approaches, for example to provide identity documents, that do not contemplate newer approaches such as a re-useable digital identity.
- Impose secrecy and confidentiality requirements for some functions that result in information needing to be held in silos, limiting opportunities for customers to access their information held with government through a central website portal and mobile app.

The *Service Victoria Act 2018* (the Act) aims to streamline customer services through Service Victoria, so customers have one place to go and do not need to present the same information to multiple agencies. For example, instead of proving identity repeatedly, customers can choose to have a re-usable electronic identity credential through Service Victoria.

In June 2022, an Independent Review of the Act by Dr Claire Noone was tabled in Parliament. The Independent Review engaged with over 40 stakeholders, analysed over 100 documents, and included detailed research including domestic and international case studies.

This Bill implements the legislative recommendations of the Independent Review. The Bill will amend the Act to deliver better services built around customer needs, and to bring more services online faster. The Bill will remove legislative obstacles and introduce necessary enablers.

The amendments will better enable the implementation of the *Victorian Government Digital Strategy 2021–2026* and support the digital strategy’s vision of ‘better, fairer, more accessible services’, with a focus on using technology to deliver improved government services designed around customer needs.

These reforms build on amendments made to the Act in 2022 that addressed technical issues identified during the COVID-19 response. Further changes will ensure the Act keeps pace with evolving technology and increasingly high customer expectations of government service delivery. This Bill uses a future-proofing approach, incorporating flexibility into the Act to ensure more services can be delivered and to enhance existing services where required.

I now turn to the reforms in the Bill.

Summary of the Bill’s reforms

The Bill introduces a range of reforms to the Service Victoria Act to implement the legislative recommendations in the Independent Review.

End-to-end service delivery

The Bill introduces amendments to better enable Service Victoria to deliver more end-to-end services, without unnecessary handover points to other agencies. This reform will provide clarity that Service Victoria can ‘issue’ documents, approvals and grants for customers.

For customers, that means being able to go to Service Victoria to receive more documents and approvals for more services without being passed around different parts of government. It will support Victoria having one place to go for government services.

This change will also support reduced costs of running government services by avoiding extensive additional work to link up multiple separate information technology systems across agencies to deliver a service.

Flexibly responding to new priorities

The Bill ensures Service Victoria can flexibly respond to new priorities and launch new services quickly by taking a less prescriptive and more principles-based approach to Service Victoria's functions.

For example, Service Victoria will be able to quickly launch a new service when new government support programs are established, such as in response to an emergency, so people who need government support can register to get the help they need. Under the current Act, this requires legal instruments which would not be required in other government agencies, and delays the delivery of services to customers.

More innovative approaches will also support the bundling of services. For example, delivering a suite of outdoor recreation permits including a fishing licence, boat and trailer registration, and a marine licence renewal bundled into a single application. Service Victoria can play a greater role in supporting customers by streamlining these services to reflect common customer journeys.

Reducing back-office administration

The Bill removes unnecessary back-office administration. For example, it reduces the need to make regulations to deliver new services and reduces the need to obtain Ministerial approvals for operational matters, such as establishing the underlying technology for a new database to create an improved experience for people applying for a copy of their marriage certificate.

This is about removing unnecessary red tape and making it faster for Service Victoria to deliver more services. This supports timely, efficient and cost-effective service delivery.

External delivery partnerships

The Bill enables external delivery partnerships outside government. Working with businesses offers opportunities for customer benefits. For example, allowing customers to re-use their verified record of identity through Service Victoria with organisations, including businesses, so customers do not need to keep providing identity documents again. This also helps to protect sensitive data from being stored in multiple places by third parties.

The Bill will enable Service Victoria to collect charges from businesses benefiting from these services. Any charges would be set in line with government cost recovery guidelines. Further, any engagement with organisations outside government will be designed to protect customer information, including using enforceable provisions under contracts.

Flexible options for identity verification

The Bill will enable more flexible options for identity verification.

The Victorian Government has agreed, with other states and territories, to all align to a common standard for digital identification and verifiable credentials. The Bill will provide Service Victoria with the flexibility to align to national and international standards as they evolve in the future. The Bill will also support possible future participation in the Australian Government Digital Identity System by elevating the Service Victoria Act to be more principles-based and removing inconsistent provisions.

Currently, the Act includes complex provisions about applications, processing, review and issuing of temporary and ongoing electronic identity credentials. The Bill will support these requirements to instead be set out through the Identity Verification Standards made under the Act.

This change also supports more alternative processes for people who are unable to verify their identity online and enables existing services to be moved to Service Victoria more quickly. It supports more customer-friendly processes, for example by repealing requirements to send formal letters with titles such as 'interim refusal notice' if more identity information needs to be checked.

The Bill repeals an unused identity verification review pathway to the Victorian Civil and Administrative Tribunal (VCAT). This pathway allows a customer to seek review of decisions about verifying their identity. Since this provision was introduced in 2018, Service Victoria has verified over 1.5 million customer identities, and no customer has sought VCAT review. The Bill will not affect other rights to seek review, such as an internal review by a complaint, a complaint to integrity bodies, or judicial review.

Harmonising information management requirements

The Bill supports flexibility and service evolution by harmonising information management requirements across government.

To ensure alignment with the information and privacy requirements that apply to government entities across Victoria, the Bill removes information management requirements that are unique to Service Victoria from the Service Victoria Act. The Bill ensures information will continue to be protected under the *Privacy and Data*

Protection Act 2014 and the *Health Records Act 2001*. Information will be held using a minimalistic approach in accordance with Service Victoria's Retention and Disposal Authority under the *Public Records Act 1973*.

The Bill will continue to ensure there are standards in place through flexible, delegated instruments under the Act, including the Customer Service Standards and Identity Verification Standards.

The Bill will also clarify the limited and reasonable circumstances where Service Victoria is authorised to disclose information. These include:

- To the person the information relates to, for example as part of a pre-filled form, or as part of an interaction with a frontline customer support officer.
- To the partner agency responsible for the service, or to a person who the partner agency is legally authorised to share the information with. This covers a scenario where a partner agency delivering an existing service shares information under their legislation, for example to employers verifying a Working with Children Check, and Service Victoria is engaged in the delivery of this service.
- Where the relevant customer has provided consent.
- To another prescribed person for purposes prescribed in regulations, subject to consultation with the Office of the Victorian Information Commissioner.

Having consistent alignment with the *Privacy and Data Protection Act 2014* and *Health Records Act 2001* across Victorian agencies ensures services can be moved quickly into Service Victoria where the service has already been designed to meet the whole-of-government privacy requirements. This ensures government can keep modernising services to deliver improved customer experience.

Conclusion

This Bill will implement the legislative recommendations of an Independent Review and in doing so:

- Support faster, more efficient delivery of online government services through Service Victoria;
- Access to more innovative end-to-end services for licences and approvals through Service Victoria;
- Provide for improved experience for individuals and businesses interacting with government by more consistent use of recent digital capabilities; and
- Reduce regulatory obstacles to make it easy to consider benefits from technological change.

I commend the Bill to the House.

James NEWBURY (Brighton) (10:46): I move:

That the debate be adjourned.

Motion agreed to and debate adjourned.

Ordered that debate be adjourned for two weeks. Debate adjourned until Wednesday 13 December.

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

Statement of compatibility

Sonya KILKENNY (Carrum – Minister for Planning, Minister for the Suburbs) (10:47): In accordance with the Charter of Human Rights and Responsibilities Act 2006 I table a statement of compatibility in relation to the Building Legislation Amendment (Domestic Building Insurance New Offences) Bill 2023.

In accordance with section 28 of the *Charter of Human Rights and Responsibilities Act 2006* (the **Charter**), I make this statement of compatibility with respect to the Building Legislation Amendment (Domestic Building Insurance New Offences) Bill 2023 (the **Bill**).

In my opinion, the Bill, as introduced to the Legislative Assembly, is compatible with the human rights protected by the Charter. I have this opinion for the reasons outlined in this statement.

Overview of the Bill

The purpose of the Bill is to amend the *Domestic Building Contracts Act 1995* (**Domestic Building Contracts Act**) and the *Building Act 1993* (**Building Act**) to improve consumer protection by enhancing requirements for builders to obtain appropriate building insurance.

The Bill amends the Domestic Building Contracts Act to insert two new offences penalising a builder who demands or receives money from or on behalf of a building owner under a major domestic building contract if the builder has not ensured that the domestic building work to be carried out under that contract is covered by the required domestic building insurance.

The Bill amends the Building Act to empower the Victorian Building Authority, or a person authorised by the Victorian Building Authority, to investigate and bring proceedings for a contravention of the new offences. The Bill also provides that builders who are found guilty of contravening either of the new offences may be subject to disciplinary action by the Authority and have their registration suspended or be ineligible to apply for registration for a period of time.

Human rights issues

The human rights protected by the Charter that are relevant to the Bill are the right to privacy in section 13(a), the right to a fair hearing in section 24(1), the rights in criminal proceedings in section 25, the right not to be tried or punished more than once in section 26 and the protection against retrospective criminal laws in section 27.

Power to obtain information or documents

Clause 11 of the Bill inserts new paragraphs into section 227G(1) of the Building Act expanding the circumstances in which the production of information and documents can be compelled. These new subsections will provide that an authorised person may, by notice in writing, require a person to provide information or produce documents in the custody or control of the person if the authorised person has reasonable grounds to suspect that an offence has been committed under the new offence provisions inserted into the Domestic Building Contracts Act by this Bill. The new offence provisions apply to a builder and concern receiving money from or on behalf of a building owner for carrying out domestic building work under a major domestic building contract or for carrying out domestic building work, in either case, without holding the required insurance.

Clause 12 of the Bill inserts a new subsection into section 227I of the Building Act, which expands the circumstances in which a Victorian Building Authority inspector may apply for a court order requiring a person to provide information to include where the inspector believes that the person may have contravened the new offences inserted into the Domestic Building Contracts Act by this Bill.

These provisions engage the rights to privacy and protection against self-incrimination in the Charter.

Right to privacy (s 13)

Section 13(a) of the Charter provides that a person has the right not to have their privacy unlawfully or arbitrarily interfered with. An interference will be lawful if it is permitted by a law which is precise and appropriately circumscribed, and will be arbitrary only if it is capricious, unpredictable, unjust or unreasonable, in the sense of being disproportionate to the legitimate aim sought.

While not all information required under clauses 11 and 12 of the Bill will be of a private nature or be information concerning a natural person, as opposed to information concerning a corporation to which the Charter does not apply, the expansion of purposes for which a power to obtain information or documents may be exercised may constitute an increase in the level of interference with privacy permitted by the Act. However, to the extent that these provisions do require disclosure of personal information, this will occur in lawful and not arbitrary circumstances. The expansion serves a legitimate purpose, being to facilitate the effective administration of the Building Act and related legislation through investigating suspicions of non-compliance or breach of the regulatory scheme. The provisions are circumscribed in their scope, require the provision of written notice and can only operate to compel the provision of information in the specific circumstances outlined in the sections. These relate to important areas of consumer protection where significant gaps have been identified in relation to industry compliance, exposing consumers to risks of financial harm. The powers will principally apply to registered builders who have voluntarily undertaken to practice in a regulated industry where special duties and responsibilities attach.

Further, confidentiality requirements in section 229J of the Building Act apply to any information gained in the exercise of these powers, as well as the availability of complaint mechanisms under sections 231 to 234A of the Building Act relating to an exercise of power by an authorised person.

I therefore consider that any interference with the right to privacy resulting from these provisions will be neither unlawful nor arbitrary.

Protection against self-incrimination (s 25(2)(k))

Section 25(2)(k) of the Charter provides that a person who has been charged with a criminal offence has the right not to be compelled to testify against himself or herself or to confess guilt. It is also an aspect of the right to a fair trial protected by section 24 of the Charter. This right under the Charter is at least as broad as the

privilege against self-incrimination protected by the common law. It applies to protect a charged person against the admission in subsequent criminal proceedings of incriminatory material obtained under compulsion, regardless of whether the information was obtained prior to or subsequent to the charge being laid.

Clause 11 of the Bill expands the circumstances in which an authorised person can compel the production of information and documents to include where the authorised person has reasonable grounds to suspect one of the new offences inserted by this Bill has been contravened or where the authorised person requires this information or documentation to determine whether one of these offences has occurred.

The above provisions are subject to the protection against self-incrimination by way of section 229G of the Building Act, which provides that it is a reasonable excuse for a natural person to refuse or fail to give information or do any other thing that the person is required to do if the giving of the information or the doing of the thing would tend to incriminate the person. The protection is limited to information only and does not extend to documents which an authorised person can require to be produced.

The privilege against self-incrimination generally covers the compelled production of documents or things which might incriminate a person. Section 229G of the Building Act limits this protection by not excusing a person from producing documents that would tend to incriminate that person. However, it is my view that this limit is reasonable under section 7 of the Charter.

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

These expansions to existing powers enable authorised persons to monitor compliance with the Building Act in relation to the new offences to be inserted into the Domestic Building Contracts Act, investigate potential contraventions, and protect consumers from detriment resulting from non-compliance with the regulatory scheme. It is necessary for authorised persons to have access to documents to ensure the effective administration of the regulatory scheme, being the investigation and detection of money received by a builder pursuant to domestic building work where the required insurance has not been obtained.

There are no less restrictive means available to achieve the purpose of enabling authorised persons to have access to relevant documents, and access to such documents is necessary to ensure the safety of consumers and to protect the financial interests of consumers. To provide for a document-use immunity would unreasonably obstruct the role of authorised persons and the aims of the scheme, as well as give the holders of such documents an unfair forensic advantage in relation to criminal and disciplinary investigations.

Therefore, I consider that the limitation of the privilege against self-incrimination with respect to documents is compatible with the right not to be compelled to testify against oneself or confess guilt in section 25(2)(k) of the Charter.

Suspension of builder registration

Clause 10 of the Bill inserts a new subparagraph into section 180(b) of the Building Act adding a further ground on which a builder may have their registration immediately suspended, being a contravention of the new offences inserted by this Bill. The expansion of the grounds for suspension of registration is relevant to the right to a fair hearing.

Right to a fair hearing (s 24)

Section 24(1) of the Charter relevantly provides that a party to a civil proceeding has the right to have the charge or proceeding decided by a competent, independent and impartial court or tribunal after a fair and public hearing. The concept of a 'civil proceeding' is not limited to judicial decision makers but may encompass the decision-making procedures of many types of tribunals, boards and other administrative decision-makers with the power to determine private rights and interests. While recognising the broad scope of section 24(1), the term 'proceeding' and 'party' suggest that section 24(1) was intended to apply only to decision-makers who conduct proceedings with parties. As the administrative decisions at issue here do not involve the conduct of proceedings with parties, there is a question as to whether the right to a fair hearing is engaged.

In any event, if a broad reading of section 24(1) is adopted and it is understood that the fair hearing right is engaged by this Bill, this right would nonetheless not be limited. The right to a fair hearing is concerned with the procedural fairness of a decision and the right may be limited if a person faces a procedural barrier to bringing their case before a court, or where procedural fairness is not provided. The entire decision-making process, including reviews and appeals, must be examined in order to determine whether the right is limited.

Any decision made by the Victorian Building Authority to immediately suspend a builder's registration is made pursuant to a show cause process (section 182 of the Building Act) and is subject to internal review (Part 11, Division 4, subdivision 2 of the Building Act). The builder is provided with the opportunity to provide oral or written representations during the show cause period (section 182A(1) of the Building Act) and on internal review (section 185B(2)) of the Building Act).

Finally, any decision made to suspend a builder's registration by the Victorian Building Authority is subject to external review by VCAT (section 186 and section 186(3) of the Building Act). This affords builders a hearing before an independent and impartial tribunal and satisfies the requirements in section 24(1) of the Charter.

As such, I conclude that the fair hearing rights in section 24(1) of the Charter are not limited by this Bill.

Strict liability offences

Clause 5 of the Bill inserts a strict liability offence into the Domestic Building Contracts Act. New section 43B(2) relates to a builder demanding or receiving money from or on behalf of a building owner under a major domestic building contract without holding the required insurance. This offence does not require proof of fault (being that the builder did so 'knowingly or recklessly').

The inclusion of the strict liability offence in clause 5 of the Bill is relevant to the right to be presumed innocent under section 25(1) of the Charter.

Right to be presumed innocent (s 25(1))

Section 25(1) of the Charter provides that a person charged with a criminal offence has the right to be presumed innocent until proven guilty according to law. The right is relevant where a statutory provision allows for the imposition of criminal liability without the need for the prosecution to prove fault.

To the extent that this imposition limits the presumption of innocence, I consider that this limitation can be reasonably justified pursuant to the factors in section 7(2) of the Charter. Strict liability offences will generally be compatible with the presumption of innocence where they are reasonable, necessary and proportionate in pursuit of a legitimate objective.

A strict liability offence is considered legitimate where it is directed at preventing loss in particular contexts, such as consumer protection. This offence will deter existing practices within the building industry that have exposed consumers to significant risks of financial harm. This assists to enhance compliance with regulatory requirements and ultimately to protect consumers who may find it difficult to independently verify if the builder holds the proper insurance and who are otherwise vulnerable to losing large amounts of money where proper insurance was not held. It is reasonable that the offence does not require proof of fault given significant consequences and loss that can arise regardless of whether a builder acts knowingly or recklessly.

The offence is reasonable in that it does not exclude the common law defence of honest and reasonable mistake of fact, and it does not attract a penalty of imprisonment. While the offence attracts a fine of up to 240 penalty units for a natural person, which is at the high end of the liability spectrum for what a strict liability offence would generally attract, this is reasonable and proportionate noting the very large values of contractual commitments by builders and their customers under major domestic building contracts, and the significant costs to the community where builders fail to hold the required insurance. Accordingly, this maximum penalty provides a significant deterrent to prevent builders from operating without holding the required insurance in response to identified practices of non-compliance in the industry.

For these reasons, the limitation to section 25(1) of the Charter is reasonable and justifiable within the meaning of section 7(2) of the Charter.

Right not to be tried or punished more than once

Section 26 of the Charter provides that a person must not be tried or punished more than once for an offence in respect of which they have already been finally convicted or acquitted in accordance with law. This right reflects the principle of double jeopardy. However, the principle only applies in respect of criminal offences – it will not prevent civil proceedings being brought in respect of a person's conduct which has previously been the subject of criminal proceedings, or vice versa.

Penalties and sanctions imposed by professional disciplinary bodies do not usually constitute a form of 'punishment' for the purposes of this right as they are not considered to be punitive.

The ability of the Victorian Building Authority to immediately suspend the registration of a registered building practitioner (clause 10 of the Bill), for a court to grant an injunction against a person in circumstances where the Court is satisfied that the person has engaged in, or is proposing to engage in conduct that would constitute a contravention of one of the new offences (clause 13 of the Bill) and for a court to impose an order making a person ineligible for registration (clause 15 of the Bill) do not engage this right. This is because the purpose of each of these sanctions, for example an injunction against a registered builder from receiving further money under a contract without holding the required insurance, or suspending the registration of a

builder, is imposed to protect consumers from future harm. As these sanctions are for protective rather than punitive purposes, they do not engage the right against double punishment set out in section 26 of the Charter.

As such these provisions are compatible with the Charter.

Conclusion

I am therefore of the view that the Bill is compatible with the Charter.

The Hon Sonya Kilkenny MP

Minister for Planning

Second reading

Sonya KILKENNY (Carrum – Minister for Planning, Minister for the Suburbs) (10:48): I move:

That this bill be now read a second time.

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

Incorporated speech as follows:

The Victorian Government is committed to ensuring that consumers are provided with strong and meaningful protections when building or renovating their home and that builders face appropriate and commensurate consequences when they do not meet insurance requirements that provide consumer protection or seek to avoid these protection measures.

Following the collapse of Porter Davis Homes Group on 31 March 2023, it was revealed that more than 500 homeowners, or prospective homeowners, were at risk of losing their entire deposit due to the failure of Porter Davis Homes to obtain builders insurance on their behalf when required. Subsequently, we learned that several other builders that had previously collapsed – including Snowden and Hallbury Homes, among others – also had not obtained insurance to protect their customer's deposits.

In April 2023 the Government stepped in to help Porter Davis customers get back on their feet by compensating those customers who were left without insurance cover for their lost deposits through no fault of their own. Since then, the Government has also set up the Liquidated Builders Customer Support Payment Scheme for customers of other builders whose businesses collapsed between 1 July 2022 and 30 June 2023, where those customers were at risk of losing deposits because the builder had not obtained domestic building insurance.

This Bill will introduce the first initiative to reform the regulatory framework to ensure that consumers and the money they pay builders for domestic building work are protected, and to ensure builders are incentivised to obtain insurance when required. The Bill will amend the *Domestic Building Contracts Act* and the *Building Act* to:

- Insert a set of two new offences, with tough penalties, to ensure domestic builders will comply with the insurance requirements; and
- provide strong powers for the Victorian Building Authority to enforce compliance with the insurance requirements.

The set of new offences this Bill will apply where a builder enters into a major domestic building contract and demands or receives money from or on behalf of the building owner to carry out work under that agreement without ensuring the builder holds domestic building insurance when it is required.

The Bill will provide for significant penalties for any contravention of these new offences. It sets the maximum penalty level for where the offence is committed knowingly or recklessly at 500 penalty units, or approximately \$96,000, for a natural person and 2500 penalty units, or approximately \$480,000, for a body corporate.

Where the offence has been committed under a standard of strict liability, the maximum penalties are set at 240 penalty units, or approximately \$46,000, for a natural person and 1200 penalty units, or approximately \$230,000, for a body corporate.

Following their commencement, the operation of the proposed new offence provisions will be monitored to ensure that the consumer protections are upheld and appropriately balanced with industry interests.

The Bill will also enable the Victorian Building Authority to be the lead regulator to take strong action against a builder for non-compliance with any of the new offences.

The Bill will provide broad powers for the Victorian Building Authority to:

- take proceedings against a builder who contravenes any of the new offences; and
- take disciplinary action against a registered builder for non-compliance with any of the new offences, including immediate suspension of their registration if warranted.

This approach will allow the Victorian Building Authority to take the necessary actions to ensure commensurate penalties are meted out to non-complying builders and minimise ongoing community harm from non-complying builders that continue to operate.

As the general market regulator, the Director of Consumer Affairs Victoria will continue to exercise other regulatory powers and functions under the *Domestic Building Contracts Act* and the Australian Consumer Law (Victoria).

With the Victorian Building Authority taking the lead regulatory role, and empowered to take strong action where necessary, this will send a strong message to industry on the importance of builders adhering to insurance requirements and will, in turn, give building customers greater confidence in the building industry, which will be beneficial for builders, their customers and the wider building industry over the long term.

The collapse of Porter Davis Homes Group revealed an additional issue of multiple agreements being used by builders, often avoiding the threshold for the requirement to obtain a DBI policy. This issue – and further legislative options to address it – will be considered as part of a review of the Domestic Building Contracts Act. This review will also consider related issues including whether there should be any changes to monetary thresholds for deposits, the definition of domestic building work and progress payments at various stages of a construction contract.

I commend the Bill to the House.

James NEWBURY (Brighton) (10:48): I move:

That the debate be adjourned.

Motion agreed to and debate adjourned.

Ordered that debate be adjourned for two weeks. Debate adjourned until Wednesday 13 December.

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

Statement of compatibility

Lily D'AMBROSIO (Mill Park – Minister for Climate Action, Minister for Energy and Resources, Minister for the State Electricity Commission) (10:49): In accordance with the Charter of Human Rights and Responsibilities Act 2006, I table a statement of compatibility in relation to the Climate Change and Energy Legislation Amendment (Renewable Energy and Storage Targets) Bill 2023.

In accordance with section 28 of the *Charter of Human Rights and Responsibilities Act 2006* (the **Charter**), I make this statement of compatibility with respect to the Climate Change and Energy Legislation Amendment (Renewable Energy and Storage Targets) Bill 2023 (the **Bill**).

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

Overview of the Bill

The Bill is an amending Bill that makes amendments to –

- the **Climate Change Act 2017** to change the title of the Act, bring forward Victoria's long-term target for zero net emissions to 2045, provide for interim emissions reduction targets, and bring forward the preparation of certain documents required under the Act; and
- the **Renewable Energy (Jobs and Investment) Act 2017** to increase the renewable energy target for 2030 to 65%, provide for a new renewable energy target of 95% for 2035, and introduce energy storage targets and offshore wind energy targets; and
- the **Planning and Environment Act 1987** to expressly require consideration of climate change during the preparation of planning schemes and amendments to planning schemes under the Act.

Human rights protected by the Charter that are relevant to the Bill

The Bill does not raise any human rights issues.

Consideration of reasonable limitations – section 7(2)

As the Bill does not engage any human rights protected by the Charter, it does not limit any human rights and therefore it is not necessary to consider section 7(2) of the Charter.

Conclusion

Accordingly, it is my view that the Bill is compatible with the human rights as set out in the Charter.

Hon Lily D'Ambrosio MP

Minister for Climate Action

Minister for Energy and Resources

Second reading

Lily D'AMBROSIO (Mill Park – Minister for Climate Action, Minister for Energy and Resources, Minister for the State Electricity Commission) (10:49): I move:

That this bill be now read a second time.

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

Incorporated speech as follows:

The Victorian Government is committed to strong and decisive action on climate change and renewable energy to help secure Victoria's economic prosperity and competitiveness in a net-zero emissions future.

Today I bring to Parliament the Climate Change and Energy Legislation Amendment (Renewable Energy and Storage Targets) Bill 2023 that continues to set world-leading climate action and renewable energy targets, introduce crucial energy storage targets and Australia's first offshore wind electricity generation targets, and expressly embed climate consideration in land use planning decision-making.

Victoria's ambitious climate action

The Victorian Government recognises that climate change is one of the most critical issues facing us today. Both the science – and our lived experience in recent years in Victoria – tell us clearly that sustained and ambitious action to reduce greenhouse gas emissions is essential to avoiding the worst impacts of climate change.

Victoria continues to demonstrate that ambitious emissions reduction action brings with it economic prosperity and growth. Between 2005 and 2021, our nation-leading climate change agenda has helped drive a 32.3 per cent reduction in state-wide emissions. Over this time Victoria's economy has grown by 42.8 per cent.

Emissions reduction targets provide a clear signal to businesses, investors, households and governments on our plan to transform Victoria to a net zero economy.

By legislating our ambitious climate change targets, and setting them years in advance, the Government is providing clarity and certainty around the State's direction and vision for our future.

These targets have been informed by independent expert advice, which considered the latest climate science, Victoria's position in a rapidly decarbonising global economy and community expectations of climate action.

And we have already announced our intention to set our net zero emissions target to 2045 – five years earlier than our previous commitment.

Amendments to the *Climate Change Act 2017*

This Bill makes amendments to the *Climate Change Act 2017* that will legislate our updated net zero target, setting in stone an emissions reduction goal that puts Victoria at the forefront of global climate action.

The Bill will also legislate interim emissions reduction targets: 28-33 per cent below 2005 levels by 2025; 45-50 per cent below 2005 levels by 2030; and 75-80 per cent below 2005 levels by 2035.

The Bill also updates the title of the Climate Change Act to the Climate Action Act. This change reflects the imperative the Victorian Government places on taking real action on climate change.

Delivery dates of key products under the Climate Change Act will also be streamlined as part of the Bill. The Emission Reduction Sector Pledges and Climate Change Strategy will be aligned to ensure a more efficient and effective approach to delivering significant emissions reductions across Victoria's economy.

Whole-of-economy net zero transformation

Achieving our ambitious emissions reduction targets will require a whole-of-economy transition delivered in a strategic and coordinated manner. The amendments to this Bill focus on two high-impact areas for climate action: energy and land use planning.

The electricity sector currently generates around 50 per cent of Victoria's total emissions, and addressing these emissions is key to achieving net zero.

In addition to the energy sector, the Victorian Government also recognises the critical role Victoria's land use planning system will continue to play in achieving a net zero emissions and climate resilient Victoria.

This Bill reflects this approach – prioritising the increase of renewable energy generation and energy storage as the largest share of Victoria’s future energy mix, and reforming other key pieces of legislation to promote climate action across Victoria’s economy.

The energy transition

Victoria, along with many other parts of the world, is undergoing an accelerated transition of its energy sector from fossil fuel electricity generation sources towards renewable energy. This transition will require a generational investment in a diverse and decentralised mix of renewable electricity generation and renewable energy storage, supported by upgraded electricity transmission and distribution networks.

Over the last nine years, Victoria has established itself as a leader – nationally and around the world – in the development of renewable energy.

Over the last four budgets, we’ve committed more than \$3 billion to drive forward our renewable energy transition.

As a result, Victoria achieved its first Victoria’s Renewable Energy Target (VRET) target of 25 per cent renewable generation by 2020, with renewable sources providing 26.6 per cent of Victoria’s electricity generation for the year. Since then, Victoria has built on this success, achieving a renewable energy generation share of 38 per cent in 2022/23.

Today, Victoria has 5,280 megawatts (MW) of commissioned large-scale wind and solar capacity, 4,030 MW of small-scale rooftop PV capacity and 537 MW of operational energy storage capacity.

And as I present this Bill today in Parliament an additional thirteen renewable energy projects totalling 1,407 MW are currently under construction and a further 6,129 MW of new projects have been approved under our Government but are yet to commence construction.

These achievements have made our State one of the leading destinations for renewable energy investment in Australia.

Amendments to the *Renewable Energy (Jobs and Investment) Act 2017*

This Bill continues this Government’s tradition of decisive action to lead Victoria’s transition to renewable energy. This Bill enshrines the Victorian Government’s commitment to deliver the clean low-emissions energy all Victorians deserve and seize the significant economic, social and environmental benefits this transition will deliver.

To manage Victoria’s renewable energy transition and ensure reliable and affordable electricity supply is maintained for all Victorians, this Bill amends the *Renewable Energy (Jobs and Investment) Act 2017* to set forward the following targets:

- Increase the VRET for 2030 from 50 per cent renewable electricity generation to 65 per cent;
- Set a new VRET of 95 per cent renewable electricity generation by 2035;
- Set new energy storage targets of at least 2.6 gigawatts (GW) of energy storage capacity by 2030 and at least 6.3 GW by 2035; and
- Set new offshore wind energy targets of at least 2 GW by 2032, 4 GW by 2035 and 9 GW by 2040.

Legislating Victoria’s renewable energy, offshore wind and energy storage targets demonstrates our leadership and commitment to the energy transition. It will send a clear signal to the market and give confidence to the community that Victoria’s energy transition is being well managed.

Energy storage is vital to the decarbonisation of Victoria’s electricity sector. The firm capacity delivered by our energy storage targets will provide reliable, affordable and renewable energy as Victoria’s ageing and increasingly unreliable coal generation is replaced with new renewable capacity. Given the variety of energy storage technologies, the Bill contains a provision for the Minister to declare a facility not to be an energy storage facility for the purposes of the targets, ensuring that only dispatchable energy is counted. This will provide certainty clarity to industry and ensure the integrity of our energy storage system.

In addition, the scale of construction required to reach these targets will create substantial demand for labour. Achieving Victoria’s renewable energy and energy storage targets for 2030 and 2035 targets is expected to:

- support 27,800 jobs in Victoria over the period to 2030 and 59,200 jobs to 2035, with storage investment contributing 4,400 of these jobs to 2030 and 12,700 of these jobs to 2035
- support economic activity of at least \$5.3 billion (in net present value terms) in Victoria over the period to 2030 and \$9.4 billion (in net present value terms) over the period to 2035, with storage investment contributing \$750 million of this amount to 2030 and \$1.7 billion of this amount to 2035.

Legislating Victoria's renewable energy, energy storage and offshore wind energy targets will also support their inclusion in national energy market frameworks and plans – notably the Australian Energy Market Operator's Integrated System Plan.

To manage Victoria's transition towards renewable energy, this Government has delivered and continues to deliver a number of initiatives and programs to improve system reliability, increase energy efficiency, create local jobs and support regional communities.

Victoria is implementing programs and policies to put the state at the forefront of the energy transition. This includes the \$1.3 billion Solar Homes program, which has assisted over 250,000 households and businesses in installing solar PV systems, and the Victorian Energy Upgrades program, which has assisted over 515,000 households and 50,000 businesses in 2022 undertake energy savings and emissions reduction initiatives.

Victoria is also investing in battery and energy storage initiatives, such as the 300 megawatt Victorian Big Battery and investing in 100 neighbourhood batteries across Victoria to improve the energy reliability for local communities.

The VRET 2 Auction in 2022 brought forward 623 MWs of new renewable energy generation capacity, 365 MW and 600 megawatt hours (MWh) of new battery energy storage, and is expected to support at least 920 direct jobs and attract \$1.48 billion of investment in new Victorian renewable energy projects.

The Victorian Government has committed to bringing back the State Electricity Commission, as an active energy market participant and to build new renewable energy projects. The SEC will invest an initial \$1 billion towards delivering 4.5 gigawatts of power through renewable energy and storage projects.

Victoria is also leading nationally in developing offshore wind by establishing Offshore Wind Energy Victoria, which is currently undertaking engagement with industry and Traditional Owners on offshore wind projects. Victoria has also established VicGrid to coordinate the overarching planning and development of Victoria's Renewable Energy Zones and Offshore Wind transmission projects. The \$540 million Renewable Energy Zone (REZ) Fund has made investments to address some of the most severe areas of constraint on the grid to ensure that more renewable energy can flow through Victoria.

Accountability

To monitor Victoria's progress with the energy transition, the Minister for Energy and Resources will continue to report to Parliament annually on progress made towards meeting Victoria's renewable energy targets and will also report on Victoria's progress towards meeting the energy storage and offshore wind targets. In October, the Minister tabled the 2022/23 VRET Progress Report in Parliament, which reported that renewable electricity sources provided around 38 per cent of Victoria's electricity generation in 2022/23, putting the State on track to achieve its VRET 2025 target of 40 per cent.

Climate consideration in land use planning

In addition to the energy sector, the Victorian Government also recognises the critical role that Victoria's land use planning system will continue to play in achieving a net zero emissions and climate resilient Victoria. Land use decisions cut across a range of activities and sectors, presenting significant opportunities for strong and meaningful climate action.

This Bill will add Victoria's climate change goals to the objectives of the planning framework established under the *Planning and Environment Act 1987* to expressly integrate climate considerations into our planning framework and the decisions made about the use and development of land across our State. This new objective will form part of the objectives to be considered when municipal councils come to review their planning schemes.

These amendments will also introduce a new head of consideration for planning authorities – including local councils – to consider climate change when preparing a planning scheme or planning scheme amendment.

Ministerial Directions will be issued by the Minister for Planning. Supporting technical material to inform the Minister's Directions will be prepared by the Department of Energy, Environment and Climate Action. The Ministerial Directions will provide important clarity for how planning authorities are to comply with the new requirement, and fulfil their duty to consider these matters.

The Planning and Environment Act amendments do not directly concern planning permits, and the Ministerial Directions and technical and planning guidance will support planning authorities or proponents in considering emission reductions and climate change risks.

We have heard from local councils that they want to be empowered to take stronger action on climate change. We look forward to working with them on these changes.

Conclusion

The Victorian Government's decisive leadership will continue to encourage the unprecedented investment Victoria's renewable energy sector needs to deliver a renewable energy transition and help meet our target of

net zero emissions by 2045. It remains committed to taking the serious and far-reaching action that has made our State a global model for others to follow. Our climate action leadership is helping prevent the worst impacts of climate change while bringing immediate benefits to the Victorian economy and community.

I commend the Bill to the house.

James Newbury: On a point of order, if I may, Deputy Speaker, and a query, the minister has not been prepared to provide ministerial briefings on previous bills; is the minister going to provide the opposition with a bill briefing on this bill?

The DEPUTY SPEAKER: It is not a point of order.

James NEWBURY (Brighton) (10:50): I move:

That the debate be adjourned.

Motion agreed to and debate adjourned until 13 December.

Ordered that debate be adjourned for two weeks. Debate adjourned until Wednesday 13 December.

Land (Revocation of Reservations) Bill 2023

Second reading

Debate resumed on motion of Steve Dimopoulos:

That this bill be now read a second time.

James NEWBURY (Brighton) (10:51): I rise to speak on the Land (Revocation of Reservations) Bill 2023. When one looks at a bill of this nature, a bill that effectively changes the status of pieces of land around Victoria, you could mistakenly think that these changes have little impact or are not particularly important. How wrong you would be. The status of land and the status of land around this state is important, and it is important because it characterises what can be done in terms of government land and, in terms of non-government land, what the users can do with it.

In this case this bill proposes to remove the permanent reservation on a number of sites in both metro and regional Victoria – to break that down, 10 sites which are for the intention of sale and in three cases aligning the legal status to their actual use. Just to explain a little further, on 10 pieces of land, from the advice provided by the government, a nearby user, owner or neighbour has expressed an interest in that piece of land, and so the proposal would be that the permanent reservation be lifted off those 10 sites so that there can be some conversation between the government and those interested parties in relation to sale. Now, that does not mean that there are not a lot of processes to go through before we get to the point of sale or the government reaches a point of sale. However, this bill allows those conversations to start. In three cases – I spoke about the alignment – there have been longstanding uses for those three pieces of land and the legal status currently overlaid, for want of a better term, on those pieces of land does not align with their actual use, which is also important. In those cases, which I will refer to in more detail, oftentimes the local council has approached the government and said that the alignment does not suit, and in one case for some 150 years the use and the overlay alignment have been different. So a request has been made to change the overlay on those sites.

These changes actually do matter, and we know that because there are so many pieces of land around this state. You could talk to every member in this place and they will have had an experience of an alignment of land not suiting potentially the use and a legal change that may be required or a community request for a changed use. I will talk about a number of instances of that. Although the department I am sure works hard to ensure that changes occur, I think it would be fair to say that most members have experienced an instance where they have made a representation to the government, to the department, to ensure that a piece of land is either aligned properly or such and that has not yet occurred. So I would say that although we are dealing with 13 pieces of land today in this bill, there are, I am sure, many members in this place who have more than that in their own electorates that are

outstanding in relation to the government providing advice to requests for proper alignment of those pieces of land.

For background, the Crown Land (Reserves) Act 1978 specifically precludes the sale of Crown land unless the alignment is correct in terms of the reservation being lifted, so that is what we are proposing to do with this bill in relation to 10 pieces of land. I will mention each of them specifically for the record. Victoria Park Lake in Shepparton: this proposal relates to a permanent reservation at that site. The lake is permanently reserved for public park purposes which are managed by the local council, Greater Shepparton. The revocation aims to enable the purchase and refurbishment of a caravan park located on the southern end of the reserve by the council in an attempt to increase tourism. The sale could take some time to effect. As I said earlier, the potential sale is in its very initial interest stage rather than anything further than that.

The second site – I have the member for Eildon with me – is in the member's electorate, a former potato research station at Toolangi. The revocation relates to a piece of land that was once a site for agricultural research purposes. I understand there are actually three parcels of land in what is being proposed in this bill. The research station was closed in 2008, and there has been interest expressed by one of the leaseholders in terms of part of that land.

It is worth noting in all of these instances, as potentially an advisory note to the department, that though there has been interest expressed potentially by a leaseholder or a neighbour or an interested party, there are other affected parties. There are other neighbours, there are other leaseholders surrounding these pieces of land, and no consultation has occurred with any of those people. I say that not in a way to reflect on the work of the department, because of course they have noted quite clearly that this bill has come from a place of interest being expressed by one party and have been quite open in saying that full consultation and negotiations have not proceeded further than that. It is worth noting that the department, should this bill pass, would want to ensure that it does consider the impact on surrounding parties and surrounding neighbours and that full consultation would occur to ensure that any potential sale does not disadvantage any of those parties, who in some cases may have been looking after all good neighbours for many, many decades. I think that is an important point to put on the record.

The third site relates to Merriman Creek in Seaspray, which is a small area of land on the banks of the creek which is currently permanently reserved for public purposes. I have been advised that due to a survey error part of a house is located on the permanently reserved waterfrontage, so this revocation aims to rectify that survey error, and potentially an adjoining landowner has interest in acquiring that land. It is worth noting that in terms of this piece – and there are a number of pieces that we will deal with today – that will require consultation with traditional owners, but I will speak to that a little later.

