

**PROOF**

**Hansard**

**LEGISLATIVE COUNCIL**

**60th Parliament**

**Tuesday 18 November 2025**



# CONTENTS

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ANNOUNCEMENTS	
Photography in chamber .....	1
MEMBERS	
Liberal Party leadership .....	1
QUESTIONS WITHOUT NOTICE AND MINISTERS STATEMENTS	
Economic policy .....	1
Youth justice system .....	2
Ministers statements: water policy.....	3
Youth crime.....	4
Somebody's Daughter Theatre.....	5
Ministers statements: pill testing .....	5
Medically supervised injecting facilities .....	6
Economic policy .....	7
Ministers statements: gambling harm.....	8
Public sector review .....	8
Government consultation .....	9
Ministers statements: kindergarten audit and assurance program .....	9
CONSTITUENCY QUESTIONS	
Northern Victoria Region .....	10
Northern Metropolitan Region .....	10
Northern Metropolitan Region .....	11
North-Eastern Metropolitan Region .....	11
Western Victoria Region .....	11
North-Eastern Metropolitan Region .....	11
South-Eastern Metropolitan Region .....	12
Southern Metropolitan Region .....	12
Northern Victoria Region .....	12
Western Victoria Region .....	12
Southern Metropolitan Region .....	13
Eastern Victoria Region .....	13
PETITIONS	
Health system.....	13
BILLS	
Control of Weapons Amendment (Establishing Jack's Law, Use of Electronic Metal Detection Devices)	
Bill 2025 .....	14
Introduction and first reading .....	14
COMMITTEES	
Scrutiny of Acts and Regulations Committee .....	14
Alert Digest No. 16 .....	14
Procedure Committee.....	14
Inquiry into Variation of Scope of Orders for the Production of Documents .....	14
Economy and Infrastructure Committee .....	16
Inquiry into Wildlife Roadstrike in Victoria.....	16
Public Accounts and Estimates Committee .....	18
Inquiry into Fraud and Corruption Control in Local Government: A Follow up of Two Auditor-General Reports .....	18
PAPERS	
Papers.....	20
COMMITTEES	
Legal and Social Issues Committee.....	21
Inquiry into Workplace Drug Testing in Victoria .....	21
BUSINESS OF THE HOUSE	
Notices .....	21
General business .....	21
MEMBERS STATEMENTS	
Working-class women round tables .....	21
<i>The Weight of Men</i> .....	21
<i>Coral's Last Stand</i> .....	22
Movember .....	22
Energy policy .....	23
Drought.....	23
Youth justice system .....	23

# CONTENTS

---

Health system.....	24
Williamstown truck ban.....	24
Community safety .....	24
Economic policy .....	25
Asia Society Australia.....	25
Rural Press Club of Victoria awards .....	25
<b>BUSINESS OF THE HOUSE</b>	
Notices of motion .....	26
<b>BILLS</b>	
Parks and Public Land Legislation Amendment (Central West and Other Matters) Bill 2025 .....	26
Second reading.....	26
Instruction to committee .....	43
Committee.....	44
Third reading.....	73
Voluntary Assisted Dying Amendment Bill 2025 .....	73
Council's amendments.....	73
State Taxation Further Amendment Bill 2025 .....	74
Second reading.....	74
<b>Committee</b> .....	96
Third reading.....	101
<b>ADJOURNMENT</b>	
Family violence .....	102
Somerton Road, Greenvale, duplication .....	102
Animal welfare .....	102
Mount Waverley ambulance services.....	103
Youth crime.....	103
Sunshine train station .....	104
Metro Tunnel .....	104
Royal Melbourne Philharmonic.....	105
Energy policy .....	105
Expedition Pass Reservoir.....	106
Melton rail line electrification .....	106
Community safety .....	107
Community sport.....	108
Victims of crime .....	108
Responses .....	109

**Tuesday 18 November 2025**

**The PRESIDENT (Shaun Leane)** took the chair at 12:02 pm, read the prayer and made an acknowledgement of country.

*Announcements***Photography in chamber**

**The PRESIDENT (12:04):** I inform members that there are professional photographers in the gallery today to capture action shots. This is for the Parliament website and other activities. I appreciate people not being too concerned about the photographers being in different parts of the building.

*Members***Liberal Party leadership**

**Bev McARTHUR (Western Victoria) (12:04):** I advise the house that, effective from today, I am now the Leader of the Opposition in the Legislative Council.

*Questions without notice and ministers statements***Economic policy**

**Bev McARTHUR (Western Victoria) (12:05):** (1133) My question is to the Treasurer. Treasurer, your government has spent \$81 million on consultants to help repackage and sell your debt to overseas investors. How much more will you need to spend on consultants and spin before the Labor government debt comes down?

**Jaclyn SYMES (Northern Victoria – Treasurer, Minister for Industrial Relations, Minister for Regional Development) (12:05):** I thank Mrs McArthur for her question. Unfortunately, there is no basis for the claim that she has made, so I do not accept the premise of her question. But when we do talk about consultants and professional services, you know that I am on the record constantly as saying that these should be limited to supplementary advice, specialist skills and the like, and we have been tracking down in many areas in relation to that. But you have talked about debt and you have talked about the state's finances, and that is why we are a government that have a plan, and we have been sticking to that plan. Our fiscal strategy is working. We are delivering the services and infrastructure that Victorians rely on whilst ensuring that our debt as a share of the state's economy is shrinking.

I have an opportunity, Mrs McArthur, to take you again through that fiscal strategy. Step 1, creating jobs – this is coming out of the pandemic, and we achieved that. Step 2, returning to an operating cash surplus – we are on track to deliver the third one in a row. We are achieving step 3 this year of returning to a surplus. We will be the only state on the eastern seaboard with a surplus, and that includes the Commonwealth government. We remain on track to meet steps 4 and 5, which are net debt as a share of the economy stabilising and falling in the years after. These results show that we are getting on with the job of growing the economy and delivering on our fiscal strategy.

Instead of those that continually talk down the state of Victoria, we will continue to support businesses. It is why we have the strongest business growth in all of the states. It is why people want to employ people in this state. It is why people want to set up businesses in this state. There is always more to do, Mrs McArthur. That is why there are five steps, and we are on track to deliver that.

**Bev McARTHUR (Western Victoria) (12:07):** Treasurer, you could not answer the question. You are still spending \$81 million, and what we need to know is how much more you are going to spend, because the debt is growing, so the consultant expenditure is obviously growing. But do you plan to return to New York to find new buyers for the Labor government debt to avoid another credit rating downgrade?

**Jaclyn SYMES** (Northern Victoria – Treasurer, Minister for Industrial Relations, Minister for Regional Development) (12:08): Mrs McArthur, for I think every Treasurer that has preceded me, speaking to credit agencies annually is part of the job. I was in New York in June this year, and I expect I will probably return next year, but those conversations and the result of those conversations are evident in what the credit rating agencies have had to say. In their September statement, they reaffirmed Victoria's credit rating. Moody's noted:

[QUOTE AWAITING VERIFICATION]

... the state's clear and demonstrated commitment to fiscal consolidation and prudent financial management in recent years, as well as the resilience of its large, diverse and wealthy economy, underpins the state's capacity to service its debt.

These are not my words, Mrs McArthur. You asked about the credit rating, so I thought you would be quite interested in what they have got to say. S&P's response to the budget that I delivered:

We view Victoria's commitment to controlling operating costs, delivering promised savings, and slowing growth in debt as important for maintaining ...

our credit rating.

### Youth justice system

**Sarah MANSFIELD** (Western Victoria) (12:09): (1134) My question is for the Minister for Corrections and youth justice. Last week you denied in the house that the government had abandoned its youth justice strategy for 2020 to 2030. That plan states as an action item that the government would – and I quote from page 19:

Reduce remand numbers by analysing the factors contributing to current rates of remand.

But contrary to this, the Premier has also repeatedly stated in the last couple of months that the government's justice strategy is working because it has drastically increased the total number of both adults and young people on remand. As I am surely not the only one who is confused by the contradiction here, can you please clarify if state Labor's youth justice strategy aims to reduce the total number of children and young people on remand, as in the plan you released a few years ago, or increase the total number of children on remand, as per the Premier's recent comments?

**Enver ERDOGAN** (Northern Metropolitan – Minister for Casino, Gaming and Liquor Regulation, Minister for Corrections, Minister for Youth Justice) (12:10): I thank Dr Mansfield for her question and her interest in these matters. I think these are really important questions. I think the Premier's announcement last week, and what she reiterated today, was about how as a government we are focused on ensuring that there are serious consequences for people that cause high levels of harm, but there are early interventions. As the Minister for Youth Justice and Minister for Corrections, I am proud to say we do have the lowest incarceration rate in the nation in Victoria, and that is because we have been relatively successful in diverting young people away from the criminal justice system in the first place. That is what I want for young people. But unfortunately, although the number of unique offenders is quite stable, we have seen a high level of repeat offenders. Our policies and the announcement made by the Attorney-General last week were about targeting those offenders – the home invasions, the aggravated burglaries, the carjackings – that are causing significant levels of harm to victims and causing a lot of fear in our community. Everyone deserves to feel safe and be safe in their home, and I think that is what our policies are: they are targeted.

I will continue to do work to ensure that we can divert young people away from the justice system, and that is why the announcement this morning was so important. The announcement we made today was about partnering and about having a violence reduction unit that will report directly to the Premier. It was about lived-experience mentoring, partnering with people that have credibility, that have worked with young people that are from these communities, that have interacted with the youth justice

system but have turned their lives around. So as a government I think Victorians expect us to do both: tough consequences but also serious investments in early intervention and diversion.

*Members interjecting.*

**Sarah Mansfield:** On a point of order, President, I do not think the minister has answered my question. He did not mention the word ‘remand’ once. My question was specifically about remand.

**The PRESIDENT:** I believe the minister was being relevant. In saying that, we have this Mr McGowan–Mr McIntosh show – the constant interjections from Mr McGowan, not so much constant from Mr McIntosh – but then Mr Galea is kind of playing third fiddle. Maybe if those three members can cooperate, Dr Mansfield will hear the answer and I will, and then we will be able to judge from there.

**Enver ERDOGAN:** As I was saying, as a government we are committed to doing both. We are making sure that people that do cause high levels of harm are held to account, and some in a custodial facility, but on the other hand we are committed to making sure that there are early interventions and diversions for young people so they stay away from the justice system. In Victoria we have the lowest incarceration rate in the nation, and that is because of the success in moving young people away from contact with the criminal justice system. There is obviously more work that needs to be done, and today’s announcement was about our violence reduction unit – a world-leading example that is going to be implemented first in Victoria. That is about partnering with people with lived experience that have done the work from these communities that have turned their lives around, because we know that violence is preventable. We need to do that work, and we are committed to doing that work with all our partners.

**Sarah MANSFIELD** (Western Victoria) (12:13): I appreciate the announcement today – very good. It was something lots of people have been calling for for a long time – a little bit too late, but we welcome that. This question is really about the number of young people on remand. The Premier has been clear and unequivocal that higher total numbers of children and young people on remand are a clear indication that the changes to the government’s youth justice strategy are working. So can you confirm that a KPI of your new youth justice strategy is to increase the total number of children on remand, and if so, what is the quantifiable target or forecast for the average number of children that will be held on remand for the 2025–26 calendar year?

**Enver ERDOGAN** (Northern Metropolitan – Minister for Casino, Gaming and Liquor Regulation, Minister for Corrections, Minister for Youth Justice) (12:14): I thank Dr Mansfield for her supplementary question. Dr Mansfield, I think our KPI is keeping the community safe. All our law reforms that we have brought to this chamber during this term of government have been focused on ensuring the Victorian community is as safe as possible. Whether that be in the youth justice setting, whether that be in a workplace setting, that is our focus. In terms of decisions made about who enters into custodial facilities, those decisions are made by independent courts, and I respect those. But we have of course rebalanced some of those settings to reflect community concern targeted at those high-level harm-causing offences.

### **Ministers statements: water policy**

**Gayle TIERNEY** (Western Victoria – Minister for Skills and TAFE, Minister for Water) (12:15): In a changing climate water security is an increasingly important issue for our state. Our regions know this all too well, with drought impacting farmers and household water supply. In a landmark move to address northern Victoria’s future water challenges, I can report today that seven of our regional water corporations have united to officially launch the Northern Urban Water Accord. The accord spans almost two-thirds of Victoria, including Central Highlands, Coliban, Goulburn Valley, Goulburn–Murray, Grampians Wimmera Mallee, Lower Murray and North East Water. Collaborating across boundaries supports water corporations to work together on region-wide water security solutions that best serve their communities. This is about planning the next generation of projects that will shape

water security across northern Victoria. This complements our water security plan by ensuring our regional and metro water corps are all focused on water security planning. We are also investing in water security through the latest round of integrated water management grants. Integrated water management projects support more recycled water and stormwater use, preserving our precious drinking water. And with a dedicated regional stream, we are ensuring drought-impacted regions have access to upgrades that preserve precious water supplies. Previously funded projects include a system to collect rainwater from rooftops in Warrnambool's Albert Park sporting precinct to add to the city's drinking water supplies. Our focus is ensuring Victorians have access to safe, reliable and high-quality water supply, because water is one of our most precious resources.

### Youth crime

**Evan MULHOLLAND** (Northern Metropolitan) (12:17): (1135) My question is to the Minister for Corrections and youth justice. Last week, Minister, the Premier stood in front of a four-word slogan to admit what she had previously refused to: that crime was out of control under her and Labor. The government has cut funding to crime prevention programs – for example, to 34 groups affiliated with the African community – when the community is demanding urgent support to tackle this youth justice crisis. Melbourne-based youth support service Youth Support and Advocacy Service says the government has cut a third of its funding for its crime prevention program, denying 330 at-risk people and their families help each year. The government seriously now claims that it supports early intervention programs, after cutting them. Given youth criminals are causing chaos on our streets and yet less youth detention beds are available, how can Victorians take you seriously?

**Enver ERDOGAN** (Northern Metropolitan – Minister for Casino, Gaming and Liquor Regulation, Minister for Corrections, Minister for Youth Justice) (12:18): I thank the deputy leader in this chamber on the other side Mr Mulholland for his question and his interest about the government's community safety announcements. What I will say is that many of the issues that Mr Mulholland pointed to do fall into the Minister for Police and community safety portfolios, but what I will say insofar as they relate to my systems is I have been focused on building and planning up our systems so that they can cope with the increase in demand, while those opposite are committed to tearing down their leaders time after time. My focus is on building and planning the systems, while you are committed to tearing down your leaders. What I will say is that today's announcement is focused on ensuring that early interventions are in place, that we are taking innovative approaches. The violence reduction unit, which will report to the Premier, will have sole focus on ensuring that we coordinate government services – because we do a lot of work across a lot of services – and make sure they are better coordinated and make sure that the help goes to where it is needed. I was proud to join the Premier, and I will continue to do that work.

**Evan MULHOLLAND** (Northern Metropolitan) (12:20): The *Australian Financial Review* revealed that some cabinet members threatened to resign rather than support these measures, which include measures in your corrections and youth justice portfolios. If the members of the government do not really believe the Premier's slogans, how can the Victorian people trust you to fix the crime crisis?

**Enver ERDOGAN** (Northern Metropolitan – Minister for Casino, Gaming and Liquor Regulation, Minister for Corrections, Minister for Youth Justice) (12:20): I thank Mr Mulholland for his supplementary question. I know those opposite are focused on some scuttlebutt rumours in the media; I did see those reports. What I will say is that the government is committed to keeping Victorians safe. Every cabinet minister is united in keeping the community safe, and that is why we announced that package. That package is focused on serious consequences for those that cause serious harm but also early intervention and prevention, because we want to divert young people away from the criminal justice system in the first place. We are united in keeping Victorians safe. I was proud to stand with the Premier last week, and I am proud to stand with the Premier today.



### Somebody's Daughter Theatre

**Rachel PAYNE** (South-Eastern Metropolitan) (12:21): (1136) My question is also for the Minister for Corrections. We both had the pleasure of attending *She'll Be Apples*, a performance by women in Dame Phyllis Frost Centre run by Somebody's Daughter Theatre Company. The performance was a powerful exploration of trauma, abuse and isolation. It examined how the choices we make and the choices made for us shape our lives for better or worse. Somebody's Daughter have been working with women in Victorian prisons since 1980 using the arts as a driver to break cycles of abuse, addiction and disengagement, but after years of patchwork grants they are in desperate need of funding. My question is: will the minister work with me to advocate for adequate and ongoing funding for Somebody's Daughter in next year's state budget?

**Enver ERDOGAN** (Northern Metropolitan – Minister for Casino, Gaming and Liquor Regulation, Minister for Corrections, Minister for Youth Justice) (12:21): I thank Ms Payne for that question, which is really a great example of what rehabilitative programs look like within the four walls. Part of our justice system is that when people enter into custody we have an obligation to ensure they have the best opportunity to turn their lives around, and Somebody's Daughter Theatre Company do amazing work in that space. I know of Ms Payne's longstanding passion for that program. What I can say is we are scaling up our justice system. That means, thanks to the Treasurer, we have significant investments. Parts of those investments are not just in frontline staffing but are also about programs and ensuring they scale up, so I will take that on notice. We are going through the budget process, without disclosing those processes, but I will be advocating for more funds for programs within our corrections system. That is a really good program that has been really successful, so I look on that positively.

**Rachel PAYNE** (South-Eastern Metropolitan) (12:22): I thank the minister for his response and also for taking me up on the offer of going along to see the show. I am really glad you saw it. By way of supplementary, Somebody's Daughter in partnership with Newcomb Secondary College deliver an arts-led education program called Nobody's Fool Theatre, a program for school non-attendees. It is a creatively led education program for marginalised and disengaged young people who fall through the cracks of mainstream education. We know it is important to engage young people who are disengaged, offering a circuit breaker to see them engage in community and education. Will the minister commit to advocating for funding for programs like this, which support young people?

