



# **Hansard**

## **LEGISLATIVE ASSEMBLY**

### **60th Parliament**

**Thursday 21 March 2024**



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

**Speaker**

Maree Edwards

**Deputy Speaker**

Matt Fregon

**Acting Speakers**

Juliana Addison, Jordan Crugnale, Daniela De Martino, Paul Edbrooke,  
Wayne Farnham, Paul Hamer, Lauren Kathage, Nathan Lambert, Alison Marchant,  
Paul Mercurio, John Mullahy, Kim O’Keeffe, Meng Heang Tak, Jackson Taylor and Iwan Walters

**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**

<b>Member</b>	<b>District</b>	<b>Party</b>	<b>Member</b>	<b>District</b>	<b>Party</b>
Addison, Juliana	Wendouree	ALP	Lambert, Nathan	Preston	ALP
Allan, Jacinta	Bendigo East	ALP	Maas, Gary	Narre Warren South	ALP
Andrews, Daniel <sup>1</sup>	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 <sup>2</sup>	South Barwon	Ind	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 <sup>5</sup>	Warrandyte	Lib
Edwards, Maree	Bendigo West	ALP	Southwick, David	Caulfield	Lib
Famham, Wayne	Narracan	Lib	Spence, Ros	Kalkallo	ALP
Foster, Eden <sup>3</sup>	Mulgrave	ALP	Staikos, Nick	Bentleigh	ALP
Fowles, Will <sup>4</sup>	Ringwood	Ind	Suleyman, Natalie	St Albans	ALP
Fregon, Matt	Ashwood	ALP	Tak, Meng Heang	Clarinda	ALP
George, Ella	Lara	ALP	Taylor, Jackson	Bayswater	ALP
Grigorovitch, Luba	Kororoit	ALP	Taylor, Nina	Albert Park	ALP
Groth, Sam	Nepean	Lib	Theophanous, Kat	Northcote	ALP
Guy, Matthew	Bulleen	Lib	Thomas, Mary-Anne	Macedon	ALP
Halfpenny, Bronwyn	Thomastown	ALP	Tilley, Bill	Benambra	Lib
Hall, Katie	Footscray	ALP	Vallence, Bridget	Evelyn	Lib
Hamer, Paul	Box Hill	ALP	Vulin, Emma	Pakenham	ALP
Haylett, Martha	Ripon	ALP	Walsh, Peter	Murray Plains	Nat
Hibbins, Sam	Prahran	Greens	Walters, Iwan	Greenvale	ALP
Hilakari, Mathew	Point Cook	ALP	Ward, Vicki	Eltham	ALP
Hodgett, David	Croydon	Lib	Wells, Kim	Rowville	Lib
Horne, Melissa	Williamstown	ALP	Werner, Nicole <sup>6</sup>	Warrandyte	Lib
Hutchins, Natalie	Sydenham	ALP	Wight, Dylan	Tarneit	ALP
Kathage, Lauren	Yan Yean	ALP	Williams, Gabrielle	Dandenong	ALP
Kealy, Emma	Lowan	Nat	Wilson, Belinda	Narre Warren North	ALP
Kilkenny, Sonya	Carrum	ALP	Wilson, Jess	Kew	Lib

<sup>1</sup> Resigned 27 September 2023

<sup>2</sup> ALP until 29 April 2024

<sup>3</sup> Sworn in 6 February 2024

<sup>4</sup> ALP until 5 August 2023

<sup>5</sup> Resigned 7 July 2023

<sup>6</sup> Sworn in 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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**Thursday 21 March 2024**

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

*Documents*

**Department of Education**

*5-Year Legislative Review of the Child Information Sharing Scheme: Government Response to Review Recommendations*

**Mary-Anne THOMAS** (Macedon – Leader of the House, Minister for Health, Minister for Health Infrastructure, Minister for Ambulance Services) (09:34): I table, by leave, the government response to the five-year review of the child information sharing scheme.

**Documents**

**Incorporated list as follows:**

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

*Child Wellbeing and Safety Act 2005* – Child Information Sharing Scheme Five Year Review under s 41ZO

*Safe Drinking Water Act 2003* – Drinking water quality in Victoria – Report 2022–23

Victorian Electoral Commission – Report to Parliament on the 2023 Warrandyte District by-election

Victorian Inspectorate – Special Report on a compliance case study on the use and oversight of coercive powers – Ordered to be published.

**DOCUMENT TABLED UNDER STANDING ORDERS** – The Clerk tabled:

Government response to the Environment and Planning Standing Committee's Report on the Inquiry into Apartment Design Standards.

*Business of the house*

**Adjournment**

**Mary-Anne THOMAS** (Macedon – Leader of the House, Minister for Health, Minister for Health Infrastructure, Minister for Ambulance Services) (09:35): I move:

That the house, at its rising, adjourns until 30 April 2024.

**Motion agreed to.**

**Parliamentary privilege**

*Complaint: contempt of Parliament*

**The SPEAKER** (09:35): Before we move to statements by members, I wish to advise the house that in keeping with the practice adopted in April 1978, the Manager of Opposition Business this morning provided me with written notification of a complaint of a contempt of Parliament. The complaint alleges that the attendance and actions of a person on the parliamentary precinct on the sitting day yesterday improperly interfered with the free performance of a member's duties as a member. All members will be aware that serving civil or criminal processes within the precincts on a sitting day or on a day when a member has committee responsibilities can be a contempt of the house's privilege. Members must be able to attend sittings or committee activities freely and without obstruction. However, yesterday a person had access to the parliamentary precinct and delivered legal documents to the Leader of the Opposition directly.

My role in this matter is to determine whether the complaint raised falls within the category of a contempt. I am satisfied that this complaint meets that threshold. I note that the matter before the house

is not about any legal action itself – the house will have no view about that and respects court processes. The issue for the house is whether its rights have been infringed.

Further, in considering whether the complaint should be granted precedence over business of the house, I must be satisfied that the matter has been raised as soon as reasonably practical. The member wrote to me this morning, and so that requirement has been met.

**James NEWBURY** (Brighton) (09:37): I move:

That the complaint made by the member for Hawthorn on Thursday 21 March 2024 be referred to the Privileges Committee for examination and report.

The member for Hawthorn has requested that I put the following facts about what occurred yesterday in the parliamentary precinct on the record. At about 9:45 am the members for Kew and Malvern and Ms Crozier of the other place undertook a doorstep interview at the back door of Parliament House. The member for Kew later remarked she had seen Mrs Deeming of the other place watching the media conference with, it appeared to her, one or more other people.

At about 11:40 am the members for Hawthorn and Nepean exited the annex building via the lift on the mezzanine floor on their way to an arranged media conference. The member for Hawthorn was approached by two women, later identified as Anna Hughes, an electorate officer of Mrs Deeming of the other place, and Louise Carrigg. Ms Carrigg greeted the member for Hawthorn and asked if he was John Pesutto. The member for Hawthorn replied in the affirmative. Ms Carrigg then attempted to force a set of papers into the member for Hawthorn's hands, claiming he had been served defamation proceedings by Ms Angie Jones. The papers in question about Ms Jones were not sealed; that is, they did not bear the seal of a court, which is required for legal service. The member for Hawthorn also said Ms Carrigg and Ms Jones's lawyers had electronically sent defamation papers to his lawyers, MinterEllison, so no further action to achieve that purpose was required. The member for Hawthorn took possession of the documents so he could proceed to the media conference in the garden. It was apparent to Mr Pesutto that Ms Carrigg and Ms Hughes knew where he would be and were waiting for him. Last year Ms Carrigg, along with Ms Jones, protested outside the Leader of the Opposition's electorate office in Hawthorn.

It is the member for Hawthorn's belief that Ms Carrigg intended to attempt to confront him had he held a press conference at the back door of Parliament House and for it to be captured on camera by the assembled media. The later interaction at 11:40 am was a further attempt to have vision of the member for Hawthorn supposedly being served for defamation captured by the media. It was therefore a stunt as part of the ongoing and highly publicised legal actions of Ms Angie Jones, Ms Kellie-Jay Keen and Mrs Deeming of the other place.

The member for Hawthorn is concerned that the events of Wednesday constitute a contempt of Parliament and raise serious concerns about security for all members of Parliament, staff and visitors who work and attend the parliamentary precinct. The Victorian constitution incorporates the rights of members of Parliament as they existed in July 1855 in the United Kingdom House of Commons. A right inherited, as *Erskine May* asserts, is against any who would:

... obstruct Members in the discharge of their responsibilities to the House or in their participation in its proceedings.

*Erskine May*, the 25th edition, on page 296, says,

It is a contempt to molest a Member of either House while attending the House, or coming to or going from it, and in the eighteenth century, both Houses roundly condemned 'assaulting, insulting or menacing Lords or Members' going to or coming from the House or trying to force to influence them in their conduct in Parliament.

The member for Hawthorn therefore requests that the Privileges Committee consider the question of the following: whether visitors obstructing a member going about his or her parliamentary activities within the parliamentary precinct is a contempt of the Parliament or a staff member employed by the



Parliament signing in a visitor for that purpose is a contempt, irrespective of the fact that Ms Carrigg did not, in law, serve defamation proceedings on the member for Hawthorn; and whether members are protected against being served legal documents while at work in the parliamentary precinct, or whether such protections extend to a member's electorate office.

The member for Hawthorn thanks the house in anticipation of the success of the motion and looks forward to an expeditious inquiry and report by the Privileges Committee.

**Motion agreed to.**

### *Members statements*

#### **Victorian Blue Ocean Safety Skills Centre**

**Richard RIORDAN** (Polwarth) (09:42): I wish to bring to the house's attention this morning the heroic efforts on the weekend of a passer-by at Marengo near Apollo Bay who came to the rescue of three stranded swimmers. Unfortunately, one of those swimmers did not make it and became the 27th casualty of a drowning this summer season. I draw the house's attention to the fact that the Apollo Bay community and Apollo Bay surf club have now been lobbying very, very hard to this state government since 2020 for the VBOSS, the Victorian blue ocean swim school in Apollo Bay. The purpose of this swimming school is to help spread understanding and knowledge of safety in our ocean swimming. Increasingly, multicultural communities are over-represented in drowning deaths in Victorian waters, and more needs to be done to support knowledge of the dangers of swimming outside of patrolled beaches and swimming pool areas and in our rivers, our lakes and our oceans. The Victorian blue ocean swim school would provide that service, and I urge this government to consider it in this year's upcoming budget for a much-needed funding boost.

#### **Youth housing**

**Tim PALLAS** (Werribee – Treasurer, Minister for Industrial Relations, Minister for Economic Growth) (09:44): I rise to update the house and celebrate the official opening of youth accommodation in my electorate. This project has been delivered in partnership with the Melbourne City Mission under the \$50 million youth housing capital grants program and is part of the Allan government's \$5.3 billion Big Housing Build. The grants program is shared by eight agencies to build 10 projects across the state, delivering important and real action in addressing youth homelessness and providing the support that they need. It is designed to house young people aged 16 to 24 years at risk of homelessness and who leave out-of-home care. The value of partnering with organisations such as Melbourne City Mission in delivering more social housing for our youth cannot be underestimated.

Often when young people are at risk of homelessness, they may have a range of complex needs that require a level of integrated support. These new studio apartments will have those onsite support facilities available along with communal living areas. Located close to the Werribee CBD, residents will importantly have easy access to public transport, educational facilities, shops and local services. It was a pleasure to meet a young resident named Paris, who said, 'This saved my life; they gave me hope when I have nothing left,' because nothing is more important than the safety, dignity and stability of somewhere to call home.

#### **Kindergarten funding**

**Annabelle CLEELAND** (Euroa) (09:45): Free kinder is a great idea in theory, but unfortunately the reckless rollout of the program is already having a negative impact on our regional kindergartens and our children. Staff shortages across the sector have been amplified, and classes are now being combined to compensate for the lack of available teachers. One school has stated that in order to receive kindergarten funding from this government it must now run a mixed-age program that has seen three- and four-year-old kindergarten classes jammed together. Concerned parents have already

reached out to me to say they are worried about how this will impact their child's education and wellbeing. Broadford-based mother Amanda Wallis said:

With limited places in the area and the change being delivered with such short notice, there is currently no other option for these children.

Seymour mother Samantha Irving said:

We weren't told anything beforehand, I got an email on the Thursday saying it would be in effect the following Monday.

My daughter was in one class one week, then moved the next ...

What will happen next year, will she have to still be in the same class learning the same things ...

one year on? These parents were not consulted, and the decision has been made suddenly and without time for the staff, parents or children to prepare. While we want to make kinder accessible for all, this is not the way to do it. The poorly executed kinder reforms are another example of Labor's city-centric policy which ignores the impact it will have on regional Victoria, with a 500-teacher shortfall by 2028.

### **Findon Primary School**

**Lily D'AMBROSIO** (Mill Park – Minister for Climate Action, Minister for Energy and Resources, Minister for the State Electricity Commission) (09:47): I rise today to speak about my recent visits to Findon Primary School. I was delighted to chat with the kids at Findon on their International Women's Day assembly. I talked about fairness and respect, including earning the same pocket money for the same household chores and brothers and sisters being able to play the same sports, and that went down really well. School captains and student representative council representatives, including wellbeing officers, also addressed the assembly and presented on what International Women's Day means to them.

The following week I returned to the school alongside the federal member for Scullin to hear from the school principal Anita Osavkovska about the school's plan for improvements. We received a list from the grade 5 and 6 class meeting of what students thought the school needed, with some excellent suggestions. The school principal has done a fantastic job leading her school team, and I thank her for her dedication to making a wonderful school environment.

### **Mill Park electorate mental health services**

**Lily D'AMBROSIO** (Mill Park – Minister for Climate Action, Minister for Energy and Resources, Minister for the State Electricity Commission) (09:48): I was also very excited to be at the official opening of the new Whittlesea mental health and wellbeing local in South Morang with Minister Ingrid Stitt and Lauren Kathage. Locals aged 26 years and older can now walk in and get the mental health help they need free of charge and without a GP referral or appointment. The service is collaborating with a number of other providers. This will be a fantastic global service to meet the growing demand for mental health care in my community in the Mill Park electorate.

### **International Women's Day**

**James NEWBURY** (Brighton) (09:48): Brighton North Rotary recently celebrated International Women's Day with a sold-out dinner that heard from a panel of inspiring women. The incredible speakers included Chloe Chang and Rebecca Leith, who led the Monash Uni lunar rover team. The team and their pink rover recently placed second in the world rover challenge. A big thankyou to club president Lyn Mortimer for organising the huge event.

### **Hampton Primary School**

**James NEWBURY** (Brighton) (09:49): The students at Hampton Primary School always ask a lot of terrific questions, and it was no exception when I recently visited the grade 6 students. The students wanted to understand Parliament and government better, but it was their insights into policy in the

future that were most powerful. Thank you to school captains Tasman and Emma and their teacher Anne Hostein for the invitation.

### **Recycle Regatta**

**James NEWBURY** (Brighton) (09:49): The Brighton community headed down to Middle Brighton Pier on Sunday for the second annual Recycle Regatta, a Brighton North Rotary event that encourages participants to build floatable recycled boats for mental health. With 30 boats crafted and a hotly contested Titanic Award for the best sinking boat, all had fun. Thank you to Rotary volunteers and club president Lyn Mortimer.

### **Elwood Cricket Club**

**James NEWBURY** (Brighton) (09:49): Finally, the Elwood Cricket Club has had an incredible season, bringing home two premierships. The club won the F-grade flag, captained by Andrew Byrns, and under-16 flag, captained by Wilson Crawford. The club has a proud history, having been formed in 1972. To raise money on formation, the club had a beer bottle drive on Sunday nights at 9 cents a dozen. Special congratulations to club president Luke Stanley on the incredible year.

### **Fred Cullen**

**Anthony CARBINES** (Ivanhoe – Minister for Police, Minister for Crime Prevention, Minister for Racing) (09:50): I rise to give thanks for the life of Mr Fred Cullen OAM. His was a grand life of service, warmth and compassion and he reached the age of 102. He was a former member of the RSL state executive and state council, former long-time president of the Ivanhoe sub-branch, tireless advocate for veterans and war widows and an outstanding appeals collector for over 60 years. He had RSL life membership, received a meritorious service level in 2002 and was made an Order of Australia in 1991.

Fred served in World War II with the 4th Field Regiment Royal Australian Artillery, serving in New Guinea until he was discharged in 1947. Fred also suffered a fractured skull when he was shot in the head by a Japanese sniper at Shaggy Ridge, and the world-renowned plastic surgeon Sir Benjamin Rank patched up Fred at the Heidelberg Repatriation Hospital, where of course he went on to meet his wife. Hundreds gathered at the Mary Immaculate Catholic Church in Ivanhoe to farewell Fred, including CPSU branch secretary Karen Batt and Dr Robert Webster OAM, state president of RSL Victoria.

Fred until he was well into his 90s would get the train from Ivanhoe or Eaglemont to sell badges and poppies at Parliament station, raising over \$1.2 million over so many decades. Even when a fire destroyed the Ivanhoe RSL just before Anzac Day in 2017, Fred was there selling badges and selling poppies. There is no-one else like Fred, and we are really going to miss him. Vale, Freddie. He was one of a kind.

### **Park Orchards Chalet**

**Nicole WERNER** (Warrandyte) (09:51): I rise today to speak in support of the Park Orchards Chalet. The 96-year-old chalet is a unique example of Spanish architecture from the 1920s and had a key role in helping the Australian Army in World War II. During the war the army chose the chalet as a suitable space for a wireless interception and signal station and an espionage training school. The chalet is not only historically important but important to my community in Park Orchards; therefore I echo the calls from the Park Orchards Ratepayers Association and their secretary David Connolly to save the Park Orchards Chalet.

### **Park Orchards market**

**Nicole WERNER** (Warrandyte) (09:52): The Park Orchards Ratepayers Association also runs the wonderful Park Orchards market every month, which I attended only last Saturday. The market is well loved by our community. I always love attending, and I encourage everyone to attend also. It is held

on the third Saturday of every month. A heartfelt thanks to the organisers, in particular Nicole Volk, who is up from 5:30 in the morning to make sure that the market is a success and the rest of the committee from PORA, president Mark Haley, secretary David Connolly and the committee members Serena Williams and Shane Dickenson. Thank you to the Park Orchards Ratepayers Association for all that you do for our community.

### **International Women's Day**

**Melissa HORNE** (Williamstown – Minister for Casino, Gaming and Liquor Regulation, Minister for Local Government, Minister for Ports and Freight, Minister for Roads and Road Safety) (09:53): Last month I put out the call in the Williamstown electorate for people to nominate a woman to be recognised at my International Women's Day celebration, which took place last Friday. My office was flooded with nominations, so much so that the venue had to be changed to accommodate. Not only did the morning celebrate and recognise the incredible work of these women in my electorate it also fostered new connections and strengthened the community. I would like to congratulate all the women nominated, and I look forward to next year's event as well.

### **Rotary Club of Williamstown**

**Melissa HORNE** (Williamstown – Minister for Casino, Gaming and Liquor Regulation, Minister for Local Government, Minister for Ports and Freight, Minister for Roads and Road Safety) (09:53): Last Sunday I had the pleasure of attending the 75th anniversary of the Williamstown Rotary Club. It was clear that over the last 75 years the club has lived and breathed the key value of Rotary, service above self, through fundraising, hosting events and supporting the community. I was really honoured and humbled to be inducted as an honorary member of the club, and I wish them the very best for the next 75 years.

### **Williamstown electorate sporting clubs**

**Melissa HORNE** (Williamstown – Minister for Casino, Gaming and Liquor Regulation, Minister for Local Government, Minister for Ports and Freight, Minister for Roads and Road Safety) (09:54): Finally, with Hobsons Bay City Council starting to set their budget for the upcoming year I was really pleased to lend my support to two key petitions: one for Altona East Phoenix Soccer Club to upgrade their facilities at Paisley Park and one for Newport Storm to upgrade their facilities at AW Bond Reserve. These are two clubs that are going through enormous growth, but their facilities have not kept pace with the needs in the community. Keeping communities actively engaged in sport by creating a safe and welcoming environment for everyone to be involved is absolutely paramount, and I am proud to lend my support to these two key clubs in my community.

### **Mornington Peninsula parking**

**Chris CREWETHER** (Mornington) (09:54): I raise my opposition to the Mornington Peninsula shire's paid parking trial around Schnapper Point, Sunnyside Beach and elsewhere. I have been concerned about this and have had many complaints for a while but, in the context of the Briars issue, held off raising it. In August last year I warned councillors in my meeting with them about my opposition to it and the potential consequences before it started. Since starting it has had a number of consequences. I met with the owners of The Rocks and SPK cafe at Mornington Pier, who have reported a 20 to 25 per cent drop in revenue. I heard reports of a wedding party who went for photos getting fined, which will not help tourism. Motorcyclists who might normally stop for a quick coffee for 20 minutes are avoiding it. Community groups are avoiding using the yacht rooms. People are driving around looking for more than 15 minutes for a park and getting a fine. Those bringing people with a disability down to the beach or Mornington Pier are getting fined as well, and older residents who normally like to go down at sunset or at other times are avoiding it altogether. I have seen the playground nearly empty at times when it is normally busy. We have had a flow-on effect to businesses at the top of Main Street like ice cream places, fish and chip shops and more. The issue is, particularly for older residents, it is not easy for them to get a resident permit and it is not easy to pay for parking

on an app, particularly for those without a mobile phone. People either do not like to pay or do not like the inconvenience of paying, and as a consequence they go elsewhere. The idea was to use tourists to add to rates, but it is actually impacting locals, local business and local expenditure. I call on the trial to be completed.

### **Greensborough College**

**Colin BROOKS** (Bundoora – Minister for Development Victoria, Minister for Precincts, Minister for Creative Industries) (09:56): One of the great local secondary colleges in my electorate is Greensborough College, and I have been proud over the years to be part of a government that has invested tens of millions of dollars rebuilding this great school, making sure that the high quality of the teaching and the community spirit is matched by the high quality of learning and sporting facilities.

Last week I had the opportunity to join the principal Ms Pauline Barker, school council president Ms Kate Lansbury and many from the school community to celebrate the new student leaders for 2024. In particular I would like to congratulate this year's college captains Will Baker and Olivia Hickey, college vice-captains Charli D'Onofrio and Jaye Sun and junior college captains Dakota Edmonds and Koby McDonald. I would also like to congratulate all the other students that have been given positions of leadership and important responsibilities at the college, including year level captains, college sports captains and arts captains.

As Minister for Creative Industries I was particularly impressed with the performances on the night of some of the talented musicians at Greensborough College, including their renditions of Stevie Wonder's *Isn't She Lovely* and Nirvana's *Come As You Are*. They were great. Congratulations once again to all students that have been given leadership positions. I know each and every one of you will do a fantastic job representing your school, and I applaud our Greensborough community.

### **Abbotsford Street, North Melbourne**

**Ellen SANDELL** (Melbourne) (09:57): A few months ago I met with North Melbourne residents on Abbotsford Street to see for myself how dangerous the road has become for drivers but also cyclists and pedestrians. There have been too many cases of near misses and collisions following the new design of the road, which includes installation of concrete tram separators and separated bike lanes. While these measures should improve safety, the two are just not working well together, and the road is a classic case of different levels of government not talking to each other and not consulting residents, and it is creating chaos. I have written to the department and the minister several times and still nothing has been done, which is deeply disappointing. The department and the City of Melbourne urgently need to come down to Abbotsford Street to see the issues for themselves so they can find a solution that works for everyone to keep everyone safe.

### **Melbourne Youth Orchestras**

**Ellen SANDELL** (Melbourne) (09:58): Also, today I want to congratulate 13 young people from my electorate who have been accepted into the Melbourne Youth Orchestras ensemble program this year, including Arthur, Joanna, Samantha, Tiana, Angus, Matilda, Dash, Tom, Archer and En. Congratulations on your achievements in music to date. I hope you learn so much and have a great time making friends and making music. The Melbourne Youth Orchestras provide a music program to those who might not otherwise be able to access it, including public school students who do not have adequate music programs, students with disability and regional and lower income students, so I was disappointed to hear the Victorian government have cut their funding, but I very much hope that it will be reinstated in this budget.

### **Carrum electorate school leaders**

**Sonya KILKENNY** (Carrum – Minister for Planning, Minister for the Suburbs) (09:59): Congratulations to the 2024 school captains at Lyndhurst Primary School, Khanav Singh and Ayesha Pawar. Congratulations to the 2024 school captains at Seaford North Primary School, Rose Parker,

Benji Potter, Darcy Roberts and Yumi Leys. You will be outstanding role models and ambassadors for your schools. I know you will work hard to support your peers to be the absolute best they can be.

#### **Birdman Rally**

**Sonya KILKENNY** (Carrum – Minister for Planning, Minister for the Suburbs) (09:59): Congratulations and well done to Ruth Littler and the other Girl Guides from Carrum, Jessica Rees, Niamh Cornell and Caitlin Cartwright, for an outstanding effort in the Moomba Birdman rally. Ruth was the Birdman's youngest pilot and, with her support crew and fellow guides from Carrum, raised more than \$4000 for State Schools' Relief. To Ruth and the girls: thank you for your compassion and determination to make a difference, not to mention your courage. You are inspiring.

#### **Campbell Harrison**

**Sonya KILKENNY** (Carrum – Minister for Planning, Minister for the Suburbs) (09:59): Congratulations to Campbell Harrison for qualifying to represent Australia at the Paris Olympics this year in sport climbing. This exceptional young man has worked so hard to achieve this goal. He could not have done it without the incredible support of his beautiful family and my near neighbours in Seaford, mum Yvette, dad Russell and his brave sister Emily.

#### **State Emergency Service Frankston unit**

**Sonya KILKENNY** (Carrum – Minister for Planning, Minister for the Suburbs) (10:00): Thank you to the members and volunteers at SES Frankston for all that you do to keep our community safe. Your dedication, commitment and unconditional care and compassion for our community make a real and impactful difference in the lives of so many people. I am delighted that your new facility on Ballarto Road is now finally complete, and I am proud to have been able to help deliver this base for you.

#### **Education First Youth Foyers**

**Jade BENHAM** (Mildura) (10:00): Last week I met with Mallee Family Care CEO Teresa Jayet to discuss their Education First Youth Foyer project. Education First Youth Foyers offer stable, affordable housing to support young people who wish to study and are unable to live at home. This could mean completing their final years of secondary school or undertaking an apprenticeship or a TAFE or university course. Teresa says it is critical that the next foyer is built in Mildura, so I urge the government to back their application for this centre and change the lives of so many young people in Mildura and surrounding districts.

#### **Lifeline**

**Jade BENHAM** (Mildura) (10:01): Last week I also met with Lifeline Loddon Mallee CEO Lisa Renato. It has been 12 years, but after many, many years of hard work and fundraising Stephen Hegedus and his wife Leanne, along with the dedicated committee, were able to open their Irymple call centre. Volunteers have been swift to put their hands up, although they do need more, and of course they need more funding in this year's state budget to save more lives.

In terms of Victorian government funding, five of the eight Lifeline centres in Victoria have direct service agreements with the Department of Families, Fairness and Housing of about 150 grand a year to meet a target of 10,440 calls. One of the Lifeline centres, Lifeline Melbourne, receives over \$790,000, with a target of answering 55,000 calls in their agreement with the department. Lifeline estimates each call to cost approximately \$39. Existing funding therefore does not meet the service demand for current KPIs with government, which we estimate to cost around \$4.1 million. To be able to meet the actual level of demand from the state, Victorian Lifeline centres need to boost their capacity significantly, and this requires wider support from the state government.

**World Down Syndrome Day**

**Katie HALL** (Footscray) (10:02): Today is World Down Syndrome Day, and today we raise awareness about the rights and inclusion of people with Down syndrome, with the theme 'End the stereotypes'. Today I would like to pay tribute to an exceptional young woman from my electorate, Greta, who is here in the chamber today. In Greta's words, she was born with something extra – she has mosaic Down syndrome. Mosaicism, or mosaic Down syndrome, is diagnosed when there is a mixture of two types of cells with 46 and 47 chromosomes. Greta does a great job educating her school community about having something extra through sharing her story. She loves netball, footy and going on holidays, and of course she is a Swiftie.

I first met Greta's mum Lizzie when I called her out of the blue as her local MP, and we had a wonderful chat about mosaicism. When I was pregnant with my daughter Matilda, like many expectant parents I did a non-invasive prenatal test and was told it came back with a trisomy, and it ended up being confined to the placenta. Greta, thank you for sharing your story with your fellow students at Yarraville West Primary School and to your mum for all the support she provides through the podcast *One Screened Every Minute*, presenting in-depth conversations with people about how they navigate decision-making after receiving unexpected non-invasive prenatal screening tests, which can often raise more questions than answers. Thank you, Greta, for everything you do.

**Ramadan**

**Dylan WIGHT** (Tarneit) (10:04): In this sacred month of Ramadan we extend our heartfelt support and respect to our local Muslim community as they observe a period of fasting, prayer and reflection. Ramadan, a time of deep spiritual growth and compassion, reminds us all of values, patience, empathy and community service. We recognise the significance of this holy month and admire the commitment and dedication displayed through fasting from dawn until sunset, engaging in charitable acts and gathering with loved ones to break the fast each evening.

Tarneit is enriched and strengthened by the diverse cultures and faiths that coexist within it. We stand in solidarity with our Muslim neighbours and use this time to call for the peace, kindness and mutual respect that Ramadan embodies. Let us all embrace this opportunity to foster understanding and unity, showing unwavering support for one another in these times. I would like to particularly thank the three mosques in my electorate – Melbourne Grand Mosque, Virgin Mary Mosque and Golden Wattle Mosque – and deeply thank my Muslim community for the many iftar invitations that I have received. Ramadan Mubarak to all those who are observing. May this Ramadan bring peace, health and happiness to you and your families.

**Karroong Kanyool**

**Chris COUZENS** (Geelong) (10:05): A lot has been happening in Geelong, and it was no different over this past weekend. I had the privilege of opening the new youth hub, Karroong Kanyool, meaning 'home of the young', at Wathaurong Aboriginal Co-operative. The funding for the hub was supported by the Allan government with a \$1.6 million grant from the Aboriginal community infrastructure program. It provides an opportunity for Aboriginal young people to connect to their culture; for access to clinical, social and emotional wellbeing services and support; and for young people to have their own gathering place. I congratulate Wathaurong for their incredible work to make this happen. I acknowledge and thank Simon Flagg and Lily and Jordan Edwards for their passion and commitment.

**Kardinia Park**

**Chris COUZENS** (Geelong) (10:06): Saturday night was the official opening of stage 5 of Kardinia Park stadium and the Joel Selwood Stand. Geelong was buzzing all week in the lead-up to the game, and what a night it was, with the Cats winning by eight points in front of 40,000 fans, who packed out the stadium. The crowd went wild when Joel walked out on the oval and kicked the footy through the goal to signal the best regional stadium in the country is open for business. I congratulate the Kardinia Park trust for their work on delivering stage 5 on behalf of the Allan government.

**Marshall Cricket Club**

**Chris COUZENS** (Geelong) (10:06): Of course local sport is just as important, so I headed to Marshall Cricket Club to officially open their new training facilities – four turf wickets, four hard wickets, netting, run-ups and a new storage facility. This was funded in partnership between the Allan government and the federal government to ensure a local community get what they deserve. I also want to acknowledge the 15,000 – *(Time expired)*

**Goodstart Early Learning, Reservoir**

**Nathan LAMBERT** (Preston) (10:07): Goodstart Early Learning centre on Gertz Avenue in Reservoir recently received two grants from this Victorian Labor government, one to build a more inclusive playground and one for a new bush kinder program. I would like to take this chance to acknowledge the great leaders of that centre, Fatima Khatoun and Lina Mostafa, and thank all the staff there, including Suzie, who was cooking up some very nutritious food when we were there recently.

**Darusalam Society**

**Nathan LAMBERT** (Preston) (10:07): Last week I visited the Darusalam centre along with the Minister for Multicultural Affairs, the Minister for Police and the wonderful and hardworking member for Northcote, who has just joined us in the chamber. I would like to thank all the team there, including Yusuf Osman and Maryam Sheikh Hussein, for the great work they do for the community and for sharing with us some thoughts on some important issues.

**Reservoir police station**

**Nathan LAMBERT** (Preston) (10:07): Separately, I would like to acknowledge the great work of Reservoir police. There is still a bit of a concern in the community about the movement of the station from Edwardes Street to Mahoneys Road, but I would really like to thank them for the great work they do out of that new station, led by Senior Sergeant Mark Van Rooyen. I would in particular like to give a shout-out to Sergeant Nick Konstantinidis and also Senior Constable Vahid Kamali, who I understand led some recent important work relating to illegal behaviour at Edwardes Lake Park. The community are grateful for their efforts.

**Preston Reservoir Bowls Club**

**Nathan LAMBERT** (Preston) (10:08): Finally, a shout-out to Stephen King, Carmen Frawley and everyone at Preston Reservoir Bowls Club. Long may their great work in the community continue.

**Community safety**

**Paul HAMER** (Box Hill) (10:08): 21 March is Harmony Day, which celebrates our cultural diversity, but this year has been anything but harmonious for many in Victoria's Jewish community. Death threats, vandalism and promoting boycotts of local businesses, terminations of commissions and employment, public shaming of individuals, use of antisemitic tropes and slurs, online and in-person vilification, harassment of students at schools and universities and individuals being made to feel so unsafe in their own communities that they have needed to move to the other side of the city: these are all examples of what members of the Victorian Jewish community have had to endure since 7 October simply for being Jewish.

No Australian should be vilified or harassed on account of their religious or ethnic identity or the actions of a foreign government. This hatred stands against everything we pride ourselves on as a multicultural society. Those in the extreme left who are harassing and vilifying Jews or advocating for that harassment to continue should be condemned by all members of this house. Calling out antisemitism does not negate the immense pain caused by the war, either for Israelis who were killed on 7 October or continue to be held hostage or for the thousands of innocent Palestinians who have died or are suffering as a consequence of the ongoing fighting.



The last five months have been an incredibly distressing time for both our Jewish and our Islamic communities as we have watched the crisis in Israel and Gaza unfold. My heart goes out to everyone who is experiencing loss and grief as a result of this war, but this cannot provide an excuse for acts of hate on our own shores which not only are unacceptable but actively work against the peace and coexistence we all wish to achieve.

### **Uniting Place community art exhibition**

**Gary MAAS** (Narre Warren South) (10:10): I recently had the pleasure of representing the Minister for Carers and Volunteers at the opening of the Hampton Park Uniting Place annual art exhibition. The exhibition showcased and celebrated the creativity of local artists, with over 100 pieces of art being exhibited. The event is run by volunteers, who put their valuable time into supporting our local community artists, but it is also used as a form of outreach, with art as a connection into our community. Many in attendance enjoyed the different artworks, the food and the live music from local performers. It has been an annual event supporting artists so that they can showcase their work, but all proceeds are used to further support the more needy in our community. Thanks to Lyn McBain and the arts committee at the church for a very well organised and well attended event.

### **Reverend Ric Holland**

**Gary MAAS** (Narre Warren South) (10:10): Also at the church recently I attended the retirement ceremony for Reverend Ric Holland. Reverend Ric worked for 53 years. He has served communities in the UK and in Australia, finishing his last five years at Hampton Park. His social justice work is inspired and has made a real difference to many here and abroad. From Lort Smith and the Melbourne City Mission he pioneered the Sleep at the G, and he also performed the first wedding under new marriage equality laws at St Michael's Uniting Church in Melbourne. He is a giant in the social justice world. Happy retirement, Ric.

### **Friends of Steele Creek**

**Ben CARROLL** (Niddrie – Minister for Education, Minister for Medical Research) (10:11): It is my pleasure to rise to make a statement on the Friends of Steele Creek. At the outset I want to congratulate the retiring president Helen van den Berg, who for several decades has been a warrior for cleaner urban waterways in Melbourne's north-west. Helen and her partner Jos have been dedicated to making Melbourne's north-west what it is, one of the most environmentally friendly places around. It was my pleasure to meet the new president Peter Hoyne, fittingly at Perry's cafe down at Valley Lake Boulevard, which is something that Helen fought so hard for when the former Liberal government under Jeff Kennett wanted to make the estate there a toxic waste site. It is now a beautiful living community, and to be there at Perry's cafe – we worked so hard to make sure it became a cafe for the local environment and not additional housing – was good. But more than that, I was there to announce \$200,000 to improve the habitat and water quality of Steele Creek. With the new president of Friends of Steele Creek Peter Hoyne it was really important to highlight what this money will do. It will provide more cool, green spaces and better nutrition for the urban creeks, rivers and waterways down at the Valley Lake estate. This grant can be used for the local fauna, to increase the floristic diversity of the area and to plant aquatic and semi-aquatic plants to improve the water quality at Steele Creek.

### ***Business of the house***

#### **Notices of motion**

**Colin BROOKS** (Bundoora – Minister for Development Victoria, Minister for Precincts, Minister for Creative Industries) (10:13): I move:

That the consideration of government business, notice of motion 1, be postponed until later this day.

**Motion agreed to.**

*Bills***Commercial and Industrial Property Tax Reform Bill 2024***Statement of compatibility*

**Tim PALLAS** (Werribee – Treasurer, Minister for Industrial Relations, Minister for Economic Growth) (10:14): In accordance with the Charter of Human Rights and Responsibilities Act 2006, I table a statement of compatibility in relation to the Commercial and Industrial Property Tax Reform Bill 2024:

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 Commercial and Industrial Property Tax Reform Bill 2024.

In my opinion, the Commercial and Industrial Property Tax Reform Bill 2024 (**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**

This Bill reforms the taxation of commercial and industrial property by introducing the commercial and industrial property tax (**CIPT**). In doing so, the Bill also make consequential amendments to the *Duties Act 2000* (**Duties Act**), the *Taxation Administration Act 1997* (**TA Act**), the *Treasury Corporation of Victoria Act 1992* (**TCV Act**), the *Heritage Act 2017*, the *Property Law Act 1958* (**Property Law Act**), *Retail Leases Act 2003* (**Retail Leases Act**), the *Sale of Land Act 1962* (**Sale of Land Act**) and the *Valuation of Land Act 1960* (**Valuation of Land Act**).

Many provisions of the Bill do not engage the human rights listed in the Charter because they either do not affect natural persons, or they operate beneficially in relation to natural persons.

**Human rights issues**

The rights under the Charter that are relevant to the Bill are the right to property, the right to privacy, the right to freedom of movement, the right to a fair hearing, the presumption of innocence and the right against self-incrimination.

**Right to property: section 20**

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

*Imposition of CIPT*

Parts 2 and 3 of the Bill prescribe the regime by which the CIPT reform scheme operates. Clauses in these Parts engage the right to property to the extent that a natural person taxpayer may be liable to CIPT.