The fourth site relates to the port of Geelong. Part of a permanent reserve which was created in 1873 at that port is targeted for revocation. Changes in Corio Bay's foreshore position have prompted the revocation, and the intention is to sell that piece of land to GeelongPort Pty Ltd, who have expressed interest.

The next site relates to borough chambers reserve in Clunes, which is, as many would know, leased to Wesley College. Wesley College is interested in the purchase of that piece of land relating to the borough chambers, and again this site would be subject to agreement with traditional owners.

Further, Stringers Creek in Walhalla – the revocation relates to certain land on the banks of Stringers Creek. As I understand it, there is an unsatisfactory arrangement for current owners of that land, so allowing the sale of the occupied land would correct that. The advice received from the department is that in that case the traditional owners are aware of this issue and a potential sale and have at this point made no objection to that. In terms of consultation with traditional owners, I understand that that is further along in this instance.

The next site relates to Alexandra Park. Following the completion of upgrades to the Swan Street bridge, a small section of the permanent reservation forming Alexandra Park was incorporated into

the bridge structure. This is one of the instances where the revocation will align the legal status of the land to its current use. That is also the case with Melbourne City Baths. There is a small piece of land, as I understand it, on the corner of the baths which has been used as a road for over a century, as I am advised, and this bill will align that use to its actual use.

There are five former mechanics institute reserve sites – two in Gippsland South, one in Gippsland East, one in Narracan and one in the electorate of Lowan. So there are five sites where there was a former mechanics institute, which would have been a community use site, but in all cases none have functioned for many, many years, and the land is used for various purposes, including things like grazing. In all of the cases other than in Narracan, the trustees of the reserves are deceased, so there is no lineage at four of the sites. In one of the sites there is a trustee who has been spoken with and contacted in relation to this proposal, who has confirmed in writing that they have no objection to the bill.

I mentioned earlier that there are a number of sites – and touched on them as I noted them – and there are four in total that are impacted by traditional owner arrangements. Those sites are at Clunes, Walhalla, Mirboo and Seaspray. There would of course be processes in place that would need to ensure that, both at a legislative level in terms of the requirements that sit around that and otherwise, negotiation occurs with traditional owners in relation to any proposed sale of that land. As I noted each of the sites, I did mention in one case where consultation has occurred, but there would need to be a fuller negotiation and consultation in relation to those other sites. Those are the sites that are being dealt with in the bill.

As I noted earlier, there are many, many sites that I am sure we will hear about from members throughout the debate on this bill where land use may not align with current use. As this bill has been considered over recent weeks a number of members have spoken to me about many, many outstanding instances where they have made representations to the government in relation to the overlay of status in relation to land. I was speaking, for example, to the member for Polwarth about a piece of land in his electorate just behind the Lorne foreshore. In that instance he, the community, the site owner and the council have been making representations to the department for over a year, and none have actually received a response – not even an acknowledgement.

You have got instances where acknowledgements are not even being received from the department, and I am not in any way reflecting on the department's good work, because I am sure they are dealing with a lot of requests in relation to land. But it is worth noting that in relation to the Lorne site, which is just behind the supermarket, at 10 Erskine Avenue, that land was purchased five years ago. Since that time the owners have been working through the status of a carriageway behind the supermarket to the site, currently a cottage home site, which is used for accommodation of course. What the site owners are hoping to do is build 15 more sites on the property, which is fantastic. I mean, we have a housing crisis in Victoria in terms of the need for more housing, and we have an instance where a site owner has gone to the government and said 'We want to build 15 more sites to allow 15 more people or families a place to live, a roof over their head'. An issue has arisen in that the driveway, as it were, into the property itself has not got the correct legal status. The banks have said, 'Well, we're sorry, we can't support you in your proposed development until the legal status of that piece of land is corrected.' So for over a year the owners but also council, in recognition of the important proposal, have contacted formally the department and said 'We have someone here who wants to build more homes. We want to build 15 more homes. All we need is a correction to land use'. To not have received an acknowledgement after all of those representations from various authorities is deeply concerning.

I use this instance to illustrate what many members of this place speak to. They speak to representing constituents about legal status changes being required to land, and many have occasions where they have made representations and an acknowledgement has not even been received by the department yet. I do not think it is unreasonable where we are proposing to do things that actually make a big difference – in the case of the Lorne site, to build 15 new homes at a time that they are really needed – to assume that a department can work through issues in a year. I do not think it is unreasonable for an

acknowledgment to be received and the process started to bring about any change, or if there is a concern around making that change, to stop it.

I was recently talking to a number of farmers who own a particular property. They had for some 100 years driven over a bridge onto their property. The bridge was washed away in recent flooding. Because that piece of land that had been used for some 100 years had not been aligned correctly, the department refused the rebuild of the bridge. The landowners were told to use what is technically allocated as the right-of-way access onto the property, which no longer exists – it is bush – but has been classified as the original right of way at best since early last century. So the only way the owners could actually get into their property was to drive through a busy utilised caravan park, which I do not think in any way benefits anybody. In that instance the home owners had been battling with the department for a very long time just to help them understand that a proper right of way and access existed and should be the point of access into the future.

I would say, with due courtesy, where there are instances of outstanding representation from the community or from members of Parliament, I would hope that we can perhaps look at the backlog. There has been some debate around planning reform and ensuring that decisions are not left on ministers' desks. I would say in relation to land usage and whether applications or representations have been made in relation to those pieces of land – I have just spoken about two, so I am sure many members will raise those instances. Perhaps this is an opportunity for the government to consider those occasions where representations are made and clear off that backlog. Perhaps there could be an assessment as a result of today and the government could have a look at what is outstanding and work through any issues, because in the case of the Lorne site, we do not want to see someone who wants to build 15 homes for the local community not able to build them. I would leave that point.

I did talk about the importance of ensuring that the overlay is correct on pieces of land. I know in my community there is a current amendment to the planning scheme in relation to a rezoning of land which is very, very close to my heart, and that is Elsternwick Park North, which is now the Yalukit Willam Nature Reserve. There is an application underway to change the status of that site. It is a very, very important site. There is a proposal to ensure that that site is protected as the nature reserve and wetland that it is. This is one of those issues that I have spoken about many times in this place and have been very passionate about since before I became a candidate to represent my community. This issue is one that I am very passionate about – ensuring that the rezoning of this piece of land protects it into the future. There are very few opportunities where you can have enormous pieces of land protected in the centre of Brighton, so close to the city, as a reserve and wetland.

When I first became the candidate, one thing that I was very concerned about was of course the flooding that occurs in Elwood. Brighton is an original seat in terms of this chamber – an 1856 seat – and over that time nothing has been done to mitigate flooding. Setting aside politics, you look at issues that happen in your community and you say, how do challenges not get solved over the best part of 175 years? How do they remain outstanding? I am sure that we all, as members in this place, have issues that drive us in terms of wanting to fix those challenges, and ensuring that flooding was mitigated in Elwood, in my community, was one of those challenges.

When we got wind that the golf course at Elsternwick Park North was not interested in proceeding with a new lease at that site, a number of us put our heads together and said 'Well, why couldn't we use that site as a reserve – a beautiful reserve – and also install wetlands on that site to catch water as it comes down towards the bay?' That vision was led by a number of people. Jo Samuel-King, who is now a local councillor in Bayside, and Marcus Gwynne have been instrumental in that vision and in ensuring that we have seen that vision come to life. When the proposal first came to pass at that site, only about four locals supported that vision. I remember talking to each of the local councillors, who all thought we were mad. Only one local councillor had the vision to accept it as an important project for the local community.

Over time the council learned that the community was on board. It is one of those instances where you find a local project that is meritorious and the community gets on board before everyone else does in terms of representatives, I note, having had very engaging debates and such with local councillors and also the state government – I recall the member for Bentleigh being very outspoken in his opposition to the proposed project – that this project was one that the local community supported. To give them credit, the former federal Liberal government and the now federal Labor government have both committed funding to ensuring that project comes to pass in the way that it deserves. It is an incredible site; in fact CNN just identified it as one of the six most important conversions in the world. So it is an incredible site which is currently underway in terms of a land use change application. But to have an international media organisation list it as one of the six most significant conversions on the globe is an incredible testament to the local community for their support but also the visionaries who have seen this change come to pass and led that change. And it is not finished yet; we have a lot more to do at the park. There is a lot that we can do in terms of protecting endangered species, but I will not say too much on that. I think that there are more things that we can do on that site, so the reclassification of that piece of land is an important thing.

In terms of the bill, though, I have implied but not stated clearly that the coalition will not be opposing the bill. The sites listed in this bill – I can understand, based on the advice the government have provided, why they have taken the path that they have in terms of the revocation of these sites. Again, the coalition will not be opposing this bill.

Anthony CIANFLONE (Pascoe Vale) (11:18): I rise to speak on the Land (Revocation of Reservations) Bill 2023. From the outset I just want to acknowledge that as the member for Pascoe Vale, Coburg and Brunswick West, I do not have any parcels of land directly included in this bill. However, I do certainly have a number of case studies that are definitely related and contextual for those communities that are directly impacted, both historically and prospectively, that I will be touching on in due course.

In Victoria Crown land can be reserved either temporarily or permanently, and while temporarily reserved land may be revoked through an administrative process, permanent reservations may only be revoked by an act of Parliament. Acts which revoke permanent reservations are a normal part of government business, and Parliament has passed such acts in the past. This bill will therefore seek to facilitate new management arrangements, new future uses and new development of relevant areas of land. The bill seeks to achieve this by revoking permanent reservations at 13 locations across Victoria as well as six corresponding restricted Crown grants. Future uses across these sites may include re-reservation in some cases, continued use by existing occupiers and potential sale and development. In doing so it is very important to note that in Victoria the sale of Crown land is subject to a range of Victorian government legislative and policy requirements, including strategic Crown land assessment policy, the land transaction policy and the landholding policy and guidelines. Additionally, any sale must adhere to the obligations under the Native Title Act 1993 at the Commonwealth level and under relevant agreements made under the Traditional Owner Settlement Act 2010.

The bill therefore seeks Crown land revocations, including Victoria Park Lake in Shepparton, which is in the member for Shepparton's electorate. We actually had the great opportunity as part of the Economy and Infrastructure Committee earlier this year to travel to Shepparton for a public hearing on the road safety inquiry, and it is looking pretty marvellous up in Shepparton, particularly with the investment in the new art gallery and the like.

The former potato research station in Toolangi, in the member for Eildon's electorate – with that research station having been closed or decommissioned as of 2008, this bill will help free up the future use of that land. Merriman Creek in Seaspray, in the member for Gippsland South's electorate, I believe – the bill is to revoke a small area of land permanently reserved for the site for public purposes along the banks of the creek.

The bill will also revoke five redundant permanent reservations for mechanics institutes at four locations in eastern Victoria as well as in the west. I understand that the mechanics institutes have not functioned for many years and there are no buildings or structures on these reserves, with the land now used for a range of purposes, including pine plantations, grazing and as parts of surrounding state forests. The bill will revoke a redundant permanent reservation at the port of Geelong, and it will also revoke part of the permanent reservation of the of the borough chambers reserve in Clunes, which Wesley College, Melbourne, currently leases as a residential college.

A small area of Alexandra Park in Melbourne on the banks of the Yarra in South Yarra will be revoked via this bill to reflect the legal status of the land and its current use as part of the upgraded Swan Street bridge, which has played a big role in alleviating congestion through that corridor, as I am sure we can all appreciate. The bill will also revoke the permanent reservation for public baths and washhouses over a very small area of the Melbourne City Baths reserve. According to the City of Melbourne, the relevant area located on the corner of Swanston and Franklin streets has, since the time of the land's reservation in 1878, never been used for the reserved purposes and only used as a road.

Finally and additionally, the bill will revoke the reservation over certain land permanently reserved for public purposes along the banks of Stringers Creek in Walhalla, in the member for Narracan's electorate, I believe, and it relates to several dwellings along the creek. Through this bill the revocation of 13 permanent reservations and six restricted Crown grants will enable appropriate use for the relevant lands, providing certainty to communities and affected individuals.

Generally, Crown land is owned by the Commonwealth government or state government, with most Crown land in Victoria owned by the Victorian government. It has been set out previously by the Department of Environment, Land, Water and Planning – the old DELWP – that about one-third of Victorian land is Crown land, with 8 million hectares in over 10,000 parcels of land. Of this land, approximately 50 per cent of Crown land in Victoria is national or state parks, 39 per cent is state forest, 4 per cent is unreserved or Australian government managed Crown land and 7 per cent, or 550,000 hectares, is Crown reserves. Crown reserves include many of our public schools, universities, TAFE colleges, public hospitals, mental health and other community services, cemeteries, municipal buildings and land, public roads, government railways, parks, community halls, recreation reserves and even racecourses.

Some of the earliest Crown reservations and land subdivisions in this state and colony's history actually took place in my community, which I would like to touch on to provide some context again for those communities which are impacted by this bill. Shortly after the arrival of John Batman and John Pascoe Fawkner on the banks of the Yarra in 1835 to establish what is now Melbourne on the traditional lands of the Wurundjeri people, my area was first surveyed by Robert Hoddle, the person who granted Melbourne its distinctively ordered grid layout sometime around 1837 or 1838. Through this surveying a 327-acre reservation was established for a village to be served by two distinct local roads, Bell Street West and what would later be called Sydney Road. The Pentridge name would come later in 1840 when surveyor Henry Foot named the area for the birthplace of his wife, Pentridge in Dorset, England. We heard the member for Hastings earlier give a big shout-out to his wife, but I am not sure if he is yet to name a city after his wife, like Henry Foot did here in Coburg with Pentridge.

Ten years later in December in 1850, in response to a burgeoning crime rate driven by the Victorian gold rush, the Pentridge stockade was established, with an initial population of 16 prisoners who were transferred from the overflowing Melbourne Gaol in Russell Street. By 1850 there were 20 farms in the area and land was reserved for places of worship and other future community needs which still stand and are utilised for their original purposes to this day, including St Pauls parish and Coburg Primary School.

Bluestone quarries began opening during this early era, and the increasing number of prisoners at the newly conceived Her Majesty's Pentridge were put to work breaking up the very stones that would later go towards building the very prison they were to be incarcerated in and towards the construction

of Sydney Road. By the end of the 19th century Coburg was home to 41 quarries that had been reserved for such purposes, and one such former quarry would later become Coburg Lake, when the area now called lake reserve was purchased in 1912 and a weir constructed to form a man-made lake contained by basalt rock and outcroppings. The bluestone drawn out of these quarries, including from Coburg Lake, has very much remained ever present across the streets and the laneways of my community. It still stands just as resilient and tall through the walls of Pentridge prison to this very day and very much has played an important role in shaping the character, identity and culture of Melbourne's northern suburbs. Coburg Lake, for example, continues to be enjoyed by many across the community on a daily basis thanks to its ongoing reservation for community benefit. For example, just last Sunday, on 26 November, the member for Broadmeadows and I attended the Alevi community's 30th anniversary festival at Coburg Lake. Supported by the Victorian Labor government, the festival is a wonderful celebration of all things Alevi, including food, music and culture. I pay tribute to Minister Stitt and Minister Erdogan for having attended, and I pay tribute to the dedicated long-time volunteers of the entire Alevi community, including president of the Alevi Federation of Australia Suzan Saka, president of the Alevi Community Council Huseyin Duman, president of the Dandenong Alevi Cultural Centre Serda Daşoğlu and all the volunteers.

Another example I would like to draw the house's attention to, which also can provide some further context, relates to the utilisation of land in my community related to the Robinson Reserve and Reynard Street Neighbourhood House in West Coburg. Originally, the site was a long-time army barracks and drill hall, and the story of how the land was returned to the community is an illustration of how sometimes the good work of a nifty local councillor can help uncover some positive outcomes. This reserve of land was part of the original Crown portion 140 and owned by the original crown grantee John Pascoe Fawkner before changing ownership a number of times to the Metropolitan Permanent Building Society, who then sold it to the old Borough of Coburg in 1908. In 1912 the army accepted the then Coburg Borough Council's offer of the land for a drill hall at a peppercorn rent of 1 shilling per year for 500 years – a 500-year lease on community land for an army drill hall. The hall was erected for £1500 for the 59th regiment. It was opened in 1914 by the then defence minister Senator Millen. Two years after the council agreed to the 500-year lease, which would be controversial by today's standards by any means, the registrar of titles in the state of Victoria questioned the legality of such a lease and refused to sign it. An application was made to the High Court to compel the registrar of titles to register the lease, but the court dismissed the application.

However, in 1975 it was then Labor councillor Murray Gavin, whose son Paul Gavin volunteers for me to this very day and does an amazing job, continued to pursue the matter and discovered it was illegal for councils to lease land for longer than 10 years. So after what I can imagine were some very interesting and extensive conversations, the army was eventually asked to vacate the site. According to the Coburg Historical Society, the army originally wanted a local sporting body to take over the site, but the council decided the reserve should be returned to residents for community use. The reserve and the hall were later officially opened in 1988.

On 18 November I was very happy to represent the Minister for the Suburbs to officially unveil the latest chapter in the rich history of the site by opening up the revitalised Reynard Street Robinson Reserve park, play and recreational space. It was a \$420,000 project made possible by a \$178,000 Labor government contribution. As a former chair of the house who oversaw the strategic planning for the site to integrate the house back with the park, I was delighted to be there to officially open it and put it back to good community use. I commend the bill in that context.

Tim BULL (Gippsland East) (11:28): It is a pleasure to rise to talk on the Land (Revocation of Reservations) Bill 2023. I repeat the statement from our lead speaker that we are not opposing this bill. I must give great credit to our lead speaker the Shadow Minister for Planning for being able to find 27 minutes to talk about on this bill. It is not the most riveting bill that I have come across in my time in the chamber. That was a fantastic effort by the member for Brighton to get through 27 minutes.

This bill revokes the permanent reservations at 13 locations across not only metropolitan Victoria but also regional Victoria. The primary purpose of these revocations is an intention to primarily sell the land but in some cases allot it to the existing uses in the surrounding area. Five of the areas are locations that are reserved for mechanics institutes, and I will get onto that a little bit later, but it is a very interesting scenario if you know the area in Gippsland East that had been reserved for a mechanics institute. In all cases they have not functioned for many years, and I would suggest in some of the locations perhaps they have not ever functioned at all – the land was just put aside. Therefore there are no buildings or structures on these reserves, and they are now used for a range of purposes, including as previous speakers have mentioned, for plantations or grazing or as part of a state forest.

The one area that is in my electorate is Haunted Stream in Gippsland East. It is a little place, and I am sure no-one in this chamber would know where it is. It is located in very dense bushland and has literally hundreds, in some cases, of kilometres of bush around it, and I was most surprised in reading this bill report to realise that there had been a reservation for a mechanics institute on the Haunted Stream. For those who are even remotely interested, it is between Bruthen and Ensley on the Great Alpine Road on the way to Omeo, and Haunted Stream cuts through the Great Alpine Road. But when this bill came up and I saw this, I did initially think it must have been a mistake that a mechanics institute area of land had been reserved in Haunted Stream, because the only township that I knew of was a little place called Stirling, now very, very long abandoned. My assumption was that it was possibly in the area of Stirling that this land was put aside, but there is literally nothing there now.

Why I am familiar with this area is that many years ago I caught my first trout in the Haunted Stream. I went up there with a mate of mine called Wayne – not the member for Narracan but a fellow called Wayne Tatnell – up through the bush in the Haunted Stream area. I can assure you it is extremely remote, best described perhaps as mountain goat country. We were walking through with our fishing rods getting tangled in everything and our Celtas and managing probably through good luck rather than ability to catch a few trout.

Wayne Farnham: How big was it?

Tim BULL: Look, it was probably 12 inches, mate. But it is a very, very picturesque area. It is a fantastic, remote area of bushland in East Gippsland and a very, very fire-prone area. I do not know how a mechanics institute would have gone on the Haunted Stream, had one ever been built, in relation to the fire risk there, because every two to three years it unfortunately gets burnt. But hopefully we are not headed there again this year.

Just back to the bill –

A member interjected.

Tim BULL: I can tell another fishing story if you would like, but I will get back onto the bill.

The Crown Land (Reserves) Act 1978 specifically precludes the sale of reserved Crown land, and therefore the revocation of these areas is an essential preliminary step towards any sale proposal, but I do note that in the area of Haunted Stream I am not sure there would be many buyers. But I believe it is to revert to the existing use of the land that is surrounding that area, which would more than likely, in my assumption, be state forest. Of course the sale of Crown land, which will be applicable to some of these other areas, is subject to a whole lot of legislative requirements, and that is obviously why we are in the chamber at the moment debating this bill, which will open up the possibility for that to happen.

There is a potential for some of these areas to have sensitive Indigenous sites. Now, from reading the bill report and the second-reading speech, my understanding is that that is potentially not applicable in the majority, if not all, of the areas that are included here. But I note that one of the other areas that was reserved for mechanics institute purposes, whether that be an institute or a library or a hall, was in the seat of Narracan. I am sure the member for Narracan will be speaking on this, and I will be interested to know if his area is just as remote as the one in Gippsland East. But the other ones are in

Darlimurla, in Gippsland South; Mirboo, in Gippsland South; Narracan; and Wombelano, on the other side of the state in Lowan.

The fact that we are debating this bill now gives us little bit of a snapshot back in history when times were obviously very, very different. Towns like Stirling, back in the day when the gold rush was on, were thriving little communities. A couple of weeks ago I visited a little place called Bullumwaal, just north of Bairnsdale, which consists of a couple of townhouses now. There are no commercial shops open, just a few private residences. From reading the history of that place, there were 12 hotels there back in the day when the gold rush was on – 12 pubs and two footy teams, and Stirling would not have been a lot different to that. So when you consider, I guess, those times past and that gold rush era and period in our history, some of these areas where these townships do not exist now were very much thriving communities with a lot of trade and a lot of residences back in the day.

So it is interesting – when this bill throws up some of these locations, it gives you a bit of a snapshot of what the history of our area was like. But as we know, I do not believe there was any mechanics institute ever built at Haunted Stream. There may have been, but my brief google searching cannot find any trace of one ever being built, so I understand it was probably land that was simply put aside. But with the end of the gold rush period, which saw those locations on the Haunted Stream become a little line of important villages, it was something that never, ever eventuated and never came to be. I believe that other than the Narracan site, all the trustees for the reserves that were put aside are now deceased, but in the case of your one surviving trustee in Narracan the advice is that they have no objection to this proceeding.

In some of the other locations, beyond Haunted Stream, that are included in this bill, on the face of it perhaps a tenant or a neighbour has expressed some interest in purchasing the land. Importantly, the department advised our shadow minister in the bill briefing that there have been no sale negotiations that have been progressed on any of these sites. That probably technically cannot occur until this bill has passed. But hopefully this will open the way for some use for some of these areas of land into the future. As stated, a number of these sites are dependent, contingent, on negotiations with the Indigenous landholders of the area – in the case of Haunted Stream that will be the Gunnaikurnai of course – although I do not believe, according to the bill report, that there are major implications really for any of these sites.

In finishing up, I think this will probably be one of the very, very few times the Haunted Stream area will ever be mentioned in this Parliament for potentially some time into the future. But it is a great little area. All members of the chamber, if you are heading up to Omeo over the Christmas period, please keep an eye out for the Haunted Stream. There is a great bushwalking track that follows the stream up on the western side of the highway, and I would well recommend that to all members when they come and visit beautiful East Gippsland.

Dylan WIGHT (Tarneit) (11:38): It gives me great pleasure this morning to rise to speak on the Land (Revocation of Reservations) Bill 2023. Indeed I am not quite sure how I am going to fit everything I have to say about this bill into the 10 minutes provided. I would like to acknowledge the contribution, though, of the member for Gippsland East, just previous to me. I more than intend actually to take up his offer of some bushwalking in Gippsland East. I will also point out the fact that, although I do not have any in my electorate, I am very fond of a good mechanics institute. In fact I remember a country football club that I played for that still had a mechanics institute in the town. We used to do the local ball every year there and different things. I have very fond memories. But I might perhaps get to the bill after that introduction.

Tim Bull: It's been a wideranging debate.

Dylan WIGHT: It has been a wideranging debate. I am not quite sure why he would want to point of order me, but we will get our way through it.

At its core this bill seeks to authorise the revocation of some permanent reserves across the state – 13 strategically chosen sites in Victoria – in conjunction with the alteration of six restricted Crown grants. This legislative action is in alignment with the broader goals of optimising land use and responding to the evolving needs of the Victorian community and environment. I think the member for Gippsland East just used an example of arrangements that were perhaps made during the gold rush, as far back as that, and obviously things have changed significantly over the course of time since then. This bill just seeks to clean up and clarify some of those changes that have occurred.

The bill also proposes to repeal part 4 of the Land (Reservations and other Matters) Act 1999, paving the way for innovative land management strategies. This repeal is not just a procedural step but a significant move towards more adaptable and efficient land administration. A cornerstone of the bill is the facilitation of new land management arrangements. It will open avenues for these lands to be re-reserved for alternative purposes aligning with contemporary needs and priorities. Furthermore, it provides a framework for the development or sale of these lands subject to future requirements.

It is important to note that any potential sale process will be conducted in strict compliance with existing legislation, including adherence to the obligations under the Native Title Act 1993. The department has advised that this process is the first step in any process of re-reservation, development or sale. Relevant traditional owner groups have been advised of the proposals relating to the sites. No objections have been raised at this stage, and any further issues will be worked through if that point is reached.

There are a number of strategic sites that we are applying this legislation to across Victoria, as I said in my opening remarks. One of those is Victoria Park Lake in Shepparton, and I acknowledge the member for Shepparton, who is in the chamber at the moment. I believe that that site is a local caravan park, and the change and what we are doing here will make it easier for people to holiday, to go to that caravan park, and it will be good for tourism in the area. It is a significant move under the land revocation bill. A portion of the permanent reservation of Victoria Park Lake in Shepparton, encompassing almost 3.5 hectares, is set to be revoked.

Victoria Park Lake, a cherished public space, is currently reserved for public park use, with the Greater Shepparton City Council serving as the management committee of the reserve. Notably, the southern end of the reserve, which also includes land owned by the council, is home to a longstanding caravan park operated by the council for over six decades. Council has advised the Department of Energy, Environment and Climate Action that it wishes to purchase the Crown land portion of that caravan park, creating more capacity for holiday-goers in peak periods. This area has been identified by the council as a prime location for refurbishment, aiming to enhance its appeal and cater to the growing tourism demands in the Shepparton area.

The council has expressed its intention to acquire the Crown land segment of the caravan park, which necessitates the revocation of its current reservation status. To ensure its seamless transition, the bill proposes a temporary reservation of the land for public purposes under the Crown Land (Reserves) Act 1978 during the interim period, which is anticipated to last at least 12 months. Throughout this period the Greater Shepparton City Council will maintain its role as the land's committee of management until any potential sale is finalised.

Another incredibly important site is the port of Geelong. The member for Lara and I were only speaking about this it must have been two weeks ago, in the last sitting week. We were sitting next to each other in the chamber, and we were talking about the port of Geelong situation. The port of Geelong plays a few critical roles in Victoria's economy. If you were to travel down to Geelong now – or if you have done so in the last 12 months – you would notice two things with the port of Geelong. It is the new site for the *Spirit of Tasmania*, which has really opened up that port in a tourism sense and has really opened up the west of Melbourne, I would say, from my electorate in Tarneit all the way down through the Western District, through the Surf Coast and through Geelong. What we have now is a situation where if you are coming from Tasmania for a holiday, you are landing at the port of Geelong and driving your car off. Perhaps you are going on a holiday down the Surf Coast, you are

going through Geelong, you are going through Torquay, you are going through those coastal communities, or indeed you are going to Melbourne and you are coming past my electorate, coming past Hoppers Crossing and coming past Tarneit. That decision to take the *Spirit of Tasmania* from Port Melbourne to the port of Geelong was something that was incredibly important for Victoria's regional economy, and as I said, the port of Geelong plays an important role in that.

The port of Geelong has always played a role, as most ports do, in respect to economic activity and imports, but a significant role that it is also playing now is as part of Victoria's energy transition. The port of Geelong has for some time now had significant renewable energy imports come through it. So when we talk about wind blades, most of which are coming from Europe into the port of Geelong and then out to construct wind farms in the Western District and sort of north through Horsham, through Ararat and that sort of area, the port of Geelong has played a significant role in that. It has also played a significant role in the importation – sometimes only from the Port of Portland, to be frank – of towers for those renewable energy projects. Opening up that port, expanding it and giving the port of Geelong now the capacity through acquiring this land to continue to expand that port is really important and will play a significant role in opening up regional Victoria's economy and strengthening regional Victoria's economy as well – don't you reckon, member for Narracan? Is Walhalla in your electorate?

Wayne Farnham: Yes, it is.

Dylan WIGHT: Beautiful. There is some stuff here on Walhalla as well. I went to Walhalla about a year ago. I went on a lovely walk. It was beautiful.

Kim O'KEEFFE (Shepparton) (11:48): Today I rise to speak on the Land (Revocation of Reservations) Bill 2023. The bill before the house is a bill for an act to provide for the revocation of certain permanent reservations of Crown land at 13 sites, to revoke related Crown grants and to re-reserve certain land and for other purposes. This bill allows conversations to start between the government and interested parties and the appropriate consultation.

I will start by referring to the land in my electorate. One of the main provisions of this bill is to revoke the permanent reservation of certain land at the Victoria Park Lake caravan park to provide for the temporary re-reservation of the land for public purposes. As a member of local government in the region for over six years, this has had a lot of conversations in regard to what the future of this site should look like, so it is very pleasing to see this come to the house today.

Clause 3 of the bill provides for the revocation of part of a permanent public park reservation at Shepparton in order to facilitate the future use, including the potential sale, of the land. The clause revokes one order in council that is set out in item 1 of schedule 1, providing for one permanent reservation insofar as it relates to Crown allotment 2024, township of Shepparton, parish of Shepparton. In addition, clause 4 of the bill sets out, subject to clauses 5 and 6, the consequences of the revocation under clause 3 of the bill. This clause will provide that the land is taken to be unalienated land of the Crown and that the appointment of any committee of management of that land, the appointment of any trustee of that land and any regulations made under section 13 of the Crown Land (Reserves) Act 1978 are also revoked to the extent they relate to that land.

Furthermore, clause 5 of the bill provides that on the revocation of the order in council referred to in item 1 of the schedule, being the land in respect of which the reservation is revoked by clause 3, that land is taken to be temporarily reserved for public purposes under section 4(1) of the Crown Land (Reserves) Act 1978. Clause 6 of the bill provides that on the revocation of the order in council referred to in item 1 of schedule 1, the Greater Shepparton City Council is taken to be the committee of management of that land appointed under section 14(2) of the Crown Land (Reserves) Act 1978. The reserving of the land temporarily for public purposes is to ensure that the Greater Shepparton City Council retains appropriate management control over the land following the revocation. Currently Victoria Park Lake is permanently reserved for the purpose of public land and the Greater Shepparton City Council is the reserve's committee of management. At the southern end of the reserve at Victoria

Lake on the land owned by Greater Shepparton City Council is the caravan park, which the council has operated for more than 60 years for the Shepparton community. Extensive growth, as you can imagine, has occurred during that time. In the minister's second-reading speech he spoke about how the Greater Shepparton City Council has advised the Department of Energy, Environment and Climate Action that it wishes to purchase the Crown land portion of the caravan park in order for the park itself to be refurbished to cater for the increased tourism rates experienced across the Shepparton district.

This land is in a prime location at the gateway of the city next to the Shepparton Art Museum, one of our major tourist attractions, which sits on our beautiful lake precinct. There has been significant investment also into this lake precinct over the years, and as mentioned by the member for Brunswick, the Economy and Infrastructure Committee got to see this beautiful precinct on their visit recently – and I invite members in the chamber to come to my region. Over many years the caravan park on the land owned by council has deteriorated; the land was flood-affected and more than ever needs work to be done. Council in the past has looked at refurbishment and future opportunities for the caravan park area to be upgraded, to turn the current run-down site into a wonderful tourist attraction and destination. The current size of the land owned by council led to roadblocks and limitations to what could be achieved. Council being able to purchase this extra Crown land hopefully will create a significant opportunity to look at future opportunities for the site. This is a great example of Crown land sitting dormant that could be used for public space and activation and an extension of the current offering.

The cost of the land to council is still to be determined. However, any sale is likely to take place in at least 12 months after the permanent reserve is revoked, after which the bill would temporarily reserve the land for public purposes under the Crown Land (Reserves) Act 1978, and Greater Shepparton City Council will continue as the land's committee of management pending any sale. Under clause 1 the other areas included in the bill to be revoked are permanent reservations of certain agricultural research land at Toolangi; the permanent reservation of certain land at Seaspray; permanent reservations and related Crown grants of certain mechanics institute land at Haunted Stream, to be dedicated as a reserved forest under the Forests Act 1958; at Narracan South, which I am looking forward to hearing the member for Narracan speak about, at Darlimurla, Mirboo and Wombelano, the permanent reservations of certain land; the port of Geelong; permanent reservations of certain borough chambers land at Clunes; and the permanent reservation and related Crown grant of certain land at Alexandra Park in Melbourne. It also revokes the permanent reservation related Crown grant of certain land at the Melbourne City Baths reserves and the permanent reservation of certain land at Walhalla. This bill is providing a range of opportunities and improvements at all of these locations.

Clause 2, the commencement provision, provides for the bill to come into operation on a day or days to be proclaimed or on 1 November 2024 if not proclaimed before this date. I commend the bill to the house.

Tim RICHARDSON (Mordialloc) (11:54): I rise to speak on the Land (Revocation of Reservations) Bill 2023 – a bit of alliteration there; well done to the adviser team and the drafters – and follow the member for Shepparton, whose community it has a direct connection with and obviously an impact on, so it was great to hear that contribution. This is a really interesting bill for where Victorians find their land reservations and for thinking about in each and every parcel and community the significance of Crown land reservations that are put aside for a range of different uses. It is worth reflecting on the more than 8 million hectares, an area of Victorian public land on which there are 1200 portions of public land reservations across 550,000 hectares, forming a range of different usages – road, rail, environmental outcomes, community, recreational, you name it. Those reservations are things that were envisaged, but as our state starts to grow and millions more Victorians come to live here in the years to come, these reservations and their future use and purposes are really critical to consider.

I want to make two interesting reflections and analogies on reserves that I have been familiar with having grown up in the eastern suburbs of Melbourne and then also servicing the Mordialloc electorate. There are two particular reserves that could not be more contrasting in their needs and that

have been Crown land reservations. One is the Mordialloc Freeway reserve, or the Mornington Peninsula Freeway reservation, which was first conceived by the Hamer government. Maybe in the future – there is room for more Hamers in Victoria, that is for sure. The member for Box Hill Paul Hamer is in the chair, so I am not just talking to the ether or nowhere – but there is a lot of room for Hamers in the Parliament.

The Hamer government put aside the Mornington Peninsula northern extension freeway reserve, which went a lot further up towards the Monash, but gradually as communities developed and land reservations around green wedge land and market gardens through there changed, we saw the freeway retreat a bit to where it intersects now with the Dingley bypass and the Mordialloc Freeway. But for decades, the community questioned whether this was a necessary reservation. Debate went on – people thought this should be an environmental trail, a shared user path or should be incorporated into the green wedge – but I am proud to say that we delivered the Mordialloc Freeway. We used that reserve, and it took the Andrews Labor government to act on that reserve. I am so glad that we did not have a revocation, because it is that forward planning – that thinking around community use and benefit that was decades in the making – that happened under the Hamer government and was realised by the Andrews government some 40-plus years later.

Contrast that to out in the eastern suburbs and the Healesville freeway reserve. It is still named as such, but sections were taken offline 11 years ago to make that an environmental shared user path and a planted corridor. It is a spectacular addition to Victoria's open space and the corridor through there. It is not envisaged for a freeway anymore, and it just shows that in two communities – in metropolitan Melbourne and on the fringes of our interface councils – that change could be so substantial. I think the section from Springvale Road to Boronia was a section that was taken offline previously. We need to adapt to those changes and those community uses, and that is where community consultation and long-term planning outcomes from our Department of Transport and Planning and our environmental departments are really critical to stress-testing that over time and working with our local government authorities to make sure that we are always in check with what we need for the future and the outcomes going forward. I wanted to provide that as a reflection because it shows how over time things can change and how different usages of what was envisaged to be road reserves can have such a different community story.

There is also a really important role, particularly when we talk about the parcels of land – some being as small as the baths that are mentioned in this bill, I think being 10 square metres, all the way up to thousands of hectares – that we are respectful and always engaging with traditional owners. When we think about our journey at the moment towards a treaty with First Nations people – a bipartisan-supported commitment in this Parliament – land usage is a really critical element for consideration. The consultation particularly that goes on with the Bunurong Land Council, out my way, but all traditional owner land groups and representatives is a really critical part of that consultation journey. I know that a lot of these parcels of land have gone through years if not decades of consideration, and as members have reflected, there are times where it has been advocacy over multiple terms of Parliament that has led to other outcomes as well. But we need to be respectful, consultative, caring, nurturing and supportive of traditional landowner groups and be informed in that process of consultation. I know that was a key reiteration in some of the considerations and work of this bill.

The member for Shepparton made a good point about the productive use or alternative uses of Crown land. It is something that I am really passionate about out in the south-eastern suburbs in my electorate as well. We had a Crown land allocation near the National Water Sports Centre – of course the National Water Sports Centre was one of the linchpins in the pitch for the Olympic Games that eventually went to Atlanta in 1996. This water body was allocated and reserved for the potential pitch for the Olympic Games and now is for public use.

But to the north near Cornish College was an allocation of land that was really redundant. For all the work that Parks Victoria and the department undertook, it was almost impossible to maintain on a regular basis. We had a number of call-outs and concerns during that time of people accessing this

illegally. So it was offered to an organisation called the Melbourne Cable Park, a leasing arrangement that has been amazing in terms of the change of Crown land. It is still deemed in that space but provides a complimentary use in green wedge allocated Crown land, a recreational reserve with two massive lakes through there that allow waterskiing and an aqua fun park that has really opened up so much more usage. Tens of thousands of people enjoy this facility each and every year. But if not for that change and that consideration of land usage, we would not have had that process. We have had considerations in previous bills on the use of Crown land and its operation.

The other one that really sticks out to me is the helmeted honeyeaters allocation in Yellingbo. I give a shout-out to the member for Monbulk – what a majestic part of Victoria Yellingbo is. My nan is in Woori Yallock, and I know the member for Eildon has a connection to that part, and also the former Deputy Premier, the member for Monbulk James Merlino. He might have a couple of helmeted honeyeaters – I do not know, he is so passionate about them. They are obviously one of our emblems. It is a substantial environmental precinct through the reserve for the helmeted honeyeater, and that Yellingbo allocation is just an amazing use of Crown land. The reasons we have those reserves and their preservation are so very critical – it is part of our identity in Victoria. Just up the road through there where I grew up as a kid, we protect the Leadbeater's possum as well. When we think about those reserves that stand in perpetuity and that we support under legislation, we have to be considerate of those usages, of how community connects and the environmental significance of those into the future. I know the member for Monbulk is very passionate about that space and that advocacy, and a number of members of Parliament have been part of that as well.

I want to reiterate and thank the department and the minister's office for the journey to this point. They have got a great team of advisers and bureaucrats who do an outstanding job each and every day. The new minister has obviously hit the ground running, briefed up and ready to go. Land revocations are one of the many things that are on the go. I want to just reiterate the importance of the community consultation that has gone on and the engagement that has been had with members across the Parliament. The lived experience that they bring to this on behalf of their communities and the respect and important diligence and dignity that has been shown in the engagement with First Nations peoples on this bill will see further land revocations and considerations of reserves come through. But in this iteration, when you look through each of the individual circumstances, they make a lot of sense. Some are really postage-stamp small, all the way up to thousands-of-hectare allocations. It just shows the diversity and breadth across the more than 1200 public land reserves that we look after in Victoria across the 550,000 hectares.