**Enver ERDOGAN** (Northern Metropolitan – Minister for Casino, Gaming and Liquor Regulation, Minister for Corrections, Minister for Youth Justice) (12:23): I thank Ms Payne for her supplementary question – another great example of the rehabilitative change that arts programs can make. Especially in the First Nations space we have had the Torch, which has been successful over a number of years and strongly supported by you and many members in this chamber. I think a program like that sounds exciting, and I will run it by our youth justice team. We are reopening, obviously, our Malmsbury site, which will have a different model of care focused on a lower risk cohort, a more rehabilitative cohort, that is showing really positive signs of reintegration. Let us continue the conversation. I will make sure my office reaches out.

### Ministers statements: pill testing

**Ingrid STITT** (Western Metropolitan – Minister for Mental Health, Minister for Ageing, Minister for Multicultural Affairs) (12:23): I am pleased to update the house on the Allan Labor government's pill-testing trial. The first reports are in from our fixed site in Fitzroy, and the results are clear. The fixed site is saving lives and providing critical drug-monitoring data. In the first six weeks of operation more than 500 samples were tested, with the service conducting harm reduction conversations with nearly 300 people. For one in four service users this was the first conversation they had had about substance use with a health professional. Importantly, while most samples contained the expected drug, one in eight contained an unexpected psychoactive. Two drug notifications were issued for counterfeit oxycodone pills containing nitazenes, a synthetic drug up to 500 times stronger than heroin.

In an increasingly volatile and unpredictable drug market this information has never been more important.

Last week I was pleased to announce the first three events of the summer festival period that will host the mobile pill-testing service. The Victorian pill-testing service will be available at Spilt Milk, Dangerous Goods 6XXL and the Pitch Music & Arts festival from 6 to 10 March, with further events to be announced soon. To ensure that more Victorians can access confidential health information we are expanding the hours at our fixed site in Fitzroy for the holiday period. From 1 December the fixed site will operate with extended hours on Thursday and Friday, and it will be open additional days ahead of Christmas and New Year's Eve.

No drug is ever truly safe, but Victorians deserve to have all the information possible to help them make better, safer and more informed decisions, and that is what we will be providing this summer at our pill-testing fixed site and at events across the state.

### **Medically supervised injecting facilities**

**Georgie CROZIER** (Southern Metropolitan) (12:26): (1137) My question is for the Minister for Mental Health. The mayor of the City of Yarra has called the medically supervised injecting room in Richmond (MSIR) 'the greatest public policy disaster in recent Victorian history'. Hundreds of residents rallied again over the weekend against its location. Minister, why won't you acknowledge, as the mayor has, that an injecting room next to a primary school is inappropriate?

**Ingrid STITT** (Western Metropolitan – Minister for Mental Health, Minister for Ageing, Minister for Multicultural Affairs) (12:26): I thank Ms Crozier for her question again on the MSIR in North Richmond, and I will say up-front that I respectfully disagree with the mayor. This is a really important service. This is a service that has saved countless lives – 63 lives in fact – and safely managed more than 11,000 overdoses. Nobody wants to see anyone struggle with addiction, but we need to take a health-led response, and that is exactly what our government has done with the safe injecting service in North Richmond. We will continue to support that service.

I would really urge anyone who has doubts about this and the power of this service to actually go and visit them. They have an open-door policy – they will take you through and show you exactly what they do in their service, because it is not just about saving lives, it is about also connecting people in with the critical services that they need to turn their lives around. Let us not forget: North Richmond has been a drug hotspot for decades, and this service was in direct response from calls in the community to make sure that we tackled things in a different way and that we provide health care to people who are struggling with addiction. Whilst I am always up for having conversations with the community and with our local government colleagues, I do respectfully disagree with the position that has been taken by the Yarra council, and I can be absolutely unequivocal: this site is an important part of our AOD system here in Victoria, and our government will continue to support it.

**Georgie CROZIER** (Southern Metropolitan) (12:28): Thank you for that response. I note that no government MPs turned up to the rally on Sunday to listen to the residents. Residents, business owners and operators and the council have been warning the government that the injecting room is in the wrong location. Victoria Street businesses in particular have suffered a huge decline in patronage. What advice have you received as to the impacts to businesses that are already doing it tough due to high energy costs and the plethora of taxes that have been imposed on them by your government?

**Ingrid STITT** (Western Metropolitan – Minister for Mental Health, Minister for Ageing, Minister for Multicultural Affairs) (12:28): I thank Ms Crozier for her supplementary question, but you are conflating a number of issues here, Ms Crozier. There are separate conversations and good work being done between our government and the traders in Victoria Street. This is a really, really important part of our city. The small businesses in that part of Richmond have been working closely with a number of our colleagues, with the small business minister and DJSIR ministers, around revitalising that strip. You are making the assertion that the issues that are being confronted by businesses in Victoria Street

are directly related to the MSIR, and I simply do not accept that fact, because the data and the statistics do not support that fact.

### **Economic policy**

**Richard WELCH** (North-Eastern Metropolitan) (12:29): (1138) My question is to the Treasurer. Treasurer, last week the Business Council of Australia ranked Victoria as the worst state to do business in – again. When will you admit your policies are making it harder for businesses to create jobs for Victorians?

**Jaclyn SYMES** (Northern Victoria – Treasurer, Minister for Industrial Relations, Minister for Regional Development) (12:30): Whilst I welcome a question from Mr Welch, I am a bit confused because it was the exact same question that I received last week from Mr Davis, and I was able to take you through the stats. I am more than happy to do that again. So, Mr Welch, in Victoria we have the highest business creation in the country, one of the best participation rates, historically high business investment numbers and a regional unemployment rate lower than any other state in the country. The regional unemployment rate is the lowest anywhere in the country. We are backing businesses with record productivity-enhancing investment – things like roads, schools, hospitals and public transport infrastructure, which is about productive infrastructure. This makes life easier for businesses in Victoria. We are going to open the West Gate Tunnel. If you understood the participation rate versus the unemployment rate, then you would not be gloating so much about your so-called rate of unemployment. If we had the same participation rate as New South Wales, our unemployment rate would be 1 per cent, Mr Welch.

*Members interjecting.*

**The PRESIDENT:** I think Mr Ettershank was going to call a point of order that he could not hear the answer.

**David Ettershank:** Thank you, President.

**The PRESIDENT:** Because I can read minds now. Could people let the Treasurer respond without assistance, and Mr Welch can ask his supplementary without assistance as well.

**Richard Welch:** Thank you, Minister, for your answer, although I know we do have the highest unemployment in the nation and the highest underemployment.

**The PRESIDENT:** Mr Welch, sorry, I jumped the gun. See, I cannot read minds. The Treasurer has not finished. She has still got a minute.

**Jaclyn SYMES:** Thank you. I did start to interact with Mr Welch, and not through the Chair, President, so I will bring my answer back to you in terms of some general information that I will repeat, because I said it last week. It is obviously not sinking in. I do not make the facts up. We have added more than 123,000 businesses since June 2020. It is an increase of almost 20 per cent and, again, higher than any other state. While business investment growth has moderated recently, it is coming off an extremely high base, which brought business investment to its highest share of the economy on record – the highest rate on record. Quarterly business investment figures are good. Investment grew by 1.7 per cent, significantly faster than the national average of 0.7 per cent. Again, I am repeating these facts. I can keep repeating them because they are not my stats, they are the real facts. While consumer sentiment has continued to go up, the index has increased 4.4 per cent to 103.8. All of the stats might sound boring, but they are positive, Mr Welch, and they are the facts. I will continue to point them out to you.

**Richard WELCH** (North-Eastern Metropolitan) (12:33): Victoria is ranked last in the nation for property taxes and for licensing and requirements for doing business. When will the government take a leaf out of their successful Labor counterparts in South Australia and New South Wales and drop their anti-business policies, which are hurting our state?

**Jaclyn SYMES** (Northern Victoria – Treasurer, Minister for Industrial Relations, Minister for Regional Development) (12:33): Mr Welch, as I have indicated, business confidence in Victoria is high. We have the strongest business growth in the nation, but as you point out, there is always more to do. There is. That is why we have an *Economic Growth Statement*. It is about to come up to its 12-month anniversary. It is about reducing regulatory red tape on businesses, ensuring that we are having the conversations with businesses and investing in those businesses that want to employ more people and grow. There are always conversations, and the door is open for those that want to participate and make Victoria even better, as opposed to those who continue to talk the economy and the state down.

#### **Ministers statements: gambling harm**

**Enver ERDOGAN** (Northern Metropolitan – Minister for Casino, Gaming and Liquor Regulation, Minister for Corrections, Minister for Youth Justice) (12:34): Gambling harm builds slowly through early exposure, normalised habits and a lack of safeguards around those most at risk. Our task as a government is to lay the foundations for earlier interventions, faster responses and smarter regulation. The Allan Labor government's work in reducing gambling harm is doing exactly that. When I visited the new offices of the Victorian Gambling and Casino Control Commission on Exhibition Street, the message from staff was clear: modern regulation is about education and prevention, not just enforcement. Their work through inspections, investigations, monitoring and risk-based compliance helps catch problems before harm takes hold. A strong regulator means early intervention and a safer gambling environment for everyone. These are the ideas that sit at the heart of journeys towards harm. New research funded by the Allan Labor government into how young people experience gambling shows that harm often begins long before someone ever places a bet, shaped by social cues, family attitudes and online behaviour. It shows that the earlier we understand those pathways, the earlier we can address that harm. That is all part of the holistic approach to preventing gambling harm: having the evidence that tells us where to move first, which is where the research will help; building a robust regulator that ensures gambling is conducted responsibly, fairly and free from criminal influence; and building the policy framework that helps people take control through our landmark reforms like reduced load-up limits and account-based play. This combination is exactly why Victoria leads the nation with harm minimisation, and it is how we work to prevent harm before it takes hold.

#### **Public sector review**

**Renee HEATH** (Eastern Victoria) (12:36): (1139) My question is to the Treasurer. Treasurer, you commissioned the Silver review in February claiming it would zero in on waste and inefficiency to find savings for Victorian families struggling with cost-of-living pressures. Yet we now know that your government spent over \$2 million on external consultants to write the review, including a massive \$1.3 million deal for Gilbert + Tobin, a law firm that coincidentally had just donated to the Labor Party months before winning this lucrative contract. The Silver review was delivered to you at the end of June, nearly five months ago, so for nearly five months it has been sitting on your desk while workers wait for the axe to drop. My question is: just when are you going to release it, and when are we going to see this report that we have paid for?

**The PRESIDENT:** I think it is the same question, but the Treasurer would be happy to give the same answer, I suppose.

**Jaclyn SYMES** (Northern Victoria – Treasurer, Minister for Industrial Relations, Minister for Regional Development) (12:37): Dr Heath, the best way to probably answer this is to refer to the answer in *Hansard* that I gave to the former Leader of the Opposition in the upper house. I have been asked this question several times in different formats, and the way you have asked it has not presented anything new except to continue to discredit a very respected and qualified independent person who has conducted a review. Please refer to *Hansard*.

**Renee HEATH** (Eastern Victoria) (12:37): I thank the Treasurer for her response. Treasurer, credit rating agencies in New York knew about this review's contents before Victorian workers facing

redundancy and many of your own ministers. You have commenced restructures in multiple departments based on its recommendations, but the Victorian people who funded this \$2.3 million exercise have been kept in the dark. Treasurer, can you confirm to this house whether you personally or anyone in your office had any discussions with Gilbert + Tobin around their role, the cost or their donation prior to the contract being awarded?

**The PRESIDENT:** I think that is very similar to a question before too. There is a six-month same question rule in the standing orders. I find the Treasurer very helpful in the chamber and usually very happy to help. She can give the same answer if she wants.

**Jaclyn SYMES** (Northern Victoria – Treasurer, Minister for Industrial Relations, Minister for Regional Development) (12:39): First of all, I reject the premise of the question – to suggest that you know what I said in a meeting. I would like to see where you have drawn that information from. Continuing to talk about an independent review and the way they commissioned the work that they did in the way that you have is just a little bit nastier, but it is the exact same question that I have been asked already. I am a bit confused; we have a new leader, but it does not erase everything that happened before. *Hansard* has evidence of that same question twice. Dr Heath, I assume that you did not write that, so I do not mean to take a swipe at you. But it is in breach of the standing orders, and I think it is just best if I refer people to *Hansard*. If you need to check, have a look at the questions that Mr Davis has asked me, because they are just rehashed today.

#### Government consultation

**Anasina GRAY-BARBERIO** (Northern Metropolitan) (12:40): (1140) My question is to the Minister for Children. Minister, have you or your department required stakeholders, including committees and advisory councils, to sign non-disclosure agreements as part of the consultation processes for legislation in the past year?

**Lizzie BLANDTHORN** (Western Metropolitan – Minister for Children, Minister for Disability) (12:40): I thank Ms Gray-Barberio for her question in relation to consultation on legislation. Indeed, as I have outlined for the house in relation to the bills that are before the house at the current point in time, consultation is something that we do broadly with various organisations and across the board. There are numerous consultation forums set up for different pieces of legislation. In order to answer Ms Gray-Barberio's question, I would need either some more information or some specifics about which legislation she might be referring to.

**Anasina GRAY-BARBERIO** (Northern Metropolitan) (12:41): Is it practice for you and your department when it comes to committees and advisory councils to sign non-disclosure agreements as part of the consultation processes? If it is common practice, Minister, how do you ensure impartiality among stakeholders if they are encouraged to sign NDAs?

**The PRESIDENT:** I think the end bit was a supplementary question.

**Lizzie BLANDTHORN** (Western Metropolitan – Minister for Children, Minister for Disability) (12:41): I am not sure which of those questions was part of the substantive or indeed a supplementary, but I will seek some advice from my department. It is not something that I have personally required, and I will consult with the department in relation to their consultations.

#### Ministers statements: kindergarten audit and assurance program

**Lizzie BLANDTHORN** (Western Metropolitan – Minister for Children, Minister for Disability) (12:42): Earlier this month I was pleased to announce the commencement of the new kindergarten audit and assurance program. This is a dedicated auditing program designed to provide for increased confidence in the important funding of our kindergarten programs. It builds upon our extensive package of reforms both in relation to child safety and quality, which are implemented in line with the recommendations from the child safety rapid review. In addition to those reforms, this program

assesses how providers use kindergarten funding and will also check compliance in areas such as staffing, management and program delivery.

This is a dedicated auditing program with its aim to detect and prevent any misuse of public funds. It is also to ensure that all funds have been directed to ensure quality and safe provision of early childhood education to Victorian children. Under this program, providers found to be deliberately doing the wrong thing face decisive action, which could include termination of funding. Services making genuine efforts with only minor or accidental errors will receive targeted support to maintain compliance. Audits under this program are commencing, and in the first year around 100 providers will be audited, covering more than 400 early childhood services. This represents around \$100 million of Victorian kindergarten funding annually. Every year at least 10 per cent of services are to be audited.

The kindergarten audit and assurance program will cover all types and all sizes of providers, as well as both for-profit and not-for-profit services. This program sends a clear message: kindergarten funding is for children's learning, not for profit. By holding providers to account, we are giving parents and carers confidence that every kindergarten dollar is supporting their children's education and not being wasted.

**Ryan Batchelor:** On a point of order, President, in relation to at least one and possibly two questions that were asked during question time being identical to questions that were asked last week, Dr Heath, word for word, asked a question that Mr Davis, when he was Leader of the Opposition, asked last week about the Silver review. I just seek some clarification so that we do not have repeats of repeating questions if the same question rule still applies to this place and whether the new leadership can ask old questions.

**The PRESIDENT:** The answer to your final question is no, but I think that what I might do, Mr Batchelor, is have a look back at last week's *Hansard* and the one before. There definitely is a same question within six months rule, and it remains in the standing orders. But for my edification I might have a look back.

### *Constituency questions*

#### **Northern Victoria Region**

**Gaelle BROAD** (Northern Victoria) (12:45): (1984) My question is the Minister for Emergency Services. I ask the government to listen to the concerns raised by CFA volunteers in my electorate and address these issues. Conditions are similar to Black Saturday, yet our CFA approaches this fire season with reduced funding, the oldest fleet and fewer active volunteers. The CFA maintains close to 2000 tankers and many are well past their use-by date, with inadequate protection for volunteers, with a cab that fits only two people and leaves the rest of the crew vulnerable. With the rapid rollout of solar farms and lithium-ion batteries, there remain no Australian standards to fight such fires. The training they receive is to use water and let it burn, releasing toxic chemicals and putting volunteers and communities at risk. Victoria also lags behind other states with presumptive rights legislation with limited protections, which need to be expanded. Last week this chamber saw a petition signed by over 43,000 people against the Emergency Services and Volunteers Fund that notes how unfair this new tax is and requests the government to cease its introduction and consult on a fairer funding model. Minister, will the government address these issues and listen to the concerns raised by our valuable CFA volunteers?

#### **Northern Metropolitan Region**

**Anasina GRAY-BARBERIO** (Northern Metropolitan) (12:46): (1985) My constituency question is for the Minister for Roads and Road Safety. Minister, I am sponsoring a petition by local road safety group Safe Moreland Rd Now! that has gathered signatures from nearly 800 Victorians and counting. The petition calls on the government to take real action to improve safety on Moreland Road by implementing reduced speed limits, building protected bike lanes, installing more signalised pedestrian crossings and building a safe and well-lit connection across Merri Creek, where Moreland

Road meets Normanby Avenue. This follows a spate of horrific accidents on Moreland Road, with three vulnerable road users – a motorcyclist, a skateboard rider and a cyclist walking his bike – killed by car drivers between May and September. It is clear that my constituents in Northern Metro expect this government to act to keep vulnerable road users safe on Moreland Road. Minister, how will you respond to this petition?