The imposition of CIPT is not arbitrary because it is precisely formulated in Parts 2 and 3 of the Bill. These clauses are adequately accessible, clear and certain, and sufficiently precise to enable affected natural person taxpayers to inform themselves of their legal obligations and to regulate their conduct accordingly. Furthermore, taxpayers will have the protections provided by the TA Act including rights of objection, review, appeal and refund of overpaid tax.

*Change of use duty: Duties Act*

Clause 37 inserts section 69AR into the Duties Act which imposes duty in respect of certain dutiable transactions over property which has entered the CIPT reform but subsequently undergoes a change of use.

Clause 41 inserts section 89FB into the Duties Act which imposes landholder duty in respect of certain relevant acquisitions where property in which the landholder has an interest has entered the CIPT reform but subsequently undergoes a change of use.

The right to property may be engaged by these amendments as natural person taxpayers may become liable to duty.

To the extent that a natural person's property rights are affected by the above amendments to the Duties Act, any limitation is in accordance with the law, which is clearly articulated, not arbitrary, and sufficiently precise to enable affected natural person taxpayers to inform themselves of their legal obligations and to regulate their conduct accordingly. Any deprivation of property arising from the payment of duty under the change of use provisions is further justifiable since these provisions are anti-avoidance in nature.

*Transition loan program: TCV Act*

Clause 57 of the Bill inserts provisions relating to the transition loan program into the TCV Act. Under this new Part 3C of the TCV Act, natural persons may apply for and enter into a transition loan with the Treasury Corporation of Victoria (TCV), and such loan is to be used for the payment of duty under the Duties Act on transactions that result in land entering the CIPT reform. A natural person who is a borrower under a transition loan would be required to repay amounts to TCV under that transition loan. Further, under the proposed section 36S(1) of the TCV Act, TCV will have a first statutory charge on the borrower's interest in the land to secure any amounts owing under the transition loan. Under the proposed section 36U of the TCV Act, in the event of non-payment by a borrower, TCV may enforce a statutory charge and the enforcement of that statutory charge may result in the sale of the property by TCV.

The right to property may be engaged by these amendments as natural persons may become liable to repay amounts to TCV under a transition loan agreement. Further, natural persons may be deprived of their property if they do not repay the transition loan when it is due, as the property may be sold as part of the enforcement process.

Transition loan repayments and the enforcement of the statutory charge are not arbitrary because natural persons will enter into the loan agreements voluntarily and repayment terms and enforcement terms will be agreed between the relevant natural person(s) and TCV in the applicable transition loan agreement and by virtue of the proposed amendments to the TCV Act under the Bill. Natural person borrowers under the transition loan scheme will have the requisite information to inform themselves of their legal obligations and to regulate their conduct accordingly.

*Investigative powers of tax officers*

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

The powers of an authorised officer include, under section 76 of the TA Act, the power to seize a document or thing where the officer has reason to believe or suspect it is necessary to do so to prevent its concealment, loss, destruction or alteration. Similarly, section 81 of the TA Act provides that an authorised officer may seize a storage device and the equipment necessary to access information on the device if the authorised officer believes, on reasonable grounds, that the storage device contains information relevant to the administration of a taxation law and it is not otherwise practicable to access the information on the device.

Sections 76 and 81 of the TA Act, as they will apply to the Bill, do not limit the right in section 20 of the Charter because they are sufficiently confined and structured, accessible, and formulated precisely such that any deprivation occurs in accordance with the law. Further, these provisions guard against any permanent interference with property where no offence has been committed. For example, the TA Act provides that reasonable steps must be taken to return a document or thing that is seized if the reason for its seizure no longer exists (section 84), and the document or thing seized must be returned within the retention period of 60 days, unless the retention period is extended by an order of the Magistrates Court (section 85).

**Right to privacy: section 13**

Section 13(a) of the Charter provides that every person has the right to enjoy their private life, free from interference. This right applies to the collection of personal information by public authorities. An unlawful or arbitrary interference to an individual's privacy will limit this right.

*Notification requirements*

Clause 33 of the Bill requires persons served with a notice of assessment of CIPT to notify the Commissioner of State Revenue (**Commissioner**) of certain errors or omissions in the notice within 60 days after the date of issue of the notice of assessment. Clause 34 of the Bill requires owners of tax reform scheme land to notify the Commissioner within 30 days if the land or any part of it undergoes a change of use.

However, to the extent that the collection of this personal information may result in interference with a natural person's privacy, any such interference will be lawful and not arbitrary as these provisions do not require that a person's personal information be published, and only require the provision of information necessary to achieve the purpose of accurate and correct CIPT taxation.

*Permitted disclosures under the TCV Act*

Clause 57 of the Bill inserts new section 36W into the TCV Act, allowing TCV to disclose to any person information about whether any land is subject to a statutory charge under the new section 36S(1) of the TCV Act or any information obtained by TCV under or in connection with the transition loan program.

To the extent that TCV's discretionary power to disclose transition loan program or statutory charge information relates to natural persons and engages the right to privacy, I consider that engagement to be neither arbitrary nor unlawful. TCV's power to disclose information obtained under or in connection with the transition loan program does not extend to information obtained by TCV from a tax officer under section 92 of the TA Act. These amendments ensure that TCV can administer the transition loan program in accordance with legislation.

*Investigative powers of tax officers and secrecy provisions under the TA Act*

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

- Section 73 of the TA Act provides that the Commissioner may, by written notice, require a person to provide the Commissioner with information, produce a document or thing in the person's possession, or to attend and give evidence under oath.
- Section 76 of the TA Act which provides for entering and searching premises, as outlined above.
- Section 77 of the TA Act provides that an authorised officer may apply to a magistrate for a search warrant in relation to a premises, including a residence, if the authorised officer considers on reasonable grounds that there is, or may be within the next 72 hours, on the premises a particular thing that may be relevant to the administration or execution of a taxation law.
- Section 81 of the TA Act which provides for obtaining information from a storage device, as outlined above.
- Section 86 of the TA Act provides that an authorised officer may, to the extent it is reasonably necessary to do so for the administration or execution of a taxation law, require a person to give information, produce or provide documents and things, and give reasonable assistance, to the authorised officer.

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

Section 92 of the TA Act permits a tax officer to make certain disclosures of information obtained in the administration of a taxation law. Specifically, section 92(1) permits the disclosure of such information for several different purposes, including in accordance with a requirement imposed under an Act, in connection with the administration or execution of a taxation law, to an authorised recipient such as the Ombudsman or a police officer of or above the rank of Inspector, or in connection with the administration of a legal proceeding arising out of a recognised law.

The types of information that may be disclosed include, but are not limited to, information regarding land ownership, tax liabilities and payments by taxpayers, taxation defaults by taxpayers, and applications for objection, appeal and review under Part 10 of the TA Act by taxpayers.

Permitted disclosures are strictly confined to their legitimate purposes and are subject to considerable legislative safeguards. In particular, section 94 of the TA Act prohibits 'secondary disclosure', that is, on-disclosure of any information provided by a tax officer under section 92, unless it is for the purpose of enforcing a law or protecting public revenue and the Commissioner has consented, or a disclosure made with the consent of the person to whom the information relates (or at the request of a person acting on behalf of that person). Further, section 95 provides that an authorised officer is not required to disclose or produce in court any such information unless it is necessary for the purposes of the administration of a taxation law, or to enable a person to exercise a function imposed on the person by law.

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

*Permitted disclosures to TCV under the TA Act*

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

Consequential amendments to the TA Act pursuant to clause 48 of the Bill will now prescribe TCV as an authorised recipient where the disclosure is for the purpose of, or in connection with, the transition loan program introduced by the Bill. There will be instances where a tax officer (as defined in section 3(1) of the TA Act) may disclose information protected under section 91(1) of the TA Act to TCV to assist in its administration of the transition loan program.

To the extent that a tax officer's discretionary power to disclose protected information to TCV engages the right to privacy, I consider that engagement to be neither arbitrary nor unlawful. These amendments ensure that the Commissioner and TCV can exercise their respective regulatory and administrative functions in accordance with legislation.

*Property clearance certificates: TA Act*

Clause 49 of the Bill amends section 95AA of the TA Act to provide for the inclusion of information relating to CIPT on property clearance certificates. This may engage the right to privacy to the extent that natural persons' information may be disclosed.

Only an owner, mortgagee or bona fide purchaser may apply for a property clearance certificate under section 95AA of the TA Act. The Commissioner is required to disclose the amount payable with respect to any charge on the land for unpaid CIPT, whether the land is CIPT reform scheme land and, if so, when it became or will become subject to CIPT. The Commissioner may also provide additional information. This may include, for example, an amount of CIPT that has not yet been assessed, or information relating to another debt payable to the Commissioner under a revenue law with respect to that property.

To the extent that information that may be disclosed in a property clearance certificate is personal information, the right to privacy is engaged. However, the right to privacy is not limited. The disclosure contemplated by this amendment will not be arbitrary, nor will it constitute unlawful interference. The disclosure of this information will be expressly permitted by and subject to the secrecy provisions of the TA Act.

*Section 32 statements: Sale of Land Act*

Clause 63 of the Bill amends section 32A(c) of the Sale of Land Act to require certain land information relevant to CIPT to be disclosed in vendor statements. This may engage the right to privacy. To the extent vendors of land will be required to disclose this information to prospective purchasers, this is not unreasonable or arbitrary, as the amendment helps to reduce information imbalances between vendors and purchasers in property transactions.

**Freedom of movement: Section 12**

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

As set out above, the administration of CIPT may involve the exercise of investigative powers provided in section 73 of the TA Act. Among other things, this section provides that the Commissioner or an authorised officer may exercise their power to direct a natural person to attend and give evidence in relation to a matter. Accordingly, a person's right to move freely within Victoria may be engaged.

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

To the extent that section 73 of the TA Act limits the right of freedom of movement, any such limit is demonstrably justified under section 7(2) of the Charter, as the Commissioner's power to compel a person's attendance to give evidence will in certain circumstances be essential to obtain the information needed for the proper administration of the CIPT, and for the collection of reportable information in accordance with the TA Act.

**Right to fair hearing: section 24(1)**

The right to a fair hearing is protected under section 24 of the Charter which provides that a person charged with a criminal offence or a party to a civil proceeding have the right to a fair hearing. The right to a fair hearing applies to both courts and tribunals, such as the Victorian Civil and Administrative Tribunal. Generally, the right to a fair hearing is concerned with procedural fairness and access to a court or tribunal, rather than the substantive fairness of a decision of a court or tribunal determined on the merits of a case.

Clause 55 of the Bill inserts a new subsection (13) into section 135 of the TA Act to provide that it is the intention of sections 5, 12(4), 18(1), 96(2) and 100(4) of the TA Act, as those sections apply after the commencement of clause 55, to alter or vary section 85 of the *Constitution Act 1975*. These provisions preclude the Supreme Court from entertaining proceedings of a kind to which these sections apply, except as provided by those sections.

The central purpose of this Bill is to introduce the CIPT and provide for its administration under the TA Act consistent with other Victorian taxes. Section 5 of the TA Act defines the meaning of a non-reviewable

decision in relation to the TA Act, which will apply to the Bill. 'Non-reviewable' is referred to in sections 12(4) and 100(4) of the TA Act.

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

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

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

A power is provided to the Commissioner under section 100 of the TA Act, which provides that Commissioner with discretion to allow an objection to be lodged even though it is out of time. This decision is non-reviewable to ensure the efficient administration of the TA Act and to enable outstanding issues relating to assessments to be concluded expeditiously.

To the extent that limiting the jurisdiction of the Supreme Court may limit a person's fair hearing rights as protected under section 24(1) of the Charter, any such limit would be demonstrably justified. The classification of certain decisions under the TA Act as 'non-reviewable' is directly related to the particular statutory purpose and context of those particular decisions, and the TA Act provides an alternative regime for dealing with objections, which is necessary for the efficient discharge of the Commissioner's functions under the TA Act, which will now include the administration of the Bill as a taxation law.

#### **Presumption of innocence: section 25(1)**

The right in section 25(1) is engaged where a statutory provision shifts the burden of proof onto an accused in a criminal proceeding, so that the accused is required to prove matters to establish, or raise evidence to suggest, that the accused person is not guilty of an offence.

#### *Sale of Land Act amendments and TA Act defence of reasonable excuse*

The right to be presumed innocent may be considered relevant to clause 62 of the Bill as well as several offences under the TA Act which place an evidential burden on the defendant.

Clause 62 of the Bill amends offences in the Sale of Land Act to enforce a prohibition on passing on CIPT liability under certain arrangements over land, e.g. contracts of sale. The right to be presumed innocent may be considered relevant to these strict liability offences which place an evidential burden on the defendant to rely on a defence such as the defence of honest and reasonable mistake.

As outlined above, section 73 of the TA Act empowers the Commissioner to issue a written notice requiring a person to provide information, produce a document or thing, or give evidence. Section 73A provides that the Commissioner may certify to the Supreme Court that a person has failed to comply with a requirement of a notice issued under section 73. The Supreme Court may inquire into the case and may order the person to comply with the requirement in the notice. Section 73A(4) provides that a person who, without reasonable excuse, fails to comply with an order of the Supreme Court under section 73A(2), is guilty of an offence.

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

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

Although these provisions require a defendant to raise evidence of a matter to rely on a defence, they impose an evidential, rather than legal burden. Courts in other jurisdictions have generally taken the approach that an evidential onus on a defendant to raise a defence does not limit the presumption of innocence. The defences and excuses provided relate to matters within the knowledge of the defendant, which is appropriate in

circumstances where placing the onus on the prosecution would involve the proof of a negative which would be very difficult.

*Failure to exercise due diligence: TA Act*

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

Section 130C(3) provides that it is a defence to a charge for an officer of a body corporate to prove that they exercised due diligence to prevent the commission of the offence by the body corporate. The defence in 130C(3) of the TA Act imposes a legal burden on the defendant. The imposition of a legal burden to rely on the defence of due diligence is compatible with the right to presumption of innocence in section 25(1) of the Charter, as any limits on the right will be reasonably justified under section 7(2) of the Charter. Section 130C applies only to a narrow range of offences of dishonesty, and only to officers of a body corporate as persons who carry on a specific role and possess significant authority and influence over the body corporate. Courts in other jurisdictions have generally taken the approach that an evidential onus on a defendant to raise a defence does not limit the presumption of innocence. Further, a defence is available for the benefit of an accused to escape liability where they have taken reasonable steps to ensure compliance in respect of what could otherwise be an absolute or strict liability offence.

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

Such persons are best placed to prove whether they exercised due diligence. Therefore section 130C(3) of the TA Act as it applies to the Bill is compatible with the right to the presumption of innocence protected by the Charter.

**Rights in criminal proceedings: section 25(2)(k)**

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

Section 86 of the TA Act, which will apply to the Bill, is outlined above. It is an offence to fail to comply with a requirement made or to answer a question under this section. Section 87(1) limits the right to protection against self-incrimination by providing that a person is not excused from answering a question, providing information, or producing a document or thing on the ground that to do so might tend to incriminate the person or make the person liable to a penalty. Section 87(2) provides that, if a person objects to answering a question, providing information, or producing a document or thing, the answer, information, document or thing is not admissible in any criminal proceeding other than proceedings for an offence against a taxation law, or proceedings for an offence in the nature of perjury.

Section 87(1) of the TA Act is a reasonable limit on the right to protection against self-incrimination under section 7(2) of the Charter. The ability of an authorised officer to require a person to give information or answer questions will be necessary for the proper administration of the Bill. Section 87(2) of the TA Act only authorises the admission of evidence obtained under section 87(1) in an offence against a taxation law, or proceedings for perjury, and otherwise preserves both the direct use immunity and derivative use immunity. This section directly promotes the objective of the TA Act, which is to facilitate the administration and enforcement of Victoria's taxation laws and is a significant public purpose.

Further, with respect to the power of an authorised officer to require the production of documents, I note that at common law, the protection accorded to the compelled production of pre-existing documents is

considerably weaker than the protection accorded to oral testimony or to documents brought into existence to comply with a request for information.

There are no less restrictive means available to achieve the purpose of enabling the proper administration of the Bill, as providing an immunity that applies to the offence of perjury or an offence under the Bill or the TA Act would unreasonably obstruct the role of the authorised person to investigate compliance with the Bill.

#### Conclusion

For these reasons, in my opinion, the provisions of the Bill are compatible with the rights contained in sections 12, 13, 20, 24(1), 25(1) and 25(2)(k) of the Charter.

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

#### *Second reading*

**Tim PALLAS** (Werribee – Treasurer, Minister for Industrial Relations, Minister for Economic Growth) (10:14): I move:

That this bill be now read a second time.

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

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

##### **Introduction**

It is with great pleasure that I rise to speak in support of this Bill, a Bill which will reform the taxation landscape of commercial and industrial property in Victoria by moving away from stamp duty and towards a more efficient tax.

I am honoured to be a part of the first government in Victoria's history with a plan to abolish stamp duty on commercial and industrial properties in this State.

Replacing stamp duty on property purchases with a broad land-based tax has long been supported by a wide range of independent think tanks, policy commentators, industry groups and inquiries.

This is a transformational reform. It isn't a simple adjustment to tax settings. It is a different way of taxing commercial and industrial property that will support business to grow and expand.

It will make it easier for businesses to expand or set up in the best location, for example closer to their customers or where there is a growing workforce.

Economic modelling suggests that after 40 years, this reform will have added 12,600 jobs to Victoria's economy and have increased the size of the Victorian real economy by a cumulative \$50 billion in net present value terms.

##### **Overview of the Bill**

The Bill introduces a new principal Act to provide the necessary legal powers to effectively introduce and administer this reform, and to help transition commercial and industrial properties from stamp duty to a more efficient tax. The Bill also amends other acts including the *Duties Act 2000*, the *Treasury Corporation of Victoria Act 1992*, the *Taxation Administration Act 1997*, the *Valuation of Land Act 1960*, the *Heritage Act 2017*, the *Property Law Act 1958*, the *Retail Leases Act 2003*, and the *Sale of Land Act 1962*.

This Bill follows the public announcement of the reform in the 2023–24 Budget. External consultation with key stakeholders and industry groups has been undertaken to ensure the design of the reform supports property owners through the transition.

##### **Policy design**

The new tax system proposed under this Bill will apply to commercial and industrial property transactions with a contract and settlement date on or after 1 July 2024. For these properties, stamp duty will be paid one final time and Commercial and Industrial Property Tax (property tax) will be payable 10 years after the final stamp duty payment, regardless of whether that property has transacted again.

If a property is sold again, stamp duty will not apply on that transaction if the property continues to be used for a commercial or industrial purpose.



To smooth the transition to the new tax system, the Government will give eligible purchasers of commercial or industrial property the option of accessing a government-facilitated transition loan to finance the upfront stamp duty if they desire.

The reform is designed to be revenue neutral over time, with the property tax replacing revenue from stamp duty.

*Entry into the tax reform scheme*

The Bill defines eligibility for entry into the reform scheme and defines when transactions will bring property into the scheme.

The reform will commence on 1 July 2024. People who own commercial or industrial property prior to that date and do not transact will not be directly affected.

For the first time a commercial or industrial property is transacted with a contract and settlement date on or after 1 July 2024, one final stamp duty liability will apply, and the property will automatically enter the reform scheme. A 10-year transition period will commence for that property upon settlement of that transaction. Once this transition period has passed property tax will be payable.

At settlement, the property purchaser will pay the property's final stamp duty liability upfront by choosing to self-finance, or by financing the liability through a government-facilitated transition loan.

If the purchaser chooses the loan, the amount provided by the loan will be used to pay the full stamp duty payable at settlement of the property transfer. Following this, the purchaser will make fixed annual loan repayments over 10 years, equal in aggregate to the property's stamp duty liability plus interest.

The Bill amends the *Duties Act 2000* such that stamp duty will not be payable on future transactions of that property as long as it continues to have a commercial or industrial use.

Property will automatically enter the reform scheme if a contract of sale is entered on or after 1 July 2024, the transaction relates to 50 per cent or more of the property, there is a positive stamp duty liability, and the property has a qualifying commercial or industrial use at settlement.

Transactions such as landholder acquisitions or fractional interest transactions where less than 100 per cent of a property is transacted will cause a property to enter the reform scheme if the transaction relates to 50 per cent or more of the property.

Transactions eligible for the corporate reconstruction or consolidation concessions will not trigger entry into the reform scheme. This ensures an ongoing tax liability does not result from efficiency improving restructuring of corporate groups.

Dutiable lease transactions and economic entitlement transactions will not trigger entry into the reform scheme. These types of transactions occur infrequently.

Commercial and industrial property transactions that are exempt from stamp duty will not cause a property to enter the reform. These include transfers such as deceased estates, a transfer to a spouse or partner, and purchases by charities and friendly societies.

Existing stamp duty concessions will continue to apply for the final stamp duty liability on the property. This includes the stamp duty concession for property purchased in regional Victoria for commercial, industrial, and extractive industry purposes.

The Bill defines a property as having a qualifying commercial or industrial use if the property is allocated an Australian Valuation Property Classification Code that represents commercial, industrial, extractive industries, or infrastructure and utilities land. These codes fall in the range of 200 to 499 and 600 to 699.

In addition, some student accommodation will be included as a qualifying use for the purpose of the reform, despite having an Australian Valuation Property Classification Code outside of the qualifying range. Land which is solely or primarily used as commercial residential premises and also solely or primarily used for providing accommodation to tertiary students will be considered commercial property.

Some properties have a mix of qualifying and non-qualifying uses, for example a street shop with a residence above. For these properties, a sole or primary use test will be used to determine if the property will enter the reform scheme upon a qualifying transaction.

If reform properties and non-reform properties are consolidated into a single property, the consolidated property will be deemed to be in the reform scheme if 50 per cent or more of the consolidated property is in the scheme.

Child lots of a property that is subdivided will inherit the reform scheme status of the parent property.

*Commercial and Industrial Property Tax*

The *Commercial and Industrial Property Tax Reform Act 2024* implements the property tax, which will commence 10 years after settlement of the entry transaction.

The property tax replaces stamp duty for the property and will only apply for commercial or industrial property that is in the reform scheme.

The property tax will not apply to property used primarily for residential purposes.

Exemptions that apply to land tax will also apply to property tax for relevant commercial or industrial property. Therefore, commercial or industrial property primarily used for primary production, community services or sport, heritage, and culture purposes will be exempt from property tax if the criteria for exemption under the *Land Tax Act 2005* are met.

The property tax rate will be a flat one per cent of that property's unimproved land value per annum, with no tax-free threshold. It will be separate from, and in addition to the existing land tax system.

Like land tax, taxpayers will be able to pay property tax in a single annual payment or by instalments.

For property with a mixture of uses, if property tax applies, it will apply to the entire value of the property.

The Bill amends the *Retail Leases Act 2003* to align the treatment of the property tax with land tax, including prohibiting the property tax from being passed on to certain tenants subject to a retail lease under the *Retail Leases Act 2003*.

Passing on property tax to residential renters will also be prohibited through provisions included in the *Commercial and Industrial Property Tax Reform Act 2024*.

The Bill also amends the *Heritage Act 2017*, the *Property Law Act 1958*, the *Sale of Land Act 1962*, and the *Valuation of Land Act 1960* to ensure consistency between the treatment of property tax and land tax and allow for the administration of the reform.

*Transition loan*

As part of the transitional support built into this Bill, taxpayers will have the choice of paying the final stamp duty liability for a property upfront either using their own finances, or by accessing a government facilitated transition loan. The loan will in turn pay off the stamp duty liability upon settlement and be repaid by the taxpayer in annual instalments over 10 years.

The taxpayer has the freedom to take-up the loan if it suits their circumstances, however they are not mandated to and are free to pay their stamp duty without a government facilitated transition loan using their own finances.

The transition loan will help smooth the transition to the new tax system and allow eligible taxpayers who opt for the loan to transition towards annual payments from the time of purchase.

The loan will help free up capital for businesses to invest in property improvements and expand their business. This will be of particular benefit to small and medium-sized businesses as the loan will be available for property with a purchase price of up to \$30 million.

To facilitate the implementation of the transition loan, the Bill amends the *Treasury Corporation of Victoria Act 1992* to empower Treasury Corporation of Victoria to administer the transition loan program. This additional power is confined to this specific transition loan program only.

The Bill allows the Treasurer to determine by written notice any matters necessary for the operation of the transition loan program, such as eligibility criteria and key lending terms. These lending terms will include parameters the Government has already announced. For example, that borrowers will be required to make ten equal repayments based on the property's final upfront stamp duty liability and a fixed commercial market-based interest rate.

The Bill also gives the Treasurer the power to execute a guarantee in favour of Treasury Corporation of Victoria in relation to the performance of borrowers' obligations under transition loan agreements on any terms and conditions that the Treasurer determines.

Treasury Corporation of Victoria will have a first ranking statutory charge over the borrower's interest in the land relating to the loan. As outlined in the Bill, this charge will be prioritised ahead of all other encumbrances. TCV must record this charge with the Registrar on the land title to inform prospective purchasers.

In addition, the Bill includes provisions to prevent a loan from being novated or transferred to a third party or subsequent purchaser. If the property is subsequently sold, the borrower will be obliged to repay the outstanding balance of the loan before it can be effectively transferred. The Bill supports this by restricting the Registrar from transferring land title in instances where the statutory charge has not been removed from the title. Further, the borrower will be contractually obliged under the transition loan agreement to repay the outstanding balance of the loan if the property changes to a non-qualifying use.

Information regarding the existence of the statutory charge recorded on the certificate of land title will be publicly accessible by interested parties, including prospective purchasers, through a title search. This information will also be included as part of a Section 32 Statement provided by vendors to prospective purchasers under the *Sale of Land Act 1962*. In addition, the Bill provides Treasury Corporation of Victoria with the power to provide information in connection with the transition loan program or the statutory charge to any person it thinks fit.

#### **Industry consultation**

In designing the reform, the Government engaged with the property, real estate and financial sectors. The Government consulted with policy advocacy groups, chambers of commerce, planning and local government representative groups and the tax law community.

Feedback from these sectors was used to inform the final design of the reform. This feedback has helped ensure that the reform maximises the economic benefits for Victoria and supports business.

#### **Administrative powers**

The Commissioner for State Revenue will be able to recover property tax subject to a tax default from lessees, mortgagees or occupiers of the land, subject to the Commissioner serving a written notice. This is consistent with land tax recovery provisions.

The Bill amends the *Taxation Administration Act 1997* to extend the provisions for the administration and enforcement of taxation laws to the property tax and the tax reform scheme.

The Bill also amends this Act to permit disclosure of taxpayer information to the Treasury Corporation of Victoria for the purposes of the transition loan program.

Further amendments to the *Taxation Administration Act 1997* include allowing property clearance certificates issued to prospective purchasers of land to be updated with information on whether the land is tax reform scheme land, when it became tax reform scheme land, and when the land will become or became subject to the property tax.

The Bill introduces additional anti-avoidance provisions through amendments to the *Duties Act 2000*, including the introduction of change of use duty that may apply to properties that received a stamp duty exemption and subsequently changed to a non-qualifying use.

Change of use duty will disincentivise taxpayers from avoiding stamp duty by purchasing a property that is in the reform and converting it to a residential or other use.

The *Commercial and Industrial Property Tax Reform Act 2024* will require the aggregation of multiple qualifying dutiable transactions for the purpose of determining entry of properties into the reform scheme. This is an integrity measure to ensure properties cannot be kept outside of the reform scheme by splitting up a transaction.

#### **Implementation**

Subject to parliamentary endorsement, the reform will begin on 1 July 2024. In the lead up to the start date, the Government will provide educational support on the reform, including helping industry and taxpayers navigate the new scheme given its complexities and transformational nature.

Once again, I note that this reform only applies to commercial and industrial properties which are transacted under contracts entered into on or after 1 July 2024. Transactions with contracts signed before this date will not be affected.

This provides a clear and transparent break so that previous property purchasers who are awaiting settlement are not impacted, and prospective purchasers will be fully informed of the new tax system before entering a contract.

We're making history by being the first government in Victoria to eliminate stamp duty on commercial and industrial properties in this State. This reform will encourage businesses to invest, create jobs and grow, and help drive productivity in our state. And it will facilitate this transition in a manner that supports businesses in a sustainable way.

#### **Jurisdiction of the Supreme Court of Victoria**

I draw the members' attention specifically to clause 55 of the Bill. This clause proposes to limit the jurisdiction of the Supreme Court to ensure that the legislative regime under the TAA applies to property tax in the same way as it does in relation to any other taxation law. Accordingly, I provide a statement under section 85(5) of the *Constitution Act 1975* of the reasons for altering or varying that section by this Bill.

I commend the Bill to the house.

**Section 85(5) of the Constitution Act 1975**

**Tim PALLAS:** I wish to make a statement under section 85(5) of the Constitution Act 1975 of the reasons for altering or varying that section by the Commercial and Industrial Property Tax Reform Bill 2024.

Section 85 of the Constitution Act 1975 vests the judicial power of Victoria in the Supreme Court and requires a statement to be made when legislation that directly or indirectly repeals, alters or varies the court's jurisdiction is introduced. Clause 55 of the bill inserts a new subsection (13) into section 135 of the Taxation Administration Act 1997 to provide that it is the intention of sections 5, 12(4), 18(1), 96(2) and 100(4) of the Taxation Administration Act 1997, as those sections apply after the commencement of the bill, to alter or vary section 85 of the Constitution Act 1975.

This bill reforms the taxation of commercial and industrial property by introducing the commercial and industrial property tax. Division 2 of Part 5 of the bill makes consequential amendments to the Taxation Administration Act 1997 to enable the CIPT, consistent with other state taxes, to be administered under the Taxation Administration Act 1997 and any regulations made under it.

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

I commend the bill to the house.

**James NEWBURY** (Brighton) (10:20): I move:

That debate be adjourned.

**Motion agreed to and debate adjourned.**

**Ordered that debate be adjourned for two weeks. Debate adjourned until Thursday 4 April.**

**National Electricity (Victoria) Amendment (VicGrid) Bill 2024**

*Second reading*

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

That this bill be now read a second time.

**James NEWBURY** (Brighton) (10:20): I rise to speak on the National Electricity (Victoria) Amendment (VicGrid) Bill 2024. Before I mention what this bill does do, it would be remiss of me not to say what this government has not done and what this bill does not do. What this government has not done is anything effective with VicGrid since it was formed. We are here today with a bill before us which starts to provide VicGrid with powers for works in relation to energy and transmission. But for years the community, business and the coalition have been calling for action on transmission and on VicGrid, and the government has done nothing. We are here to talk about a bill and powers that are contained within that bill, but it is important to note that and to put that on the record before the substance of the debate commences.

I note in March 2019 in one of the first speeches I gave in this place I spoke about the *NSW Transmission Infrastructure Strategy*, which was released in November 2018, which in many ways does some of the things that this bill now does. So some five years ago there were calls for action in terms of strategy and planning on transmission in Victoria. We have, after almost half a decade, started to look at doing some of the things that have been done around this country years and years and years ago. It should be noted, though, that what the government is proposing to do in this bill in terms of planning and strategy for transmission is not equivalent to what has happened around the country. I do note that some of the elements of this bill have picked up the New South Wales approach, if I can put it that way, and the government through their briefings prior to this bill being debated confirmed that the New South Wales model had been looked to and had been incorporated.

The one difference that exists with this bill and these powers as opposed to the New South Wales model is how strongly involved industry was in the development of this bill and future planning and strategy of transmission. It is a big difference, because in New South Wales the government worked with industry on planning how renewables primarily and transmission upgrades to the grid would take place, and that makes sense. Of course it does, because it is a partnership in terms of leading that work and then working with the community with their social licence to deliver it. That is a big difference between the way this government operates and the way the New South Wales government has operated in these matters.

What this bill does in short is provide new infrastructure energy planning powers in Victoria and outline how that infrastructure work will be brought about in terms of working with communities. That is the overarching purpose. So the government is empowering VicGrid to undertake planning and consultation on energy projects and to consult with the community to some degree on those works. It will further implement a new Victorian transmission infrastructure framework, set a time line for that planning and also allow payments for landholders who hold energy infrastructure. In short, that is what this bill does.

If I can set the scene on where we are as a state – not just in terms of policy and infrastructure, which I will speak to in detail shortly, but in terms of how the delays in the government's approach to dealing with these issues have had an effect on every single household – what matters to Victorians is that they have reliable, secure and affordable power. That is what matters to Victorians. They deserve reliable,

affordable and secure power, and the government has not delivered that. We know from the recent St Vincent de Paul report finding that Victorians are paying 22 per cent more for gas and 28 per cent more for electricity. The most recent ABS statistics show a 25 per cent increase in the last year on energy costs. So the year-on-year costs are significant. We know it because we hear it from our communities. We know it because it is a key issue raised in our communities. And though I am not a huge fan of polling, polling shows that two out of three rate the issue as one of their most significant concerns. That only underlines what people actually tell us in the street, what people speak to us in the street about. We know the cost for people is up year on year on year – 25 per cent as per the ABS in the last year.

But we also know that it is not just in relation to affordability. On the reliability and security, we have as a coalition deep, deep concerns about the government's failure to ensure that our energy is reliably provided to Victorian households. Of course we saw most recently the worst blackout in our state's history, where 530,000 people were left without power. But it is important to note that though that was the worst blackout in our state's history and the government will say, 'It's not our fault; it's the weather,' over the last six years 1.9 million Victorian businesses and households have suffered a blackout. So set aside this most recent event because the government will blame the weather, but almost 2 million Victorian businesses and households have suffered blackouts over the last six years. So security and reliability of energy is obviously a significant issue in our state. The Australian Energy Market Commission found that 95 per cent of blackouts in Victoria between 2009 and 2018 were caused by transmission and distribution failures, not the weather – 95 per cent. These are real issues. These are real challenges.

I am not suggesting that every single issue was caused by the Minister for Energy and Resources herself. What I am saying is it is the minister's job to make sure they do all they can to fix it. Today we are considering a bill that does not go far enough in terms of fixing these issues after spending years and years and years doing nothing in relation to transmission.

Many of us will have read recent reports around the transmission infrastructure in Victoria and how alarmed we should all be in relation to the grid and the Australian Energy Market Operator warning of imminent and urgent issues in relation to our energy transition. These are serious concerns, and I quote from AEMO:

The projected electrification of traditional gas loads, particularly heating loads in Victoria, increases forecast consumption and maximum demands in winter. For Victoria in particular, winter peak demands may exceed summer peak demands by the end of the ESOO horizon.

So we are having the peak body warn of the system and warn of the lack of capacity of our system to meet the needs of Victorians, and that is the government's job – to ensure that supply is provided. If I can refer back to AEMO again:

To ensure Australian customers continue to have access to reliable electricity, it's critical that planned investments in transmission, generation and storage projects are urgently delivered.

How many warnings do we need? We are being warned by people who know more, who are experts in this field, over and over again. I refer to the warning of supply earlier. The warnings have been clear from the most peak minds, the most peak experts, that our transmission system is not good enough, that our supply is at risk, yet we are dealing with a bill that does not do anywhere near enough and is the best part of a decade behind what the other states have been doing.

After the recent blackout where 530,000 people were left without power we saw a report of an AusNet Services assessment that one in seven of Victoria's 13,000 electricity transmission towers were damaged by patchy or extensive rust. About 8000 of them – more than half – are now a decade or less from their designed service life. This is a deep, deep concern. So we are now having industry say,

‘We’re concerned about the infrastructure.’ It is not just the peak experts; we are now having industry say we have issues. The report further says that:

All failed structures were built to historical design standards with inadequate strength to withstand convective downdraft winds occurring during extreme storm events.

I mean, you cannot get a clearer warning for the weather, can you? I think that even the minister can understand that one. The report says further that, of the 13,000 towers, 12 per cent were deemed to be in average condition with patchy rust and 1.5 per cent in poor condition with extensive surface rust and that 60 of the towers were a present health and safety risk because they were next to roads. How deeply concerning. It shows clearly how urgent it is to ensure our transmission is of the standard that we will need moving forward. Without being alarmist, it is a concern that we have had so many blackouts and that a weather event caused the damage that it did. So we need to get cracking, and what this bill does not do is get cracking fast enough on ensuring that we have the grid for the future.

I do think it is important to note that the coalition spoke very, very strongly on these issues in the last term and also in the last election. We announced policy to ensure that we as a government would have worked very closely with industry to work on upgrading our infrastructure. It was a core part of our energy and climate policy. That was announced, from memory, in July 2022. It is almost two years later, and we are dealing with a bill that starts to do some of that work. The government has been so slow on these issues it is a serious concern – and should be for all Victorians.

I note the warnings the government has been receiving do not just relate to infrastructure and do not just relate to security and reliability of energy; they also, specifically on energy today, relate to gas. We have seen AEMO again warn about serious issues in terms of gas supply at a time when the Labor government are persisting with their mad ideological ban on gas. The CEO of AEMO said:

From 2028, supply gaps will increase in size as Bass Strait production falls significantly ...

What that means is that Victoria’s total available gas supply is forecast to reduce by 48 per cent, from 297 petajoules in 2024 to 154 petajoules in 2028. At the same time, and I am quoting reports, demand is expected to hit 187 petajoules in 2024 and 176 in 2028. What does that mean? This:

... increases the probability of outages.

Further:

It is clear that more gas supply is required because the forecast decline in production is faster than the forecast decline in gas consumption ...

We have seen the government sit on its hands for the best part of a decade as other states were doing work, and warnings come in and collect dust on the minister’s desk in relation to infrastructure, in relation to supply and today in relation to gas. How many warnings does this government need?

We know that over the last six years almost 2 million Victorian businesses and households have suffered blackouts, so starting work frankly is not good enough and committing to creating a plan will not get us what we need as soon as we are going to need it. Planning is not good enough. Delivering is what matters, and we have seen from business very, very clearly how concerned they are about what is going on in Victoria. In fact we have seen extremely clearly from people like Paul Guerra from the Victorian Chamber of Commerce and Industry how concerned they are, because as he said:

We cannot let energy security be the casualty of the transition to net zero.

And:

... call out the ideology. This isn’t a game. This is our future. Reliable energy at affordable prices must be aligned.

When you have people like him speak to these issues with such fervour, you know that he is speaking on behalf of industry more broadly.

The chamber recently released a survey of 500 members and on the release said if the government ‘cannot guarantee that the lights remain on in this state’ then they guarantee that many businesses will find places other than Victoria to set up. That survey found that energy policy was a top concern for Victorian businesses, with 65 per cent rating it as their biggest worry – two out of three businesses rating it as their biggest worry – with him underlining that businesses will find other places to invest. That survey also found that 86 per cent believe that a move to renewables will impact their output – the businesses that is. These are deeply worrying concerns.