On behalf of my community, with the examples we have demonstrated around the Mordialloc Freeway road reserve, the story around the Healesville Freeway reserve and the contrast there with the land usage and engagement, we are really appreciative of the bill coming before us. We wish it a speedy passage through the two houses.

Wayne FARNHAM (Narracan) (12:03): I am pleased to rise today on the Land (Revocation of Reservations) Bill 2023, being that it actually does affect my electorate. It has been an interesting contribution today. We had a beautiful history lesson from the member for Pascoe Vale. We had a fishing lesson from the member for Gippsland East. The member for Tarneit finally figured out there was something in my electorate today, which I was very proud of, and there was the member for Shepparton. But the member for Mordialloc is probably the one that stayed closest to the bill today, and I congratulate him on that. I also congratulate the shadow minister, who gave us an absolutely inspiring 27 minutes on this bill today, and that would have been a challenge. The member for Brighton did an absolutely fantastic job – inspiring, it was. I was riveted to my screen. I could not tear myself away.

We do not oppose this bill, because this bill is commonsense. I do appreciate the staff sending me through the actual maps of Walhalla. These are not props, but I can tell you there are about 36 different titles, if I am correct – somewhere around that figure – in Walhalla that have to be readjusted or sold off or whatever needs to be done. Obviously in this process we do have to consult with the

Gunnai/Kurnai people, which I am sure will be pretty, I would say, cordial. Everyone will get along. It will be fine. This bill does fix some things. I can tell you some of the titles in Walhalla go back to 1889, when these titles were put in place. So it would be good to –

Tim Bull: The gold rush.

Wayne FARNHAM: Gold rush time. I hope people in this chamber go down to Walhalla, because it is a beautiful part of Victoria. I have talked about Walhalla many times in this chamber, and there is a reason for that, because it is one of the best places in Victoria.

Ros Spence: Get the steam train.

Wayne FARNHAM: Well, if we had a train line – from where? But speaking about the steam train – I am glad the Minister for Agriculture at the table brought that up – I actually took the Shadow Minister for Tourism, Sport and Events down there last week. The big man, me and him, went on the train from Thomson River into Walhalla. It was not a train; it was one of the maintenance carriages, and I will say the big man struggled to get in the carriage. He struggled to get in. He is a big lad. If you ever catch the train, it is quite a steep incline out of Walhalla – I think it is about 17 degrees – and with the shadow minister and I in this little maintenance carriage it might have been a bit too much for the incline. I will blame the shadow minister, because one of the fellows had to get out and push it up the hill, so the shadow minister or I need to do a bit of weight loss. It is a great part of the town.

Walhalla is an interesting place. I do not know if many people know this: Walhalla Cricket Club started in 1882, and in 1907 – I know the member for Gippsland East will love this – they had a cricket match at Walhalla. The cricket match was between Walhalla and the Melbourne Cricket Club. How about that? How long would it have taken the MCC to get to Walhalla back in those days? Unfortunately, the MCC declared at 7/233 and the Walhalla team only made 133 runs. Apparently they had a rematch in 2007, but I could not get the scores on that one. I am tipping the MCC probably won again. It takes you half an hour to walk up the hill in Walhalla to get to that cricket ground. Have you ever played there, member for Gippsland East?

Tim Bull: No.

Wayne FARNHAM: No? You are a cricketer. I thought you would have.

This is a commonsense bill, and we do not oppose it. I also have a mechanics institute in Narracan. I think the trustees are the only trustees that are not deceased, and they do not have a problem with this being in this bill either. It is a well-supported bill. As I said, it has been a pretty wideranging debate today.

This actually comes at a perfect time for Walhalla, because Walhalla, as I mentioned the other week, has been put up by UNESCO for heritage listing. This bill will tidy up those titles around there, and hopefully for the people who own properties around there, if it is adjacent to their title, this will pick that up. Obviously there are titles around roads as well. This will go a long way to tidying all this up. So if Walhalla does get recognised for World Heritage listing, it will be a lot easier to do other works there into the future to improve their tourism and their economy. Hopefully one day this government will listen to me and put sewerage on in Walhalla, because that is very, very important.

The other thing I think the government needs to start looking at is the correlation between Department of Energy, Environment and Climate Action owned sporting grounds and local councils. This causes me no end of grief in my community, because unfortunately in these situations it gives both authorities a bit of an out. I am going to reference the Bunyip Football Club, which is a DEECA-owned ground, and there is a ground out the back, and that is owned by someone else.

I have been trying to get this ground resurfaced, because in winter you are 8 inches deep in mud. The argument that I keep getting from council and DEECA is, well, the council do not want to do anything because they do not own the facility – and a lot of councils do not want to own the facilities because then the burden is on them – and DEECA do not want to do anything because they do not want to

invest in it for whatever reason. I am not quite sure. I have been trying to get a meeting with DEECA on this particular issue, because we need to get a correlation between these two parties to get improvements to these reservations that are DEECA owned.

I know the Bunyip Football Club has been advocating for a long time now to get resurfacing done, but it is not the only one in my electorate where I have this problem. I have quite a few grounds that are DEECA reserves where councils have put the buildings on them, and councils sometimes are reluctant to put the buildings on them because they do not own the land. So I would love to see the government get together with local councils and sort out this issue, because it is becoming an issue in my electorate. At the Bunyip ground, for example, they had a women's football team, but unfortunately because the facilities are in such a poor state they moved on to better facilities. We all know AFLW is very, very popular at the moment. I was at their awards the other night actually, and good on the Richmond girl, Conti, for winning the best and fairest. It was a good win for Richmond this year. I was there with her – well, there; I was at the awards. It was a great night.

I think my contribution has about wound up, but I just would like to say to the department: please consider the correlation we have between these reserves – the DEECA reserves and council – so we can get that sorted out so maybe I can get someone to take responsibility to upgrade those facilities. Thank you, and I will leave it there.

Steve McGHIE (Melton) (12:12): I rise today to speak on the Land (Revocation of Reservations) Bill 2023. I should say that I am pleased that the member for Narracan had a great time at the AFLW awards during the week – and a good effort on that. This bill is a fairly dry bill. I did not hear the lead speaker from the opposition, but obviously he dragged it out over 27 minutes. He could not complete the 30 but got it to 27, and someone said if he had spoken to it a bit more quickly, then he might have done it in 15 minutes. But anyway, here we go. I want to acknowledge the work of the Department of Energy, Environment and Climate Action, who did quite a substantial amount of consultation with the relevant traditional owner groups and clearly the Department of Transport and Planning, and I want to acknowledge the great work of the Minister for Environment and his staff in hitting the ground running with this bill.

Approximately one-third of Victoria is Crown land, and about 7 per cent of this land, or 550,000 hectares – and I think the member for Mordialloc raised the issue of 550,000 hectares – of this Crown land is Crown land reserves. A Crown land reserve is land that is set aside for public use purposes, such as educational or recreational activity, and places like public schools, TAFE colleges, universities, public hospitals and clearly public parks and recreational reserves – such as have been alluded to in previous contributions – like local football grounds. Of course we know how important our educational and recreational facilities are to this state and to this country. I am pleased to be part of a government that is delivering on educational facilities right across the state. I know in my electorate, since I have been in office over the last five years, the number of new schools that have been built and opened to keep up with the growth of our population within the Melton electorate is just amazing.

This bill will repeal permanent reservations at 13 locations throughout Victoria as well as repeal restricted Crown grants at six sites. Additionally, the bill will abolish part 4 of the Land (Reservations and other Matters) Act 1999, which is associated with these reservations.

This is really quite a narrow bill; it is quite technical. It is only 41 pages. Nine of the 11 parts in the bill are outlining the revocation of the specific reservations. The legislation is designed to enable new management frameworks for future utilisation of these parcels of land and the development of the specified land areas. Prospective land uses could include ongoing use by the current occupants – potential sale and development – or may involve re-reservation in certain instances.

I would just like to remind everyone that the sale of Crown land in Victoria is subject to various legislative and policy requirements set by the Victorian government and that any sale process must

adhere to obligations outlined in the Native Title Act 1993 and relevant agreements established under the Traditional Owner Settlement Act 2010. The cancellation of the enduring reservations will allow the sites to be redesignated for alternative purposes, supporting suitable management plans or facilitating the sale of the land for future utilisation and development. Additionally, it will help regularise the land use by current occupants, allowing them to get on with their businesses and organisations with some level of stability and surety for their future.

Ten out of the 13 revocation proposals outlined in this bill pertain to the potential sale of Crown land if this bill is passed. In three instances this involves associated restricted Crown grants. In the three revocations proposed in the bill, the sale of the land is expressly not contemplated. Government departments have been proposing the sale of certain sites for several years. In the case of Walhalla, which has been mentioned in many contributions, the proposal involves revoking specific parts of the reserve to potentially sell them to current occupiers and to the people who are already using that site. The progress of these revocations is based on this basis. I went to Walhalla many, many years ago. It is quite an amazing place. I would love to travel back there, but I just have not had time in recent years. But I do remember it well, and we did spend some great time there. It is quite an interesting place to travel to.

I am going to raise the issue of mechanics institutes. I just want to let the house know the important role that the mechanics institute played in the Melton electorate, or the Melton community. The Melton Mechanics Institute was opened in 1868 – I was not around then, but some might think I was. The purpose of it was providing working people with a means to acquire knowledge in diverse subjects by means of a comprehensive library and an organised series of lectures. While it might have become more of a social function centre than a library, it was ensuring that educational opportunities were available to everyone who wanted them, which is still the cornerstone of this government's identity. I have got to say that Melton now has a fantastic new library that is probably three or four years old or maybe a bit older, five years old, but it is an amazing library that the whole community uses. It is great to go in there and see the diversity of those utilising that library now, and it is money well spent within the local community to provide those types of facilities and services for our local community.

I also want to mention TAFE and TAFE facilities. The good thing about TAFE is, firstly, this government is providing free TAFE courses. I think it is in excess of 70 free TAFE courses, so it allows people to go on and get that higher education or do some course that will assist them with future employment, and I think that is fantastic. We know how TAFE plays a really important role in our communities right across Victoria and across the country, and it is great to see that it has been announced that Melton will have a new TAFE facility operational by no later than 2028. The provision of TAFE education within Melton has now been awarded to Bendigo Kangan Institute. I am meeting with them within the next week to talk about what they intend to do in regard to the TAFE provision in Melton. We look forward to having a good working relationship with them and then delivering TAFE for the Melton community. We will start with 600 positions for construction training, which is important, as we know, with all the infrastructure build that is going on around the state. We know how important it is to continue to provide that level of training for people in the construction industry – and that is across the construction industry, not dedicated to one thing, like carpentry or whatever; it is right across. We need them because we have got the Big Build and other big plans for housing and infrastructure going ahead over the next few years.

In Melton we have got around about 30 schools in the electorate, and it is still growing. Each year we are building more schools, like Binap Primary School, which is in Brookfield. I was out there a few weeks ago with the principal Jean Bentley. That opens up next year, from the start of 2024. Then we have got another school coming in 2025 at Weir Views, and we are hopeful that a new secondary school will be built for the start of the 2026 school year. So there is a lot happening out in our area.

As I said, a lot of this Crown land has been utilised, as I alluded to earlier, for recreational and educational facilities, and this government is delivering on educational facilities for all of our communities. This is a really important bill, and I commend it to the house.

Cindy McLEISH (Eildon) (12:22): Every now and again we have bills come before us such as the one before us, the Land (Revocation of Reservations) Bill 2023. I have spoken on bills like this previously, and in fact some of the areas and bits of land that are included in this I have spoken about previously as well. As I said, from time to time these bills come up. The bill here revokes the permanent reservations of 13 locations across metropolitan and regional Victoria. The primary purpose for 10 of the revocations is the potential intention to sell the land. That tells me two things. It tells me first of all that the government is broke and is looking for every zack it can get and to sell off every asset that it can find. To do so, in certain instances changes need to be made, because the Crown Land (Reserves) Act 1978 precludes the sale of Crown land that is reserved. Therefore the revocation of the reservation is essential to taking the next step. We have got 13 different locations that are identified here where, before anything can happen, before sales can take place, the reservations need to be removed. There are different reasons for the removal in different instances in each of those locations, but mostly it is around preparing for sale.

For the sale of Crown land in Victoria there are a range of legislative and policy requirements, and I want to just list what they are first of all. The Victorian government strategic Crown land assessment policy needs to be considered, the *Victorian Government Land Transactions Policy* needs to be considered and the *Victorian Government Landholding Policy and Guidelines* need to be considered. So there is quite a bit that they have to assess going forward to get to the end game here, and strategic Crown land assessments must be undertaken to confirm that the land is surplus and is able to be sold. I have seen some instances of land that has been completely landlocked and only able to be sold to one particular buyer, because it only has that one boundary. Sometimes the government and the valuer-general put pretty crazy prices on these. I think of land in Yarra Glen which was landlocked. It was a small section of land and the only person who could access that land if they purchased it was the neighbour, but the government put a price on it as though it was a vineyard that was going to bring in millions of dollars. That did not make a lot of sense. Finally, after years, that hurdle was jumped and the land was sold.

Now, sometimes with the revocation of these reservations, they need to consider the Native Title Act 1993, because there may be obligations. So in a few instances there is some work to be done with the traditional owners to get their agreement.

As I have mentioned, there is land all across Victoria, and the one I am going to concentrate on most is the former potato research station in Toolangi. This area is well known to me. It has been the home of potato research for 85 years – dedicated research into potatoes. Initially it was the government potato research centre, and in the last 29 years it has been leased to AuSPICA, which is the Australian Seed Potato Industry Certification Authority. Last night they had their 29th AGM, so they are coming up to 30 years having leased that land which was the potato research station. The land, as I understand it, is in three parcels, and the government has told us that the neighbours are looking at potentially buying it – I am not sure which neighbours. Some of it, if you look at maps, is surrounded by dense forest, but two of these areas are grazing land and one, of 52 acres, is leased to AuSPICA. I am not sure which is the one that is interested in the purchase. One of the nurseries could be interested. I am not 100 per cent sure, but the government tells us that somebody has been interested. I advise caution with preparation of land for sale, because sometimes it might seem easier, but I understand that for one of these parcels, the assets on the land and the water licence have been handed over to a third party, so it is not so easy to disentangle that and to work out how they are going to do that. It is certainly something that they must consider. The three parcels are known as Cones, Blue Range and Mick's.

I want to talk just about the potato research and agriculture and my concerns about what is going to happen to this land long term. I hope they can work with the current tenants to come up with a good solution. Agriculture is pretty well a \$20 billion industry in Victoria, and it is exceptionally important. There are 150,000 jobs in primary and secondary production, but one of the things that is really important here is agricultural research. We have had massive cuts in the department of agriculture, which is very concerning, because at the moment there is one horticultural pathologist in the state, and

with the exodus of staff, 135 years of post-harvest technology brain has been lost. This is very concerning, because at the moment we have industries that rely on work with the department of agriculture, such as the seed potato industry, which works on disease and pests. The more that you decimate the department of agriculture, the less of this work that can be done and the less that some of the private organisations that are doing this are supported. It worries me greatly – the extent of expertise that has been lost.

AuSPICA deal with seed potatoes, and they are the potato tubers that are used for planting. They are on sold as certified and disease-free. Also nearby we have strawberry runners, which are a similar sort of thing. They provide strawberry runners for, I think, something like 70 per cent of strawberries. Fifty per cent of Australian potatoes start life in Toolangi through AuSPICA. They work at suppressing disease, and they have got some expertise. Kay Spierings has been chair of the board for some time, and potato pathologist Dr Nigel Crump is the general manager. I have met with them many times. They are continuing their work with collaboration around food security, food nutrition and the genetic resource centre, and they really aim to build up a potato bank to supply the Oceania region.

Some recent successes – in the last four or five years or so they have had access to the Indonesian market, and 5000 tonnes of potatoes have been exported to Indonesia. They are looking to open up further markets through Japan in crisps – chips – but the crisp ones, not the hot potatoes. These markets are looking for commercial and seed potatoes. They are doing some amazing work in Vanuatu with the building of food security, and they are solving some birth defects and anaemia in women particularly, because potatoes are a source of zinc and iron. It was most telling of how important it is to support this industry going into the future that during the cyclone emergency one of their country leaders actually stopped to meet with the representatives from AuSPICA to make sure that they did not lose the flow of the important work that is being done.

So when we have got these parcels of land in Toolangi having their reservation being removed so that they can be sold, I really hope that they can work out a way to maintain the seed potato industry up there, because not only has it got that long history but also this work is extremely valuable. We know if we are purchasing potatoes to grow in our gardens, for example, or tomatoes or whatever it is, we want them certified as disease-free. We want to know that they are going to give a good crop and a good harvest so that we do not get duddled. If you have got disease or pests in them, they can spread and you can lose an entire crop, so it is important that this expertise continues to be supported. The potato research industry really does underpin so much in agriculture, and that research just needs to be supported. I fear very much for the industry with that great loss of expertise and what it means.

What might happen at Toolangi is a little bit unsure at the moment – who the buyers will be, what will happen in that area – but the government needs to make sure that it continues to invest in the agriculture sector and in particular in seed potatoes. We all love our spuds. We eat chips hot and cold, mashed potatoes, roast potatoes – that industry needs to be supported.

Nina TAYLOR (Albert Park) (12:32): There is a lot to love about a potato, I agree. We all love a potato. Well, I do not speak for everyone – most people love a potato. Anyway, how did I get there? I am going to speak to this particular bill, which one might say has some more administrative aspects when we are looking at revocation of portions of land, but by the same token of course land is extremely precious, and I think that the use is certainly an issue when you are looking at all elements. Whether it is public or private land, we are all very conscious of making sure that land is used optimally, particularly in the public domain, and hence it is necessary to have these kinds of formal processes to ensure transparency in the way that land is transacted and hence this parliamentary process, literally, to ensure that the broader public is aware of these changes in terms of revoking certain areas of land across the state.

Also it really is a trigger, I should say, to make sure that the broader public are alert should there be anything that was not apparent at the point of drafting the bill, although there has been relevant consultation on matters. I will note a further point that the Department of Energy, Environment and

Climate Action have advised that in many of these cases the community has been asking for years for the revocation of these sites, and they have not undergone a formal consultation process for this reason. Therefore you can see why there is a relative amount of unity, I should say, across the chamber, because actually this is reflecting – and I make a broader statement without attuning to the individual portions of land that we are speaking about today – that there has been support and advocacy for the changes which are coming forward in certain regards. So that is a good thing too. That certainly reduces some contention, because we know that when we are talking about land it can inspire very strong opinions. I know that when I was a councillor a few years ago, planning matters absolutely provoked some pretty strident opinions and emotions, and it makes sense because it is your area. It is good because it reflects people actually caring about the area where they live and the way the land is used. Hence that is reinforcing why we need these particular protocols to be followed in terms of the way revocations and the like are transacted, to be sure that the broader community have the opportunity should they wish to be abreast of the particular changes that are being brought about.

I note advocacy for some of the relevant changes that are being brought about, such as with Victoria Park Lake, Shepparton. In particular, land situated at the southern end of the reserve, as well as the land owned by the council, is a caravan park which the council has owned for more than 60 years. The council has advised the Department of Energy, Environment and Climate Action that it wishes to purchase the Crown land portion of the caravan park so it can be refurbished to cater for increased tourism in the Shepparton area. That would seem to be a very reasonable thing to do, and obviously there is broad agreement with regard to this particular revocation. Because any sale is likely to take at least 12 months after the permanent reserve is revoked, the bill will temporarily reserve the land for public purposes under the Crown Land (Reserves) Act 1978 and the council will continue as the land's committee of management, pending any sale.

You would note I was talking about a potential sale there, noting that this bill of itself is not effecting any sale of land – and I think that is another important nuance – but it is, rather, making sure that the particular process of revocation is fulfilled appropriately. It is anticipated that there is potential for the sale of land. It is highly probable that a sale of land may follow, but then that will be a trigger for further processes to be undertaken should those particular contingencies prevail.

Accordingly, in that regard I do not wish to overstate what this bill is doing but rather wish to say that it is an important step in the process of transparency and being very precise about particular changes in terms of the land usage, noting that further steps in the process are likely – or not unlikely, perhaps – to follow. But as you can see, I am being quite cautious in my language because I do not want to extend the ramifications of the bill beyond that which it is seeking to serve here in this debate today.

There are a couple of the revocations that are closer to the area of my electorate. With regard to Alexandra Park, Melbourne, the bill will revoke the reservation over a small area of Alexandra Park on the banks of the Yarra River in South Yarra which is permanently reserved for public recreation purposes and also the associated restricted Crown grant issued to the former Board of Land and Works and the City of Melbourne for the purposes of the reservation, to the extent that it applies to the area of the reservation being revoked. This will allow the legal status of the land to reflect its current use as part of the Swan Street Bridge.

We can see there, I think it is fair to say, not a particularly controversial change being effected by the revocation, because that bridge is being used very heavily, with good reason. I should say there were upgrades to the Swan Street Bridge to alleviate congestion and increase pedestrian and cycling capacity. I am emphasising that point because I know there is an increasing trend of people wanting to use low-carbon transport mechanisms, and hence making these kinds of changes is a really important way of fostering further multimodal transport options and getting people fitter as well – it is terrific if you can ride your bike or walk. Anyway, I went on a tangent there, but it is an important one because it suggests why upgrades were undertaken – as well as improving road safety, and we know that that is absolutely paramount. I can say, having crossed the Swan Street Bridge hundreds and hundreds of times myself going to and from various parts of our beautiful city, there is a fair whack of

traffic along there. So mechanisms to encourage different ways of transport around the city, not only the car, are a good thing, and the changes that were made to improve road safety also get the tick because obviously we want to keep Victorians as safe as possible on the roads.

Those upgrades were completed in September 2018. It seems like just yesterday – how time flies. The works resulted in a very small section of the permanent reservation forming Alexandra Park being incorporated into the structure of the Swan Street Bridge. Following revocation of the relevant area of the permanent reservation, the subject land will be proclaimed as a government road through a separate administrative process. You can see that I have emphasised those elements because I am distinguishing what this bill will deliver versus what further processes will deliver to effect those anticipated further changes.

Another very important issue has been addressed in the chamber already, but I wish to reiterate it because of the importance with regard to the history of our country – our traditional owners' 60,000-plus years of tremendous history, both cultural and on so many levels. The department has advised that consulting with traditional owners is the first step in any process of re-reservation, development or sale. I do want to emphasise that because that should be, quite rightly, an important element and an important first step before you proceed to these kinds of changes in land use. Relevant traditional owner groups have been informed of the proposals relating to the sites. No objections have been raised at this stage, with the caveat that any further issues will be worked through if that point is reached. Coming back to the issue, as the first step in any process of re-reservation, development or sale, relevant traditional owner groups are certainly consulted, as is right and proper to do. Hence the first consultation has been undertaken, and should further contingencies prevail, which seems probable, then further consultation will need to take place as well.

Danny O'BRIEN (Gippsland South) (12:42): I am pleased to rise to say a few words on the Land (Revocation of Reservations) Bill 2023. Showing my great interest in this piece of legislation, I will begin by, I think, castigating others for praising the member for Brighton for going for 27 minutes on this bill. I do not think he deserves any praise whatsoever. I am saying that tongue in cheek of course, for *Hansard's* purposes, but really –

Members interjecting.

Danny O'BRIEN: That is why I had to add the irony in 'for *Hansard's* purposes'. Well done to the member for Brighton, but there probably are some speakers who have given him some praise to pad out their 10 minutes. I will not do that.

I am very pleased to see this legislation come forward for a couple of reasons. One is the reference to Merriman Creek at Seaspray, which has been an issue that I have been dealing with with constituents for some time this year. It is literally a situation where the surveying was done incorrectly – I do not think by government surveyors; I think it might have actually been by a private surveyor – and a house was built, as it happens, right on Merriman Creek in a beautiful spot at Seaspray in the beautiful electorate of Gippsland South. In fact I have canoed past the house in question on Merriman Creek; it is a lovely spot. But yes, the house, I believe, was built across what is Crown land reserve. As I said, my office in particular has been liaising with the department and the government to try and address this issue for a number of months this year, and so I was very pleasantly surprised when this legislation was introduced a few weeks ago to see it on the list.

I am surprised in some respects because it is far from the only one of these sorts of situations that I have had to deal with. It may be a technical issue, I suspect, but I have had at least two others in the South Gippsland shire in the last couple of years where homes or property boundaries have been mistakenly gazetted or drawn up across Crown land boundaries. It was particularly the case in a property in Foster a couple of years ago, where literally again the same situation happened where the house had been built on what was actually Crown land.

Generally speaking there is a practical acceptance of these mistakes and they do not cause a big issue, particularly when the house or the property stays within one family or with one owner. The problem of course comes when you start to look to sell the properties and, naturally, prospective buyers want to see things like titles and the like and raise questions about them. It is amazing that these things can happen, although I am reminded of one of these similar issues, which was raised with me at a little place called Outtrim, just south of Korumburra, a couple of years ago. If anyone has been through that area, Outtrim in particular is a very steep and very hilly area. It used to be the site of a coalmine back at about the turn of the previous century. There remain some land title issues. I was shown the original title drawings that had been drawn up by whatever it was back in around the 1890s, 1900s – presumably it was the lands department. They had drawn up plans and titles for the town of Outtrim. They had clearly been done in Melbourne at a time before there was easy travel to South Gippsland and certainly a time before there was Google Maps, because the person in question had drawn up these house blocks and literally just gone ‘Well, there’s the town, there’s the main street – we will draw up a number of literally quarter-acre blocks side by side with a road down the middle and more quarter-acre blocks on the other side’. The problem was that when they had drawn it up, they clearly had not been to the location, because it was an absolutely precipitous hillside. There is no way in the world, even with today’s technology, that you would be building houses and roads and streets on that particular hillside. Thankfully, we have probably come a bit further than that these days. It was amusing to some degree but also still a problem for the then landowner, because they had an issue that had resulted from that planning 120-odd years ago.

I am pleased to see the Seaspray situation being sorted out. The family I have been dealing with there I am sure will be happy. Subject to the negotiations with the Gunaikurnai Land and Waters Aboriginal Corporation, I hope that will be sorted out. I have not spoken to GLaWAC about it, but I would hope that there would be no particular issue. The land in question is of course of no value to anyone else; it will only suit the house and the property involved.

There are two others in the list of changes in this legislation that also relate to Gippsland South. That is at Darlimurla and Mirboo, where the former mechanics institute sites are being effectively handed over. These I think will also come into the Gunaikurnai area, should they be sold. But these are not areas of particular interest, perhaps other than to neighbours that might be interested in buying or indeed looking at opportunities on those small sites. I highlight that both of them are in beautiful South Gippsland: Darlimurla, just out of Mirboo North, and Mirboo just out of Mirboo North, to the south. I use this opportunity to highlight that a number of people say to me from time to time, ‘Why is there a Mirboo North but no Mirboo?’ Well, there actually is. It is often misunderstood, Mirboo. There is even a Mirboo East, for those who are interested. Mirboo is a beautiful spot on the Tarwin River east branch. It is just a gorgeous part of the world, and I am sure that if this land is ultimately put up for sale, it will be snapped up, because it is a gorgeous part of the world: beautiful rolling green hills, lovely trees and good farming country.

I would just like to comment briefly on the issue of traditional owner involvement in this. As I said, I hoped that the Seaspray circumstance would be straightforward, but it is far from straightforward when it comes to selling Crown land. My understanding of it, certainly from my experience with GLaWAC, is that where native title exists there obviously needs to be a consultation with traditional owners, and the process, I believe, is that an Indigenous land use agreement needs to be arranged. What it boils down to, I understand, is that if Crown land is to be sold in an area of native title, then the traditional owners need to be not only consulted but compensated. My understanding in dealing with a couple of different pieces of land that are not related directly to this bill is that those negotiations have been bogged down.

What I am referring to in particular is the former Sale police station. The new police station was opened in Sale in 2015, thanks to the great work of my predecessor Peter Ryan and the former Liberal–Nationals government. But since 2015 the old Sale police station, which sits very close to the centre of town and right on Lake Guthridge in the middle of Sale, has sat there as an eyesore. It has not been

used. It has become a mecca for vandalism, for antisocial behaviour and indeed for rough sleeping. The irony is at one stage allegedly some people who had done a series of burglaries took their ill-gotten gains back to the old Sale police station to store them. The irony of that is not lost on anyone. A couple of months ago Victoria Police did in fact properly secure the building and have fully boarded it up now so people cannot get access; the last time I checked no-one was getting access. But that is still a site that has been sitting there now for eight years, and nothing has happened with it.

It is, as I said, prime real estate. I raised this issue in Public Accounts and Estimates Committee hearings last week, and the department indicated that negotiations with GLaWAC were 'ongoing'. That is not really what I am hearing from my sources at the Gippsland end. They have not heard much recently and are wondering what is happening. So I encourage the government to address that situation, and I am surprised it actually has not had more publicity across the state, because it will be slowing down the process of Crown land sales in many areas. Of course the Gunnai/Kurnai are very keen to finalise these arrangements as well. I hope that the Sale police station issue can be resolved.

I am pleased to see the Seaspray situation is resolved and that both Darlimurla and Mirboo will also proceed to a sale process. I look forward to this legislation therefore passing through this chamber and the Parliament in general.

Josh BULL (Sunbury) (12:52): I always seem to have the opportunity to follow on from the member for Gippsland East. I always quite enjoy listening –

Danny O'Brien: South.

Josh BULL: South. My apologies.

Emma Kealy: You should have worked it out by now.

Josh BULL: Yes, I should know that by now. I am just riveted by the contribution, that is all, member. He did tell a very funny story last night with his Christmas hat on that I enjoyed, and hopefully he will be able to give me a tap on the shoulder for a good speech in Strangers.

Can I take the opportunity to say that I am pleased to contribute to debate on the Land (Revocation of Reservations) Bill 2023. This bill is all about adding flexibility, adding opportunity to the way that land within our state and our agencies, councils and local communities is managed. Through contributions that have been made this afternoon and conversations within our local communities we know and understand that when it comes to opportunities that exist with and conversations about particular parcels of land within our local communities it is about striking the balance. It is about striking the balance between creating jobs, delivering economic activity and of course protection and enhancement of our environment. We know that it is a critical balance, and what is important is to be able to find that balance, because we are indeed a growing state. As it stands today, we are growing by about 1 million people per decade. This Allan Labor government has, since we have had the opportunity to govern in this state, delivered in education, delivered in health and delivered in transport to create a state that gives each and every Victorian the very best opportunities in life, right from free kinder through to free TAFE, all the way through to opportunities that exist within local communities to be their very best. What we want to see is the opportunity for communities to have those options, and the management of land contained within the provisions of this legislation simply provide for greater flexibility.

By 2050 Melbourne will be the size that London is today – more jobs, more opportunities – but what we know is that places additional pressure on our environmental resources. It places additional pressure in growth corridors, like where I am from in the northern suburbs. It creates additional pressure. Of course we welcome new communities right across our state. We welcome new opportunities and the jobs that come with our new communities, but what we need to do and what I am very proud to be able to say that we have done in the nine years that we have been in office in this

state is to deliver on a whole range of services within this space. This bill goes to the management of land and the provision that is contained within the legislation around Crown land.

This government does have a strong record when it comes to our environment, whether that is the Victorian renewable energy target, whether that is bringing back the SEC or whether that is massive investments in solar and wind and battery and so much more. But we know that we are not talking about these investments simply from the prism of commentary, like some – our friends in the Greens political party. We are not talking about these things simply from afar by posting a graphic on Facebook or Twitter or wherever it might go. We are delivering real jobs through these investments. What is important about this legislation is that it does have the opportunity to, in quite a local sense, do some important work around the management of land within this state. We know, Deputy Speaker – and you know so well – that dealing with those challenges that come from land management and growth but also making sure that we are providing for those environmental management supports and the initiatives and the policies that are contained within some of the programs that I mentioned earlier are incredibly important.

The purpose of this bill is to revoke permanent Crown land reservations at 13 locations across metropolitan and regional Victoria, together with six restricted Crown grants, as well as repealing part 4 of the Land (Reservations and other Matters) Act 1999. Some reservations and restricted Crown grants will be fully revoked whereas others will be revoked in part. Revoking the permanent reservations and Crown grants will facilitate new management arrangements and future use and development of the land, including the potential future sale of some land parcels. What is important is that the Department of Energy, Environment and Climate Action must undertake an assessment of each Crown land parcel to determine if the land is surplus before it can be made available for a potential sale. The assessment identifies the land's environmental heritage and recreational use as well as the status of traditional owner or native title rights to determine if the land can be declared as surplus or retained within the portfolio.

The bill also repeals part 4 of the Land (Reservations and other Matters) Act 1999, which relates to the revocation of reservations of land at Walhalla. This will be redundant following revocation to be made through the bill and further matters. What we know and understand is that we need to ensure that there is some flexibility within the way that these parcels of land are managed through having those important conversations with local communities, because we know as members of this house that local communities are strongly engaged, are heavily engaged, with parcels of land within their local community. When you are out and about talking to residents within each and every one of our electorates, we know that there is a high level of interest. No matter the electorate that you represent, no matter where you are, we know that there is a strong level of interest from our local community when it comes to supporting and working with flexible options that may be presented for land use and management within our local communities.

Members interjecting.

Josh BULL: I will ignore the humour from the other side. What we know is that making sure that we are striking that critical balance between population growth, between the delivery of services and between managing our transport network and around providing education, around listening to local communities and around getting on and making those important decisions, each and every day, is exactly what this government stands for.

I am conscious that we are just about on the clock for lunch. I do not know if I can go for 27 minutes, but I reckon I have got a few more minutes in me yet, but I think the house will well and truly walk out. It is about flexibility and it is about providing the very best opportunity we can, and I commend the bill to the house.

Sitting suspended 1:00 pm until 2:02 pm.

Business interrupted under sessional orders.

*Announcements***Distinguished visitors**

The SPEAKER: Before I call for questions today, can I acknowledge in the gallery the presence of the consul-generals and honorary consul-generals of the following countries: Brazil, Chile, Ecuador, El Salvador, Guatemala, Haiti, Peru and Uruguay. Welcome to the Victorian Parliament.

*Members***Minister for Planning***Absence*

Jacinta ALLAN (Bendigo East – Premier) (14:02): I rise to inform the house that for the purposes of question time today I will answer questions for the portfolios of planning and suburbs.

*Questions without notice and ministers statements***Ambulance services**

John PESUTTO (Hawthorn – Leader of the Opposition) (14:03): My question is to the Minister for Health. Ahead of the last election Labor promised that Victorians will get world-class health care when they need it. It was revealed at PAEC that this was not true for 20 Victorians, who tragically died while waiting for an ambulance. Will the minister guarantee that no more Victorians will die waiting for an ambulance on her watch?

Mary-Anne THOMAS (Macedon – Leader of the House, Minister for Health, Minister for Health Infrastructure, Minister for Ambulance Services) (14:03): I welcome the question from the Leader of the Opposition. Every sentinel event that occurs in our health system is a tragedy, and I want to recognise the impact that these tragic events have on the families and friends of those who have lost their lives when something has not gone how it should go in our health system. But I do want to assure Victorians of this: when such an event occurs we take it very, very seriously. There are a range of review processes in place. We established Safer Care Victoria of course back in 2016, following a number of unexplained deaths of babies at Bacchus Marsh hospital. We always have at the top of our mind a focus on improving the safety and quality of our health care system. And when things do not go as they should, then it is our duty and responsibility to learn from those mistakes, and indeed that is what Safer Care does. Safer Care reports annually on the work that it has done and on the implementation of improvements that have been recommended as a result of the inquiry and analysis into events such as those that have occurred at AV.

John PESUTTO (Hawthorn – Leader of the Opposition) (14:05): Marianne Maher is a 53-year-old mum from Ballarat. Two weeks ago she woke up with sharp pains in her leg. Her partner called 000 and was assured that the next ambulance will be there. Four additional calls to 000 and over 4 hours later, an ambulance arrived. Tragically, it was too late, and doctors had to amputate Marianne's leg to save her life. Doctors told Marianne that if she had arrived at the hospital earlier, the leg could have been saved. How many more Victorians like Marianne will have to suffer catastrophic outcomes like the amputation of a leg before the government fixes the crisis in our health system?

Mary-Anne THOMAS (Macedon – Leader of the House, Minister for Health, Minister for Health Infrastructure, Minister for Ambulance Services) (14:06): My thoughts are with Ms Maher and her family at this very distressing time, and I want to assure the house that Ambulance Victoria is indeed in touch with Ms Maher herself and with her family. They have issued an apology, and a review has commenced to understand exactly what has gone wrong here. As part of this review, Ambulance Victoria will work directly with Ms Maher and her family. Again, my thoughts are with her – Ms Maher – and her family at this time.

Ministers statements: gender equality

Jacinta ALLAN (Bendigo East – Premier) (14:06): At 10 o'clock this morning the declaration of the poll occurred for the seat of Mulgrave, endorsing the election of Eden Foster to this place. Now, not only is this a good result for the Labor Party, it is a great result for gender parity here in the state of Victoria. With Eden Foster's election as the member for Mulgrave, for the very first time the Victorian Parliament has reached an equal number of men and women in both houses of Parliament. This is a historic moment, and it is a moment that is worth remembering and recording. We are also leading the nation – we are the only state Parliament to have this equality in our ranks. We are leading the federal Parliament, the South Australian Parliament, the Queensland Parliament and we are also leading the world, with very few Parliaments around the globe reaching this sort of gender parity.

I am very proud to say that those of us on the Labor side have led the way, with 55 per cent of our Labor caucus being women. Two-thirds of the members that I sit around the cabinet table with are women. What this means is that not only does the Parliament better reflect the community we are elected to serve, but it also is making a difference – a better difference – to the policies and projects and discussions we have as a government. There are so many examples: free kinder, expanding kinder, putting pads and tampons in schools and then rolling them out to public spaces, the focus on women's health, just to name a few. They are the sorts of examples of where we are a better government from representing the community that we serve. We are proud of the work that we have done. We know that there is more work to do across the Parliament. We have more women on our front bench than those opposite do in their entire party room. It is a joint effort, and I am very proud on this historic occasion.

Tourism

Roma BRITNELL (South-West Coast) (14:09): My question is to the Minister for Ports and Freight. Ahead of the last election, Labor promised more international tourists, more often. 65,000 tourists will no longer visit Melbourne with Cunard and Princess cruises rerouting their tours to avoid Melbourne entirely from 2025 due to the government's port and wharfage tax grab. How many jobs in the Victorian tourism and hospitality industries will be lost as a result of this broken promise?

Melissa HORNE (Williamstown – Minister for Casino, Gaming and Liquor Regulation, Minister for Local Government, Minister for Ports and Freight, Minister for Roads and Road Safety) (14:09): I really thank the member for her question, because it is a great opportunity to highlight the importance of the cruise sector to Melbourne, and indeed what we are doing. I am not entirely sure why the member is such an apologist or such a supporter of the Carnival cruises that – let me say – had an all-time revenue high this quarter of \$6.85 billion. So what we have done –

James Newbury: On a point of order, Speaker, it is entirely irrelevant to bash up on the companies that are bringing tourists into this state.

The SPEAKER: There is no point of order.

Melissa HORNE: We have got two new cruise shipping lines coming into Victoria: we have got Virgin and we have got Disney. We have got the *Resilient Lady* coming on in. These will bring millions of dollars to the Victorian economy and support jobs. Basically, Carnival have made a commercial decision. What we have done is increase that cost from \$28.50 per passenger to \$32 per passenger. Now, I am sorry if a company that earns \$6.85 billion in its three quarters cannot afford to buy – you cannot get a cup of coffee for that – their passengers less than a cup of coffee to maintain the historic Station Pier. I am sorry; I am not sure whose side you are on.

Members interjecting.

The SPEAKER: The member for Bulleen is warned.

Roma BRITNELL (South-West Coast) (14:12): P & O Cruises Australia, Holland America Line, Seabourn Cruise Line and Carnival Cruise Line are also actively considering pulling out of Melbourne.

What actions will the minister personally take to ensure that these cruise lines do not pull out of Melbourne?