#### **Northern Metropolitan Region**

**Evan MULHOLLAND** (Northern Metropolitan) (12:47): (1986) My question is to the Minister for Transport Infrastructure, and it concerns the Wallan diamond Watson Street interchange in my electorate, and I am pleased to see it is progressing, finally, with contracts awarded for construction. This is after the federal government of course put it in their infrastructure review, which delayed the project by about a year and a half. But the question I want to ask the minister is: why have you cut the duplication of Watson Street from the Watson Street interchange in Wallan? Originally included in that was a duplication of Watson Street. Now the interchange will not include a duplication of Watson Street. My community are up in arms about this and the council are up in arms about this, so I think it is fair to ask the minister why she has cut the duplication of Watson Street from the scope of the project.

#### **North-Eastern Metropolitan Region**

**Aiv PUGLIELLI** (North-Eastern Metropolitan) (12:48): (1987) My question today is to the Minister for Transport Infrastructure. It is my understanding that following the awful chemical spill in the Banyule Creek, which spewed 5000 litres of bright blue acrylic chemical solution into our waterways at a North East Link worksite, four contractor companies have each been fined \$10,000. Considering the damage, the negligence, the failures to prevent such an occurrence and the risk that these spills and releases of chemicals pose to nearby residents and the environment, this penalty seems manifestly inadequate. Minister, what further actions have you taken to ensure that this type of environmental damage does not occur again on a North East Link site?

#### **Western Victoria Region**

**Joe McCRACKEN** (Western Victoria) (12:49): (1988) My constituency question is for the Minister for Public and Active Transport, and it relates to the Beaufort railway station. Some time ago the car park was upgraded there and CCTV cameras were placed at the precinct, but the problem is that the cameras are only facing the car park. The car park is not heavily used, whereas the station precinct itself houses a number of other community organisations, and there is no coverage of those particular groups and the facilities that they have access to. The problem is that there have been break-ins recently that have meant that a lot of the different assets that those groups use have been vandalised and so forth. So my question is: what will the minister do to solve that problem? Because it is having a real and meaningful impact on the community to a detrimental effect.

#### **North-Eastern Metropolitan Region**

**Richard WELCH** (North-Eastern Metropolitan) (12:50): (1989) My constituency question is for the Minister for Roads and Road Safety. Now, every morning and every afternoon children from Surrey Hills Primary School are put at risk along Canterbury Road, and quite rightly, the community have been calling for a 40-kilometre zone along that section of Canterbury Road. I acknowledge that both the member for Box Hill and I have advocated for and support this, and the department endorsed a 40-kilometre zone back in February 2025. We are now in November 2025, and the minister has not allocated funding to implement the 40-kilometre zone. So frankly, I am actually concerned the minister and the member for Box Hill are playing politics with the children's lives by deliberately waiting to announce funding for the school zone so that the member for Box Hill can win votes. Can the minister confirm that funding for the 40-kilometre zone is imminently forthcoming and that the minister is not colluding with the member for Box Hill to delay funding of this project to his political advantage?

**The PRESIDENT:** I do not think you can make accusations against a sitting member unless it is via a substantive motion. So maybe we will take out that bit about the allegation.

**Richard WELCH:** Can I confirm with the minister that funding for the 40-kilometre zone is imminently forthcoming?

### South-Eastern Metropolitan Region

**Ann-Marie HERMANS** (South-Eastern Metropolitan) (12:51): (1990) My question is for the Minister for Education. Minister, can you please explain why your government is presiding over falling satisfaction rates in our government schools? I have received several complaints from constituents concerned about the state of our public schools. The department's 2024–25 annual report, released with a multitude of other reports on Labor's 'dump day', reflect their concerns. According to this report, the government failed to meet its own targets for school satisfaction by primary and secondary parents. Shockingly, according to the *Herald Sun*, the Victorian Registration and Qualifications Authority received 349 complaints centring on compliance with minimum standards for student welfare. Minister, teachers are working harder than ever. School satisfaction, meanwhile, and attendance are failing under your watch. Parent satisfaction with government schools is failing under your watch, and it is simply not good enough.

**The PRESIDENT:** Schools in your electorate, was it?

**Ann-Marie HERMANS:** Yes, constituents have contacted me.

**The PRESIDENT:** Very good.

### Southern Metropolitan Region

**Georgie CROZIER** (Southern Metropolitan) (12:52): (1991) My question is for the Minister for Police. My constituent Alex is extremely concerned about dangerous behaviour he has witnessed at St Kilda Pier by jet ski riders that are in very close proximity to swimmers, forcing them to leave the water to avoid being hit. The footage Alex provided to me is frightening, showing reckless conduct risking the safety of others, which I understand occurs regularly in this area. In February this year, a swimmer was injured after a collision with a jet ski. Alex reported a recent incident to the water police, who said they were too stretched and under-resourced to respond to the situation. So I ask the Minister: will you provide additional police patrols at St Kilda Beach and the pier to address this ongoing activity and ensure safety for beachgoers this summer?

### Northern Victoria Region

**Wendy LOVELL** (Northern Victoria) (12:53): (1992) My question is for the Minister for Environment. A constituent of mine is trying to purchase a parcel of land involving a disused road that runs through his property near Chiltern, and I will forward the specific details to the minister's office. My question is: will the minister ensure that the Department of Energy, Environment and Climate Action assesses and decides upon my constituent's request to buy the land? The land is in the Indigo shire, and the council has said it would be supportive of his request to discontinue the road and purchase the land, but council has been informed by DEECA that they are currently not processing any requests for Crown land sales because they are under-resourced. The Allan Labor government is facing a budget black hole and taxing Victorians to death but refuses to accept an offer of money for an unused road. The minister must ensure that DEECA assesses and makes a decision on this offer to purchase this land.

### Western Victoria Region

**Bev McARTHUR** (Western Victoria) (12:54): (1993) My question for the Minister for Environment relates to serious concerns raised with me by a constituent about the deteriorating state of infrastructure under the management of the Great Ocean Road Coast and Parks Authority. He has documented extensive potholes, corrugated access roads, unrepaired beach entry points, poor toilet



facilities at Torquay Surf Beach, Point Impossible, Point Roadknight and Urquhart Bluff. For a region so dependent on tourism, this is deeply damaging. If GORCAPA cannot keep the primary beaches, car parks and surf club access in Torquay in a safe and attractive condition, what is the point of the authority at all? Maintaining safe, functional and welcoming foreshore infrastructure is GORCAPA's core responsibility. Minister, when will GORCAPA deliver the basic maintenance that visitors and locals rightly expect in Victoria's premier coastal tourism destination?

### **Southern Metropolitan Region**

**David DAVIS** (Southern Metropolitan) (12:55): (1994) My constituency question today is for the Minister for Planning, and it concerns the government's plan for high-rise, high-density zones, specifically the housing choice and transport zone that is in Hassett's estate – heritage overlay 191. This is an area near Riversdale Road, and it is an important heritage area that is at risk. I am in possession of significant data from the 1920s and 30s that show the importance of these, including heritage studies going back to 1986 and 1991 by the earlier council for Camberwell. What I am seeking is that the minister intervene and pull back from her decision to put high-rise, high-density zones in these areas of great heritage and importance. It is extraordinary that these would be put at risk. I ask the minister: will she meet with the residents and desist from this process?

### **Eastern Victoria Region**

**Melina BATH** (Eastern Victoria) (12:56): (1995) My question is to the Minister for Environment, and it relates to Gippsland farmers who are facing devastating impacts from wild dog attacks. One East Gippsland farmer reports losing 250 to 300 sheep this year alone, despite having a dog-proof fence and using thermal gear nightly. The local Department of Energy, Environment and Climate Action trapper has trapped and shot 27 dogs on or near this farm, yet cameras show 15 further dogs on the farm and five to seven on another property. These attacks are extended to calves, threatening the viability of farming families. Doggers are overworked and under-resourced, and these attacks are escalating, threatening farming families but also community safety, with wild dog packs attacking family dogs and even tracking joggers near state parks in West Gippsland. Minister, will you urgently allocate additional resources to control wild dog populations in my electorate to protect livestock and secure the future for our farming communities?

### ***Petitions***

#### **Health system**

**Sonja TERPSTRA** (North-Eastern Metropolitan) presented a petition bearing 648 signatures:

The petition of certain citizens of the State of Victoria draws to the attention of the Legislative Council that the State practices a multidisciplinary model of care that supports individual treatment plans for people accessing gender-affirming care which is supported by a strong evidence base.

We support the Australian concept of universal healthcare for all that is based upon individual needs and is inclusive, accessible, and respectful to all Australians. Restricting individual rights to healthcare, or interfering in the relationship between doctor and client, impacts all Australians adversely.

Many communities have experienced stigma, discrimination, vilification and beyond, which has disproportionate impacts on individuals and communities affected. Every Victorian has the right to live safely, wholly, and freely. This includes accessing services that respond to their unique needs, including non-medical pathways of support for trans and gender diverse individuals or medical pathways as appropriate. We welcome the opportunity by the Federal Government to ensure that standards of care are consistent for LGBTIQA+ people across jurisdictions, providing all Australians equal access to the care they deserve.

**The petitioners therefore request that the Legislative Council call on the Government to protect universal healthcare that meets the needs of all Victorians, regardless of gender identity.**

**Bills****Control of Weapons Amendment (Establishing Jack's Law, Use of Electronic Metal Detection Devices) Bill 2025***Introduction and first reading*

**David DAVIS** (Southern Metropolitan) (12:58): On behalf of Mr Mulholland I introduce a bill for an act to amend the Control of Weapons Act 1990 to provide greater powers for police officers to use electronic metal detection devices to search persons for weapons and for other purposes. I move:

That the bill be now read a first time.

**Motion agreed to.**

**Read first time.**

**David DAVIS:** I move:

That the second reading be made an order of the day for the next day of meeting.

**Motion agreed to.**

**Committees****Scrutiny of Acts and Regulations Committee***Alert Digest No. 16*

**Sonja TERPSTRA** (North-Eastern Metropolitan) (12:59): Pursuant to section 35 of the Parliamentary Committees Act 2003, I table *Alert Digest* No. 16 of 2025, including appendices, from the Scrutiny of Acts and Regulations Committee. I move:

That the report be published.

**Motion agreed to.**

**Procedure Committee***Inquiry into Variation of Scope of Orders for the Production of Documents*

**Wendy LOVELL** (Northern Victoria) (12:59): Pursuant to standing order 23.22, I table a report of the inquiry into the variation of scope of orders for the production of documents, including an appendix, from the Procedure Committee. I move:

That the report be published.

**Motion agreed to.**

**David DAVIS** (Southern Metropolitan) (13:00): I move:

That the Council take note of the report.

This is an important report from the Procedure Committee. This was done at the request of the Leader of the Government that we examine matters around the issues of documents and the government's provision or non-provision of documents. The government has argued that some document orders are a little too wide. We are prepared to indicate that the report shows that the Procedure Committee looked at these matters. We took evidence from interstate, specifically the New South Wales Legislative Council, and from all sides of politics and from the officers of the New South Wales Legislative Council. Given that the documents order provisions here were modelled directly on the New South Wales documents order provisions, it was appropriate to pay attention to those.

Importantly, the recommendation is that a mechanism be set up that enables a new point to be put into the documents order process so that where the government believes that the document order may be too broad or there is some other issue the government can convey that to the mover of the motion and

make suggestions as to how that can be improved. The mover of the motion will have the option, as in New South Wales, of accepting or rejecting that in a very short procedure in the house.

I draw these documents into two categories. I am not saying that there has never been an occasion where a member has put too broad an order in; that can certainly occur. In that sense, if it improves the process, we are happy to accept the advice of the New South Wales officials. I do indicate that there are many other documents which the government is slow or reluctant to provide for a range of other reasons that have nothing to do with the shape of the documents order or the size of the documents order but have more to do with the government's sensitivity to such matters.

In good faith, I think all of the members, and I may be speaking too broadly here, of the Procedure Committee were quite prepared to look at this constructively, to accept a set of recommendations from New South Wales and to see those implemented, I think with general support, in the sessional orders at this point. I do put on record that this might be removing one excuse that the government might from time to time wish to raise about documents orders, and the government may then be in a position to move swiftly with a whole range of outstanding documents that are well tabulated in a list of documents that are in a notice of motion that has been put onto the notice paper and well could be updated to bring that to the latest moment.

I want to thank the staff for the work that they have done on this. I think Keir, Richard Willis and others enjoyed engaging with the New South Wales officials. We are always happy to learn from our interstate colleagues, especially when it comes to these matters of the powers of the chamber, which were tested in Australia directly out of a series of documents motions in the New South Wales Legislative Council. The case that went there – the Sydney Water case and so forth – made it very clear that the powers of the chamber are clear, the powers to order documents are clear. The Bret Walker opinion that this chamber has on hand, for those who would wish to read it, and I would commend it to those who have not read it, makes very clear the origin of those powers and the extent of them.

**Sonja TERPSTRA** (North-Eastern Metropolitan) (13:04): I might just make some short remarks also on the report that has just been tabled by Ms Lovell in regard to documents procedures. I do not necessarily agree with some of the remarks that Mr Davis made about the government being slow or sensitive and those sorts of things. There are tests that determine whether documents are produced or not. There are some slight differences with the Victorian regime versus the New South Wales regime, but I guess what came out of all of that was that the new sessional order that can be adopted by the chamber will encourage parties to have a conversation about what it is that they are actually after. That is really the important part of this, rather than perhaps somebody making a very wide order, which puts the government in a position where it cannot comply with it, which has been the case a lot.

There have been a lot of times when there have been thousands of documents, but what it allows for is for the mover of the motion seeking documents to have a conversation with the government and articulate in particular what it is that they are actually seeking and then give the government an opportunity to respond. But as Mr Davis correctly said, the mover of that documents motion does not have to agree. If there is no agreement reached about any narrowing of the scope of an order, then the mover of the original motion is quite within their rights to maintain their original position. I would just like to thank everyone who worked on that committee, and of course thanks to the New South Wales officials who gave us information and reported to us about what they had been through and their experience with these things. I would also just like to thank the committee staff. I think we have landed in a really good position where people can have conversations about what they are actually after, and I would just encourage the chamber to make full use of this new procedure.

**Sarah MANSFIELD** (Western Victoria) (13:06): I too want to thank the staff and fellow committee members for all of the work put into this report and commend the report and the recommendations to the chamber. This is dealing with an issue that I think everyone here is quite familiar with and we have come up against time and time again with arguments about production of

documents. One of the clear bits of feedback we have had from the government in every instance is that it is difficult to comply with some of the documents orders because of the scope or the timing or there is some other issue with the request, and then there is no mechanism to modify that or have a negotiation around that. All this will do, if the chamber is willing to take on the recommendation from this inquiry, is effectively create a formal mechanism whereby a negotiation can happen around that documents order. As has been stated, if that is not accepted, it reverts to the original order, so that will still stand. We know that there are a number of other issues with the documents process in this chamber that mean that we may still not have the same process that is followed in New South Wales, despite having essentially identical standing orders, give or take a word here or there. But I do hope that this leads to some more constructive discussions around it, the production of some more documents and the Parliament being able to exercise its role and its duty in serving the Victorian public when it comes to asking for documents that we believe are really important. For transparency reasons alone I think the government should be more forthcoming with a lot of documents. I hope that these changes lead to that, but time will tell.

**The PRESIDENT:** I echo my thanks to all the committee members, the staff and the witnesses.

**Motion agreed to.**

### **Economy and Infrastructure Committee**

#### *Inquiry into Wildlife Roadstrike in Victoria*

**Georgie PURCELL** (Northern Victoria) (13:08): Pursuant to standing order 23.22, I table the report of the inquiry into wildlife road strike in Victoria, including an appendix, extracts of proceedings and a minority report, by the Economy and Infrastructure Committee, and I present the transcripts of evidence. I move:

That the transcripts of evidence be tabled and the report be published.

**Motion agreed to.**

**Georgie PURCELL:** I move:

That the Council take note of the report.

I am really pleased as chair of the Economy and Infrastructure Committee to be tabling this really important report on wildlife road strike here in Victoria. We know that wildlife road strike is an absolute crisis on our roads across the state. It is not just an animal welfare issue, it is a public safety issue and it requires urgent attention and action from the government in order to address it. The injuring and killing of native animals as a result of collisions with motor vehicles, or wildlife road strike, causes enormous suffering for the animals but also substantially increases the risk of death and injury to motorists across the state.

Anyone who drives on regional roads regularly, like me – I drive on regional roads every single day that are surrounded by native animals – knows the true extent of this problem. It is really easy to get lost in numbers; the reality is that 10 million native animals are killed on Australian roads every single year. But when you narrow it down to those individual animals, we have a whole network of volunteers responding every single day to those individuals, each of which has a different story and has suffered in ways that are really hard for us to often comprehend or understand, often for days or at least hours, sometimes even weeks on end, depending on the part of Victoria these animals are discovered in. We know that this is not just an issue that is a breaking point when it comes to the wildlife rescue community, but the Victorian public wants action on this issue as well. Obviously recently we had the really tragic case in Victoria where two good Samaritans stopped on a road to try and assist a kangaroo and unfortunately both lost their lives in the process. That is why this report makes some really, really important recommendations that will help to ease the burden on the rescue community and the community responding to this but to also implement better public safety measures on our roads across the state. The reality is we are destroying the habitat of animals, we are destroying their homes, and it

is leaving them with nowhere to go. We have native animals going to places that we have never seen them go before, and it is putting their lives and existence at risk.

This report recommends a number of things, including updating safety protocols to wildlife rescuers when responding to road strike and establishing a single statewide number for reporting wildlife road strike collisions. Importantly, and something that I am really proud of, it recommends a small optional vehicle registration contribution so that Victorians can directly give back to wildlife rescuers every time that they pay their vehicle registration to support their work. Our wildlife rescuers are volunteers; they are self-funding this work. They are doing it on top of their day jobs, and it is certainly not cheap. The very least that the government could do is financially support them, given that they are doing a job that is keeping our public areas safe and accessible and taking that off the hands of the government and the department. It also calls on statewide education campaigns so that people know the risks, the signs and what to do in the case of a wildlife road strike and many, many other really important things across the report to actually reduce this problem in the first place, such as drawing on international comparisons to reduce wildlife road strike and to implement safety measures and infrastructure and detection systems to notify not just animals when there is a risk on the road but road users when there is a risk on the roads as well.