I do want to note one of the issues in relation to this bill and the capacity under this bill to declare renewable energy zones in terms of the bill – but at the same time that this bill was laying on the table, the Premier and the Minister for Planning were announcing a new renewable energy power. You can see how these two issues are aligned in terms of the government’s thinking and how this power will play into how this bill will operate in terms of renewable planning. What the government did last week was announce they would extend the development facilitation program, which is in short a power that the Minister for Planning has under the act to take projects out of the system, as it were – to exempt them from the planning system and deal with them individually and personally, as the minister or through the minister’s delegate. Last week the Minister for Planning announced that renewable energy projects would now be exempt from the planning system, at the same time as this bill is proposing to allow the minister to declare renewable energy zones. So yes, the bill has a renewable energy zone power, which does include consultation, but at the same time the government has confirmed that there will be a new power on top of that for the minister to bring in renewable energy projects and deal with them personally or through her delegate, though when I looked, just midweek, the details of that power had not been added onto the government’s website in relation to this particular program.

If I can give some context, the way this power works is when a project is put forward the department considers it, and if it meets certain criteria, the minister can make a determination completely outside the planning law. No consultation, no meaningful consultation allowed – and that is a key theme for how this government is operating in relation to planning more generally but in relation to this power and renewable energy projects. Just for some context, although the details have not been released, in other priority sector criteria the average cut-in for being eligible for a project regionally is about \$10 million. So I think it would be reasonable to expect that there may be a cut-in around that amount. Potentially there could be a cut-in of zero. We do not know, because the government, other than by putting out a press release with very little detail and a lot of quotes, has not put the detail on their own website. So it could be zero. It could be every project – every single project. But as I say, in other sectors the cut-in for regional projects has been around \$10 million.

What this does is undermine social licence. We see it with planning and we are seeing it with renewables more broadly; not only have the government forgotten industry, but they have also forgotten the community. You can see with that particular power I spoke to earlier there are a number of other areas in which the government has circumvented the planning system, and the community is rightly concerned. I have a number of my National Party colleagues with me at the table, and they would be aware of a report that was on the department’s website, until it was removed, which stated that up to 70 per cent of Victorian agricultural land could be required for renewable projects.

I have gone to the government, to be fair, and said this is a concern, and they have said that that report did go to ‘the impossible scenario’, in their words, of providing up to 60 gigawatts of capacity, whereas to meet the targets the minister believes that we will be aiming for 25 gigawatts, so just under half. Well, if you are on agricultural land and you see a report which is then removed from the government website that says 70 per cent and then the minister says, ‘That is the impossible scenario, so it’s just under half’ – so what is it, 30 to 35 per cent of agricultural land? That is the obvious math. That would concern everybody who lives in regional Victoria, and I think that it is only fair and reasonable for a fuller explanation to be given by the government in relation to those calculations, because it is a genuine concern that has not been properly answered by the government. At a time when social licence is ebbing away in relation to renewable projects, many members in this place would know of



communities right across the state that are concerned about being cut out of consultation in relation to renewables. That is not how you do business; that is not how you operate as a government. You do not cut the community out where you are going to build it, and that is exactly what is being proposed. Then, on top of that, members are seeing reports that say 70 per cent of agricultural land will have to be covered. Well, even if it is 30 to 35 per cent, how will that look?

I do want to note that the coalition in the upper house will be moving a number of amendments, and they will be moved by the shadow in the upper house. They go to two things primarily: firstly, to ensure that proper community consultation occurs. That would be through, in our view, a community advisory panel that would include the interests of Victorian farmers, the interests of the Victorian manufacturing industry, the interests of Victorian rural councils, the interests of Victorian small business owners, the interests of the Victorian seafood industry and the interests of Victorian consumers in Victoria. The shadow in that place will move an amendment that relates to that community advisory committee and all of those people and interests involved in that. Finally, the shadow will move amendments that relate to easement land tax, which is of course passed on to consumers in the form of higher electricity bills. So those amendments will be introduced in that place, in relation to both the land tax easement issue and also community consultation. There is more that this bill does not do than what it does do. This bill does not fix the problems that we have. This bill does not address the warnings that the government is receiving. So the coalition has deep concerns about it and cannot support it in its current form, because we cannot be ripping away the rights of the community.

We cannot be not ensuring that we have reliable, secure and affordable power. We must do those things, and this government has not done that. The government have not addressed the warnings they are receiving, and so until they can provide reliable, secure and affordable energy, they stand condemned.

**John MULLAHY** (Glen Waverley) (10:50): It is a pleasure to rise as the first government speaker to speak in favour of the National Electricity (Victoria) Amendment (VicGrid) Bill 2024. At the outset I would like to thank the Minister for Energy and Resources, Minister for Climate Action and Minister for the State Electricity Commission for her hard work as a trailblazer for the Victorian renewable energy transition. I extend that thanks to the minister's entire team and the thousands of public servants in the Department of Energy, Environment and Climate Action and its associated entities for the work that they do.

Make no mistake, Victoria is in the middle of a renewable energy boom, and we are only just getting started. It is not words like those of the Greens political party and it is not inaction like that we saw with the policy purgatory that was the previous Liberal–National government. It is with real action that only Labor governments deliver. As the minister for energy, climate action and the SEC recently highlighted in this place, Victoria has already slashed our emissions by almost a third since 2005 while our economy has grown by 42 per cent over that same period. It busts the myths peddled by the Institute of Public Affairs science deniers and coal huggers that bold climate action is somehow incompatible with economic growth and prosperity. The reality is that bold climate action is delivering thousands of jobs, driving economic growth and boosting Victoria's economy to new heights, and it is why the Allan Labor government proudly backs climate action.

Since 2020 alone we have delivered more than \$3 billion of investment to support our renewables transition, because we know that half of our emissions are created in the energy sector and action in this space is the key to slashing emissions further. This investment into renewables is paying dividends. To give the house some perspective on the scale of this transition currently underway, Victoria currently has over 5.2 gigawatts of large-scale wind and solar capacity online today, and there is another 7.5 gigawatts more in the way of projects approved by this government. That will more than double our large-scale renewables capacity. Of course that is in addition to our hugely successful Solar Homes program; the Victorian community's passion for rooftop solar has delivered more than 4 gigawatts of capacity.

The numbers speak for themselves. Our renewables transition is moving at a rapid pace under our government, and the contrast could not be any clearer when compared with the Baillieu–Napthine era, when investment and progress stagnated. Where would our state be if the Liberals and Nationals had had more time on these benches? The outcomes would be bad: they would be dirty and they would be nuclear. But thankfully we have a progressive Labor government that is taking our renewables transition to the next level, with 30 per cent of Victoria’s electricity needs sourced from renewables compared with 10 per cent or so when we came to government. From next year all Victorian government electricity needs will be sourced from renewables – everything at schools, hospitals and public transport, and even the electricity in this place.

We are only just getting started, because at the 2022 state election the Victorian people resoundingly endorsed the boldest energy policy in Victoria’s history, putting power back in the hands of the Victorian people and accelerating decarbonisation across the entire economy. First, we are bringing back the SEC, creating 100 per cent renewable government-owned power for Victoria. We are well on the way, with a power of work underway to deliver the first billion dollars of investment to grow our renewable energy workforce and drive down Victoria’s energy prices, because we know that renewables are the cheapest form of new energy generation in this state. Second, we are bringing forward our net zero target to 2045, setting Victoria up with one of the fastest decarbonisation targets in the developed world. For context, our transition here in Victoria is set to be faster than world leaders like Canada, Luxembourg or New Zealand. Third, we are accelerating our renewable energy targets, adding more renewable energy capacity to the Victorian grid and faster.

Originally we were set to have half of our energy sourced from renewables by 2030, but we are going to do even better, upping that target to 65 per cent, and in just over a decade, in 2035, we will have 95 per cent of our energy sourced from renewables. That is bold, and only the Allan Labor government is making it happen. These three elements – bringing back the SEC, bringing forward net zero and ramping up our renewable energy targets – were endorsed by the Victorian community at the last election, and I am proud to be part of the Allan Labor government that is making this happen. This bill before the house today, the National Electricity (Victoria) Amendment (VicGrid) Bill 2024, is part of our legislative package to make it happen, because as a government we need to be setting the legislative conditions needed to support our whole-of-economy decarbonisation. The market will not magically do it alone. The Victorian government needs to lead the way as a proactive partner on this journey, making investments of our own and supporting the investment choices of our industry in our state.

And that brings me to the specifics of today’s bill. The National Electricity (Victoria) Amendment (VicGrid) Bill 2024 is all about providing the legislative framework needed to deliver energy grid reform as we shift from fossil fuel electricity generation to renewables. This bill achieves this in a number of ways. First it establishes the broad transmission planning objectives, which the CEO of VicGrid will use in the creation of Victorian transmission plans, the first of which is due for publication in July next year. Furthermore, it writes into law the processes for the declaration of renewable energy zones across our state, including around matters such as community consultation, but also around detailed work around the renewable energy zones, which will connect to the transmission network. The bill also establishes a scheme to compensate landowners who host new transmission infrastructure, supporting the expansion of the transmission network in our state and in addition to existing acquisition laws. Put together, these changes are all about supporting investment in our transmission network as we deliver a rapid renewable transition, because without the legislative framework, you cannot deliver the benefits of our upcoming renewables boom.

What does that boom actually mean for Victorian families? It means a brighter future for Victoria’s environment. It means cheap, reliable energy for households and businesses, and most excitingly, it means jobs – thousands and thousands of great union jobs. That is what excites me most as a dad, as an MP and as a proud member of the Electrical Trades Union. This government’s investment in renewables is going to set up the next generation with quality, stable jobs in a prosperous industry with

immense capacity to deliver social, economic and environmental good for this state. It is set to create 59,000 jobs over the coming years and decades. That will not just change individual lives; it is about improving outcomes for families and our entire Victorian community, in the city and indeed in the mighty regions.

We hear a lot in this place from those opposite about how renewable transition is somehow harmful for folks in the regions, the supposed blight of solar and wind on the landscape and the apparent city-centric focus of our government, but it could not be further from the truth. On this side of the house we are proud to have so many regional and rural MPs who were resoundingly endorsed at the last election, and even city MPs with rural and regional lived experience, me included. As a Geelong boy raised on a farm in Meredith in the member for Eureka's beautiful part of the world, I remember fondly and can still see the beautiful views from outside our window of the Golden Plains wind farm.

I take comfort in knowing that the Labor government is investing in a brighter future with local jobs, investment in the regions and indeed a cleaner world for our next generation. Regional and rural Victorians see the benefits. That is why they resoundingly endorsed this government's bold climate action agenda over the rhetoric and the supposed voice of the country in the Nationals and the Liberals. I am so proud of the government's commitment to real action in this space – not nuclear energy or fossil fuels from those wishing to make Victoria a climate pariah. This VicGrid bill is an important step in continuing our nation-leading journey to net zero, setting Victoria up for a sustainable expansion of our transmission network as we bring thousands of new projects online. It is for that reason and for so many more that I commend the bill to the house.

**Peter WALSH** (Murray Plains) (10:59): I rise to make a contribution on the National Electricity (Victoria) Amendment (VicGrid) Bill 2024. Before I start what I was going to talk about I might just remind the member for Glen Waverley, who said the Labor government has put the power back in Victorians' hands, that when it comes to these renewable energy projects and transmission lines, the people of my electorate, who are victims of VNI West, the major proposed transmission line, would consider that they are powerless with what the Australian Energy Market Operator and the state government have done to them through that particular planning process. It is appalling how they have been treated and the games that have been played about whether it was this route or that route or another route, and then all of a sudden it was a whole new route after the discussion had progressed quite substantially. So there is no power. People do not feel they have any power at all.

If you look at this particular piece of legislation, which effectively takes some powers back from AEMO to VicGrid, again it might give the illusion that there is some community consultation going to happen and it might give the illusion that the community is going to be involved in these particular projects, but if you look at what the Minister for Planning has done, on the other hand, in having these renewable projects come under the development facilitation program, the minister can do whatever the minister wants. There is no joy at all in this particular piece of legislation for the people in my electorate who are going through torture – and I do not say 'torture' lightly, because they are going through torture – with the way they are being consulted and dealt with by the people who are doing the planning for VNI West.

If you take the people of Tragowel, who are going to have this giant substation forced on them in that particular community, they do not want it there and they have got no power to stop it. If you take some of the people further south that are going to have the huge powerlines going through their properties, for generations they have been in those particular areas and for generations they have farmed that land very, very well and looked after it. They have got no power to stop it.

If you look at the compensation clauses, one of those people that is going to be affected raised them with me after he read this particular piece of legislation. It starts with a set figure, and there is indexation once the project is built and has triggered that compensation clause, but the figures in here are around \$8000 a kilometre. If that project is not built for six years, that \$8000 will have depreciated substantially over that time. I would put it on the record particularly for that constituent of mine, who

did the work and actually read the legislation as we sent it out for consultation, that he said that money will depreciate every year until the project is built and it will not have anywhere near the buying power it has now in six or eight years time – if this project ever does actually go ahead.

The other issue that I would like to raise in this discussion is that the community was very, very engaged in this and looked at what alternatives there may be to having this huge powerline go through their particular properties, and they had quite a lot of discussions with a gentleman called Bruce Mountain. His organisation has an alternative view, which is called plan B, which would be instead of building this huge transmission line from New South Wales, coming down to Bulgana and linking up with the western link, we would upgrade the existing routes and build the high-voltage powerlines on the existing easements. We would still have the capacity to feed in all the power that we need to feed in out of renewable projects in northern Victoria, but we would not start a whole new scar through the landscape with these monstrous powerlines.

Under pressure, the minister agreed to have an analysis done of AEMO's proposal versus the plan B proposal. As I understand it, that report was finished late last year, but 'No show, Your Honour' – no-one can actually get access to that particular report. As part of this debate I would like to call on the minister to release that report and have the courage to actually put it out into the public arena so the people who are being affected by this project, who went to the effort to look at alternatives, who actually analysed what was going on – which I do not believe the government necessarily has done – can see: does plan B actually have a net positive for the Victorian community, for Victorian energy users? Because these big projects are not being paid for by the government. Ultimately they are paid for by energy consumers, and what a lot of people do not realise is what their energy bills will be in 10, 15 years time. We think energy bills have gone up now; wait until the costs of all these major projects hit the balance sheets of power companies and that is passed through to energy users. People's bills will continue to go up. The panacea that the minister is trying to paint that renewable energy projects will drive down prices, as she keeps emphasising, I do not believe is going to happen when you look at the investment that is going to be required to both produce that energy but particularly to transmit it around the state and particularly with the eastern links that have the interstate transfer.

Victoria has grown up with reliable, affordable energy. Our manufacturing industries have grown up and created the wealth of this state based on that energy. As I understand it, as this program goes on, instead of Victoria being a net exporter of power, we are going to become a net importer of power, so that puts us at the mercy of our interstate cousins and the power that they will produce. It does not matter whether you are on the end of a road or whether you are on the end of a water pipe or on the end of anything – if something goes wrong, it is the person on the end that actually misses out. So if there are any issues with power in the future and we are on the end of the line from interstate, although there may be interstate sharing agreements, we run the risk of being the ones that will miss out through those particular issues.

What we are finding also – and I am sure the member for Ovens Valley will speak about this – is we are having huge batteries put into our electorates.

*Members interjecting.*

**Peter WALSH:** That is great! That is really great until you have a bushfire. We see apartment blocks now banning people from bringing their scooters in because the batteries are a fire risk. We are talking about a battery so big, and we are talking about acres and acres of batteries going into rural communities. If there is a bushfire – and there always is a bushfire, particularly with the way that the Labor government under their green ideology is managing the public estate – the fuel loads will be higher, the risk will be higher. If those batteries catch on fire, I bet you will be nowhere to be seen out there on those particular issues. The community is powerless to stop these acres and acres of batteries being put in the middle of their particular community.

*Members interjecting.*

**Peter WALSH:** People can interject, people can ridicule, but the facts are those batteries will burn, and there is no known capacity to put those fires out. There is not enough water in those communities to put those particular battery fires out.

*Members interjecting.*

**Peter WALSH:** I take it that the ridicule from the other side is because they do not care about country communities. They do not care whether country communities will burn or whether people will live with the pollution and the toxicity from those particular fires there. They just do not care. So keep on going. Just show how much you do not care. Show how much you do not care around those particular issues.

Coming back the legislation before us now, it does not empower country people at all. What the planning minister has done in making renewable energy projects, including current projects, part of the development facilitation program means they are disempowered. They are having their powers taken away. There will be a charade. There will be an illusion of consultation. It will be, 'We'll go and talk to them, but we'll actually tell them. We won't talk to them. We won't listen to them. We'll actually tell them what's going to happen.' That is what the communities and people in my electorate feel about what has gone on with VNI West, and they can have no joy that this legislation will actually improve that for them.

**Sarah CONNOLLY** (Laverton) (11:09): I too rise to speak on the National Electricity (Victoria) Amendment (VicGrid) Bill 2024, and it always fills me with just a little bit of frustration when I follow the Leader of the Nationals, particularly when talking about the sorts of climate change natural disasters that are taking place across the world, across this country and indeed across this state. We talk about the risk of fire and we talk about drought and lack of water – we need to talk about climate change; in fact we need to talk about climate action.

It would be wonderful to be able to stand here and know that the Leader of the Nationals and those opposite actually back in real climate action. This side of the house time and time again, every week when we come to this place, is introducing legislation and bills to do just that – tackle climate change and take real climate action. There is a reason why we are seeing increasing fires and the ferocity of those fires, and it is climate change, and we need to take some climate action. This is partly what this bill is about.

**Anthony Cianflone** interjected.

**Sarah CONNOLLY:** That is right, member for Pascoe Vale. We know that those opposite do not believe in climate change, and they certainly are not prepared to engage with this side of the house when it comes to taking climate action.

I do have to say I am really glad to be able to stand today to debate again another piece of energy legislation. Time and time again, since I was elected in 2018, I have been absolutely astounded at how hardworking this government and the Department of Energy, Environment and Climate Action have been – there is no other way to describe it – in pumping out legislation to improve Victoria's energy network and absolutely turbocharging our investments in renewable energy. For the last three sitting weeks we have had a piece of legislation relating to this portfolio, which again speaks to how impressive, how gargantuan – I can barely say that word – the work really is that our government has been doing in the energy space. Just last week we were here in this place debating legislation that would enshrine the SEC in Victoria's constitution – such an important debate that took place here in this place. The sitting week before that we passed legislation that enshrined our government's ambitious renewable energy and emissions reduction targets into law. And this week we are here to debate another two pieces of legislation that deal with – surprise, surprise – renewable energy.

This bill in particular takes a look at our energy transmission network and the grid, because it is all well and good to be investing in renewable energy projects, particularly at the pace we are – projects

that are going to transform our energy network – but we need to be able to get the energy generated into homes, into businesses and into the many, many thousands of buildings that now rely upon it.

This renewable energy future requires significant investment. I recall a few years ago my office was contacted by a constituent who had taken part in our government's Solar Homes program. This was a phone call about which I think many MPs here in this place will be able to say, 'Yes, I've had many of them myself,' if they too have not already experienced the problem. This constituent did the right thing and set up solar panels on his property, but there was one slight problem – our grid was built and designed with the purpose of feeding power one way. It had always been like that – directly to the consumers. With solar now allowing households to generate and feed electricity back into the grid, it is now a two-way street that a large proportion of the network was not designed for and was never set up for. It is something that our government is already tackling. In the last term we invested \$10 million, remember, into the grid of the future program, which looked at upgrading our transmission network to enable that feedback that we were getting from solar-powered homes.

This bill takes a more holistic approach. It sets a strategy for long-term planning for and the transformation of Victoria's transmission network and energy grid, because we know that by 2035, when we reach our target of 95 per cent renewable energy in Victoria, we are going to need to unlock an additional 25 gigawatts of new capacity. At the moment our current network generates about 15.6 gigawatts of capacity, and you do not need to be a mathematician to see we need to do something in this space. We are set to lose at least 4.8 gigawatts with retiring coal-fired power generators. But we do know on this side of the house – and I do believe that our community know; indeed it is a global conversation that many, many countries are going ahead and tackling and getting on and doing something about – that it is clear that the next big build is in renewables. It is a big build that is going to generate an additional 59,000 new jobs by 2035, attract billions of dollars in investment and create some of the cheapest electricity we have ever produced. Just this week we have already seen it begin to pay off for Victorians with the Victorian default offer dropping power bills by \$112 for households and \$266 for businesses. That is a huge win whether you are a family or you are running a small business. Indeed it is something that, when I have put it up across social media channels, has been so popular, with so much commentary about being able to save money and put that money towards other things like holidays or food on the table. Whatever families are wanting to spend that extra money on, now they have a bit extra in their back pocket. That is money back into the pockets – let us be clear about this – of over half a million Victorian families and 58,000 businesses.

Our renewable energy transition will ensure that power prices continue to drop over the coming years. But key to this transition is the preservation, the operation and the management of renewable energy zones. I look at this and I think, 'Oh, my gosh. We've got another acronym for energy, and that is the REZ.' These zones are areas that have been identified as prime land and prime locations with the greatest potential for renewable energy projects to generate the best outcomes. There are currently six of these renewable energy zones in Victoria, and they have been identified by the Australian Energy Market Operator. We know they are going to be in the central north, Gippsland, the Murray River region, the Ovens–Murray region in the north-east of the state, western Victoria and indeed the south-west coast, including Portland, Heywood, Mortlake and Terang.

What this bill does is combine each of these zones under one big framework, and that is going to be the Victorian transmission investment framework. I am not going to read out that acronym, because I think one in my contribution today is well and truly enough. At the helm of the framework is a new government body, and that is going to be VicGrid, which is the subject of this bill today. VicGrid was first announced by our government in 2020 and was established as a division within the former Department of Environment, Land, Water and Planning, which is now the Department of Energy, Environment and Climate Action.

The first thing the bill is going to do is empower the CEO of VicGrid to make decisions regarding the planning of these REZs, and this is effectively going to make VicGrid a body responsible to the Victorian government for the planning and development of those zones. Under the current legislation

we know that AEMO is solely responsible for the planning and the expansion of Victoria's transmission network. But what we have actually done is gone out and listened to the stakeholders and the key players in this space, and what we have heard about is the way this process currently works. It all seems, quite frankly, pretty backward. All it does is create angst in communities that host this infrastructure, and it creates further uncertainty, sadly, for investors. What we have also learned is that communities want to be consulted earlier on, and I think that is something we certainly do take into account regardless of what bill and legislative reform we are undertaking. In addition to the planning, VicGrid will also be empowered to assist AEMO with its functions and performance, and this includes things like environmental surveys and facilitating investment.

I have only got about 60 seconds left, and this is such a great bill. There is so much to talk about on the contents, and I know that my colleagues on this side of the house will very soon delve into the detail of this bill. But I do have to say, as someone who spent 13 years working across the country on transmission and distribution of electricity and gas networks, this is a fantastic bill. This goes to the heart of making sure that legislation is continuing to keep up with the dramatic investment that we are making into renewables – because it is one thing to make announcements, but it is another thing to bring bills and legislative reform here to this place to be debated to ensure it is in place and working when these sorts of renewable energy projects come online. I do want to commend the minister for her hours of work on these projects, and I commend the bill to the house.

**David SOUTHWICK** (Caulfield) (11:19): I rise to make some comments on the National Electricity (Victoria) Amendment (VicGrid) Bill 2024. What this bill seeks to do is enable Victoria to opt out of the national electricity transmission planning process and instead establish VicGrid as its own body to effectively ensure that transmission connection is done at a state level with a new planning process and a new planning framework to connect electricity into the grid.

This government has a very poor track record when it comes to connectivity of energy programs and particularly when it comes to transmission of new energy. This is one of the massive reasons why we have seen failure. We have all been very strong in terms of looking at transitioning to cleaner energy but also ensuring we have got affordable and reliable energy, and one of the biggest mistakes that we have seen happen up until now is the government has sought investment in new projects – new wind, new solar – and not had the transmission to be able to connect that back into the grid and be able to benefit. There have been many times that I have heard from electorates right across the state of projects that have been funded, that have been put up, that only 15 or 20 per cent of the energy is able to be used because there is not enough grid capability. That is a massive failure, because already the government has spent a whole lot of money subsidising these programs and it is not able to utilise that energy going forward. That is why we are paying the price that we are for energy. It has been a big misfortune to see that 25 per cent rise in energy costs under this government in the last 12 months. That has fundamentally been through poor management and poor supply.

The idea of having a Victorian grid authority is certainly something that is not a problem and we should be looking at how we do this properly, but one of the key things as part of establishing VicGrid is to ensure we bring all the players together, we get proper consultation and we get the best outcomes. We know that the government has on one hand been slow off the mark in progressing this but then at the same time more recently has not in that time frame – and they have had plenty of time to do it – consulted with landowners, farmers, industry and all the people that are going to be affected by new transmission going forward, and that is a real concern. This is going to continue to cost.

We also need to look at better ways of doing things. We know that one of the big projects that the government wants to push forward is VNI West, which will be a massive cable, a massive network, and I have had a number of key experts in this energy space tell me that they will be creating effectively MCG towers that they will connect a lot of VNI West through – big towers, big infrastructure, big cables. It is effectively putting all of our eggs into one basket in terms of this transmission, because it goes effectively from Victoria into New South Wales – one big, massive cable. We saw the issue when we had the blackouts just recently with transmission lines with towers. Ultimately, faulty transmission

lines and towers led to redundancy in our network and blackouts that all Victorians had to experience. This is a similar situation. There have been a number of people, including Bruce Mountain, who I spoke to recently, who have suggested to me that if you have an issue on that grid, on that network of VNI West, it takes out the whole system. So that is the first issue. And we are not looking in terms of future capability. This government on one hand talks about all of these distributed networks and distributed power. You have got people like big manufacturing, and you could potentially utilise some of them in more of a hub-and-spoke kind of model. None of that has been considered. None of that has been thought through. It is like, 'Here we go, let's put a big, massive cable straight through agriculture and straight through farmland.' And ultimately, who is paying for it – taxpayers again are paying for it. Ultimately, we know that it just has not been properly considered and properly thought through. It is what is seen as a quick fix.

The other concern, particularly while I am on the issue of VNI West, is the fact that the whole allowance and the planning model, which I do not think the Minister for Energy and Resources has actually properly looked at, considers the fact that Victoria, which had the best reputation of being a net exporter of energy, proudly had that medal to say we were the home of manufacturing because we had cheap, reliable and affordable energy. But at the same time we had abundant energy, so we could export it to other states. Now what we will be reliant on going forward in terms of the projections is 25 per cent of energy coming from New South Wales into Victoria.

Let us just play that out. If that happens in terms of a time of pressure on the network and New South Wales is absolutely full-scale in terms of using their energy – a warm, hot summer period – do you think they are going to turn around and say, 'Well, you know what? We'll flog 25 per cent of our energy over to Victoria to keep their lights on, but don't worry about what's happening here in New South Wales'? Of course energy security is going to be paramount to New South Wales. Again, we need to ensure that energy security is paramount, because we have seen what happens when it is not. We have seen what happens to families when they have three, four or five days or two weeks of no power. All their groceries, their food in their fridges, is gone. Who pays for that? We had a number of examples of people coming into the Parliament and talking about a week's worth of food – gone. The government said, 'No, we're not paying for anything.' We had a number of businesses that had to throw out a whole lot of food leading into I think it was Valentine's Day – a big time when a lot of these big traders had to throw food out because they did not have power. If you play that out and you do not have the security and you are putting all of your eggs into one basket, that is a problem.

I suggest the government needs to take advice from a number of energy experts, because there are a number out there that are offering other solutions and other ideas. We cannot rush. Bruce Mountain is one of them, from Victoria University, a very capable –

**Jade Benham** interjected.

**David SOUTHWICK:** Do you want me to tell them? I know a number of you are big supporters of Victoria University. Bruce Mountain is an absolute expert in this space, and it would be great to be able to talk to him.

**Jade Benham** interjected.

**David SOUTHWICK:** Yes, he is a professor. Great man – yes, he is. He is a great man, and I suggest that the government should be talking to him, but again the energy minister is not speaking to the likes of Bruce Mountain and others.

St Vincent de Paul have been a strong advocate, and they are energy experts in terms of their division. They have been very vocal on energy pricing issues and in recent months have commented that they are not sure that VicGrid has the required skills or experience for this task. That is from St Vincent's. It is going to be important that we have the right skills, that we have the right people in play and that we engage. One of the things that I would be very keen for the government to consider doing as part of this is to have a community stakeholder group form. There is no mention of that. Let us get a



community stakeholder group formed before we start committing to millions and millions of dollars that we are all going to have to pay on our energy bills – straight on our energy bills. Let us consider that.

We have got an easement tax currently that sits there – an easement tax that goes back to Alcoa, the Portland days, as part of that smelter. That money is literally sitting there, and there is no consideration for that as well as that continues. That adds about \$70 to every household bill. We have seen bills just continue to rise. The government do not have the solutions. All the government do is announce things in press releases – the SEC. We have got gas bans. Today we hear that there is a shortage of gas because the government have sat on their hands and done nothing. We know the importance of gas as a transition fuel. This government has been missing in action when it comes to gas. This government is not looking at affordability, reliability or energy security. Clean energy is part of the transition. It is all part of the game. You cannot just have one part of the equation, you have got to have the lot.

I think we are in for a real shock going forward. I know energy is a big issue when it comes to cost of living. This government is missing in action on that. It is all about press releases, not about detail, and SEC lollies and show bags are not going to fix energy prices in this state.

**Anthony CIANFLONE** (Pascoe Vale) (11:29): It is a pleasure to rise on the National Electricity (Victoria) Amendment (VicGrid) Bill 2024. I really do thoroughly enjoy rising on this bill off the back of yesterday's Energy and Public Land Legislation Amendment (Enabling Offshore Wind Energy) Bill 2024. We have had a lot of talk in this chamber. There has been a lot of wind in this chamber and a lot of hot air coming from that side of the chamber. But for all the hot air being generated by those opposite, they are not generating any power for the Leader of the Opposition. They are not generating any power for their divided party room, and they are not deriving any power from the Victorian people by continuing on with this illogical, prehistoric position, which is denying the science of climate change and denying the need for us to move towards a renewable energy future.

The other thing I note is that the numbers do not lie – the numbers speak for themselves. As we on this side of the house increase our investment and increase our commitment to renewable energy, the number of Labor MPs in this chamber, funnily enough, increases. There were 55 of us the last time I checked. And as we decarbonise and as we drive down carbon emissions across the state, you know what else goes down – the number of Liberal MPs in this chamber. I think there is a strong correlation in the political science of supporting renewable energy and actually getting outcomes at the ballot box and taking real action on climate change. So good luck with the hot air on that side of the house. We are getting on with what the Victorian people voted for over here.

In that respect I do support the efforts of this bill, which are all about taking real and meaningful action on climate change by connecting our future renewable energy zones to the Victorian power grid. It is all about ensuring that we keep the lights on for businesses, workers and families as we transition towards that renewable energy future by positioning Victoria to be the renewable energy hub and capital of the country. Of course while we are doing that, it is all about making energy more affordable and accessible and secure for Victorians and creating a new wave of jobs for the regions of the member for Lowan, the member for Nepean, the member for Mildura and a lot of the regional MPs, where a lot of these renewable energy zones are actually going to be embedded. I find it absolutely ironic that as regional MPs they are actually advocating against jobs in their own region. They are advocating against renewable energy infrastructure and renewable energy powerlines, which this bill is all about. They are going to be constructed in their respective regions, so they are against union jobs in their regions. There against unions representing safe and secure jobs in their regions. Let the record show that – it is quite amazing.

The bill of course does build on the Climate Change and Energy Legislation Amendment (Renewable Energy and Storage Targets) Bill 2023, which we passed a couple of weeks ago to set those landmark targets; it is built on the Energy and Public Land Legislation Amendment (Enabling Offshore Wind Energy) Bill 2024, which we have been talking about as of yesterday; and of course it complements

our ongoing measures to take real action. The main components of this bill are of course to establish the new electricity transmission planning objective and supporting framework for the planning of major electricity transmission infrastructure across Victoria. It is also to establish interim measures to enable the CEO of VicGrid to support the delivery of high-priority electricity transmission projects such as the Victoria to New South Wales Interconnector West, the Marinus Link, the Western Renewables Link and transmission connections to offshore wind projects, which we were talking about yesterday. It is about the provision for cost recovery of VicGrid activities in electricity transmission infrastructure planning and project development as the industry standard.

**Emma Kealy** interjected.

**Anthony CIANFLONE:** The member for Lowan has quite a lot to say today, which I am actually shocked about. She always has a lot to say, but it is all about talking against climate change, renewable energy and jobs in her own region – bizarre, just bizarre. ‘Serenity now,’ like Frank Costanza says. ‘Serenity now’ – I have got to say that again.

While those opposite continue to deny the reality of climate change and actively resist decarbonisation, we on this side of the house are listening to the scientists and taking the actions we need to, including through this bill. Just yesterday the United Nations weather agency released new data emphasising the urgency around governments around the world having to take real action to combat climate change. The UN report *State of the Global Climate 2023*, released yesterday – I refer the members opposite to have a read of it, I can send them a link, no problem – shows that 2023 was the warmest year on record, with global average surface and near-surface temperatures at 1.45 degrees above preindustrial levels. On an average day in 2023 nearly one-third of the ocean surface was gripped by a marine heatwave, harming vital ecosystems and food systems, and observed concentrations of the three main greenhouse gases, carbon dioxide, methane and nitrous oxide, reached record levels in 2022 and again increased globally in 2023. As the UN Secretary-General António Guterres said:

Sirens are blaring across all major indicators

...

Some records aren’t just chart-topping, they’re chart-busting. And changes are speeding up.

According to the UN, fossil fuels – coal, oil and gas – are by far the largest contributors to global climate change, accounting for over 75 per cent of global greenhouse gas emissions and nearly 90 per cent of all carbon dioxide emissions, and are responsible for compounding global warming issues.

The good news in the report – and I refer the members opposite to this section of the report, I genuinely do – is that as of 2023 renewable energy capacity across the globe soared by more than 50 per cent, now totalling 510 gigawatts, the highest observed rate in two decades. The report stated that the surge in renewable energy generation, primarily fuelled by solar, wind and the water cycle, has positioned the renewable energy sector as the leading force in climate action and achieving decarbonisation goals. That is why I am proud to be part of an Allan Victorian Labor government that is leading the nation and indeed many jurisdictions around the world when it comes to taking this real action on climate change to drive down our emissions and move us towards a renewable energy future.

As of 2021 the main source of Victoria’s emissions was burning fossil fuels like coal, oil and gas, which equated to around 51 per cent our state’s emissions. However, since 2014 we have taken that real action to decarbonise at the fastest rate in the nation. We have driven down our emissions by 32.3 per cent and we have grown the share of energy generation that comes from renewables to 39.3 per cent of the state’s energy generation, all while growing our economy and growing jobs by 42.8 per cent. We can actually do that. We can invest and progress towards renewable energy and grow the economy and grow jobs in the regions too, where unemployment, by the way, is at record low levels.

As we on this side of the house do this, the Liberals of course are stuck in the past with their heads buried in the sand. Of course these measures are all consistent with our legislated emissions targets, which we recently passed: 28 to 33 per cent below 2005 levels by 2025, 45 to 50 per cent below 2005

levels by 2030, 75 to 80 per cent below 2005 by 2035. And of course we are working with this bill towards that net zero emissions target by 2045. Along with that we have invested \$3 billion into renewable energy infrastructure. We have also set forward some of the most ambitious renewable energy targets in the nation and in the world – 65 per cent renewable electricity by 2030, 95 per cent renewable electricity by 2035 – and we have set those new energy storage targets of at least 2.6 gigawatts of storage capacity by 2030 and at least 6.3 gigawatts of capacity by 2035.

Underpinning each of these targets and measures will be our capacity to oversee unprecedented growth in Victoria's renewable energy generation sector, which needs to be connected to the broader Victorian electricity grid, which this bill will play a crucial part in achieving. We are undergoing one of the most rapid transitions towards renewable energies in the world. As I said, we are working hard to reach those targets, but to get this cheaper, cleaner and more reliable renewable energy to people's homes and businesses across the state we need to modernise and expand the electricity grid. The current legislative framework was never designed to accommodate a transformation of this scale. The last time we built a major new transmission line was more than 30 years ago. The member for Narracan likes his history. It was 30 years ago, member for Narracan, that we built the last transmission line before the Liberals sold off our energy assets. The current arrangements simply are not fit for purpose. They do not allow for the planning and investment we need for the future, and they do not hold those private companies that the Liberals are best mates with that built and own these transmission assets to account. They do not properly account for land use, and most importantly they do not bring local communities and traditional owners with them as part of the process.

The bill will address these issues by implementing an entirely new way to plan and develop transmission renewable energy zones in Victoria, known as the Victorian transmission investment framework. We know on this side of the house where the sun shines and where the wind is the strongest. It is in those renewable energy zones that we have designated in central northern Victoria, in the Shepparton region, in the Gippsland region, in the Murray River corridor down to Bendigo, in the Ovens–Murray region, in the south-west Victoria region through Portland and in the western Victoria region up to Horsham, in the member's electorate. These renewable energy zones have been identified and are recognised by government and industry as the areas across the state with the greatest potential for accommodating and operating baseload renewable energy power and, as I said, where we can harness the wind, the sunshine, the rain, the tides, the waves and the geothermal heat to provide for the state's future energy needs. I commend this bill to the house. It is all about taking that real action, which the Liberals are in denial about and forever will be.

**Emma KEALY** (Lowan) (11:39): I rise today to speak on the National Electricity (Victoria) Amendment (VicGrid) Bill 2024. It is a fascinating experience hearing some of the rhetoric which comes out of the members of the government's mouths as they try to convert everybody to a certain position in the world that simply does not reflect accurate history or the current situation in any way, shape or form.

I would encourage each and every one of the city-centric Labor MPs in this chamber to make their way out to regional Victoria and speak to just a couple of the landholders who have engaged with VicGrid, which has been established for more than two years now, even though this legislation pretends that is a brand new thing and that we are going to do things differently. Guess what, locals have already had their experience with VicGrid. They have already had their experience and they understand exactly what this is all about, and it is all about not listening to community concerns. We in our region, in country Victoria, are people who actually understand rural communities and who bother to listen to and engage with people who live in the country, and we remember that footage of a security guard throwing young Billy to the ground because Billy was daring to bring a speaker into a community meeting because the older people from the community could not hear what was being said. This is what is happening: the government are tackling young people to the ground who are trying to help their local community in the efforts of consultation.

*Members interjecting.*

**Emma KEALY:** I hear the laughing coming from Labor because they do not care about country people. This is funny to Labor MPs in this chamber. I note that the member for Wendouree is in here, and you have got a very interesting record when it comes to engaging with your local people and standing up for them against policy which just harms their communities, as does the member for Ripon. I note that I have not seen her speak on this legislation yet. She likes to say one thing quietly to local people, and do I hear her say it in here? No. She has not fronted up to one single forum – not a single thing that VicGrid has hosted. She has not been there and will not stand up for her community.