Melissa HORNE (Williamstown – Minister for Casino, Gaming and Liquor Regulation, Minister for Local Government, Minister for Ports and Freight, Minister for Roads and Road Safety) (14:12): Again, thank you very much to the member for South-West Coast for her question. I am not entirely sure if she is aware that the visitor economy is \$3.3 billion –

A member interjected.

Melissa HORNE: Major events – \$3.3 billion. People are flocking to Melbourne. We have got two new cruise ships that are coming on in, and we will continue to support this industry.

Members interjecting.

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

Member for Nepean withdrew from chamber.

Members interjecting.

The SPEAKER: Order! Members will be removed without warning. The member for Sunbury can leave the chamber for half an hour.

Member for Sunbury withdrew from chamber.

The SPEAKER: The minister has concluded her answer.

Ministers statements: rental support

Gabrielle WILLIAMS (Dandenong – Minister for Government Services, Minister for Consumer Affairs, Minister for Public and Active Transport) (14:13): I rise to update the house on the work the Allan Labor government is doing to support Victorian renters. We know many renters are doing it tough right now, and that is why we are backing the community organisations that support them. Our \$2 million rental stress support package will mean legal assistance, financial information and advocacy services are available for those Victorians in need. It will mean more renters will be supported to stay in their homes while we boost social and affordable housing right across our state. This investment also builds on our \$25 million private rental assistance program, helping community agencies deliver this important work.

Victorian renters know that they cannot rely on those opposite to keep them in their homes. When we introduced the Residential Tenancies Amendments Act 2018, with over 130 reforms to make renting fairer for Victorians, the opposition voted against it. They voted against a ban on rental bidding. They voted against a ban on evicting renters without reason. They voted against pets in rental properties. They also voted against minimum rental standards. It is absurd.

On this side of the house we unashamedly support renters, and we are proud of that fact. Only the Allan Labor government will build more social and affordable housing and only Labor will deliver more reforms to give renters greater control of their leases, greater control of their living standards and greater control of their finances.

Government contracts

John PESUTTO (Hawthorn – Leader of the Opposition) (14:15): My question is to the Premier. Ahead of the 2018 election the government promised to reduce spending on consultants. The Auditor-General has found that spending actually increased by 47 per cent, with a total spend of \$11.6 billion on contractors and consultants. Why can't the government manage taxpayers money?

Darren Cheeseman interjected.

The SPEAKER: Order! The member for South Barwon can leave the chamber for half an hour.

Member for South Barwon withdrew from chamber.

Jacinta ALLAN (Bendigo East – Premier) (14:15): I thank the Leader of the Opposition for his question. In the Leader of the Opposition’s question he went back in time to 2018. In 2018 there were, as he pointed out, a range of commitments that were made to the Victorian community. I remember some made commitments at the 2018 election and the 2022 election to bring back the east–west link project, but that is for them to have made those commitments.

We did make that commitment in relation to what the Leader of the Opposition has referred to, but I point to a couple of significant events that required the government to make additional investments to support the Victorian community. The first of those was the horrific fires that tore through particularly the eastern part of the state in that Black Summer period of late 2019 and into 2020, and in terms of marshalling the resources alongside the tremendous work that our emergency services did in terms of responding to that immediate fire threat, we needed to make additional investments to support the recovery and the rebuilding effort for the local community. And yes, some of that did require the investment from people with particular expertise outside of government; hence, as that information is collected through the Auditor-General’s process, that is captured under the category of contractors and consultants, because those contractors, for example, had to be engaged to do that giant clean-up effort that was required, particularly for places like Mallacoota that were just devastated as a result of those fires. We know from previous experience that if you can get in there and move quickly on those clean-up efforts, yes, that does mean you need to engage outside contractors to do that work. That is just one example of additional – you may call it an expense, but we describe it as supporting the community with their rebuilding and recovery effort.

As we all know, in February–March 2020 we had to move quickly and rapidly to support our community in terms of at that time the emergence of the COVID virus, and then over the following years we also needed to employ an additional range of measures to support the Victorian community – and yes, again, that did require the signing of contracts for additional PPE that needed to come into our health system. I hope that provides the information for the Leader of the Opposition.

John PESUTTO (Hawthorn – Leader of the Opposition) (14:18): The Auditor-General reported that there was a lack of transparency on reporting on contractors and consultants and the government did not properly report on expenditure. Why is the government trying to hide the true cost of its waste and mismanagement of Victorian taxpayers money?

Jacinta ALLAN (Bendigo East – Premier) (14:19): I thank the Leader of the Opposition for his question, and in asking his question he obviously did not get to the bit of the report that indicated that the government is considering all of these recommendations. And whether it is through the annual reporting processes or through the budget and budget updates or through the work that the Auditor-General does, of course we will continue to work hard to provide this information. But again – I go back to the points I was making earlier – from time to time government will need to engage with contractors. We will need to engage external expert advice, particularly when it is in times of responding to natural disasters or responding to health pandemics. We also from time to time engage expert advice to make sure that we can build big and important infrastructure projects in transport infrastructure and in health infrastructure, and that work will continue.

Ministers statements: family violence

Vicki WARD (Eltham – Minister for Prevention of Family Violence, Minister for Employment) (14:20): Today is day five of 16 Days of Activism Against Gender-based Violence. Victim-survivors of family violence are at the centre of the Allan Labor government’s landmark housing statement. Home should be a safe place for everyone. We know that too often, particularly for women and children, home is not always safe. It can be the most dangerous place they can be. Women and children are forced to flee to safety and forced to create a new life, and we know how serious this is.

Since 2015 this government has made unprecedented investments in housing, flexible support packages and assistance for victim-survivors, and we have had a mountain to climb due to the actions of those opposite, who made ruthless cuts to housing assistance, social housing and supports for disadvantaged Victorians over four long years. In 2021–22 more than 46,000 Victorians were provided homelessness assistance after experiencing family violence, an increase of 50 per cent since those opposite were last in government.

On this side we are not satisfied by merely patching up the damage done by those opposite. In the last two budgets this government has delivered over \$100 million to fund new and existing housing refuges and crisis accommodation. The Big Housing Build has already delivered more housing supply. We have invested in the construction of 14 new core and cluster refuges and committed to up to 1000 new homes across the state specifically for those fleeing family violence. There is not a one-size-fits-all solution, so we are delivering over 6500 flexible support packages each year to make sure each person receives tailored and individualised support. Safer housing is a key part of our strategy to end family violence, and we remain committed to investing in the programs and infrastructure that will help more Victorian families stay safe.

Housing affordability

Sam HIBBINS (Pahran) (14:22): My question is to the Premier. Premier, over the past year the median rent across Melbourne has risen by 16 per cent. Right now people are struggling to pay the rent, to afford food and to pay the bills. During the pandemic the government, with the support of the Greens, did freeze rents. Premier, given the level of hardship people are facing, the level of financial stress and the level of housing insecurity, will the government freeze rents again and finally put a stop to unlimited rent rises?

Jacinta ALLAN (Bendigo East – Premier) (14:23): I thank the member for Pahran for his question. I think the member for Pahran might already know the answer to his question, because this question has been asked by the Greens political party before. The answer and the policy position of the government remains the same because the proposition that has been put forward by the member for Pahran simply does not work. What we know we need to do to support renters is build more homes and build more houses, and that includes, member for Pahran, upgrading and building more public and affordable and social houses, particularly with our public housing tower redevelopment. So rather than running around those public housing towers with your colleagues and that ongoing scare campaign of deliberate misinformation that is being put to people living in those public housing towers, how about you tell them that we are going to build more? The member for Pahran is so pleased to talk about where he has joined with the government to make improvements – join with the government to build more homes. It is as simple as that. Stop opposing and blocking important initiatives, whether it is in places like Markham or whether it is in places like Hawthorn. Stop blocking and stopping the building of more homes. Get on board and support the construction of more homes, particularly for people who are the most vulnerable in our community.

Sam HIBBINS (Pahran) (14:24): On a supplementary, what we are trying to stop is unlimited rent rises, and the fact is that they have risen by 16 per cent over the last year. A broad section of housing services, legal services, advocates, unions, renters and even some landlords have all called for the government to introduce rent controls in some form. Why won't the government listen to them, to people in need and to those who support them, instead of constantly siding with the property industry and their profits?

Jacinta ALLAN (Bendigo East – Premier) (14:25): Let me pick up a couple of things that the member for Pahran has said in his question, and that little jibe at the end. Do you know what – it is the property industry who help us build homes. It is the property industry and all the carpenters and all the plumbers and all the tradies that they employ that help us build more homes, that help us make sure that more Victorians have the dignity of a roof over their heads. So let us not have what you might think are these clever little jibes at the people who are working with us to build more homes.

Secondly, the reference to unlimited rent increases – that is not something that is allowed for here in Victoria. The Minister for Consumer Affairs was just taking us through some of these matters. With the work we have done in our rental reform space, we are restricting rent increases between successive fixed-term rental agreements. That is just one of more than 130 changes we have been making to support renters here in Victoria.

Ministers statements: infrastructure

Colin BROOKS (Bundoora – Minister for Development Victoria, Minister for Precincts, Minister for Creative Industries) (14:26): As the Premier was just saying, building more homes is what the Allan Labor government is all about – boosting housing supply to make housing more affordable. Our ambitious housing statement brings together planning, social and affordable housing, rental settings and financial incentives to get more homes built, with a target to build 800,000 homes in the first 10 years. We will deliver many of these homes in world-class precincts, with access to jobs and transport, like Arden: 20,000 people will call the Arden precinct home once it is completed, with thousands of jobs built on the back of our investment in the Metro rail tunnel and a new hospital. Like Fishermans Bend – not the corrupt planning mess that was left to us in Fishermans Bend by those opposite but a properly planned and staged precinct. More than 4000 homes in Fishermans Bend have already been built or are under construction, and more than 30,000 will be built in the next three decades – again, built off the back of our investment in schools and transport and the innovation precinct at the old GMH site.

John Pesutto interjected.

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

Colin BROOKS: And we are getting on with other precincts and getting them ready to go: Sunshine, East Werribee and Footscray, just to name a few. We are building the Suburban Rail Loop, delivering housing and jobs at precincts at every station, linking suburban communities with universities, jobs, schools and the airport. I acknowledge the great work of the Minister for the Suburban Rail Loop and his predecessor, who both did great jobs. We as a government know that the Suburban Rail Loop will improve the lives of millions of Victorians who live in our suburbs, because on this side of the house we do not just back our regions and the beating heart of Melbourne, we also back our suburbs. We invest in them through projects like the Suburban Rail Loop. But of course some oppose that investment in the future of our suburbs, and there is no second prize for guessing what happens to them.

Members interjecting.

The SPEAKER: Order! The Minister for Prevention of Family Violence, I do not want to remove you from the chamber – I ask you to come to order.

Immigration detention

Michael O'BRIEN (Malvern) (14:28): My question is to the Minister for Police. Following the High Court's decision in the NZYQ matter, 141 immigration detainees have been released into the Australian community. Noting the –

Members interjecting.

Michael O'BRIEN: Speaker, it is a serious matter.

The SPEAKER: Member for Malvern, I would ask you not to screech at me, thank you. Members will come to order.

Michael O'BRIEN: Noting the Attorney-General's answer yesterday that this is a matter for the Minister for Police, I ask the minister: how many of these 141 individuals are now free in Victoria?

Anthony CARBINES (Ivanhoe – Minister for Police, Minister for Crime Prevention, Minister for Racing) (14:29): I notice that the member for Berwick seems to still be in witness protection. He has not been allowed to ask the police minister one question in 18 months. He has not asked me one question –

Brad Battin interjected.

The SPEAKER: The member for Berwick will come to order.

James Newbury: On a point of order, Speaker, on relevance, this is an important question about community safety, and I would ask you to ask the Minister for Police to provide that advice to the house and Victorians.

The SPEAKER: I ask the Minister for Police to respond to the question that was asked.

Anthony CARBINES: Can I say also that not only is the Chief Commissioner of Victoria Police in constant engagement with both the Australian Border Force and the Australian Federal Police, they are our partners and lead agencies in relation to these matters. They will continue to do that work and give them every support in these matters. I thank the honourable member for Malvern for his question. These are matters that are very much in the purview of the law enforcement agencies of the federal government, and they have every support from Victoria Police, as they always do, and support –

Michael O'Brien: On a point of order, Speaker, we asked the Minister for Police because he is responsible for Victoria Police. It is not for the minister to duckshove responsibility –

Members interjecting.

The SPEAKER: Order! The member for Malvern, there is no point of order. The minister has concluded his answer.

Members interjecting.

The SPEAKER: Order! I have ruled on the point of order.

James Newbury: On a point of order, Speaker, standing order 58 does require the minister to be direct. He is not being direct in answering the question in relation to how many of the 141 people have been released into Victoria. How many?

The SPEAKER: The minister has concluded his response.

Michael O'BRIEN (Malvern) (14:31): According to the federal Department of Home Affairs, 21 released immigration detainees have character concerns relating to 'national security, cybercrime, serious and high profile organised' gang membership, while a further 27 have concerns relating to 'crimes against children ... domestic violence' or 'violent, sexual or exploitative offences against women'. Minister, what specific action is Victoria Police taking to monitor the movements of these dangerous individuals who are in Victoria?

Anthony CARBINES (Ivanhoe – Minister for Police, Minister for Crime Prevention, Minister for Racing) (14:32): The federal Department of Home Affairs, as the honourable member for Malvern has mentioned, is certainly not in the jurisdiction or the purview of anyone in this place. I make it very clear that the chief commissioner, in the operational matters that he is engaged with at Victoria Police, is in very regular engagement –

James Newbury: On a point of order, Speaker, this question specifically asked the Minister for Police what actions were being taken by police to monitor the movements of these dangerous individuals, and in two questions the minister has failed to answer any of them.

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

Anthony CARBINES: Section 10 of the Victoria Police Act 2013 makes it very clear about my rights and responsibilities as the Minister for Police and the obligations of the chief commissioner when it comes to operational matters.

Michael O'BRIEN: On a point of order, Speaker, yesterday in the other place the Attorney-General said the information could only be provided by the Minister for Police. That is why the question is being directed to him, and I ask you to bring him back to answering the question, which was not about directing Victoria Police, it was about informing the house about the actions of Victoria Police.

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

Anthony CARBINES: I can again assure the house that the Chief Commissioner of Victoria Police is engaging with every resource that is being brought to bear by Victoria Police in its partnership and engagement with Australian Border Force and with Australian Federal Police. That work continues each and every day, and everyone can be assured of that work. I commend the leadership of the chief commissioner in these matters.

Ministers statements: renewable energy

Lily D'AMBROSIO (Mill Park – Minister for Climate Action, Minister for Energy and Resources, Minister for the State Electricity Commission) (14:34): I am pleased to update the house on how we are delivering on our world-leading renewables targets, which are slashing energy bills for Victorians and our emissions and creating 59,000 new jobs for Victorians. Through our Solar Homes program more than 350,000 rebates have so far been approved for rooftop solar PV, for hot water and for batteries, which are saving Victorian households more than \$1000 a year on their energy bills. Our nation-leading Victorian energy upgrades program is delivering real savings to more than 500,000 households and businesses through discounted products in 2022 alone, with savings of between \$110 and \$3700 a year, plus all Victorians are benefiting because of the resulting lower network and wholesale prices. Our Victorian default offers, the first in the country, continue to provide the cheapest default offer in the country. The reason is clear: it is because of our massive investment in renewables – the cheapest energy you can build, and more is to come. We are now legislating new renewables targets – 65 per cent by 2030, 95 per cent by 2035 – and the SEC will help accelerate that build.

We know that the best way to slash household energy bills is through electrification and getting out of expensive fossil gas. Today a new all-electric home costs no more to build and, even better, from day one when you move in, it can save you at least \$1000 – or \$2200 if you have got solar panels – off your bills every year. If you electrify your existing home, you will save 30 per cent – or 60 per cent if you have got solar – off your annual bills every year. Those opposite voted for nuclear – higher bills. They voted for fracking – higher bills. They voted to sell off the SEC – higher bills. That is not our way, and we will continue to deliver for Victorians.

Constituency questions

Polwarth electorate

Richard RIORDAN (Polwarth) (14:37): (450) My question this afternoon is for the Minister for Roads and Road Safety, and the question I put to the minister is: could the minister please tell the people of Birregurra, or inform the people of Birregurra, why the designated detour route that has been used in that community for at least the last 25 years and has been approved by Victoria Police and the local shire is no longer valid. Recently Department of Transport and Planning officials have informed the community that that route can no longer be used, which will cause great inconvenience to that town, as it is a popular main street in the heart of Birregurra for festivals. In fact this February there will be the Birregurra Show n Shine, which will not be able to go ahead if they cannot use the detour route. Minister, could you please tell us why the traditional detour route in Birregurra cannot be used this year?

Laverton electorate

Sarah CONNOLLY (Laverton) (14:38): (451) My question is for the Minister for Transport Infrastructure. Last week it was announced that our government would be fast-tracking the removal of four level crossings on the Melton line, including at Hopkins Road in Truganina. Whilst this level crossing does not sit directly within my electorate of Laverton, this road is an absolutely essential link for my community in Wyndham. If you live in Trug or Williams Landing or even Laverton, for that matter, and you need to drive to Melton or take the Western Freeway beyond Bacchus Marsh or Ballarat, then chances are you will be driving up Hopkins Road and back. I know that locals in my electorate are keen to see further improvements on this road, such as our \$18 million upgrade of the intersection at Boundary Road at the border of the Wyndham LGA, which is why the fast-tracking of this level crossing is such an important step in the right direction. So my question for the minister is this: how many commuters who drive on this road will benefit from the removal of this level crossing?

Evelyn electorate

Bridget VALLENCE (Evelyn) (14:39): (452) My question is to the Minister for Roads and Road Safety. What are the start and the expected completion dates for the Maroondah Highway duplication at Coldstream, including fixing the Killara Road and Station Street intersections? For years I have worked with the local community, traders, Coldstream fire brigade and Gruyere fire brigade to get the state government to fix this dangerous road. The state Labor government has no more excuses to delay this vital road safety project, because earlier this month the federal government handed down its final report into the review of transport infrastructure projects, which confirmed in black and white the commonsense outcome that the \$20 million funding allocated in 2019 for this project is secure and that the Maroondah Highway, Coldstream project needs to be built. In response to my adjournment matter 401, the minister stated the government now:

... understands the importance of Maroondah Highway to the local community ... and is getting on with the Maroondah Highway upgrade in Coldstream.

So with the government getting on with the upgrade, our community deserves to know when, because there should be no further delay.

Glen Waverley electorate

John MULLAHY (Glen Waverley) (14:40): (453) My constituency question is for the Minister for Children in the other place. Minister, how is the rollout and the operation of bilingual kinders working in my electorate of Glen Waverley? One of our commitments for the last election was to deliver bilingual kinders across Victoria. Last week 11 new bilingual kinders were announced to be rolled out at the start of next year. I am absolutely delighted to announce that one of the 11 kinders is Brentwood Preschool in Wheelers Hill in my electorate. From 2024 Brentwood Preschool will be offering Auslan, Mandarin or Japanese language programs. I am so proud of my little one, who is finishing kindergarten in the next couple of weeks, and as a result I am glad to see that the Allan Labor government is investing in the education of our youngest Victorians. We know that it is easiest for children to pick up a second language at a young age. Additionally, the program aims to maintain the connection our kids have to their backgrounds and cultures, which I know is something that will be highly valued in my culturally diverse electorate. I look forward to the minister's response.

Euroa electorate

Annabelle CLEELAND (Euroa) (14:41): (454) My constituency question is for the Minister for Roads and Road Safety, and I ask: how many accidents or fatalities will occur before the speed limit on the Euroa-Mansfield Road is finally reduced? There have been two tragic fatalities and more than 10 serious accidents, and several people have suffered life-altering injuries on this road in the past year. VicRoads and police confirmed the urgent need to reduce the speed limit in the area in August. I brought this to the attention of the minister immediately, yet it took four months to receive a response. While we were told changes would be made, today the speed limit still remains the same. I have grave

concerns about these delays and the minister's ability to make a change in a timely manner. Gooram CFA captain Michael Stubbe says:

We have CFA volunteers being called out for road accidents too often and we are not equipped for that.

The most recent life that was lost took us three hours to get her body out of the wreckage. She was just 18 years old. She hadn't even finished her exams.

Too much is at stake for our communities. Minister, act now.

Narre Warren South electorate

Gary MAAS (Narre Warren South) (14:42): (455) My constituency question is for the Minister for Planning and concerns the recent Allan Labor government announcement regarding granny flat planning reforms. Minister, how will the planning reforms in the housing statement support granny flat construction and housing in my electorate of Narre Warren South? *Victoria's Housing Statement* outlines a bold target to build 800,000 new homes across the state over the next 10 years. Currently in most council areas, though, granny flats are required to be only for dependent persons relying on the person in the main dwelling, and planning permits may be required. Indeed granny flats can be ordered to be demolished or moved when the dependent person no longer occupies the flat. Many in my electorate have raised the issue of granny flats, so I look forward to sharing the minister's response with my community.

Kew electorate

Jess WILSON (Kew) (14:43): (456) My question is to the Minister for Planning. When will the minister meet with Boroondara Heritage Group for Advocacy and Protection to discuss important protection of heritage homes under Victoria's planning laws? The electorate of Kew has many heritage homes and homes built between the 1800s and the 1960s and is most famous for its Victorian Edwardian architecture. However, current planning laws are not adequate to prevent the loss of such historic homes, which form an integral part of our area's character. Just this week I visited a beautiful Edwardian home on Edward Street, Kew, with the Boroondara Heritage Group. Sadly, a demolition permit has been issued for the property without any regard for its heritage value, and it is not known what will replace it. This has sparked fears that the property may remain vacant for a long period of time. The Boroondara Heritage Group is a local community group which was established in response to the loss of heritage in the Boroondara area. I commend Nerida, Christina, Sandra, Rosemary and Jane for their dedication to preserving our local history and architecture and note their words:

... we, the local community and businesses, are the guardians of for future generations.

We must do better.

Ripon electorate

Martha HAYLETT (Ripon) (14:44): (457) My question is for the Minister for Environment, and I ask: how many drink cans, bottles and cartons have been recycled across the Ripon electorate as part of the container deposit scheme to date? Locals across the region are so excited about our Labor government's new CDS Vic scheme. So many people came up to me at the Clunes annual show and the Beaufort annual show to rave about it. It is giving locals 10-cent refunds for every drink can, bottle and carton they recycle. It will reduce the amount of litter in Victoria by up to half while putting money back in the pockets of hardworking people. Depending on the type of refund point, locals can choose whether they want to receive their refund in the form of cash, a retail voucher or an electronic refund. People can also choose to donate their refund to a local charity or community organisation registered with the scheme. There are now refund points in Maryborough, Flagstaff, Beaufort, Ararat, St Arnaud and Creswick in my electorate, with work to find a location in Inglewood well underway. I want to thank the legendary local businesses and volunteers helping to make the scheme run smoothly.

Morwell electorate

Martin CAMERON (Morwell) (14:45): (458) My constituency question is for the Minister for Roads and Road Safety, and the information I seek is: when will works commence on the proposed upgrade of the Lloyd Street and Waterloo Road intersection in Moe? This is a dangerous intersection where trucks, buses and cars travel daily across a railway line from one side of town to the other. Words from the government's own website state:

The Lloyd Street and Waterloo Road intersection in Moe has been identified as a dangerous intersection. Queuing and short stacking is common at the intersection.

The people of Moe have been waiting for these desperately needed upgrades that seem to be dragging on and on. Minister, the intersection has been identified as dangerous and needs to be fixed. We await a much-needed response.

Kororoit electorate

Luba GRIGOROVITCH (Kororoit) (14:46): (459) My question is for the Minister for Skills and TAFE in the other place. Free TAFE has helped more than 153,000 Victorians embark on a new and rewarding career, saving Victorians more than \$394 million in course fees. Unlike those opposite, who gutted the TAFE system and closed campuses, this government has a track record of delivering training opportunities for young people and expanding free TAFE. As we know, the Melton LGA is the fastest growing local government area in Victoria, with 58 babies being born per week on average. Can the minister provide an update on our commitment to delivering a new TAFE campus at Melton, as the residents out there and those around are very much looking forward to it.

Annabelle Cleeland: Speaker, I want to raise a point of order regarding overdue responses to questions on notice. I am still waiting on 35 overdue questions, all of which were raised last sitting to absolutely no avail, so again I ask the ministers for housing, environment, transport infrastructure, public transport, racing, emergency services, water, treaty and First Peoples, WorkSafe and the TAC, skills and TAFE, and the Attorney-General to please urgently respond. One in particular I would like to point to is question 256 directed to the Minister for Housing, which is now 221 days overdue. I will not list the questions out of respect for your time, and I will pass these to you, but I do encourage a response.

The SPEAKER: Pass the list to the clerks, thank you, member for Euroa.

Bills**Land (Revocation of Reservations) Bill 2023***Second reading***Debate resumed.**

Colin BROOKS (Bundoora – Minister for Development Victoria, Minister for Precincts, Minister for Creative Industries) (14:47): I think that members approaching this bill, turning to page 1 and reading the long title of the bill:

A Bill for an Act to provide for the revocation of certain permanent reservations of Crown land at Shepparton, Toolangi, Seaspray, Haunted Stream, Narracan South, Darlimurla, Mirboo, Wombelano, Geelong, Clunes, Melbourne and Walhalla, to revoke related Crown grants and to re-reserve certain land and for other purposes ...

hoping that the bill was more exciting and controversial than the long title suggests will be greatly disappointed. But nonetheless these are important changes to the way that Crown land is managed across the state, particularly to local communities in many cases, to improve the way the land in those areas is used. They are commonsense changes, and often in particular cases of these sites they are changes that have been sought by adjoining owners or local councils – local communities – so they are a relatively uncontroversial tidying up of some of the sections of reserved Crown land.

It is important for people to remember that Crown land reserves is land that is set aside for a particular public purpose, such as education or recreation. The Governor in Council has the power to reserve Crown land for public purposes under the Crown Land (Reserves) Act 1978. These reservations may be temporary or permanent. However, while the Governor in Council may revoke a temporary reservation generally, a permanent Crown land reservation may only be revoked by, or in accordance with, an act of Parliament, and that is what this bill is doing today across these 13 locations. This bill revokes the permanent reservations over 13 areas of Crown land, and I will come to those sites in a moment.

I know that a number of speakers previously have already spoken to some of those sites and in particular focused on ones that were of interest to their community. The bill also revokes six restricted Crown grants to trustees – in four cases the entire grant and in two cases in part. The bill also repeals part 4 of the Land (Reservation and other Matters) Act 1999, which established a process to remove the relevant sections of the occupied section of land that relates to Stringers Creek as it runs through Walhalla. So it is an important piece of legislation. As I said, it is not super exciting, but it is important for the Parliament to consider. I do not think there is anyone opposing the bill, so hopefully it has a clear passage through both houses.

In relation to land at Shepparton, the proposed legislation changes part of the Victoria Lake caravan park area, which has been Crown land for some 60 years, and removes a reservation that will enable potential sale of the land to the Greater Shepparton City Council, which will hopefully facilitate an improvement to the caravan park for increased tourism in that area. That seems to be a fairly straightforward change.

The Toolangi potato research station, which closed back in 2008 – I think 44 hectares of that site were excised a few years ago, and that was reserved as state forest, and this is removing the remaining 105 hectares of the permanent reservation. There is a site at Seaspray, Merriman Creek, which relates to a private survey error, so it is cleaning up that issue.

Former mechanics institutes – five institute sites have not functioned for many years, and we understand there are no buildings or structures on those sites, so that reservation is being removed, potentially for those sites to be better utilised. There is a change in relation to the port of Geelong, which I know previous speakers have talked about – removal of the permanent reservation.

In Clunes there is a section of land that Wesley College has occupied at the borough chambers – Speaker, you are probably well aware of that facility, which is outside of your electorate but not too far away – and that will enable the potential sale of the land to the college for what is its existing use.

Alexandra Park in Melbourne – when the Swan Street bridge was expanded a few years back, a part of the bridge now occupies what was a section of Crown land at Alexandra Park, so this bill tidies up that section of land as well and ensures that it correctly reflects what is Crown land and what is not.

The Melbourne City Baths – it cleans up a piece of the reservation there that has been in place since 1878. That is a wonderful piece of Melbourne's history, the Melbourne City Baths, and it looks like that section of Crown land that is being rectified has always been and will always be used as effectively public footpath. In a technical sense it is public road, but it is effectively a footpath out the front – a small piece of the tip of the triangle at that site on the corner of I think Franklin and Swanston streets from memory, and that is an important thing. The old city baths, which are now a modern aquatic and exercise facility, were built back in 1860, and then the more recent version of that, the heritage buildings that are there now, were built in the early 1900s. But of course they were not designed as a swimming pool solely. Back in the 19th century, I am informed from University of Melbourne research that I will make available to Hansard, Melbourne was dubbed 'Smellbourne' back in the 19th century because of the fact that waste and water management was not what it could have been and the system struggled to keep pace with the rapidly expanding population. So it would not have been a very nice place to be, I would imagine, and Melbourne built the baths there for people to actually take a bath, so that is a really important place. I will not go through all the different facilities there, but it is an important piece of our

history here in Melbourne. I understand that in the 1930s it was nearly closed because it fell into disrepair from a lack of investment, and in the 1970s it was threatened with demolition again but was refurbished in the 1980s. Today, as I said, it has been refurbished to provide aquatic and fitness facilities for people who live in and around Melbourne and who work in Melbourne as well.

There is one other site that I mentioned, which is Walhalla. The bill excises just over 2 hectares of what have been long-term encroachments from Stringers Creek public purposes reserve, and that enables the sale of those pieces of land to the people who are occupying them at the moment – so again it is tidying up the relevant pieces of land.

This is, as I said, not a super exciting bill and not one that will change the world but certainly one that is important in terms of making sure that Crown land accurately reflects what it is used for. I commend the bill to the house.

Paul HAMER (Box Hill) (14:55): I rise to also talk on the Land (Revocation of Reservations) Bill 2023. It has been a wideranging and entertaining debate this afternoon. I was reflecting initially on the contribution of the member for Gippsland East, who waxed lyrical about the Haunted Stream and the mechanics institute down there. Certainly he did a very good sales pitch for coming down to East Gippsland for the wonderful hiking and trout fishing that goes on down there. I will not try my hand at trout fishing. I did not even catch a trout when I went to the trout farm, so wild trout in East Gippsland – as much as it does sound appealing getting away from it all, I think all that I will catch is a cold going down there.

As previous speakers have said, this is an important bill even if it perhaps for some is not the most stimulating. It is to provide for the revocation of certain permanent reservations of Crown land at Shepparton, Toolangi, Seaspray, Haunted Stream, Narracan South, Darlimurla, Mirboo, Wombelano, Geelong, Clunes, Melbourne and Walhalla, to revoke related Crown grants and to re-reserve certain land for other purposes.

I was reflecting on this legislation. It really provides quite an interesting social history of postcolonial, post-European settlement of Victoria and Melbourne. There are a couple of items that I wanted to draw out in that respect. The legislation proposes to revoke permanent reservations and related Crown grants at certain mechanics institutes land. That is at a number of sites; I think it is five in total, including at Haunted Stream, which the member for Gippsland East mentioned. It is interesting to reflect on the development of mechanics institutes and how they started. They really started as a form of adult education, particularly for working-class men who did not have the opportunities and avenues that more privileged members of the community had at that time to attain further adult education. I think there is quite a strong link to our own government's policy, particularly when it comes to further education and the enormous investment we have put in our TAFE courses right throughout regional Victoria. Mechanics institutes were the TAFEs of their day. They were not only learning spaces but were often accompanied by libraries that were accessible to the working-class people of Victoria. They served a really important role. While they do not serve that role anymore, there are many mechanics institutes that still exist in terms of their actual structures around metropolitan Melbourne and in many of our regional cities and towns, and they still continue to serve an important community purpose, as the member for Tarneit was saying, as a meeting place for local community groups, continuing that strong tradition.

I also wanted to talk about and refer to the changes around the port of Geelong. The bill will revoke a redundant permanent reservation at the port of Geelong. The land is part of the permanent public purposes reserve created along the shores of Port Phillip Bay and Corio Bay in 1873. Part of the land also holds the status of a government road controlled by the City of Greater Geelong under the Local Government Act 1989. This development of the port is another way of actually illustrating the history of the development of Victoria and particularly of our ports. Being an island nation, our ports were and still are the gateway to the international market, and both through Geelong and through Melbourne there were streams of immigrants who came into Australia to head to the goldfields, and out of

Geelong and out of the other ports would be the export of goods – even to this day you will have wool and grain – and, as mentioned also by the member for Tarneit, the importing and major manufacturing of wind turbines in the Geelong area and using that Geelong port area. Obviously, over time, as the design of our cargo ships has changed and the stevedoring patterns have changed, the port has changed and the port infrastructure has changed as well. Land has been reclaimed around the port of Geelong, which means that the area that was part of the Crown reserve is now inland, not actually on the coast.

If we look back at history, as was mentioned, the reservation was handed down in 1873. In June 1873 all unappropriated Crown lands along the shores of Port Phillip Bay were permanently reserved. Prior to that time there appear to have been some fairly piecemeal approaches to reserving land and ensuring that that land was Crown land along the foreshore of the bay. It has thrown up a number of anomalies. I was looking at the planning map of Melbourne as part of the research for the bill, and while there is public zoning around almost the entirety of the bay, there are small pockets where the private land and the zoning actually extend right to the coastline. These are areas down particularly in the lower reaches of the Mornington Peninsula where through the historical allocation of land and historical sale of land the title boundaries would extend through to the coast. But after 1873, as stated, all unappropriated Crown lands along the shores of Port Phillip Bay were permanently reserved. On 23 May 1881 a blanket reservation was made for all unalienated land within 1½ chains of the colony's rivers, rivulets, creeks, channels, aqueducts, lakes, reservoirs, swamps, inlets, loughs and straits. I do not know of any loughs that are within the greater Port Phillip region, but it did try to cover all bases. I think that by and large since that time successive state governments have tried to protect the public reserve around the bay. Some areas obviously have been dedicated as public parkland and Crown reserve entirely for public use and in most of the other areas along the bay full public access is retained, and that is how it should be. We all would like to see that our beaches and our bay are a resource for the use of the entire public.

Just finally, I also do want to touch on the Melbourne City Baths. There is a tiny reservation that will transfer, and it will revoke the permanent reservation for public baths and washhouses over a very small area, just 10.2 square metres, which has to the best of my knowledge always been used just as a splay for the intersection of Franklin Street and Swanston Street. Perhaps this was an oversight when that reserve was first laid down. I commend the bill to the house.

Emma KEALY (Lowan) (15:05): Thank you very much, Acting Speaker Farnham. Again, it is just wonderful to see you in that chair, and you are doing an absolutely fabulous job in chairing the government business of the day. I greatly appreciate your contribution to the Parliament of Victoria.

I rise today to speak on the Land (Revocation of Reservations) Bill 2023. This does excite me. When I grew up in the small town of Edenhope, with just 1000 people, in the far west of Victoria, I never in my wildest dreams would consider that I would be a member of Parliament and able to contribute to the formation of laws in Spring Street. Even further from that, my friends who would catch the Wombelano bus in from that special region and come into town –

Danny O'Brien: Womby.

Emma KEALY: It is otherwise known as 'Womby' by the local people. I would never think that I would have the good fortune to be able to speak up for the community of Wombelano in the Parliament of Victoria, and this may be the highlight of my parliamentary career. Wombelano is a very special place. There are very few people who still live in the Wombelano area, and that is one of the reasons why the reservation for land for a mechanics institute is no longer a burning issue in Wombelano. I have made contact with local people who have farms in the Wombelano area, and certainly there is a consideration that it would be a wonderful thing for the local area if the Crown land was opened up for purchase, likely by an adjacent landholder. In fact this is exactly what has happened with the football ground, which is no longer utilised. I believe that Shane Anson has purchased that property, and he is doing a fabulous job in making sure the community have still got that area and it is well maintained and well looked after. I believe he may be one of the interested parties when this particular allotment of land becomes available in the near future.

There are two elements of this legislation which mention Wombelano. Clause 20 will also dissolve the incorporation of the Wombelano Fire Shed Committee of Management under section 14A of the Crown Land (Reserves) Act 1978. We all know the fabulous work that our CFA volunteers do. For our CFA brigades, and in particular those in the Wombelano area – they have got nearby brigades at Charam; I actually assisted in opening the fabulous Charam fire shed many, many moons ago now – the fire shed is used also as a central meeting point for the local community. Charam's is adjacent to the Charam tennis courts. Again, Charam is very similar to the area of Wombelano, where it is not necessarily a community. In fact I am sure if I spoke to some people who live in Melbourne and have all their lives, they might say, 'Where is the suburb of Charam?' or 'Where is the suburb of Wombelano?' They might be bitterly disappointed to know that it is little more than a fire shed with a sign out the front and perhaps an adjacent tennis court, as is the case with Charam. As I said, in Wombelano we have got the oval which stands in that place. Karnak is a very similar area in my electorate, and they have a vibrant CFA brigade there; they are doing an absolutely fabulous job.

But what is putting an enormous amount of pressure on these regional communities – these rural communities – is that our farming practices are changing over time. More and more often we have people who move off farm and into larger centres. There may be people from Wombelano who have moved into or retired to communities like Edenhope, a town of about 1000 people as I said earlier, or have moved to a bigger centre like Horsham. As a result, there are fewer people living on a farm. This creates a number of risks to our rural areas, and particularly areas like Wombelano, which once upon a time did have its own football club, which did have its own tennis club, where they had aspirations to have their own mechanics institute in the community, where they have had I am sure many dances locally and many events. I know that there are still events held in the local area, but they have not been held recently.

But if there was ever an event at Wombelano, it would be my absolute honour and privilege to attend, member for Gippsland South. I have been to birthday parties in that area in Woolshed, if that is counted. I did go to Phil Adams's 18th birthday party, I think it was, in that area. It was quite some years ago – sorry, Phil – but I am the same age as you, so we were in the same category for that. But it is important that we do make sure that the people who are left in those communities have an opportunity to retain some of the privileges of the areas that are there.

Another nearby area in that region is Ullswater. Again, I used to play tennis at the Ullswater tennis courts. Similar to the changes in legislation that are before us today, the Ullswater hall was certainly a place where I attended many local events. There were concerts there. They would always have carols by candlelight in the local area. Not many people lived in the local area, and certainly fewer people live there today. But what happened with Ullswater hall, similar to many of our older small halls in country areas, is that the upgrade of that facility and the cost of the insurance became too much for the local council to manage and to operate. So in that instance, as we will see with this allotment of land in Wombelano, the Ullswater hall was put up for sale, it was bought up for a small fee and it now is being maintained and is made available free of charge to anybody in the area who wants a nice quaint hall to hold an event.

There is also an area just outside of Ullswater which is now planted with trees, but formerly it was a football oval, and Ullswater had its own football club. This was important for my family because we owned an Ullswater property which was adjacent to this football oval, and it was I think many of my forefathers and foremothers – shearers and other workers on the farm – who actually would form part of that critical, vibrant community of the local footy club, and they probably played a bit of cricket there over summer as well. It reflects upon how our rural and regional communities are changing over time. However, the issues that we see change so much over time.

If you travel along that road to Wombelano, you will find that it is extraordinarily narrow, and there are trucks that travel along that road as well, and a school bus service, as I mentioned earlier. That road has got crumbling edges, and it needs to be widened. That is something that the local council have been calling for for some period of time. I have certainly been lobbying for more road funding for a

very, very long period of time, and I am fortunate to share the table at the moment with the member for Gippsland South, who is the Shadow Minister for Roads and Road Safety. He has been very supportive of our campaign to ensure that Victorians have safe roadways no matter where they live, including if they live in the Wombelano area, perhaps travelling through to Harrow, Douglas and Miga Lake. Or maybe you are heading across, as I said, to Charam or Edenhope. You could be heading further north to Karnak or Goroke, or you could be travelling easterly and heading towards the big smoke of Horsham.