I would really like to thank those rescuers who gave up their time to speak to us, because I know if wildlife rescuers do not have much of something it certainly is time, because they are responding to this significant issue. I would really love to thank the committee staff, who have produced such a wonderful report alongside the committee. As always, there was a diversity of views among members, but I think that we had a consensus, an agreement, that this is an issue that needs addressing, and we have come up with a range of findings and recommendations that will now go to the government in order for them to respond to. Just in particular I would like to thank Michael Baker, Jessica Summers, Adeel Siddiqui and Julie Barnes for their ongoing work supporting us as a committee; we all really, really appreciate it. And I am looking forward to seeing the government's response to this report.

**Richard WELCH** (North-Eastern Metropolitan) (13:14): Just to speak further on this report, it was my pleasure to be part of the inquiry, and like the chair, I thank all the parliamentary staff and committee members and staff who helped us run an efficient inquiry. I would also pay tribute to the wildlife rescuers and the whole community who gave their time to give us some great insights into the challenges that they have. We wrote a dissenting report, or a minority report. It was not really dissenting, it was really a case of just providing additional context to some of the recommendations that were made. I agree that we have a significant problem with wildlife road strike in Victoria. If the wider community understood the scale of it, they would be scandalised by it. But what hampers everything in making all good faith attempts to address it is the lack of data. We have excellent anecdotal information about where and when these road strikes occur, but we do not have properly systemised, standardised data gathered on a like-for-like basis. That makes it incredibly difficult to know, when we are putting resources into solutions, where we put them, which ones are effective and which ones are not one.

One of the really disappointing elements of the inquiry was we all had great hopes for virtual fencing and other technologies that might come to our aid. Sadly, none of the existing sets of technologies are up to the job. We will have to wait for further innovation before that becomes a viable alternative. The other challenge is that the volunteer groups themselves need to organise better so that they can be a vehicle for support. At the moment it is a very disparate group. Again, I would like to thank everyone from the committee. I think it was an excellent and valuable exercise, and I also commend the report to the house.

**Gaelle BROAD** (Northern Victoria) (13:16): I am pleased to be able to speak about the wildlife road strike inquiry, and I thank my fellow committee members and the secretariat for their work on this. As Mr Welch mentioned, we did submit a minority report. Road strike is a huge issue in Victoria, particularly in regional Victoria. We know that there have been over 10,000 accidents or collisions, and many, many more are unreported, so we know that the data is missing. A number of

recommendations are things like improving our roads, maintenance on our roads, clearance of roadsides, also driver education and training and how important that is, and the need for a centralised number. If you are in that situation where you hit wildlife, what do you do? At the moment there is a number of different numbers you can call.

Population mitigation is important because we know that there is a huge number of kangaroos in our region, also wombats and deer are also spreading. Speed limits were discussed. But we heard that you can hit a kangaroo at any speed, doing even 30 kilometres an hour. As has been highlighted, the lack of data really inhibited the ability to make recommendations, but it was clear that Victoria is very unique. We have thousands of kilometres of roads, so it is a very big challenge that we face.

I do want to thank all those who made a submission, because your contribution to this was very important. One of the recommendations that we put forward was the need for a code of practice, because there are so many volunteers, including the CFA and the SES and our wildlife rescuers, engaged in this issue, to ensure that there is not overlap. We look forward to the government's response because this is a very important issue, particularly in northern Victoria.

**Katherine COPSEY** (Southern Metropolitan) (13:18): It was also my pleasure to sit as part of this inquiry, and I just want to echo the chair's comments around the urgency of some of the recommendations that have been made in this report. We heard extensively from witnesses, and this was underlined by events during the course of the hearings when we saw tragically two more lives lost, those of young women who had stopped to assist a kangaroo struck on the road. The urgency of that incident was just echoed throughout all of the submissions and contributions we heard directly from submitters at hearings.

This is an issue that is causing loss of life, injury, death and suffering on our roads for animals and also for people. I really want to thank the rescuers in particular who came and gave evidence before the committee. The work that they do is really, really difficult. It is wearing emotionally and physically, and it is not adequately reimbursed at the moment. I really want to throw my support behind the recommendations that suggest that we take better care of our carers and find a better way to facilitate their very important work in the community. They are a community of volunteers that deserve support. I would hazard a guess that many people in the broader general public do not realise that our wildlife carers are not in some way professionally supported by the government. We have emergency first responders for a range of other incidents, but this is a really big issue that only you confront, I suppose, when you as an individual have a collision, but it is happening every day, it is causing distress every day, and I really urge the government to take seriously the urgency of addressing this problem, which came through so clearly throughout the hearings.

**Motion agreed to.**

#### **Public Accounts and Estimates Committee**

##### *Inquiry into Fraud and Corruption Control in Local Government: A Follow up of Two Auditor-General Reports*

**Michael GALEA** (South-Eastern Metropolitan) (13:20): Pursuant to section 35 of the Parliamentary Committees Act 2003, I table a report on fraud and corruption control in local government, a follow-up of two Auditor-General reports, including appendices and extracts of proceedings, from the Public Accounts and Estimates Committee, and I present the transcripts of evidence. I move:

That the transcripts of evidence be tabled and the report be published.

**Motion agreed to.**

**Michael GALEA:** I move:

That the Council take note of the report.

This was a very worthwhile inquiry for PAEC to be involved in. It does cover two separate Auditor-General reports: audit report 40, *Fraud and Corruption Control – Local Government*, published in 2019, and audit report 316, *Fraud Control Over Local Government Grants*, published in 2022. These two separate but obviously similar reports both look at different areas of local government spending and fraud controls as they relate to grant processes and to internal staffing processes as well, everything from salaries to fuel cards. It was a worthwhile review for PAEC to undertake. Of course one of PAEC's many roles is to fulfil that oversight function of the Victorian Auditor-General's Office, but also we have the capacity to do these follow-up reports and inquiries into matters which VAGO has previously done reports into. It was deemed by the committee appropriate to do this self-referral into this matter.

Noting that whilst, as of now, all of the audited councils have acquitted all of those recommendations that were put to them in the 2019 and 2022 reports, we do note that some of them only acquitted some of those final actions as late as earlier this year. It does make it all worthwhile, noting that the audits identified serious weaknesses in oversight, transparency and prevention. The committee found genuine processes in place and genuine progress but also a very significant deviation and different interpretation of those processes and how they actually apply in practice as well as the capability across the sector, noting of course the great variance between the sizes of different local governments as well, ranging from small rural local governments such as in Western Victoria Region through to larger councils in the metropolitan region.

We have recommended some practical measures to strengthen the supports for councils to ensure that they are all meeting a consistent set of statewide minimum quality standards. These measures will give the community and should give the community greater confidence in the capacity for all local councils in Victoria to meet and achieve these very important goals. To quote from the chair:

A recurring theme throughout the Inquiry was the need for stronger coordination, leadership and legislative compliance. Local Government Victoria, integrity agencies and peak bodies all have roles in supporting Councils, but the support must be coherent and accessible to all Councils. Strengthening these agencies is essential if prevention and oversight are to be more than aspirational.

Ultimately, integrity in local government depends as much on culture as on compliance. Systems can be designed, but they must also be lived. Leadership, transparency and accountability are not optional features ...

and should not be seen as optional features in our local government sector, but they must be absolutely central and they must be at the foundation so that elected officials can have confidence in their councils but more importantly so that local communities can have confidence in their council administrations and in their council elected officials as well.

Acknowledging the considerable amount of work that has gone into this inquiry, I would like to particularly thank the secretariat for all their hard work, including our new head of the secretariat Igor Dosen, and acknowledge all the members of the committee, including our chair the member for Laverton in the other place, and our former members of PAEC, who contributed very much to this report, Mr Welch and Mr McGowan. I am sure all new and existing members of PAEC are very much looking forward to being back in this building on Monday next week.

**Aiv PUGLIELLI** (North-Eastern Metropolitan) (13:25): I also rise to contribute, and I concur largely with the sentiments that Mr Galea has expressed. The secretariat and all of the committee staff have worked incredibly hard, as they always do, in preparing this report. It is an important function of the Public Accounts and Estimates Committee to following up Auditor-General reports, in this case two of them into fraud and corruption controls in local government. A key excerpt or moment from the inquiry process was the examination of the effectiveness of municipal monitors in resolving council governance issues. In fact looking at chapter 7, we see finding 56 noting that:

The effectiveness of municipal monitors in resolving Council governance issues is unknown.

It highlighted the need for clearer criteria in the appointment of municipal monitors, noting in finding 58 that:

There has been an increase in appointment of municipal monitors –

across Victoria. So following on from that I am somewhat disappointed to look at extracts of proceedings that I moved as a consequence of the recommendation in chapter 7 that the Victorian government commission an independent evaluation of the impact of municipal monitors on governance and culture in the local government sector, it was the non-government members who supported that motion and it was opposed by government members. But nonetheless there is space to proceed into the future. I again thank the secretariat for their work and commend the report to the house.

**Richard WELCH** (North-Eastern Metropolitan) (13:26): By leave, I would like to echo both Mr Puglielli's and Mr Galea's contributions. This is an important inquiry because it is something of a vexed concern for the community about how our councils run and how they manage their governance. We found there was a very wide disparity between best practice and worst practice across the state. I think unfortunately the largest part of that is cultural, that we have a large cultural variation. But that means that the rules themselves are loose, because if culture can play such a role in performance, then you are very vulnerable to it. I think we did not quite get to the real nub of matters. I think there is further to go on this subject. A lot of the hearings we had were simply councils making their own representations to it. Therefore the evidence base is contestable, challengeable and a little bit subjective. I think there is somewhere further to go on this topic, which is not to downplay the worthwhileness of what did take place. We did identify some structural weaknesses that we can address, but I still feel there are things left to be examined. I would like to explore after this where we can take it from here, because tightening up a few rules is fine – I think that is great – but I think there are some more systemic problems that we did not quite untie the knot on and get to the core of.

**Motion agreed to.**

*Papers*

**Papers**

**Tabled by Clerk:**

Education and Care Services National Law Act 2010 – Education and Care Services National Amendment Regulations 2025, under section 303 of the Act.

Fire Services Implementation Monitor – Report, 2024–25.

Planning and Environment Act 1987 – Notices of approval of the –

Bass Coast Planning Scheme – Amendment C172.

Boroondara Planning Scheme – Amendment C418.

Murrindindi Planning Scheme – Amendment C73.

South Gippsland Planning Scheme – Amendment C131.

South West Healthcare – Report, 2024–25\*, together with an explanation for the delay.

Victorian Fisheries Authority – Report, 2024–25, together with an explanation for the delay.

Yarram and District Health Service – Report, 2024–25\*, together with an explanation for the delay.

*\* together with the Minister's reported date of receipt.*



*Committees***Legal and Social Issues Committee***Inquiry into Workplace Drug Testing in Victoria*

**The Clerk:** I have received the following paper for presentation to the house pursuant to standing orders: government response to the Legal and Social Issues Committee's inquiry into workplace drug testing in Victoria.

*Business of the house***Notices****Notices of motion given.****General business**

**Aiv PUGLIELLI** (North-Eastern Metropolitan) (13:38): I move, by leave:

That the following general business take precedence on Wednesday 19 November 2025:

- (1) order of the day made this day, second reading of the Control of Weapons Amendment (Establishing Jack's Law, Use of Electronic Metal Detection Devices) Bill 2025;
- (2) notice of motion given this day by David Limbrick on judicial appointments;
- (3) notice of motion 1151 standing in David Ettershank's name on cannabis laws;
- (4) notice of motion given this day by David Davis on the Business Council of Australia's rating of Victoria; and
- (5) notice of motion 1139 standing in Melina Bath's name on bushfire preparedness.

**Motion agreed to.***Members statements***Working-class women round tables**

**Sonja TERPSTRA** (North-Eastern Metropolitan) (13:39): I rise to speak about the first working-class women's round table as part of a very important and exciting series of upcoming round tables that I not only have the absolute privilege to be involved in but have the privilege of chairing. The national round table titled 'Led by us: working-class women talk' places women with lived experience at the centre of a national dialogue to examine the impacts of class bias on working-class women, their economic independence and labour mobility. The first round table created a safe space for women to speak, listen and build solutions, covering wages, safety, caring responsibilities, training and cultural respect, with a call to action that includes research and campaigning efforts to ensure the issue of class and how it holds women back is elevated to national significance. It was exciting and energising to see so many women from diverse backgrounds and lived experiences gathering to speak about the hidden and overt impacts of class bias on women, with a need to label it and to work with industry employers to eliminate its impact.

For far too long class has not been spoken about as a factor that impacts women's employment, and it is time to change that. I would like to thank all the women who were involved in this very important round table but also significantly Professor Noreen Young, associate dean of Indigenous leadership and engagement and professor of Indigenous policy at the Jumbunna institute at UTS; Professor Jane O'Leary, research director at the Jumbunna institute; and also Emma Dawson, CEO of the Chifley Research Centre. I look forward to the continuing work of these round tables.

*The Weight of Men*

**Joe McCRACKEN** (Western Victoria) (13:41): I rise to talk about a book that was launched last week in Beaufort, which is my electorate. It is called *The Weight of Men*, and I want to read from this document. It is really a beautiful book which shows the stories of a lot of men in rural communities,

particularly in Beaufort, and it talks about not just the photography of who they are but their life stories as well. Dean Morris, who is the author and put the book together, made some remarkable comments that I want to read out to the house. He said that:

This project began as a simple idea. My first thought was only to take portraits, to capture the faces of men in our community and show them in a small local exhibition. I wanted to record the character that is often written in a person's face, the lines that tell of years of work, laughter, and experience. It felt like a worthwhile project, but still a modest one.

It was the community that suggested something more. People began to say, "You should write down their stories as well." At first, I hesitated. Taking a photograph is one thing, but asking men to open up and share their lives felt much bigger.

I want to commend the Beaufort community for coming up with this, and over \$13,000 has been raised for the local men's shed. I am assured that in the months and maybe even year ahead that there is going to be a women's book as well, which will equally promote up to 200 local women. The aim is to target \$20,000 for the CWA. Thank you and well done.

### *Coral's Last Stand*

**Sarah MANSFIELD** (Western Victoria) (13:42): Last week my team and I hosted a parliamentary screening of *Coral's Last Stand*, a documentary following marine scientists and advocates working to protect Scott Reef, a 15-million-year-old coral atoll off the coast of Western Australia. This magnificent reef supports marine life seen nowhere else in the world. Endangered pygmy whales and other rare marine mammals depend on krill at Scott Reef for their annual migrations, but the reef sits on a vast gas reservoir known as Browse Basin. Woodside and their joint venture partners plan to drill for gas and oil beneath this unique ecosystem, seeking to sink 50 wells in the water around Scott Reef. As Tim Winton, who features in the film, said:

... Scott Reef is a sentinel. If we lose Scott Reef ... we'll have effectively lose the battle to save all the world's clearwater corals.

The fight to save Scott Reef is about more than just this incredible place. It is about the fight to save our marine ecosystems and about our fight for a survivable climate. I thank Greenpeace, the Australian Conservation Foundation and the Australian Marine Conservation Society for their contributions to our really interesting panel discussion after the film and remind the house that the Greens will never stop fighting offshore oil and gas projects, including here in Victoria.

### **Movember**

**Lee TARLAMIS** (South-Eastern Metropolitan) (13:44): As November rolls around each year, many Australians prepare for warmer days and the countdown to Christmas. I, however, prepare my upper lip for its yearly performance; yes, the moustache has made its return, or at least something that aspires to be one. Whether you see it as a bold style choice, a misplaced tribute to the 1970s or simply a brave attempt at self-expression, the mo is growing for a very important reason: Movember.

Movember is far more than a chance for men to experiment with facial hair; it is a global movement focused on improving men's health, particularly prostate cancer, testicular cancer and men's mental health. As the month progresses, I am pleased to report that although my moustache may never grace the cover of a grooming magazine, it has achieved its mission of sparking conversations and encouraging people to pay attention to men's wellbeing. The statistics behind the campaign are confronting: millions of men worldwide are living with prostate cancer, testicular cancer remains the most commonly diagnosed cancer in young men, and heartbreakingly a man dies by suicide every minute across the globe.

Men are also continuing to die younger than women, often from preventable causes. These are the realities we cannot ignore, so in the spirit of doing my part I have tended to this mo with determination and a good sense of humour. There have been moments of uncertainty and plenty of jokes from colleagues, but if it encourages even one man to book a check-up or start a conversation, it is worth

every awkward stage of growth. Movember has supported more than 1250 projects since its inception, driving research services and support programs to change lives, but this vital work depends on donations and there is still time to donate before 30 November. Support the cause, support the men in your lives and, if nothing else, support the courage it takes to walk around with a moustache like this.

### Energy policy

**David DAVIS** (Southern Metropolitan) (13:45): I want to draw the chamber's attention to the welcome gas strike down off the south coast of Victoria. US energy giant ConocoPhillips has struck gas in its initial well in a \$100 million drilling operation. This is important. There is a Korean partner. Victoria needs gas. We need gas to play a significant role in helping the transition, particularly by providing that peaking power for Victorian industry and households. This is a development that is welcome. The state government has banned gas exploration on land. There has not been a single new permit issued since 2013 in Victoria for onshore conventional gas exploration, but the state government's war on gas goes much further. On 1 April 2027 the state government will ban gas connections in rental properties where there is a replacement appliance that is required – a heater or a hot water service. And whilst they say on one hand they will exempt cooktops, when confronted with the chance in this chamber they voted down cooktop choice. I say people should be able to choose how they cook and heat and shower and use hot water in their own home. Choice is critical, and Labor should stop its war on gas. It needs to end its war on gas, and we need more gas to help the transition.