**Sarah Connolly:** On a point of order, Acting Speaker, whilst I absolutely take delight in listening to the member for Lowan, she has strayed so far from the bill I am unsure what she is talking about.

**The ACTING SPEAKER (John Mullahy):** It is not a point of order.

**Emma KEALY:** I would like to inform the Labor MPs in the chamber what is actually happening in western Victoria. Now, you are deadset certain that VNI West is the number one way to go, and I have heard the member for Pascoe Vale speaking about how renewables are so important we need to expand them. You know what? If the government was truly focused on engaging and getting access to more renewables, you would look at plan B. And what is plan B? You should all know what plan B is because many of us have raised this opportunity, this great option that Bruce Mountain has put forward in a fabulous document called *No Longer Lost in Transmission*. If you have not read it, I am more than happy to make this document available to the house. Now, I would like to just reference some statistics on this. Plan B is essentially upgrading existing powerlines rather than going through prime agricultural land and going through areas where there are no easements at all, where we have got powerlines which are going right by houses in areas where people just do not want transmission lines, because they have never had them.

**Lauren Kathage** interjected.

**Emma KEALY:** I actually would like to raise and compare and contrast VNI West versus plan B. Let us have a look. I am getting interjections from across the chamber because apparently the member for Yan Yean is now an expert on VNI West, which is great to see, but let us just go back to the document rather than taking her word for it, because we never take Labor's word for it because they consistently put out mistruths. Let us have a look: require minor widening of 10 metres, 1000 kilometres; requires new easements, 130 kilometres for plan B. How many kilometres of new easements for VNI West?

**Lauren Kathage** interjected.

**Emma KEALY:** Apparently the same, we hear from Yan Yean. I am sorry, but it is actually 1270 kilometres of brand new easements – over 1000 kilometres of new easements. I would say you can hear the rattling of the nod, but I do not even think there is a rattle in there at this point in time. And we look at the capital cost. This is the thing – we hear from this government all the time, 'Renewables will cost less; we're going to drive down the cost of living.' Guess what, you look at the transmission lines and you are going to drive power bills through the roof.

We know that even with the difference between plan B and VNI West, that cost, which is over a billion dollars a year, will actually work out as an increase on household bills of about 30 per cent, and for larger consumers – our businesses, the people who create jobs in this state – it is going to either double or triple their transmission costs. That is a problem, and you never hear this from the Labor government. You never hear that by expanding this infrastructure – it is not the government paying for it from this magic bucket that everything comes from – it ends up on your power bill. So every time you hear a Labor MP saying, 'We're keeping cost of living down,' do not believe them, because their drive to renewables means more transmission lines, and the more transmission lines we have, the higher the cost of every single energy bill in this state. Every single household will have a higher energy bill. Every single business will have a higher energy bill, and that will close down businesses in this state. It is already driving businesses to move interstate, where they are looking at sensible

options with existing infrastructure and upgrading the infrastructure they have got and they are making sure that they have better options and reliable energy for their local community.

Now we are seeing this odd little conflict. If you listen to what the government say and what they do, they are two completely different things. Even in this legislation we hear that VicGrid is going to be responsible for community consultation. But what happened just last week? We had an announcement last week that we are going to have a development facilitation project which would sidetrack – actually completely push aside – any community consultation at all. This is the concern that people have in my local community, because while Labor likes to prosecute country people as being anti-environmental, you know what, people are concerned that this sideways process will actually not just silence community consultation; it will also mean there is no requirement for an environment effects statement. There will not be the requirement for the environment to be considered as part of this, and it is very concerning to my local people –

**Sonya Kilkenny:** On a point of order, Acting Speaker, can I bring the member back to the bill and also ensure that when she is referring to matters they are factual.

**Emma KEALY:** My locals are very concerned about it, and, Minister, if you would like to come and meet with them, please do. They are very concerned about it, and they have not been able to get access to information from the Minister for Planning. Given that she is here and so interested in listening to the community and getting factual information about their concerns around the environment, I invite the minister to come with me to that Bulgana area and meet with local people who are impacted by VNI West. I will put that forward in writing, and I do appreciate the minister's interest in that matter.

We have also got concerns from Laverton saying, 'This will empower the CEO of VicGrid.' Do you know what – what about empowering the communities who are going to be impacted by this? What about supporting and listening to farmers? You might say, 'It's just 2 per cent of farmland that's going to go.' That is not what is in the government report. In the government report, which has now been taken down off the internet to keep it hidden, 70 per cent of agricultural land will host renewables going forward to reach your targets. I cannot see anything in this bill that talks about agricultural zones. I cannot see anything about that. This government relies on the income and the economic benefit of the agricultural sector. Our smallest rural communities rely on the strength of the agricultural sector to keep those local businesses, schools and hospitals alive. By doing this cutthroat transmission across to having just a host of renewable energy in country Victoria, you are going to kill the agricultural sector. Listen to them. Get it right. You can do that. You can deliver more renewables with plan B. Support plan B. Makes sure you listen to our country communities.

**Tim RICHARDSON (Mordialloc) (11:49):** It is great to rise and speak on the National Electricity (Victoria) Amendment (VicGrid) Bill 2024. I will come to some of the comments made by the member for Lowan, because it gives you a sense of how difficult federal policy and state policy have been on renewable energy transmission. If you were listening to the member for Lowan's speech, you would think that there was no renewable energy in our state, that it is suddenly going to take over all the land and that we are not having this transition. It is actually 35 per cent at the moment of the energy mix. And the notion that 70 per cent of agricultural land would go under renewable energy does not stack up – it does not stack up in any form. And you can see –

**Emma Kealy:** On a point of order, Acting Speaker, it is a requirement for every member of this place to be factual in the information they provide. The member has suggested that I have provided misinformation to the house. I am happy to make the government document available to the house so that he can read that and inform himself and ensure his comments are factual.

**The ACTING SPEAKER (John Mullahy):** On the point of order, I think the member for Lowan knows that is not a point of order.

*Members interjecting.*

**Tim RICHARDSON:** And chastise everyone for interrupting during the member for Lowan's speech.

**The ACTING SPEAKER (John Mullahy):** I ask the member for Mordialloc to continue, please.

**Tim RICHARDSON:** Yes. I know it is a sensitive topic, the transition to renewables. We saw this during the coverage of *Nemesis*, when the then Prime Minister Malcolm Turnbull tried to bring on the National Energy Guarantee and was undermined by none other than the Deputy Prime Minister Barnaby Joyce and a range of Liberals and Nationals. I have always thought that the Nationals in Victoria were a bit of a green-leaf-type Nationals outfit, not the heavily polluting industry, non-transition, 'Let's bring coal into the Parliament' type Nationals that we see in New South Wales and Queensland, but what we have seen today is the quiet bit being said out loud on energy policy: the fact that they do not want to transition to renewable energy. They are not listening to their communities. And it is really strange –

**Jade Benham** interjected.

**Tim RICHARDSON:** Member for Mildura, you are not quite at the table yet. You might be leader in time to come for the Nationals. You are out of your place. But I know that it elicits a strong response. I would have a bit of a complex if I was in the Nationals and I had Barnaby Joyce as my leader previously rather than Darren Chester. That would elicit a bit of an emotive response. I would have a response like that if I saw some of the dysfunction that happens in energy policy and would want to say, 'Split our coalition', like they proposed at the end of 2022. You see, they have lost their way in representing communities on what really is a transition, an equitable transition, into the future.

**Jade Benham:** On a point of order, Acting Speaker, on relevance, this is in no way related to the bill.

**The ACTING SPEAKER (John Mullahy):** I ask the member for Mordialloc to come back to the bill.

**Tim RICHARDSON:** We are on the VicGrid, on the transition. The member for Lowan literally just said that agriculture, hospitals and education are gone in the future. That was wide off the bill, you might say – a bit of a fleeting moment when you do not have your speaking notes quite ready. But this is an example of not wanting to front up to do the policy development and a sensible debate on this.

You see, when you put forward a policy like the national electricity VicGrid bill, you are saying to the community, 'Well, these are the nuts and bolts, infrastructure and really important structures that need to be established to empower the energy transmission.' If we cannot get the renewable energy there based on infrastructure that is not fit for purpose, how are we going to meet that ambition when heavily polluting, old fossil fuel technology comes offline? We know the dates. Surely the Nationals, when market failure is happening in brown and black coal technology, when we have had to prop up those industries – and we have seen that federally, propping up old industries – are not saying that they are wanting to prop up those technologies into the future. They are failing communities and they are failing jobs, and every single sensible policymaker knows that those heavily polluting industries are going under.

What do we do? Do we step back then and not take action, not invest in the heavy transition that we need to secure the energy future and the jobs and the security of Victorians going forward? That is what the VicGrid is all about. That is the planning certainty and the investment certainty that we need. It is a critical element of that. So to come in here and say, 'We oppose this form of transition to renewable energy,' but then not offer a single skerrick of the transition, except – and I will give them their credit; they did have a crack. They wanted to burn it all: put it in the incinerator, burn all the waste. That was one policy. We do not hear too much about that. The member for Malvern had a good go at it – 'Yeah, let's go and burn stuff. Let's go have a crack'. Incineration – literally the last form, the last rung on transition to renewable energy is burning it. No, we then had the next brain fart, which

was absolutely incredible: nuclear energy – nuclear. We have got a ban in the state. How do you front up to that? You do not hear anyone on the Nationals or Liberals side acknowledge how crazy this policy is except for the former Liberal candidate for Dunkley and the Leader of the Opposition federally, Peter Dutton. They are the only people that are talking about this as a viable alternative. That is the nature here.

We do not have Victorian Liberal–Nationals with a credible alternative or policy here at all other than, ‘It’s going to be bad – we’re telling you it’s bad,’ even though we are already at our 35 per cent renewable energy target. We have exceeded those renewable energy targets, and it has offset heavy impacting, polluting technologies that are failing.

Do I need to remind them of that infamous moment when the Liberal candidate for Frankston in 2018 said, ‘We will let coal-fired power stations be market-driven. We’ll leave it to the markets.’ David Speers said, ‘Well, if that’s the case, they could build new coal-fired power stations now.’ Then there was 7 minutes of the greatest TV that we have ever seen on Sky News or across any news media. There was a panicked, ‘No, it would actually be the state continuing to prop up old technologies and coal-fired power stations.’ If that is still your policy, with all the information, say the quiet bit out loud and say you are still opposing renewable energy and you are backing old, heavy-polluting technologies that are impacting on communities.

The transition to renewable energy is clear. It was something that the Liberals tried to put up in their policy going into the federal election, but once again we saw the Nationals absolutely tear them to pieces. When you listen to the member for Brighton’s contributions, you go, ‘Okay, well, there’s a bit of reason in there.’ He is standing up. Obviously he does not get along well with the Leader of the Nationals – dare we mention some the things early on around ducks and other things – but he has put forward a policy position. When you hear the member for Lowan, they might as well be in Queensland, they are so far apart on policy. They are not in any unison on that. So how do Victorians have that longer term confidence, and how does business, who they say they are trying to support into the future, have any confidence when they see the policy inertia still going on? It is why people back Labor’s policies. It is why they back our SEC policy to create 59,000 more jobs and to invest in renewable energy, our renewable energy target of net zero going forward, the work that we are doing and the actual infrastructure that we are putting in. It is not hope, as the former environment minister Josh Frydenberg used to say: ‘We hope the technology gets there at some stage. It’s making leaps and bounds and will get there itself.’ You need to incentivise the business community when you have smashed this market for so long.

What we have seen as well is that states have met the federal government’s renewable energy target from all the actions that they are taking. Those numbers that are quoted in various international forums are actually all the hard work of state jurisdictions that have come together in a policy sense and really made that investment. Victorians can trust and be proud of a government that is investing in that technology, investing in critical infrastructure and planning for the future. That is why I am really pleased to see this bill – the establishment of our transition planning objectives and supporting that framework for the planning of major electricity transmission infrastructure in Victoria. How do we do it if we do not have the freeways and networks to get the power there? We need to make that investment. That is a critical identified requirement of national energy reports, which have said, ‘If you’re not putting the investment into that critical infrastructure, there’s no way you’re going to be able to meet those renewable energy targets and ambitions.’

The establishment of VicGrid will support the delivery of these high-priority electricity transmission projects into the future, and some of the projects have been listed and discussed in this chamber. That is the challenge. For anyone serious about energy policy, do not come in here and do 9 minutes saying that everything is bad and the cost of living will go up, even though the heavy fossilised fuels are driving up the cost of living and the renewable energy sector is now becoming more affordable and cheaper and leading that transition. We see that in other jurisdictions. Come in with a policy alternative other than ‘We’ll light it on fire’ or ‘We’ll build nuclear reactors in the next two decades’. Have a

serious go. The member for Polwarth is next. The challenge is there. I mean, front up and give us an alternative.

**Richard RIORDAN** (Polwarth) (11:59): Thank you to the 38-times-passed-over member for Mordialloc. I will take that challenge up, because the member for Mordialloc has often struck me as someone who pays attention and reads his notes. We worked a little bit together on the Public Accounts and Estimates Committee. When he was not playing patience or something on his computer while he was he supposed to be asking ministerial questions, I thought he did actually read his notes. He got up today and disputed the claims made by this side –

**Luba Grigorovitch**: On a point of order, Acting Speaker, I think the member is straying from the debate.

**The ACTING SPEAKER (Wayne Farnham)**: I ask the member for Polwarth to come back to the debate.

**Richard RIORDAN**: Certainly back onto it, thank you, Acting Speaker. The member made a claim that he disputes the fact that 70 per cent of agricultural land will be required to meet the government's renewable energy targets.

**Tim Richardson** interjected.

**Richard RIORDAN**: Well, member for Mordialloc, I can tell you it is on pages 18 and 19 in the Victorian government's directions. What they talk about is that in Victoria, to achieve the goals the government wants, we are going to need to use 70 per cent of agricultural land to meet the targets for solar and wind. The member for Mordialloc probably will not know; he will probably know about dog-walking parks and things in his electorate. In my electorate that has solar and wind opportunities, my community knows very well the limitations of the current networks that we have. He would know that most parts of the existing infrastructure in transmission in Victoria is at capacity. We actually need to get more transition happening in this state if we are to get anywhere near the government's ambitions.

But what they do wrong is that they do it so badly. We saw the transmission lines collapse near Anakie just recently. Well, the same thing happened a couple of years ago on existing infrastructure that has been overseen and managed by this government now for the last 10 years. There have been two collapses within two years of significant infrastructure. The one that collapsed at Anakie the other day may not have been a huge risk to nearby populations. However, the one that collapsed in my electorate fell across the very busy Colac-Ballarat Road. Those travelling on the Colac-Ballarat Road put their lives at risk very, very often because of the potholes, poor edges and complete and utter decay from this government. However, when a massive 500-kilowatt powerline collapses on the road in the middle of the day it is very dangerous, and that level of danger is of concern to my community. It was only sheer luck that it did not fall on a school bus, on a truck or on the numerous cars that travel up and down with people going to work. This government are big on the safety of people going to work, but they turn a blind eye when it comes to their own failings in infrastructure to keep people safe.

Communities not only in western Victoria but right across the state understand what is going to be required to get transmission infrastructure in place that will deliver what the community wants and what the broader state needs, but they also want to know that it is being done safely. What this government have shown time and time again is they fundamentally do not understand what these transmission lines do to communities where they go across. With the western transmission line, we have heard of this government's complete disregard of the potato-growing communities and others along there that were going to be significantly affected. In my own patch, with the Portland 500-kilovolt line that runs through, time and time again the farmers and those underneath those transmission lines understand the impact on their business. For example, at harvest time, with dust and things, whether it is the dust from the crops when you have to burn off stubble – there are all sorts of jobs that occur in and around transmission lines that can greatly affect the productivity of the land and



the farms and the communities involved. This government needs to have a process in place that listens and takes those things on board.

The other thing that has come up over recent years about the need for greater transmission lines right across the state is the other options for transmission. Once again the member for Mordialloc was quick to say, 'Give us some more ideas; give us some more solutions,' because the 29 people on this side of the house are supposed to solve their problems –

**A member:** You don't have an idea.

**Richard RIORDAN:** No, I have got one. I am going to give it to you. But your 40,000 bureaucrats have been incapable of actually giving us a sensible look at high-voltage direct current options. What are they using in England? They have got the same problem, and, guess what, they have got even more confined spaces and regional land to use. They are going HVDC. Why should we be looking at HVDC? Because it means we can get the transmission lines around the state without the impact on farming communities and without the impact on public land, private land and into residential communities.

Why won't this government look at it? Because it is just being pig-headed. This government has refused to respond to the communities from Tarneit through to Ballarat and beyond who have said to this government, 'Okay, if you have to build a transmission line, if you want to reach your renewable targets, if you want to provide more renewable energy, why aren't you also applying world's best practice to the distribution and transmission of electricity and energy?' That is a very fair question. So when the member for Mordialloc says there is not an alternative, there is an alternative. There is an alternative that this side of the house and communities have been giving this government, and for the last four or five years they have refused to look at that alternative.

We heard yesterday about the need to bring offshore energy sources into the grid to try and meet the government's renewable targets. If we are going to not explore all options available in transmission, how are we planning to transmit that energy that is generated offshore across a sensitive national park such as the Otway Ranges? How are we going to transmit energy across our beautiful beaches? How are we going to transmit energy across a whole range of other communities that to date have not had to experience the need for large transmission lines? In fact to make a grid work, you are going to have to connect into what exists. In my electorate alone, if we are going to have offshore energy with transmission, the new transmission lines that this government seeks to build will have to go up to 150 kilometres across country that is either national park, prime residential land or fairly heavily populated areas, such as that area between Torquay, Bellbrae, Winchelsea and across that part of the world, where there are lots of densely populated communities. Are they all to have transmission lines across those areas when there are alternatives? There are alternatives this government should look at.

Acting Speaker Farnham, you will be interested in this because this has probably become an issue in your own electorate. We see in this bill that the government is also seeing transmission lines as a big new tax for them. The transmission lines that we currently have in the state are generating some \$250 million a year in land tax. If you were looking at a government that was going broke, had run out of money, was desperate to raise more income sneakily, then I would suggest to you the reason it is not looking at underground options or other more viable options like sharing existing transmission lines, as the member for Lowan pointed out, you might say, is that this is just another big tax grab by this government in insisting on a whole range of new airborne transmission lines. If it is currently generating \$250 million a year in land tax from transmission lines, there is the very strong incentive that a broke government would be very keen to continue on its merry way putting up transmission lines across regional Victoria to once again have regional Victoria send more money into the coffers here in Spring Street.

What is worse about those land taxes is that of course they are not being paid by the companies as such; they get added on to our power bills. So it is mums and dads – it is cost of living – it is people at

home trying to make ends meet, trying to pay their energy bills, who will in fact be just another cash cow for this government to raise revenue to pay for the Suburban Rail Loop tunnel in Melbourne. To think that for many people in regional Victoria, one of the reasons more transmission lines are going to be put across their valuable farmland, destroying their local communities, when there are other options is that they are just a tax in disguise that will hit the hip pockets and the cost-of-living nerve for so many people and families right across Victoria. This is a poorly thought out option for Victorians.

**Lauren KATHAGE** (Yan Yean) (12:09): I would like to dedicate the start of my contribution to debunking some of what we have heard from those opposite over the last few contributions. The member for Caulfield, the member for Lowan and the member for Polwarth all spoke about this magical plan B, the unicorn plan B. ‘Why won’t you get behind it?’ they said. ‘Why won’t you look at other alternatives? Why are you being pig-headed?’ they said. Well, there is a simple answer, and the answer is, with all respect to Professor Bruce Mountain, that plan B has been thoroughly debunked by the Australian Energy Market Operator – the market operator which, I might add, those opposite tell us is the expert in these matters. The body that they say is the expert in these matters has debunked plan B. One of the things that are wrong with plan B that may be of interest to those opposite based on their contributions so far is that it involves zero community consultation. The very thing they are in here calling for and the very thing this bill does has been absolutely bypassed by plan B. We know it is because those opposite are really just interested in plan N. They just want plan N for Victoria, and that is why they are ignoring the facts and ignoring the reality to take us down that path.

What I found troubling about the contributions from those opposite was their seeming willingness to use incorrect facts to scare their community, their incorrect claims about the use of agricultural land for renewable energy to make people worried – fearmongering. Those claims that they are making are simply untrue because those claims do not take account of offshore wind. They only look at onshore wind and solar, and we in this place just this very week have been debating a bill about offshore wind, because our government has aggressive targets in relation to offshore wind. The reason why offshore wind will make such a contribution to our renewable energy transition is that offshore wind is the strongest form of wind energy because, and forgive me if I am stating the obvious, it is windy out on the sea. In fact in your electorate, Acting Speaker Farnham, my husband went to take up the recommendation of a fishing expedition from Lakes Entrance that you gave, and that fishing expedition was cancelled due to high winds. So we know it is windy there, and offshore wind is more consistent and offshore wind blows strongest in the afternoons and evenings, which is when we have peak demand for electricity use. That is why offshore wind is such an important option for us.

The member for Polwarth makes the amazing claim that this whole process, this transition that we are talking about, is a tax grab, and I think by saying that he is revealing more about those opposite than he is about us – that their focus is on income and profit, and our focus is on bringing down power bills for consumers and transitioning to a renewable future. Those are the facts, so I thank you for allowing me the time to run through those.

But what we are here to discuss is the National Electricity (Victoria) Amendment (VicGrid) Bill 2024, and this bill is a reflection of our overarching approach to the transition to renewables. It is about bringing down the cost of power bills. It is community focused, it is about transparency and accountability and it is about energy reliability and security. Implementing the Victorian transmission investment framework will mean that we have guidance for the planning and development of our transmission infrastructure and the renewable energy zones, and these need to be planned and designed in concert. We have seen what happens when that does not happen. In Texas in the early 2000s they had developers building onshore wind farms all around the place, and then they struggled to gain permission to connect their wind farms to the statewide electricity grid. Because of that difficulty, then investors stopped developing wind farms. So by developing this in concert we are providing certainty for investors and developers, but more importantly we are providing certainty for communities around the location of renewable energy zones and transmission infrastructure.

The guiding principles that I spoke about that drive us more broadly also drive the Victorian transmission plan, and I just want to compare those principles to those opposite's plan N. With their obsession over there with nuclear and flirting with nuclear, they are really not providing the transparency that we are providing under this plan. Where are they planning on putting nuclear power? Where are they putting the waste? Where is the transparency there? They should be open with the public. And where is the community focus? People do not want nuclear. It is not just the current community that will be impacted, it is future generations. Nuclear waste gets stored for 100,000 years, so they are very much expanding the community that needs to be consulted.

We know that, as opposed to our guiding principle of bringing down power bills, nuclear will not. The cost to build is unreal. Hinkley Point C started with a £26.6 billion estimate to build in 2022; fast-forward to 2024 and it is £46 billion – nearly double. Then the estimated cost of the energy to consumers from that power plant has gone up from £43 per kilowatt hour to £191. That is about five times, according to my left hand. Compare that to our plan. Victoria has the cheapest wholesale prices for energy at the moment because of our renewables. We saw that with the default offer most recently. If we are talking about cost, it cost Japan hundreds of billions of dollars to clean up after the Fukushima disaster, so I hope they are counting that in as well.

Quickly, on the guiding principle of energy reliability and security that this bill and our whole approach are based around, it takes a long time to build nuclear. They announced Hinkley Point C in 2008; the current estimate is 2031. In Finland and Sweden it has taken them 40 years to plan where to put the waste. They are burying it in copper in clay soil under 400 metres of bedrock. I mean, that is why I am worried about Mount Buller. It is not possible in Australia to have nuclear before around 2040 or later. Coal plants are going offline sooner than that. But by 2040 we are going to have already an almost fully emission-free system, so it just does not make sense to be looking for plan N. Get behind plan A, those opposite.

The former chief scientist of Australia has noted that the trajectory of power prices with renewable energy is down, down, down and that by the time 2040 rolls around those incredible costs of developing nuclear power will be sky-high compared to our renewable-produced electricity. So it just does not make sense for them to continue on with their plan N. Those massive capital costs simply do not produce cheaper renewable energy. I ask those opposite: please stop scaring your communities, stop ignoring the facts and stop coming in here with falsehoods. The reality is that we are transitioning to a renewable energy system for Victoria.

**Brad ROWSWELL** (Sandringham) (12:19): I also rise to address the National Electricity (Victoria) Amendment (VicGrid) Bill 2024. It is another day in the life of the Allan Labor government and another false promise that Victoria's power bills will be reduced as a result of this legislation, yet there is no evidentiary point that that will in fact be the case. In fact over the last 10 years this government has been pledging that power prices will be lower than they currently are, and every year that they have made that commitment power prices have not gone – to quote the Minister for Energy only a few weeks ago in this chamber – 'down, down, down', but they have been going up, up, up.

Do not believe me just for a moment, believe Victorians who are receiving their power bills in the mail at the moment: power prices are going up. The reason for that is because this government's energy policy and energy focus have been driven purely by ideology and not driven by the practicalities of delivering renewable, reliable and affordable energy for Victorians, not just for Victorian households but also for Victorian businesses. In the last 12 months alone power prices have increased in the state by 25 per cent for households and 26 per cent for businesses. That is having an incredible impact on the bottom line of Victorians at this point in time in the middle of a cost-of-living crisis. It is in addition to cost increases on school fees, on mortgages and on grocery bills. Power prices going up, up, up, not down, down, down – to quote the minister again – is just making life all that more difficult for Victorians at this point in our history.

This particular bill deals with VicGrid. I am in one sense absolutely thrilled that finally this government is defining what the heck VicGrid actually does, because those of us with a longer memory than just this term will know that this government introduced or announced VicGrid earlier in a previous term of Parliament, which was a previous term of the then Andrews government. For a period of that time I had the privilege of serving as the opposition's Shadow Minister for Energy and Renewables. It was a real mystery to me and to every Victorian what the purpose of VicGrid actually was. In the absence of that, as Shadow Minister For Energy and Renewables at the time I thought one of the major issues we had in Victoria in terms of energy in total was energy transmission. It made sense to me at the time that VicGrid should be responsible for energy transmission in this state, which is why at the time I took a policy to our shadow cabinet, which was approved, stating that the remit of VicGrid would be expanded to facilitate transmission changes in the state and that the Liberals and Nationals would invest VicGrid with the authority to carry out the work of transmission infrastructure in the state in addition to assuming the role of transmission planner in place of the Australian Energy Market Operator. Now, that was in August 2021. We are now in March 2024, some three years on, and lo and behold, the Allan Labor government has introduced a bill to effectively do just that. Here we go!

In fact the media release that I released at the time together with the Leader of the Opposition – which I am happy to provide to Hansard for their reference – stated that the Liberal–Nationals would:

... direct VicGrid to establish a Competitive Evaluation Process through which this transmission project and all future all transmission projects will be planned and costed. This Process will prioritise keeping power costs low for consumers whilst adopting best-practice procurement guidelines for major infrastructure projects – drawing upon private sector expertise and consulting in a detailed and meaningful way with the community.

To that point about community consultation, I fully support the textual amendment moved by the member for Brighton Mr Newbury, where he seeks to insert a new part 8 to this bill relating to a community advisory committee, specifically that the minister must establish a community advisory committee and the minister and CEO of VicGrid must consult community advisory committees.

Here is the thing: we all know that we have got six renewable energy zones around this state, but we also know that it is one thing to have a renewable energy zone in this state but another thing to get this power from where it is generated to work needs to be, and that is to the grid.

In order to solve that we need to have greater transmission infrastructure in this state, and I am pleased that this Parliament is finally talking about transmission infrastructure in this state, because for far too long it has been the elephant in the room. It has been the untouchable subject in terms of energy transition that this government and other people in power-making roles have not wanted to touch and have not wanted to talk about. I am thrilled that we are finally having this very important conversation. But as part of that conversation we must not just be talking about new transmission infrastructure; we must also be talking about the upgrading of existing transmission infrastructure if we are to do this correctly, and we must be talking about engagement with community along the way. We have a circumstance in Victoria at the moment where one option and only one option is being presented to communities in the west of Victoria – it is being imposed upon them – which they frankly do not agree with. That is the wrong way of going about transmission infrastructure in this state. The right way is to actually task VicGrid with the responsibility. As we proposed back in August 2021, it is directing VicGrid to have responsibility for transmission infrastructure in this state from go to whoa – from the inception of the idea, from the community consultation piece to the planning piece, to advising government on where transmission infrastructure is actually needed and where transmission infrastructure not only is needed but can be upgraded as well, using best practice major project procurement processes in order to let out the contracts, to assisting with the first turning of the sod on the project, to the delivery of the project, to the implementation of the project, to the certification of the project, right through to the final stages of delivery of the project. We think this is entirely sensible. We thought it back then in 2021, and I dare say it is for the government to consider that very worthwhile policy process and policy proposal in 2024.

Of course we are doing this because one of the driving factors behind this side of the house at the moment is keeping Victorians' bills as low as possible. Acting Speaker Farnham, you and I both know that at the moment, because of the policy settings of this government, power bills are going up, up, up, not down, down, down. That must be a guiding principle of policy. That must be a guiding principle of governments. That must be the guiding principle of policymakers when it comes to our energy transition.

I refer to a media release from my colleague the Shadow Minister for Energy, Affordability and Security Mr Davis in the other place, who earlier this week suggested that:

Reports of a proposed belated decrease to the Victorian Default Offer (VDO) provide little comfort to Victorians who have endured years of double-digit percentage price increases.

Mr Davis said in this release:

Since 1 July 2022, Victorian households have suffered a VDO increase of 17 per cent, or \$240 per household – \$240 in the middle of a cost-of-living crisis actually makes a difference –

The proposed 6.4 per cent decrease will only apply to Victorians on VDO contracts – just 13 per cent of Victorian households and 20 per cent of small businesses.

My bottom line is this: I think we can all agree on both sides of the chamber that we want energy to be affordable, we want energy to be reliable and we want energy to be renewable, the difference being that the government have had 10 years to achieve that and frankly they have not. Their plan is flimsy at best, and it is not delivering the results for Victorians at this time. It is not delivering cheaper power, and that is the key difference between the opposition and the government.

**Gary MAAS** (Narre Warren South) (12:29): Goodness me, really. Look, it gives me tremendous pleasure to rise to speak to the National Electricity (Victoria) Amendment (VicGrid) Bill 2024, but of course it would be remiss of me not to pick up a few of the comments that have been made by the member for Sandringham. As has been noted in this place, when we do talk about prices going down, down, down, we actually mean that. You only have to look at the Victorian default offer, the draft determination of which came out only two days ago. That just continues to be the trusted safety net for Victorians. The draft VDO shows that bills will be going down for each and every household by \$112 – and \$266 for small businesses. So there is just a very, very recent example of prices going down, down, down.

We know that to achieve that and to achieve our renewable energy targets for a cleaner and more efficient energy future we have to keep moving this way. I know many MPs in this place have risen so many times in the term of this Parliament to speak to energy bills, and it is a great testament to our Minister for Climate Action, Minister for Energy and Resources and Minister for the State Electricity Commission for the power of work that her office and the department are doing so that we can reach those targets.

Just on something else from the member for Sandringham: I do not think any reasoned amendments have been put in this place. I understand they were being foreshadowed as being put in the upper house when they reach there.

The National Electricity (Victoria) Amendment (VicGrid) Bill introduces new arrangements for transmission planning in our state by implementing the Victorian transmission investment framework. The bill puts a new framework for planning and developing transmission infrastructure and renewable energy zones in Victoria. The Allan Labor government is making moves on its commitment to renewable energy, but to make this transaction orderly and efficient we need to ensure connecting transmission links are in place to get this renewable energy across Victoria's grid. The bill will avoid Victoria experiencing reliability issues, importing electricity from neighbouring jurisdictions, pushing up electricity prices and losing investment to other states upon the exit of coal-fired power stations in

Victoria. The bill is about moving forward in the state government's pledge to achieve net zero emissions by 2045 and ensure this necessary transition away from fossil fuels occurs smoothly.

We are, as I have said, in the process of one of the most rapid energy transitions in the world. The Allan Labor government has nearly quadrupled the share of renewable energy in power generation since 2014 after investment was halted unfortunately under the previous four years of a Liberal government. In contrast, the Allan Labor government is committed to moving forward on renewable energy legislation. Our goal of 65 per cent renewable energy by 2030 and 95 per cent by 2035 is ambitious, but as we know, you have got to have targets to be able to get there. We must be ambitious if we want to do what is right by the environment and transition to a cleaner, cheaper and renewable energy future. And they are the future. Renewables are the future and will create incredible opportunities for our state, including the creation of some 59,000 jobs by 2035 and billions in industry investment.

I know from speaking to constituents in my electorate of Narre Warren South that they are for renewable energy. They are very concerned about keeping their energy costs down and moving to efficient energy sources to help mitigate the burden on their wallets and the burden to the planet as well. To get renewable energy to our homes and businesses we need to modernise and to update Victoria's grid. The current framework was simply never designed to keep up and accommodate such rapid transitions. The last major transmission line was built over 30 years ago, before energy assets were sold off to private companies by a previous Liberal government. These arrangements do not allow for the current planning and investments being made in renewable energy under the Allan Labor government. They fail to hold companies accountable for land use or engaging early enough with important stakeholders such as traditional owners in the planning of transmission infrastructure.

This bill will implement a new framework to develop these important transmission lines, which will keep the lights on in our homes and in our businesses. As I said, under the bill, what we will see is an updated plan in the development of transmission and renewable energy zones in Victoria. That will be known as the Victorian transmission investment framework and will be implemented by the new government body known as VicGrid. The main purpose of the bill is to establish a new electricity transmission planning objective and supporting framework, the VTIF, for planning of major electricity infrastructure in Victoria by the CEO of VicGrid to support Victoria's energy transition. It will establish interim measures to enable VicGrid to support the delivery of high-priority electricity transmission projects. It will provide for cost recovery of VicGrid activities and electricity transmission infrastructure planning and project development. It will provide for reforms to be integrated into the existing national electricity transmission planning framework. It will also delay the review of the operation of division 7 of part 3 of the National Electricity (Victoria) Act 2005 by one year, to 31 December 2026. Finally, it will provide for payments to landholders who host major electricity transmission infrastructure easements.

The current arrangements in the expansion of transmission lines occur under the Australian Energy Market Operator, who consult community and engage in environmental assessments too late after the identification of a new transmission line. Under the new Victorian transmission investment framework, the VTIF, engagement with local communities and traditional owners will occur not just at the beginning of the process but through ongoing consultation as well. Local communities and traditional owners, as I have said, are really important stakeholders in this process and should not be forgotten about when selecting and planning the work corridors for those transmission projects. This will also feed into the overall plan, the Victorian transmission plan, which will provide long-term certainty for investors and communities involved in transmission line infrastructure.

The bill will also allow VicGrid to develop renewable energy zones and continue working with energy market bodies on three major transmission projects: Victoria to New South Wales Interconnector, Marinus Link and Western Renewables Link too. VicGrid will be empowered to assist and cooperate with the Australian Energy Market Operator as it performs its functions. It will allow VicGrid to

conduct early works and environmental surveys and facilitate investment in Victorian transmission projects.

The bill allows VicGrid to plan projects based on a long-term outlook, outlining the specific Victorian needs relating to our renewable energy targets. The first Victorian transmission plan will be published in 2025 after a period of consultation with communities, traditional owners and stakeholders and will be updated every four years in line with the various and inevitable changes to technology, demand and how land is utilised.

This legislation is an incredibly important piece of legislation. It connects with the full suite of other pieces of energy legislation as we move into the future under this Allan Labor government with cleaner, cheaper and renewable energy sources. I commend the bill to the house.

**Tim READ** (Brunswick) (12:39): I rise to speak on the National Electricity (Victoria) Amendment (VicGrid) Bill 2024. I have heard many of the other contributions, so I will not go into much detail on what the bill does other than to say that it gives VicGrid a transmission planning role for renewable energy zones; it sets out a process for ministerial declaration of the zones, including transmission hosting capacity; and it requires VicGrid to publish and regularly update a Victorian transmission plan for the zones.

As most members agree, the lack of adequate high-voltage transmission lines in Victoria puts much of Victoria out of reach of utility-scale renewable energy projects, and this is one of the important factors delaying Victoria's transition from coal to renewable energy. It is important that we be up-front and accept that transmission lines are not pretty, and there is no point pretending otherwise. As the Leader of the Nationals said yesterday in the debate on the Energy and Public Land Legislation Amendment (Enabling Offshore Wind Energy) Bill 2024, they will destroy someone's view. But they are necessary if we are to retire coal and still expect to draw power from the grid.

The World Meteorological Organization announced this week that last year, 2023, broke every single climate indicator, with their secretary-general Professor Celeste Saulo saying:

Heatwaves, floods, droughts, wildfires and intense tropical cyclones wreaked havoc on every continent and caused huge socio-economic losses.

I do not need to remind members that that even included Victoria. We have already done so much damage to the climate by burning coal, petrol, diesel and gas, and there is plenty more to come before we retire these fossil fuels for good. Last year's global temperature was 1.48 degrees above the pre-industrial average. Droughts, fires and floods will destroy the view and much more besides, so Victoria needs more high-voltage powerlines, despite their aesthetic drawbacks. That does not mean powerlines can go just anywhere, particularly if that means clearing forest or important habitat, for example. I made further comments about the balance between renewable energy infrastructure and nature in yesterday's debate on the enabling offshore wind energy bill, so I will not repeat them here.

Properly conducted consultation with affected communities is important, however, when imposing infrastructure like high-voltage transmission lines needs to be built. It has not been done well in the past. The bill requires that consultation is done, and that should mean that it is done better in the future. A requirement to pay compensation to affected landholders at a rate, as I understand it, of \$8000 per kilometre per year for 25 years should also make it easier for landholders to live with these powerlines. We should also look at how communities are compensated.

However, I am keen to see more grid-scale solar and wind projects under construction in Victoria. I am worried about the decline in new projects, and I suspect it will take much more than this week's renewable energy bills to turn this around. The SEC does seem to be underfunded to tackle the task of building renewables on the scale we need to retire coal and charge electric vehicles, and I urge the government to increase its funding so that it can build more projects and transmission lines and speed up the retirement of brown coal, because many Victorians are deeply worried that both state and federal Labor governments are not moving fast enough on global heating. They have been marching

in the streets over this, urging their governments to lift their ambition to aim to get off fossil fuels faster than the somewhat leisurely timetable that we have set.