It is wonderful to see this legislation before us today. I do not think anyone in this chamber is more excited about this this legislation than I am. I believe, as I said, that this is perhaps the proudest moment of my parliamentary career, because I never thought that Wombelano would be so frequently mentioned in the Parliament of Victoria.

Danny O'Brien: You've got it in at least 20 times.

Emma KEALY: I did not ever think I would be able to recount so many stories.

Members interjecting.

Emma KEALY: I am hearing across the chamber – where is Womby? Where is Wombelano? Where is Edenhope? I am more than happy for any of the members of this chamber to join me, to travel across our rough, pothole-ridden and crumble-edged country roads. Come out and see the wonderful people at Edenhope or Wombelano or whatever wonderful community you would like to see. I am very fortunate –

Danny O'Brien: Charam.

Emma KEALY: Charam – a wonderful, wonderful institution. Maybe Konongwootong – that is another fabulous place; Konongwootong is absolutely amazing. Benayeo. Bringalbert – you can leave Albert at home if you choose to, because we will bring Albert along. But if you would like to come out to western Victoria in our upcoming season – we have got a festive season coming. We have got a few weeks away from Parliament. What a wonderful opportunity to head to the fabulous electorate of Lowan, the home of Wombelano and so many other fabulous small communities that were once thriving – and now are still thriving and growing and keeping our state alive by contributing to our agricultural economy. But I do welcome anybody to travel out further west. It is 20 per cent of the state by landmass, and I think it is probably 100 per cent of the good times, good fun and economy. It is some of the best land you could ever have, so please come out west over this coming break. I congratulate and thank the community of Wombelano for always fighting for their local mechanics institute.

Darren CHEESEMAM (South Barwon) (15:15): That was an outstanding contribution. I am very impressed by the member for Lowan's contribution on the Land (Revocation of Reservations) Bill 2023. In my time in this place I think this is at least the second or perhaps third time we have had a bill of this nature brought to this chamber, which I suspect is a relatively regular practice of codifying and making sure our Crown land works the way that it is supposed to. In doing some research on this, because the content is somewhat dry and boring, I was interested to discover a number of interesting facts about Crown land in Victoria. Anyone who has followed the history of the state of Victoria will very quickly become aware that in almost every regard we have set up legal instruments through legislation, the very, very first of those acts were indeed acts of the New South Wales Parliament, because we were of course a part of the New South Wales colony. The very first act that spelt out these arrangements was a New South Wales act. Now, anyone who has followed the history of the state of Victoria will quickly become aware that Victoria was granted statehood, and that was in 1858, if my memory serves me correctly.

Members interjecting.

Darren CHEESEMAM: 1854, okay, we have got some colleagues here that are assisting me with when Victoria became a state. Indeed in 1860 the Victorian Parliament passed some legislation that

set out in our own terms as a parliament, as a state, what our Crown land would look like and the underpinning legislative arrangements. As people would be aware, at that point in time globally the industrial nature by which our economy works was well and truly underway. The way that people engaged in the economy, the types of goods and services that our state needed and indeed the way that people made a living in the state of Victoria were profoundly changing in so many ways. Of course in this period of time we had the goldfields underway, driving a significant part of our economy. We had industrialisation taking place, and the needs and the services of the state of Victoria were underway. In that context indeed as a state we needed to spell out very clearly land use, and we needed to very clearly set aside land for public purposes to assist our growing and relatively wealthy state, particularly in comparison to New South Wales and, to be frank, to what people were enduring and experiencing in the United Kingdom.

In the Victorian context, where we are today is that about a third of Victoria's land mass is set aside as Crown land. That is effectively land that is controlled and owned by the state of Victoria, with of course different protections and different uses spelt out for that land. At that period of time there was a great demand in the Victorian economy to gain the sets of skills that the economy needed. People were very keenly wanting to get themselves a level of education that would enable them to participate in the economy. In the context of this particular bill, there was a great desire in many, many communities across Victoria to establish mechanics institutes. Local communities, in partnership in some ways with the Victorian government, would establish mechanics institutes through which men and women in the colony of Victoria would be able to access the skills that they needed to participate fully in the Victorian economy, and we saw through that period of time mechanics institutes established. We saw this in a lot of the regions, particularly those regions that were attached at that point in time to the mining economy but also in other settings where manufacturing and the like were key parts of the economy. Indeed at that point in time the Crown clearly responded by setting aside Crown land for that purpose. Almost every single town of any size or any scale across Victoria had land set aside for public benefit, often for these types of services.

This bill has recognised that despite the intention of the Crown at that point in time, the Parliament of Victoria and its people, not every single one of those sites was needed. Good planning had set it aside for the purposes of communities that ultimately needed it, and of course in some of these instances and some of these settings it was not needed. Today we have an opportunity, as I say and as I have said on a number of occasions as a member of this Parliament, to reflect on that use and to determine in some of these instances that we do not need it for that purpose. It was a good intention to set it aside, and if the economy had gone in a certain way in a certain location perhaps it might have been taken up for that purpose. I think in so many ways that was good planning back then. It was a good partnership back then in the context of these mechanics institutes.

Now, in a Geelong context one of the provisions in this bill relates to a set of land that is now inland. At the time that it was set aside in Geelong it was for the purposes of a port, but as the bay has changed and as encroachment has happened from the Port of Geelong into the bay, there is now a parcel of land that was seaside but that is now offset from the coast and no longer requires the set of arrangements that were spelt out. It makes sense that we indeed make that change.

This is a pretty straightforward, I think, tidy-up of the arrangements. It is a bill that will see further additions to it as Crown land is assessed and as things get tidied up as we go forward. It has been good to contribute on it. It has been good to reflect on the history of mechanics institutes and those things. From time to time we have the ability and the opportunity to add Crown land or to change the underpinning need for Crown land. This is just one of those instances when we are reflecting that.

Gabrielle WILLIAMS (Dandenong – Minister for Government Services, Minister for Consumer Affairs, Minister for Public and Active Transport) (15:25): It is with great enthusiasm that I move:

That this debate be now adjourned.

Motion agreed to and debate adjourned.

Ordered that debate be adjourned until later this day.

Motions

Parenting support services

Debate resumed on motion of Mary-Anne Thomas:

That this house recognises the government's support for Victorians starting or growing their families, and in the critical early years of their children's lives, by:

- (1) delivering public IVF;
- (2) establishing Victoria's first public egg and sperm bank; and
- (3) expanding Victoria's early parenting centre network.

Gabrielle WILLIAMS (Dandenong – Minister for Government Services, Minister for Consumer Affairs, Minister for Public and Active Transport) (15:26): Acting Speaker Farnham, you are indeed doing a fine job, as the member for Lowan was at such great pains to express.

It is a pleasure to be able to speak in support of this motion here today, one that initially came up I think in October, the month that is also dedicated to acknowledging pregnancy loss. I know other speakers, in particular the member for Lowan, spoke to that, and I will make some remarks about that as well. This is an issue that is exceptionally close to my heart – making assisted reproductive treatments more accessible to Victorians and being able to celebrate our achievements in Victoria to that end. It is, I have got to say, probably one of the achievements of this government that I am most proud of, and I would like to talk a little bit about why.

Like many in this place, I had a very long journey with assisted reproductive treatments – about 5½ years. I have spoken about that at length in this place before. It is not a journey for the faint-hearted, I must say. It is – and I have described it this way before – a roller-coaster of hope and despair. For most who embark upon it, it does not necessarily bring the outcome that they hoped for. Not only is it a very emotionally draining process, it has been traditionally a very financially draining process as well. I lost count of the number of times I was sitting in the waiting room of Monash IVF, where I had my treatment, and watched couples quietly talk about how many more rounds they could afford, if any, or this being the last one, and saw the stress and anxiety that that reality caused, let alone the stress and anxiety of the process itself.

In 5½ years of IVF treatments I myself had three early pregnancy losses, and none of them were easy. But I know there are many in this place who have spoken about their experiences with the same, and some with far more advanced pregnancies or stillbirths. I want to single out the member for Laverton, who has been brave enough to share her story in this place many times before and I think has captured well in telling her story the experience of so many others – the life-changing nature of pregnancy loss, which we can sometimes be a little bit flippant about. I know myself it is something that has stayed with me but has also been a part of the journey that did eventually, in my case, lead to the birth of my son, and I will talk about that in a little bit.

I think it is worth noting that by the time somebody reaches that point where they are accessing assisted reproductive treatments, they have gone through a significant journey before then. Often for many it has been years of trying with no success. It can be years of trying with repeated losses, and it can be a lot of medical exploration to try and find out what the issue is. Everyone comes to IVF in particular with that being a part of their story, so it is not necessarily a particularly fun journey before they have even started that next phase, which brings with it a lot of other challenges.

In my case, I was diagnosed at 19 with polycystic ovary syndrome, so I knew to some extent that I may have issues with fertility. I was diagnosed at a time when there was not great interest among governments to invest in research into those sorts of diagnoses, which meant that the information

provision around them was not great. Sometimes it could be a little bit alarmist. I am very proud to be able to say that in addition to what we delivered in public IVF, in public egg and sperm banks and in a range of other initiatives to help Victorians grow or start a family, we were also quite unusual as a government in investing, under then minister Jill Hennessy, in dedicated research and treatments for polycystic ovary syndrome. That was a huge deal at the time because it had been a largely misunderstood and a fairly silently endured condition, but it is one that is pretty common really and one that we really should understand.

But by the time that I had, on the back of that diagnosis, started accessing IVF treatment, all throughout that period, like it is for many, life had taken some twists and turns. I started the process with a partner; I ended up pursuing that process alone and making the decision to do it with donor sperm. Can I say to this house: donors are angels. They give the most remarkable gifts, and sadly we have too few of them. We need more men who are eligible to be open to donating sperm. I know the donation of eggs is also a really tough journey as well. So for those who might think about doing it, I would really urge them to. But I look at my little boy each and every day, and I do not know his donor, and yet I am so grateful to this man who is out there somewhere who had the foresight and the generosity to know that he could have a life-changing impact on someone else, and he has – he completely illuminated and elevated my being with the arrival of Ruairi last year. I think it is such an incredibly selfless thing for somebody to do. Thankfully here in Victoria when you access donor sperm you get a little bit of insight into your donor and why they decided to do this – so they can outline their own reasons for doing so. And overwhelmingly it is just altruism; it is wanting to give to someone else what you might already have yourself. It might be that people have experienced themselves the struggles of infertility or know somebody or have a loved one who has, and so they want to do their bit to give the joy of a family to those who might want to embark upon it.

First and foremost, let me say how much I love donors. I also know well the expense, the heartache and the frustrations with our assisted reproductive technology process and sector, and this government has done an enormous amount to try and overcome those. We have heard a lot over the years about poor practices in that sector, whether it be misleading information or whether it be questionable technologies and upselling of those technologies, let alone the issue of cost, which is itself such an enormous barrier – and that is something we have been able to address in our delivery of public IVF. But we also did really practical things like removing the need for police checks, which is something that I found really jarring when I went through the process. No-one else I knew who had a family without treatment had to get a police check before having children, so it seemed really discriminatory and it seemed like you were being treated with suspicion for the reason that you were just infertile. It was such an awful process to go through and something the clinicians seemed really uncomfortable with as well – so I am really glad that we have managed to make that change.

To have now a public sperm and egg bank – I have not got the latest figures on the donation rates, but I know that in the first couple of weeks that that was open there was a huge surge of donations into the public sperm and egg bank, which is incredible – and to do things that make these services more accessible to LGBTIQ+ Victorians, especially that change in the definition in the legislation from 10 women to 10 families, which might allow two people in a couple to mother a child by the same donor, is really, really important. All of that goes towards destigmatising these challenges, destigmatising the process, and that is really important if we are going to encourage accessibility.

Finally, in the short time I have left I want to offer a really big thankyou, because they say it takes a village to raise a child, and in my case it took a village to make one. I want to thank Professor Beverley Vollenhoven, who was my IVF clinician over many, many years. I think of her these days more as a friend. I want to thank Dr Ryan Hodges, who delivered my son and did so with great expertise, all of the midwives at the hospital at his delivery and also the embryologists at Monash IVF, who did their magic. I do not pretend to know what they do, but I know it is bloody amazing. I had the world's best anaesthetist regularly, Dr David Lloyd. I want to thank finally my parents, whose love for my son just shows that these things cross generations.

Annabelle CLEELAND (Euroa) (15:36): That is a hard act to follow. It is with great privilege that I can finally rise today to speak on this motion brought forward by the Minister for Health. This is a motion that boasts about the government's efforts to help Victorians starting or growing their family and in the critical early years of their children's lives. I do often find myself talking about how disappointing it is to hear Labor members boast about a thriving health system while regional Victoria is still doing it so tough. As Shadow Parliamentary Secretary for Health, this is an issue that I have raised in Parliament on multiple occasions. Sadly, the efforts of this government have simply not been enough to provide good outcomes for regional Victorian families. Every Victorian family, irrespective of where they live, deserves quality health care. This is a fundamental right, and it should not be seen as a luxury.

Our hospitals are underfunded, ambulance response times are absolutely appalling and the barriers to accessing mental health services are pretty extreme. These barriers, including the high costs and long waitlists, are disproportionately impacting the most vulnerable in our communities. Our community-owned hospitals have begged the government for support yet continue to be ignored by minister after minister. Maternity care is one area that perhaps suffers the most in regional areas. The critical lack of resources in our regional communities is very genuinely putting lives at risk. While I have my own personal experience with this, I know I am not alone. Regional maternity care is personal for me; nearly five years ago my hospital lacked the resources to provide a safe birth for my son Arthur.

When I was elected to this role I vowed to leave a better legacy for young people and future generations of this electorate so that my children and yours can choose to live in regional communities without disadvantage. Speaking up on motions like this gives us the opportunity. After my own experience I became a community adviser working to improve health and safety outcomes for patients at a local hospital under extreme pressure from population growth and negligent government support. Devastatingly, I have had countless conversations with women just like me: women like Ellen from Nagambie and Meg from Heathcote. Meg had the first baby born at her local hospital in 30 years. She initially presented at a larger regional hospital in labour but was turned away because they were too busy. Meg and her baby almost died at her local hospital because they simply did not have the equipment needed to appropriately care for them. There are too many horror stories about unsafe births, unsuitable facilities and our local hospitals simply not being able to provide maternity services.

Every aspect of regional Victoria's health system is deteriorating. Extensive ambulance wait times and out-of-control surgery waitlists are also of major concern. People are waiting for urgent medical attention with their lives hanging in the balance for upwards of 25 minutes before help arrives. I have heard stories from my constituents of the wait time reaching 2 hours, with absolutely devastating consequences. Under questioning from the Liberals and Nationals during Public Accounts and Estimates Committee hearings Department of Health officials confirmed nearly 1400 Victorians were removed from the elective surgery waitlist because they died during 2022–23, 20 Victorians died due to Ambulance Victoria's failure across 24 months to June 2023 and nearly 19,000 taxi trips were used to transport Victorian patients because an ambulance was not available. On top of the blown-out ambulance wait times, our hospitals are gasping under the mounting strain. Our category 1 surgery waitlist, the most urgent there is, ballooned by 45 per cent in just three months. These are people's families, loved ones and children suffering. We have seen cuts of up to 15 per cent to our grassroots and preventative services, including programs to address chronic illnesses and contributing factors such as smoking, vaping, unhealthy eating and physical inactivity. So rather than boasting, this government must step up and ensure that our communities and all the people in them are safe and make sure that our healthcare providers can operate effectively, because at the moment neither of those things are guaranteed.

While on this motion it is important to address this government's claims that they are improving the critical early years of children's lives. Our child care continues to be an issue plaguing our regional communities – and I sound like a broken record. A survey I recently organised really highlighted the dire state of child care in the region, with responses from all over the electorate sharing their concerns.

The survey, which was launched in June and remains open to responses, asked members of the community several questions about their experience in accessing child care. Responses have been received from major towns across the electorate, including Avenel, Benalla, Broadford and Rushworth, and smaller towns throughout the region. There are far too many people in our community who are struggling to access childcare options. From both the survey and the conversations with my community it is clear there are so many parents wanting to get back into the workforce who cannot, because they are unable to get their kids into child care. This is a handbrake on our community and places a hurdle in front of young people who want to raise their families in the country.

Some of the other issues raised in the responses include multiyear waitlists, a lack of childcare providers in their town and families relocating to other areas to access better childcare options. Overwhelmingly, 100 per cent of respondents said they had been adversely impacted by access to child care in the region; 100 per cent of respondents shared that the limited childcare options had resulted in their being unable to get back to work or training. Of those that were looking, the responses highlighted a significant reliance on family and friends for child care, because there were no other options. More than 50 per cent relied on family and friends a great deal, and many did not have that option. We have already campaigned for Avenel to receive a new childcare centre, but the issue extends across the entire electorate and across the entire state for regional Victoria. Seymour is set to receive an early learning centre, but even this, it has been confirmed, will not be ready until after 2028. Our towns are not inaccessible backwaters, but they are placed at a disadvantage when child care is so rare.

I do want to thank the Minister for Health and the Attorney-General in the other place for their letter targeted towards me in a somewhat recent edition of the *North Central Review* newspaper. While speaking on issues brought directly to me by our local medical professionals may seem like a fear campaign to them and this government, it is what I like to call community advocacy, something foreign to many members of their party. As someone who has volunteered at local hospitals that suffered years of government neglect I invite them both to meet with our local healthcare providers, GPs and other medical professionals. They are the people who raised these concerns with me, and I suggest the minister learns how they really feel about this Labor government.

Of the 27 priority primary care centres you boast about, there are none in the Euroa electorate that I represent. Nineteen of these are in Labor electorates and just five in Nationals or Liberal seats. It is a disgrace. For people in my community, access to general practice is not being improved but rather going backwards under this government. GPs are already suffering with significant waitlists or are just flat out unable to accept new patients. To best serve our communities and provide the care our locals require, these GPs need more support, not less, and not a cash grab new tax. The flow-on effect has reached our urgent care facilities. Our GPs are already having an incredibly difficult time.

Your commitment to ensuring all Victorian communities have health care available close to home, especially in rural and remote locations, is just talk. Hospitals in my region are struggling and in need of assistance to remain open. As things stand we are seeing mergers between different hospitals just to keep the doors open. For the hospitals that are staying open the resources are limited. Benalla is without a dialysis facility despite frequent appeals to this government. Nexus in Kilmore is dependent on community funding. Maternity facilities in Heathcote are non-existent. The closest PET scan machine is in the next electorate. Euroa Health has partnered with cattle yards and farmers to raise funds for equipment. In Seymour a recent report into women's disadvantages in our community highlights the town being on the periphery of crucial health services.

Sarah CONNOLLY (Laverton) (15:46): Well, I rise with a great deal of pleasure to talk about this motion before the house this afternoon. I absolutely love talking about IVF and sharing my experience and my road to parenthood. It is also a great opportunity to talk about the great investment. This government has truly gone above and beyond to ensure that more people here in Victoria, regardless of the size of their bank account and the money in their back pocket, can afford to undertake IVF and make their dream of having a baby come true.

Before I begin my contribution I do want to start by acknowledging that the road to parenthood is not always an easy one. I also want to acknowledge the thousands of people right across Victoria and indeed Australia currently undergoing IVF treatment. IVF and undergoing that type of assisted reproductive technology or that treatment – IVF, ICSI or whatever it is that you are doing – sucks. It is something that none of us ever want to have to do. It is something that none of us ever thought that we would have to do. But I do want to say to people undergoing that treatment: we see you, we support you and we are here to pick you up when you feel like it is all too much – and keep going, because at the end of it your dreams may in fact come true.

I also want to acknowledge all of the little miracles – and we have had little Ruairi talked about here earlier this afternoon – and the ones that have now grown up and are having families of their own that were conceived through IVF and fertility reproductive assistance, including little Felix. Felix is the first child to be born through our free public IVF program that we have rolled out here in Victoria. That is a remarkable achievement. Welcome to the world, little Felix. I also want to acknowledge my miracles: Vivienne, who was stillborn; Emily, who turned 13 last month and is really 13 going on 23; and my Leo, who is 10 and wants to be a pro soccer player and buy yours truly her own private island with a swimming pool – something that I am very much encouraging indeed.

My road to parenthood starts with love and it finishes with love, and in between that it has been a really bumpy ride, I think to say the least. It has been 13 years since I gave birth to my miracle baby, Emily. She is my rainbow baby. A rainbow baby is a baby that is born after you undergo the loss of another one. They call it a rainbow baby because it is your rainbow back to happiness. The years in the lead-up to Emily's birth were really tough, and they could easily be described as traumatic. I would stand here and say they were probably the worst times of my life, the darkest days, and it is really sad to say that because that ride to parenthood or that road to parenthood started six months after I got married – two years after I met the man of my dreams.

The early years of our marriage, maybe our honeymoon years, were anything but that. Yes, the early years of my marriage were marred with really dark days of fear, of pain, of loss, of grief, of feeling that the world was against us – it was so unfair. I am able to smile standing here talking about that because we made it through those years together. We were changed, perhaps stronger and I would say a lot more resilient than some couples I come across. As I have already said, my story started with love. Perhaps it was the love of each other, Scott and me, that got us through it. For many, many couples their relationships do not survive after undergoing IVF and most certainly then the loss of a child on top of it. We learned that through going to counselling to try and help our marriage survive the loss of Vivienne and the IVF cycles that we would have to undergo to get pregnant with Emily and Leo. Happy endings in this life are never guaranteed. That is certainly something that I know very well.

Today I want to take some time to talk about treasure island. You might ask, 'What is treasure island? Is it a real place?' Yes, it is. Many of us have to visit treasure island, and I am looking around the chamber and I can see members here who indeed I know have had to go to treasure island. All those years ago, when I underwent IVF, 'treasure island' is what the IVF sector or industry was referred to by GPs, really. The reason it was called treasure island is because there was so much money to be made by the incredible people that worked in it – the fertility specialists, the scientists, the nurses. As the member for Dandenong talked about, it takes an entire tribe and a community to actually get you pregnant. Those people are very special people, but they work on treasure island. If you are not someone or a couple that has a lot of money, visiting treasure island to make your dreams come true is very difficult, if not prohibitive.

There is nothing crueller in life, I can tell you, than to be told that you cannot have a child the way most of us do: in private. I call it the traditional way, but that is just me. There is nothing crueller than that and realising that the way in which you need to get pregnant is completely different, and in some respects it is quite public and it is quite invasive and it involves quite a few people in the room. What is even crueller is to find out that you cannot even undertake that journey and engage with the scientists and the fertility specialists that can get you pregnant in the first place, because you cannot afford it.

That is something our Labor government has recognised, and it has changed. It is changing lives – it is actually bringing lives into the state, as I talked about previously with little Felix. I have to wonder if there are babies that have been born since Felix that we just have not heard the names of. But those parents will be forever grateful for having a government that understands that the size of your bank account, how much money you have got in your back pocket, should not determine whether or not you should be able to go through IVF and become a parent.

But like I said, our journey was over a decade ago: it was in Queensland, I was in my 20s and we were lucky enough to be able to undertake the first cycle, and I think back then it was about \$10,000. I remember our parents saying that they would help fund it. We needed to do as many cycles as possible, because remember there is no guarantee with IVF. Some people in fact get to the end of the journey and they do not have a baby to hold in their arms. But that whole process of undergoing IVF is so stressful. It is full of anxiety, and that is because the stats and the numbers might not be working with you, you are worried about how many eggs you will get on pick-up and the number of eggs that will be fertilised and make it to the freezer. That is a very stressful process. It is also a really expensive process, and the more things you need to assist you to get pregnant, the more cost there is.

For us, treasure island and that experience, as horrendous as I found it – it was a time when you did not talk openly about IVF; it was something quite private – was such a stressful time in our lives. We were lucky enough to undergo three cycles and be pregnant three times, so our journey has not been marred with years and years and years of trauma attached to IVF. In fact I was just laughing about science the other day and explaining to my son Leo, who is 10, that he actually may be scientifically older than his sister Emily, who is 13, because he was a little embryo we left behind in the freezer after we put fresh ones back and they did not work and we went on to the third cycle. Isn't it remarkable how amazing science really is? 'Does that mean Emily now has to listen to me because I'm older and I know what's what?' But that really is the beauty about science and technology and what we have learned in this space. I know that over the past probably 15 years since I underwent my first cycle there has been a tremendous amount of research in this space, and new things are being learned all the time to help get parents and people pregnant. I do want to end my contribution by saying to people undergoing IVF at the moment: do not give up. Keep going. You will get there in the end.

Chris CREWTER (Mornington) (15:56): I rise today to speak on the motion moved by the government on IVF and supporting growing families. Every year IVF helps thousands of Victorians to have children. It provides a means to overcome a range of health and fertility issues that otherwise would not allow them to conceive. However, unfortunately the success of IVF is not guaranteed, and many must undergo more than one cycle of expensive treatment before they are successful. The cost of this treatment places additional stress on many Victorian families and makes starting a family unachievable for some. Even with Medicare rebates, patients are left around \$5000 out of pocket. This significant expense is a barrier for thousands of Victorians looking to start a family, especially as cost-of-living pressures mount and household budgets are stretched to the max.

The Liberals and Nationals are committed to improving IVF services across Victoria. In fact during last year's election we committed to improving access to fertility services by providing a rebate of up to \$2000 to undertake an initial IVF procedure using private fertility clinics, a rebate of \$2000 for a subsequent procedure if the first was unsuccessful, a rebate of \$500 for pre-IVF fertility testing and up to five days paid fertility leave. We also committed to supporting Victorians to have a family by removing out-of-pocket costs for the collection and initial storage of eggs for women with cancer and other conditions, which would have saved women up to \$7000.

As for me personally, I have been very involved, working with young mums and those wanting children, with young children or who have lost children, whether it is through Zoe Support Australia – set up by the now Nationals member for Mallee – helping pregnant women and young mothers both in parenting and in getting them back into education and helping break the cycle of intergenerational disadvantage, or through MISS, the Miscarriage Information Support Service, based locally, an amazing service set up by local constituent Melissa King, who is the president and founder.

Let us not forget, though, the unnecessary distress that the government caused in January 2022 during their code brown by cancelling IVF services. Victoria was the only government across the country that implemented what was called the code brown, suspending IVF services and surgery. This was a devastating move and incredibly damaging to so many couples, adding many weeks and longer of waiting to the process. This is time some families did not have before success became much more difficult or too late altogether. This delay for some meant not having a family of their own. It was only through a social media campaign with thousands of signatures and families sharing their heartbreaking stories of how the suspension of IVF treatments was decreasing their likelihood of having a family that this cruel decision by the then Andrews Labor government was reversed. The government at the time also argued that staff at closed private hospitals would be transferred into the public system. This did not happen, and we only found this out much later at the Pandemic Declaration Accountability and Oversight Committee. As a result, IVF services and treatments in these specialist clinics, where these specialist health workers were employed, could not be –

The SPEAKER: Order! The time has come for me to interrupt business for the matter of public importance. The member will have the call when the matter is next before the Chair.

Business interrupted under sessional orders.

Matters of public importance

Frontline workers

The SPEAKER (16:01): I have accepted a statement from the member for Kororoit proposing the following matter of public importance for discussion:

That this house notes the hard work of Victoria's frontline workers during the holiday and summer season, not just in Melbourne but right across regional Victoria.

Luba GRIGOROVITCH (Kororoit) (16:01): It gives me great pleasure and joy to be speaking to this matter of public importance (MPI), because it is very important. Ultimately, thanking workers is something that we all should be doing all year round, not just during the festive season. Given we are coming towards the end of the year, I think it is extra special to make mention of them, so I am pleased it is today's matter. As the end of the year approaches, I know that some workers are honestly deserving of a shout-out – more of a shout-out than any of us in here deserve. I am talking about frontline workers: workers who will be working during the holiday and summer season. While the rest of us knock off or go away and enjoy a well-earned break with the people that we love, these workers will be sacrificing their own time with their loved ones and friends so that the rest of us can enjoy a break and do so safely. These are the workers who make our own holidays possible. I am talking about our municipal workers and cleaners; our public transport workers; our aviation and airport workers; our wharfies and maritime and freight workers; our hospitality and retail workers; our army of ambos, nurses, doctors, paramedics, allied health and support staff; and of course our emergency response workers.

I want to single out just a few of these groups of workers, starting off with our frontline healthcare workers. What an incredible job they did during the pandemic – saving lives under the most gruelling conditions – and they continue to do this work, day in, day out. It is extraordinary work, for all of us and all of our community. We understand the toll that the pandemic had on our healthcare workers. The burnout of these workers was absolutely horrendous. It took this Labor government to enshrine in law nurse and midwife to patient ratios, taking this off the bargaining table so that they can concentrate on being paid decent wages.

Now over to our aviation workers. It would be remiss of me not to start with singling out Qantas, and I want to further congratulate these workers and their union – the Transport Workers' Union – on their stellar victory in the High Court against the greed of Alan Joyce and Qantas in September. We all remember Qantas sacking 1700 of their workers during the height of the pandemic. It was absolutely sickening. Further, they outsourced jobs. It could not get any worse – 1700 hardworking and loyal ground handling and fleet workers were just thrown on the scrap heap for the sake of profits and bonuses. It was

one of the most blatant examples of corporate greed in recent Australian history, and frankly, in my opinion, it shows just why Qantas should never have been privatised to begin with. As many of you know, these workers at Qantas united together with their union and fought the giant of Qantas in the highest court of the land. Then what did Qantas do? They appealed the Federal Court's ruling that their sackings were illegal, and what happened? They lost. These sacked workers and their families won. It was a fight that they never should have had to wage. But they proved once and for all that Alan Joyce's and Qantas's sacking of them was both unjust and illegal. The next step of the battle now is ensuring that each and every one of the 1700 sacked workers is granted just compensation from Qantas, and I will be with them every step of the way. It is why we on Labor's side cannot rest until there are permanent and secure jobs guaranteed across the aviation sector so that this cannot happen again.

Now over to our thousands of frontline public transport workers and of course my old union, the Rail, Tram and Bus Union. My hat goes off to them. Public transport workers literally keep this state moving to where we need to go throughout the holiday season – New Year's and all the way up until the Australian Open – just as they always do. For anyone who does not know, it has been another huge year for the public transport network. As per usual, our public transport workers have worked tirelessly to keep our trains, trams and buses moving, getting Victorians around our state.

Colleagues may not know this, but this year we saw the biggest week of travel on our regional rail network since before the pandemic. This is no doubt thanks to the introduction of our regional fare cap in March. It is exciting that 13 million trips have taken place since March. There have also been 1000 extra services rolled out across the metropolitan network, including trains, trams and shuttle buses. Just a few weeks ago these were well and truly in force during Victoria's Spring Racing Carnival. I should give a special shout-out to the station staff and the ever versatile authorised officers who work tirelessly during all major events to help Victoria keep moving so that the punters can get to their destination and then get home safely.

Throughout this year of milestones for our public transport network, Victoria's public transport workers have continued to deliver a reliable and safe experience for passengers with our train, tram and bus services regularly exceeding their reliability targets in 2023 despite challenges. This is all thanks to the hard work of the frontline staff.

As the former secretary of the Rail, Tram and Bus Union, I often get asked about gaining employment in the public transport sector and how one should go about this. I am pleased to say that Melbourne's Metro Tunnel will be open in 2025. This is a project that will absolutely transform our public transport system. If you are keen to work in public transport, this could be your chance, as I know that staff are currently being sought for Victorians to work across our train network in particular.

I looked into some facts on the latest class of Metro Trains drivers, who recently graduated, and I have something very special to share with everybody: the 550th female driver recently went through the class and was recruited by Metro. Five hundred and fifty female drivers – well, I have got to say, I never thought that I would see the day. I recall starting at the Rail, Tram and Bus Union back in 2010. At that time there were less than 30 female drivers – less than 30. Today, 550. The inequality that too often took place in the workplace was completely unacceptable for that day and age. I, along with Hervinder Kaur and Shelley Barnes, created RTBU Women. This was a women's committee to try and make change in what was an 88 per cent male-dominated industry. I am so proud of what RTBU women have done and continue to do for equality in the workplace, and I am confident that the spike in female drivers will see these improvements daily.

I digress, reminiscing about the good old days at the Rail, Tram and Bus Union. So back to the matter of public importance – I am glad I did not get a point of order there. I must say it is an incredibly important MPI, and one that I am sure everyone in this place is going to agree with. As I was saying before my trek down memory lane, I want to thank Victoria's hardworking public transport workers for the key role that they play in helping millions of Victorians get to where they need to go quickly

and safely. I just do not think that the effort that they put into keeping the network running and making it a safe journey is ever really appreciated enough by us.

Have you ever gone to a station and seen a station staff member get up and spruik to you, and has it made you smile? I know that I have, and I want to give a shout-out today to one very special station member who is currently going viral on all forms of social media. This is Rail, Tram and Bus Union member Laurence, who works at Flinders Street station. If you have not seen him in person or on TikTok, be sure to go on and check him out. Laurence is providing a unique and engaging customer experience at Flinders Street station for all passengers on their daily commute, and I hope he keeps this up over the holiday season as I know he puts a smile on my face and other commuters' faces. To each and every public transport worker who keeps the state moving, it is time for us to stop and say thank you – thank you to our public transport workers.

While talking about appreciation, abusive and violent behaviour towards workers, whether it be public transport or any other industry, is never okay. Everyone has a right to be safe at work and to be in a safe work environment. No-one goes to work to be spat at, to be yelled at or to be treated poorly, so please see the human before you see the uniform when you are interacting with people assisting you, especially during this summer and festive season.

As the end of the year approaches and shopping commences – I know that I have already started my shopping – it might be easy to get caught up in the holiday season, but that is no reason to take your frustration out on these workers, many of whom are working long hours. So when you hit the shopping centres for those last-minute items, make sure that you thank your retail workers for assisting you. I remember when I was in my teens working in retail the rush and the countdown to Christmas Eve. It was a real thing – long hours and sore feet but a lot of adrenaline. There was nothing that would put a smile on your face more than a customer who smiled at you and said thank you.

As we all know, our community is growing. Our police officers are there and always willing to protect our growing and proudly diverse community. Policing is often a dangerous and selfless job, and what they sometimes experience on the job most of us can barely imagine. This Labor government is prioritising the safety of all Victorians, having already delivered thousands of additional police more resources so that our police force can keep protecting all Victorians. As well as the police, there are emergency services workers who put their own lives at risk every single day, including thousands of firefighters. As another dangerous bushfire season approaches and as extreme weather events only become more frequent, our firefighters will be on the front line keeping each and every one of us safe and protecting our lives, our homes and our communities. Our police, our paramedics and our firefighters are really the unsung heroes of our community. Thank you to each and every one of you.

Many of us forget how things get to this state. To our wharfies and maritime and freight workers, who work incredibly long hours at times to ensure that everything arrives on time: thank you. It is often a thankless job, but we appreciate all that you have done this year. I note that there have been some disputes on the wharves with greedy bosses, but with the unity of union membership and the will to fight, which the mighty Maritime Union of Australia has, I am confident that maritime workers will be treated with respect and dignity in their workplace.

Now over to our hospitality workers: too many of these workers will not be getting the penalty rates or the conditions that they are entitled to as they work over the break, and that is simply outrageous and completely unacceptable. To these workers giving up their time over Christmas, Boxing Day and New Year's Day, I say to each and everyone of you: you deserve your penalty rates. The Liberals and Nationals have already shown what they really think of these workers by encouraging the Fair Work Commission to cut their penalty rates back in 2017. No matter how they try to spin it, we know the truth: every Victorian deserves a good, stable job with a decent wage. It is more than just a pay cheque; it is about the security of being able to build a life and provide for your family. If those workers who keep this state moving over the break cannot afford the ceilings over their heads, to put food on their

tables or to keep their kids in school, then what is the point? When we return to this place in February next year, I hope that we will serve these workers as well as they serve us.

To all those workers in Kororoit and across Victoria, I am only going to make one ask of you in return, and that is: if you do not belong to your union, join your union today. Your union makes you stronger together. They are the ones who will actually fight for you. If you do not know what your union is, just go to the affiliated unions page on the We Are Union website and you will be able to find it.

Again, to each and every worker sacrificing their time so that we can enjoy our own: take care and stay safe during this period. I can never thank you enough, but I and others on this side will be here to fight for you. This Allan Labor government is putting Victorian workers and Victorian jobs first, and we thank you for all that you are going to do for us over the summer period.

Richard RIORDAN (Polwarth) (16:13): I rise to also comment on today's matter of public importance about hardworking frontline workers. But this side of the house of course sees all Victorians who are giving up their time working in the service of others around the state over summer as frontline workers not just as a cheap recruitment drive for the union movement. It was disappointing to see the member for Kororoit's biggest priority. The biggest priority she had in this MPI was making sure that her Qantas frequent flyer points would not be hindered when she travels around this summer, when she leaves the luxury of this place and heads off on some glamorous holiday. She was more worried about the frontline workers at Qantas, and that is a huge disappointment to this side of the house, because this side of the house acknowledges that this summer over this holiday period literally thousands and thousands of volunteers in community safety and emergency services workers will be on call.

They will get up from the Christmas table to attend a grassfire, bushfire, whatever it may be. We saw it in my own electorate in 2015, when literally hundreds and hundreds of local people gave up their Christmas Day to try and keep communities safe. They were not sitting there worrying about what Labor's prospects were or what the Trades Hall had to say or what the latest recruitment drive for the union movement was – no, they were worried about their fellow citizens. They were worried about the safety of the community, they were worried about community assets, they were worried about making sure that the communities they live in, love and serve were kept safe. That is the clear difference on this side of the house: we think and care about all Victorians, not just those that subscribe to our own very boutique ideology.

This holiday summer season is in fact a time of year all Victorians look forward to very much –

Danny O'Brien: Even outside Melbourne?

Richard RIORDAN: Even outside of Melbourne they do, and outside of Trades Hall. We all look forward to a good, long, sunny, summery Christmas period. Victoria is well known for its at times beautiful summers but also extreme summers. We can think back to 2010, when we were deluged in this state and emergency workers from one end of the state to the other were kept very, very busy over that summer period keeping people out of the water. Of course there is no shortage of summer experiences when quite the reverse happens.

Danny O'Brien: We have got flood warnings now.

Richard RIORDAN: Flood warnings now – exactly right, member for Gippsland South. There are the not-so-happy times when we need our frontline workers and support. When we talk about frontline workers, we do not just talk about those who are in a professional capacity who are actually paid and supported to be in that role; we talk about the volunteers as well. We know very well that our society and our community rely on all frontline workers.

It is also in the good times that we need our frontline workers. We know, for example, this coming holiday season we will have our beaches and our lakes and our rivers packed with visitors and tourists alike who are there for the good times, but they still need those frontline workers. It is the nurses and

the doctors at the local ambulance and emergency departments in often small, fairly underfunded country hospitals and urgent care centres that will attend to and help look after those people.

We talk about the SES and we talk about our surf lifesaving community. It is a massive resource that this state has, where city and country people alike come together over their summer period and combine a bit of fun and sun and pleasure and also the serious duty of keeping all sorts of people safe. We know in fact that in summer last year down at Anglesea 11 people from one family group were all sucked into a rip and could have all lost their lives had it not been for volunteers. At that time it was some of the youngest volunteers at the Anglesea Surf Lifesaving Club that were able to jump to the rescue and provide a great service that actually ensured that no loss of life occurred, which could have otherwise happened.

We have got our ocean rescue crews and we have got our coastguard crews, all manned by volunteers here in the state of Victoria. Not only will these people be on call 24 hours a day, seven days a week while most of us are having a pretty relaxing break, but they will also be out on other days rattling cans, selling raffle tickets, going about and working with the community to raise much-needed funds for much-needed equipment. Sadly, we have heard, just in recent days in fact, that the much-beloved SES, who have really got off to a very busy start this summer, still have not been paid their SES unit operational funds.

Danny O'Brien interjected.