### Drought

**Rikkie-Lee TYRRELL** (Northern Victoria) (13:47): Over the weekend we saw a bit of precipitation up north. As much as this is welcome, this will not be easing the pressure on our farmers. Currently there are bales of hay being baled and loaded onto trucks and restocking those long-empty hay sheds. Sowing will also be underway for summer crops, but with the high cost of water many crops will not be sown due to the fact that the returns will not exceed the input. This is an opportunity missed by our government to prove to our regional communities that they matter, that their contribution to the economy is a huge benefit to this state. How? This Labor government could be assisting drought-stricken farmers more. This government could also ease their stress by stopping the approval of renewable projects in the heart of their communities. But no, instead our farming communities are in the midst of harvest during a dry spell and also fighting this government tirelessly, trying to be heard on their opposition to these renewable projects. Poor form, government, poor form.

### Youth justice system

**David ETTERS HANK** (Western Metropolitan) (13:48): Like many Victorians, last week I experienced a profound sense of political dissonance. On the one hand we witnessed the signing into law of Australia's first treaty with First Nations people. This is a big thing; it is a historic moment and something of which all Victorians and this government can be rightly proud. That new law commits this government to genuinely working with First Nations people in shaping laws, programs and policies that will affect them. That is outstanding. But on the other hand, at the same time as this government was signing into law the treaty, they rolled out their adult time for violent crime program. We saw the Premier promising to put 14-year-old children in jail for life. Who will be disproportionately captured by these new tough-on-crime laws? Surprise, surprise, it will be First Nations people. How much involvement did those First Nations people have in the formulation of those new laws? None at all. What was this government thinking? Maybe, 'Oops, sorry, we forgot about that treaty thing,' or maybe, 'Don't worry about that treaty thing, because we're going to actually increase the number of Aboriginals we lock up,' or maybe, speaking on behalf of the government's focus groups, Mary and Joe whispered in the Premier's ear, 'Don't think about it. Just follow the *Herald Sun*'s lead.'

### Health system

**Georgie CROZIER** (Southern Metropolitan) (13:50): The Department of Health's website says:

The Victorian Agency for Health Information (VAHI) is Victoria's end-to-end health data agency, delivering trusted information to inform better decisions to improve the health and wellbeing of Victorians.

As a division of the Department of Health ... we ensure that data and information on the quality, safety and performance of Victoria's healthcare system are readily available to health services, government departments and agencies, researchers and the Victorian community.

On that website there are a whole lot of considerations that are taken into place – data on ambulance response times, waitlists for dental care, emergency care responses, hospital admissions and discharges, data on mental health services and, importantly, planned surgery for Victorians who need vital surgery – just like Rhonda, who contacted me and lives in regional Victoria. She has been five years on the waitlist for knee surgery. She regularly asks for a specialist appointment, but that has been pushed back and rescheduled up to three months at a time. This is the reality of what is happening in Victorian health services, yet the government fails to provide adequate transparency around data, refuses to report on time. It is now 18 November – this was due at the end of October, so we are halfway through the next reporting period. This government is not full of transparency, just full of spin.

### Williamstown truck ban

**Katherine COPSEY** (Southern Metropolitan) (13:51): Communities in the inner west have been lobbying for years for Williamstown Road to be closed to trucks when the West Gate Tunnel finally opens, and they have recently had a big win, with the government's announcement that trucks will face a curfew on nights and weekends. While not the full truck bans that groups like Save Willy Road and the Maribyrnong Truck Action Group have lobbied for, this is a welcome step, and it will mean significant reduction in noise and particulate pollution and help make those neighbourhoods safer and more livable. There is of course so much more to do. The government needs to do more to support a shift of freight from trucks to rail, to get as many trucks as possible off the streets entirely. There is a need to get the port rail shuttle moving, but the government also needs to make sure it is not going backwards by severing freight links as part of the Sunshine super-hub project without providing a viable replacement. In the meantime, to the Save Willy Road group, MTAG, local councillors and community members: enjoy your win and your quieter, healthier streets, and the Greens will keep campaigning with you for safer streets and to make sure that these truck bans are enforced.

### Community safety

**Wendy LOVELL** (Northern Victoria) (13:52): The Liberals have been listening to the people all across Victoria who are suffering from the crime wave under Labor, and the Liberals have been formulating a real plan to cut crime. Our campaign for safer communities is clearly touching a nerve, because the Allan Labor government has been dragged kicking and screaming to finally admit that crime is out of control under Jacinta Allan's watch. Imitation is the greatest form of flattery, and the Liberals are flattered to see that Labor is now trying to steal our law and order policies. But it is clear that Labor will not follow through on their delusional promises and will not be able to deliver real results on crime, because the party is controlled by socialists who will never enforce real consequences for violent offenders. Labor spent all their time writing headlines and billboards and forgot to actually write the legislation. It is not surprising to see that a Labor government that cannot deliver a train station or a road upgrade on time also cannot deliver new crime laws on time. Jacinta Allan is not fooling anyone with her Temu crime policies that are all talk and no action. It is too little and it is too late for all Victorians who have been attacked in their own home. There is no substance, and Victorians know that nothing will be changed by empty slogans. Only the Liberals have a real plan to cut crime and to make Victorian communities safer. We will ensure that those who break bail face jail. We will fund an extra 200 PSOs to patrol high-risk shopping centres, and we will ensure the community's expectations on crime control and sentencing are met.

### Economic policy

**Richard WELCH** (North-Eastern Metropolitan) (13:54): Victoria is the worst state in Australia to do business, and that is both unfortunate and a very unfortunate fact. Recent surveys show for business states we rate last, eighth out of eight; for cost and regulations we rate last, eighth out of eight; for payroll tax we rate seventh out of eight; for property taxes and charges we are last, we rate eighth out of eight. We run a state trade deficit of \$92 billion a year. We have the highest inflation and the highest unemployment. What this means is that other states are doing things better than us. When businesses look where they are going to place their investment, they are going to choose which jurisdiction to invest in. They look at Victoria and say, 'Well, no, things are worse there. It's harder to do business there. We'll be taxed higher there. It's harder to employ there.' We have special laws in Victoria that are inconsistent with the rest of the nation, so there is always a premium to invest in Victoria.

This is not sustainable for us because we have to support an Australian leading debt, and we have to pay \$10 billion in interest. My ambition for Victoria is that in one term of office we are rated number one for competitiveness, number one for tax, number one for land tax and number one for regulations that make it easier to invest in this state, because that is the only way we will grow Victoria.

### Asia Society Australia

**Trung LUU** (Western Metropolitan) (13:56): Earlier this month I had the pleasure of attending the fifth annual Melbourne Asia Game Changer Awards at the Asia Society Australia's flagship committee gala dinner. This is an event that celebrates Australians of Asian heritage, innovation, leadership and the power of connecting across our region. The Asia Society has long played a vital role in building bridges between Australia and the broader Asia-Pacific community through dialogue, culture, understanding and collaboration in business, education and public policies. These awards reminds us that our strength lies in our diversity and our shared commitments to progress. The individuals and the organisations that were recognised have not only made impact in their respective fields but also in strengthening the ties that unite across the borders.

As I came from Vietnam, I have always believed in the transformation that comes from the power of opportunities and partnership, values that the Asia Society embodies. The stories of awareness reflect our same values, resilience, innovations and a vision of the future where Asia and Australia grow stronger together. Congratulations to all the award recipients and nominees. Thank you to Asia Society Australia's team for their continued leadership, fostering understanding and connections across the region. Together we continue to shape the future, define cooperation and respect and share prosperity.

### Rural Press Club of Victoria awards

**Gaelle BROAD** (Northern Victoria) (13:57): I was delighted to see journalists from across Northern Victoria celebrated in this year's Rural Press Club of Victoria Rural and Regional Journalism and Photography Awards. There were more than 250 entries spanning newspapers, television, radio and online. I would like to congratulate the winners from our region, including photographer Darren Howe from the *Bendigo Advertiser*, who was crowned Photographer of the Year; and Chris Earl at the *Loddon Herald*, who was awarded Journalist of the Year and received the Community Champion Award. The award for coverage of a breaking news event went to the *Bendigo Advertiser* news team, well done.

Congratulations to all those recognised in the awards, including Paula Matrippolito of the *Sunraysia Daily*, Shannon Schubert of ABC Central Victoria, Dale Webster of the *Regional*, Andrew Mole of the *Riverine Herald*, Darren Chaitman of the *Euroa Gazette* and Alastair Finlay of the *Sunraysia Daily*. Accurate, independent reporting helps people make informed decisions, holds government to account and ensures local voices are heard in statewide debates. Quality journalism is vital to a healthy democracy, especially in regional communities. Keep up the great work.

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

**Lee TARLAMIS** (South-Eastern Metropolitan) (13:59): I move:

That the consideration of notices of motion, government business, 278 to 1146, be postponed until later this day.

**Motion agreed to.**

*Bills***Parks and Public Land Legislation Amendment (Central West and Other Matters) Bill 2025***Second reading***Debate resumed on motion of Harriet Shing:**

That the bill be now read a second time.

**Sarah MANSFIELD** (Western Victoria) (13:59): I rise to speak on the Parks and Public Land Legislation Amendment (Central West and Other Matters) Bill 2025. The Greens will be supporting this bill, which at long last will create the Mount Buangor, Pyrenees and Wombat–Lerderderg national parks. As my colleague the member for Melbourne said in the other place, this is the result of decades of environmental activism and love for these forests by communities across Victoria. That includes everyone involved in the Victorian Environmental Assessment Council’s *Central West Investigation: Final Report*, and this bill will fulfil other outstanding commitments from the government’s response to that inquiry in 2021. Those commitments include but are not limited to creating the Cobaw, Hepburn and Mirboo North conservation parks; adding land to Bendigo Regional Park; extending the Wimmera River Heritage Area Park and revoking several native game sanctuaries in central west Victoria.

We are also really supportive that this bill will grant Aboriginal title over several parks to the Gunaikurnai Land and Waters Aboriginal Corporation and the Taungurung Land and Waters Council. The Greens will always back the return of country and land management to their original custodians. We appreciate that this bill will change the name of the Yellingbo Landscape Conservation Area to the Liwik Barring Landscape Conservation Area, and we support last week’s separate but related announcement for a cultural reserve pilot on Taungurung country, which was a call from the Strathbogie Ranges Immediate Protection Areas process. The Greens support these new parks and the progress on land back, and we will be voting to support this bill.

But the Greens were really concerned that this bill as initially drafted would have handed over tens of thousands of hectares of Victoria’s native forests to recreational deer hunters. Labor’s bill would have given access to whole new areas of these three new national parks in Mount Buangor, Pyrenees and Wombat–Lerderderg, as well as existing areas in the Errinundra and Snowy River parks. The plans for Mount Buangor were particularly worrying because hunters would actually have had to share that land with existing bush users and businesses. I want to emphasise that: the proposed hunting zone would have covered roughly 2800 hectares of forest already used by outdoor recreation businesses, camping sites and public hiking trails like the iconic Beeripmo Walk. The bill would also have revoked a game sanctuary nearby at Mount Cole and opened 6000 hectares of that state forest to recreational deer hunting for the first time. It is actually not necessary to open those parts of the national park up at all. Hunters had more than twice that amount of land in the game sanctuary. The Greens do not want any game hunting in national parks. National parks are for people and nature, not just game hunters. We also know that deer are a pest, and that means we need laws and funding to eradicate them, not treat them as game. I will say more on that later. The proposed hunting zones at Mount Buangor would have threatened hikers, campers, businesses and even schoolkids. I think everyone in this chamber can appreciate why that is completely unacceptable.

Following a collaborative discussion with the government – and I really thank them for their engagement on this – the Greens are pleased to table amendments that will just remove deer hunting from that national park while maintaining it in the former game sanctuary. This is a really commonsense amendment that protects the existing bush users and the businesses that rely on them while still creating a net gain for deer hunters. To understand why we need this critical amendment, I want to cite a joint letter received in October from the Victorian National Parks Association, Outdoors Victoria and the Australian Camps Association. These groups all specifically called for a targeted amendment to protect existing bush users at Mount Buangor and Mount Cole and disallow deer hunting in this new national park. They were perfectly fine with opening up the 6000 hectares at the game sanctuary to deer hunting; they just said, ‘Please leave the 2800 hectares at the national park alone.’ VNPA groups even provided a map demonstrating how the new hunting zones across Mount Cole and Mount Buangor directly overlap with walking tracks, recreation sites and outdoor recreation and educational organisations. I received a similar letter from the Pyrenees Shire Council, who I thank for advocating for the safety of their local bush users and businesses. These groups go out of their way to stress that they do not even have an ideological objection to recreational deer hunting. They just point out the obvious: deer hunting is fundamentally incompatible with safe recreational and educational use. I will directly quote the CEOs of the Victorian National Parks Association, Outdoors Victoria and the Australian Camps Association:

[QUOTE AWAITING VERIFICATION]

The perception of a loss of safety alone would likely be enough for many schools and other community groups to withdraw from camping in the area. Parents are unlikely to allow their child to participate in camp activities in an area where hunters may be stalking. The proposed seasonal hunting area is hardly big enough for any hunter to operate safely, having to always be certain that they are a safe distance from a road, walking or mountain bike track, campground or place where a member of the public or schoolchild may be.

I think most of us here, and hunters themselves, would agree that outdoor enthusiasts, schoolteachers and schoolkids should feel safe from a stray bullet in a national park. It is a fundamental safety issue, regardless of your perspective on recreational deer hunting. So we are really glad that Labor has come to the table and agreed to at least not introduce deer hunting in the Buangor national park. The amendments can be circulated.

Again, the Greens still do not believe we need to open up any new national parks to recreational deer hunting. We need to treat deer as the pest they are, not the game that some hunters want them to be. Right now we have more than 1 million feral deer in Victoria trashing our farms, polluting our forests and increasingly running into our towns and cars. The Invasive Species Council, the Victorian Deer Control Community Network and the Victorian National Parks Association have all been very clear about what is needed to rein in those numbers, let alone actually eradicate them – that is, for the government to finally start classifying deer as pests and funding a statewide multisector control program to protect high conservation value areas. That kind of program would require supervised professional hunters, active pest control support for landholders and thermal-assisted aerial programs that could reduce deer populations faster than they could reproduce. That impact on population levels is crucial. Eradication means numbers go down, while game hunting means they either stay stable or go up.

The government’s own 2021 statewide deer control strategy says that recreational hunting on its own is not an effective means of controlling deer numbers. That is because game hunting does not have an incentive to eradicate deer. If anything, recreational hunting incentivises healthy and stable populations. That is why hunters have bag limits. They focus on male deer or even deliberately move populations into new areas, because this sport cannot exist without something to kill. That is not the fault of the hunters; it is the fault of a government that treats deer as wildlife and game, not as pests. Those same game hunters could actually be part of that multisector solution, but they need laws and regulations that encourage eradication, not recreation.

Unfortunately, in Victoria we have a government that specifically chooses not to manage deer as an invasive species and treats them instead as wildlife. Victoria is the only mainland state left that protects them as wildlife and game. In fact every other jurisdiction has come to its senses and started classifying deer as pests. Last month Labor had the opportunity to fix that when they finally delivered their response to the 2021 Wildlife Act 1975 review, and guess what Labor did? They chose not to join the 21st century and rejected the expert recommendation to list deer as pests. The difference between these classifications is one of both regulation and legal obligation. Classifying deer as pests would create new obligations on both the government and landowners, who would have a legal responsibility to prevent them spreading and eradicate them where and when possible.

It is also an ideological barrier to creating a state geared towards eradication. To quote Peter Jacobs from the Victorian Deer Control Community Network:

Under current arrangements, feral deer continue to enjoy the same protections as native species, creating confusion and preventing a coordinated landscape-scale response.

Landholders receive no government support, funding or advice for control, and in many cases must navigate complex permits to remove animals causing damage on their own property.

Yet for some reason Labor rejects that recommendation and plans to keep eight deer species protected as wildlife and six of those further protected as game species, which on top of everything else can require special hunting licences to kill. The minister tells us with a straight face that classifying deer as wildlife is not a barrier to effective control, which flies in the face of those expert Wildlife Act recommendations as well as just common sense. Labor cannot claim, on the one hand, to be doing everything possible to eradicate feral deer while on the other refusing to even classify and treat them as pests. It is an outward contradiction but one that should not come as a surprise.

Sadly, this bill is hardly the first cave-in to the shooting lobby from Labor this term in Parliament. First, Labor under Jacinta Allan backflipped on Labor's own inquiry's call to ban duck hunting. Then we saw Labor commit to investigating new national parks through the Great Outdoors Taskforce, which was set up in 2023 as part of Victoria's \$1.5 billion transition out of native forest logging to investigate new national parks across eastern Victoria. Labor once promised to create the largest environmental protection plan and largest expansion to our native forest reserve system in our state's history. It sounded very exciting, but Premier Allan backflipped on this promise too, later withdrawing the taskforce's remit to investigate national parks.

Ahead of announcing this welcome but very overdue bill, the Minister for Environment promised hunters that Labor would not pursue the decades-long plan for a great forest national park in the Central Highlands. We saw all these backflips come to fruition a few weeks ago in Labor's tepid response to the review of the Wildlife Act 1975 and *Great Outdoors Taskforce: Recommendations Report*. The government sat on that Wildlife Act review for more than four years, only to reject 10 out of 40 expert recommendations to fix Victoria's broken wildlife laws. That shortsightedness is genuinely disappointing from a government that, for its many faults, has overseen the end of commercial native forest logging in this state, complete with more than \$1 billion in transition funding. So we know they can do it. That presented this government with a once-in-a-generation chance to permanently protect Victoria's irreplaceable forests and safeguard millions of hectares of public land for both people and the planet. But looking at all those recent backflips together – the concessions to deer hunters in this bill, the bans on new national parks that preceded it and those backflips on duck hunting – it really seems like Labor has shirked that historic opportunity.