On that note I would like to mention Brad Homewood and Violet Coco, whose jail sentences were increased from three weeks to two months the other day, despite the fact that their motives in their protest were entirely selfless, and there will be many more Brads and Violets arrested before long. In fact 27 Victorians were charged on Saturday for their participation in an Extinction Rebellion protest, and there will be many more to come. The best way Parliament can show them that we are lifting our ambition is to speed up our targets and to get rid of the barriers to connecting renewable energy so that we can retire coal and other fossil fuels faster than we already have. The Greens support this bill and encourage the government to lift its ambition so we can see more renewable energy connected to the grid sooner.

**Ros SPENCE** (Kalkallo – Minister for Agriculture, Minister for Community Sport, Minister for Carers and Volunteers) (12:45): I move:

That the debate be adjourned.

**Motion agreed to and debate adjourned.**

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

### *Committees*

#### **Legal and Social Issues Committee**

#### *Reference*

**Vicki WARD** (Eltham – Minister for Prevention of Family Violence, Minister for Employment) (12:45): I move:

That this house refers an inquiry into the mechanisms for capturing data on the profile and volume of perpetrators of family violence in Victoria and barriers to achieving a full understanding of this cohort to the Legal and Social Issues Committee for consideration and report no later than 26 November 2024.

The Allan Labor government is unrelenting in our commitment to ending family violence. Since holding the nation's first Royal Commission into Family Violence and implementing all 227 recommendations, Victoria has invested over \$3.86 billion in reforming the way we respond to and prevent family violence. Some of our key reforms include the establishment of the Orange Door network, which includes more than 36 safety hubs and access points across the state; establishment of Victoria's first dedicated primary prevention agency, Respect Victoria; and investment in over 95 grassroots prevention initiatives to help local communities challenge harmful beliefs and behaviours, including the delivery of 41 capacity-building elements, including the Mate bystander sessions, gender equality training and forums. We have partnered with Aboriginal Victorians through the Dhelk Dja agreement to provide culturally safe spaces for community and services. We have trained over 200,000 workers across the community sector in our multi-agency risk assessment and management framework to ensure we keep people safe by adequately addressing their level of risk and increased the frontline specialist family violence workforce fivefold. And we have done so much more.

Violence in our homes, particularly gender-based violence against women and violence against children or children who are witness to violence, remains a serious issue. It is still a choice that too many Victorians are making. More needs to be done to ensure that we can identify people using or at risk of using violence early so that we can interrupt that trajectory and prevent further harm and reduce recidivism. It is important to note that establishing support services for perpetrators has increased the number of people independently asking for help on how to manage violent and abusive behaviours. This includes presenting to our Orange Doors.



As we continue to build the capacity of the sector to identify and respond to family violence risk, we must continue to look for opportunities to ensure that we are capturing valuable data on the number and profile of people – who we know are most often men – who are choosing to use violence. With this in mind, this motion asks the Legal and Social Issues Committee to consider ways in which the government, through our social services and partner agencies, many of whom are working directly with those who have chosen to use violence, can collaborate to understand this important data. It is critical that the government receives an accurate picture of those who are choosing to use violence against family members. It is through accurate data collection that we can continue to focus our efforts on prevention and working to support those who have chosen to use violence against people they love or once loved. I look forward to the recommendations of this committee, and I recommend this referral to the house.

**Emma KEALY** (Lowan) (12:49): It is a great pleasure, although the content of the motion is of course of great concern. The coalition of course, the Liberals and Nationals, support this motion to refer an inquiry to be focused on the mechanisms of capturing data on the profile and volume of perpetrators of family violence in Victoria and the barriers to achieving a full understanding of this cohort to the Legal and Social Issues Committee for consideration and report no later than 26 November 2024.

Acting Speaker Farnham, before your time in this chamber, I held the portfolio of Shadow Minister for the Prevention of Family Violence, and over that period of time I was able to work closely with the former family violence reform implementation monitor and speak to many individuals who were victims of family violence right across the state.

I also had the opportunity to speak to perpetrators of family violence, and it was very, very clear in speaking to these unique cohorts – and I should add also the Orange Door and other counsellors and people who were providing support or education to victims of family violence or support and rehabilitation programs to perpetrators of family violence – that there were significant deficiencies. This was extraordinarily disappointing to everybody in the sector, because there has of course been a Royal Commission into Family Violence, which was handed down in this place in 2015. There is no doubt that now people are more willing to come forward. They are more educated in understanding what a red flag is, who they can reach out and get support from and where they can go to seek that support. I think there is also greater awareness in the community from men in understanding when they are stepping over a line. That first little step towards unacceptable behaviour and violence is perhaps the time that we need to get assistance or support, rather than what we often hear about family violence, which is that you reach out for help when things are horrifically bad and you have got police constantly at your doorstep or you are in hospital suffering incredible injuries from these sorts of incidents as well.

We also need to make sure there are alternative mechanisms for people in a relationship where they can look at working out how they can deal with those red flags where inappropriate behaviour is happening before it escalates, because there are so many women, particularly women with children, who do not want the only option available to them to be to leave the house now. Generally, women want to try and fix it. We need to make sure they are given the appropriate tools to fix it, which is not just to accept the flowers and the apology and the 5 minutes of ‘It’s my fault. We need to sort this out. You’re the best. Love you, babe.’ We need to make sure that that behaviour stops and that in whatever circumstance we can try and keep that relationship and family unit together where it is safe to do so.

These are not just my thoughts; these are issues that have come through as part of numerous reports by previous family violence reform implementation monitors. The first family violence reform implementation monitor, Tim Cartwright, published a number of reports in his time in the office of the family violence reform implementation monitor, and he highlighted in the very early stages his concerns about the implementation of the recommendations. That concern followed through in the work of the subsequent family violence reform implementation monitor, Jan Shuard PSM, who flagged her concerns. I recall a report that flagged her concerns that the implementation of the

recommendations was not achieving the desired outcome for the changes that the system required, so that women and children in particular were better supported by the system when they came forward needing support in a family violence situation. I do not have the report in front of me, but there was a report which was released in either December 2022 or December 2021 – I think it was in 2021. There was a specific reflection from the family violence reform implementation monitor where she captured the concern of one person who worked within the system that the implementation of the recommendations felt like a ‘tick the box’ exercise. That was always the concern of the sector – that while we had a large number of recommendations to be implemented, it seemed like they were simply being allocated out to individuals in a large office and there was never a level of cohesiveness around how perpetrators were handled and supported and how victim-survivors were handled and supported.

It is interesting to note that, while I personally heavily advocated for the family violence reform implementation monitor office to continue into the future, it was actually an election commitment that the Liberals and Nationals took to the last election: that we do acknowledge that the aspirations of the royal commission were not implemented in the way that we had hoped, that it had not achieved those goals and that we should continue to have somebody in the family violence reform implementation monitor role.

Jan Shuard’s last report was actually subtitled ‘Service response for perpetrators and people using violence within the family’. There are excellent recommendations within that report. While Jan in that family violence implementation monitor role finished up at the end of 2022 – the funding was ceased at the end of last financial year – I encourage this committee to reflect upon Jan’s work and Tim’s work and reflect upon the impact of putting out media releases rather than making a meaningful difference to the support of victim-survivors of family violence and also to ensure we have got sufficient supportive mechanisms in place to support perpetrators who are doing the wrong thing in those earlier stages to stop it from getting to a harmful position where women and children are being mentally, financially, physically and emotionally traumatised through violence. We support the motion.

**Motion agreed to.**

### *Bills*

#### **Estate Agents, Residential Tenancies and Other Acts Amendment (Funding) Bill 2024**

##### *Second reading*

#### **Debate resumed on motion of Gabrielle Williams:**

That this bill be now read a second time.

#### **And Tim McCurdy’s amendment:**

That all the words after ‘That’ be omitted and replaced with the words ‘this house refuses to read this bill a second time until the government provides:

- (1) proof that tenants and rental providers will not be disadvantaged by the bill;
- (2) more information about how the Rental Dispute Resolution Victoria (RDRV) will work;
- (3) a breakdown of costings and how the RDRV will be funded;
- (4) advice on the timeline of when each stage of establishing the RDRV will be reached and for full operations;
- (5) details on how the minister intends to seek advice in the absence of the Estate Agents Council (EAC) and Public Records Advisory Council (PRAC); and
- (6) details on what bodies will replace the EAC and PRAC, including plans for appointments, remuneration, and public information about those bodies.’

**Roma BRITNELL** (South-West Coast) (12:56): The government’s changes to the Residential Tenancies Act 1997 have failed to achieve their goals. They have not improved the rental market for renters. Rents have increased. There is less rental stock available. Landlords are exiting the market in

Victoria. This, together with the last decade of underinvestment by this government in social housing leaves, the state of Victoria with a housing crisis.

I have highlighted the situation before of Doug Bowen in the Parliament. He is a single father with two children under the age of eight, one of whom is in a wheelchair with cerebral palsy. They have been on the waiting list for social housing for four years. I recently had a government department briefing which informed me that there is no available housing for Doug. They say nothing has been built in Warrnambool to suit their needs. They said the property at 7 Crawley Street, which I highlighted as an empty Department of Families, Fairness and Housing government-owned home, was going to be disposed of. So after four years and supposedly investing \$67 million in Warrnambool, the department informs me there is nothing for a family with a child in a wheelchair. They could not even say when a house would be available, so there was no hope, no timelines, nothing. Under this current government, Doug is living on the charitable goodwill of our community. I do want to thank a family who have stepped up and given Doug a place to stay, but a temporary solution is not the one that we need.

The government have a responsibility to Doug, and I will not let them get away with their responsibilities not being met. For Doug to be advised by the department that he should get a rental property just shows how much the government is completely out of touch. Locally the average price of rental properties is \$500 a week. How can anyone afford that? And do not be fooled that rent assistance and the other help would help long term; it would not. It would not even put a dent in the budget challenge that the family would be in if they took a rental property. To say there are no properties available in government stock that are suitable for a wheelchair but 'Go and rent something' that is still not suitable for a wheelchair just demonstrates how out of touch this government is to a vulnerable family like Doug's, who the system should be helping. That is why we have a system – for that exact family that suits that system and needs to be in a public housing house. The government needs to step up, and I will not let this go. They will find Doug a house, because he needs one.

**Matt FREGON** (Ashwood) (12:59): It is my pleasure to rise on the Estate Agents, Residential Tenancies and Other Acts Amendment (Funding) Bill 2024. I am really happy to rise on this, because I think the main point of this bill is to fund alternative dispute resolution in regard to rental disputes. Hopefully after lunch I will get a bit of time to talk about what happens when ADR is not possible. I have a constituent by the name of John who is currently going through a bit of a problem with Mercedes, and I will just give the example. I am giving forewarning to Mercedes: you have got an hour to maybe sort it out.

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

**Business interrupted under standing orders.**

### *Questions without notice and ministers statements*

#### **Energy policy**

**James NEWBURY** (Brighton) (14:02): My question is to the Minister for Energy and Resources. According to the Australian Energy Market Operator, Victorian families and businesses will face gas shortages as early as next winter. Will the minister scrap Labor's ban on gas?

**Lily D'AMBROSIO** (Mill Park – Minister for Climate Action, Minister for Energy and Resources, Minister for the State Electricity Commission) (14:03): I thank the member of the opposition for his question. Can I just be really clear here: the member would do very well to actually read the report that the market operator has released today. The market operator has been very clear that, in the event that there were some peak demand day shortfalls for gas, they are very confident that with a number of different approaches they can meet any of those gas shortfalls. Certainly that is what the market operator has been very clear about. Anyone who wishes to misinform the broader community about the facts – not ideology, which is what motivates you every single day – would do well to actually

read the report, the independent report by experts, to know that there is more than sufficient gas to meet our needs for a number of years.

**James Newbury:** On a point of order, Speaker, on relevance, I do accept the minister's acknowledgement of shortfalls, but the question was whether the minister would scrap Labor's ban on gas.

**The SPEAKER:** The minister was being relevant. The minister has concluded her answer.

**James NEWBURY** (Brighton) (14:04): The minister was asked during an interview in January if the government would 'deliberately restrict production of gas'. In response she said, 'Keep it in the ground, yes.' Why is Labor restricting the production of gas?

**Lily D'AMBROSIO** (Mill Park – Minister for Climate Action, Minister for Energy and Resources, Minister for the State Electricity Commission) (14:05): Can I just say to that supplementary question, the only ones who worry about the lack of facts are those opposite, because I can be really clear about this –

*Members interjecting.*

**Lily D'AMBROSIO:** If they want the answer, perhaps they could listen. We are very, very clear about the need for us to have a plan to manage gas supply in this state, because the fact is this: our resources, our reserves of gas across New South Wales, Victoria, Tasmania, South Australia and Queensland, are diminishing and are depleting. Acknowledging that fact and planning for it is really critical. It is about keeping energy security in place –

**Danny O'Brien:** On a point of order, Speaker, I believe the minister is debating the question and ignoring the media release of her own predecessor, which stated that there were potentially significant onshore conventional gas resources –

*Members interjecting.*

**The SPEAKER:** Order! Member for Gippsland South! If members wish to raise points of order, I ask them to do it succinctly.

**Lily D'AMBROSIO:** What I say is that you have got to listen to the experts, and you plan around that. The market operators have listened to the experts. They have done their research, and the report that they have produced today tells us exactly what is ahead of us.

#### Ministers statements: Kardinia Park

**Jacinta ALLAN** (Bendigo East – Premier) (14:06): I am absolutely delighted to update the house on our government's commitment to world-class regional sporting infrastructure. I am particularly pleased to talk about it in that great regional city of Geelong. Kardinia Park is the best regional sports and major events centre in the country, and last week it just got that little bit better – with some help from Bendigo's own Joel Selwood –

*Members interjecting.*

**Jacinta ALLAN:** Geelong love it when we remind them. I was delighted to join with my colleagues from across the Geelong region the member for Lara, the member for Bellarine, the member for Geelong and the member for South-West Coast to see the delivery –

*Members interjecting.*

**Jacinta ALLAN:** When you are a one-trick pony, you learn you have got to have a few more cards up your sleeve, right? And we do. We were celebrating the completion of stage 5 of the upgrade of Kardinia Park. To get to stage 5 you have got to have stages 1, 2, 3 and 4. Each and every stage over the past 20 years has been backed by successive Labor governments. This is Labor investment in the great regional centre of Geelong to make this venue the best venue in regional Australia – 40,000 seats.

The new Geelong Sports Museum is supporting not just the great sporting culture you see around the Geelong community but also the opportunity to bring major events and other activities to that great facility. I want to thank the Geelong community and thank the Geelong members. We will continue to invest in that great regional city with investment in infrastructure, jobs and services.

### Teacher workforce

**Jess WILSON** (Kew) (14:09): My question is to the Minister for Education. Over the next four years Victoria faces an expected shortfall of over 5000 teachers. There are currently 1313 job vacancies at government schools, and less than 4 per cent have incentives attached. Why is the minister failing to address the teacher shortage crisis?

**Ben CARROLL** (Niddrie – Minister for Education, Minister for Medical Research) (14:09): I have got 3 minutes, okay? Thank you for the question, shadow minister. I am a bit disappointed because I think the shadow minister is the great hope for the other side, but she has obviously not read the report. If you go to the report, on page 3 it says –

**Jacinta Allan** interjected.

**Ben CARROLL**: that early; I will get to the other pages – modelling does not include the expected positive supply of all the Victorian government initiatives. It also highlights in the report that in Victoria we are growing the teacher workforce by twice the national average. I remind the chamber, yesterday I said 50 per cent of schools built across the nation are built here in Victoria and 50 per cent of the national workforce growth for teachers is built right here in Victoria. I look at my colleagues, and I see many teachers here that have become members of Parliament. I look at the other side and I do not see any teachers, but we know the opposition leader did tell everyone today he is a lawyer, and that is what they have got.

We also know that under our government \$1.6 billion has been invested in the teacher workforce. Do not take my word for it; take the federal minister Jason Clare's, who said himself what we are doing in Victoria is nation leading. We are at nearly 10 per cent of people enrolling in teaching degrees just this year. We are getting on with it. To directly answer the question, there are 8000 more registered teachers today than there were three years ago, because we are a government that invests in education. We are the Education State, and we will keep going and supporting our teachers. Some might think being a lawyer is the greatest job in the world and need to tell everyone; we know being a teacher is the most important job in the world.

*Members interjecting.*

**The SPEAKER**: Members will be removed from the chamber without warning. The interjections are unacceptable.

**Jess WILSON** (Kew) (14:12): Swinburne Senior Secondary College in Hawthorn had to cancel VCE classes in term 1 due to a lack of teachers. How many government secondary schools are currently being forced to cancel classes due to a lack of teachers?

**Ben CARROLL** (Niddrie – Minister for Education, Minister for Medical Research) (14:12): Right across the state every school I have visited so far this year – and right across the 14 schools that we opened at the beginning of this year – is fully resourced. In fact, if you go to the report, it says the Victorian school system overall has not only met its expectations but has achieved reductions in student–teacher ratios and that Victorian student–teacher ratios are some of the best in the country. That is why the Productivity Commission handed down a report showing we are number 1 when it comes to education. The report also says – I want to quote; I have got 25 seconds:

Sufficient teachers are available over the forecast period to meet demand –

**James Newbury:** On a point of order, Speaker, the minister is required to be direct. The question asked how many schools are being forced to cut classes, and the minister has not addressed that simple question.

**The SPEAKER:** A point of order is not an opportunity to repeat the question. The minister was being relevant to the question that was asked.

**Ben CARROLL:** Since we came to office we have invested, and the report goes to it, \$1.6 billion in school workforce initiatives. That is more than they invested in the whole entire miserable four years when they were in office in education. We spend more on workforce than they did in full on school upgrades. The biggest threat to education in this state is the election of a Liberal government.

#### Ministers statements: creative industries

**Colin BROOKS** (Bundoora – Minister for Development Victoria, Minister for Precincts, Minister for Creative Industries) (14:14): The Allan Labor government understands the importance of Victoria's \$38 billion creative economy. It is why we have invested \$3 billion in the creative industries since coming to office and developed our *Creative State* strategy that leads the nation. There are over 320,000 creative jobs in our state, and our creative events and festivals help drive our visitor economy too, driving jobs in tourism and hospitality.

There has been plenty happening. The National Gallery of Victoria's Triennial has seen 530,000 visitors come through the doors, including 14,000 children who joined the NGV Kids Summer Festival. We have had the wonderful *Photo 2024* exhibition and the fashion festival, and Midsumma had 280,000 visitors.

**Jacinta Allan:** You're a fashionista.

**Colin BROOKS:** I am. Melbourne Recital Centre is smashing box office figures, with its strongest quarter 1 ticket sales in close to a decade. Warrnambool Art Gallery has the wonderful *Lisa Gorman + Mirka Mora* exhibition. Hamilton Gallery's *Emerging from Darkness* runs until 14 April. The Bendigo Art Gallery has just opened its latest exclusive international exhibition, *Paris: Impressions of Life 1880–1925*, another big Bendigo blockbuster. ACMI's *Marshmallow Laser Feast: Works of Nature* has attracted over 60,000 visitors. Melbourne Museum's *Titanic* exhibition had 230,000 tickets sold in less than a hundred days. As the Leader of the Opposition should know, the captain of the ship went down with the ship.

There have been a lot of events happening in the creative space this year – a close second to the number of media events that the Leader of the Opposition has called this week. But at least people are turning up to our events.

**The SPEAKER:** The minister was never this funny when he was Speaker.

#### Victoria's Big Build

**David SOUTHWICK** (Caulfield) (14:16): My question is to the Minister for Transport Infrastructure. The Australian Workers' Union alleges that the Labor government's Big Build sites are plagued with corruption and that builders not affiliated with the CFMEU are blocked from contracts, even when they offer lower costs. Why is the government signing contracts on Big Build sites that include higher costs just to placate the CFMEU?

**Danny PEARSON** (Essendon – Minister for Transport Infrastructure, Minister for the Suburban Rail Loop, Assistant Treasurer, Minister for WorkSafe and the TAC) (14:17): I thank the Deputy Leader of the Opposition for the question, and I do note that the deputy leader indicated this morning that he was going to refer these matters on to IBAC. What I can advise the house is that the secretary of the Australian Workers' Union wrote to me in January making a number of allegations about the procurement process on the Pakenham roads upgrade. My office immediately referred these matters on to the MTIA's legal and integrity unit, which is an independent team within the MTIA, who took

an intensive investigation. The MTIA's legal and integrity unit determined that the procurement process was compliant and that no further action was taken. The letter canvassed a range of issues, as the member would know.

In relation to the question about the industrial relations matters, those are matters for the companies involved. Companies make a determination as to whether they choose to engage with the CFMEU, whether they choose to engage with the AWU, whether they choose to engage with another party, and over the course of a number of years a number of different contracts have gone to different companies that have different arrangements in place. It is entirely appropriate that those industrial relations matters are managed by the companies involved. What I would say is that my expectation is that everyone behaves properly and appropriately at all times and that all people obey the law of the land.

**David SOUTHWICK** (Caulfield) (14:18): Workers on Big Build sites report being targeted and harassed if they are not part of the CFMEU. What action will the minister take to stop AWU members from being harassed on CFMEU-run Big Build sites?

**Danny PEARSON** (Essendon – Minister for Transport Infrastructure, Minister for the Suburban Rail Loop, Assistant Treasurer, Minister for WorkSafe and the TAC) (14:19): What I would say to the Deputy Leader of the Opposition is that an allegation was made to me, and I acted on it by referring it on to the department and asked the integrity advisors to go through that. They indicated that there were no anomalies with the tender processes involved. What I would say –

**David Southwick:** On a point of order, Speaker, I would ask if you could bring the minister to answering the question. This is not about tenders, this is about the members not feeling safe on work sites. I would ask you to bring the minister back to answering the question.

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

**Danny PEARSON:** If anyone has got allegations to make, then they should make them, and these should be made to the appropriate agencies. As I have indicated, allegations were raised with me. I immediately got my office to pass those allegations on to the department. They were investigated by the integrity unit within the MTIA, and they indicated that the allegations made in the letter written by the secretary of the AWU could not be substantiated.

### Ministers statements: land transfer duty

**Tim PALLAS** (Werribee – Treasurer, Minister for Industrial Relations, Minister for Economic Growth) (14:20): I rise with great excitement really to talk about the landmark stamp duty reform for commercial and industrial property undertaken by the Allan Labor government and leading the nation. Removing up-front costs from purchasing commercial and industrial land or buildings will make it easier for businesses to get established and of course to thrive in this state, boosting economic activity, jobs and growth. The cumulative increase in the size of the Victorian economy as a result of these initiatives will be about \$50 billion in net present value terms. There are 265,000 businesses in this state that have commercial or industrial properties, and over time they will become stamp duty free, benefiting countless businesses and workers right across the state.

The Victorian Chamber of Commerce and Industry describes this as a landmark generational productivity reform which businesses across Victoria will welcome. The Grattan Institute penned an article titled 'Victoria shows Australia how to abolish stamp duty'. The Property Council of Australia has called this a landmark reform delivering huge long-term gain. In last year's budget, we announced that we would be increasing the payroll tax free threshold for business from \$700,000 to \$900,000 and subsequently to \$1 million, meaning 6000 Victorian businesses will no longer pay any payroll tax, and we announced that we would be the first state to phase out duty on business insurance. All up, these reforms will see business paying well over half a billion dollars less in tax over the next four years. That is what this government does; we put businesses first because we know they back employment of workers.

**Community safety**

**Brad BATTIN** (Berwick) (14:22): My question is to –

**Danny Pearson** interjected.

**The SPEAKER:** Assistant Treasurer!

**Brad BATTIN:** I would have been thrown out for that. That is what I was talking about.

**The SPEAKER:** Member for Berwick, I ask you to apologise for casting reflections on the Chair.

**Brad BATTIN:** I apologise to the Chair.

**The SPEAKER:** On a question, member for Berwick.

**Brad BATTIN:** My question is to the Minister for Police. Data released today has revealed that home invasions have increased by 29 per cent in the last 12 months to over 16 home invasions per day or one every 90 minutes. Why are home invasions continuing to rise under your government?

**Anthony CARBINES** (Ivanhoe – Minister for Police, Minister for Crime Prevention, Minister for Racing) (14:23): I thank the member for Berwick for his question. I point out again that the crime statistics that were released today demonstrate that Victoria continues to have a lower youth offence rate than New South Wales, that our crime offence rate continues to be lower than 2019 pre-COVID levels and that our crime rate is –

**Brad Battin:** On a point of order, Speaker, on relevance, we are talking specifically about home invasions, with one home invasion every 90 minutes in Victoria, and I ask you to direct the minister to answer that question.

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

**Anthony CARBINES:** Operation Trinity, which is a focus of Victoria Police, and Operation Alliance, again a focus of Victoria Police work on aggravated burglaries and youth gangs, have made sure that we have seen over 500 arrests by Victoria Police members to crack down on those who seek to break the law. You cannot do that – you cannot make 5000 arrests around aggravated burglaries and youth gangs – unless you invest in Victoria Police. That is why our government has invested some \$4.5 billion to fund an additional 3600 police. Those opposite cut the police budget by \$100 million and did not fund one additional police officer in their time in government, and that is why we have seen again the chief commissioner Shane Patton make it very clear today on the radio, as he has on many occasions, that Victoria continues to be a very safe state. The reason that it is a safe state is because we are able to thank our Victoria Police members who provide an emergency response to all Victorians 365 days of the year, and we thank our Victoria Police members for the work that they do.

I take this opportunity further to make a call-out to those in the community – I go out to the police academy every fortnight to see those double squads graduate at the academy to put themselves on the line to keep communities safe in Victoria – to come and make that commitment. We call on all Victorians to give consideration to what they can do to further serve Victoria Police to keep the community safe, to get out there every day and to provide the community with the reassurance that we need.

**Brad Battin:** On a point of order, Speaker, again in relation to relevance, if the minister would like to put the facts on the table, 48 new members in in Victoria Police, 49 members resigned. That is one less in the last fortnight alone.

**The SPEAKER:** That is not the way to raise a point of order.

**Anthony CARBINES:** What we know is that there have been some very successful programs run by Victoria Police like our embedded youth outreach program, which has seen an additional \$7 million invested in that program for the member for Melton. We are doing that also in Brimbank with my



colleague the member for St Albans. We are also doing it in Shepparton because that program is seeing a reduction in youth crime reoffence rates of some 29 per cent. These are the programs that work and are leading the state. These are the programs that see our 48 youth specialist officers embedded with young people and youth workers to ensure that young people get the support that they need. But there must be a balance to hold also to account those who seek to break the law. That is why we have seen some 5000 arrests in relation to the operations that police are able to provide –

*Members interjecting.*

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

**Member for Mildura withdrew from chamber.**

**Anthony CARBINES:** driven and directed by Victoria Police and the chief commissioner because of the resources and the record investment that is provided by our Allan Labor government. I say again on behalf of all members of this house that 365 days of the year, day and night, Victoria Police members are out there keeping our community safe. We thank them. We thank them again, and we thank them again.

**Brad BATTIN** (Berwick) (14:27): In relation to –

**Darren Cheeseman** interjected.

**The SPEAKER:** Member for South Barwon, you can leave the chamber for 90 minutes.

**Member for South Barwon withdrew from chamber.**

**Brad BATTIN:** Given that 64 per cent of aggravated burglaries remain unsolved, is the rate of unsolved aggravated burglaries the result of the government's inability to fill over 1000 Victorian police vacancies?

**Anthony CARBINES** (Ivanhoe – Minister for Police, Minister for Crime Prevention, Minister for Racing) (14:28): I am a bit concerned that the member for Berwick seems to be blaming Victoria Police members. I would like to think that that is not the case.

**Brad Battin:** On a point of order, Speaker, if you want to put the facts again on the table, it is a thousand vacancies because this government has failed to invest where they need to put police, not those that are doing a wonderful job –

**The SPEAKER:** The member for Berwick will resume his seat. Please do not raise points of order that are not raised in the correct manner.

**James Newbury:** On a further point of order, Speaker, on standing order 118, the minister knows not to make an imputation against a member.

**The SPEAKER:** There is no point of order.

**Anthony CARBINES:** The Victorian government's Made for More campaign is a reflection of why we are seeing double squads graduate at the police academy every fortnight. I am not sure if the member for Berwick is made for more and I am not sure if the member for Hawthorn is made for more, but we are seeing double squads at our police academy – people putting their hands up to serve the community. We will continue to make sure the police have every resource they need: \$214 million for tasers to make sure they have got the tools they need to do the job and legislation in this place around firearm prohibition orders that the chief commissioner says is a game changer to hold those to account. We are making sure through our record investment in Victoria Police that they have the tools they need to do the job, and the 5000 arrests we have seen across aggravated burglaries and across youth crime is a demonstration of the work of Victoria Police, and we thank them every day.

**Ministers statements: veterans**

**Natalie SULEYMAN** (St Albans – Minister for Veterans, Minister for Small Business, Minister for Youth) (14:30): I rise today to update the house on how the Allan Labor government supports our veterans as we approach Anzac Day. Each year on 25 April we pause to remember those who have given so much to our state. We reflect on the values of the Anzac spirit forged on the beaches of Gallipoli. As the Minister for Veterans I meet so many people in the veteran community who have served our country, like Allan Godfrey, one of our last Victorian World War II veterans. Allan passed away, sadly, yesterday, a few days shy of his 101st birthday. I send my condolences to his family and his friends.

I know many in this place attend local services in their communities or the shrine dawn service. Anzac Day is more than a commemoration. It is also about supporting our veterans' welfare. Through the Anzac Day Proceeds Fund the Allan Labor government is giving back to our veteran community, and major sporting events held on Anzac Day contribute to the fund, which gives directly to support the health and wellbeing of our veterans. Organisations like Soldier On, RSL Active, Carry On, TPI and Melbourne Legacy are just a few that have received funding to continue their important work. We owe it to our veterans to have their backs, and that is why our Anzac Day Proceeds Fund matters.

Whether you are at the dawn service or at the MCG for the Anzac Day match, let us remember and reflect on the service and sacrifice of our veterans for our state and country. The Allan Labor government will continue to support veterans on Anzac Day and every other day. Lest we forget.

*Members interjecting.*

**The SPEAKER:** The member for Bentleigh can leave the chamber for an hour.

**Member for Bentleigh withdrew from chamber.**

**Breakthrough Victoria**

**Bridget VALLENCE** (Evelyn) (14:32): My question is to the Treasurer. In November 2020 the government promised the \$2 billion Breakthrough Victoria would create 15,700 new jobs. Breakthrough Victoria invested \$30 million in Seer Medical, which has cut nearly 100 jobs. Why has the government invested \$30 million in a company that is cutting Victorian jobs?

**Tim PALLAS** (Werribee – Treasurer, Minister for Industrial Relations, Minister for Economic Growth) (14:33): I thank the member for their question, and I want to also acknowledge the outstanding work that Breakthrough Victoria does in leading innovation in this state. No other jurisdiction in this nation has an equity investment firm, a firm that looks at those opportunities for the state of Victoria to harness and to secure high-paying jobs in this state in areas where we have a clear and demonstrable advantage. Breakthrough Victoria of course is now being copied by the federal government with the National Reconstruction Fund, but it has not yet got started. Breakthrough Victoria has made some 20 investments. It is an equity investor, so we said at the time when this was being established that people needed to appreciate that there was a higher appetite for risk and it would require patience in terms of the investment strategies that were being pursued, and ultimately –

**Bridget Vallence:** On a point of order, Speaker, on relevance, it was about cuts after the promise. You also promised 15,700 jobs, which are not forthcoming.

**The SPEAKER:** Order! That is not an appropriate way to raise a point of order, and you will direct your comments through the Chair.

**Tim PALLAS:** Of course Breakthrough Victoria is a \$2 billion fund that has a brief over 10 years to receive to the state an investment mandate of around 8 per cent return on the investment the state is making, and I am confident that it is on track. But let me also assure this place that with a company like Seer, which has gone through a cash-burn problem, which ultimately happens a lot in cases of

companies that are scaling up, the state of Victoria, as an equity shareholder in this company, is doing massive work to ensure that that company continues.

*Members interjecting.*

**Tim PALLAS:** It is clearly apparent that those opposite have never taken a risk in their life, other than to plot numbers against each other. The state of Victoria is a leader in innovation. That is why LaunchVic has now got Victoria to the point where startups are 600 per cent faster growing than they were under the previous Liberal government. That is why we have more startups in this state than the state of New South Wales at the moment.

**Bridget Vallence:** On a point of order, Speaker, on relevance, it was a very narrow question: why has the government invested in a company that is cutting jobs?

**The SPEAKER:** A point of order is not an opportunity to repeat the question. The Treasurer was being relevant to the question that was asked.

**Tim PALLAS:** I am trying to expand the narrowness of the opposition to a broader bandwidth of economic opportunity. That is why this state and Breakthrough Victoria have more than 20 investments to help unlock the massive innovation potential that this state has. Let me give you an illustration: \$12 million invested in Aravax, a groundbreaking peanut allergy therapy that will bring life-changing health technology to the world; \$5 million to support FLAIM Systems, a virtual reality technology to make firefighting safer; \$2 million to support Cyban's cutting-edge medical technology to prevent traumatic brain injuries. That is what a dynamic government does.

**Bridget Vallence:** On a point of order, Speaker, may I ask that the Treasurer tables that information.

**The SPEAKER:** Documents are tabled during formal business, not in question time.

**Bridget VALLENCE (Evelyn) (14:37):** Breakthrough Victoria has invested in at least one company that has sent jobs offshore. Will the Treasurer direct Breakthrough Victoria to disclose how much it has invested in each company?

**Tim PALLAS (Werribee – Treasurer, Minister for Industrial Relations, Minister for Economic Growth) (14:38):** I thank the member for their question again and the opportunity to demonstrate that anytime she wants to pick up a media release, because I do not shy away from singing the triumphs and the great investment that Breakthrough Victoria do, I do incorporate that information in media releases about what the technology has the potential to provide and what investment the state is making. There are occasions when commercial-in-confidence arrangements require the equity share that the state is acquiring not to be produced. These rules apply and have applied to authorities that operate in a commercial arrangement, such as TCV and Victorian funds management, and such were the rules under those opposite when they were in government. Simply, we are not going to get in the way of innovation and investment that will grow the technological base of this state and high-paid jobs in areas of growth and opportunity.

#### Ministers statements: major events

**Steve DIMOPOULOS (Oakleigh – Minister for Environment, Minister for Tourism, Sport and Major Events, Minister for Outdoor Recreation) (14:39):** I rise update the house on the major events capital of Australia. There is so much happening in Melbourne: Melbourne Fashion Festival, Melbourne Food and Wine Festival and Melbourne International Flower and Garden Show, and of course today is day 1 of the four-day Australian Grand Prix at Albert Park. This year's grand prix will have 136 food vendors, 29 bars and 400,000 collective hours of work over 12 weeks to put it on. We build the equivalent in grandstand capacity of half the MCG in 12 weeks. According to Crown Resorts, an extra 300 staff are being put on for the Formula One weekend. This includes chefs and waitstaff in restaurants and bars right through Crown Resorts, housekeeping staff, hotel staff and cleaners. All 1600 rooms through Crown hotels are completely full over the weekend. Last year's grand prix

generated \$268 million of economic activity in Victoria, and about 50 million of the world's eyes will be on Melbourne. This year's grand prix is going to be our biggest yet. In fact tickets for Friday, Saturday and Sunday have been completely sold out. You will not find a ticket.

There is so much to see on track. There are two Australians on the grid, Daniel Ricciardo and Melbourne boy Oscar Piastri, who trained in Oakleigh. We also welcome back Formula Two and Three and the Supercars, but there is much more to see than just racing. Last night we had what was effectively a fashion festival on the grid, Glamour on the Grid. Guests will be entertained by a bunch of different Australian artists – Vanessa Amorosi, Jet and many more – because in Victoria we do not just put on a sporting event, we put on a festival. While we are busy organising a workforce of thousands for this weekend, those opposite cannot organise a workforce of 30 to decide who their leader will be. So start your engines, because we have got another major event coming in the Allan Labor government, like we do every other weekend.

### *Rulings from the Chair*

#### **Constituency questions**

**The SPEAKER** (14:42): I have reviewed yesterday's constituency questions. The member for Gippsland South asked the minister to fund some traffic works in his electorate. The member directly sought an action from the minister rather than asking a question; therefore I rule the member for Gippsland South's constituency question out of order.

**Jade Benham**: On a point of order, Speaker, I am still seeking answers on some overdue questions, including 462, 503, 522, 559, 629, 757, 821, 877 and 1002.

**The SPEAKER**: Could you please pass the list to the clerks.

#### *Constituency questions*

##### **Caulfield electorate**

**David SOUTHWICK** (Caulfield) (14:43): (580) My question is to the Minister for Education. Yesterday I tabled a petition with nearly 1800 signatures calling for the minister to take action against rogue teachers and the Australian Education Union using the classroom to push their radical anti-Israel agenda to Victorian kids. Antisemitism has increased as much as 700 per cent since 7 October, yet we are still seeing some teachers at Victorian schools openly conspiring to manipulate Victorian children to teach them to hate Israel and create hostility towards the Jewish community. Teachers are so important, but these fringe-dwelling, hateful activists are a disgrace to this noble profession. Minister, off the back of my community's petition, how will you keep my community safe and stop rogue teachers and the AEU from brainwashing kids in schools?

##### **Bass electorate**

**Jordan CRUGNALE** (Bass) (14:44): (581) My question is for the Minister for Health. Recently our government made an important, practical and wonderful announcement, the extending of the community pharmacy pilot program. As part of this, 729 pharmacies across Victoria, including in Cowes, Wonthaggi, Lang Lang, Inverloch and Pearcedale in my electorate of Bass, will be able to treat patients for mild and common skin conditions, including psoriasis and shingles. We know that 3700 Victorians, the majority of whom are women, have already accessed this program, getting the care they need. For women it has meant that they can just pop down to their participating local chemist to get a refill for their oral contraceptive pill without having to go to their GP each and every time or to get treatment for uncomplicated urinary tract infections. My question for the minister is: how will these changes benefit community members, including women in my electorate, who access this program?

**Gippsland East electorate**

**Tim BULL** (Gippsland East) (14:44): (582) My constituency question is to the Treasurer, and the information I seek on behalf of my constituents is whether the Treasurer has plans to review the unfair land tax. It is unfair on many fronts, but I will give you just two examples. I have one resident of Bullumwaal, a pensioner, who has his driveway providing access to his home on a separate title. He has now been issued with land tax on the driveway parcel of his land due to the lower threshold. This is entirely unfair. He cannot sell that parcel because he needs access to his home, but he has got no money to pay the land tax. Then we have another pensioner, who bought an adjoining block to his home some years ago when he was working. He bought it cheap from the government as it was surplus. Now a pensioner, he has also been caught by the lower threshold and has to pay but cannot afford to do so, so he is being forced to move. Treasurer, you need to review this unfair tax.