Richard RIORDAN: Who do we ring when a tree falls down on our house or there is a flood or there is a major car accident – we call the SES. Member for Gippsland South, are you aware that the SES volunteers have not been paid? They are paying for petrol themselves, they are paying for maintenance themselves. They are forced to pay for everything themselves because this lousy government, which wants us to get up and talk about frontline workers today and what they are doing to support them – we heard it was nothing more than a covered-up union recruitment drive, this MPI from the other side. But can I say: this side stands with all frontline workers in Victoria, and particularly the ones that are doing it for nothing. They are doing it out of the love of their community and the love of their state. So it is a great disappointment, it is a huge disappointment to think this government wants to grandstand about its support for frontline workers when it cannot even get the chequebook open to pay the annual subsidy to the SES unit so that they can afford to keep their equipment and machines on the road over this summer period. That is a huge disappointment.

Danny O'Brien: Maybe they should be consultants; then they would get paid.

Richard RIORDAN: Well, that is perhaps right, and FRV ones.

There will of course be others who put in time and effort over the summer, and as I said it is not all volunteers. We have got our 000 callers, we have got our doctors, we have got our nurses, we have got all sorts of people that will be doing the hard yards over that summer period. And from this side of the house we very much thank all of them – all of them, anyone who takes the roster. Particularly in my own family – we have family members who will be working in aged care. In fact my sister-in-law will be missing Christmas lunch this year because she will be making sure that 75 people in the local nursing home in Colac will have people there to be with them over that period, and we thank all people that do those types of things.

But this cash-poor government over recent years has seen fit to cancel the Commonwealth Games and to cancel big projects, particularly those in regional areas. The community health service in Torquay, promised back in 2017, is still a paddock full of thistles. This government has been very slow to deliver the funds and resources. It came as a great concern to frontline workers, particularly those in our wonderful CFA – and we will talk a bit more about the CFA. But when we are talking about the stinginess of the government that cannot pay operational funds to the SES, they have now come out and said to the CFA crews – and we touched earlier on the fact that so many of our volunteer groups, surf lifesavers, CFA, SES, the whole lot of them, will be out in their uniforms at some point over the

next few months, madly fundraising to keep our communities safe – this government has now announced to them ‘Guess what, folks? The money that your community raises in your local CFA is no longer to be spent at your discretion’.

Can you believe that? On one hand, they want you to go out and pay for your new ute, your new rubber ducky or your new hoses, they want you to fund the recruitment drives and all the other necessary bits and pieces and they want you to sometimes half pay for your new brigade shed or provide the services inside it, and this government has now said those hard-earned funds that your community has donated to your brigade for the betterment of your community is now no longer going to be at your discretion – you are going to have to seek approval to spend your money. If ever there was an act that said to volunteers and to frontline workers we do not respect you and we do not respect your community, this is the issue. I think people could be rightly concerned. I think volunteers and frontline workers who give up their summer and Christmas periods for the betterment of their communities have every reason to wonder what is next in store for them, because they have seen this government crank up taxes, crank up charges. I mean, we heard today ‘Well, a cruise ship line made too much money and we’re not going to have that on our watch, so we’re going to tax them a bit more’. Is that what this is? Is that what volunteer CFA firefighters can expect – that their hard-earned fundraising is now going to go back to Melbourne to help pay for the over-cost tunnels, the overrun programs and the ballooning bureaucracy that this government is now riddled with? How do we know that this concerns our frontline workers, our volunteers, our CFA, our SES, our lifesavers? How do we know that this attitude of this government, this lack of support that it continually shows, concerns them? The evidence is, sadly, in declining operational volunteers in the state of Victoria.

Danny O’Brien: The figures are pretty damning.

Richard RIORDAN: The figures are in fact very damning, and no matter what spin this government puts on it – on its tireless attack on volunteerism and on regional communities in particular but also on our outer metropolitan communities, who also have very strong and robust SES units and CFA brigades and others – they are looking with despair at the recruitment and the maintenance of volunteers. The government will have us believe times have changed, people are not interested in volunteering. That is simply not true. They are not interested in being puppets of the government. They are not interested in being caught up in the unnecessary bureaucracy and red tape that takes the experience away from the people doing it, and they are certainly not prepared to work within an environment that does not respect them.

This environment increasingly is one that is controlled centrally and controlled by a government that has other agendas. And we know what that other agenda is, don’t we, member for Gippsland South? We heard it before when the government was given the opportunity to lead on this debate and show its support for volunteers and for frontline workers – no, they talked about Qantas airfares and Qantas management, and they talked about union recruitment. That is what their focus is on. It is not about supporting communities and supporting people in them. And if we look at, for example –

A member: It was about supporting workers. That’s what it was about.

Richard RIORDAN: Well, the simple fact about supporting people and communities and our volunteer frontline services is that there was a dramatic attack on operational volunteer members. We have seen, for example, at the CFA only in 2018 – so just when the government really got its heavy tools out to start the attack on volunteers – we went from 34,500-odd operational volunteers, people prepared to give up their day and get out into the field and help support communities, to this year reporting only 28,785, a massive reduction in supporters. Unfortunately, that percentage drop is replicated right across the emergency services, and that is an indictment on this government, because it just has not put the effort in. If it put the effort in to supporting frontline workers and people that keep Victorians safe, we certainly would not be seeing the Victorian police about to go out on strike for the first time in a long time, because they cannot talk to this government. You certainly would not have the fact of CFA brigades right across the state being told that their trucks are so old that they are

now no longer able to go on major campaigns and jobs around the state – they have got to stay pretty much to their home territory.

With the minute-odd that we have left, while we are talking about the age of trucks, this government has been absolutely negligent. The government talks about its support even for its friends in the union, but even the United Firefighters Union (UFU) is coming out very strongly and saying, ‘The average age of our trucks is 15-odd years.’ We have got the CFA, the poor cousins, with trucks with an average age of 26. And what is this government’s response to just a supply of decrepit vehicles, some 1900-odd vehicles? It is to replace 43 this year. That is 2.5 per cent of the entire fleet being replaced this year. At this stunning rate Victorians can expect to have fire services vehicles at an average age of some 40 years. Forty-year-old vehicles – that means half the people in the vehicles will in fact be younger than the vehicles are. And when we are talking about the need to have the best equipment, the safest equipment –

Danny O’Brien: Only for FRV, apparently.

Richard RIORDAN: Well, not even for them, sadly, member for Gippsland South. This government are not only neglecting their volunteer base with vehicles twice as old but also neglecting their UFU mates.

This government at every level says it is wanting to support frontline workers, but it clearly is not. This matter of public importance today is a critical one for Victoria in the sense that we need to support our frontline workers. This should not be treated by the government today as a recruitment drive for Trades Hall and the ACTU, and there certainly should not be a focus on the member for Kororoit’s desire for efficient Qantas services over summer.

Daniela DE MARTINO (Monbulk) (16:28): This matter of public importance is one very close to my heart. Our frontline workers are the people who do keep our state moving along, and the member for Polwarth’s contribution I listened to intently. It did appear, however, that he may have tuned out after the first couple of minutes of the member for Kororoit’s contribution, because I distinctly recall her mentioning our CFA volunteers and our other frontline workers. In fact it was a very comprehensive list which looked at all the people who contribute and front up every day, day in, day out, to make sure that our state keeps ticking along.

Moving on, I join the member for Kororoit in recognising the hard work of all frontline workers, especially as we enter this holiday and summer season. My contribution today will focus on retail and hospitality workers. These are two industries really close to my heart. It is not to detract from the important work of all the others, but it is one that I just wish to highlight.

I am the daughter, originally, of a cafe owner – back then it was called a coffee lounge – who went on to open up and run video libraries; remember those? I worked in retail from the age of 12 and hospitality from 20 in pubs in Manchester until my teaching years. I then worked for the Shop, Distributive and Allied Employees Association, the SDA union, for retail and fast-food workers and re-entered the hospitality and retail space when I bought my greengrocery in 2015 and then opened up a cafe in 2017. So these are industries I feel I know very well and care about deeply, both for employees and the small business owners themselves.

John Mullahy interjected.

Daniela DE MARTINO: I was a business owner – thank you, member for Glen Waverley.

As a kid we never had time away over Christmas and the summer holidays. They were the busiest times for my parents’ businesses. Instead of beach holidays away, we worked in our stores, ensuring customers could hire their videos, buy their popcorn and entertain their families on a budget. There was nothing like five weekly videos for \$10 to keep the kids happy and from killing each other once school had finished. Those were the days.

I know many of us here are looking forward to the upcoming holidays – it is definitely the chatter in the hallways. It is a chance to take a breather and slow down as the weather warms up. How lucky are we that we can, because so many people in retail, in fast food, in restaurants and in hospitality right across my electorate of Monbulk but also right across the state of Victoria, from Melbourne's CBD to the far reaches of our regions, will not be winding down; they will be ramping up. Small business owners and employees across the retail and hospitality industries will be working longer hours and at a greater intensity to keep the rest of us well fed and well watered and keep the fuel in our cars, our pharmacy scripts dispensed and the gifts flowing over Christmas and new year. They will be cooking us the fish and chips, the souvlakis, the kebabs and the banh mi to be enjoyed on the beach. They will be sweltering over a fryer. They will be over the hot bakers ovens or the grill while we dip ourselves into the ocean or a river or we go for a nice cool walk in a temperate rainforest.

Many will work on Christmas Day itself, especially across hospitality, so let us spare a thought for those turning up when we are still in our pyjamas and enjoying meals with those we love. Let us hope they will be paid properly too for their efforts on days when we all get to enjoy time off. If you are planning a New Year's Eve at a fun restaurant or bar, think of the staff who will be serving you, because without them, your night is not going to happen.

For retail workers it is not just the lead-up to Christmas that will leave them with sore feet for the hours that they work at a counter or they stock shelves. The Boxing Day sales will see a huge spike in retail trade, and it will be hardworking employees ensuring that those bargains are processed and sold to people seeking to save some money. I would like to impress upon Victorians to please keep their cool during the sales. If an item is not there or the queue to pay is long, please do not take it out on the staff. Retail, fast-food and hospitality workers are some of the lowest paid across our state and our nation, yet they are there when we need them. Without them our world simply grinds to a halt. How else do you buy your toilet paper?

The retail trade sector in Victoria employs 297,471 or 9.4 per cent of people. It makes it the third-largest employer, effectively equal to construction and behind healthcare and social assistance. The accommodation and food services sector employs about 196,000. Put the two together and we are talking about just under 400,000 people employed across retail and hospitality. So I would like to say to Victorians: when you next go to a supermarket, a retail store, a takeaway shop, a servo or a pharmacy, take a moment to say thank you to the person serving you for working when you do not have to. A smile and an expression of gratitude go such a long way. Fellow Victorians, please remember that people in service are not servants. A wonderful former employee of mine, Suzie, reminded her colleagues of this if ever they were abused by a customer. It became my mantra. In my store the customer was not always right. No member of staff was ever expected to cop abuse.

During 2020 and 2021 the abuse from certain customers who refused to wear a mask in my shop became so regular and so vile that I hired a security guard to stand at our door for eight weeks to ask people to wear a piece of cloth on their face. If they became agitated – and several did every day – I was called forward to deal with the abuser, because I firmly believed that none of my staff were paid enough or trained at a level to cop some of the awful aggression which was on display. Every day when I woke up and got myself ready to turn up at my store I did so with a knot of fear and anxiety in my stomach. It did not know what the day would hold, but I knew that it would not be long until I was abused.

Let me assure people out there who have never worked in customer-facing roles or patient-facing roles that abuse from customers can leave you with a feeling of such dread. It is absolutely unacceptable, and I am proud that the union I had the distinct pleasure to work for, the SDA, have been running their No-one Deserves a Serve campaign for several years now to good effect. They have highlighted some of the atrocious behaviour which retail and fast-food staff can be subjected to, and I would like to share just one example, because I am conscious of the time. This is from a fast-food worker here in Victoria, who said:

A customer called and said he was not happy with one of the burgers in his meal. I offered a replacement or refund but he demanded a full \$45 refund on the whole meal, that he had eaten. He then said he was going to come back to the store, jump the counter, smash my head in and kill me.

Retail, fast-food and hospitality workers simply do not deserve to be abused. They do not deserve to be threatened. They do not deserve to be attacked. No-one does.

If I look at the SDA's survey which they conducted this year of over 4600 workers, unfortunately things are not getting better. In the last 12 months 87 per cent of workers said they had experienced verbal abuse from a customer. In 2016 and 2021 the surveys recorded 88 per cent. Nine per cent of respondents said they had been spat on; 12.5 per cent of respondents said they had been the victim of physical violence from a customer, compared with 8 per cent in the 2021 survey; and 17 per cent of respondents reported the incidents of customer abuse and violence they experienced were of a sexual nature, compared to 10.65 per cent in the 2021 survey. I myself have been sexually assaulted when working, and I can tell you it is something that lives with you forever.

When I entered Parliament, I did so with retailers, retail employees and small business at the forefront of my mind. Ninety-eight per cent of businesses in our state are small businesses, and collectively they are the largest employer. So whether they are in the CBD or Mount Dandenong, Bendigo or Benalla, Torquay or Tatura, we know as a government that when small businesses succeed, Victoria thrives. They are absolutely the heart of our local communities. They generate important jobs, they create local economic activity and quite often they support other small businesses in the region. Many of them form the fabric of our local communities. They sponsor sporting clubs and organisations and they get involved in community events. So I would plead to Victorians out there to support their local small businesses. Choose your strip shops that are part of your community, put your hands in your pockets, spend that money over their counter and support the people working there and those people who form part of the fabric of where you live.

I am really proud to be part of an Allan Labor government which proudly backs small businesses. At this year's state budget we actually delivered reform to reduce pressure on small businesses by making payroll taxes fairer. From 1 July next year we are going to raise the tax-free threshold to \$900,000, with a further increase to \$1 million from 1 July 2025. That is going to save 26,000 Victorian businesses up to \$14,550 per annum, and around 6000 of those businesses will stop paying payroll tax altogether. We are doing a lot to help. There is so much more that we are doing – and I know I am about to run out of time; I am mindful. But I do just want to say one more time a huge, sincere thanks to all frontline workers, whether they be in retail, in hospitality, transport workers, CFA volunteers or in hospitals. Whenever someone turns up on a day that you can have off, thank them.

Tim BULL (Gippsland East) (16:38): It is a pleasure to rise and make a contribution on this matter of public importance (MPI). Its foundation is recognising our frontline workers over the holiday and summer season. Hence I would like to talk for a few moments about our timber workers, because every summer season they are at the forefront of our bushfire response. They are there protecting not only the people who live in our area but the many thousands who flock from the metropolitan area to holiday within our region over summer. I want to just speak very quickly about the importance of these timber works. This is a quote from Chris Hardman at a recent public meeting in Mallacoota around the importance of our timber industry. Chris is the chief fire officer of forest and fire operations, and Chris nailed this. Here is Chris's commentary. He said the forest contractors are singly the most important part of his team and that you cannot replace them. They are absolutely gold dust. He cannot do his job properly without them and he is hopeful many will be around for a long time.

These are the timber workers that saved communities in the 2019–20 bushfires. Last summer, almost 12 months ago, they were again protecting communities in East Gippsland from fire – at the forefront. We spoke about the complaints a minute ago, about getting an order wrong and the abuse someone might get behind a counter at a cafe. No abuse should be accepted, and I am in agreeance with that. But these are the people who are cutting firebreaks through flames. They have burning branches dropping on the top of their machinery as they are going through the bush putting in firebreaks to protect

communities. These are the people that are getting sparks and embers in their face – not just verbal abuse from environmentalists but sparks and embers in their face as they go about their business.

This MPI talks about thanking our frontline workers. Let me tell you how these workers have been thanked by this government. Weeks after defending communities in East Gippsland last summer, just weeks after being at the forefront, they got told their industry was ending, that it was being brought forward seven years with no prior warning – ‘You’re finished, and you’re going to be out by 1 January 2024’. Weeks after saving towns and saving communities – what a way to say thank you. Now as we progress, the compensation package that has been put on the table for these frontline workers is paltry. It is hopeless. They are in a situation now where we are about to enter December – they are out by 1 January – and some have been asked to put in expressions of interest as to whether they want to keep working for the government in a role of first responders to fire. The contractors have asked, ‘Okay, we’ll put in an expression of interest. Can you tell us where the work is? Can you tell us what the work is so we know what machinery we’ve got to keep, and can you tell us what we’re going to be paid?’ None of those questions have been answered in the level of detail that is required for them to make a decision. What a way to say thank you to our frontline workers.

The equipment: the first draft that came out said they will be compensated for equipment one to 10 years old only, up to a level where the budget for the equipment criteria is exhausted. That is in the document. How is that fair? How do you get fairly compensated for your equipment when the government puts a cap on the budget that they are going to compensate them for? If that is not a big enough doozy from this minister, they then got told equipment over 10 years old will not be compensated. There is a lot of equipment more than 10 years old of forestry workers worth hundreds of thousands of dollars with low hours, worth a lot of money, and the initial offer, which I hope is reversed – I have not had confirmation of that yet – is we have got nothing there for you, that is not going to be compensated. They also asked contractors who they are booting out the door to pay for the retraining cost of their members – again, it is just wrong, absolutely just wrong. What a way to say thanks to our timber industry workers who have done so much for our community. They are families who have been on call – they race to the fire front – and now they are fairly much getting shafted.

I will also add the recent Public Accounts and Estimates Committee hearings last week revealed that the state has only burnt 70,000 hectares in fuel reduction burns in the last year. So when the 2009 Victorian Bushfires Royal Commission suggested that to keep communities safe we have to burn around 400,000 hectares and last year we burnt 70,000 hectares, I would like a member in this chamber, anywhere, to tell me how that is ever going to end. When you are not keeping on top of fuel loads and every summer we have hot weather, and it is getting hotter, and we have lightning strikes that start fires and you do not do the fuel reduction burns, how is that protecting our frontline workers? You are increasing the chances of them facing another mega-fire. It is an absolutely hopeless situation – an absolutely hopeless situation. If we are going to have MPIs about recognising the importance of our frontline workers and respecting them, I reckon a good place to start would be the timber industry. They have done so much for so long over summer periods protecting our communities.

I turn to the CFA in the couple of minutes I have got left. There are three vehicles in my area of Gippsland – Tyers East, Valencia Creek and Clydebank, Tyers East being just out of my electorate – where the vehicles are too old to be part of a strike team. They are too old to travel any level of distance to be in a strike team. What sort of first line of defence is that? You are getting rid of our timber industry and you have got vehicles almost older than some of the members of Parliament we have got in this chamber. The SES has just been told they have got a 10 per cent cut. Units have received a letter this week while we have been in Parliament saying they have got to have a 10 per cent cut. The Lakes Entrance police station – we have just been told it is having its opening hours cut in half, from 16 hours to 8. When that town’s population is going to grow from 5000 to 25,000 as of next week, opening hours at the station get cut to 8 hours – absolutely hopeless.

We have had 16,000 nurses leave the health system in the past two years. The Victorian Auditor-General’s Office report – not a political comment – says that in addition to this, one in four hospital

workers is suffering high to severe stress levels. That is the Auditor-General. In 2020 the healthcare and social assistance sector was absolutely decimated in relation to funding to match the number of claims and the increased workload that they were experiencing. The levels of support that have been put in place to try and help those that are the most vulnerable in our community just are not there.

There is a lot that can be done in relation to frontline workers. I have got timber workers and contractors in my office not knowing what their future holds because they have been booted out of their sector. There are grown men in tears, and their wives are in tears. I am sick of dealing with them because this government will give them no certainty on what their future is going to be beyond 1 January. They are not trained to do anything else. They only know about working in the bush. They cannot get any level of detail from this government. If they put in an expression of interest, are they going to get sent to the other side of the state? What is the pay going to be? Will it pay their mortgage? What sort of gear do they have to hang onto? What can be sold? And we are about four weeks away.

This was policy done on the run. It is a sham and a shambles. I tell you the one thing that this Parliament and the government can do: in the next four weeks, just give them all the detail that they need so they can make a basic decision about their future. There is even talk of if they want to go on and work for the government, they will not get the full benefits of their package. They should be treated separately. Their exit package should be given to them, and then they should be able to make a decision on whether they want to continue – they should not be linked. They should be compensated for getting the boot, and then if they want to continue working for the government, that should be treated separately – not ‘If you want to keep working for us, we’re going to diminish your exit package’. How is that looking after frontline workers in this state? We want to talk about other things of relative insignificance – Qantas and the like. Let us get into the real stuff and look after these workers.

Michaela SETTLE (Eureka) (16:49): I am delighted to rise to speak today on this matter of public importance (MPI):

That this house notes the hard work of Victoria’s frontline workers during the holiday and summer season ...

What I pick out here is that this is across regional Victoria. We have had some wonderful contributions from both sides of the house, acknowledging all of our frontline workers. CFA and health workers are wonderful, wonderful people, all. I think I am going to concentrate a little bit on the lighter side of life. Regional Victoria is an absolutely fantastic place to visit, and summer is a really beautiful time. We have beaches, we have bush and we have warm summer nights. A lot of us use it to get some rest and relaxation – to catch up with our families that we have not seen and to go and visit friends and sit around and have some Christmas cheer together.

As we head into the festive season I am here to give a particular shout-out to the many people across regional Victoria who will be working to make our holidays fun-filled and enjoyable. We see the regions absolutely swell in summer as holiday-makers head to the many attractions that regional Victoria has to offer, and of course there is an even better reason now – with the train fare cap you can visit anywhere in regional Victoria for just \$10. With more and more visitors, though, coming into the regions, that does put pressure on our hardworking tourism and hospitality staff. In preparing for today’s MPI I was chatting to the wonderful Tara Cunneen, who is my adviser, and she was telling me about her first job at McDonald’s in Torquay and that when summer would come that would just increase the workload by an enormous amount. I really want to thank people that work in retail, hospitality and tourism in our regions.

This government works hard to support workers in many practical ways. Just from a business perspective, we have got the lowest payroll tax in the country in regional Victoria – it is a quarter of what it is in Melbourne. That means that businesses are able to hire more people. And of course we now have the lowest unemployment rate we have ever seen in the regions. But this government has been really keen to support tourism infrastructure, and a \$2 billion package is going to be rolled out for tourism infrastructure and increasing regional workforces as a consequence of the money that came from the regional package at the end of the games. A part of that is the worker accommodation package.

That is a \$150 million fund, and it is really to look at easing the stresses. For example, the member for South Barwon is not with us, but I know that people in his electorate struggle to find accommodation, which then has the effect that people are lacking in the hospitality industry. A package like this is incredibly important, but it is not just in the tourism sector. I know the member for Ripon talks very passionately about the need for worker accommodation in some of the towns in her region, which is less about hospitality than providing those really important services like health services.

Free TAFE has just been an absolute game changer, and we know that over 150,000 Victorians have taken part in that. There was an article in the Ballarat *Courier* last week about the extraordinary number of people that have gone through Fed Uni TAFE. I was delighted to stand with the member for Wendouree and our federal member quite recently to announce some extra courses. They are the certificate IV in kitchen management, the diploma of hospitality management and the certificate III in tourism. These are ways that we can really support workers in our regions. It means that they have free access to an education for some professional development. It economically benefits everybody as well as those students.

The next bit is not going to go down well with the Speaker, but I have to let her know that Ballarat was voted the top tourism town in 2023. My apologies, but –

The SPEAKER: Member for Eureka, that is only temporary.

Michaela SETTLE: Oh! Well, them's fighting words, but I have got the member for Wendouree on my side and the member for Ripon. You have got the Premier, I know. But I am very, very proud of the fact that Ballarat was voted the top tourism town. It has been some of those extraordinary investments. I know something that was very close to the member for Wendouree's heart was the Foto Biennale, which has been an extraordinary tourism event locally, but over the summer there are many, many things to do in Ballarat. I would just like to use a quote from the wonderful new chair of the Tourism Midwest Victoria board – who will be known to some in this house – John Pandazopoulos. He is working very closely with us to make sure that many, many more people come to Ballarat. But what I would like to flag is a quote that he made, and he said:

This win is a recognition of the talented businesspeople and their staff who make up our region's visitor economy ecosystem.

It's our people who make Ballarat and Midwest Victoria what it is, and whose innovation, creativity and friendliness continually give visitors a compelling reason to visit, and to return time and time again.

So really what he is saying there is it is all about those people, those frontline people in tourism and hospitality; it is their warmth in Ballarat that made us the winners of the tourism town award, so I would suggest that people get on a train and get up to Ballarat. Sovereign Hill, what a fantastic experience that is, but when you are there please just take a moment to think about having to earn your living dressed in crinoline in the middle of summer. Those fine workers at Sovereign Hill really go the extra mile to keep us entertained and happy. But then of course there is the Ballarat Wildlife Park and the lion feeder there, that is another job that we have to really thank.

If you are coming up to Ballarat without the kids, we have got some fantastic distilleries in Ballarat, and I know that my good friend the member for Wendouree may have stayed a little later than she ought at the launch of the Itinerant Spirits gin distillery. Myself, I spent a bit too much time at Kilderkin. I would suggest people get on the train and come and enjoy it. And of course there are the festivals that we have in the region, so the Meredith Music Festival I will be heading off to as the local member, but I am also delighted I will be joined by the member for Eltham. But spare a thought for the people there that keep the loos clean for 12,000 people over a weekend. They are the people that are really making our experience such a wonderful, wonderful time.

But my hot tip if you get out into the regions is also to stop in those smaller towns. I know the member for Ripon and I have talked about the joy of the Tiny Towns grant system. We have wonderful little towns, they are the best places to visit, the bakeries are the best, and we are going to make them even

better, supporting them with the Tiny Towns grants. This government is absolutely committed to regional Victoria.

I have got a wonderful, wonderful patch, but there are plenty of other places to go and we have to acknowledge all of the people along the way. I recently went to along the silo art trail – it is 200 kilometres and a really fun thing to do. This government really got behind it in 2021 with the then Minister for Regional Development investing in accommodation along the way. A particular favourite for me was stopping at the Stick Shed. If anyone has not visited the Stick Shed, you really should. It is fabulous, and this government spent \$350,000 refurbishing it.

I guess what I am trying to say here is that this government is utterly committed to the regions, it is utterly committed to tourism and economic development in the regions, but we know that that rests on the backs of these wonderful, wonderful people who get out there every day. While we are all having Christmas with our family, they are working to make sure that we can have a wonderful Christmas. On that note I really just want to thank every hospitality worker, every person working in tourism across the whole of regional Victoria, for all that they are going to do for us over summer so that we can have a wonderful summer experience. Thank you very much.

Wayne FARNHAM (Narracan) (16:58): I am pleased to rise today on the matter of public importance (MPI) to talk about the hard work of our frontline workers during the holiday and summer season not just in Melbourne but across regional Victoria. I am going to lead off from where the member for Gippsland East left and talk about our timber workers. I would also like to talk about the fact that the member for Kororoit was talking about union membership; well, unfortunately union membership did not help our timber workers one bit. In fact they were totally ignored by the CFMEU. So any union member out there in the timber industry I think would find that pretty hollow to say ‘Join a union, they’ll protect you’, because they obviously do not, especially when it comes to this government.

I want to start talking about our real frontline workers, and I am going to start with our police. Our police are out there every day protecting our community – us, our kids, our parents. They will go through the Christmas period and they will see some horrific things; we all know that. They will be there no matter what the weather, what the conditions, whether it is 40 degrees or whether it is 40 millimetres of rain. That is their job. They generally put us first and their needs second. That is what they do. They are a great credit to themselves. As I said, they are there to serve and protect us, and that is something that should always be applauded for anyone in those services.

It is a shame, coming I think Friday, that 99 per cent of Victoria Police probably will not feel the love that this MPI is meant to share. Ninety-nine per cent of Victoria Police union members have decided they are going to paint their cars. So that is telling me that no matter what you put in an MPI, if you sit up there and say how good they are, you need to back it up. You cannot turn around and say you care and then rip stuff away from them. I mean, police numbers have declined for the last three years. At the moment there are over 800 vacancies on rosters. At the moment there are 43 police stations that have gone from 16 hours a day to 8 hours a day. At the moment we have single-man police stations being cut. So when you put an MPI forward to say how important they are, back it up. In my electorate I have the town of Rawson, which has a single-man station that will go, and the closest police response now to that town is nearly an hour away.

When we talk about these frontline workers, they should be honoured. Every time we stand up in this place they should be honoured. Let us talk about the CFA and what they do. Again, these guys are just pure volunteers. That is what they are. They do not get paid. They will jump out of bed at 4 am, and they will try to make that response time. There is a threshold that they have to meet, and they will do their darnedest to make that response time. I mean, bushfires are horrific at the best of times, if we go back to 2009 and 2020, and these guys are out there all day trying to protect our communities. Again, if we are going to honour what they do, let us back it up. As mentioned earlier by the member for Polwarth, their fleet is old. There is no investment in it. In fact when the government says let us honour

our frontline workers, do not cut \$300,000 out of their community engagement fund. It is hypocritical. You do not say this over here and cut it over here. It is absolutely hypocritical.

The two CFAs of most concern in my electorate are Nar Nar Goon and Bunyip. Nar Nar Goon have over 400 call-outs a year, Bunyip not quite as many, just down the road, but the conditions of these stations are terrible. If you want to honour your volunteers, invest in the infrastructure. If you want to know why volunteer numbers are declining, it is because they do not have the infrastructure to house any more volunteers. They do not have turnout rooms. They go to a fire covered in asbestos and they come back to the station, and they are meant to, what, just leave the asbestos lying around? Do not be hypocritical. Do not try and honour our frontline workers and then not invest in their infrastructure. The Nar Nar Goon CFA are trying to honour a CFA volunteer that died in the 1983 Ash Wednesday fires by putting a seat up in – I am not quite sure of the area, to be perfectly honest. But they cannot get approval to put a seat there to honour a CFA volunteer that died on Ash Wednesday, because Parks Victoria are making a big deal about it. For goodness sake, honestly.

Then we talk about our true heroes in orange as well, our SES. Our SES, again, are volunteer based. When that tree comes through your roof and there is a thunderstorm and your house is flooded, who turns up? The SES. They turn up with their gear, they turn up with their chainsaws and they turn up with their tarps. They do not whinge that it is cold, and they do not whinge that they are getting hailed on. They are there to help us. They are there to help every Victorian.

The Warragul SES, as the member for Polwarth said earlier, are still waiting on their money. They are still waiting on their money, but now it has been cut by 10 per cent. Do not honour people and then cut their infrastructure. The Warragul SES have to go between two pretty crappy stations, one in Warragul and a shed in Drouin, to house their gear. It is ridiculous. It is absolutely ridiculous that in 2023 I cannot get an SES station in Warragul, which is one of the fastest growing towns in Victoria. The population is growing and growing. The Warragul SES serve a very big area, and I cannot get this government to invest in the infrastructure, again, for them to have all their stuff in one spot and to increase their volunteer base. You should see the change rooms – it is chipboard and concrete. That is what they get changed in.

Steve McGhie: You should have built it in 2010–14, when you were in government.

Wayne FARNHAM: Well, maybe you have had a decade to invest in it, so why haven't you done that?

The DEPUTY SPEAKER: Through the Chair. Member for Melton, you will have your chance.

Wayne FARNHAM: I tell you what, you go down and visit it and you tell me it is acceptable, at any point in time.

Steve McGhie interjected.

Wayne FARNHAM: You have been in government for two decades.

The DEPUTY SPEAKER: Member for Melton, you will have your chance. Member for Narracan, through the Chair.

Wayne FARNHAM: My apologies, Deputy Speaker. This is what I am saying: if we are going to honour our frontline workers, we must invest in our frontline workers.

I am going to talk about our ambos too, who see absolutely horrific stuff. They really do. I shared with this house not long ago a story about a good friend of mine that has been through an absolute nightmare and PTSD, and she is still going through a hard time. The problem we have with the ambulance service at the moment is that as much as we are trying to invest in it, we are not. We do not have the ambulances on the road and do not have the staff, and ambos are burning out. People have left through COVID. They have left these emergency services, and now we have got a declining workforce that has to travel further and work longer hours. It is not unusual for ambulance drivers to do a lot of

overtime. They do a fantastic job. I mean, they are the people who turn up to look after our loved ones when they are in trouble. They are the people who turn up to some pretty horrific scenes and have to talk to families when they are dealing with an emergency situation.

If we are truly going to have an MPI that honours the work of our frontline workers and what they have to do over summer, then we truly have to back that up. It is no use having empty words. It is a waste of time. Our emergency services are suffering. They are the ones who will give up their Christmas dinner without even a second thought. So my suggestion to the government is: if you are going to bring forward an MPI, back it up and invest in our frontline workers and our emergency services.

Steve McGHIE (Melton) (17:08): Clearly there should be no surprise of my appreciation for frontline healthcare and emergency services workers, given that I have had some extensive experience as a frontline healthcare worker as a paramedic for 15 years and then the assistant secretary and secretary of the ambulance union for 23 years. So I have had 38 years involvement with ambulances, and I think I know the types of work that they do and the pressures that they are under – and also the other emergency services workers. Whether they be paid employees or whether they be volunteers, they work well together and they look after us in the community, and I appreciate everything that they do. Of course I am pleased to stand here today to talk about these extraordinary people that assist our community members. They are running towards the danger when we are running away from it, and they are dealing with the traumas of what individuals and families go through.

I also want to extend my appreciation and thanks to our 000 heroes out at ESTA for the work that they do. I know with the upcoming festive season their workload absolutely goes through the roof, particularly over that Christmas week period. New Year's Eve is one of the busiest nights of the year for 000 calls and obviously for ambulance and police responses, so I want to extend my thanks to them. What we have done is grow a 340,000-strong healthcare workforce, the largest workforce in the state. One in 10 Victorians are healthcare workers. Nearly one-quarter of these workers live in regional and rural Victoria, and they ensure access to health care and economic opportunities and keep our communities strong and safe. Since we came to office in 2014 we have grown this healthcare workforce by 40 per cent, which is quite amazing. There are now 36 per cent more nurses and midwives and nearly 50 per cent more paramedics. I will just remind the member for Narracan that there has been much employment of new paramedics. When I left the union job in July 2018 there were 4200 paramedics. There are now well over 6000 paramedics in the state of Victoria.

Wayne Farnham: How many in Narracan?

Steve McGHIE: There are plenty in the Gippsland region and the Latrobe Valley region. There are plenty down that way in the south-east of the state, and I was one of the advocates of increasing the numbers. In excess of 2000 additional paramedics is quite an amazing figure, and there are more to come. There has to be more to come with the growth of the population.

Clearly we have had some challenging times of late and these people – these workers, the healthcare professionals, the frontline emergency service workers, the paramedics – clearly face challenges. Their dedication is amazing. Their skill in dealing with issues just shines brightly. Again, I have nothing but appreciation for what they do, and I do understand what they go through and the burdens that they carry in their own individual lives because of what they do and see. I have raised this previously. As a frontline worker, in particular a paramedic and someone that is dealing with death and dying and trauma, you never lose that. You will never get that out of your head. Sometimes it will flash up like a movie – a particular event will flash up in your head – so you take it with you right through the rest of your life.

On nursing and what we have done in support of our nurses, we are making nursing and midwifery free to help train the next generation of nurses. More than 10,000 students will have the cost of their nursing or midwifery undergraduate studies paid for, while scholarships will be available for thousands more who complete postgraduate studies in areas of need, including things like intensive

care, cancer care, paediatrics and the nurse practitioner specialties. Of course these workers make sacrifices, along with their families, and it is through the support of their families that they can continue to work in these professions. I cannot emphasise enough how important it is to have family and friends support these frontline workers.

It is a difficult period that we will be going into, and it does get busier. Of course for the healthcare profession and the paramedic profession there will be incidents over the Christmas period that will be so traumatic and tragic, as we saw only a few weeks ago in Daylesford. We never want to see that again. But unfortunately, we will see multiple fatalities in some situations right through the Christmas period, and these workers will have to deal with that, along with others such as the SES and the CFA. Again, we compliment all of those supporting the system.

I just want to go on about some of the investment that we have made in things like scholarships for postgraduate nurses to complete their studies in specialty areas – as I said before, intensive care, emergency medicine, paediatrics and so on. The scholarships average about \$10,000. There are also scholarships for enrolled nurses to become registered nurses, and again those scholarships are worth about \$11,000. There are scholarships to support the training and employment of 100 new nurse practitioners, and that is really important. Why nurse practitioners are really important is because they will be able to do some of the duties that previously a GP would have done. Where GPs may not be available to be able to provide the service, nurse practitioners can fill that gap, and it will be fantastic to have another 100 nurse practitioners and of course more than \$20 million to provide more support to the growing numbers of graduates and postgraduates as they transition to working in our hospitals.

We have also provided a sign-on bonus of \$5000 for student nurses and midwives. We know that evidence shows a direct correlation between nursing staffing levels and better patient outcomes. We know that, and that is why we are proud to have the first legislated nurse-to-patient ratios making sure our incredible nurses can give the patients the care that they need. You know, if anyone here has been in a hospital or in a healthcare setting, about having a direct relationship with a nurse and not having the nurse run off their feet, because they are dealing with more than a number of patients – four patients, two patients, whatever the ratio is depending on the area that they work in.

We are going to be strengthening those nurse-to-patient and midwife-to-patient ratios in law, and we will boost nurses on duty in our intensive care units, which are some of the most incredible units – if anyone has ever been in there – the high-dependency units, the coronary care units and the resuscitation bays. These are all areas of the fine line between life and death, and the greater the expertise and skills of people that we have in these areas, the greater the outcomes for patients and their families.

Of course I talk about the paramedic workforce, and I alluded before to how it has grown since I left in 2018. But since this government has come into office, as I said before, we have recruited over 2000 – I think it is 2200 – paramedics. The numbers now are about 6500 paramedics across the state, and that is growing. I should just give a bit of a brief history. We have MICA paramedics, and MICA in regional Victoria was introduced by the Bracks government, which was fantastic, in the major regional centres. Now we have MICA single responders in a number of areas, and the most recent one is out at Ararat in the seat of Ripon. I can tell you the Ararat paramedics and MICA paramedics are so pleased that they have a MICA responder in their area, and right around the state we see MICA single responders but also MICA units in the major regional centres.

I have only got a short time left. We have opened a new Melton West ambulance station, which is fantastic, and there is another one to come down in Melton South, so to suggest that the government are not putting in and pulling their weight is a complete joke. I do remind the member for Narracan that they had four years to build the branch or station that he was referring to, back in 2010–14, and what did they do in their term? Nothing. They went to war against paramedics. It was absolutely shameful. You can criticise what our government have done, but we have delivered on the figures and we have delivered on the workforce. We will support our frontline healthcare workers. It will be a

busy period going into the Christmas period. I thank them for all that they do, and I just hope that they stay safe.

Nicole WERNER (Warrandyte) (17:18): I rise to support the matter of public importance submitted by the member for Kororoit:

That this house notes the hard work of Victoria's frontline workers during the holiday and summer season, not just in Melbourne but right across regional Victoria.

First and foremost, let me take a moment to express my profound gratitude to the exemplary police officers who serve our community with unwavering dedication. In my election of Warrandyte we are fortunate to have outstanding individuals like Inspector Carlie Kohler, Sergeant Stewart Henderson, Acting Senior Sergeant Janine Saunders and Acting Senior Sergeant Mark Morgan, to name a few who collectively represent the epitome of professionalism and commitment. It was my pleasure to meet with some of them just last week. Sergeant Henderson's 10 years of service locally, Inspector Kohler's local area command and acting senior sergeants Saunders' and Morgan's leadership in Doncaster highlight the calibre of individuals who stand on our front lines ensuring our safety.

I was in attendance when Inspector Kohler delivered a poignant and eloquent speech at Doncaster East RSL's recent Remembrance Day service, skilfully honouring the sacrifices of those who served with heartfelt words that resonated deeply with the audience. Her articulate expression and sincere tribute underscored the significance of the occasion. Thank you, Inspector Kohler.

Sergeant Henderson, through his unwavering dedication and leadership as a local police officer, has become a true hero in our community, embodying courage and commitment to the safety and wellbeing of the residents. It has been 10 years that he has served as the officer in charge at the Warrandyte police station. Thank you very much, Stewart.