None of this is to say that there has not actually been good work done in this term of Parliament to ban large-scale commercial logging and transition to plantation harvesting – I do want to highlight that. It is just that there is still work to be done to end it entirely in Victoria and ensure it never comes back under future governments. It is not just the Greens saying this; the Great Outdoors Taskforce may have



been neutered before it could propose any new national parks, but it did catch these logging loopholes. Recommendation 5 calls on the government to:

Change relevant legislation and regulations to prevent the return of large-scale commercial native timber harvesting in state forests. This should not limit Traditional Owner or the government's forest and fire management activities.

Labor has done a good job transitioning workers from commercial-scale native forest logging, but it is yet to show any progress on closing these loopholes.

The Greens have identified five major loopholes to permanently transition from native timber harvesting in Victoria. First, we have a law that could enable future governments to bring back native forest logging at the stroke of a minister's pen: the Forests (Wood Pulp Agreement) Act 1996, which once committed large volumes of Victoria's native forests to Japanese timber company Opal. Two, we have the Forests Act 1958, which can be used to grant forest produce licences and permits that enable people to log, remove and sell native forest products. Thirdly, logging of native forests is actually still happening on private land in Victoria. We saw that in March this year when East Gippsland Shire Council was forced to accept a plan to harvest timber at Cabbage Tree Creek after the Minister for Planning shirked responsibility for this issue. Fourth, it is currently still legal for companies to harvest native timber in other states and then just process it here in Victoria. That is why we have been seeing ancient wonders being shipped to Victoria from Tasmania. Finally, there is a risk of disaster prevention and recovery being weaponised by the native forest logging industry.

We understand that the loopholes around private land and other states deal with complex planning laws and constitutional issues and so will not be attempting to address those in this bill. We also understand that the Victorian government probably cannot appeal the wood pulp agreement, considering its current court case with Opal, although we do hope that once that is resolved, the government will repeal that agreement as an urgent priority. Instead, we have developed what we believe are really commonsense amendments to address the threat of future governments bringing back commercial-scale logging under forest produce permits, those concerns about bushfire prevention and recovery being weaponised as well as those fears around expanding recreational deer hunting.

I understand those amendments have already been circulated, and I will just go through them briefly. Amendments 2 to 10 would remove this bill's expansion of recreational deer hunting in the new Mount Buangor National Park, which I have already explained. We would love to see deer hunting removed from the Pyrenees and Wombat–Lerderderg national parks, as well as the existing Errinundra and Snowy River national parks, but as I indicated, after some good faith negotiations, we are glad that the government has agreed to at least protect those existing bush uses at Mount Buangor and pass our commonsense agreement as an urgent and crucial compromise.

Amendments 1, 11 and 12 address two loopholes in the ban on native forest logging: forest produce permits and salvage logging. These are, again, commonsense changes that we urge this Parliament to get behind. They would amend the Forests Act 1958 to ban timber from any forest produce permits being sold for profit. This would stop licences being used for native forest timber logging while still enabling things like beekeeping or firewood collection. They would also stop bushfire prevention and recovery being used as an excuse as a cover for logging – logging under another name – including by adding to the purposes of this bill and creating new ecological monitoring requirements and investigative powers. These are all really non-controversial – they just reaffirm the government's existing ban on commercial native forest logging – so I hope they will all be supported. We would really encourage everyone in the chamber to do so.

To summarise, we will be supporting this bill. We really welcome the creation of the new national parks. It is something that is well overdue and something I think all Victorians can celebrate. We thank the government for compromising on the Mount Buangor deer hunting issue and hope that the outcome achieved is one where all interests can be well served, but we urge the government and other

members of this chamber to take on board our further amendments, which we believe would strengthen this bill and the commitment to preserving our forests for people and the planet.

**Wendy LOVELL** (Northern Victoria) (14:17): I join the debate on the Parks and Public Land Legislation Amendment (Central West and Other Matters) Bill 2025. At the outset I say that I will be opposing this bill, along with my Liberal and National colleagues. This bill substantially upholds the commitments made by the Victorian government in 2021 in response to the 2019 Victorian Environmental Assessment Council *Central West Investigation Final Report* in that it transfers large areas of multiple-use forests to national or conservation park status, but it breaks a key promise that was made by the Premier in Bendigo last year that she would not lock up any more public land.

The main provisions of this bill, in parts 2 to 4, amend the existing land acts, part 5 makes amendments to the Great Ocean Road and Environs Protection Act 2020, parts 6 and 7 amend the Heritage Rivers Act 1992 and Mineral Resources (Sustainable Development) Act 1990, and part 9 amends the St Kilda Land Act 1965 to allow long-term leases. Parts 10 to 11 revoke the native game sanctuaries. I do not intend to make any comments on that. It is part 8 of this bill that I intend to concentrate on.

It creates three new national parks: the Mount Buangor, Pyrenees and Wombat–Lerderderg national parks. It creates three new conservation parks, in Cobaw, Hepburn and Mirboo North. It does permit some deer stalking in designated areas of the Mount Buangor, Pyrenees, Wombat–Lerderderg, Snowy River and Errinundra national parks, which is the only part of part 8 that I might agree with. As I said, clause 8 will permit deer hunting by stalking in designated areas of the existing Snowy River and Errinundra national parks and also in designated areas of the proposed new national parks in Mount Buangor, Pyrenees and Wombat–Lerderderg.

Hunting is a big industry, and it generates significant visitor income for gateway towns, where hunters pass through to access the public land. It is also an activity that reduces pest animals. These are hard-hoofed animals. The government has been ardent in their shooting of brumbies, but they tend to protect deer, which are doing equally as much if not more damage – actually more damage, because the deer wallow where the brumbies do not wallow. The Liberals and Nationals support expanded recreational hunting opportunities for law-abiding hunters, and so we do like that part of the bill.

The Liberals and Nationals will move an amendment to omit part 8, clauses 49 to 59, clauses 74 to 115(1) and 116; and schedule 1, part 2, clauses 1 to 12, which establish the three new national parks. If these amendments fail, the Liberal Party will oppose the bill in its entirety. There is more in this bill that is bad than is good.

At the Bendigo bush summit in March 2024 the Premier publicly promised not to restrict activities in Victorian state forests, saying:

As Premier, and as a proud country Victorian, I will never put a padlock on our public forest.

That statement has now been proven to be a lie. This bill is proof that Premier Allan has reneged on the promise she made not to lock up public forests. The Premier claimed that hunting will still be allowed in the Wombat–Lerderderg National Park but only during the designated season and only in designated areas. The Premier claims that activities like camping and fishing will still be allowed, but everyone knows that these freedoms will die the death of a thousand cuts as Labor gradually ban activities one by one as they acquiesce to the Greens' demands. Permission to hunt, fish, four-wheel drive and camp will all be at the mercy of Labor ministers, who will be able to ban hunting or impose restrictions with just a stroke of their pen. Labor's creeping restrictions in national parks will eventually end traditional activities that Victorians have enjoyed in their forests for so long. The Premier promised to keep access to state parks open, but once again Labor has betrayed Victorians.

The area of park that is to be locked up as a national park is approximately 44,000 hectares, and it will be made up of approximately 20,000 hectares of the existing Lerderderg State Park – so 45 per cent of the new park – and approximately 24,000 hectares from the Wombat State Forest, which is 55 per cent of the new park. As I said, the types of activities that are currently allowed in state forests

compared to national parks are quite extensive. Firewood collection, prospecting, dog walking, horse riding, drone use and timber harvesting are all allowed in state forests but not in national parks – they are strictly prohibited in national parks. Pest hunting is allowed in a state forest but it is prohibited in national parks, with an exception in May to September, when a season is allowed. Fishing, four-wheel driving and trail bike riding are also prohibited in national parks except in designated areas. The government says that most existing recreational activities will be able to continue in the new national park, but this will only be by exemption, which means that the government can change that and can ban all activities with the stroke of a minister's pen.

I will now turn to some of my concerns in this legislation, and they are really around Parks Victoria's capacity, because no-one benefits from a national park. Changing the status does not guarantee any additional resources for the management of this park. This bill increases the amount of land under the responsibility of Parks Victoria but does nothing to increase the staffing or capacity of Parks Victoria to manage that land. Effectively, land and fire management have deteriorated under Labor. Parks Victoria annual reports show a decline in management capacity despite land under management increasing by 20 per cent over the last 10 years, yet the operational funding for Parks Victoria is down by 35 per cent and ranger numbers are down by 28 per cent, so there are less resources, more land to manage and more land that will be left to decline. Operational decline in land management means increased fuel loads, invasive weeds and pest animals, and it means increased bushfires – and bushfires that burn more intensely and that will destroy much of our natural bushland.

Fire track access is also a major concern because prohibiting camping and four-wheel driving means fallen trees will not be cleared from tracks, leaving obstacles in the path of fire tracks when they need emergency access to national parks. Also, once the land is declared a national park, firewood collection will be permanently banned. This is a financial kick in the guts to rural and regional Victorians who rely on collecting firewood as a low-cost energy source during a cost-of-living crisis when Labor's disastrous energy policy is pushing energy bills higher and higher. The public should be able to collect fallen timber as firewood prior to fuel reduction burns. There are around about six coupes in the Wombat–Lerderderg park that will be closed once it becomes a national park. Basically that means that there are almost no coupes in northern Victoria that are to the north-west of the Hume Freeway, from the edge of Melbourne to the border and west until you reach Warracknabeal or Creswick. In fact most of the coupes in the west of Victoria are dotted along the Western Highway. This means it will be a very long trip for residents from the Moira, Campaspe, Gannawarra and Loddon shires and residents in the cities of Mildura, Greater Bendigo and Greater Shepparton to reach their closest coupes.

This bill represents the government pandering to a tiny number of green activists who want state forests converted to national park status. The people that use our state forests and parks do not want any new national parks. Over 66,000 Victorians have spoken loud and clear and signed petitions saying they do not want new national parks in Victoria. Ms Bath had a petition that had 40,208 signatures; Mr Farnham, 13,969 signatures; and my own petition that specifically objected to the Wombat–Lerderderg and Mount Buangor national parks was signed by 11,974 Victorians. That is 66,151 Victorians who have signed these petitions, but this government continues to ignore the wishes of the people of Victoria.

Bush users love Victoria's wilderness areas. Whether they live in the country or travel from the city to our state forests, the people who signed these petitions are people who make the most of the Victorian bush to walk their dogs, fossick for gold, fish, hunt, drive and explore back-country tracks. They want to protect and conserve bushland while continuing to enjoy using our public land and participating in traditional activities in the bush.

It is not only bush user groups who oppose the new national parks. Even Lisa Neville, a former Labor government minister and who chaired the Great Outdoors Taskforce, agrees. Her report said that:

... the Taskforce does not believe large scale tenure change is required to enhance protections in Victoria's forests. It will not be making any recommendations for large-scale changes to land tenure, including not creating any new national parks.

I am further concerned that this bill could significantly hurt local economies by limiting tourism and visitor numbers to communities where these parks may be established. The government continues to tell us that making somewhere a national park will increase tourism. But that never happens, and it does not replace the economic activity that has been generated by traditional activities. The Victorian Apiarists Association, which represents 10,000 beekeepers, has raised concerns that this bill fails to mention apiculture or the use of public land for bee sites and makes no reference to the existing *Apiculture (Beekeeping) on Public Land Policy*. They have warned that without access to public land, this sector cannot function.

In conclusion, the Liberals and Nationals and regional Victorians support the Wombat–Lerderderg and Mount Buangor state park and state forest remaining state park and state forest, because these areas operate as multi-use public land and balance conservation with community access, recreation and local economic activity. In a state forest hunting, dispersed camping, firewood collection, bushwalking, hiking, horseriding, dog walking, prospecting, forestry, fishing, drone use, four-wheel driving, trail-bike riding and off-road driving will go eventually.

In state forests they are permitted. National parks on the other hand prioritise environmental preservation and restrict public use when they are managed by Parks Victoria. One of the reasons the coalition oppose the creation of additional national parks is because the government cannot manage what they have already. The government's decline in public park management capacity means campgrounds are closed for extended periods, broken facilities are not restored after bushfires and fuel loads, invasive weeds and pest animals are not addressed. Pest animals – foxes, wild dogs, pigs and rabbits – are causing widespread environmental damage, and without adequate controls these pests will destroy native vegetation and threaten biodiversity. Pressing ahead with this bill shows disregard for the bush user groups that cherish our bushland and wilderness areas and have long enjoyed outdoor recreation activities in state forests. Communities are concerned that this proposal will mean areas of state parks and bush will no longer be accessible and users will be locked out of a range of activities. We will oppose this bill because it is a bad bill that does nothing to increase resources for the management of public land in Victoria and because it breaks a promise made by the Premier just 12 months ago.

**Jeff BOURMAN** (Eastern Victoria) (14:31): I stand here to tee off on this legislation because this is perfect carrot-and-stick legislation, which in the last 11 years or so I have seen in a number of cases. This sounds good to us in some ways – 'us' being hunters specifically. It sounds good that in the Errinundra and Snowy River national parks we get to go hunting seasonally, but that is the carrot. The stick is the new national parks. Originally when this was proposed as a coherent bill, there were going to be three new national parks that were of interest to us. There were a few more. There was the Buangor State Park, the Pyrenees, the Wombat–Lerderderg and others. Originally there was going to be seasonal hunting in all of them, and then due to concerns, there is now not going to be any in Mount Buangor. I do not know Mount Buangor State Park as it is now really well, but for 20-odd years I used to have to go past it and occasionally through it on my way somewhere. I would suggest it has at some point been probably harvested, and as an environmental value other than having trees, I do not feel there is a blinding need to make it a national park.

I used to live opposite the Pyrenees State Forest, as it was then – now to become a national park – when we first moved to Victoria back in the 1980s. At least from the 80s it was a decent area. The Wombat–Lerderderg has been an ongoing thing. So I feel I understand why the government is going here, but I reject it. In fact whole reason I reject these is for the reason that we might be able to have seasonal hunting in some of these places which we do not have now, but the very fact that the Greens

are able to deliver an amendment to get rid of them, for reasons that are really not logical, shows the folly of doing it this way. I feel an opportunity was missed. I probably never would have voted for new national parks anyway, but there was an opportunity, I suppose, if the government had stood tall, and they did not. That is the downside and that is what we are going to have to deal with come the committee stage, and I will have some questions then.

I started writing what was wrong with the Greens contribution. I cannot use props, but I started running out of space on the page. It was just getting worse and worse and worse. First of all, apart from just the general hunting sort of thing, national parks are bad news for anything that is not a national park now. You cannot have prospectors; four-wheel driving and camping are all severely limited; and you cannot hunt with dogs – you certainly cannot hunt with hounds there. These are all things where it is perfectly okay now. I feel this has just become an ideological grab, an ideological need to do this. Maybe it is fulfilling a promise made by a previous Premier. I do not know; in the end it really does not matter. Here we are standing with it. There is a lot going on in this. As I said, a lot of it I am supportive of. The Shooters, Fishers and Farmers do have a principle of not locking up public land. There was a 2018 Crown land reserve bill that went through. That was quite a carry-on, but we ended up getting through that okay. Public land is public land that should be accessed by the public. Changing tenure sometimes is a risky business.

The rest of my contribution, and I have got plenty of time, is going to deal with some of the mistruths. I am going to take them as made in the proper belief that they are true. Deer do not have bag limits, except for hog deer. Hog deer are the only deer in Victoria that have any limit on them at all, and that is because they are endangered on a worldwide scale. The problem that we have as a group is that hog deer have such a small footprint in this state. They are basically down the bottom part of Gippsland and on some of the islands. You can hunt them, but it is controlled hunting. It is one of those things where you do not want to hunt them to extinction, when the problem is that there might be an actual extinction in the near future. This is where game management comes into it.

Deer do not have bag limits. We pay to hunt them. Dr Mansfield sounded like she was reading from an invasive species or national parks association textbook on what rubbish you say when you have got no facts. They are not feral. I am being pedantic here: anything that is feral was domesticated or cattle or something like that – an animal that was brought in for the purposes of farming. Deer, for worse, were brought in to be released. The 1800s was not a pretty time in Australia. We brought all sorts of rubbish in from overseas and put them in here. They may have had what they felt were good intentions, but now we have got rabbits, foxes, prickly pear, deer. But while rabbits and foxes are pests, deer are not, and there are a number of reasons why it should stay that way.

First of all, you cannot hunt pests in national parks. Even in the Errinundra and Snowy River national parks there are still no changes, as far as I am aware, to hunting pests. The obligation now will be on the landowner to control them. I have seen and heard from a lot of farmers who get a lot of grief from the council and I say ‘parks’ in the global sense – there are all sorts of environmental people going through that – about not controlling blackberries and rabbits and stuff like that. At the moment as a farmer, subject to animal welfare conditions, you can shoot deer whenever you like with whatever you like. You can shoot them at night; you can shoot them during the day. As long as you are using a suitable calibre it is happy days. You can just go for it. Calling them a pest will not change that whatsoever. It will not, absolutely, except the farmer will have to do that, whereas right now they do not have to even though they can. What farmers do not need at the moment is another requirement.

National parks cannot have dogs, and you cannot camp – we have gone through that – and cannot collect firewood. It is always hard to tell how many deer recreational hunters have removed from the environment, because obviously, like unregistered guns, we do not register our deer. We do not know where they are or how many are going, but there is an estimate of 167,600 deer being removed from the environment. It looks to be that the majority were removed on farmland, which is good, as it means that at least farmers are getting their end of the bargain done, and 52,600 or so were done on public land. That might not sound like a lot, but that is 52,000 deer that are not there, mostly sambar, a few

fallow – fallow tend to be in the lowlands and the pastures and things like that. But with this obsession that the Greens have with stopping people recreational hunting, you can be assured that there is going to be a whole lot less than 167,600 deer removed from the environment. Why? Because contractors and helicopters can only do so much. They cannot be there all the time. And the experts that they are relying on – I should not say experts, I should say so-called experts – continually come up with these falsehoods. The reason, perhaps, is when you look at where the head office of the Victorian Greens is and when you look at where people like the Victorian National Parks Association and that live, it is all at 60L – 60 Leicester Street. They share an office, so I do believe they must sit around with their vegan coffees and their sustainably sourced water or whatever it is and their mung beans and come up with these things.