**Pascoe Vale electorate**

**Anthony CIANFLONE** (Pascoe Vale) (14:45): (583) My constituency question is for the Minister for Medical Research: how is the Victorian Labor government's record \$1.3 billion investment into the medical research and technology sector supporting jobs, skills, health and wellbeing outcomes across my community of Pascoe Vale, Coburg and Brunswick West? Melbourne is proudly one of the leading biomedical research cities in the world. As one of the state's fastest growing sectors, the med tech industry generates \$1.4 billion in economic value, employs 6000 med tech workers and is home to 650 med tech related companies. For every one dollar invested in the sector, med tech generates \$3.90 of economic activity and most importantly changes and saves countless lives every day through its research and technology, including through the COVID-19 pandemic. The Merri-bek community is proudly home to over 12,800 local healthcare workers, representing nearly 14 per cent of local workers, many of whom are employed at Victoria's leading med tech institutes, including the Burnet Institute, the Florey brain institute, the Murdoch children's institute, and the Olivia Newton-John and the Walter and Eliza Hall medical institutes. I met with Professor Keith Martin and Michelle Marven from the Association of Australian Medical Research Institutes – *(Time expired)*

**Rowville electorate**

**Kim WELLS** (Rowville) (14:46): (584) My question is to the Minister for the Suburban Rail Loop: why is the government spending \$216 billion towards a redundant rail loop when constituents in Rowville still have no train line to travel to and from Melbourne? With Melbourne expecting to reach a population of over 6 million people past 2030 and outer suburbs like Rowville being expected to bear the brunt of this population surge, the government ought to be addressing the serious issue of public transport in places like Rowville. \$475 million was funded by the federal Liberals for stage 1 of the project from Caulfield to Monash University, with stage 2 being committed to once the state Labor government matched the funding. Typically, Prime Minister Anthony Albanese and federal Labor in its first budget made it pretty clear that federal Labor has no interest in providing public transport for the residents of Rowville and cut the funding for Rowville rail.

**Bellarine electorate**

**Alison MARCHANT** (Bellarine) (14:47): (585) My constituency question is for the Minister for Outdoor Recreation: minister, what is the expected time frame for the St Leonards boat ramp upgrade? The Better Boating Fund established by the Labor government contributes approximately \$33 million each year to recreational boating projects and programs. I am proud that we are delivering better boating and fishing infrastructure for our community by improving the St Leonards boat ramp, ensuring it can be utilised and loved by locals and tourists for many years to come. I look forward to hearing from the minister to share the response with my constituency.

**Brighton electorate**

**James NEWBURY** (Brighton) (14:48): (586) My constituency question is to the Premier: when will the state Labor government start to genuinely address the environmental issues in the Elster Creek canal and catchment area in my community? The Elster Creek canal and catchment run like an artery through my community. It deserves to be protected from plastic, litter and toxins. Over recent years we have seen works begin in Elwood to help mitigate flooding at the Yalukit Willam wetlands. The once vibrant Elster Creek canal catchment area in Port Phillip Bay deserves an immediate remedy to the growing volume of plastic and polystyrene litter causing harm to wildlife and humans. Almost 800 residents in my community in recent weeks have signed a petition calling on the state government, in partnership with surrounding councils, Melbourne Water, Parks Victoria, the Environmental Protection Authority Victoria and interested groups in the community to find solutions to eliminate rubbish. As part of the state government taking a leadership role, the community has also called on the Minister for Water to personally receive a copy of the completed petition.

**Narre Warren South electorate**

**Gary MAAS** (Narre Warren South) (14:49): (587) My constituency question is for the Minister for Multicultural Affairs in the other place and concerns the multicultural festivals and events program: Minister, how does the Allan Labor government's multicultural festivals and events program support the diverse community in my electorate of Narre Warren South? Narre Warren South is home to a large Afghan, Sri Lankan and Indian community, with the last census informing that just under 60 per cent of people have both parents born overseas. Hazaragi, Dari, Punjabi and Sinhalese are amongst the most spoken languages at homes. With such diverse backgrounds in my electorate, I am grateful for any available support for multicultural groups to celebrate their culture and educate the wider community on their history, heritage and beliefs. I look forward to sharing the minister's response with my community.

**Berwick electorate**

**Brad BATTIN** (Berwick) (14:50): (588) My question is to Minister for Police. What data does the minister have on the response times of Victoria Police when attending to serious incidents in my electorate of Berwick? Crime Statistics Agency data for the year ending 31 December 2023 has revealed a 12 per cent increase in recorded offences in the Berwick area, with a 12.5 per cent increase in Clyde North compared to the same period in the previous 12 months. A serious consequence of Labor's failure to keep its promise over police numbers is an alarming rise in crimes remaining unsolved, with 43 per cent in Casey during the 2023 calendar year remaining unsolved, which even exceeds the statewide unsolved number of 41 per cent. Victims of crime – indeed all residents of the Berwick electorate – have been badly let down by the Allan Labor government. Police numbers are going backwards. Police are doing the best they can, but they are just not being given the tools they need, including the Clyde North police station that was promised for 2018.

**Bayswater electorate**

**Jackson TAYLOR** (Bayswater) (14:51): (589) It is a school on the side of a hill, and it is getting a major upgrade. St Joseph's Primary in Boronia is a fantastic local school for which I was excited to announce \$2.1 million for new facilities in the last budget, which was ticking off an election commitment. My constituency question is to the Minister for Education: when will construction works start at the school? I have been proud to be a big supporter of the school since I was elected in 2018, and I know how important new facilities are to ensure they match the exceptional quality of the teaching. I cannot wait to see the works kick off.

*Bills***Estate Agents, Residential Tenancies and Other Acts Amendment (Funding) Bill 2024***Second reading***Debate resumed.**

**Matt FREGON** (Ashwood) (14:52): Just before lunch I was starting to talk about the importance of alternative dispute resolution and how having that available in this bill for rental disputes will be a very good thing for Victorians. I will give an example on a slightly different matter, where we do not yet have alternative dispute resolution. I note the Minister for Government Services is at the table – I thank her for her work on this – and maybe this is something that we can look at down the track. It is in regard to the purchasing of vehicles.

I have a constituent, John, a self-funded retiree who is about 80. He sold their previous car, and he bought his wife a new car, a Mercedes. They saved a bit of money because they got the dealer model. I will not mention the name of the franchise because frankly it has gone past that, but essentially he had some problems with the car. As they were driving their new C-class the dash went off – no speed, no engine and the heads-up display apparently went off. This concerned John's wife somewhat, so she obviously pulled over and they got the car sent back to have it fixed. To cut a long story relatively short, that problem reoccurred four times. The last time the same problem occurred it was in the shop for 73 days. The franchise did provide them with an alternative car – it was not the same type, but it was an alternative car – so they were trying to fix it. The problem that John has is that his wife does not have confidence in the car anymore, and I think in regard to this, after having the same problem four times, that is probably fair. Anyway they finally got the car back. They had it for three days. They went shopping; they came back from the shops with their stuff and the car would not start. It is a different problem now.

In the situation where you look at consumer affairs law and the Australian Consumer Law, it would be fair to say that John would have a decent argument that the car might be a lemon, and if so, there are ways to argue in court that that is the case. But in order to do that, because the car is worth more than \$40,000 – VCAT cap out at that – he has to go to the Magistrates' Court. That is going to cost him thousands to do. He is a self-funded retiree, and while he has got a bit of cash obviously – because he sold a car and bought this car – fronting up possibly \$10,000 for a win or a loss or a you do not know is a problem.

Hypothetically, if the Mercedes company said 'Let's go to some dispute resolution' or 'Let's try and work this out', that would be a good move. It would not necessarily cost us much. They could come to terms, everyone would save money and the courts – or in this case, VCAT – would not be using their time on things that could be otherwise agreed. In this case Mercedes unfortunately have not done that. They have basically responded to John, who said, 'You take the car back, I'll take my money back and we'll call it even. We'll move on.' They have said, 'No, it's with our lawyers,' which is a bit rough. I mean, five times this car has been back in the shop now; four for the same reason and one for another. We do not give legal advice in this house, but it seems a bit rough to me.

I think this is why, if you look at the rental reforms that this government has made over many years – and I go back to even little things like allowing renters to put hooks on the walls or have pets. I remember when my kids were little, if I went to IKEA and bought some shelves Rebecca would not let me finish that job without attaching those shelves to the wall, because kids have a habit of climbing things, and we have all seen horror stories of kids having bookshelves land on them. So before we bought those changes in for rentals, if you were renting and you had a toddler, you would not be able to do that without your landlord saying yes. You would like to think most landlords would say yes, but some might not. Again, if you have a dispute with your landlord following the hopeful passing of this bill, you will be able to not just go straight to VCAT but hopefully have some alternative dispute

resolution and save not only yourself and not only the landlord but the state as a whole and the courts and VCAT time and money.

While we are at it I will give a shout-out to the mediation people of the Victorian Bar, who do great work. They sometimes feel like they are not treated as kindly as some of their other colleagues, but I think we all appreciate it when we need it. Until then, you probably do not know anything about it. Going back to John, John had no idea that his experience with Mercedes would leave him either with a car that his wife is not comfortable with or having to go to the Magistrates' Court and potentially risk 10,000 bucks – might win, might not, who knows? That is a matter for the courts.

The other thing I just want to quickly say in regard to some of the work that we have done on underquoting – and again it is a testament to the minister at the table, Minister Williams, and the former minister, Minister Horne – it is very important, especially in a rising market, which we have seen for decades now. It is very difficult to know how much to spend on your house if you get the feeling that the prices are underquoted. I know there would be many people lucky enough to have bought a house who went in thinking, 'Oh, yes, we're probably in the market for this,' and then got blown out of the water in 10 minutes and thought, 'Oh, well. There you go.' So on that, I would just like to give a shout-out to another constituent and a former constituent, Heinz Weller and Peter Stewart. Peter passed away a couple of years ago. Heinz and Peter are probably well known to Consumer Affairs Victoria because for many years they were on a crusade for underquoting. I thank them for their assistance with my office and being able to put their case forward with the former minister, and I thank the former minister for listening. With the work that we have done even recently, I saw there is another real estate agent who is getting a bit of trouble. We are doing good work in this area; this is more of it. I commend the bill.

**Richard RIORDAN** (Polwarth) (14:59): I rise this afternoon to speak on the Estate Agents, Residential Tenancies and Other Acts Amendment (Funding) Bill 2024. I guess any bill that comes before this house that can do more to make the relationship between renter and landlord or a rental property owner better, more seamless, more efficient and quicker to resolve is potentially a good act. However, I do note in this particular piece of legislation, and with the second-reading speech tabled, there are a couple of points that I would like to elaborate a little on. The minister says that:

The Victorian Government is committed to ensuring access to fair, safe and secure housing for all Victorians.

As the Shadow Minister for Housing I just make the observation that I know in public housing the rental experience that tenants have there is for some reason deemed a different experience to that of tenants in the private sector. I guess if the state government was in fact a premiere landlord, a rolled-gold first-rate class landlord rental provider, then that would be understandable, because you would not have too many complaints. But the Ombudsman released a report just yesterday into the experience of public sector tenants and found that in fact the Victorian government is probably the state's worst landlord – a lousy landlord, you might say, certainly not one setting the highest standards. What we learned in that report yesterday is that the Ombudsman found herself having to produce it as a follow-up, because when she did the report two years earlier the government failed to make any commentary. In fact, she goes on to say in this follow-up report that three ministers were in the job and that in that time not one of them had the courtesy to respond to the Ombudsman's report on the way tenants were experiencing their landlord. I think when the government comes to play and expects the private sector and private landlords and real estate agents and all those involved in the market to show ethical, progressive behaviours, then it is quite frankly astounding that the Victorian government chooses to flout all those expectations themselves.

The report found, for example, an 83 per cent increase in complaints handed to the Ombudsman over the last six years. And not only that, she also made the observation that tenants were becoming so desperate for getting simple things such as blocked toilets, plumbing that does not work and basic services repaired that they were being forced to go to the media, to members of Parliament, pulling every string possible just to get basic services done. I think when we look at the way the rental and



housing crisis is manifesting itself in Victoria at the moment, one of the best ways we could get more transparency and better service into the private market is not possibly through more legislation and more rules, and in the case of this, creating yet another Victorian government authority of some description but in fact to get more supply into the market, so that the consumer – the renter – has more choice that is suitable for them.

I was disturbed just this afternoon to receive a response from the department and Homes Victoria on a family that we have mentioned here in Parliament a couple of question times ago, a single dad with a profoundly disabled daughter who is unable to access accommodation in a regional city. I received correspondence today that in fact Homes Victoria has no solution at all for that family any time in the foreseeable future and in fact has no housing stock and has no plans to do anything about it. So where does that family go to resolve its accommodation crisis? At the moment it is forced to rely on the goodwill and support of a community who has provided them a bus to live in, but that is far from adequate. In fact I met also with another family in very, very similar circumstances – a profoundly disabled daughter, both families had. This other family has been 10 years waiting to get accommodation that has a shower for a 20-year-old disabled young woman, confined for the rest of her life to a wheelchair, unable to access the bathroom facilities in the accommodation that this government provides. So this family and this poor young woman can only access a shower once a week when carers come round to both lift her into the glass cubicle, rather than the all-access shower. It actually beggars belief that in this day and age a government that can find billions to spend on an underground tunnel cannot make sure that for the most vulnerable people in this community – after 10 years, mind you; this did not just suddenly happen – they can offer something as simple as a shower. But I am not surprised, because the Ombudsman's report basically detailed that.

We heard from the Ombudsman's report yesterday that people in public housing are being left with a bucket for a toilet for 18 months. We heard about rats and mice. We heard about basic maintenance that just cannot get fulfilled. In fact late last year, about this time last year actually it was, a single mum and two kids escaping domestic violence, who were very, very, very desperate to leave the community that they were in for safety reasons, finally got a house through Homes Victoria. I went with them to the house they got. The house that they got had not been painted. The stove did not work. It had no blinds on the windows. It had a small potentially functional courtyard that was just littered with broken glass and debris, and the spouts were all full of grass. No-one from Homes Victoria had either noticed or ever bothered to do basic spout maintenance. The house inside reeked. It was not just a stuffy smell of mould or something like that. It just reeked, probably from never having been cleaned or serviced properly between tenants.

I just sat there, and I apologised to that family as a representative of the Parliament that she elects, the Parliament that is supposed to represent her. The government is the largest landlord. It is not as if providing housing accommodation is not something this government should actually understand or have some skills in. They have 64,000 properties. Those 64,000 properties, as the Ombudsman said, are handled badly – poorly serviced and badly maintained. But worst of all, for the very thing that this legislation says it is enforcing and trying to do in the private sector, this government refuses to hold itself to the same account.

There were other announcements today through Consumer Affairs Victoria – that we are going to have a panel to go out hunting down bad private landlords. This government is prepared to impose penalties of many thousands of dollars on landlords that do not do the basics, and yet this government, which is the largest landlord, refuses to hold itself to the same standards and the same level of accountability.

For the many Victorians in a housing crisis – the 60,000 families still waiting for a home, the 60,000 families waiting for somewhere permanent to live – they have got a rough road ahead of them, because not only is this government mismanaging its Big Build program but we heard in the other place just this afternoon in question time that the minister does not have a plan for when the department demolishes the 44 public housing towers. At the moment demolition tenders are now underway to

demolish the first three of the towers that will displace many thousands of people. In six years this government has only managed to provide an extra 1322 homes, a figure that the minister herself did not dispute. She did not dispute the fact that in six years she has only added an extra 1322 homes, and yet they are going to commence demolishing homes with nowhere and no plan for those people to go to. Once again, the state's biggest landlord, who is forcing better behaviours and better standards, which we would not necessarily disagree with, on the private sector, refuses to hold itself accountable to the same levels and expectations. I think that is a huge worry to all Victorians.

Finally, in the few seconds I have left, this bill references the government's housing statement and its need to provide more homes. I would make the observation that this government has promised Victorians 80,000 new homes. A big percentage of those will need to be rental homes. We have seen this government only manage to get just a bit over 50,000 in the last 12 months. They are now miles behind their targets before they have even properly begun. It is a real concern. Let us hope this government can be a better landlord and a better provider of accommodation than it is now.

**Emma VULIN** (Pakenham) (15:09): I rise to speak on the Estate Agents, Residential Tenancies and Other Acts Amendment (Funding) Bill 2024. Firstly, I congratulate the Minister for Government Services for bringing this bill to the house. This is a bill which paves the way for all tenants to have the support they need to ensure they have appropriate, safe and secure housing. Its passage is necessary to begin delivery of key rental-related reforms set out in *Victoria's Housing Statement: The Decade Ahead 2024–2034*.

This bill will amend the Estate Agents Act 1980 and the Residential Tenancies Act 1997 to authorise funds from the Victorian Property Fund and the Residential Tenancies Fund established under those acts to be utilised to fund alternative dispute resolution and consumer advocacy and assistance services. So what does that really mean? It is about making it simpler for renters to get the support they need when a dispute arises and gives landlords and agents important guidance to manage their properties professionally and ethically.

Over the past 10 years the number of rental properties has increased by more than 32 per cent in Victoria, but it also now takes longer to save to buy a home, so we are now in a situation where the demand for rental properties is skyrocketing. In Pakenham it costs on average more than \$520 a week to rent a family home, which is a considerable amount for many low-income working families in my electorate. Three years ago in February 2021 it cost around \$360 a week to rent home in Pakenham, so this increase is significant. Renting bigger and more spacious homes costs more, and you are looking at about \$600 a week. Although this is not as expensive as areas closer to Melbourne, remember I am referring to the last suburb on the most distant growth area of Melbourne 60 kilometres from the Melbourne GPO. With queues out the door at rental inspections, this does mean that just to put a roof over their family's head people can end up accepting a lease on a property that is not up to scratch.

Often the reasons for a dispute will just be one of a range of cost-of-living pressures a renter could be facing. Having a medical emergency or having a large bill come in unexpectedly could lead them to fall into rent arrears and the landlord not being open to drawing up a payment plan. When unexpected things happen, like my stroke seven years ago, it changes everything. All of a sudden a loss of income or a massive change in earnings seriously impacts every other aspect of your life – not just for you but for your family and in turn the community. It could be a matter where a landlord is not fully aware of their obligation on what might seem a small repair on a necessary appliance, like having a working oven. A renter should not have to end up at VCAT to have simple repairs done, and a landlord should not have to go to VCAT to seek rent in arrears. VCAT should be the last resort, not the first stop.

In the landmark housing statement this government committed to establishing an alternative dispute resolution service, so this is exactly that – an alternative way to resolve disputes about housing between two parties other than VCAT. This organisation will be called Rental Dispute Resolution Victoria and will provide a one-stop shop for renters, agents and landlords to resolve tenancy disputes over rent,

damages, repairs and bonds. As the housing statement says, it will have a clear pathway to settle issues faster, more fairly and in a cheaper way.

This organisation will be created by expanding the use of the Victorian Property Fund and the Residential Tenancies Fund to fund the establishment and ongoing running costs of assisting consumers in relation to housing and property issues. With the right support, those with housing and property issues can avoid having a dispute mediated in the first place while others needing support to bring a more serious issue forward to the right people to be resolved will be pointed in the right direction. Part of this initiative includes funding for the financial counselling program administered by Consumer Affairs Victoria. This financial counselling, often provided by local not-for-profit organisations, enables people to get the help they need to alleviate the impacts of economic abuse and hardship. It helps people to manage debts, stabilise their financial situation and rebuild and get on with their lives. In turn it places them in a position to be a reliable tenant.

I did want to note that the Victorian Property Fund has been of some benefit to my community in the past through the housing funding. In the 2017–18 grant round, the Victorian Women's Housing Association received over \$1.3 million towards the construction of affordable housing in Pakenham. Expanding the Victorian Property Fund to include other supports makes administrative sense. On rental disputes, yes, currently there is a backlog at VCAT, and to tackle this the Attorney-General in the other place appointed 20 new VCAT members in November last year to assist with hearings. Sixteen of these were specifically appointed staff to help to clear the residential tenancies backlog.

This government is recognising help is needed, and are doing something about it. There are more reforms in the housing statement to come which will assist renters. They include stopping landlords from evicting first-term renters to secure higher rent, extending notice of rent increase and notice to vacate periods to 90 days, the creation of a portable rental bond scheme and the stamping out of all types of rental bidding.

In my reading on these issues it became apparent to me that one of these initiatives in particular, the portable rental bond scheme, is well worth our investment.

This bill covers quite a few changes, but it also covers the closure of the Sex Work Regulation Fund. On 1 December last year the full decriminalisation of sex work occurred in Victoria. This bill will close the Sex Work Regulation Fund, which was established as a trust account to support the operation of the previous sex work licensing and registration scheme. The scheme has remained open to refund brothel owners and managers their licensing fees. Also, the Public Records Advisory Council will be abolished under this bill.

There is a lot to talk about, but I know there are other members in the house that would like to speak on this, so I do commend this bill to the house.

**Gabrielle DE VIETRI** (Richmond) (15:16): This bill to set up a funding flow for a new dispute resolution body for renters is a sign that the pressure on the government is working – pressure from renters who are crying out to have their basic rights met through Consumer Affairs Victoria and VCAT, to absolutely no avail. I think we can all agree that our current dispute resolution system is embattled, with grossly inadequate funding, with an out-of-control backlog and with delays stretching up to two years, affecting thousands and thousands of renters. That is why when the government announced this new dispute resolution body six months ago, I was hopeful a new body would be able to clear the backlog and would be able to give renters the time to have their cases heard to resolve some of the horrendous situations that renters are finding themselves in, with mould and damp and drafts and doors that do not lock and toilets that do not work. But this bill and this funding body will really have no impact on the situation – the dire situation – that renters are facing if we do not actually change the laws to enable renters to have their rights met. It reinforces a drastic power imbalance between renters and landlords that still prioritises landlord profit before renters' rights to an affordable,

safe and secure place to live. It does nothing to change our current legislative environment, which reinforces renters' powerlessness.

Renters have told me that 40 per cent rent increases are being given the rubber stamp of approval by consumer affairs, causing immense distress and huge financial insecurity. That is because under Labor our laws allow unlimited rent increases. This new dispute resolution body will have no additional powers to prevent unlimited rent increases being slapped on a renter, forcing many renters to move out to a cheaper, further away, mouldier property to be able to afford the rent. Because the onus is on renters either to prove that their landlord is withholding bond unfairly or to prove that their landlord has not met the minimum standard – it is on the renter to prove that a rent rise is unreasonable as long as they are given notice – most renters are actually too scared to pursue their rights to a healthy, affordable, secure home because of the very real threat of a landlord retaliation: exorbitant, punitive rent rises or a straight-out notice to vacate. That is not to mention of course Labor's own despicable record of being the biggest and worst landlord in the state themselves, forcing our public housing residents to live in leaky, infested, unsafe homes that they have deliberately created in a program of deliberate neglect and cost-cutting to be able to demolish these homes under the guise of them being unsuitable to live in. This government must also apply the same standards that they expect private landlords to provide to their own public housing stock, and they must also ensure that there is a plentiful supply of public housing so that our public system does not experience this kind of exorbitant rent hikes because of the vacancy rate.

Renters have been putting the pressure on this government to fix these issues, and as the rental crisis has got worse, it is great to see that the pressure is finally working, with the announcement today from Labor that there will be 14 new staff at Consumer Affairs Victoria and the establishment of this new dispute resolution body. But 14 new staff to deal with the very real complaints of the 700,000 Victorians who rent is hardly a taskforce, because as long as unlimited rent rises and no-grounds evictions are still legal, the Victorian dispute resolution body will be utterly toothless.

How can the government guarantee that this service will be fairer, faster and cheaper if a landlord can still kick out a renter for very legitimate complaints about a mould-infested, damp, cold, leaky dwelling? How will it be fairer, faster and cheaper if renters are too scared to even ask for basic repairs or maintenance because the law does not give them any power and because they are vulnerable to exorbitant rent rises or a straight-out eviction as retaliation? How do we know it is going to be any different from what currently exists? This system will continue to be useless unless we also change the laws that give landlords endless power to screw over renters – laws that are pushing renters to the brink. That is why the Greens will be supporting the Shadow Minister for Consumer Affairs' reasoned amendment, which requires further information about how this body will operate.

I also want to raise some concerns about another aspect of this bill – that is, the section that abolishes the Public Records Advisory Council, or PRAC. This is a legislated advisory body that is an important element of the operation and oversight of any archives, including the Public Record Office Victoria. The designated roles required to constitute PRAC ensure that the advice provided to the public record office is representative of diverse communities and their needs, with important expertise across areas including Indigenous heritage, public administration, information management and family history.

Stakeholders have told us that there was no opportunity to provide feedback about this decision before the bill was introduced and that no information about the decision to develop alternative avenues to consult on policy and practices in managing public records is forthcoming as part of this change. It appears that these alternative avenues for consultation are yet to be developed, which undermines their effectiveness and is not a guarantee of their operations into the future. An open and transparent consultative process regarding the future of PRAC and methods by which the public record office will seek independent advice are critical and should occur prior to the advisory body being removed from legislation. I look forward to further discussions with the government about this bill.

**Kathleen MATTHEWS-WARD** (Broadmeadows) (15:23): I rise to support the Estate Agents, Residential Tenancies and Other Acts Amendment (Funding) Bill 2024. The Labor government's landmark package and *Victoria's Housing Statement: The Decade Ahead 2024–2034* were developed to boost housing supply and affordability. Victoria is the fastest growing state in the country, with population projected to reach 10.3 million by 2051. This bill specifically speaks to the key objective of protecting renters rights by making fairer, faster and cheaper ways to resolve tenancy disputes through the establishment of Rental Dispute Resolution Victoria, or RDRV.

The amendments proposed to the Estate Agents Act 1980 and the Residential Tenancies Act 1997 will allow government to expand the uses of the Victorian Property Fund and the Residential Tenancies Fund to support alternative dispute resolution options, including RDRV. It will also fund a range of advocacy and assistance services. The current process for an unresolved tenancy dispute is to lodge an application via VCAT. The introduction of a quicker and more informal dispute resolution service will reduce the need for many matters to progress to VCAT, which can be expensive, with the majority of services requiring an application fee, and lengthy – the current average wait time on the VCAT website is four weeks for a hearing and can be up to 12 weeks for compensation and bond claims. And it can be intimidating as a formal court proceeding with evidence, swearing in and testifying. These barriers to fair dispute resolution are particularly pertinent in the electorate of Broadmeadows, which has higher levels of disadvantage and lower levels of literacy. RDRV will provide a one-stop shop for not only renters but agents and landlords to resolve simple tenancy disputes over rent, damages, repairs and bonds. Access to the RDRV will be free.

Often a rental dispute can be just one of a range of cost-of-living pressures a renter could be facing. Removal of one of these financial barriers for dispute resolution will make an immediate difference. A reduction in VCAT applications will reduce wait times throughout VCAT and will also mean that VCAT will be more available for serious or complicated matters which are appropriate to be heard in a formal court setting. As I mentioned earlier, a quick, fair and simplified resolution process will be highly welcomed locally. The Broadmeadows electorate has the highest number of people living with a disability and over 40,000 adults who have not yet completed year 12, and 62 per cent of my constituents speak a language other than English. Broadmeadows is often the first place many new arrivals begin their lives in Australia. A rental property is a common place to start their residence. I highlight the opportunity to promote the RDRV service in different languages and through different mechanisms to ensure people new to the country are aware of their rights and obligations and people who speak a language other than English have easily accessible information and are therefore less vulnerable to exploitation. Information sessions for community groups and organisations may be useful, as may notices in community facilities such as libraries and neighbourhood houses, to help engage the communities that will benefit directly.

This bill will also enable the use of funds to resource organisations that advocate for tenants. This includes funding for the financial counselling program run by Consumer Affairs Victoria, which eases the impact of economic abuse and financial hardship. We know that older people, people with a disability and those with low literacy are too often at risk of financial abuse. Additional resources for financial counselling programs will give the opportunity to help more Victorians manage their debts, get control of their finances and get on with their lives. In addition, the housing statement will deliver a rental stress support package of \$2 million to support legal, financial and advocacy services. This will reduce the current strain on tenancy support services in Victoria and assist Victorian renters when they are most in need of help. I welcome the support for our most vulnerable. We are delivering an easier system where tenants will be less likely to need legal assistance, as well as a financial boost to the tenancy support services.

A large proportion of our constituent inquiries at the office are around housing and tenancy matters. Common themes are around the ongoing and increasing need for housing, increasing costs and the need for certainty over people's future living conditions and finances. Constituents have let us know of incidences where their private landlord has written advising them of a \$400-per-week increase to

their existing rental agreement. Another renter sought help and advice from our office as their landlord refused to act on serious and urgent maintenance issues. They felt they were not confident enough to attend VCAT and feared the landlord would increase their rent if they took action. The RDRV will now offer an alternative dispute resolution mechanism for examples such as these.

Thankfully, though, these examples are not the norm. I would like to acknowledge the landlords and agents that do provide a safe and affordable home to their tenants. A close friend of mine has worked for years as a property manager within a local real estate agency. She has commented that most landlords reward long-term tenants with minimal rent increases and are quick to authorise any repairs to their properties. Some are even handy enough to go and fix the odd leaking tap themselves. The mandatory training component of the bill ensures that all real estate professionals will be equally skilled no matter how long they have been in the industry.

I commend the Labor government on providing a number of other reforms to protect the rights of Victorian renters. This includes a portable rental bond scheme. I know for a lot of renters it is always such a financial stress to pay a full month's rent in advance plus another month's worth of bond. Depending on the property, this could be thousands of dollars. Being able to transfer from one property to another alleviates cash flow pressure for tenants at a time when it is needed most – when you are setting yourself up in your new home.

The reforms are also making rental applications easier and protecting renters' personal information. Simplifying application forms is really important, especially for new arrivals to the country and those I highlighted earlier with lower language or educational attainment. A standardised application process will not only save time, but it will give a clear indication of what is required to apply. Privacy protection is also really important, and given the amount of personal and financial detail needed on a rental application, it should be highly protected. It can be very similar to what is required on a loan application with a financial institution who have comprehensive privacy procedures in place. And it is not uncommon to make multiple rental applications, so a prospective tenant could be handing over personal information to many people at once with no training and no safeguards. Limiting what details agents and landlords can keep on file and for how long will better protect tenants' privacy and data. I look forward to letting my constituents who have raised this issue know that Labor is addressing their concerns with this bill.

The simplest changes can often be the best. The opportunity to keep a pet in a rental property with written permission has been life-changing for so many. It is widely reported that pet ownership is beneficial to both mental and physical health. I have personally come across a new dog owner while at a dog park recently. She had always wanted a dog and is now overjoyed that she is finally able to have her beloved sausage dog after years in a rental property.

The bill will also reduce the ability of rental providers to unjustly increase rents by restricting rent increases between successive fixed-term rental agreements. A recent trend has seen some rental providers evict tenants at the end of their first fixed-term lease and place the property back on the market at a highly inflated rate, more than they could justify in a simple rent increase to the existing tenant. This bill will give more stability and fairness to tenants who face the unpredictability of eviction at the end of their fixed-term lease.

A further reform will ban all types of rental bidding, closing loopholes which have seen agents allow or encourage rental bidding, which puts unfair financial pressure on applicants in their attempt to try and secure the rental property. Tenants can no longer offer higher than the advertised rent or offer more than four weeks rent up-front.

I also commend the reform to extend the notice of rent increase and notice to vacate periods to 90 days to provide renters with more certainty over their leases and budget and more time to prepare to vacate. In such a tight rental market it can take a substantial amount of time to secure a new property and

prepare financially for the costs that a move incurs. It is more than just the rent; it is the packing boxes, the cleaning of the property, the removalists and the time off work.

The Labor government is also supporting those looking to transition into their own home. With the release of a further \$500 million from the Victorian Homebuyer Fund, home ownership is within reach for more Victorians. This additional funding will support around 3000 more Victorians into a home through a shared equity model. The fund provides eligible participants with a contribution of up to 25 per cent of the purchase price of the home, with participants contributing a minimum of 5 per cent of the purchase price, and you can buy the government out at any time. Since the fund started in October 2021 Labor has supported 4251 settlements with \$1.07 billion, including many Victorians who had found it particularly tough to get into the housing market. From the existing program half of participants are women, more than half are single people and two-thirds are first home buyers.

I am so proud of Labor's investment in social and affordable housing too, with our landmark \$5.3 billion Big Housing Build, which will deliver more than 12,000 homes. It was wonderful to have the Premier and federal and state housing ministers in Broadmeadows to announce \$80 million to build 120 new homes at Banksia Gardens, the biggest investment in Broadmeadows history.

**Kim O'KEEFFE** (Shepparton) (15:33): Today I rise to make a contribution on the Estate Agents, Residential Tenancies and Other Acts Amendment (Funding) Bill 2024. The bill is for an act to amend the Residential Tenancies Act 1997 in relation to funding dispute resolution services, to amend the Estate Agents Act 1980 in relation to funding dispute resolution and advocacy services and to abolish the Estate Agents Council (EAC), to amend the Business Licensing Authority Act 1998 to facilitate the closure of the Sex Work Regulation Fund, to amend the Public Records Act 1973 to abolish the Public Records Advisory Council (PRAC) and for other purposes. The bill makes several amendments across a variety of current acts. As such, the Estate Agents, Residential Tenancies and Other Acts Amendment (Funding) Bill 2024 amends the Estate Agents Act 1980 to provide that money in the Victorian Property Fund may be used for the establishment and ongoing costs of a dispute resolution service as well as support the provision of consumer advocacy and assistance services. The funds made available will allow the government to resource community organisations to provide advocacy and assistance services to consumers on housing and property issues.

It is important to note, in reading the bill before making this contribution, that the bill contains no substantive information about the make-up of the potential dispute resolution body, nor does the bill outline the replacement or alternative avenues for the Estate Agents Council and the Public Records Advisory Council in providing industry advice to the minister. In addition, in the amendments the bill makes to the Estate Agents Act 1980 it provides that money in the Victorian Property Fund must be utilised for the costs and expenses of establishing, and the ongoing funding, operation and administration of, the provision of dispute resolution services.

From the recent Consumer Affairs Victoria annual report 2022–23, the Victorian Property Fund total trust fund revenue was just over \$94 million in comparison to its total trust fund expenditure of \$34 million. These are some limitations and concerns in this bill that we will be looking at for the total costs of establishing this new dispute resolution service, separate to the Victorian Civil and Administrative Tribunal, known as VCAT, and the costs and ongoing expenses for the operation, administration and funding for the provision of this new dispute resolution service. This new alternative dispute resolution service, which will be known as Rental Dispute Resolution Victoria, will assist renters in residential rental by providing a service for Victorians to resolve tenancy disputes over rent, damage, repairs and bonds. We know that there can be many complex disputes from both the landlord and renter, and we do need a fair and equitable process.

The Greater Shepparton region is in the midst of a housing availability and affordability crisis. We have one of the highest rates of homelessness across the state and in fact over 2000 people on the public housing waiting list. There are minimal rental properties, and for those that do try and get a rental, either they are too expensive or they are competing with so many others. The recent land tax

has had a significant impact on the landlords, and what we are seeing is properties going on the market and rents increasing. How does the government address the housing crisis by pushing landlords out of the market and increasing rent for tenants in a cost-of-living crisis?

I also wish to mention a couple whose rental property burnt down nine years ago. They are currently in a shed on that property, still awaiting accommodation. The government claims this new service will be a faster, fairer and cheaper means for Victorians to resolve their disputes, as it will enable VCAT to use its resources to address more complex matters such as disputes around termination of residential rental agreements or applications for an order for possession of rented premises. However, in the bill briefing the government provided the opposition on this bill, department representatives were unable to provide an exact answer and cost of what it would be looking at in establishing this new dispute resolution service. We do not have details of how this service will be faster, fairer and cheaper.

In addition, the other concern in this bill is what the difference will be between this new dispute resolution service and what we currently have invested in VCAT. What powers will this new dispute resolution service have in comparison to VCAT, and what effectiveness will it have in resolving such dispute matters prescribed under the relevant acts that it is able to deal with and facilitate? In addition, the bill contains no substantive information about the make-up of the potential dispute resolution body, nor does it outline the replacements for both the EAC and PRAC in providing industry advice for the minister.

The bill also makes amendments to the Residential Tenancies Act 1997 to provide that money out of the Residential Tenancies Fund may be used for the establishment and operation, including administration costs, and the provision of dispute resolution services for prescribed disputes arising under the Residential Tenancies Act 1997 and any regulations that may have been made under that act. In the recent Consumer Affairs Victoria annual report 2022–23 the Residential Tenancies Fund provided a total revenue of \$30.4 million and total expenditure of \$30.8 million, which as a result provided a deficit of \$472,295. In addition, in CAV's annual report for 2021–22 the Residential Tenancies Fund provided for a total revenue of \$22.6 million and a total expenditure of \$33.4 million – again, another deficit of \$10.7 million.

Furthermore, the Estate Agents, Residential Tenancies and Other Acts Amendment (Funding) Bill 2024 repeals sections 25A and 25B of the Businesses Licensing Authority Act 1998 with the intention to close the Sex Work Regulation Fund. Previously, sections 25A and 25B have been operating as a transitional provision by providing financial relief to licence-holders in relation to fees payable under the licensing scheme. Section 25A provides that the Sex Work Regulation Fund established by the now repealed section 66 of the Sex Work Act 1994 continues under the Business Licensing Authority Act 1998, whereas section 25B enables the Business Licensing Authority to refund annual licence fees to licence-holders in relation to the utilisation portion of a license period and provides for regulations to be made regarding refunds. As a result of the decriminalisation of sex work on 1 December 2023, the bill makes administrative changes to close the fund given it no longer serves its required purpose.

Lastly, the bill makes further amendments to both the Estate Agents Act 1980 and the Public Records Act 1973. Clause 10 of the bill repeals part IIA of the Estate Agents Act 1980, which will have the effect of abolishing the Estate Agents Council. Abolishing this council will no longer see this council consulting the government on policy and practices relating to the regulation of the real estate industry. As such, since its establishment, the EAC has strongly envisioned a fair real estate marketplace by balancing the interests of sellers, buyers, tenants and landlords, through serving the broader industry and having the confidence of the Victorian community. In doing so, the government must recognise the importance of this industry and not leave them behind by abolishing this council. In the explanatory memorandum to the bill it states that the decision has been made:

... to develop alternative avenues to consult on policy and practices relating to the regulation of the ... industry.

The government must recognise this and not leave the industry behind in doing so.



In addition, the PRAC has played a key role in providing advice to the Public Record Office Victoria and advising the minister and administration on the act as well as promoting cooperation between the public record office and other government agencies. Clause 19 of the bill repeals section 4, 4A and 5 of the Public Records Act 1973 to abolish the Public Records Advisory Council. This bill does not provide enough detail and information and more thought needs to go into the bill. I support the reasoned amendment by the lead speaker for the opposition, Shadow Minister for Consumer Affairs and member for Ovens Valley.