As we extend our thanks to these brave men and women, we must acknowledge the sacrifice that they make during the Christmas period. While many of us are surrounded by the warmth of family, our police officers are often attending to the most challenging incidents, confronting the harsh realities that punctuate what should be the best time of year. It is with deep appreciation that we recognise the difficulty that they face, particularly when they deliver heartbreaking news to families, a task that becomes even more devastating during the holiday season. Importantly, we must recognise the toll that their responsibilities take on their mental health. The challenges of the last few years, exacerbated by the COVID-19 pandemic, have added a layer of pressure that cannot be ignored. It is our duty to support these men and women not only in times of crisis but in the aftermath as well.

However, the matter at hand is not just a celebration of our frontline workers, it is a call to action. I stand here today because we believe that mere words of gratitude are not enough. We must address the concerns that loom over our police force. The decline in police numbers over the last three years, the staggering number of vacancies across the state and the impending closure of 43 police stations for hours at a time are alarming indicators of a system that requires urgent attention. The current industrial action undertaken by police officers is not a sign of ingratitude; rather, it is a desperate plea for support. The neglect of the Allan Labor government cannot be ignored, and the absence of the Minister for Police in addressing these concerns is deeply troubling. It is our responsibility as representatives to ensure that our frontline workers receive the support they deserve. Let us not wait for a crisis to recognise their worth; let us act now to secure the safety and wellbeing of our communities.

One group in my community that deserves our utmost recognition is the CFA – heroes within our community and also our state. Our CFA volunteers embody the spirit of selflessness and courage. These individuals stand ready at a moment's notice, even on Christmas Day when the rest of us are celebrating with loved ones, and it is crucial that we express our deepest thanks to these heroes who often witness horrific accidents and scenes that most of us cannot fathom. These dedicated individuals – from Wonga Park to South Warrandyte, from Chirnside Park to North Warrandyte – selflessly dedicate their time and energy to ensuring the safety of our communities. The courage and commitment displayed by our

CFA captains Aaron Farr, Cam Mackay, Shane Murphy, Ben Cash, Trent Burris and Will Hodgson is truly commendable. Can I also take a moment to thank their partners and families, who enable them to serve our community. Your sacrifice does not go unnoticed. Thank you.

One shining example of community support for our firefighting heroes was the annual Fireball held at Bramleigh Estate in Warrandyte. This event, initiated in 2014, has consistently raised significant funds, including contributions for much-needed vehicles for the local CFAs. I was fortunate enough to attend this year's ball with our wonderful former member the Honourable Ryan Smith and his wife Avril and with my amazing husband Fraser. The Fireball raised an impressive \$60,000, a testament to the generosity and solidarity of our community. I want to take a moment to acknowledge the outstanding individuals whose dedication and hard work made this initiative possible. Julie Quinton of Quinton's IGA, Warrandyte, started the Fireball after being so moved by the firefighters fundraising outside of her IGA. She knew the community needed to do more, so she started the Fireball. To Mary-Anne Lowe of Bramleigh Estate and Greg Kennedy of the Grand Hotel, Warrandyte: your commitment to supporting our community also does not go unnoticed. Special recognition is due to the committee members: Michelle Lambert, Jaime Noye, Leasa Dyason, Angela Germech, Dinah Ward, Deanne Dickson, Geri Overberg and Katie Murphy. Your tireless efforts made Fireball a great success, ensuring that the four CFAs in our area receive the support they need.

Furthermore, I extend my appreciation to Freya Dugan and Rohan Thornton, who served on previous committees, laying the foundation for the event's success. With these lessons Fireball will transform into the Thunderball for the SES, showcasing the spirit of collaboration and innovation. Well done to everyone involved in making the Fireball a fabulous success but also a source of great inspiration for community spirit.

However, amidst these commendable community efforts we must delve further into the funding challenges confronting our CFA and address them with urgency. One pressing concern lies in the ageing state of our firefighting fleet. Warrandyte CFA's current fleet of pumps is in desperate need of updating ahead of the upcoming bushfire season. The 20-year-old-plus vehicles are well overdue for an upgrade, and we owe it to our brave volunteers to provide them with the best possible equipment, ensuring that they can continue to safeguard our communities with the utmost effectiveness.

Furthermore, we must confront the issue of declining volunteer numbers. I extend my gratitude to Victoria's frontline heroes, especially our SES members in orange, who work tirelessly across Melbourne and regional Victoria during the holiday and summer season. Let our gratitude be more than words. We need to make a commitment to supporting our SES heroes by ensuring their operational capabilities remain intact. They deserve not only our thanks but our unwavering support.

Finally, while we are speaking of frontline workers, if the house will indulge me, I would also like to take the opportunity to thank my amazing team, who are the first point of contact for my community as the newly elected member for Warrandyte. My team Diti Vedagarba, Lenny Shepherd and Anna Laird have worked tirelessly to ensure that my first three months have been so effective. We have had many wins for our community, so I thank you for your hard work and for how you care for our community. Further to that, may I also thank the amazing staff here at Parliament, who keep this place running and make it an incredible place to work.

As we approach the festive season, I would like to extend my heartfelt gratitude to each and every frontline worker, whether in a paid or volunteer capacity, for their unwavering dedication to safeguarding our communities. This motion serves as a testament to our appreciation for the sacrifices made by these individuals, and it is, as I said, a call to action.

Finally, to my electorate and people in my community, it has been my great honour to serve as the member for Warrandyte. I love our community and all the people who make it great. To you and your families, I wish you a very merry Christmas and a happy new year.

Emma VULIN (Pakenham) (17:27): I am thrilled to make a contribution on this matter of public importance today: that this house notes the hard work of Victoria's frontline workers during the summer season. I would like to acknowledge all the speakers that we have had in the house before me thanking our incredible Victorians for the work that they do each and every day. There are plenty of them that work through tirelessly to protect us and to keep us safe.

My main focus today is the CFA – surprise, surprise – and our SES volunteers, who service our communities all the time. We know that they are facing potentially a very busy summer season ahead. Many operational members in the fire brigade are busy doing their pre-summer hazardous trees training and burnover training and making sure that they know how to draught and do all the operational things that are needed when things hit the fan. It is also a reminder for Victorians to prepare for the bushfire season ahead by cleaning up their properties and by having a fire plan, which should not just include a plan A but also a plan B, C and D. I would strongly suggest that people, particularly those living in more rural areas, have a conversation with their families and their local brigade and make sure that they have a plan in place and a back-up plan, because sometimes things do not always go to plan.

There are 51,738 volunteers in the CFA getting ready for the fire season. 28,909 are operational members. I am one of the 4425 women, and so is the member for Bass – although I have not made it to very many training sessions or jobs lately; I think this job has kept me a bit busy. There are 21,775 support volunteers and 1054 junior members. My children were both part of the CFA juniors at Beaconsfield fire brigade when they were a bit younger. I would also like to take this opportunity to thank the people in many brigades across our state that have juniors in particular – children aged between 11 and 16 – and teach them things about being a part of the community but also about fire and fire preparedness.

The CFA also has 879 permanent CFA staff and nine operational rest support. I think people often forget how time consuming being a volunteer is, especially for our CFA vols, who not only attend trainings, meetings, education courses, group meetings, group training exercises and community events but do it all on top of responding when the pager goes off any time of the day or night. It is a massive sacrifice that these dedicated and incredible firefighters make but also a massive sacrifice for their families and friends.

There have been a few occasions where I have come to understand the impact this role has had on my family. During the Bunyip fires I was on shift for 16 hours straight, and that fire was actually the scariest one I had ever been at. My family were trying to call and message me after seeing news about crews being stuck and cut off up in Tonimbuk and surrounded by fire. I was in one of those strike teams that was surrounded by fire. There was another strike team that was in a worse position than we were, and they could not get out and we could not get to them. So it was at that point where we moved to a burnt-out paddock. We could see the fire all around us. My phone was going crazy, but my focus was on the crews that I was with and the residents to whom we were trying to say, come and stand with us, this is the safest place to be. I was thinking 'Oh, my gosh, this is going to be the first time I'm in a burnover', and I was so frightened. It was quite interesting because I had this big build-up, thinking 'Oh, my gosh. Oh, my gosh', and then the fire got to us and we were in a paddock that had been eaten out by cows. Some of the more experienced CFA people were kind of giggling, saying 'You'll be okay', and the fire came under our feet and burnt out. I was a bit frightened and then they all laughed at me and said, 'You'll be okay'.

But this is not about me; this is about recognising the friends and family of firefighters and how they selflessly give up so much to make sure that firefighters can do that job in helping our communities. It is things like walking out of a family dinner or when the pager goes off and saves you from doing the dishes – 'Oh, sorry, the pager is going' and then you run – or when the pager goes off in the middle of the night and the dog starts barking and then everyone is awake. It wakes up the whole family. You are running out the door, and they are thinking, I wonder what she is going to. They have got no idea what I am facing, whether it is something horrible or whether it is just a washaway. But I suppose you need to recognise the fear that loved ones feel when you are so focused on doing what you are trained

to do. It is a massive sacrifice for families, so I think it is important that not only are we thanking our firefighters but also the families.

There are other things that firefighters miss, often missing big celebrations. In 2019 I went on deployment to East Gippsland. I put my hand up and it was the five days over Christmas. I spoke to my children, and said I have been asked to be a commander's aid in East Gippsland and so it would mean that I am missing Christmas. I am so lucky that they understand that, although I am not with them, I am out there helping a community in need, so I am very grateful to my kids for that. It was funny because when I was at the camp I ran into the member for Bass there, and that was when I found out that she was a firefighter. So we worked together on the peat fire in Sarsfield. But anyway, it is not about me.

I just want to say that our government has invested quite heavily in our CFA. In the 2023–24 budget we included \$15.1 million for 35 heavy rescue trucks for VICSES, which is in addition to 21 heavy rescue trucks and seven medium rescue trucks funded last year. We are backing the dedicated volunteers to protect life and property and have provided \$12.8 million for 29 new CFA ultra-heavy tankers that are currently being rolled out to brigades across regional Victoria. The CFA is also rolling out 48 heavy tankers and two light tankers funded as part of our government's \$126 million CFA capability package.

Last week I had the honour of ringing one of my local brigades, the Officer fire brigade, and telling them that they had been successful in their volunteer emergency services equipment program grant to purchase a rehabilitation unit. They were quite thrilled. My partner said to me, 'What's a rehab unit?' and I said, 'It's a rehabilitation unit.' He said, 'Very funny. What is that?' It is a truck that they take away to big jobs. If they have had a big structure fire or they are going out to campaign fires, it is where they have a truck where they have medical things on board, they have chairs, cooling – it is quite incredible, really. They were really pleased with that.

We are also building a brand new SES in Officer. We have one in Pakenham. I want to thank our volunteers that work at the Pakenham unit. I went for a drive last week and I saw the progress being made on the Officer SES, which will be a welcome addition to Officer with our massive growth corridor. There are a lot of people moving in.

The SES has 4869 volunteers and 222 staff, and it is another opportunity to thank them for their work, not just with storms and floods, but they also help us at campaign fires. They are often there helping us in all different facets of their job. Another thing that the SES and CFA do a lot during summer is you will see often Santa might be on the back of a fire truck. We have a lot of our local brigades that go around and do the Santa run and attend different community events and parties and things. I put my hand up for a couple of weeks time. I think I am going to be helping Santa at one of our local events. I want to give a shout-out to Pakenham fire brigade, Toomuc fire brigade, Pakenham FRV, Officer fire brigade, Upper Beaconsfield fire brigade, Pakenham police and Pakenham ambulance, who I visited last week with the minister.

There are a lot of wonderful people around our state that work to keep our community safe. Another shout-out too for summer would be to our surf lifesaving. They do an incredible job, and I know how busy they get. Although we do not have any beaches down in the Pakenham district, I know a lot of people from my area do go to beaches, and I want to thank them sincerely. Thank you, everyone. To our frontline workers: we are very grateful for you.

Sam HIBBINS (Pahran) (17:37): I rise to speak on this matter of public importance that has been put forward to thank and acknowledge our frontline workers, particularly during the summer ahead. I want to do that because we can all speak to this motion because obviously over the years, whether it has been various crises, like the pandemic, or various natural disasters, we have all said thanks to our frontline workers and our essential workers. But what is really important is that we actually demonstrate our thanks to those workers, whether it is people across a wide range of sectors –

healthcare; teachers; emergency services, including our fireies; those in the public sector; the community sector – because right now they are absolutely under the pump.

We have got teacher shortages in our schools – in fact teacher shortages right across the board – we have got social and community sector workers unable to help the increasing number of people in need, and healthcare workers and mental health care workers straining under the pressure. The reason why they are struggling is because on top of the cost-of-living crisis that is creating so much pressure out there – people just literally cannot afford the basics, which is putting a lot of pressure on our government services and community services – there has been a continued underfunding of these services, there has been a deliberate policy by the government to keep wages low, and we are going through right at the moment cuts to thousands of public sector jobs and cuts to funding. On top of this now, despite being overworked, overstretched, increasingly stressed and burned out, we have got a government proposal on the table to cut that from the workers compensation scheme. What makes this all the more galling is that during the pandemic – this incredibly difficult time when so many workers, essential workers, were on the front line in our hospitals, in our communities and services, keeping society functioning, helping people in need, putting themselves in harm's way when there was the real risk of catching COVID, particularly within our health system – was there anything we can take away from those very difficult years?

We all said thank you, but there was a need to demonstrate that thanks, to value our frontline and essential workers with higher wages, with better working conditions and with more support for people in need. Instead, we have had for some time now a deliberate policy to keep wages low with the public sector wage cap, which has been under inflation for some time. That depresses wages not just within the public sector but across the economy and the private sector as well – it sends a signal there. This is at a time when low wage growth has been one of the most significant economic issues that people and workers have been facing.

We have now got cuts to thousands of public sector jobs. The idea that you can somehow isolate frontline workers from the impact of these cuts when they are already stretched – many government departments are already stretched in their ability to meet the increasing needs of our community – is just ridiculous. The idea that you can just cut billions of dollars from the public sector without it having an impact is simply ridiculous. As I said, to add insult to injury, we have now got these WorkCover changes, which thankfully will now be the subject of much further scrutiny.

I am concerned that they are doing this. Why are they doing it? Well, we have got an economic approach that is saying we need to make the savings. This is coming at a time when you have got profiteering corporations. We put on the table an alternative view: instead of cutting from the public sector and from much-needed government programs, what they should be doing is making sure that those profiteering corporations pay their fair share of tax. I am also concerned about the approach to addressing inflation now – I am just concerned after coming out of recent Public Accounts and Estimates Committee hearings. I obviously respect the apolitical public service, but when asked what the government's approach to addressing inflation is, the secretary simply put on the table that the only thing that the state can do is just manage its fiscal strategy, and that is to look at spending. Again, that approach is in my view short-sighted, and it is one that will simply mean that all those people in need who are struggling with the cost of living, pushed to the margins and struggling with hardship will not get the help they need.

In terms of other essential workers, people who are also on the front line, our supermarket workers, people who work in transport, in logistics, again during the pandemic turned up to work, day in and day out, in harm's way and kept society functioning. Recently I spoke at the Retail and Fast Food Workers Union rally at the Coles AGM – the first strike by supermarket workers in history, I have been told – and really called out the behaviour of the supermarket duopoly. At a time when people are struggling to afford the basics, at a time when there is economic upheaval, at a time when we should be recognising our supermarket workers for all the hard work that they have done over the past few years and everything they put up with – let us face it, they have to put up with a fair bit of BS in their

job as well – are they seeing how they can pay their workers a decent wage? Are they seeing how they can keep their prices low so that at least their workers – people who work in supermarkets – can afford their products, which they are telling me actually they cannot? There was probably a time in history when even a large corporation might have thought that their workers being able to afford their own products would be something to aspire to – not anymore. Are they looking at how they can keep their workers safer? As I said, some of the safety issues that many of our supermarket workers face are not being addressed adequately. But are they doing those things? No, they are not. They are thinking, ‘How do we make a buck? How do we exploit the economic crisis? How do we profiteer?’ And it is absolutely appalling. Instead, they need to pay their workers a decent wage so that they can at least afford what the supermarket is selling. They need to stop price gouging, and if they do not, the government needs to step in and stop it for them.

I also want to just touch on the SES, which has been raised. Obviously there is another tough summer ahead, and previously it was not seen as the right thing to do in a time when there are disasters to talk about climate change. Well, now I think we are getting to the point where it is almost misplaced if you do not mention it. Our SES volunteers, our fires and those who are dealing with fires and with storms because of the increasing impacts of climate change – we need their help more than ever. We obviously need to take the drastic action of stopping burning fossil fuels. But when I visit a local SES, whether it is out in Malvern or in Port Phillip, again the conditions are just absolutely appalling. They do not have the stations or the locations to meet the needs of our community. Across the board the SES are very poorly funded. This is a significant issue. The SES often feel like they are the poor cousin of our greater emergency services network. There needs to be much greater funding for the SES, and I would urge the government, particularly within the areas of Port Phillip and Malvern – they desperately, desperately need new stations to meet the growing needs of those particular branches and to meet the needs of our community.

Other members have addressed our electorate office staff. My goodness, they are often doing quite a challenging job. As someone who worked in social services, I have taken that sort of thinking towards being an MP in the electorate office, making sure that there is no wrong door. If someone comes to you with an issue big or small, whether it is –

A member interjected.

Sam HIBBINS: Sorry? Oh, right. Is that you? Did you bring in the cards?

The DEPUTY SPEAKER: Through the Chair.

Sam HIBBINS: Taking that, whether it is a significant issue – you know, if someone has got a housing crisis or what have you – or whether it is that the street needs to be cleaned, it is making sure that that person is assisted and helped in every way possible. That is a big job for electorate office staff. It is a very vast job, and certainly I want to acknowledge and recognise the work that they do in their area. But ultimately, with so many people struggling and so many of them being frontline and essential workers, we need to demonstrate our thanks – not just say thanks but demonstrate our thanks – properly fund services, pay them a decent wage and provide better working conditions. This is the way that we will demonstrate respect for them and value their work as frontline and essential workers.

Darren CHEESEMAN (South Barwon) (17:47): It is with some pleasure that I rise this afternoon to make my contribution on the member for Kororoit’s very excellent matter of public importance that she has presented to us and to this Parliament today. I have the great fortune, as a member of this place, to represent a part of the Victorian coastline that many Victorians and indeed many international tourists love coming to to enjoy our fabulous beaches and our amazing national parks that are literally right on the boundaries of my seat. Indeed within my community there are many thousands of workers who, in supporting our fabulous tourism sector that thrives across the Geelong and greater Surf Coast communities and right throughout regional Victoria, will play a significant role through their

employment and through the activities that they engage with to enable us to have an amazing summer holiday.

Down in my part of the world there are a significant number of surf lifesaving clubs, and I raise our surf lifesaving clubs because they play a significant role in keeping all of us safe when we take that great opportunity of going to the beach through the summer months. Indeed if we get into trouble in the surf, they make sure that we can be retrieved from that circumstance – hopefully in a healthy way.

I would like to take the opportunity to thank the 57 surf lifesaving clubs that serve our coastline through the summer months, and indeed the 36,000 men and women of Victoria – and often boys and girls and teenagers – who participate in our surf lifesaving clubs. I also want to take the opportunity to thank the many, many thousands of people who volunteer with the CFA and the Victoria State Emergency Service, again volunteering and keeping our communities safe. On behalf of, I am sure, many colleagues in this place I would like to take the opportunity to thank and acknowledge them for the profound contribution that they make to the state of Victoria.

I would also like to take the opportunity to thank, particularly from a regional perspective, the many, many hundreds of thousands of people who work in the hospitality sector – people who slave away providing us with drinks and providing us with the meals that we enjoy through those summer months. Many of us very much like to take up the opportunity to spend time with our loved ones, and I would like to acknowledge the hard work of those who work and make their living in the hospitality and retail sectors, which are of course significant parts of our economy.

I think we should also take the opportunity, as others no doubt have, to acknowledge and to thank those that work in so many different ways for the state of Victoria – those who work hard, often in all sorts of different situations, keeping us hopefully healthy and safe through the summer months – our doctors, our clinicians, our nurses and of course our teachers, who have worked so hard over the last few years in educating us, keeping us safe and healing us when we get unwell. Many of those workers are not provided the choice of having summer holidays or taking Christmas Day off because the nature of their work requires them to be at work.

The Allan Labor government, and before the Allan Labor government the Andrews Labor government, has recognised the contribution that these workers have made. We have recognised the contribution of their unions and we have negotiated where we can – where we have a direct role – to make sure these people get strong conditions and have strong rights and when they get unwell, they have the opportunity of taking sick leave and all of those things. I would like to acknowledge and thank the ministers and indeed my colleagues for supporting those workers with those rights.

I would also like to take the opportunity to acknowledge the investments of our government in giving the Victorian community and the Victorian economy the skills that they need to make sure our hospitality experience is world class. I particularly want to acknowledge and reflect on the free TAFE arrangements that we have put in place in this state to make sure that we are providing amazing training opportunities for Victorians to get the world-class skills that they need to ensure that we have a wonderful offering in our Victorian tourist economy. Again, I would like to acknowledge and thank those ministers who have played such a fundamental role in that.

Our government has also of course made a massive contribution to our culture and our arts. If you just look at the broader Geelong region or indeed the whole of Victoria, you will see major event after major event that puts us on the world stage. That could be the Formula One Grand Prix. It could be things such as the Rip Curl Pro, which proudly takes place in my region, drawing many thousands of people to our region. Again, we are driven by these events and festivals and opportunities because we know so much of Victoria's reputation is built on these events, and we have indeed made those investments. We have also made huge investments into our creative and arts industries, whether that be the Geelong Arts Centre, the Art Gallery of Ballarat, the Bendigo Art Gallery or indeed the cultural offerings of Melbourne. We have made record investments. That is about providing those workers

with an opportunity to work in a world-class environment, but it also of course ensures that all visitors and the international community have a wonderful experience when they come to Victoria. That is something that I am very proud of, and it is good to see the Minister for Tourism, Sport and Major Events at the table who will continue to play such a pivotal role going forward.

I do not think there has ever been a more generous government anywhere in this country in supporting our regions than our government. That record of investment is profound. That is creating economic opportunities, it is creating arts and cultural opportunities and it is providing us with the opportunity to provide real jobs in this state – real jobs that pay well and that support people's aspirations in this community and this economy. We will continue to make those investments. We will continue to support them in their jobs. As I make – *(Time expired)*

Bridget VALLENCE (Evelyn) (17:57): I rise to make some comments on the matter of public importance today submitted by the member for Kororoit that this house notes the hard work of Victoria's frontline workers during the holiday and summer season. But where I think this motion falls short is that we should be paying tribute to our frontline workers each and every day of the year – 365 days of the year. Some of our emergency first responders and our healthcare workers look out for members of our community right around the clock right around the year.

I would like to pay tribute to some of the emergency first responders in our community – the CFA fire brigades, all volunteer firefighters and auxiliary and other volunteers that support the CFA and the amazing work that they do. They go to the danger. Whether it is fighting fires, bushfires, house fires, industrial fires or road trauma incidents, they do an amazing job. In my electorate I have many brigades – in Lilydale, Mooroolbark, Mount Evelyn, Montrose, Wandin, Seville, Silvan, Gruyere, Coldstream and Chirnside Park. We have so many CFA fire brigades, and they do a fantastic job.

The Lilydale SES, the Lilydale State Emergency Service, has been particularly busy over the last couple of years with the significant storm events that we have had across the Yarra Valley and the Dandenong Ranges. Again, they go to the danger. 365 days of the year they look to protect our community, and I would like to pay tribute to Shaun Caulfield, Louise Andrews and all of the volunteers at the Lilydale SES.

Of course our Yarra Ranges police are an amazing group of individuals. I know many of them locally. I see many of them socially at local football clubs and sporting events. They do amazing work in the Yarra Ranges police, and I particularly want to pay tribute to all of the police officers at Yarra Ranges but particularly Inspector Gerry McKenna and senior sergeants Mel Woods and Mark Knight for the work that they do and the support that they give. These emergency first responders work together as one, even with some of the local FRV stations in adjoining electorates.

They work together as one whether it is, as I say, a bushfire, a car accident or a traumatic house fire. At any of these types of events they work together as one, and we owe them a great debt of gratitude for the work they do to keep our community safe and protect us in times of emergency and danger.

I would also like to pay tribute to our health and mental health workers right across the electorate and in fact right across Victoria but particularly those at our closest public hospital for the work they do, at the Maroondah Hospital, and also at some of the local health services: Inspiro; Anchor Community Care, who provide both mental health services and services for people who are experiencing homelessness and other challenges; Oonah Health and Community Services Aboriginal Corporation; Cire Services; and of course the team at Bridge Builders Youth Organisation. Bridge Builders, with Beck Mitchell, Phil Stenhouse and Bonnie Knight, do amazing work looking out for the young people in our community, from Lilydale right through the Yarra Valley and the Dandenong Ranges – those young people that just need that boost, that confidence and to care for their wellbeing and mental health. They have done an amazing job. So to all our frontline workers, right across the year, thank you.

*Motions***Parenting support services****Debate resumed.**

Chris CREWITHER (Mornington) (18:01): I think we can all agree that Victoria's and indeed Australia's first ever public egg and sperm bank, which opened on 3 July 2023, was and is a huge benefit for Victorians who are trying to start a family through access to donor eggs and sperm. There has been a serious shortage of gametes in Victoria, which has caused delays in treatment and constrained treatment options for too long. Increasing the supply of gametes and embryos in Victoria will of course improve accessibility and alleviate some of the existing costs and risks associated with sourcing gametes and embryos. Over many years stakeholders including patients, industry experts and the Victorian Assisted Reproductive Treatment Authority have raised concerns about the serious shortage of donated gametes in Victoria. Feedback indicated that the scarcity of these donor gametes, in particular donor eggs, meant that it was not uncommon for people to seek donors through informal channels such as social media forums. This could result in inferior health outcomes, given the lack of regulation.

However, we have got a long way to go when it comes to improving access to gametes and embryos in Victoria. In Victoria the demand for sperm outstrips supply. Lack of donors means a lack of choice for would-be parents, with factors such as family history, hair colour and so on being important for some potential parents. Less sperm donors also means the need for closer monitoring and tracking to avoid future situations of, say, two people with the same sperm donor accidentally starting a family together without the knowledge of sharing the same father with the genetic risks that come with that. Finding the right fit in a small market can be particularly challenging. Repeatedly doctors have called on the state government to consider financial incentives for donors.

Another reform involves advertising for donor gametes. Currently advertising for donation of gametes and embryos in Victoria is strictly regulated under section 40 of the Human Tissue Act 1982, and ministerial approval is required before a person may advertise for a donor. The Minister for Health is, as I understand, unable to delegate approval of advertisements for donation of sperm and embryos. Other jurisdictions such as New South Wales, South Australia and Tasmania do not require ministerial or any other form of approval to advertise for a gamete donor. The current model of ministerial oversight is cumbersome for users but also ill-equipped when it comes to monitoring and guiding advertising activity. In its place the Victorian Assisted Reproductive Treatment Authority could be given powers to develop and publish guidelines on advertising as well as monitor advertising for donated gametes in Victoria and require the removal or amendment of material inconsistent with the guidelines.

Further, as I touched on before, unmoderated online forums and discussion groups connecting donors can sometimes lead to inferior health outcomes. There is also the potential for bullying or other undesirable contact. As such, the Victorian government could facilitate the operation of a community-led moderated online forum in Victoria to allow safe channels of communications between potential donors and recipients of donated gametes or embryos.

As we know, this area is a rapidly advancing field and more couples than ever before have been able to become parents with the assistance of innovative technology. I want to also note that we need to better support and implement seamless processes and procedures for IVF children to contact their biological parent – say, a sperm donor – if their biological parent consents. We also need to ensure that those born via an IVF birth can easily trace their biological family more broadly, including parents, sisters, brothers, cousins and so on, and that we have increasingly better systems in place, particularly for both health reasons and to avoid situations, for instance, as I mentioned before, when one might accidentally conceive a child, for example, with their biological half brother or sister or cousin.

Locally we are also fortunate to have Melbourne IVF and Monash IVF partnered with health services to bring the latest assisted reproductive technology to the Mornington Peninsula and our local community. Mornington Peninsula Obstetrics offer counselling to couples planning a pregnancy as

well as investigations and advice for couples having trouble becoming pregnant. The base hospital in Mornington has Monash IVF Mornington onsite, offering a consulting location with doctors who are specialists in fertility and a wonderful maternity service – for the last 80 years – with around 500 babies currently born annually. Their maternity unit is considered one of the finest in the country, and they are proud to have had Medibank Private customers recently award them as the highest rated maternity unit in Australia.

I would also acknowledge, while speaking about IVF, that while the hope is for a pregnancy to reach full term, it is estimated that one in four pregnancies end in miscarriage or stillbirth. October is still recognised worldwide as Pregnancy and Infant Loss Awareness Month, and on 15 October Pregnancy and Infant Loss Remembrance Day promoted greater awareness and support of those whose lives are irrevocably altered by pregnancy loss or infant death. In Victoria there are around 18,500 pregnancy losses reported each year. My wife and I have also experienced this, so we understand what many parents out there are going through. On 7 May National Miscarriage Awareness Day is also held one week prior to Mother's Day. I mentioned earlier that we have a wonderful local community organisation, MISS, which is the Miscarriage Information Support Service, on the Mornington Peninsula and in the Frankston area, who provide information and resources not just to our area but across Victoria and more generally to support women, partners and families who have lost a baby through miscarriage or stillbirth.

In closing, we have a long and proud history in Victoria of having led the field in IVF research, and we have a great story to tell in this space. I am supportive of any measures that we can take to provide more Victorians with the opportunity to become parents, as becoming a parent is the most beautiful gift that we will ever receive in this lifetime.

Bronwyn HALFPENNY (Thomastown) (18:08): I also rise to speak in support of this motion, a motion that is recognising the government's support for Victorians starting or growing their families and support for families of children in those very young and critical years. I am very, very proud to stand here as part of the Allan Labor government to talk about this motion and the programs and supports that the Allan Labor government is providing to Victorians and their families.

In this case I would like to first talk about the public fertility services and how proud I am that we are funding this important and compassionate program that continues to build on support for children and families. This program is being administered through the Women's hospital and Monash Health; however, residents of the Thomastown electorate and indeed beyond amongst the northern suburbs can now use this service at the Northern Hospital, and this program is proving of course very, very popular. Victoria's public fertility services provide access to comprehensive, world-class fertility treatment, including genetic counselling, fertility preservation and fertility assessment and treatment. The service is available to people of all genders who have been trying to conceive naturally but have been unsuccessful and/or whose situation or health may prevent or impair fertility or safe conception. Northern Health is really proud, they told me, to partner with the Women's, who are leading the service for those living in Melbourne's north. The service in Epping began on 7 August this year. There is no waiting list at the moment, and most of all it is a public IVF program, so it is free.

The birth of children, the planning, the aspirations and the dreams of having a family should be a happy and exciting time, but for some people conceiving without assistance is not possible. Often this situation is unexpected. It is unknown until you are planning the family and taking that next step, and you realise that you are unable to naturally conceive. This of course can be devastating.

I think probably nearly everybody in this chamber would have stories to tell or would have spoken of their personal experiences of the requirement to have intervention, support and assistance with fertility. I of course also know a family very close to me. I will not identify them. I do not know whether they would like their names, necessarily, in *Hansard*; I have not asked them. But they studied, they secured jobs, they started building their house and the next step for them was to start to raise a family. After many years of trying, they finally decided to seek treatment to see what was wrong, and one of the

couple was unable. In fact his sperm count was very low. He always jokes about why he was using contraception for all those years – if he had known this earlier. But it is not a funny situation, and they were really very upset. Luckily for them they were working and they were able to pay the many tens of thousands of dollars in order to have fertility treatment, but of course others are not so lucky. That is why I feel really proud that we are providing public IVF services, because it really provides true equality to all people in the very important thing of having children and wanting to have a family. It is something that most – not everybody, and it is not necessary, but most – aspire to: to have children and to grow their family.

The cost of assistive reproductive services for individuals and families can also be a stressful area of experience, making it more challenging when they are going through treatments as well as then having to worry about how they are going to pay for it and how much it costs. Even with Medicare rebates, people can be left out of pocket thousands of dollars. Existing private fertility treatment services also often provide limited access or do not cater for the individual needs of all Victorian families. So the Victorian government is providing up to \$120 million to deliver this public IVF service across the state, and it is not just around the treatment and the counselling. There is also further money to be invested in other public fertility services, including public egg and sperm banks.

Then there is even further funding in both the last budget and the current budget to provide a holistic approach to fertility and also to supporting families when they have just had the birth of their baby and in those very first years of life to support those families and those children. When I am talking about those services, I am not just talking about support in hospitals and through the conceiving of a child and carrying of a child. The Allan Labor government is also providing support once the baby is born, because bringing home a baby after giving birth is an enormous change to any family. It is such a special time, but it can also be very overwhelming and challenging. In the electorate of Thomastown, for example, many parents and prospective parents have no family supports whatsoever in Australia. Many have recently migrated to Australia and are calling it home, but they do not have any family there to look after the child and to provide advice. Yes, their parents may be a phone call away, but that is not really what is needed if you are a new parent and struggling to console your child, wondering if it is eating what it should be eating or if there is a rash that they have, what to do about it. These are the things that often families do as well as of course providing that little bit of respite, because we all know that a young baby can be very demanding of your time and of your sleep – or no sleep – and these are the times when you need extra supports.

One example of the early years supports that the Allan Labor government is providing is additional maternal and child health hours, so there is a 24/7 telephone line that families can ring as well as additional contact hours for families with the maternal and child health nurses. I know that particularly when I had my first child, Caelum, they were such an invaluable resource – somewhere to go, somewhere to talk about babies, someone to ask questions and in many cases just give you reassurance that you are doing the right thing, that you sort of know what you are doing and that you are not going to do anything that is going to be of any damage to your first baby.

I think the good thing about motions like this is that often when we talk about various services that government are providing, we do not look at them in a holistic way, and it was sort of good when researching this motion to really bring home how many things the Allan Labor government has done over not many years, really, in order to support and help families with new babies.

There is also additional support for lactation consultants. Again, it is up to parents to decide whether they want to breastfeed their child or not. Some do for a short time, or they try to do it at the start but then it drops off – the number of children being breastfed over time. Lactation consultants of course can help those parents, those mothers that want to breastfeed their children, with any problems. I think we all – again, those that have had children – had those issues, wondering if we were doing it correctly or concerned whether there was enough milk or not enough or too much or whatever. Lactation consultation I know from my own experience was a very, very invaluable support for me.

There are also dads grants – the provision of grants that fathers organisations can apply for and to help them set up. They are sort of programs mostly run by volunteers, but you can always do with a little bit of money to buy certain resources to set yourself up, to hire the hall, to provide tea and coffee – those sorts of things. These grants really are encouraging new dads to get together to talk about issues and are providing peer-to-peer training and support as well as maybe encouraging discussions and talks about healthy family life and promoting bonding, gender-equal parenting and things like that – really invaluable things. I do know of some organisations in the Thomastown electorate that are father support groups, and the people that participate really tell me that they are fantastic.

Baby bundles of course – the list goes on. I just do not have time to continue.

Nicole WERNER (Warrandyte) (18:18): I rise to speak on the motion raised by the Minister for Health, which recognises the importance of supporting growing families, delivering public IVF, establishing Victoria's first public egg and sperm bank and expanding Victoria's early parenting centre network. I thank each member for their contribution and those that have bravely shared their experiences today across the time that we have spoken to this motion.

IVF is not just a medical procedure; it is a lifeline that extends hope to countless individuals and couples who yearn to experience the joys of parenthood. Every year it becomes the bridge to a brighter future for those facing fertility challenges that would otherwise leave their dreams of a family unfulfilled. However, the financial aspect of IVF cannot be overlooked. The stark reality is that success is not guaranteed. Often this is necessitating multiple cycles of treatment. After Medicare rebates, out-of-pocket expenses can leave patients with a heavy burden, averaging around \$5000 per cycle. The financial strain places immense stress on countless Victorian families and makes the dream of starting a family unattainable for some. Moreover, this financial challenge becomes increasingly daunting as the cost of living continues to rise, stretching household budgets to the limit.

We know that at the moment delivering IVF is not convenient – that it actually gets dropped by those opposite, because IVF is one of the government's lowest priorities. Let us not forget in early 2022 Victoria was the only state or territory in the country to implement a code brown that suspended surgery and IVF services. It is surprising that those opposite would raise a motion stating that the government supports public IVF when they were the only state government to suspend it. According to the Fertility Society of Australia and New Zealand, the Andrews government's singular decision to ban IVF may mean some families will not achieve a pregnancy at all. There are families that are broken today because of the decision of those opposite, and I will not stand by and let them pretend that they support IVF when I know that because of their cruel cancellation of IVF services there are pregnancies that never happened and children that were never born.

While you can always wait a bit longer with a lot of public policy decisions – while the airport rail link can wait a few more months or years to be actioned – with a few more delays, which those opposite love, a woman's fertility often cannot survive those breaks. It is not just the breaks that the Labor government explicitly enacted during it, it is also the massive waitlist that exists in Victoria for public IVF, waitlists that can be as long as a year. We all have women that we know who are struggling with fertility, and for them we know a year is an eternity when it comes to waiting for IVF, and just one month could be the difference between having a child and not.

For a government that is always saying that it should not be your credit card but your Medicare card that determines your ability to get support, that is exactly the situation that exists under the Allan Labor government. I have local families who come to me during this cost-of-living crisis that is being worsened and perpetuated by the failed policies of those opposite who say to me that they have to take on extra jobs to be able to afford IVF, because they know, as we all know, you cannot just take the chance and wait a whole year – that is how long the waitlist can be for IVF treatment – because once that time is gone, you can never get it back.

That is why I was proud as a female candidate for Parliament to run on a platform of backing new and growing Victorian families with \$4500 rebates for fertility services. Our party would have made fertility services for Victorian women more affordable, with a rebate of up to \$2000 to undertake an initial IVF procedure using private fertility clinics, a rebate of up to \$2000 to undertake a subsequent IVF procedure if not successful with the initial procedure, a rebate of up to \$500 for pre-IVF fertility testing and up to five days of paid fertility treatment leave for nurses, teachers and other Victorian public service workers. In addition to these essential reforms, we recognise the unique challenges faced by women with serious medical conditions like cancer or severe endometriosis. Therefore our policy extends to the removal of out-of-pocket costs for the collection and initial storage of eggs for these women, potentially saving them up to \$7000. By providing this support, we would empower women facing these health challenges to preserve their dream of starting a family without the burden of high expenses, truly futureproofing their choice. It is a step towards acknowledging the deeply personal struggles that individuals go through while undergoing medical treatments and honouring their commitment to parenthood.

This would have meant that our state would have taken its most significant step towards addressing the pressing issue of access to fertility services for Victorian women and families. By providing substantial rebates for fertility services, we aimed to alleviate some of the financial burdens associated with fertility treatments, making it more accessible and affordable for those who needed it. These policies would have relieved the financial stress on families and individuals trying to conceive and helped create a more inclusive and supportive environment for our Victorian community. Additionally, offering up to five days of paid fertility treatment leave for nurses, teachers and other public service workers would have been a critical measure to ensure that those pursuing fertility treatments could do so without compromising their livelihoods. It was our vision to empower Victorian families to make the choice that was right for them, and we were committed to creating a more equitable and compassionate society for all.

In conclusion, while this motion speaks to the importance of supporting growing families and expanding fertility services in Victoria, actions must align with words. The suspension of IVF services in 2022, the year-long waitlist for public IVF and the financial burden on families reveal a stark disconnect between rhetoric and reality. Fertility is time-sensitive, and delays have profound consequences. Families should not have to choose between necessities and fertility treatments. It is crucial to bridge this gap and truly support those seeking parenthood. Let us ensure that this motion is not just a symbolic gesture but a genuine commitment to those accessible fertility services. It is time to turn words into action, providing hope and help to those facing fertility challenges.

Kat THEOPHANOUS (Northcote) (18:25): It is a pleasure to rise today to speak on this very important motion, which is about our government's support for Victorians starting or growing their families and in those critical early years of their children's lives. Can I say that the day that we start taking advice from those opposite about health investment will be a very peculiar day indeed.