I have said so many times in this place that you can say these things all you like, but if you are continually getting them wrong, you cannot call yourself an expert. I mean, these so-called experts cannot even get the basics right. They are not feral, they are not a pest and nor should they be a pest. For reasons that I have said, making deer a pest is going to just create problems. We have got enough problems in the environment without adding to them. The Victorian Community Deer Control Network people are registered in Katoomba in New South Wales. Sometimes you cannot make this stuff up, but here it is.

I am going to keep my contribution reasonably brief. I will not be supporting this. I will be withdrawing my amendments because they are effectively exactly the same as the Nationals' amendments. I will be supporting the Nationals' amendments. The Greens' amendments – no chance. As usual, I just find that they are based in the la-la land that they live in, and I am not going to be part of that. I do not commend this bill to the house.

**Gaelle BROAD** (Northern Victoria) (14:42): I am pleased to be able to speak today on the Parks and Public Land Legislation Amendment (Central West and Other Matters) Bill 2025. I live in Bendigo, my office is in Bendigo, and it is known as the city in a forest, so I am surrounded by it, as are many other thousands of people in Bendigo. For many it is our backyard and it is our lifeline. But this bill threatens that lifeline. This bill is not just about maps and boundaries; it is about whether local families can afford to heat their homes, whether bush user groups can continue their traditions and whether our forests are managed for safety or left to become tinderboxes.

I do want to start with firewood, because for thousands of households firewood is not a quaint tradition, it is an essential, affordable fuel source. Pensioners, families and farmers rely on it to keep warm through winter, and when the government shut down the timber industry it also shut down the state's major supplier of firewood, and that decision created a crisis. I have been contacted by a number of people about the issues with firewood. I have spoken in this chamber and raised concerns with the minister because people contacted me and they said, 'We've been to the designated fire collection areas, but there's just no wood.' I have heard that families are travelling hours and hours on return trips in search of very scant supplies. Why? Because the government's policy only allows collection from the side of tracks and not deeper into the bush, and those areas are stripped bare within days. I was also made aware that Department of Energy, Environment and Climate Action work crews were undertaking industrial action, and there was actually a ban on the felling of trees for firewood. But we know at the moment electricity prices are soaring, gas prices are going up and people are desperate. So what happens next? People face two choices: to cut firewood illegally or freeze during next winter. That is the reality that many families are facing. This bill makes it worse.

Once land becomes a national park firewood collection is permanently banned under the National Parks Act 1975. Bendigo Regional Park gets a very short reprieve. Collection is allowed just to 1 July 2029, but after that, nothing – a countdown to a cliff. So think about this: Victoria has record fuel loads in the bush and a firewood shortage. One problem could solve the other, allowing reasonable firewood collection to reduce fuel loads and help keep families warm, but instead government policy padlocks the forests and drives some of this illegal activity. That is not just bad policy, it is dangerous. Now, this bill does not just hit firewood collectors, it actually locks out entire communities. Prospectors and

fossickers have worked these forests for generations, and they contribute so much to our regional economies. I know through tourism people travel from far and wide. They seek accommodation in these areas and they go out prospecting and fossicking.

I do want to thank Melina Bath for her work on that and for highlighting that there is a section missing – section 32D of the National Parks Act – that is needed to permit these people to access and go out and do what they enjoy. There are horseriders also, who maintain trails and connect with nature, and trail bike riders and four-wheel drive clubs who keep bushfire access tracks open. They are often doing a lot more than contractors in maintaining those tracks. I will say too that recently I was speaking with a beekeeper that talked about the need for those roads to be maintained so that they can actually access their hives. There are campers and bushwalkers who fear over-regulation and the loss of freedom and traditional owner groups who practise cultural land use and forest gardening. These groups are not vandals; they are stewards, and yet this bill excludes them, while failing to fund proper management.

The community knows what is at stake here. As Ms Lovell pointed out in her contribution too, there are over 60,000 signatures on petitions opposing the new national parks, and we have seen that across both chambers. I know Ms Bath's was a record petition for some time as well, with over 40,000 signatures. Even blue-collar unions like the Electrical Trades Union have joined the fight for continued access. And let us not forget the Premier's words at the *Herald Sun* bush summit that was held in Bendigo in March 2024:

I will never put a padlock on our public forest.

Yet this bill does exactly that.

Locking up land does not solve environmental problems. Parks Victoria's capacity has collapsed. Funding has been reduced by 35 per cent, ranger numbers have been down 28 per cent in the past year, weeds like blackberry and serrated tussock are spreading unchecked and across northern Victoria we are seeing pests such as wild dogs and foxes just out of control. Fuel loads are building, and the government is doing less than a quarter of the planned burns recommended by the 2009 Victorian Bushfires Royal Commission. Experts said 5 per cent annual burns were the minimum for safety, and we are doing less than 1.5 per cent. Now, when I walk through our forests, there is so much fallen timber on the ground and the fuel loads are extremely high. I was speaking with the CFA recently, and the conditions over the next two years, they say, will be very similar to Black Saturday, yet our CFA approaches this fire season with reduced funding, the oldest fleet and fewer active volunteers.

There is a better way forward. We can protect biodiversity without punishing families and bush users. We can extend firewood access beyond 2029 for Bendigo Regional Park and other areas. We can fund real management and restore ranger numbers and fuel reduction programs. We can consult properly, reinstate structured engagement for bush user groups and traditional owners, and designate responsible access zones for recreation and firewood collection. But this bill locks out families of bush users, it erodes cultural practices and it undermines regional economies. It imposes a countdown to a firewood cliff in 2029, and it ignores the voices of tens of thousands of Victorians who very clearly said no. We need a public land policy that is practical and encourages people to use our forests, not padlock them away. Instead this bill creates a ridiculous scenario – record fuel loads in the bush and a firewood shortage in our homes. That is not progress; that is a policy failure.

Just on the weekend I turned on the TV and came across a show with a couple of chaps, and they were talking, and straight away I heard them say, 'Oh, this is not like the national parks. These tracks are open.' And I thought, that summarises what so many know. This bill seeks to create three new national parks that impact 65,000 hectares, and I do not want to see our state forests locked up and becoming national parks. I want to see more Victorians get outside and enjoy our great outdoors. I do want to thank my colleague Melina Bath, the shadow minister, for her work on this bill, and we stand with many, many thousands of Victorians that have made it clear that they also oppose this bill.

**David LIMBRICK** (South-Eastern Metropolitan) (14:50): I also would like to speak on the Parks and Public Land Legislation Amendment (Central West and Other Matters) Bill 2025. I will say from the outset that the Libertarian Party will be opposing this bill. If I look at our fundamental principle on this, our party has a long history of maintaining that if we are going to have public land, then the public should have access to use that land to the greatest extent possible. The fear of national parks is not that we just do not like national parks; the idea of reclassifying public land into national parks brings with it an entirely new system with how it will be managed and also the ability for shutting down activities that have traditionally been happening in those areas. As has been brought up in the debate, prospecting, for example, is a very popular activity in many parts of the state and has been for a very long time.

There are three main new parks that are being setting up that are most controversial: the Mount Buangor, Pyrenees and Wombat–Lerderderg parks. The idea that removing certain activities from these areas – we have seen what happens and the social disruption that happens. I have spoken many times in here about what has happened in Arapiles with the climbing community and the social issues that have been caused by removing or restricting those activities. We have the same sort of potential issue with removing some of the activities here, like prospecting, like some of the other potential restrictions on camping and other things that might go on here.

Fundamentally, we oppose this restriction on parks. I agree with my colleague Mr Bourman: it is a bit of a carrot-and-stick sort of bill. There are some good things in this. The government is expanding access for deer hunters, which I am sympathetic to, and I think that is a good thing; we do have a problem with too many deer in Victoria. As Mr Bourman rightly pointed out, deer hunters not only undertake this activity with their families and to obtain meat to feed their families but they also perform an environmental function in ensuring that we do not have too many deer in this state. My understanding is we do have a few too many deer in this state at the moment, certain types, so hunters certainly play their part, and I am glad that the government has expanded that.

Nevertheless I am fearful that setting up these national parks will restrict activities further and will restrict both the local communities, who do things like firewood collection, and also the visitors to these parks that do things like hunting and camping and other things, many of which come from my electorate. Everyone thinks of deer hunting as a regional issue; I was surprised to learn just how many there are in South East Metro, in fact more than any other region, I was told. There are a lot of guys – mostly guys, as it is usually men with their sons – who go out on the weekends, and a lot of them are tradesmen –

**Bev McArthur** interjected.

**David LIMBRICK:** Yes, a lot of them are union members; that is correct. In fact it was quite interesting. Our party did a stand at a hunting and firearms exhibition last year, and the vast majority of the people there looked like they were Labor guys, so I can see why Labor did not want to restrict duck hunting and is quite keen on deer hunting as well, because these guys, they love it. They love going out there and participating in this activity. But there are other activities as well, and I fear that these activities will be shut down. For that reason the Libertarian Party will be opposing this bill. I will be considering the amendments being put forward by other parties, but I also state that I will be opposing the Greens' amendments.

**Bev McARTHUR** (Western Victoria) (14:55): I too rise to speak on the Parks and Public Land Legislation Amendment (Central West and Other Matters) Bill 2025. This bill is the latest attack on the inheritance of Victorians. The proposal to convert more than 60,000 hectares of central west state forest into new national parks threatens to shut people out of the places they have known and loved for generations. These are not abstract landscapes on a map; they are real places where people bushwalk, camp, ride horses, fish, hunt, prospect and simply spend time in our wonderful natural environment. These pursuits are part of our culture. They support regional Victoria, not to mention



our mental and physical health. They bring families together and they build memories across generations.

I have had countless letters to this effect from Victorians devastated about how restrictions will stop them sharing their passions with their children and grandchildren. These activities connect us to the land, yet the government seem determined to restrict access, reduce activity and lock up the bush and throw away the keys, all in the name of environmentalism – while failing abysmally to manage the parks they already have. The state of our existing national parks is enough evidence that this government cannot meet the basic obligations of maintenance: weed control, feral animal management, track repair and fire preparedness. Until they can do these things, they have no business expanding their operations.

I want to pay tribute to the Prospectors and Miners Association of Victoria and to many other recreational and community groups who have spent years trying to make the government listen, including unions. Their experience, their knowledge of the land and their dedication to responsible use should be valued. Instead they have been sidelined by a government that listens only to activists and pressure groups, who hold no stake in regional Victoria and who reject any human presence in the bush at all.

This entire bill rests on the VEAC central west investigation. That report is incomplete, out of date and widely rejected. More than half of the submissions opposed the creation of these national parks and many raised serious concerns about fire access, safety, recreation, economics and cultural use. Those concerns were largely ignored. There are also legitimate questions about whether VEAC even followed its own act. Yet the government treats its report as gospel, as if the simple act of locking up land equals environmental protection. It does not. The belief that people and nature should never interact is not conservation, it is ideology, and it is seriously damaging to communities, to local economies and to the environment itself.

I have spent my life in the country. I was born in Terang, raised on a farm at Tylden and went to school at Mount Macedon. I now live on a farm near Camperdown. My children grew up there. I have always believed that the more people experience nature, the more they value it and protect it. Good land management requires people. It requires use. It requires the presence of volunteers, campers, riders, walkers, prospectors and timber workers. These are the eyes and ears of the bush. When you force them out, you create empty forests with growing fuel loads, rising weed infestations and uncontrolled feral animals. I have spoken in this Parliament many times about fire. Fire management in Victoria is failing. The government abandoned the planned burn targets recommended by the 2009 Victorian Bushfires Royal Commission. They failed to maintain tracks. They failed to reduce fuel loads. Farmers constantly tell me the same thing: the worst neighbour to have is the government.

Their land is choked with weeds, their fuel loads are out of control and their pest management is inadequate. Their approach to the native timber industry has been a disaster. The end of timber harvesting removed a skilled workforce that has always played an essential role in fire response. When the next major fire comes, it will not be the activists in Fitzroy fighting it; it will be locals who know the land, and they will be expected to work in a forest the government has let deteriorate. Emergency agencies were not properly consulted about these park conversions. Fire crews need access, they need tracks and they need clear lines of retreat. When you convert state forest into national park, you change the workplace of every firefighter in that region. It is extraordinary that the government is proceeding without a thorough understanding of what this means for their safety.

The economic analysis in this bill is equally weak. Prospectors and fossickers contribute hundreds of millions of dollars each year to the regional economy. Yet the VEAC report could not even differentiate between a miner's right, a small prospecting licence and a full mining licence. It had no grasp of the scale of economic activity involved. Independent analysis has estimated a loss of more than \$2.5 billion in net present value and the likely loss of more than 1000 jobs. That was calculated when gold was \$2000 an ounce – it is now close to \$6000. The opportunity cost to regional Victoria

is massive. That is before we even consider the impact on apiarists, forestry contractors, firewood collectors, local tourism operators and small businesses who rely on long-stay visitors.

There is also a cultural side to this debate, which the government refuses to acknowledge. The people who use these forests have done so for generations. Their parents and grandparents walked these gullies, prospected in these creeks and camped in these clearings. This is their culture. It matters to them just as deeply as any other cultural tradition. Some have told me that their time in the bush is part of their recovery from trauma, part of how they stay connected and well. In an age where mental health is supposedly a priority the government treats these benefits as irrelevant. We have already seen the consequences in the Grampians, where climbers were wrongly locked out and blamed by Parks Victoria for something they did not do. This bill continues that pattern. It prioritises ideology over evidence. It values the voices of activists over the experience of regional communities. It ignores fire, ignores economic reality and ignores the cultural connection that so many Victorians have to the bush.

The opposition have made it clear: we do not oppose every part of this bill. There are technical provisions that can and should proceed, but we cannot support the central west park lock-ups. I repeat: we cannot support the central west park lock-ups. That is why we moved a reasoned amendment to withdraw the bill and divide it. Let the non-controversial elements pass in one bill. That would be a good idea, wouldn't it? Let the central west proposals be examined properly in another. Victoria deserves land management that is practical, balanced and informed by those who live on the land. It deserves a government that works with communities, not against them. This bill does not meet that standard. I repeat: this bill does not meet that standard. It will damage regional livelihoods, reduce public access, weaken fire preparedness and undermine a proud bush culture that has shaped this state for more than a century. For all those reasons I cannot support it. But I absolutely support our amendments and oppose the Greens amendments.

**Aiv PUGLIELLI** (North-Eastern Metropolitan) (15:05): Victoria has the grim title of being the state with the most land cleared in our nation. About 70 per cent of all our native habitat has been destroyed since colonisation. This makes what we have remaining even more precious. Most of us feel better when we spend some time out in nature, and I think there are very few people who would say that they do not appreciate our beautiful native forests and our national parks. Our wild natural places help connect us to our planet in a way that many of us who live either in the city or in the middle or outer suburbs crave. Being in the forest reminds us of the beauty and the timelessness of our trees, of our native creatures and of the connectedness of these ecosystems. We rely on a healthy environment to thrive, and beyond what we personally gain from spending time in nature, our national parks are critical to the health of our planet and its other inhabitants.

I am very pleased to, alongside my colleagues, support this bill and these laws that will at long last create the Mount Buangor, Pyrenees and Wombat–Lerderderg national parks, as well as conservation parks in Mirboo North, Cobaw and Hepburn. This is a real win for the environment, and it is a victory for the traditional owners, for the communities and for the environmentalists who have been fighting to protect these places for many, many years. These new parks will protect huge swathes of native habitat that are home to hundreds of rare and threatened animals, plants, fungi, entire ecosystems – our biodiversity. These parks will be protected from the destruction caused by logging, by resource exploitation and by neglect. These parks will keep water catchments clean and safe for the nearby regional communities and will empower traditional owner co-management and cultural authority over country. If we want to come back from being pushed to the brink of ecological destruction, if we want to protect the many plants and animals that are facing extinction, then we need to truly commit to preserving and restoring nature in this state. But beyond this bill, our Labor government have said they will not create any more national parks, and that is simply not good enough. We cannot limit our vision in restoring and rewilding our state. There is just too much at stake. Our planet relies on our forests; we must protect them at all costs. There is literally no other option if we want a safe and livable planet for our generations and those that follow us. So alongside my Greens colleagues, I commend this bill to the house.

**Georgie PURCELL** (Northern Victoria) (15:07): I rise to speak on the Parks and Public Land Legislation Amendment (Central West and Other Matters) Bill 2025. Can I just say I am incredibly pleased that I am finally able to make this contribution today. Before I begin I would like to acknowledge the traditional owners of the lands in which these national parks lie and recognise their continuing connection to the forests and the waters of Victoria. It is my hope that we can continue to empower traditional owner co-management and cultural authority over country. I also want to recognise the organisations and individuals who have worked tirelessly for this: Wombat Forestcare and its fearless leader Gayle Osborne; the always brilliant boys at the Victorian National Parks Association Ben Gill, Jordan Crook and Matt Ruchal; the Bendigo and District Environment Council; Mount Cole–Pyrenees Nature Group; and all of the passionate locals who have campaigned for more than decades to protect these forests. I know many of them are here with us in the gallery today, and I want to say to them: this win is yours.