**Anthony CIANFLONE** (Pascoe Vale) (15:41): I rise to speak on the Estate Agents, Residential Tenancies and Other Acts Amendment (Funding) Bill 2024. This is a bill that contains a number of reforms across a number of consumer affairs portfolio and policy areas, including housing and rental reform, sex worker regulation amendments as they concern the Sex Work Regulation Fund and reforms around modernising the way in which we continue to engage with consumers, advocacy groups and industry through the Estate Agents Act 1980 and the Public Records Act 1973.

As a government we are absolutely committed to helping make Victoria a better and fairer place to live, learn, work, raise a family and retire in, and access to housing is fundamental to all of this. That is why we have invested \$5.3 billion to deliver the Big Housing Build program. In September 2023 we released the pioneering Victorian housing statement, with a target to build 800,000 new homes over the next decade, and more recently we kicked off the community consultation on a new plan for Victoria, because we know that as demand for housing has increased, we have also seen more Victorians needing to rent in order to access housing, with more Victorians renting now than ever before. As outlined by the 2021 ABS census, almost 30 per cent of private dwellings across Victoria are occupied by renters – that is 681,419 dwellings. And according to the commissioner for residential tenancies' *Renting in Victoria* report, of the people renting across Victoria, 89.7 per cent are in private residential rental properties, 1.3 million people that is, and over 11 per cent are in public housing or community housing, that is over 155,300 people. Eight of the 10 top local government areas with the highest concentration of renters were situated across inner Melbourne, including my own community of Merri-bek, where we have 36.1 per cent of renters.

As set out by the 2021 ABS census, over 25,980 local dwellings in Merri-bek are occupied by renters, equating to 38.3 per cent of local homes, which is significantly higher than the Australian average of 30.6 per cent and indeed higher than the Victorian average of 28.5 per cent of total homes that were rented across the time of the 2021 census. As we know, the most significant driver of housing and rental affordability is housing supply. That is why we are pursuing the bold housing reform, the big build, the housing statement and plan for Victoria, which I have just touched on, but it is also why we continue to drive the legislative reform that is necessary to keep renting fair for renters, including through this bill. It is a bill that builds on what are already the strongest rental protections in the country: 130 reforms that we have previously introduced to make renting even fairer via restricting rental increases between successive fixed-term rental agreements and banning all types of rental bidding. We have introduced a portable rental bond scheme to lower the cost of moving for renters, we have extended notices of rent increases and notice-to-vacate periods to 90 days, we have introduced mandatory training and licensing for real estate agents, we have made rental applications fairer and easier and we have delivered a rental stress support package of \$2 million.

We have established Rental Dispute Resolution Victoria through this bill, which we will activate to assist renters and residential rental providers by providing an alternative to VCAT for resolutions of disputes over rent, damages, repairs and bonds, because we know that with more people in Victoria renting than ever before it is inevitable that the number of rental disputes will increase. This will be a service that is faster and fairer and cheaper, and it is going to be a way to resolve a range of rental disputes that will enable VCAT to use its resources to address more complex matters such as disputes around termination of residential rental agreements and applications for an order of possession of rented premises.

The amendments in this bill will be the first step in supporting the delivery of the government's housing statement by expanding the Victorian Property Fund and the Residential Tenancies Fund to facilitate the cost of establishing this dispute resolution process and will include funding to support financial counselling services to assist renters. In this context I would like to pay tribute to a couple in my community. The Northern Community Legal Centre, which is based on Pascoe Vale Road in Broadmeadows, supports a number of disadvantaged and marginalised communities across the north, with 52 per cent of its client base being born outside of Australia. They do quite a bit when it comes to providing these clients with support for residential tenancy – bond payments, refunds, disputes, lease cessations, tenant compensation, notices to vacate, rental increase issues and rental repair issues. I would like to pay tribute to the CEO Jenni Smith and her entire team. I commend the board, whom I acknowledge, including Nicole King, the chair; Justin Barbour; Angela Bell; and the many, many others involved there. I would also like to acknowledge the community information and support service in Merri-bek, who do a fantastic job too.

The bill also contains amendments relating to the Sex Work Regulation Fund and continues to complement the decriminalisation of sex work, which took effect on 1 December 2023. The bill will close the Sex Work Regulation Fund, which was established as a trust account to support the operation of that previous sex work licensing and registration scheme. This is a world away from how sex workers were previously treated in a time gone by, which I will touch on shortly in the context of the changes to the Public Records Act 1973.

Established under the Public Records Act 1973, the Public Record Office Victoria is the archive of the state and local governments in Victoria, holding around 100 kilometres of hard copy records and 600,000 digital records dating from all the way back to 1836 to the present day. All of the staff and volunteers at PROV do an outstanding job to preserve the records of enduring value from the past for future generations. On Thursday 25 May 2023 I had the absolute pleasure to represent the former Minister for Government Services at the 2023 Sir Rupert Hamer Awards for records management held at the public records office in North Melbourne and attended by a number of distinguished guests, including former Speaker Judy Maddigan, who is the president of the Public Records Advisory Council (PRAC); Justine Heazlewood, who is the keeper of public records in Victoria; Sven Bluemmel, the Victorian information commissioner; Professor Maggie Walter from the Yoorrook Justice Commission; and former Premier Jeff Kennett, who is a patron. The awards celebrated public sector record keepers for their innovation and collaboration with PROV in identifying, preserving and accessing public records. The ceremony recognised a number of organisations for their outstanding record-keeping efforts, including the University of Melbourne, the Department of Justice and Community Safety, Cardinia Shire Council, the Department of Education and Monash Health for the transfer of the Queen Victoria hospital records and the ongoing preservation of records of women's health across Victoria from the 19th and 20th centuries.

As stated in the minister's second-reading speech, a decision was made last year to introduce a more flexible consultative pathway for the Public Record Office Victoria. This decision was a recognition of the complex policy challenges that increasingly interface with public record management. This includes the protection of digital assets and data management, particularly as increasingly there are cybersecurity risks as records move from physical to digital assets. The new consultative arrangement will enable PROV to more broadly engage stakeholders and will be designed around future challenges and the importance of record keeping. The minister, I understand, has met with the president of PRAC, Judy Maddigan, to discuss stakeholder concerns and alternative models and bodies. I have also had several conversations and been approached by several stakeholders, and I have conveyed all their views to the minister and her office. All PRAC members, I understand, have been invited to extend their terms until 30 June and will be consulted along with other stakeholders on alternative methods. I look forward to also engaging with my very interested community, including the Coburg Historical Society.

Preserving and drawing on our history, both good and bad, is an essential part of understanding our past, where we have come from and where we are going. In this respect, given the bill also contains elements that pertain to sex work decriminalisation, I thought it would be timely to share some of the historic records of PROV and their recently digitised catalogue that was made public as they relate to female prisoners in Victoria from 1934 to 1948 to just reflect on how far we have come as a state on these issues. Victorian female prisoners, numbers 7781 to 8051, include many who were in that era charged with prostitution – for loitering for prostitution or being considered to have ‘insufficient means’ including vagrancy and homelessness. Going through the records it is clear – the records do demonstrate – the criminalisation of poverty, which disproportionately impacted a cohort of women who at the time were trying to survive, to feed themselves and their families. Behind each charge sheet is only part of a story – a story of a woman who was a whole person and was more than the sum of their crimes or their class at the time.

Given Pentridge Prison’s women’s section in my electorate did open originally in 1933, with the women held under the charge of matrons, many of the women contained in these records went through Pentridge to be assessed, classified and held. Some of these women, who I am sure probably never imagined Victoria would one day decriminalise the very work for which they were charged during the 1930s and 1940s, let alone imagined that they would be named in *Hansard*, included: Fay Allan in 1939, who was charged with loitering for prostitution and sentenced to 14 days imprisonment or a £5 fine; Mary O’Dowd, who was charged with loitering for prostitution in 1934 and sentenced to 14 days imprisonment or a £2 fine; Gloria Cunningham, who was charged with loitering for prostitution in 1940 and sentenced to seven days imprisonment with a £3 fine; Murial Ward Mar, who was charged with loitering for prostitution in 1934 and sentenced to 14 days imprisonment or a £2 fine; and Olga Wilson, who was charged with prostitution in 1936 and sentenced to one month imprisonment or a £5 fine.

Fast-forward to today, in 2024 Victoria has, as we know, decriminalised sex work ensuring that sex workers today have the same protection and recognition as the many other workers in this state. But it is these records preserved by the PROV that allow us and future generations to continue delving back into times and areas that for various reasons treated different cohorts of people very differently based on their ethnicity, their gender or even their occupations, even those who were the most marginalised and disadvantaged in our community.

I also pay tribute to the great team of tour guides at the National Trust who run the incredible daily tours across the whole of the Pentridge precinct, including the many women who were processed, remanded or held there, with every team member there in Coburg very proud of their work and telling the story of Coburg really for the first time to the rest of the country and the world.

In that context, I commend the bill to the house. It is all about supporting our landmark housing statement, and it is all about finalising the decriminalisation of sex work and changes to the Public Records Act. I thank you for the opportunity.

**Sam GROTH** (Nepean) (15:51): I rise to make a contribution to the Estate Agents, Residential Tenancies and Other Acts Amendment (Funding) Bill 2024. I thank the member for Ovens Valley, the shadow minister, for his work on this bill. I do note in the second-reading speech, right at the very beginning, the minister in charge of this piece of legislation said:

The Victorian Government is committed to ensuring access to fair, safe, and secure housing for all Victorians.

I will present some stats, especially things from my local community on the Mornington Peninsula, that certainly dispute that. Recently Victoria saw the first annual decline in active bonds since records began in 1999. I do note the Shadow Minister for Housing, the member for Polwarth, has been at the table. We are committed to making a difference in this sector and doing everything we can to make sure that renters and tenants have every resource they need to be able to get the houses that they need. The decline in active bonds reflects an increasing challenge people face when entering the rental market. As the Shadow Minister for Youth, I note the Minister for Youth is that the table at this time,

and I am sure she is hearing like I am that young Victorians are desperately looking for rentals. But they are reporting soaring prices and huge numbers of people at inspections. It is a real point of anxiety for those young Victorians trying to get into the rental market.

I also note that data released recently by the Property Investment Professionals of Australia reveal that 76 per cent of rental properties being sold, so 76 percent of those rental properties that are going back onto the market, are being sold to owner-occupiers. So of those people that are feeling the stress of this government's land tax and deciding to take their rental property off the market, three out of every four of those properties are not going back onto the rental market. When you have got more than 2 million Victorians in this state who rent and you are selling that many properties, with three out of four coming off the rental market, I am sure that is also causing extreme anxiety for renters in this state. Some of Victoria's most in-demand suburbs are facing little to no rental supply. When you look at CoreLogic's data, there have been record rents in February – up 10.8 per cent in Melbourne compared with a year earlier – and we know that this is a growing problem right across the state.

Too many people in my community on the Mornington Peninsula are now facing homelessness, and it is an issue that I have addressed in this place many times since I have been here. There is a growing housing crisis in my part of the world as well. My community is in desperate need of more housing support. Yes, we have a high number of short-stay rental properties, but when you look at some of the stats of what is being sold and what properties are available on the Mornington Peninsula, out of every 100 houses sold 1.1 per cent of houses, so one in every 100, is affordable based on the information released and the current salary lists. Only one in every hundred houses sold actually comes under that affordable category. This government feels that they are putting land tax onto those people that can afford it, but if you think that putting it on to those properties is going to drive them back to the rental market, adding land tax is not going to all of a sudden make an unaffordable property affordable to those that need a home.

Six towns on the Mornington Peninsula suffer housing stress higher than the national average; 35 per cent of the residents of the Mornington Peninsula are suffering rental stress; 12 per cent of homeless residents sleep rough every night, and that is the fourth worst of any LGA in Victoria; and the median rent for a home on the peninsula is now significantly higher than the greater Melbourne average, and that is up to \$100 higher per week. Fewer than one in three peninsula rental properties are affordable to those on low incomes. We have a real housing crisis on the Mornington Peninsula.

My community, like the member for Polwarth's, is being affected by the land tax increases being put on by this government probably worse than any other areas in the state. We know Victorians are said to pay more property tax than anyone else in the country, and that is according to the Parliamentary Budget Office. This year this government imposed severe changes to land tax. Anybody would know, as we know, that lowering the tax-free threshold from \$300,000 to \$50,000 has pretty much made almost every single property in this state that is available to the rental market – every single property on the rental market – now subject to land tax. Even last week we saw that beach boxes in my electorate were legally taxed, and those people who wanted to try to dispute their land tax bill actually had to pay the bill first to then be able to try to dispute it. I mean, it is just a ridiculous situation. We have seen that tax now being backtracked on – the tax on those beach boxes – but once those people have already paid it, how many people are now going to have to seek a refund because they got the bill, they paid it and now that bill is going to have to be repaid by the State Revenue Office and by this government?

I just want to put on the record an email I got from Robyn in my electorate on Tuesday this week. She says in her email:

It appears that the Victorian government fails to grasp the connection between their rising land tax rates and the dwindling supply of rental housing. We are personally opting to sell our rental property due to the escalating expenses associated with property investment. Our intention was to retain this property until our current tenant, who is a pensioner and has personalized the space, vacated. However, the escalating costs necessitate our decision to sell.

Despite the government's new proposal for incentives to property investors to build rental properties, it's challenging to place trust in them given their track record. Many feel that the government's actions have negatively impacted Victoria, and their relentless pursuit of revenue to try and claw back its deficit is disheartening.

This is coming from people who are doing their best. You have got a pensioner renting Robyn's house, and now because of the tax that is being put on by this government, she is going to sell it and someone is now going to be without a rental property. I ask this government to do better. Please do better for renters. Please do not keep increasing property taxes. Make this state an attractive place to invest for property investors – not for the investors, but so those properties are available to the rental market for those people that really need them.

**John MULLAHY** (Glen Waverley) (15:57): It is a pleasure to rise in support of the Estate Agents, Residential Tenancies and Other Acts Amendment (Funding) Bill 2024. From the outset I would like to thank the Minister for Consumer Affairs for her important work in this space and her advocacy in implementing stronger protections for Victorian renters and consumers across the economy. I would also like to give a shout-out to the minister's team for their ongoing work to set this reform agenda in motion.

The bill before the house is a critical piece of legislation, one of many I am sure this place will be debating and passing this term, to strengthen the rights and protections for Victoria's renters. The Allan Labor government knows that there are more people renting in Victoria than ever before, and unlike those opposite, we know it is our responsibility to make sure renters are treated with dignity and the respect they deserve.

For the benefit of the house, I thought I would take a look back through the reforms in this space. I started my research looking into the purgatory of policy inaction that was the Victorian Liberal government, and as expected, I could not find much in the way of rental rights reforms. Fast-forward through the Andrews–Allan governments and the contrast could not be clearer. I am proud to be part of a Labor government that takes action to protect and strengthen the rights of renters in this state. We know that more Victorians are renting than ever before, and it is incumbent upon us to take action. Back in 2021 we passed 130 strengthened protections for renters into law, improving the process of renting every step of the way from before the paperwork is signed to when the bond is paid back. Some highlights of the package of reforms included stronger antidiscrimination provisions, maximum bond amounts and limits to rents paid in advance, plus the rent increases capped to once a year. We introduced mandatory new minimum standards and expanded the definition of 'urgent repair'. These 130 rental reforms ensure that Victorian renters can make their house a home, giving them and their landlords peace of mind.

It is important work, and I am proud to be part of the Allan Labor government that has made it a reality. But in doing so, we recognise that there is always more to do. That is why we have published the Victorian housing statement, which charts the course for the next decade across planning reform, housing construction, investment into social housing and, most relevant to the house today, strengthened rights for Victorian renters. It is a bold plan because we know the pressure Victorians are under when it comes to housing and housing affordability. If we do not take decisive policy action, that pressure will only grow as Victoria's population soars beyond 10 million in the coming decades. It is why we will be using every lever available to government to create the conditions for the construction of 800,000 homes over the next decade. Whether it be streamlining planning decisions to make good decisions faster, building more housing close to jobs and amenities, investing in social housing or strengthening the rights of renters, there is no shortage of work before us.

I am proud to be part of the Allan Labor government, which is committed to doing the work and getting results for Victorian families. The Estate Agents, Residential Tenancies and Other Acts Amendment (Funding) Bill 2024 before the house today is the first piece of the puzzle. It is critical, with more Victorians renting than ever before, that the Allan Labor government takes action to strengthen renters rights. That is why we will ban all types of rental bidding and close the loopholes

to make it illegal; we will restrict rent increases between successive fixed-term rental agreements; we will make rental applications easier and increase privacy protections; we will strengthen regulation of real estate agents, property managers and owners corporations; we will make rental bonds portable, rather than renters having to pay a new bond time each time; we will increase the notice required for rent increases and evictions to 90 days; we will deliver a \$2 million rental stress support package; and we will create Rental Dispute Resolutions Victoria to make it faster and easier to solve issues and disputes. Put together, these changes are about protecting Victoria's renters and making the system fairer and more reliable for all Victorians.

In particular I would like to focus on the creation of Rental Dispute Resolutions Victoria. The bill that is being debated before the house is crucial to achieving this goal. With more Victorians renting than ever before, we know that the number of rental disputes has increased, and of course that process is stressful, expensive and time consuming. For many renters the cost of this process adds to the already increased cost of living. The way the system currently works means that VCAT is often the method of first resort for resolving rental disputes, but it really should not have to be like that. Renters should not have to end up in a protracted VCAT case to get simple repairs done or have their bond returned. That is exactly why we are establishing Rental Disputes Resolution Victoria – to make dispute resolutions faster, fairer and cheaper for Victorian renters and landlords.

The bill before the house today makes amendments to the existing legislation which governs the Victorian Property Fund and the Residential Tenancies Fund, the two pools of money which underpin the state's investment in rental dispute resolution services. In short, it will allow the Allan Labor government to use these funds to establish and operate Rental Dispute Resolutions Victoria. That is great news and a positive step towards meaningful change to Victoria's rental dispute resolution landscape so that Victorian renters and rental providers have access to these dispute resolution services that they need and deserve. Quick, affordable, proportionate access to justice in these situations matters deeply, and I am proud to be part of the Allan Labor government, which is committed to these rental dispute reforms.

But more than just these reforms, I am proud of all the work being done to realise the aims and ambitions of Victoria's housing statement. Whether it be the Minister for Consumer Affairs, the Minister for Planning and Minister for the Suburbs, the Minister for Precincts and Minister for Development Victoria or the Minister for the Suburban Rail Loop, there is a power of work in this space. We recognise that having an affordable, secure and reliable roof over one's head is the top priority for all Victorians, and I am proud to be part of a progressive government that takes this issue seriously and is willing to grapple with the complex policy reforms needed to take meaningful action for Victorians.

I know that there are many speakers in this house who would like to speak on this bill, so for that reason and for many more, I commend the bill to the house.

**Martin CAMERON** (Morwell) (16:04): Acting Speaker Lambert, it is good to see you in the chair up there. I rise today to talk about the Estate Agents, Residential Tenancies and Other Acts Amendment (Funding) Bill 2024. Firstly, I would like to thank the member for Ovens Valley for his lead on our side of the house over here. It was great to just be able to sit down and talk to him about the actual amendment and what it is all about. I note we are not opposing the bill today, I think for a very good reason also. I do note there is a reasoned amendment that goes along with it.

The purpose of the bill is to put some more protections in place for our renters, and I think that is a good thing. You get the play-off between the landlords and the renters, and you do hear of some horror stories on both sides, but hopefully putting this in place will give speedier access to some resolutions moving forward. Now, the purpose of the bill is to amend the Estate Agents Act 1980 and the Residential Tenancies Act 1997 to allow the use of the Victorian Property Fund and the Residential Tenancies Fund to establish a fund to fund the ongoing costs of a new dispute resolution and advocacy

service, which we have heard about today, which is going to be called Rental Dispute Resolution Victoria, or RDRV, as many have spoken about.

With the rental side of it, there are a lot of people down in the Latrobe Valley that are lucky enough to own their own homes. Also there are a lot of mums and dads that own a second property and rent it out. There is a huge appetite for rental houses in the Latrobe Valley, as there is right across Melbourne and right around the state. In saying that, in setting up this new body we can actually fast-track – I think that is one of the words that I can use – and short-circuit, hopefully, these disputes that come up all the time when you are renting and when you are a landlord.

There are around 64,000 cases as of March 2023 – so 12 months ago – which are sitting in VCAT at the moment, and probably by now, after another 12 months, that would have gone up. The Liberals and Nationals do not have a specific position on the establishment of RDRV. We are happy for it to go ahead, and we can see the merits in that; however, we remain committed to working with the sector to improve the housing concerns of renters and tenants, which include reducing this backlog, because it is a long process.

In my time spent as a plumber I worked in a lot of these rental properties, and there were always, when you went into the houses and spoke, issues going on – and issues that had been going on for two, three or four years. That is not good enough for anybody, whether it be leaking toilets, dripping taps or, in winter, your roof leaking. If you are trying to provide a safe house over your head for your family, you expect it to be up to scratch. Yes, we do have renters that do not do the right thing, and this is why we have these disputes, but on the same side the landlords need to make sure that if there is an issue and it is unacceptable, it can be fixed. A lot of the time it is done through the real estate agents, and the maintenance on these houses and units is done. But unfortunately sometimes, when there is a little bit of butting of heads between the owner of the building and the renter, it ends up going to VCAT. As we can see, if you have got 64,000 cases in front of your case, it really does take time to actually march through that process to get the resolution. So in having this new body, we would like to think that those cases will go down.

I do note that when the member for Ovens Valley was talking he was hopeful that the cases would not just be shifted from VCAT – if we use that 64,000 number there – and put into the new body, with them saying, ‘Well, we’ve done our bit, and we’ve actually reduced the cases in VCAT.’ We do not want to shift the blame and park it again. I think the government are very genuine about being able to work through the disputes that are on offer to get that number down, because at the end of the day we all want to have a roof over our head and make sure our families are safe.

In the Latrobe Valley we also do have a problem with people that are waiting to get into properties. A lot of them, we find, are sleeping rough, and it is not just a single person. It is sometimes families that are sleeping rough. They can be couch surfing around at friends’ houses or they can be living out of their cars, so we need to make sure that we have got the supply of rental properties no matter where people live around the state of Victoria, whether it be here in the city or whether it be around regional Victoria.

There is a process to go through to acquire a property if you are a renter. There is a long checklist that you do get from the real estate agent, which is very time-consuming to move through, and when you have multiple people – and I am not meaning one or two but there are 10 or 20 people actually trying to bid, if I can use that word, for that rental property – it does make it difficult for these families to gain access to that property. Anything we can do to streamline all of this really is going to make it a lot better.

When I was working in rental properties, one of the big issues which came up was mould on walls and on ceilings. A lot of houses are older houses, and anyone that does have allergies and mould affecting them and making that allergy worse will know, if they have that allergy, that they are going to end up at the doctors and need medication, and the way to stop it is to actually fix the problem of

the mould or otherwise move on from the property. A lot of people are not putting their hand up to move on, because there are no other properties for them to shift into.

In my time as a plumber, a lot of it was from leaking roofs, whether the tiles were cracked or the roofs were in a little bit of disrepair. You would go in and the service agents would come in, and they would paint over the mould but they did not get rid of the mould. That was one of the big classic examples of why things would end up at VCAT. It would look nice on the wall that was freshly painted, but within a couple of weeks it was back. So we need to make sure we have got these safeguards for our renters and also for our landlords as well.

I know the member for Nepean talked about land tax and how it may take these properties off the market because the mums and dads that have that second property that they rent out and rely on for an income for themselves are selling up. We need to make sure that we can keep the amount of houses in supply and do it that way. I am not going to read through the reasoned amendments, but I think they were pleasing. The regulatory bodies that they did contact thought that the proposal was really good but it was just lacking some finer details of how it was all going to work, when it would start and things like that, just basic information on what the actual bill and amendment was going to do. To see some clarification on that would be great.

With your indulgence, Acting Speaker, before I wind up – and I know that I said before, we do not oppose – just on a personal note, it is my mum and dad Fay and John’s 60th wedding anniversary today, so I will be leaving here tonight and heading home to see them. Sixty years being married is a massive effort. Mum, as mums do, is probably at home watching, so to Mum and Dad: love you heaps, and happy 60th wedding anniversary.

**Sarah CONNOLLY** (Laverton) (16:14): I rise to speak on the Estate Agents, Residential Tenancies and Other Acts Amendment (Funding) Bill 2024. I am actually going to make my contribution quite personal today, because I absolutely love getting up in this place and talking about life as a renter in this state and the fact that this government, the Allan Labor government, has the back of renters, including folks like me, my husband and my two children.

I want to talk a bit about our experience of what it is like to rent, and every now and then I think, ‘Thank God the government has done something to ensure that homes like the very average house – I will be polite today, the very average-type house – that I am renting at the moment, for probably a very overpriced weekly rental amount I do have to say, are improved. That is something I think our government has worked towards improving, and I can see improvements in the house that I am renting. This house has been a rental house for some time, and I can actually see within the house improvements that have been made – it is an older house – in alignment with the rental reforms that we have been making since we came to government almost 10 years ago.

This bill does act on a significant step of our government’s housing statement by allowing for the use of funds to create – and by God, this is important – a new dispute resolution body for rental disputes. I feel like if there were more renters in this place – and do I note that the member for Sandringham is the only one here on his side, including any members from the Greens, listening to and participating in this incredible debate, this really important debate. There are so many renters in Victoria, but I do give brownie points to the member for Sandringham for sitting through this and listening, as I am sure he is not a renter. But this is really important, right? This is the sort of stuff that renters across the state are talking about at barbecues and neighbourhood get-togethers, about the state of rentals and rental standards here. Indeed our government time and time again has brought bills before this house to improve the standards and the homes that folks like me and many, many others are currently living in and will go to bed in tonight.

Now, thanks to our government, no-fault evictions are banned in Victoria. We made that market fairer for folks with pets – like me. I know that my two-year-old naughty beagle Ringo Starr does deserve his own Instagram page. He is such an exciting, cheeky beagle. But indeed as renters we are able to



have a pet in our lives with the amount of enjoyment and love that that pet provides, not only for me when I need a bit of comfort at the end of the week after a tough week at Parliament but also for my children in being able to look after such a lovable, cute fur baby as Ringo Starr. That is a plug for probably a new Instagram page that I will set up quite shortly for him. On top of this – and this is just so important; as I said, we are paying far too much for the very average, very well loved, over-loved home that we are living in at the moment – we have gone ahead and actually capped rent increases to once a year.

In fact when you look at the improvements to rental rights that were discussed at national cabinet last year, really importantly, you can see that many of the agreed-upon resolutions were actually things that Victoria had already done and gone ahead and implemented, and that is the absolute joy and true importance of having long-term Labor governments. That tells us that Victoria is once again leading the nation. I know that we like to say that, and it is a good problem to have in this place when you get to say it time and time again. I wonder how many times it has been said today; I have heard it quite a few times. I think in total we have made about 130 different rental reforms since coming to government in 2014 – 130 different rental reforms since coming to government in 2014 – and we are a government that has been in power for nearly 10 years. That goes to show the state of play when we came into government in 2014 that actually existed here in Victoria. We have had 130 different rental reforms. But the really great news about our government is we are not actually stopping there. There is more to do, and we are getting on and doing it, and that is because people like me and many, many renters across the state are speaking out about the state of the homes that they are living in, the experiences that they are subjected to, the interactions they have with landlords and other things. There are a lot of stories to tell. I would love to tell all my stories here, but I am not sure I would have a rental property by the end of the week. Who knows? But I do have to say there is more to do. We are listening to renters, and we are getting on and we are doing it.

Our planned reforms will see all forms of rental bidding banned, thank God, stopping landlords from inflating rental prices by exploiting the desperation of a family looking for a place to rent. We are introducing a new portable bond system which tenants can take with them when moving between properties. That is really handy because, gosh, we pay a lot of bond, and it can be difficult to get back. Sometimes there is a bit of disagreement between renters and landlords about what has happened at the property in moving between places. Renters can now take their bonds with them between properties.

We are also – and I love this – tackling dodgy practices in the real estate and property management industry. The real estate and property management industry in my experience – I would probably say I have been renting now for about 2½ years – are no friends of renters, and that has been very unsurprising. We are ensuring those responsible for engaging with tenants and landlords are actually doing the right thing through mandatory licensing and, most importantly, a training requirement. I have no idea what these people were doing before that training requirement was put in, but I do know that it is certainly a very good thing and folks like me benefit from it.

Of course what we are discussing today is a new dispute resolution body just for rental disputes, because what we know is there are a number of renters here in Victoria and sometimes there are disputes, and we need them resolved quickly. Also, I would say this is a really big step forward in creating a fairer rental market. There can be gross inequality between renters and landlords.

As everyone knows, the way the system currently works is that if you have got a problem with a rental property, whether it is something as simple as trying to get a landlord to pay for a broken appliance – we had the situation where our dishwasher would not work. I would like to say it was me, but my husband in my house was doing all of the dish washing. After about three weeks of contacting our agent, saying, ‘Mate, we need to get a guy in to check the dishwasher,’ he truly had a bit of a hissy fit or spat the dummy one night when he was covered in soap suds and he was sick and tired of having to send text messages to the agent, who is actually a really lovely guy. I am sure it was indeed the landlord who just could not be bothered to organise or pay for someone to come in and fix the

dishwasher. Like I said, we were, and still are, paying a lot of money in rent for a property that was not what we thought we would be signing a contract for to go ahead and rent. One of the issues for renters is that you cannot very well go in and look at a property and switch on the dishwasher to see if it works or switch on all of the lights or switch on all of the fans or switch on the air conditioning to check if they work, even though that is probably doing your due diligence. You never know what the state of the property will be like when you sign the contract and you pay, I am estimating, around \$5000, \$6000, \$7000 to move all of your stuff into the property, only to find out that it is not really fit for purpose. Then you have got to fight your landlord and fight your agent to have something done.

In the 50-odd seconds that I have got left I will say this is a really great bill. We have made 130 reforms, and we are not stopping there. We are going to make sure that disputes are heard by the right people and are heard quickly and resolved quickly so both renters and landlords can get on when there is a dispute. This is a really important bill. We have had in my time in the past six years a couple of different ministers who have felt really passionately about rental reform and have really engaged with caucus members like me. We might be few and far between, renters on this side, but I would say that we are far greater in number than renters on that side, including the member for Sandringham. I do want to thank the minister for bringing this before the house this sitting week. I commend the bill to the house.

**Brad ROWSWELL** (Sandringham) (16:24): I rise to address the Estate Agents, Residential Tenancies and Other Acts Amendment (Funding) Bill 2024. It is important to get the name of the bill 100 per cent right. I rise also today in support of the member for Ovens Valley's reasoned amendments and agree wholeheartedly with the reasoned amendments moved by the member for Ovens Valley. Although, as indicated by other speakers on behalf of the opposition, we will not be opposing this bill.

I would have thought that something that everyone in this place can agree upon is that we want to get more Victorians into better homes – not just any homes, but better homes – as soon as we possibly can. I would have thought that there is broad agreement in this place that a roof over your head provides Victorians not just with that – a roof over their head – but with the safety, security and stability that they need to be a net contributor to our community. I would have thought that that would be the founding principle that anyone who puts their hand up to be a member of this chamber would agree upon. Where the disagreement is, of course, is how we get there, and in the last 10 years the Labor government of this state has had a pretty good opportunity to put us on a better footing and put us in a better place than we currently are in relation to housing.

I am concerned that through the course of broader debate on the topic of housing there have been members of the government who have sought to pit one part of the ecosystem of housing against the other. One day developers are bad, the next day rental providers are bad – I believe that for us to fully solve this problem to fulfil that stated policy intent of getting as many good-quality roofs over as many heads of Victorians as we possibly can, pitting one part of that ecosystem against the other just really is not productive. What we do need is for every part of this ecosystem to be working together hand in glove with the government, because I would like to think that our purpose in doing so is to get as many people in as many houses as possible.

I am concerned that, as recently reported by Fairfax press, there have been a number of rental bombs dropped in Victoria for the first time. On 17 March this year a journalist named Kieran Rooney from that august publication the *Age*, which, as its masthead says, is independent always, said that:

The number of homes being leased in Victoria has fallen year-on-year for the first time since records began, while the number of new rental properties hitting the market has also plunged.

Again, the Labor government have had a decade to get this policy setting right, to get as many Victorians into as many good-quality homes as they possibly can, and I am concerned that Mr Rooney has reported these figures – these figures that are coming out from a government agency itself, these figures that are coming from the government agency Homes Victoria. I am quoted, generously so on

the part of Mr Rooney, in the article – can I quote myself? Is that like speaking in the third person? – as saying:

In the almost 12 months following Labor’s latest property tax hikes in last year’s budget, rents have continued to climb, vacancy rates have plummeted, and critical investment continue to be driven interstate.

The point I was trying to make in offering that reflection to Mr Rooney was simply this: I believe that you do not tax your way back to prosperity. I believe that adding additional economic impacts and additional economic burdens upon frankly any part of the housing ecosystem at this time is going to have a negative impact on delivering that policy goal, that policy aim, which is to get as many high-quality roofs over as many Victorian heads as we possibly can.

But that is not the experience of the government. That is not the example and the action of the government, who only in their last budget of May last year increased land tax and made changes to land tax which are negatively impacting rental providers, so much so that they are taking their rental properties off the market, increasing the demand for rental properties, increasing the amount that renters are paying for rental properties and potentially decreasing the quality of properties on the rental market as well.

My view is that we should be incentivising rental providers to stay on the market at a time when they are experiencing their own cost-of-living issues. Something I would like to call out, if I may, is the view that people who own a second home are rich, that they must be rich. Nothing could be further from the truth in many cases. What those rental providers own is not a second property; what they actually own is a second mortgage. And what they are trying to do is, sure, make a return on their investment but also provide another Victorian with the ability to have a high-quality roof over their head. Those are the people, those are the Victorians, that I believe and I contend are being punished because of the policy settings of the current Labor government.

I was also curious to read in another august publication, the *Australian Financial Review*, Gus McCubbing report on 4 March this year: ‘Tax rise “last nail in the coffin” for Victorian property investors’. Again, we need to be not punishing different parts of the property ecosystem here. We need to be incentivising and encouraging every part of the property ecosystem here if we are going to make an impact on the lives of Victorians. There is a property manager here, Carmen Littley, who says:

... she has lost 52 investor clients since the Victorian government targeted landowners –

rental providers –

with extra levies in its budget last year, which she describes as the “final nail in the coffin” for many owners.

She warned that property investors leaving the market would further hit rental stock because owner-occupiers tend to have fewer people in a house than renters, which could potentially further increase asking rents.

Again, you have got to take care of every part of the ecosystem here, you cannot just take care of some parts of the ecosystem. You cannot punish some parts of the ecosystem and expect that there will be a better outcome. It just does not work like that.

I think that Victorian rental providers should not be punished by their government. I think that they should be encouraged by their government. They should be incentivised by their government to do the right thing by not selling their rental properties, by not divesting themselves of an interest that is being taxed more and more by the Labor government, but being incentivised to keep their property on the market as a rental property for the medium to long term in the middle of a housing crisis. I am confident that if the government did adopt such a policy setting, that would encourage more rentals to remain on the market and encourage properties that are not currently rentals to enter the market to make life easier for Victorians and to have a positive impact on current rental prices, which have been increasing. I think that encouraging better behaviour is much better than punishing good behaviour people who are willing to invest in property at this time.

I would encourage the government to consider it. I would encourage the government to consider the reasoned amendment moved by the member for Ovens Valley, which very sensibly calls on the government to prove that this bill, the Estate Agents, Residential Tenancies and Other Acts Amendment (Funding) Bill 2024, will not disadvantage renters, will not disadvantage rental providers and will give everyone a fair go.

**Lauren KATHAGE** (Yan Yean) (16:34): I am really pleased to rise to speak on the Estate Agents, Residential Tenancies and Other Acts Amendment (Funding) Bill 2024. What I love about this bill is the way it cuts straight to the chase in setting up an alternative dispute resolution process for renters and for landlords, because contrary to what the member for Sandringham says, this is not about punishing landlords, this is about ensuring people's rights. That is why I am so glad that this dispute resolution process is good for renters and good for landlords. That is fantastic.

I think we all have a story about a difficult situation with a landlord, and if we do not, we have heard of them. I was paying electricity for the neighbouring property that the landlord also owned, and what did I do about it? Nothing. I did not do anything about it, because I was intimidated by my landlord. The process was too complicated and overwhelming, so I just copped it because I wanted to keep living there. I have had a constituent speak with me about her situation, where in her rental property she has solar on the roof. But it is not connected, and the landlord is refusing to connect the solar, which would result in cheaper bills.

Everyone has got a story; not all those stories, though, should end up in VCAT. There are better places to resolve issues such as these, and I am so glad that our government is going about setting up that more appropriate mechanism. It will mean faster and cheaper outcomes for people, and it will be less intimidating. I am really, really proud of that. It just makes sense for our government to do that, because this is the government with the strongest rental protections in the country.

Just as the member for Broadmeadows did, I want to acknowledge all the good landlords that we do have in Victoria that do provide a safe and comfortable and affordable home for people who require one. Contrary then to the member for Sandringham, we are not anti landlords, we are pro renters rights. If you see those as being against each other, as being contrary, then that demonstrates where your interest lies, and it is not in protecting people's right to a safe home.

Those strong rental protections that we have here include things like being able to have a pet and a vegetable garden. We have had a bumper crop of tomatoes at my place this summer, chutney to last for years. Everyone should have the right to make overly sweet chutney at home or to hang a painting. School photos have come back already this year, and I would love to put my daughter's photo up, and I can, because I own my home. Renters should be able to put their cute child's picture up on the wall as well, and I am so glad that our government has made it possible.

I am also really proud of the five-year tenancy agreements that were established – and I think that that has an important link to the recent announcements about cracking down on rent increases or evicting people at the end of 12 months and putting the rent up; I will come back to that later – as well as our prior improvements capping rental increases to once every 12 months and all the safe electrical standards, the need for blinds, heating and all of those fantastic improvements to renters rights that we brought in. Actually, last year we also in this house spoke to a bill that improved rights for people with disability in rental accommodation, to make sure that they had the same rights as other members of the community as well, a very Labor thing to do.

But we know that not everybody is happy about these things. We heard earlier this week from the member for South-West Coast. When she was speaking on this bill she explained about how the equilibrium is off. I was talking before about how if you see renters rights and landlords rights as being opposed, as being a zero-sum game, then you would speak in those terms, as if the equilibrium is off. But actually an increase in renters rights is not a decrease in landlords rights, because everyone is required to provide a proper standard of housing for people.