Starting or growing a family is an enormous life-changing decision. From the moment that decision is made your entire world shifts and is never the same again, because you are no longer just a 'you'; in a very existential way, whether you have a child or not, you are something beyond yourself. There are many parents in this chamber, and I have to say that while we all appreciate our roles as parliamentarians and those are important, we know that our roles as parents are even more so. As someone who was elected almost at bursting point with my second child and with a one-year-old in tow as well, I have been incredibly heartened by the changes in this institution of the Victorian Parliament in embracing members with young families.

We are soon to mark a major milestone in gender equality with the member elect for Mulgrave the wonderful Eden Foster bringing us to gender parity across the Parliament. The significance of that cannot be overstated. In tangible terms this shift in demographic has led to real improvements and strides towards the way that our Parliament recognises and supports families with children. I note for the benefit of new members who might be here from the 2022 cohort that when I was elected in 2018

to Parliament, the Parliament had no family room to feed or nap a newborn and there was no pram parking to make it easier to get a baby bundled out of the car and into the chamber. These were some of the challenges and the changes that were made early on. I was incredibly grateful for them, and I am heartened that other parents since then have benefited from them too, because I have incredible respect for every single member of this place and working parents across the board who manage that very difficult balance between work and family commitments.

The journey to parenthood is not always straightforward, and indeed it is different for everyone. I believe that our role as legislators and as a government is to give Victorians genuine choices, whether that is the choice to adopt, the choice to terminate or the choice to access IVF. Empowering people with options is what we have an obligation to do, because when the choice to conceive naturally is limited or taken away it is not just disappointing; it is devastating, it is frightening, it can put pressure on relationships, it can leave us in a state of uncertainty and it can erode our self-worth. All too often it also evokes centuries of painful stigma around the worth of women's bodies as child bearers and that corrosive feeling that so many women relay about not feeling like a woman. Moments of joy, like seeing nephews and nieces or celebrating a friend's pregnancy, turn into moments of quiet unspoken sadness. In the days before modern medicine those moments could stretch into lifetimes – lifetimes of longing, of self-doubt, of depression. Many of us would have family members for whom that loss and that longing for what could have been never faded. Many of us know people now who are on that difficult journey, except the difference is that now we have the extraordinary option of IVF.

While IVF is no guarantee and the journey of IVF itself can be emotionally and physically gruelling, it is hope, and no person should have that hope taken away from them simply because they cannot afford it. That is why I am incredibly proud of the investment the Allan Labor government is making in public IVF for couples with fertility challenges, single parents, LGBTIQ+ families and those with illness impacting fertility, such as those who have gone through chemotherapy, for instance. IVF can be the difference between being able to experience the joy of parenthood and not, yet too often and for too many these services have not been within financial reach, costing in some cases tens of thousands of dollars. That is why we are making assisted reproductive treatment fairer, more affordable and easier to access for all Victorians through our nation-leading public fertility care program and egg and sperm bank.

I join my other colleagues today in extending my heartfelt congratulations to the parents Erin and Anthony on the birth of their little Felix in October, the first baby to be born through our public IVF program. For those who have seen the picture of Felix, he is a beautiful little boy, and I understand he is doing very well. Already over 1100 Victorians have started their treatment journey out of sites led by the Royal Women's and Monash Health, and partner sites are up and running in Epping, Mildura, Bendigo, Warrnambool, Geelong and Shepparton, with further sites set to open in Sunshine, Ballarat and Heidelberg in the coming weeks.

Paul Edbrooke interjected.

Kat THEOPHANOUS: Thank you very much. Once fully operational, this \$120 million program will support up to 5000 people each year, enabling more Victorians to realise their dream of having a family and saving families up to \$10,000.

Earlier today the member for Dandenong spoke with eloquence and heart about her own IVF journey and her appreciation for the sperm donor who had made that birth possible. What we know is that in Victoria the demand for donor gametes has increased substantially, and access through the private system is often incredibly expensive and has long wait times. Our public egg and sperm bank is helping to change things for the many people who rely on the generosity of egg and sperm donors, and we are incredibly proud to see this state-of-the-art laboratory staffed with highly qualified fertility experts open at the Royal Women's Hospital, the first of its kind in Australia. For those who may be considering becoming a donor, please do. You can give the most generous of gifts – the chance at having a family.

There are many aspects of this motion that I could explore, and there is never enough time to follow all the threads that you want to follow, but I want to acknowledge that growing a family is about so much more than birthing a child. As parents soon realise, the challenges only expand and become more complex once we are thrown in the deep end of actually caring for little humans. Supporting families and children in those early critical years – those days and months – is critical. It is why ever since I was first elected, I have made it a priority to push for more services locally for families in the inner north. As we went about that work in advocating for these services, countless parents in my community came forward to tell me about their experiences, so I have heard stories of social isolation, of postnatal depression, of birth trauma, of insomnia, of incontinence, of struggles with breastfeeding and of family violence – tragically. There is so very much that some parents endure in those early days, and yet, it is those early days – those first 2000 days – that shape and sometimes transform the trajectory of children's lives. In the whirlwind of that haze and that urgency of being a primary caregiver for the first time, reaching out for help can be so hard. But what is critical is that help is there when you do reach out.

It is why one of my proudest moments as the member for Northcote was being able to tell my community that they will have an early parenting centre (EPC) to service the inner north. These centres are designed to feel like a home away from home. You and your family can come and stay overnight and be in the care of skilled practitioners and get the advice and hands-on skills that you need to help you on your unique parenting journey. Sleep and settling is a common reason to access an EPC, but there is also support for feeding and latching, behavioural issues and perinatal mental health, and these centres also provide tailored support to children with additional needs. The Northcote EPC will of course be part of an expanded network that our government is committed to, where we are upgrading two existing centres and committing to additional new centres right across Victoria. As the Parliamentary Secretary for Women's Health, I have had the pleasure of visiting some of these centres with my colleagues in Footscray, in Dandenong and in Canterbury, and can I say that the staff at these centres have literally hundreds of years of experience caring for parents and babies. They are the best of the best, and our Labor government is doing the work to ensure that even more of these centres open across our state so that even more children and families can benefit from these programs.

There is so much I have not mentioned, from baby bundles to our booster maternal child health care, but I am very proud of our government's work and proud to speak on this motion.

Nina TAYLOR (Albert Park) (18:35): I am very pleased to be able to speak on the very important matter of public IVF. I was at an event recently and there were a lot of parents there who had gone through all sorts of battles to be able to just literally carry – well, the mothers of course – the child through to birth, and it just reinforced to me the miracle of conception per se, let alone actually delivering a baby safely and let alone raising a child through all the challenges that life can present. We know even IVF, as wonderfully advanced and skilled as this incredible technique has become, provides no guarantee of being able to deliver or to get pregnant either.

I did also think about a friend in secondary school; I remember she had a serious illness and at that early stage they were having to put eggs aside so that one day she might be able to have children. It was extraordinarily confronting to think that even at that age – she would have been about 16 – she was having to confront those kinds of really important life choices. But at the same time, thank goodness she had capacity there to be able to literally put her eggs in a bank and allow for the vicissitudes of life, the possibility that she might be able to have a child, even though I would anticipate that it is obviously more difficult when you are having to use a fertility support. Nevertheless, it is a miracle of modern medicine that we have this wonderful capacity for couples, singles as well, LGBTIQ+ community families and those with illness – as I was saying with my friend from high school – that might have impacted, impaired or depreciated their capacity to get pregnant to have these pathways now. But the caveat is that there is obviously a significant cost factor.

This is why I am really proud that our government has taken that really bold but important step, and it is consistent when we look at the values that we have, whether it is across education, whether it is in transport or other mechanisms with our schools – it is really that concept of fairness and accessibility

across the board. This is why I was a little bit perplexed; I heard the word ‘symbolism’ used by a member of the Liberal opposition when it came to the implementation of public IVF. I thought, what exactly is symbolic when we know once they are fully operational public fertility services will support up to 5000 people each year and provide up to 3375 treatment cycles? Furthermore, we know that over 1100 patients have commenced their treatment journey. That is not symbolic. That is real people. So I think we have to be careful, when we are discussing issues as significant and as important as this, that we be accurate in the chamber and not just try to pointscore for the sake of some social media or whatever else it might be.

So completing that point: 1100 patients have commenced their treatment journey, with many more expected to undergo treatment cycles in coming months. So we can actually see those cycles ahead here and now, and that is really, really exciting – also for the medical staff who are able to provide those opportunities too. I am sure for them it is just as exciting. I do not want to anticipate the way they think, but I imagine if you are working in that very dignified medical profession, being able to help people in our community get pregnant and to deliver the miracle of having children is something truly wonderful. It enables them to be able to complete their role as well. I think it is sort of extending the way that we as a community feel when it comes to collectively wanting to help each other. It is supporting each other, literally, if we bring it down to that level, in terms of being able to deliver children into this world.

There is one thing I want to reflect on when we are talking about how far and wide and the accessibility issue, because I think that may have been in question as well. The public fertility services are designed to provide care to Victorians who currently have limited access to fertility services through private providers, including low-income earners; people living in regional and rural Victoria; people who need donor or surrogacy services, such as LGBTIQI+ and single people; people who need fertility preservation due to medical treatment, such as people with cancer or people undergoing gender reassignment treatment; and people who need testing for monogenic conditions.

That would suggest to me, and I think it is pretty clear, we are being emphatic and up-front about this and completely transparent in terms of the extent to which we are offering and supporting and backing in public IVF accessibility across our state. It is not just in inner-city Melbourne, this is across the whole state, and it is –

A member interjected.

Nina TAYLOR: There we go: Shepparton, for example – just as an example. Because why wouldn’t we want to do that? I would like to think, as a collective here in our government, we do have a genuine care for fellow Victorians and their capacity to be able to have access to important fertility treatments as required, as needed, if they wish to do so. So it is consistent with our values: on the one hand providing affordability when it comes to being able to use IVF services but, secondly, the accessibility across the state. I am just wanting to be really clear about that because – I do not know – I got a sense that somebody might have been trying to blur the waters there. I am just clearing that up so we are very frank and candid about what happens. They are not sort of just trying to diminish it because it is uncomfortable or unpalatable when you have a really good policy and you are actually implementing it.

The other thing I was going to talk about – yes – is the egg and sperm bank. Significantly, the Allan Labor government is also improving access to donor egg and sperm through our public egg and sperm bank. The public egg and sperm bank, an extension to public fertility services based at the Royal Women’s Hospital, was launched on 2 July 2023. Again, it is not symbolic – it is actually being delivered – so this is something to also be really proud of, not in the sense of boasting but just in saying, ‘Hey, this is great.’ When you come into government, these are the kinds of really effective changes you want to make for your community, aren’t they? We are doing it because we actually care. We want to bring joy to fellow Victorians. We know how much it means to so many to be able to be parents, at the end of the day. Just to take away some of the cynicism that can land in the chamber,

this is authentic, isn't it? We genuinely want people to have access to IVF services and – should they need it – a public egg and sperm bank. I think that is also a real positive. I should say: featuring state-of-the-art laboratory facilities and staff with highly qualified fertility experts, the bank is the first of its kind in Australia. I would like to pay due credit to our excellent medical professionals and the incredible work that they do. Again, we can be really proud of them – proud of those working in our wonderful state of Victoria to support people who are genuinely seeking to become parents.

I should say, interestingly, and perhaps not surprisingly, demand for donated eggs, sperm and embryos has grown steadily over the past decade due to the number of people seeking access to assisted reproductive treatment. So opening this bank – what does that mean? It will help support increased access to eggs, sperm and embryos for public fertility care patients. Again, you can see there is consistency here in terms of delivering on the policy, and in particular making sure that accessibility is prioritised. So we are very much genuinely authentic when we are talking about this, because what would be the point of symbolism? For people who are trying to get pregnant, there is nothing worse than just a pipe dream. We actually have to deliver on the reality, and that is exactly what we are doing because we genuinely care. We all have friends and relatives, and there are those in the chamber, who have used IVF services themselves. We know the joy that can be delivered through becoming parents through IVF services.

Paul MERCURIO (Hastings) (18:45): I am absolutely delighted to rise and speak in support of this motion brought to the house by the honourable Minister for Health and Minister for Health Infrastructure. I would like to acknowledge the work being done with this game-changing investment by the Allan Labor government. In the 2021–22 budget \$70 million was invested to establish public fertility care services, and in the 2023–24 budget an additional \$49.9 million was invested to further expand public fertility services, helping up to 4000 Victorians every year while saving them on average \$10,000 each. The public fertility care service model is focused on supporting and improving access for people who currently have limited access to private services.

There will be many different points to bring up about this motion, but there will be a word that is prevalent throughout, and that word is 'support' – support from this Labor government for people who are struggling to start a family and desperately want to but cannot due to financial or health reasons, support for people that want to help others start a family through donating their eggs or sperm at Victoria's first public egg and sperm bank established in July this year, and support for young parents to access free primary health services to help them become better parents by teaching good sleeping habits, helping with child behaviour and also looking out for parents' health and wellbeing, because as any parent in this chamber would understand, raising a child can be a pretty tough gig at the best of times, especially for first-time parents.

I am father to three daughters. I have my favourite eldest daughter, my favourite middle daughter and my favourite youngest daughter. They are all amazing women in their own right, and they make this world a better place. They have made my life richer for having them, and having them is one of the best things I have ever done, and I have done a few things in my life. But jeez, I have got to say it is not necessarily easy having kids. It is an incredibly steep learning curve, and in my day there was no help. I remember after my wife gave birth – it was a 36-hour labour – I went to the hospital a few days later and picked her and our child up and I took them home. We were in a little two-door car, which was very inappropriate with kids' baskets and prams, and I remember walking upstairs – two flights of stairs – to my flat that my wife and I lived in. I walked in, closed the door, put the cradle down, looked at my child and went, my life has now changed forever. I had no idea what I was doing. I remember that day so well. I cannot really describe the absolute joy my daughters have brought my wife and I, nor the absolute joy that the sisters have brought each other.

My favourite eldest now has a daughter of her own, and they are planning on having some more. My favourite youngest is married and is planning on having babies, but they have just started a punk rock band and they are getting booked, so they are going to delay that. My favourite middle daughter is not married and would dearly love to have a child. Unfortunately she has a number of severe health issues,

including endometriosis, adenomyosis, postural orthostatic tachycardia syndrome and Ehlers-Danlos syndrome. She is in constant pain. She has had a disc replacement in her back and she needs another one. This motion is for her and other women like her. Some years ago she took the decision to collect her eggs and freeze them with the idea of going through IVF later on. Now, at the age of 32, she is contemplating a hysterectomy. She has had to come to terms with the fact that her body just does not seem capable of carrying a child. This, to say the least, is devastating. The bright light that can come from this is that my daughter will donate her eggs so that another family may have the opportunity that she will not. This is the power of this IVF motion.

My favourite middle daughter is just one example of why someone cannot have a baby. There are many other stories. It is not always an easy conversation to have, as a number of those factors are deeply personal and private. Egg and sperm donation can help people who have experienced repeated IVF failure or have had an unfortunate early miscarriage. It helps people that have been affected by cancer or undergone treatments and procedures that affected their fertility. It is helping our LGBTQIA+ community to start families where in the past it was, sadly, extremely difficult for that community to share their love with a child.

These wonderful services are being provided through the Royal Women's Hospital, Monash Health and other partner health services across the state, making sure that every Victorian, no matter where you live, will have access to public fertility care – and this is a really important point, because I know people who have crossed from one end of the country to another to attend a fertility clinic. This not only adds to the cost of treatment but also the wear and tear on the people travelling. Travelling is tiring, and the last thing you need to do when going through these treatments is to arrive tired, worn out and stressed from the financial burden. Partner health services have already started to deliver fertility services at Northern Health's Epping hospital and Mildura Base Public Hospital. Additional partner health services sites in Mildura, Epping, Bendigo, Warrnambool, Geelong and Shepparton have already opened their doors. That is right, regional.

We are supporting families through the entire process from IVF to public egg and sperm banks. We have made access easier. Not only are we helping people start their family, but we are also supporting them when they do become parents by establishing early parenting centres across Victoria. Early parenting centres are a free primary health service that provides specialist support for families with children from birth to four years of age, offering differing levels of support for parents and helping to develop strategies that parents can use to make them a better parent for their kids. This is through helping them with sleep and settling – and every parent has had those sleepless nights, but when it continually happens it can have detrimental effects on parents that struggle to cope and indeed negatively affect relationships.

My favourite eldest daughter has a beautiful 20-month-old daughter who unfortunately is not the best sleeper. Whilst my daughter is definitely very sleep deprived, it would be a lot worse if not for the help she was able to get. The importance of this help cannot be overstated, as being sleep deprived can affect all facets of one's daily life in a negative way. When my daughter and granddaughter leave my house after a visit, my wife and I are really quite anxious about her getting home safely. As they leave the house, they both look like death warmed up and we wait by the phone until she gets home and we get a text saying 'Home'.

I am very proud to say that earlier this year I was able to join the Minister for Health and the member for Frankston –

Mary-Anne Thomas interjected.

Paul MERCURIO: to look at an early parenting centre – yes, you get a mention – that will be built in my electorate of Hastings. It will be co-located at the Hastings community centre where Peninsula Health has several services and where the awesome Western Port Community Support is based. This just makes sense. To place all these services in the one place reduces travel for people and allows for

easier access to a diverse range of health and support services. This is smart and considered thinking and planning with our community's best interest at heart.

This is incredibly exciting for young families in my community of Hastings. Hastings is becoming a destination for aspiring young families, and having these important services available will not only allow them to have the best start to family life but have the confidence that this government will back them to not just succeed but thrive. Ultimately, creating a family is a right – a right that we all have. We grow up with this idea that we can all have kids. Some people choose not to and that is their right. The fact that we can decide to have a family, to create a loving environment to bring them up in is an incredibly special gift. To feel the love between my daughters and me and my wife and to see the love in their eyes, and to see the love in my granddaughter's eyes for her mother, father, aunties and yes, her grandparents, and to see how special and unique that is, you can better understand the deep pain that people feel when they cannot create that, when they cannot share that. This motion is for them. This motion is a motion for love.

Starting your own family is a dream that many across Australia have and here in Victoria have. We acknowledge that dream and have made it easier, more affordable, safer and fairer for everyone to achieve. That is what makes Victoria the best state. I happily and lovingly commend this motion to the house.

Belinda WILSON (Narre Warren North) (18:54): What a speech to follow. As a mum of three, listening to the member for Hastings talk about his granddaughter – I must say I did instruct my kids to ensure that does not happen to me for a few more years yet. However, I will say how exciting and how beautiful it was to hear his speech about his daughters and also his grandchildren. I do look forward to that time, but if my children are watching – please, in the future, not quite yet.

Having kids is a real gift, and when I got married a long time ago – 24 years ago – I did not even think of not being able to have kids. I think it was just like, you know, I am going to get married, have kids. I remember going to the GP after not becoming pregnant after three months or something, and he said to me, 'When you have been practising or trying to have children every second day for six months and nothing's happened, then come back to me.' Well, I was mortified, my husband was very excited, and this started the journey of having children. For me that happened quite quickly, but for many people in the world it is a long and very hard process.

It was interesting looking back on the history. I am not that old, but for my mum and those of her vintage, 1978 was when IVF started. Some people in this chamber were born in 1978. I may have been four years old at that point. I think about that journey for my parents, for my mum and her friends, and how they actually did not have this as an option. It was really endearing – and again, incredible speeches – to hear from the member for Dandenong and the member for Laverton about their journeys, and when you listen to those personal journeys, you understand how hard it is for some people.

I think the other thing is that it is expensive. One of the things that I am most excited about with what we are doing with this is that it is going to be accessible for so many people who could not afford it. I know a number of people in my electorate that I have spoken to about this – and it not always the female that cannot have children; it is very often the male, which also is not spoken about enough. I have had a number of conversations, and particularly with one person, without naming names, who spoke to me. He is a new arrival to Australia and a new citizen, and he took me through his personal journey of not being able to have children and the expense of that. His wife only just arrived in Australia a year ago, and they are really looking forward to trying to be part of that program to have children, because they actually could not afford to do it unless it was through our incredible government's program. So I am very excited to hopefully see them go on that journey, because it is a journey that they would have never, ever been able to afford to go on.

We were talking about sleeplessness with babies, and it was nice to be surrounded by many mums in the chamber, as I am at the moment, as we shared stories of when we walked our children up and

down corridors trying to get them to sleep, or when we would just get them to sleep and then we would be tiptoeing out of the room, trying to make sure they stayed asleep. You thought your world was going to end because you did not sleep yourself. Many are nodding their heads in the chamber. Those days were difficult and they were hard, and to be able to have assistance, to have people to call and to have a place to go when you are struggling with sleep or settling your baby or baby issues when you are not sure what the baby is doing and the baby is crying and it will not stop – they are the sorts of things that our incredible government supports. We are very, very lucky to have such a great health minister who looks at these initiatives and puts women's health and women's issues at the forefront.

Business interrupted under sessional orders.

Adjournment

The DEPUTY SPEAKER: The question is:

That the house now adjourns.

Solar Homes program

David HODGETT (Croydon) (19:00): (471) My adjournment is for the Minister for Climate Action and Minister for Energy and Resources, and the action I seek is for the minister to work with the federal energy minister to deliver on the joint commitment made for a funding program for rebates for solar on apartment buildings. In August this year the federal Minister for Climate Change and Energy, along with the state Minister for Climate Action and Minister for Energy and Resources, released a joint media statement detailing the expansion of the Solar Homes program. This was to include the removal of barriers to installing solar on apartment buildings. The program states that there will be grants targeted at owners corporations, with a double subsidy of \$2800 available per apartment, with a maximum of 50 apartments per building. The media release, along with the information available on the Solar Victoria website, states:

This new partnership will be delivered by Solar Victoria and will be implemented later this year.

The year is nearly at an end, Solar Victoria staff know nothing about this program and my office has received inquiries about when and how owners corporations can access this program. Minister, again I ask that you work with the federal minister to deliver on this commitment and have it available for the thousands of apartment building owners and tenants so they can get the opportunity to install solar panels and help cut the ever rising cost of living.

Small business support

Ella GEORGE (Lara) (19:01): (472) My adjournment matter is for the Minister for Small Business, and the action that I seek is for the minister visit with small business owners from the electorate of Lara. The Allan Labor government knows that small businesses are a vital part of our state's economy. That is why as a government we have some great resources to support small businesses and their owners to develop essential skills and set up a pathway to success. Business Victoria, our Small Business Bus and our business grants are all great examples of this. Across the Geelong region small businesses make up 98 per cent of all businesses in the LGA.

The Lara electorate is the industrial heart of Geelong, and as such we are home to some of the most innovative and dynamic businesses. I know just how important small businesses are to the local community in Lara, creating thousands of jobs across our region. I am looking forward to hosting a small business forum in the electorate in 2024, and as part of this it would be fantastic to have the minister come along and hear from some of the wonderful small businesses across the community. I know it will be a great opportunity for our small business community to hear directly from the minister about what opportunities and supports are available to them and for the minister to hear from them about the opportunities and challenges that they are facing. I look forward to hosting the minister on the visit to meet small business owners in the Lara electorate.

Native timber industry

Tim BULL (Gippsland East) (19:03): (473) My adjournment tonight is to the Premier, and the action that I am seeking is for her to finalise fair timber worker exit packages, treating these families with more respect than they have been shown to date. As it sits now, we have got four weeks to go – it is a little bit over four weeks – before they are out of work, and it is quite distressing to see correspondence where, after committing to meeting with these timber workers in question time a few weeks ago, the Premier is now backtracking on that meeting and trying to dish that meeting out to departmental bureaucrats. She committed to meeting with these timber workers, the contractors, and she ought to do so. I would love to be present at that meeting to help them prosecute their case.

The major issues include – I touched on a couple of these earlier today – that those timber workers who want to stay on and work for the Department of Energy, Environment and Climate Action want the final information on where the work will be, what equipment will be required and how much they will be paid before they put in an expression of interest, but this government is asking for an expression of interest to be put in up-front, when they are not given all that level of detail. The government indicates that those workers who accept or put in an expression of interest that may result in ongoing employment – if that eventuates, they will not get the full amount of their exit packages, so that will be compromised. ‘If you’re staying to work for us, well, we’re not going to give you the full amount of your exit package.’ They need to be treated separately. They are being kicked out of the bush – exit package. ‘Now we’ll deal with you on your future employment.’ Those two things should not be attached. That is not fair on these workers.

The Allan Labor government has not formally overturned in writing its decision on no compensation for machinery over 10 years. I know there have been some discussions on that, but we want to see that in writing. We also do not want the compensation for machinery up to 10 years old being in a capped package. That is unfair. They should be compensated on their machinery for what it is worth.

There is also a requirement for employers to fund the retraining of staff. The government should undertake that, as it said it would at the very start of this package. There need to be some answers delivered in the next fortnight so these timber families can have a little bit of peace of mind going into Christmas. There are a number of outstanding issues, and I urge the Premier to not only meet with them but offer them a fair package prior to the Christmas period.

Northcote electorate schools

Kat THEOPHANOUS (Northcote) (19:06): (474) My adjournment is to the Minister for Education, and I ask the minister to join me in Northcote for a tour of some of our wonderful local schools. The inner north is of course home to the best schools in the state. Innovative, creative and compassionate, they reflect the values of our community, and it has been my absolute honour to work with them over the last five years to support their aspirations for the future. Through the passion, dedication and hard work of countless community members and the backing of a Labor government that places education front and centre, we have some really spectacular things to showcase, whether it is Wales Street Primary, which had a \$4.1 million investment to transform the front of the school and create some new STEM spaces and upgraded classrooms back in 2019, or Thornbury High, which just this year opened a new STEAM centre with \$14.9 million from our government, an opportunity for young people to pursue passions in science, art, food tech and much more.

We have got Bell Primary, \$7.2 million for a new gym and performance hub, and I am pleased to report to parents of that community that a new builder has been appointed. We did have some roadblocks, but a new builder has been appointed, and that should be up and running as the start of the next year begins. At Fairfield and Alphington primary schools together we created new learning buildings and spaces for 400 new children to cater to that growing 3078 postcode and those suburbs.

Just recently I visited Croxton specialist school, run by a gem of a person, Bev Fegan, where these beautiful students are now enjoying new art spaces. I got to see some of their art exhibition earlier this

month, and can I say it was really heartwarming to see these brand new facilities there for those children that are very, very deserving of them. We also this year opened Preston South Primary's \$14.6 million new three-storey learning building. Principal Leon Leonidas and I did a tour of it earlier in the year, and the school captains showed me around. It was a fantastic tour, and those facilities are incredible.

Pender's Grove have so many ideas and aspirations for improvements at their school. They had an inclusive schools grant that did some initial works around there, but I know that they have got some ideas. Northcote High is in construction for a new STEM centre, a fantastic facility there that we are funding. At Thornbury Primary, of course, in an election commitment from 2022, we are planning the work of their \$17.6 million upgrade. These are tangible projects that are building a brighter future for the inner north, and they demonstrate Labor's commitment to our suburbs and the value we place on education and its power to transform lives.

Neerim District Rural Primary School

Wayne FARNHAM (Narracan) (19:09): (475) My adjournment tonight is for the Minister for Education, and the action I seek is that the minister save Neerim District Rural Primary School in Nayook. We have heard from the minister in recent weeks about how much they are investing in schools, yet this one seems to be forgotten and looks due to be shut down. I said it today and I will say it again: in 2019 this school was de-staffed. Then in 2020, 2021, 2022 and 2023 there were no increases in enrolments, so the department has decided to close this school. Well, you cannot increase enrolments when you do not have staff in the school. It is an impossibility. You cannot put the cart before the horse.

At a recent meeting with Neerim residents on Sunday night they indicated to me that if that school reopened in 2025, to give the government 12 months to sort themselves out, there would be 40 students in that school straightaway. You cannot afford to lose it. To compound the problem we have Jindivick Primary, which is now full, and they are going to 'postcode only', so the overflow of students from Jindivick Primary could go to Neerim Primary. At the same time we have Noojee Primary, which got de-staffed in 2019, another school in my electorate that looks to be doomed for the scrap heap.

I have urged the minister – I have sent him emails – to meet with me to discuss this issue. I ask him urgently to discuss it, because it is stupid to shut this school when it is viable. I understand some schools are not viable – I get that – but this one is. It services a much wider area. It takes in Noojee and Piedmont. It takes in Powelltown. It services a very wide area. There is no reason for this school to shut down. It is viable.

Not only that, if this school shuts down, parents will spend at least 80 minutes on the road ferrying their kids to school. With petrol prices the way they are, with the cost of living the way it is and with rural roads the way they are, it would be common sense to keep this school open. It would also be common sense to put a kindergarten on the site. They do have bush kinder at that school now. They also have playgroup at that school now. There is potential for this school, because there is growth – there is very good growth – in Neerim. I am asking the minister, as I said earlier, to meet with me to save this school and do the right thing by the residents of Neerim.

Banksia Gardens Community Services

Kathleen MATTHEWS-WARD (Broadmeadows) (19:12): (476) My adjournment matter is for the Treasurer and Minister for Economic Growth, and the action I seek is for the minister to join me in a visit to Banksia Gardens in Broadmeadows. Banksia Gardens Community Services, so ably led by CEO extraordinaire Gina Dougall, do incredible work in my electorate. The Treasurer and Minister for Economic Growth will be most interested in their work on social enterprises and the economic empowerment these projects offer to people who have often faced barriers to education and employment. They have opened two social enterprise cafes locally – the wonderful Common Bean cafes – in partnership with DPV Health and Kangan Institute and most recently a makers market on Thursday night. I really hope we do not sit late tomorrow night, as I would love to get there to do my

Christmas shopping. The last market was such incredible value, and I loved being able to buy so many ‘made in Broady’ products – candles, mugs, gifts, plants, homewares, skincare products, artwork and fashion pieces – all the while supporting our wonderful young people to further develop their skills and confidence.

Of further interest to the Treasurer, Banksia gets full value out of every dollar of funding that they receive and proactively seeks funding from other sources. Just last week we heard of another successful philanthropic grant application from the Jack Brockhoff Foundation to expand the wonderful bike kitchen program. Peter Ewer set up this program, and it ticks all the boxes for me: skill development, supporting kids, promoting active transport and the circular economy as well as reducing waste. The program just makes my heart sing. Kids come after school, enjoy a snack and learn skills by repairing discarded bikes and later gift these bikes to local kids who do not have bikes. It was so great to see the smiles on local kids’ faces when they received the bikes last year. Banksia Gardens also supports many families with total care packages, and the Treasurer will enjoy seeing this program and the tangible difference it makes to so many people’s lives.

In government we often talk about place-based solutions, but Banksia lives and breathes and delivers place-based outcomes every day. It has been wonderful to work with them, a range of state agencies and Hume council in the vicinity to make tangible improvements for people living on the estate. The recent announcement with the Premier and the Minister for Housing of \$80 million to build 120 new social homes was just fabulous. Banksia are also a key partner in the work of the Broadmeadows Revitalisation Board and just so many partnerships for good across the community. The refurbishment of the futsal pitch and basketball half-court is a great example of this collaboration, and I thank the Minister for Community Sport Ros Spence for her support of that project.

Banksia does a wonderful job working with kids and schools with their innovative Project REAL and the Northern Centre for Excellence in School Engagement. It would take me far longer than 3 minutes to talk about all the fabulous programs at Banksia, including GPAN – Good People Act Now – women’s groups, children’s programs, food relief, community gardens, language programs, computer skills and digital literacy. I look forward to showing it all off to the Treasurer.

The DEPUTY SPEAKER: I remind members to use correct titles.

Energy policy

Tim READ (Brunswick) (19:14): (477) My adjournment matter is for the Minister for Climate Action, and the action I seek is for the government to legislate a constitutional ban on new fossil fuel projects in Victoria. Last week the UN reported that all the current emissions pledges by various countries to reduce emissions, to reduce climate change, still have the world on track for 3 degrees of global warming by the end of the century – and 3 degrees of warming is a hellish future for our planet. We would suffer one-in-100-year coastal flooding events every single year. We would suffer catastrophic bushfire seasons like 2009 or 2020 every single year. We would suffer when essentials like housing and food become even more scarce and expensive, and we would suffer in places like Darwin, where the normal temperature would be over 35 degrees, or in New South Wales, which would see tropical cyclones and tropical diseases, and in Victoria, where drought would cripple food production. As the UN Secretary-General António Guterres said:

We are hurtling towards disaster, eyes wide open ...

This is what is predicted if we do not do more, and that is why the Greens are demanding that the Victorian Labor government do more. This starts by Victorian Labor not adding new fossil fuels to the fire that is burning our planet. They must immediately halt the dozen or more fossil fuel projects currently under consideration. They must scrap the new offshore gas drilling projects planned for the Gippsland Basin, they must scrap the planned new gas import terminal in Geelong and they must scrap all the gas drilling projects planned for the Otway Basin, including near the Twelve Apostles. They must abandon the short-sighted and dirty coal-to-hydrogen project in the Latrobe Valley and tear up

the secret deal with AGL that lets it keep burning brown coal until 2035. Labor must stop these projects and protect our climate by banning all future new mining, drilling and burning of fossil fuels and put it in our state constitution. Enough is enough: no new coal and gas in Victoria.

Truganina electorate schools

Sarah CONNOLLY (Laverton) (19:17): (478) My adjournment is for the Deputy Premier as Minister for Education, and the action I seek is that the Deputy Premier join me early next year before the first sitting week of 2024 for the opening of two brand new schools in Truganina. In 2024 both campuses of Bemini Secondary College and Warreen Primary School in Truganina will finally open their doors to hundreds of students, another two of the 20-something schools that our government has built in Wyndham – right? – over the last five years.

As the minister knows, it has been a very long journey leading up to these schools becoming a reality, and indeed the opening of these two schools at this site in Truganina North will represent a major, major win for my local community. Two years ago parents in the Elements estate community lobbied hard for this site to be used for a school after the Catholic education office walked away from purchasing it. What would have otherwise become more housing units in an already heavily developed estate is now going to be not only home to one school but home to two, Warreen Primary School and the junior campus for Bemini Secondary College, making it easier for parents to make the morning drop-off, something made even more easy by the onsite kinder at Warreen Primary – very good news indeed. So I would like the minister to see for himself the impact our government has made for not only kids at this school, who will benefit from a brand new school with modern learning facilities and wonderful teachers, but the community, who have really rallied behind these schools and won.

South Gippsland police numbers

Danny O'BRIEN (Gippsland South) (19:18): (479) My adjournment matter this evening is for the Minister for Police, and the action I seek is for the minister to increase police resources and numbers in Gippsland, particularly in the Shire of South Gippsland. Since the Labor government came to office the crime rate in South Gippsland has increased by 66.6 per cent – I will say that again: 66.6 per cent – that is two-thirds; in the Wellington shire it is 11.7 per cent; and in Latrobe City, which I represent part of, it is 9.7 per cent. But the issue I am particularly concerned about is in South Gippsland, where we have seen in the last couple of years but particularly in the last few months a spate of burglaries, thefts, hoon driving and indeed even arson. There is anecdotal and actual evidence that there are criminals coming out of, presumably, Melbourne, certainly the south-eastern suburbs, and literally driving down the South Gippsland Highway and doing a series of crimes along the highway.

A few weeks ago it was the Fish Creek Football Netball Club that was first ransacked and burgled and then literally set on fire and the entire clubrooms burnt down. I note the Minister for Community Sport is at the table, so I will just give Fish Creek another mention and highlight again that we will be seeking some funds no doubt very soon for the rebuild of that facility.

That night they had hit a number of different places – the supermarket in Meeniyan and the Yanakie motocross club. Two weeks ago there was a similar situation with a burglary at Aherns Fruit Market in Foster. It is believed that the same people then went on to Albion, where they were disturbed by the general store owner and they smashed the windows on the way out. They then went on to Yarram where they undertook a further burglary.

It is of great concern to me that that the operators of Aherns Fruit Market in Foster, when they called 000, twice got a message saying, 'Sorry, we're too busy. Call us back'. The Attorney-General in the other place today said, 'Oh well, that's an issue for Telstra.' I do not really care who it is. She is the Attorney-General, she is the Minister for Emergency Services, she needs to deal with that issue. When I raised it at the Public Accounts and Estimates Committee hearings last week the Department of Justice and Community Safety said they were very surprised that anyone was still getting that message when they called 000.

The point is though that there was no-one around. The same thing happened with Fish Creek. The police who did come to the fire there had come from I think Wonthaggi, and they were at that stage, I understand, the only two police officers on from Cowes to Welshpool, a very, very large area. It is a very big area. It is becoming an issue. People are concerned about it. They are raising consistently with me that the lack of police presence and the lack of deterrent are making us a soft target for criminals. It is a very, very thin blue line in South Gippsland. Our communities deserve better. We deserve more police.

Ripon electorate early learning centres

Martha HAYLETT (Ripon) (19:21): (480) My adjournment matter is for the attention of the Minister for Children in the other place. The action I seek is that the minister provide me with an update on the site selection for the brand new government-run early learning centres to be delivered in the Loddon shire and Creswick and Clunes areas in my electorate. I am beyond thrilled that we will deliver three brand new early learning centres across Ripon as part of our government's rollout of 50 new government-run centres across the state.

Local families in the Loddon shire regularly ask me when we will confirm the site of the new early learning centre. Currently there are absolutely no childcare options in the whole of the Loddon shire. It is impacting so many locals, especially women who are unable to get back to work or families who are choosing to move away because of the lack of childcare options. There are similar issues in the Clunes community, where there are no childcare options currently either. Amelia from Clunes told me having an early learning centre locally would reduce travel times and fuel costs for her family and would create an opportunity to form more personal links with the community.

I cannot wait to deliver brand new early learning centres to support these families. I welcome an update from the minister on the site selection for these centres so that our kids can get the very best start in life no matter where they live.

Responses

Ros SPENCE (Kalkallo – Minister for Agriculture, Minister for Community Sport, Minister for Carers and Volunteers) (19:23): The member for Croydon raised a matter for the Minister for Climate Action and Minister for Energy and Resources, and the action being sought was for the minister to work with the federal minister to deliver on the joint commitment made for a funding program for solar rebates on apartment buildings. The member for Lara raised a matter for the Minister for Small Business; the action being sought was for the minister to join with the member and visit small businesses in her electorate that support thousands of jobs in Lara to hear about the available supports and any challenges they face. The member for Gippsland East raised a matter for the Premier; the action being sought was for the Premier to finalise fair timber worker support packages prior to the Christmas period.

The member for Northcote raised a matter for the Deputy Premier and Minister for Education; the action being sought was that the Deputy Premier join with the member to tour some of the terrific local schools in her electorate and see the great initiatives that are showcased at these schools. The member for Narracan raised a matter for the Deputy Premier and Minister for Education; the action being sought was for the Deputy Premier to save Neerim District Rural Primary School. The member for Broadmeadows raised a matter for the Treasurer and Minister for Economic Growth, and the action being sought was for the minister to join with the member in her electorate and visit the wonderful Banksia Gardens in Broadmeadows, including Banksia Gardens Community Services, and see the services and programs that they provide.

The member for Brunswick raised a matter for the Minister for Climate Action and Minister for Energy and Resources, and the action being sought was for the government to legislate a constitutional ban on new fossil fuel projects in Victoria. The member for Laverton raised a matter for the Deputy Premier and Minister for Education; the action being sought was for the Deputy Premier to join the member in

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her electorate early next year, before the first sitting week of 2024, for the opening of two brand new schools in Truganina. The member for Gippsland South raised a matter for the Minister for Police, and the action being sought was for the minister to increase police resources and numbers in his electorate, particularly in the Shire of South Gippsland, to address the increase in crime in his electorate.

The member for Ripon raised a matter for the Minister for Children in the other place, and the action being sought was for the minister to provide the member with an update on the site selection for the brand new government-run early learning centres to be delivered in the Loddon shire and Creswick and Clunes areas in her electorate. I will refer all of these matters to the appropriate ministers for action.

The DEPUTY SPEAKER: The house stands adjourned until tomorrow morning.

House adjourned 7:25 pm.