This concept of people being punished, which the member for Sandringham was speaking of earlier, just does not stack up. It just does not stack up. But it is always like those ads with 'But wait, there's more'. It seems like every bill that we introduce is always part of a broader sweeping reform that we are methodically working through, and it is no different with this. I have gone over the changes that we have made in the past, but I am really excited about a couple of the coming changes, including the portable rental bond scheme, because that was always very tricky for me as a younger woman between tenancies and needing to find a little bucket of money to get into the next place before the last one was released. This is going to make a real difference to so many people. If you imagine families who rent, who are under cost-of-living pressure, if their tenancy was coming to an end at the same time that they needed to be buying bigger school uniforms and bigger shoes for the kids before they started school, it would just be an absolute nightmare. I am glad that we are taking away that pressure and that worry for families who rent so that they can focus on the excitement of the start of the school year and things like that rather than worrying about where they will find the bond.

Acting Speaker, I do not know about you or others in this place, but on community Facebook groups – they are not somewhere I spend a lot of time – I have seen just a heartbreaking surge in people asking for help to find rental accommodation. The end of their first 12 months has come, and the rent has gone up so much that they cannot afford it. Where I live is where people have already moved to, out and out and out as rents increase further in the city, and once they get to where I live and the rent becomes unaffordable, then they are at the very edge of what we consider to be Melbourne. Certainly in speaking to the local food bank they have noted the increase as well. They have seen a very big increase in the number of single mothers that are coming to them for help and who are in situations relating to being unable to afford the house they have been living in for the previous 12 months, so how fabulous that our government is going to restrict rent increases between successive fixed-term rental agreements.

When tenants get to the end of those first 12 months, sometimes they have not even unpacked all the boxes by then. There are things left in the cupboard maybe, but the kids feel safe and happy in their bedroom, they have made it their own, your daughter's picture is up on the wall. But then you get towards the end of the first 12 months, and lo and behold the landlord wants to put the rent up by such an astronomical amount that you simply cannot afford it anymore. We are stamping that out. What we are going to do is ensure that if they do put the first tenant out after 12 months, they need to offer the property at the same rent for at least 12 months. That removes the incentive for landlords to move through renters by evicting them and continually increasing the prices. The member for Sandringham might be happy that I used the word 'incentivise' because he was looking for incentives for landlords. I hope that they will appreciate that one, and I am sure that it will have a good impact on renters.

I see this as being related to that earlier reform I spoke about, which was setting up five-year leases in our previous things, so just giving that certainty to families. You know, you move in somewhere, maybe your child is in grade 2 – well, they are going to see out primary school in the same home. They are going to walk the same route to school, their friends are going to come over to the same house and I just think that is really important. It is just one example of the excellent initiatives from this government that are improving the lives of renters.

**Daniela DE MARTINO** (Monbulk) (16:44): Acting Speaker Lambert, it is wonderful to see you in the chair. I rise with pride to speak on the Estate Agents, Residential Tenancies and Other Acts Amendment (Funding) Bill 2024. As many have already noted, the primary purpose of this bill is to support the delivery of our government's housing statement by expanding the use of the Victorian Property Fund and the Residential Tenancies Fund to fund an alternative dispute resolution service, including Rental Dispute Resolution Victoria, as well as funding a range of advocacy and assistance services. I say hallelujah to that, because up until now VCAT has been far too difficult for some to access. Some people just decide not to go down that path, because it feels too hard, and any alternative dispute resolution service that we create to make it easier for people renting to be able to find a pathway forward without it feeling insurmountable is to be commended 100 per cent.

This bill will amend the Estate Agents Act 1980 to enable the Victorian Property Fund to fund the establishment and the ongoing costs of alternative dispute resolution services for disputes arising under consumer housing and property acts, including the Residential Tenancies Act 1997, and to support the provision of those advocacy and assistance services. As my colleagues have noted, last September we issued a housing statement, and I have to say when I saw that, when I read it – I believe I can speak for all of my other colleagues here – it felt like a wonderful moment when we made a stand to do everything that we possible can to address this housing issue that we have here in Victoria. It is not just limited to our state; it is a nationwide problem. But I have to say that I am not entirely sure that other governments are tackling it with as much vigour as we are here.

Our housing statement was developed to account for the fact that we are the fastest growing state in this country. Our population is going to be over 10 million by 2051, which is astounding. That is an incredible exponential figure. I was reflecting, when I was thinking about this, about my time as a renter. Many, many years ago my then fiancé and I rented a little apartment in South Yarra. It was the cheapest one. I know it was the cheapest one for Kay & Burton as agents because when we went in there and asked for a list of available rentals we started from the bottom of the list and worked our way upwards. We did not go much further than that one because that was all we could afford at the time on very humble salaries. Mike was managing a pub at the time and I was working in an entry-level admin role in recruitment, and that is all we could afford. The reason we picked that location was so we could walk to work, because we could not even really afford my very, very, very humble car. I could use another word, but it would probably be unparliamentary. It was a bomb. It was a true bomb.

**A member:** It probably had a name too.

**Daniela DE MARTINO:** It did. Her name was Reno, named after the lead singer in *Anything Goes*. There you go; there is a story behind that. I will not go into that this time, but I am sure one day it will all be made apparent.

**A member:** Go Reno!

**Daniela DE MARTINO:** Go Reno! Well, the car was a bomb and so was the flat. It matched the car. And we had a gas leak. One day I came back and I thought, ‘I can smell something not great. I can smell gas.’ Then I worked out we had a gas leak. Luckily, I had some wherewithal. I had a father who had taught me once about where the mains gas was and how to find it, so I ran down to the bottom and I switched off the mains. It left us without the capacity to cook for a few weeks. No-one at the real estate agent at the time said, ‘Do you know that you are actually entitled to claim back the rent you’ve paid for that portion of the room of the flat?’ There was a bit of a formula for it. They did not bother to tell me, but luckily I had a friend who was informed and actually told me that. With that information from them I went to the agent, and funnily enough, repairs were made quick smart at the time.

At the time I did not think ‘I’d better not raise my head above the parapet’ as much as I probably would now. That is why I think having alternative dispute resolution services is incredibly important, because it will give renters greater assurance that they have a pathway forward, because there are some pretty shocking landlords out there. And there are some great landlords too. I will not cast everyone in the same light; life is all full of nuance and shades of grey.

I have some friends who have gone through some particularly awful scenarios in the last year alone. A dear friend of mine who is in her early 60s, as a single woman, at two successive rental places she was told, ‘Oh, you have to leave because the owner’s moving back in.’ A year after the first one, no owner had moved in. She kept driving by just to see if anyone was there, and the windows were shuttered for 12 months. There is a lot that goes on here, and we are doing our best to support those in these situations, because people have the right to shelter. I do worry a little bit that the right to shelter, the right to a home, is sometimes superseded by some others’ desire – or right, in their mind – to increase their wealth, and I think that sometimes there is a competing interest there.

I was listening to the member for Laverton's contribution with great interest on her experience of renting, and it was really positive to hear that the changes that our government has made have had an impact. She has actually seen and experienced that impact in real time in her life, and that was wonderful to hear – despite the dodgy dishwasher. My sympathies on that one, because my dishwasher just packed it in last night, and I know I am going home to a whole stack of dirty dishes.

**Sarah Connolly** interjected.

**Daniela DE MARTINO:** Yes, I will use gloves; thank you, member for Laverton. There are so many things. I was listening to the member for Yan Yean and her contribution, and the portable bond is so important because trying to scrape together the money for the next bond can be prohibitive. It can really hold you back from finding the next place, which tethers you to somewhere that maybe is less than ideal for your situation. It is incredibly important. All the work that we are doing is always done through the lens of improving people's lives and for those who most need us to govern with their interests at heart. That is why I am incredibly proud to be part of this government. I know that it is practical and it is pragmatic, but it has always got a big heart in every decision it makes.

I do want to actually address something, though, that the member for Sandringham raised in the article in the *Age*. The figures from the December 2023 quarter were quoted in that article, and I think it is important to note that data from Homes Vic has had further exclusions applied to it. It has included removing the rooming house bond numbers, which has actually led to a fall in the overall numbers, because you have taken out a chunk there. I just want to make it really clear that while there has been a slight decline in the bond numbers for the first two months of this year, the overall trend actually remains increasing in bond numbers in Victoria, so it is not as that article may have painted it, because at February 2024 the bond numbers for rentals were higher than at the same time in the previous year. That is a really important statistic that I would like to ensure is on the record here today, and I will give you the specific numbers. On the Homes Vic site you can see that the February 2024 bond count is 737,926. The February 2023 bond count was 729,954, and at very quick blush that is a difference of about 8000. We had 8000 more rental bonds in February this year than we had in February last year, in summary, and that is a positive, positive figure indeed.

I am aware that there are only a few seconds left on that clock, so I just want to touch on alternative dispute resolution. I just want to come back to it. The importance of this cannot be understated. For people to know that there is a path that does not require going through the process of VCAT gives them assurance. It also puts landlords on notice that people are more inclined to use this, and hopefully that will mean more constructive discussions between them to find a resolution with minimal fuss and stress for those involved. I commend this bill wholeheartedly to the house.

**Bronwyn HALFPENNY** (Thomastown) (16:54): It is really good to stand up here talking on and in support of the Estate Agents, Residential Tenancies and Other Acts Amendment (Funding) Bill 2024. As with many of the speakers on this side, I really understand and support the need for renters to have proper rights and protections in order for them to live good lives in rented properties. Sometimes I think those that oppose any tightening-up or any sort of regulation around the quality of housing that it is expected that a person renting should have, and those sorts of things, often seem to have this attitude that a landlord is actually doing a renter a favour. But in actual fact that is not the case. They have actually got that house as an investment, and they are making money off that house, whether it is through tax breaks or the actual income that is taken from the house. That is the reason why we have landlords. They are not there for the benefit of the community and the renter. In saying that, I am not saying that all landlords are terrible either, but certainly this is a business proposition, not a charity or a welfare proposition on the side of the landlord.

We do need tough laws and proper regulation to ensure that there are protections. Of course in some instances there also need to be protections for landlords, and that is where I think the Allan Labor government really is finding that balance and doing the right thing for all sides. While there has been lots of legislation over the years while in government to protect the rights of renters and also clarify

the responsibilities and obligations of landlords, this piece of legislation builds on that. As an amendment bill there are a few things that it is amending, but in the case of real estate, this is about providing a mechanism by which there can be an alternative dispute resolution system. We all know, and I am getting lots of residents telling me, that if they have got a rental dispute and go into VCAT, it takes many, many months there because there is such a backlog. The good thing about this, we hope, is it will set up this new fund and also a system for dispute resolution in particular for the rental housing industry. Also this legislation provides the mechanism by which that system would be funded, as well as other assistance and advocacy work for renters and landlords. This is good legislation.

I have been to visit properties in the electorate where people are renting, and they have been absolutely appalling, the conditions in there – stoves that do not work, holes in the floor. So it is really important that we do have proper strong laws. I guess the only other issue is that sometimes the renter is too frightened – I know other speakers earlier were talking about that – to report inadequacies because they are worried that they may not have their lease renewed. Of course you do not want to be moving every year or every 12 months. You have a home. You want to put your own things in it. You want that made in such a way that you are comfortable and you are familiar with it. There are a lot of memories there. We want to make sure also that renters are protected when they do enforce their rights, and I think the Allan Labor government is continuing down that path.

Sadly, renting is increasing rather than ownership of the home. In the past people might be surprised to know that the electorate of Thomastown had one of the highest rates of home ownership in the whole of the state, and this is changing. There are increasing numbers of people renting because of course wages are lower and the amount of wage required to purchase or to even get a deposit on a house is becoming unattainable. This is good legislation.

There are a few other things that we are doing as well. When we talk about amendments to law, the world is changing. Things change, and we always have to keep legislation up to date. One example is that we passed much better sex work rights way back a few years ago, and now we are required to close that regulation fund because of the change in the system and the ability to expand –

**The SPEAKER:** Order! The time set down for consideration of items on the government business program has arrived, and I am required to interrupt business. The house is considering the Estate Agents, Residential Tenancies and Other Acts Amendment (Funding) Bill 2024. The minister has moved that the bill be now read a second time. The member for Ovens Valley has moved a reasoned amendment to this motion. He has proposed to omit all the words after ‘That’ and replace them with the words which appear on the notice paper. The question is:

That the words proposed to be omitted stand part of the question.

Those supporting the reasoned amendment by the member for Ovens Valley should vote no.

**Assembly divided on question:**

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

*Noes (28):* Brad Battin, Jade Benham, Roma Britnell, Tim Bull, Martin Cameron, Chris Crewther, Gabrielle de Vietri, Wayne Farnham, Sam Groth, Matthew Guy, David Hodgett, Emma Kealy, Tim McCurdy, Cindy McLeish, James Newbury, Danny O’Brien, Kim O’Keeffe, John Pesutto, Tim Read,



## MOTIONS

Thursday 21 March 2024

Legislative Assembly

1197

Richard Riordan, Brad Rowswell, Ellen Sandell, David Southwick, Bridget Vallence, Peter Walsh, Kim Wells, Nicole Werner, Jess Wilson

**Question agreed to.**

**Motion agreed to.**

**Read second time.**

*Third reading*

**Motion agreed to.**

**Read third time.**

**The SPEAKER:** The bill will now be sent to the Legislative Council and their agreement requested.

**Energy and Public Land Legislation Amendment (Enabling Offshore Wind Energy) Bill 2024**

*Second reading*

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

That this bill be now read a second time.

**Motion agreed to.**

**Read second time.**

*Third reading*

**Motion agreed to.**

**Read third time.**

**The SPEAKER:** The bill will now be sent to the Legislative Council and their agreement requested.

## *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.

**Motion agreed to.**

### **Big Housing Build**

**Debate resumed on motion of Colin Brooks:**

That this house notes:

- (a) since the start of the Big Housing Build in November 2020, 7600 homes are completed or underway, with Victoria on track to deliver over 12,000 much-needed social and affordable homes; and
- (b) the new \$1 billion Regional Housing Fund will deliver more than 1300 additional homes.

**Motion agreed to.**

**Level crossing removals****Debate resumed on motion of Jacinta Allan:**

That this house notes that:

- (1) the government has removed 72 dangerous and congested level crossings;
- (2) in 2018 the government promised to remove 75 level crossings by 2025, and is already two years ahead of schedule; and
- (3) the government will remove a total of 110 level crossings by 2030.

**And David Southwick's amendment:**

That all the words after 'house' be omitted and replaced with the words:

- '(1) notes that two successive Auditor-General reports have found flaws with the business case put forward for level crossing removals, leading to billions in budget blowouts; and
- (2) calls on the government to release costings for every level crossing removal project it has undertaken.'

**The SPEAKER:** The question is:

That the words proposed to be omitted stand part of the question.

Those supporting the amendment by the member for Caulfield should vote no.

**Assembly divided on question:**

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

*Noes (28):* Brad Battin, Jade Benham, Roma Britnell, Tim Bull, Martin Cameron, Chris Crewther, Gabrielle de Vietri, Wayne Farnham, Sam Groth, Matthew Guy, David Hodgett, Emma Kealy, Tim McCurdy, Cindy McLeish, James Newbury, Danny O'Brien, Kim O'Keeffe, John Pesutto, Tim Read, Richard Riordan, Brad Rowswell, Ellen Sandell, David Southwick, Bridget Vallence, Peter Walsh, Kim Wells, Nicole Werner, Jess Wilson

**Question agreed to.**

**Motion agreed to.**

**Education State****Debate resumed on motion of Natalie Hutchins:**

That this house recognises the work of the Andrews Labor government to build the Education State by:

- (1) making kinder free;
- (2) delivering hundreds of new schools and school upgrades;
- (3) supporting student wellbeing;
- (4) implementing One VCE; and
- (5) putting over 70 courses on the free TAFE list.

**Motion agreed to.**

*Bills***National Electricity (Victoria) Amendment (VicGrid) Bill 2024***Second reading***Debate resumed on motion of Lily D'Ambrosio:**

That this bill be now read a second time.

**The SPEAKER:** The question is:

That this bill be now read a second and a third time.

**Assembly divided on question:**

*Ayes (54):* Juliana Addison, Jacinta Allan, Colin Brooks, Anthony Carbines, Ben Carroll, Darren Cheeseman, Anthony Cianflone, Sarah Connolly, Chris Couzens, Jordan Crugnale, Lily D'Ambrosio, Daniela De Martino, Gabrielle de Vietri, Steve Dimopoulos, Paul Edbrooke, Eden Foster, Matt Fregon, Ella George, Bronwyn Halfpenny, Katie Hall, Paul Hamer, Martha Haylett, Mathew Hilakari, Melissa Horne, Natalie Hutchins, Lauren Kathage, Sonya Kilkenny, Nathan Lambert, Gary Maas, Alison Marchant, Kathleen Matthews-Ward, Steve McGhie, Paul Mercurio, John Mullahy, Tim Pallas, Danny Pearson, Tim Read, Pauline Richards, Tim Richardson, Ellen Sandell, Michaela Settle, Ros Spence, Nick Staikos, Natalie Suleyman, Meng Heang Tak, Jackson Taylor, Nina Taylor, Kat Theophanous, Emma Vulin, Iwan Walters, Vicki Ward, Dylan Wight, Gabrielle Williams, Belinda Wilson

*Noes (25):* Brad Battin, Jade Benham, Roma Britnell, Tim Bull, Martin Cameron, Chris Crewther, Wayne Farnham, Sam Groth, Matthew Guy, David Hodgett, Emma Kealy, Tim McCurdy, Cindy McLeish, James Newbury, Danny O'Brien, Kim O'Keeffe, John Pesutto, Richard Riordan, Brad Rowswell, David Southwick, Bridget Vallence, Peter Walsh, Kim Wells, Nicole Werner, Jess Wilson

**Question agreed to.****Read second time.***Third reading***Motion agreed to.****Read third time.**

**The SPEAKER:** The bill will now be sent to the Legislative Council and their agreement requested.

*Announcements***Parliamentary officer**

**The SPEAKER (17:13):** I wish to advise the house that Parliament's resident electrician Robert De Graaf is retiring after 30 years working in this building. Rob will be a familiar face to many of you, but when he is not helping us with our sitting day needs, behind the scenes he has been instrumental in overseeing most of the major upgrades of electrical works throughout Parliament House, including wiring crucial infrastructure, switchboard replacements and maintaining the bells. More importantly, he has been a valued colleague to many and an integral member of the building and grounds team. We thank you, Rob, for your service and wish you and your family all the very best for the future.

*Members applauded.*

**Business interrupted under sessional orders.**

*Adjournment*

**The SPEAKER:** The question is:

That the house now adjourns.

**Crisis care**

**David HODGETT** (Croydon) (17:15): (601) My adjournment matter is for the Minister for Housing, and the action I seek is for the minister to fix the crisis care accommodation in the eastern suburbs so that my constituent who is currently homeless in the following circumstances can be placed into crisis care. My constituent is a 45-year-old female who attends Maroondah Hospital three times a week for up to 4½ hours a day for dialysis. She has a medical port in her chest which requires constant cleaning to prevent infection, blood clots and other complications. She has high needs and requires a bath, as she needs to keep the port as dry as possible. She is a victim of domestic violence and has contacted me out of sheer desperation. She has contacted all the local crisis care organisations in the area, and she feels that no-one is taking her seriously. My office spent hours on the phone calling every agency in the east for help, only to be told that they have nothing available or do not have any funding to put her up in hotels. Agencies are having to prioritise all their cases, and with the massive increase in demand, families are taking priority over single people.

However, this is an urgent case that requires equal attention. My constituent is on the waiting list for public housing, but with the massive wait times and demand for housing it could be years. This is a life-or-death situation. My constituent has major health issues and requires immediate accommodation. She cannot be homeless with no access to bathroom facilities. It is concerning enough to hear that a 45-year-old woman has these kinds of health issues, but what is more concerning is the stress and anxiety it is causing her, not having a safe, stable roof over her head. My constituent deserves to have housing and a warm bed where she can concentrate on her health. Minister, I urge you to fix crisis care accommodation. More funding and support are required by these agencies so they can help change the circumstances of my constituent and others in our state. I will be happy to provide details of my constituent confidentially to you in order for you to provide the necessary assistance.

**Coburg High School**

**Anthony CIANFLONE** (Pascoe Vale) (17:17): (602) My adjournment matter is to the Minister for Education, and the action I seek is for the minister to provide an update on the design, construction and delivery of the new \$17.8 million technology building for Coburg High School which the Victorian Labor government has invested in. Coburg High is located at 101 Urquhart Street in central Coburg and is one of the most vibrant, innovative, creative and progressive schools in the heart of Melbourne's north. Originally Coburg High began as Coburg Higher Elementary School, the very first of its type in Victoria, which opened in 1911 and was situated within Coburg Primary School. When the original Coburg High School building was completed in 1916 on the corner of Bell Street and Rodda Street opposite the Coburg town hall, the school's pupils transferred over, with the school becoming one of the very first coeducational state secondary schools in Victoria, initially accommodating around 195 students. Founded during the First World War, the school was utilised as an emergency hospital during that time and originally built to accommodate 275 students. However, by 1925 enrolments had ballooned out to 400 students, with the overflow of students being taught in rooms adjacent to the Coburg town hall, with the school continuing to experience growing pains to this day, but of a different kind. Over the decades, enrolments grew to 673 in 1955 and 758 in 1985, which ultimately also included my older brother and sister.

However, one of the saddest chapters in the school's history was in 1993, when the Kennett Liberal government decided to shut down and sell off Coburg High's original site along with 12 other schools in my community, a decision that was a big spark for me to become interested in politics and come to this place. Whilst the school community went through several iterations and locations over those subsequent years, it was a proud day for Coburg when a full year 7–12 co-ed high school was finally

reopened in 2015 on its current site on the former Coburg Teachers' College north of Bell Street following a strong local community campaign which I supported. Over its 108-year history it has consistently been able to teach students, with excellency, integrity, curiosity and community at its heart. Some distinguished alumni have included Glenyys Romanes, a former member of this place; Raelene Boyle, who represented Australia at the Olympics; and Doris Carter, the first female track-and-field athlete to medal at the Olympics. Reopening with only 170 students in year 7 in 2015, Coburg High has now grown, with over 1311 students as of 2024, and is on track to reach 1400 students in the near future.

That is why we have as a Labor government continued to proudly invest in and support the school's reopening and growth via a number of initiatives, including \$50,000 to support the school's master plan, because it was this master plan that allowed us to provide the record \$17.8 million to invest towards delivering stage 1 of the technology hub. This game-changing project will deliver a new double-storey technology building, creating spaces for 250 more local students and helping to ensure they are provided with the tools, facilities and resources they will need to succeed, thrive and develop the skills of the future. Some months ago the member for Preston, the member for Northcote and I helped announce that the new architects had been appointed, and the school would really welcome an update in terms of where that project is at. In that regard I am very pleased to acknowledge and commend new school leaders Jonah Day, Mary Hobson, Emma Giles and Patrick Game; deputy principals Belinda Parini and Gary Vella; and teachers, support staff, admin staff and volunteers. Today I just met with Brent Houghton, the principal, to talk about opportunities along with Ross Dudgeon from Newlands Primary School.

### Traralgon bypass

**Martin CAMERON** (Morwell) (17:20): (603) My adjournment matter this evening is for the Minister for Planning, and the action I seek is a review of coal-related planning provisions in my electorate. The current overlays, which are more than 40 years old, are outdated and are preventing progress on the much-anticipated Traralgon bypass. There are currently 10 sets of traffic lights in Traralgon, and the entire town has become a choke point. Anyone who travels through Traralgon, particularly at peak times, will tell you it is a nightmare for residents and businesses. The project has been spoken about for decades, but planning has stalled because the state government has declared there will not be a bypass until Loy Yang power station is rehabilitated, something which is at least 20 years away. That is not good enough. Coal overlays need to be reassessed and, if appropriate, part of the land needs to be rezoned so we can get on with delivering the bypass, which is a key piece of the puzzle for Gippsland's economic prosperity. We simply cannot afford for the Traralgon bypass to be put on the backburner any longer. The region needs certainty. This project would create jobs, reduce congestion, improve road safety and boost productivity.

A Traralgon bypass is overwhelmingly supported by residents across Gippsland; VicRoads' own community engagement will tell you that. The project also has the backing of both the Latrobe City Council and the Wellington Shire Council in recognition of the huge economic and safety benefits it will bring to our region. Freight volumes across Gippsland are growing rapidly, and while traffic through Traralgon is increasing, the delays continue to negatively impact the town and indeed businesses across the region. A bypass would remove heavy vehicles and traffic from the bustling town centre and offer a huge benefit to the transport sector. The Regional Roads Victoria website confirms that the Traralgon bypass has long been identified as a priority project, yet there have been no updates provided since the government announced the \$1.4 million to progress the planning phase of the project in 2018. It is simply unacceptable that the bypass has been placed in the too-hard basket, putting it on the backburner and stating it will not be revisited until Loy Yang is rehabilitated, more than 20 years away. As I said, it is just not good enough. Minister, will you agree to conduct a review of the coal overlay provisions in the Latrobe Valley and, if appropriate, rezone part of the land around Loy Yang to get on with the critical Traralgon bypass?

### Theatre Works

**Nina TAYLOR** (Albert Park) (17:23): (604) Theatre Works received funding of \$1.1 million from our Victorian government through the Victorian state government's creative infrastructure fund. Filling a vital niche in the Australian cultural landscape, Theatre Works is fiercely loyal and outward looking, an icon on Acland Street since 1980. This monumental investment will allow Theatre Works to make some critical upgrades to their St Kilda home, ensuring that they continue to grow their legacy as an artistic home and destination for the ambitious, the new and the eminent for many years to come. Only last week I attended a special performance of *Every Lovely Terrible Thing* by Adam Fawcett. Can I say it was absolutely fantastic and a testament to the high-quality productions of Theatre Works. With permits acquitted and the project advancing for the upgrades to Theatre Works, the action I seek is for the Minister for Creative Industries to attend Theatre Works with me to meet with the Theatre Works crew and discuss the next steps in the advancement of the upgrades in train.

### Lake Mountain Alpine Resort

**Cindy McLEISH** (Eildon) (17:24): (605) My matter this evening is for the Minister for Environment, and the action I seek is for the minister to review and change the decision to close Lake Mountain two days a week during the coming snow season and provide assurances to the local community as to the long-term survival of the mountain. I ask this as Lake Mountain is critical to the livelihoods of many in Marysville, and people in the area are up in arms. Lake Mountain is a smaller, lower altitude mountain just out of the town, and the economy of Marysville is closely linked to the success of the mountain. We have a tourism agenda in Victoria to get people into the country midweek, and this is having the absolute opposite effect, where we are closing the mountain midweek.

Marysville, along with other communities in Murrindindi shire, has suffered a lot with floods and fire, storms, power outages and certainly the closure of the timber industry. Loss of income for Marysville because of the closure of Lake Mountain is very problematic. There have been whispers on the street for a few weeks, and it was announced on Facebook last week that the mountain would be closed on those two days. It begs the question of whether it has actually been thought about properly, because if there is a heavy snowfall and there are not people on the mountain to address it, when the mountain reopens on the Thursday then half of the time will be spent clearing snow.

It certainly flies in the face of the objectives of the new body, Alpine Resorts Victoria, which was set up in February 2022. At the time, Minister D'Ambrosio, when introducing it, said:

The Victorian Government is committed to supporting the economic recovery and long term financial sustainability of the alpine sector.

And:

The establishment of Alpine Resorts Victoria will achieve savings through improved coordination, efficiencies of scale and reduction of duplication.

If this is the case, they should be making enhancements at Lake Mountain, not making cuts. Over the last five years they have had several changes of management, which has not helped, and at each change less and less communication with stakeholders seems to occur. The local businesses rely on the three months of the snow season to get them through the rest of the year.

There is no accommodation on the mountain for staff, so the local businesses fill that gap. Here is what it means: one accommodation provider who invested many, many thousands of dollars to upgrade their facilities to have the workers there was not able to get an answer this year on whether there would be another agreement. But with a little action, finally they found out via email that no-one was going to be staying there this year. They are all going to be moved to Healesville and bussed up. Healesville is on the other side of the Great Dividing Range. This is not just one accommodation provider, but others also have now had bookings for the middle of the year cancelled. We have school groups who come midweek. They are not going to come on the weekends, so this opportunity is now limited to three days a week. This is the wrong decision, and I implore the minister to change it.

### Preston activity centre

**Nathan LAMBERT** (Preston) (17:27): (606) My adjournment matter is for the Minister for Planning, and the action I seek is for the minister to visit central Preston to discuss the proposed Preston activity centre, which forms part of this government's housing statement. As we know, Melbourne continues to grow as it has for many, many decades, and of course we continue to build new homes, as we have also done for a long time. But I think there is very strong recognition in the community now that the thing that we cannot continue to do is to build the vast majority of those homes on the urban fringe. We know that Los Angeles is famously the poster child for urban sprawl, but in fact Melbourne is worse than Los Angeles on a number of those measures, and we know that it leads to greater congestion, it leads to more carbon dioxide emissions and it leads to more inequality in terms of access to services, jobs and cultural opportunities.

That brings me to central Preston. It is of course a wonderful part of the world, and it does have great access to jobs, services and particularly cultural opportunities. It is right next to the new Preston station, rebuilt entirely by this Labor government, and it is exactly the kind of place where you can have that more European urban form without having additional car trips and urban sprawl. So we would really appreciate the chance to chat to the minister about just what this might look like locally. There are a range of issues to think through, many of which are picked up by council's existing draft structure plan. I do thank the council for their work on that; I think it is a very good starting point. But there are some unresolved issues that we would like to chat to the minister about. Increasing enrolment pressure on Preston High is one. Preston High is a fantastic school, but it does have a very small campus in the square metre sense. The future use of the Preston Library space is a local issue. There are road safety implications for Cramer Street and particularly High Street, which is actually already one of our most dangerous stretches in the suburb, despite the fact that it is only 40 kilometres per hour, and I think further north of Murray Road there are some real questions about road safety during peak hour.

We can also chat about the further development of Preston Market and about upgrades to Preston City Oval, which will be an important green space area for any new residents. It will also be important to talk about the under-utilised VicTrack land around the station, the Melbourne Polytechnic land further along Cramer Street and the relationship with Northland. I think it is interrelated, the way that development at Northland and development at Preston Central have a relationship to each other, particularly in terms of the amount of retail space provided. As you can see, there are a wide range of important issues to discuss in order to support the very important goals of this government's housing statement, and we thank the minister for her consideration.

### Energy policy

**Tim READ** (Brunswick) (17:30): (607) My adjournment speech is for the Minister for Energy and Resources and Minister for Climate Action, and the action I seek is that the government ban the sale of new gas-fuelled appliances in this state. I am mainly talking about heaters and hot-water services. The Bass Strait gas fields are running out fast. Victoria must either cut demand or open up new fossil gas fields. Global heating induced by fossil fuels is well underway. We had hoped to limit it to 1.5 degrees and perhaps save some of the Great Barrier Reef, but those targets now seem unlikely. Ending the use of fossil gas or methane must now be a priority, both because of the CO<sub>2</sub> emitted when it is burnt and because when unburnt gas escapes it is a much more potent greenhouse gas.

I congratulate the government for stopping the connection of new homes to gas, but with around 2 million homes already connected to gas, switching them all to renewable electricity is an enormous task that must start now. The cheapest and easiest place to start is when householders decide to replace heaters and hot-water services. They are about to spend money on a new appliance anyway, and they can buy either an efficient heat pump, which will increasingly be powered by renewable electricity, or a less efficient gas heater or hot-water service, which will cost them much more to run. The additional cost for a reverse-cycle air conditioner, for example, will be recouped by savings from the gas bill over

time, but the government should also expand subsidies and no-interest loans to make buying efficient electric appliances cheaper.

The worst thing a government could do is to allow someone influenced by misinformation from the gas industry or low up-front prices on crappy, inefficient gas appliances to buy a gas heater or hot-water service today which will continue to pump out carbon for decades. People buying these appliances will also have to pay more in energy bills, as gas prices are predicted to soar year on year while renewable electricity will continue to get cheaper. Growing awareness of the health risks of burning gas inside their home, particularly the risk of asthma, is also likely to make more people regret choosing gas.

The government may want to consider exceptions in the short term for those with no connection to the power grid or those where the local grid cannot support further demand from electrification, but we must move faster to reduce gas consumption and lower household energy bills and we must ban putting new gas appliances into homes in Victoria.

### Gender equality

**Gary MAAS** (Narre Warren South) (17:32): (608) The adjournment matter I wish to raise is for the Minister for Women and concerns International Women's Day. The action that I seek is that the minister provide an update on how the Allan Labor government is supporting and empowering women in my electorate of Narre Warren South. I was honoured to recently attend International Women's Day celebrations, with this year's theme being 'Count her in' and a call to invest in women and rightfully identify women's economic parity as an essential part of a gender-equal world.

With many in this chamber, I attended the event here at Parliament celebrating the first woman Speaker and President of the Parliament, Judy Maddigan and Monica Gould, and I was delighted to have Helen Small as my guest. Helen is the executive officer for the local Casey North Community Information and Support Service, which provides a wide range of programs, including for women's health, self-esteem, financial literacy, self-care, conflict resolution and women's rights, especially in support of migrants and those experiencing family violence.

Another event that I attended in the area was hosted by the Melbourne City Football Club at Casey Fields. We celebrated the growing role of women's sport and discussed how sport is an avenue for further inclusion, recognition and opportunities, not only in sport but throughout society as well. Just as a side note, I am always chuffed to meet our highly skilled athletes, but meeting former Matildas captain and Melbourne City goalkeeper Melissa Barbieri was really something.

I thank the minister for her work on the Allan Labor government's *Our Equal State* strategy to progress gender equality and support women in my electorate, and I look forward to sharing the minister's response with my community.

### Land tax

**Jess WILSON** (Kew) (17:34): (609) My adjournment is for the Treasurer, and the action I am seeking is for the Treasurer to provide land tax relief for Victorians in the upcoming budget. Around this time last year, I sought the same action from the Treasurer after so many Victorians reached out to me to share their distress at the massive spike in their land tax bills. Unfortunately, the Treasurer did not heed my call. In fact he actually did the exact opposite, hiking land tax rates yet again at a time when Victorians can least afford to pay for them. Yet again we have seen this government punish Victorians for Labor's financial incompetence with crippling tax burdens. Property is a common investment vehicle for Australians from all walks of life. It is by no means the preserve of the ultrarich. In fact it is not uncommon for Victorians to hold the vast majority of their wealth in a single property investment. According to ATO data, 72 per cent of Australians who invest in real estate own only one investment property. The majority of these investors have an income of less than \$100,000 a year.



But it is not just individuals who bear the burden of Labor's ongoing land tax hikes. Businesses across Victoria are feeling the pinch. I have heard from business owners whose land tax bills have nearly doubled. This additional impost on business along with Labor's payroll taxes, which are among the highest in the country, and WorkCover premium hikes are putting Victorian jobs at risk. Victorian businesses are really starting to question why you would continue to do business in this state. Other states are knocking on their doors, inviting them to move over the border to enjoy the business-friendly conditions in those states. Businesses are not the magic goose that can continue to lay the golden eggs for Labor by keeping Victorians gainfully employed despite the worst economic conditions in this state since the Cain–Kirner era. At some point the music will have to stop and so will Labor's merry-go-round of taxing and spending while Victorians struggle to pay bills and make ends meet.

Of course as I have made the point time and time again in this place, land tax is a tax on rent. When land tax bills triple in the space of two years, as some Victorians have experienced this year, the Treasurer is living in la-la land if he thinks these tax hikes are not driving Victoria's rental increases. Rents are at record price highs while rental properties are at record lows in terms of availability in Victoria. The Labor government's addiction to property taxes is exacerbating the rental crisis in this state. As I pointed out in my first speech in this place, 42 per cent of the state's total taxation comes from land tax and stamp duty alone. This is not what a healthy budget with diverse revenue sources should look like. Labor must end its property tax addiction now and stop punishing Victorians for their fiscal incompetence. Once again, I call on this government to offer land tax relief in their upcoming budget.

### **Victorian energy upgrades program**

**John MULLAHY** (Glen Waverley) (17:37): (610) A quick adjournment is a good adjournment. My adjournment matter is directed to the Minister for Energy and Resources. The action I seek is for the minister to join me in the Glen Waverley district to meet with some of my constituents who have benefited firsthand from the Victorian energy upgrades program. The Allan Labor government is leading the charge in Australia's race to net zero emissions. We have brought forward our net zero target by five years, and by 2035 up to 95 per cent of Victoria's energy will be sourced from renewables. We are not on this journey just because it is the right thing to do, though; we are investing in climate action because it presents massive economic opportunities and benefits for our state, including for families in my local community. The Allan Labor government is driving down energy bills with our Solar Homes program, providing rebates and interest-free loans to cover the cost of solar panel and battery installation. More than 350,000 Victorians have already benefited, including thousands in the Glen Waverley electorate. That is in addition to the Victorian energy upgrades program. The program is terrific and hails from the Brumby era, with 2 million Victorian households benefiting from appliance upgrades since the program started. Not only is it reducing reliance on fossil fuels and supercharging our renewables transition, it is driving down family energy bills, which we have seen just this week from the Essential Services Commission. Our renewables transition, including the Victorian energy upgrades program, is great news for families looking for cost-of-living relief, and I look forward to the minister joining me.

### **Responses**

**Vicki WARD** (Eltham – Minister for Prevention of Family Violence, Minister for Employment) (17:38): The member for Croydon had an adjournment matter for the Minister for Housing, seeking a response to the crisis of the housing situation in his electorate, particularly for his constituent who has complex health needs and has experienced family violence. The member for Pascoe Vale calls on the Minister for Education to provide an update on the planning and construction of Coburg High. The member for Morwell calls on the Minister for Planning to review the coal-related planning overlays in the Latrobe Valley. The member for Albert Park called on the Minister for Creative Industries to visit Theatre Works in her electorate. The member for Eildon asked for Lake Mountain to open up during the winter season.

**Cindy McLeish:** Midweek.

**Vicki WARD:** Midweek; thank you. The member for Preston called on the Minister for Planning to have conversations regarding the planning needs of his seat in Preston, particularly focused around Preston and the activity centre in Preston. The member for Brunswick asked for the Minister for Energy and Resources and Minister for Climate Action to ban the sale of new gas appliances in the state. The member for Narre Warren South asked for the Minister for Women to provide an update on the benefits for women of the amazing policies of the Allan Labor government. The member for Kew called on the Treasurer to offer land tax relief for Victorians in the upcoming budget. The member for Glen Waverley called on the Minister for Energy and Resources to visit Glen Waverley so she can meet those locals who have benefited from the Allan Labor government's energy policies.

**The SPEAKER:** The house is now adjourned.

**House adjourned 5:40 pm.**