I would like to share just how long this journey has been as well. Victoria's very first state of the environment report, and the third-ever catchment condition report, published in 2008 and 2007 respectively, first highlighted the lack of conservation reserves in central Victoria. The organisations I listed first launched their campaign for the Victorian Environmental Assessment Council, VEAC, to assess these areas in October 2010. It was not until March 2017 that the government finally listened and commissioned VEAC to undertake a central west investigation into these areas of public land. The investigation's final report was published in June 2019. The government's response to that report was tabled in Parliament three years later, in June 2021. It was there where they accepted almost all of the recommendations, including to create the parks being established in this very bill. But it is only now, four years later, that we are finally seeing this legislation come through the Parliament. This has been one of the longest processes to create new national parks in our state's history. The national parks I refer to are the over 65,000 hectares of forest that will soon become the Wombat–Lerderderg, Mount Buangor and Pyrenees national parks. The three new national parks contain over 380 rare and threatened plants, animals and fungi. The threatened species include the greater glider, the brush-tailed phascogale, the powerful owl and the swift parrot.

The forests being reclassified by this bill are largely within my electorate of Northern Victoria. I am incredibly privileged to have the Wombat forest right near where my electorate office is in Woodend. The bill will also expand the Bendigo Regional Park to include Wellsford forest, and in northern Victoria it will also create new conservation parks in Cobaw and Hepburn.

Legislating protection for these areas is just the first step. After decades of logging, these forests need substantial investment in ecological restoration. Sadly, with this government, adequately funding for environmental protection is about as rare as the grassland earless dragon. The now three-and-a-half-years overdue inquiry into ecosystem decline recommended that to ensure active and adaptive land management in Victoria's parks the state government should spend 1 per cent of gross state product. Instead we have seen funding for Parks Victoria, the Office of the Conservation Regulator and other bodies consistently cut. The Auditor-General is currently examining the \$875 million spent on the forestry transition program. We know that very little of the more than \$1 billion spent transitioning Victoria out of native forest logging has been spent on real ecological regeneration.

Investing in our national parks does not just improve ecological outcomes, it also generates economic return for regional communities and for the entire state. Across Victoria our national parks contribute over \$2 billion to the state economy. An independent economic assessment showed that investing the very bare minimum in the creation of these new parks would double the economic return on investment. Local councils, tourism operators and outdoor education companies all see the benefits of investing in nature-based economic opportunities, because when we have well-funded, peaceful national parks, people do visit them.

What people do not want in their national parks is the sound of bullets flying, but thanks to the Allan Labor government that is exactly what they are going to get. Not only does this bill allow for hunting in three new parks but it includes one of the largest expansions of seasonal deer hunting that we have

ever seen. 130,000 hectares of the Errinundra and Snowy River national parks will be open to seasonal deer hunting. This means most public land in eastern Victoria will now be open to it and sit alongside the 1.8 million hectares of state forest already available.

When the minister announced the new hunting expansion, he described it as a win for regional communities, saying that expanding deer hunting means more visitors, more jobs and stronger local economies. Putting my personal views about hunting animals for fun aside for just a moment, this claim completely contradicts an overwhelming amount of evidence. The recent Great Outdoors Taskforce consultation gave us an insight into what people value about protected areas. In East Gippsland shire the number one response from the community is that these places are important for conservation and biodiversity. Number two was for education and learning about nature. Public safety was also a key theme throughout the whole report.

The government is undermining the steps taken by local communities to decide their own economic future. The *Errinundra to Snowy District Community Plan* was developed by the local community and clearly identifies nature-based tourism, including hiking, birdwatching and camping, as the priority for future development in the region. We know that the presence of firearms in national parks reduces visitation and deters the very tourists regional towns depend on. The government constantly refer to the economic benefits from the 58,611 licensed hunters across Victoria, but they ignore the impact those hunters have on the almost 50 million Victorians who visit national parks for literally any other reason at all. Independent polling shows that, when asked what visitors valued most about national parks, 53 per cent cited peace and quiet, while 37 per cent explicitly identified ‘no shooting and no hunting’ as a reason they would visit national parks more often. The government have also argued expanded seasonal deer hunting is an effective way to manage feral deer populations. This too is untrue. The Victorian government’s own deer control program explicitly states recreational hunting alone has not been proven to stop population increases or range spread. There are more humane and more effective ways to reduce introduced species like deer. They just prefer to outsource the job to amateur shooters. I have flagged that I will be moving amendments to remove the expanded hunting provisions in this bill, and I ask that these be circulated now. I note that Mr Bourman and I are moving exact opposite sets of amendments.

**Jeff Bourman:** I’ve withdrawn mine.

**Georgie PURCELL:** I missed that, Mr Bourman. I was going to say we have been agreeing on far too many things recently. I will also be supporting the amendments moved by my crossbench colleagues in the Greens. Although I will be moving to strip all hunting from the bill, I particularly support its removal from Mount Buangor. VEAC did not recommend its inclusion there, and for very, very good reason. As usual the government have announced these drastic changes and given the community and stakeholders no real detail for how it will be managed and particularly how they intend to guarantee the safety of other visitors. The Alpine National Park management plan, which covers these areas, has not been updated since 2016. I will be raising many of these questions during the committee-of-the-whole stage of the bill, and considering the magnitude of my concerns, I hope that the government are in the mood to provide answers to these questions.

The government’s media release for this bill declared they will not be creating any new national parks. I want to make it perfectly clear that I am not accepting that for a moment. Among many other changes, the great forest national park in the Central Highlands and Emerald Link in East Gippsland are projects which do need to happen. I want to make something very, very clear: making these forests national parks is not an automatic or a perfect solution. In her contribution to this bill Ms Bath commented that reclassifying state forest to national park is putting a name on a piece of paper – it does not protect the forest, it does not protect the land; it is simply a reclassification. In a way I agree with those comments. Without investing in real restoration and protection, the change is fairly negligible. The classification itself is not perfect. Much of Victoria’s current public land legislation derives from 19th century legislation and could be considerably improved. I did acknowledge traditional owners and their connection to land at the start of my speech, but beyond acknowledgements we need to ensure

legislation allows for real Indigenous self-determination over the land that they have been custodians of for over 65,000 years. None of this is perfect, but Victoria is the most cleared state in Australia. Our native animals are facing a worsening extinction crisis. The classification of national parks is the best mechanism that we have for long-term protection in front of us right now. In saying that, I commend the bill to the house.

**Gayle TIERNEY** (Western Victoria – Minister for Skills and TAFE, Minister for Water) (15:20): I would like to thank everyone for their contributions on the Parks and Public Land Legislation Amendment (Central West and Other Matters) Bill 2025. This bill is wideranging and addresses a number of changes in relation to public land across Victoria. This debate has been similarly wideranging, and I would like to take this opportunity to clarify some of the concerns that have been put forward. One of the key claims put forward by the opposition is that national parks restrict access and stop people from doing the activities that they love. They claim a large list of activities are either illegal or not permitted, and this simply is not true. National parks are important tourism assets as well as environmental assets. They have an international brand, known as places where visitors can enjoy the incredible natural environment of a state or country. Tourism Research Australia reports that across Australia, visitation to national and state parks has grown by 73 per cent since 2014. We expect that there will be more visitors to these beautiful parts of Victoria following the creation of these national parks, not less.

I will go through a list of all of the activities people will be able to undertake in the new national parks. You can go camping, including dispersed camping with campfire; fishing; hiking and bushwalking; car touring and four-wheel driving; mountain biking; trail bike riding; dog walking; horseriding; and recreational deer hunting by stalking. Other recreational activities will also continue in the nearby and adjoining state forests and regional parks, like prospecting. It is also important to note that we deliberately excluded most of the key prospecting areas from the national park boundaries, keeping them in surrounding regional parks and state forests, where prospecting can be undertaken. We have found the right balance, we believe, to protect what needs to be protected while keeping the land open and accessible for the activities Victorians and visitors love.

Another claim from the opposition that they have raised is that we are not looking after our existing parks well enough to consider adding new ones. Again, this is simply not true. Parks Victoria is working tirelessly to keep our landscape healthy. Parks Victoria treated 1.6 million hectares of land in the 2024–25 financial year to minimise the impact of weeds and pests. That is around 40 per cent of their land estate, and we will continue to back our Parks Victoria staff and support them in their work. The opposition have also claimed that Parks Victoria are not carrying out repairs of their assets. Not only is this factually incorrect but it also ignores the fact that closures at Parks Victoria sites are often due to damage caused by extreme weather events such as fires, storms or flooding; natural hazards, including unstable rocks, trails or trees; seasonal challenges such as flooded, snowy or icy roads; or the delivery of essential works, including infrastructure maintenance, capital projects and conservation programs. We have upgraded and reopened almost 40 sites in the last 12 months, from the Wattle Park tram shelters in the south-eastern suburbs to the Thurra north campground in East Gippsland, the new Erskine Falls lookout platform in the Great Otway National Park and everything in between. These facts are ignored by some members simply to suit their narrative.

The other issue that has been raised by those opposite is firewood access. We aim to carefully manage access to firewood in public forests for domestic purposes in a fair and sustainable manner, with an emphasis on availability for local communities and those who depend on firewood as their primary source of heating. We recognise that firewood is a limited resource with unpredictable availability and that demand can exceed supply in some areas. It requires ongoing and careful management to balance community needs and safety as well as environmental impacts. Domestic firewood for local communities in central west Victoria can be sourced during the firewood collection season from firewood collection areas in state forests in the region and, until 2029, in firewood collection areas in

the proposed regional parks near Wombat–Lerderderg National Park and the Bendigo Regional Park addition.

Some firewood may become available from time to time from land management activities in the new parks, such as removal of storm debris as part of fire management activities, treating hazardous trees or ecological restoration works. In addition, the state and federal governments have various support programs and concessions available for people on low incomes who need to purchase firewood or need assistance with energy costs, and they include the energy assistance program, the Energy Bill Relief Fund, the power saving bonus, the non-mains energy concession and the non-mains utility relief grant scheme. We will continue to support local communities who use firewood as well as keep our environment healthy.

Another concern that was raised by those opposite was in relation to bees and whether apiarists would continue to hold their current licences in the new national parks. I am happy to confirm that there will be no change to existing licences in the new parks. We will continue to support apiarists in their important work supporting a healthy ecosystem and driving regional economies. The opposition also raised concerns about alleged job cuts in Parks Victoria on the front line and alleged funding cuts. I am happy to confirm that since the new CEO has come on board, Parks Victoria has appointed or will be appointing 84 new rangers. This will put more boots on the ground, which of course is a fantastic achievement.

The opposition also expressed concern around the transfer of management responsibilities to the Great Ocean Road Coast and Parks Authority, particularly around operational funding. I am advised that jobs, depots and offices, vehicles, equipment and funding that currently exist within Parks Victoria in the Great Ocean Road area will be transferred to GORCAPA, and this is expected by 1 July next year. I am advised that GORCAPA's operations are principally funded through the revenue generated from land management activities, including caravan parks and commercial leases, supplemented by government appropriations for the operation of local ports and the management of national parks. As required under the act, all revenue is reinvested into the Great Ocean Road Coast and Parks Authority to protect the environment, improve visitor experiences, advance community priorities and enhance local infrastructure and amenities. I am also advised that establishing a sustainable funding model is the next step in the evolution of the authority to ensure that it has the resources needed to deliver all of its responsibilities. The government is committed to delivering a sustainable funding model for the authority and will have more to say about that very soon.

There are also other concerns raised by the Greens here and in the other place, where they claim that recreational deer hunting does not remove enough deer to lead to a reduction in numbers. I can confirm that the recreational deer hunting will be happening alongside deer control programs by Parks Victoria. We are continuing our comprehensive control programs whilst also opening up more opportunities for hunters and growing regional economies. The 2024 deer harvest report estimates 167,600 deer were harvested in 2024. That is an increase of 22 per cent on the estimated deer harvest in 2023 and an 83 per cent increase in the long-term average of 91,100. With more than 45,000 licensed deer hunters across Victoria who contributed over \$200 million to the Victorian economy between 2013 and 2019, it is seen to be important to continue to support these users of the great outdoors. The Greens also raised concerns about how we keep other users of the parks safe when deer hunters are utilising the spaces. I want to point out that there are several national parks already open to hunting, including Baw Baw, Alpine, Lake Eildon and the Mitchell River national parks. In all these parks there are restrictions in place to ensure the safety of all visitors. We want to implement a similar approach in the Snowy River and the Errinundra national parks, and we are employing two additional Parks Victoria rangers for the Gippsland region to support the implementation of that decision.

Parks Victoria will also ensure any required signage is in place to inform visitors where deer hunting is permitted. Information on deer hunting is available to the public on several government websites, notably those of Parks Victoria, the Game Management Authority and the Department of Energy, Environment and Climate Action.

I also wish to take issue with a matter raised by the member for Melbourne in the other place, suggesting that we have backtracked on a promise to create new national parks, including the great forest national park. Other than the central west national parks that we are delivering, I can confirm that this government never promised to create new national parks, and that is simply a fact.

Finally, I just want to raise another issue that has been mentioned by the Greens, and that is the concept of salvage logging, which we again refute. Salvage logging, or logging by stealth, does not exist. Native timber harvesting has ended. To insinuate fire management efforts are logging by stealth is factually incorrect. Strategic fuel breaks are key to reducing the impacts of bushfires on local environments and communities. We engage independent environmental experts to guide us to make sure that we are having the least possible impact on the environment while we are doing the work necessary to ensure their efficacy.

I take this opportunity to thank everyone again for their contributions on this bill, in this chamber and in the other place. I look forward to seeing the progress of this bill to secure a healthier, more accessible environment for every Victorian to enjoy. I understand members will have questions in committee, and I hope that I have answered some of those concerns already in my summing up, but I think that this will be an afternoon where we will agree to disagree on many things. I commend this bill to the house.

**Council divided on amendment:**

*Ayes (17):* Melina Bath, Jeff Bourman, Gaelle Broad, Georgie Crozier, David Davis, Moira Deeming, Renee Heath, Ann-Marie Hermans, David Limbrick, Wendy Lovell, Trung Luu, Bev McArthur, Joe McCracken, Nick McGowan, Evan Mulholland, Rikkie-Lee Tyrrell, Richard Welch

*Noes (22):* Ryan Batchelor, John Berger, Lizzie Blandthorn, Katherine Copsey, Enver Erdogan, Jacinta Ermacora, David Ettershank, Michael Galea, Anasina Gray-Barberio, Shaun Leane, Sarah Mansfield, Tom McIntosh, Rachel Payne, Aiv Puglielli, Georgie Purcell, Harriet Shing, Ingrid Stitt, Jaclyn Symes, Lee Tarlamis, Sonja Terpstra, Gayle Tierney, Sheena Watt

**Amendment negatived.**

**Council divided on motion:**

*Ayes (22):* Ryan Batchelor, John Berger, Lizzie Blandthorn, Katherine Copsey, Enver Erdogan, Jacinta Ermacora, David Ettershank, Michael Galea, Anasina Gray-Barberio, Shaun Leane, Sarah Mansfield, Tom McIntosh, Rachel Payne, Aiv Puglielli, Georgie Purcell, Harriet Shing, Ingrid Stitt, Jaclyn Symes, Lee Tarlamis, Sonja Terpstra, Gayle Tierney, Sheena Watt

*Noes (17):* Melina Bath, Jeff Bourman, Gaelle Broad, Georgie Crozier, David Davis, Moira Deeming, Renee Heath, Ann-Marie Hermans, David Limbrick, Wendy Lovell, Trung Luu, Bev McArthur, Joe McCracken, Nick McGowan, Evan Mulholland, Rikkie-Lee Tyrrell, Richard Welch

**Motion agreed to.**

**Read second time.**

*Instruction to committee*

**The PRESIDENT (15:41):** I have considered the amendments on sheet SMA44C circulated by Dr Mansfield. In my view amendments 1 and 4 are not within the scope of the bill. Therefore an instruction motion pursuant to standing order 14.11 is required.

**Sarah MANSFIELD (Western Victoria) (15:42):** I move:

That it be an instruction to the committee that they have the power to consider an amendment and new clause to the Forests Act 1958 to enable the secretary to enter into agreements and arrangements relating to the prevention and suppression of fires and recovery from fires.

**Melina BATH** (Eastern Victoria) (15:42): We will not be opposing the instruction motion on principle, because that is the common practice in this house, but we certainly do not support the intent of the amendment.

**Gayle TIERNEY** (Western Victoria – Minister for Skills and TAFE, Minister for Water) (15:43): I just wish to advise the house that the government will not be supporting the instruction motion.

**Council divided on motion:**

*Ayes (22):* Melina Bath, Gaelle Broad, Katherine Copsey, Georgie Crozier, David Davis, Moira Deeming, David Ettershank, Anasina Gray-Barberio, Renee Heath, Ann-Marie Hermans, David Limbrick, Wendy Lovell, Trung Luu, Sarah Mansfield, Bev McArthur, Joe McCracken, Nick McGowan, Evan Mulholland, Rachel Payne, Aiv Puglielli, Georgie Purcell, Richard Welch

*Noes (17):* Ryan Batchelor, John Berger, Lizzie Blandthorn, Jeff Bourman, Enver Erdogan, Jacinta Ermacora, Michael Galea, Shaun Leane, Tom McIntosh, Harriet Shing, Ingrid Stitt, Jaclyn Symes, Lee Tarlamis, Sonja Terpstra, Gayle Tierney, Rikkie-Lee Tyrrell, Sheena Watt

**Motion agreed to.**

**Committed.**

*Committee*

**Clause 1 (15:47)**

**Georgie PURCELL:** Minister, are you able to provide an estimated timeline for the creation of management plans for the new national parks?

**Gayle TIERNEY:** It is my understanding it will be within 12 months of them coming into effect.

**Georgie PURCELL:** Could you please clarify if the expansion of recreational hunting will also permit the hunting or lethal control of native dingoes?

**Gayle TIERNEY:** That was the expansion of regional hunting – was that the question?

**Georgie PURCELL:** My question was: will the expansion of recreational hunting within the three new parks include the hunting or lethal control of native dingoes

**Gayle TIERNEY:** No, only deer species will be able to be hunted.

**Georgie PURCELL:** If seasonal recreational deer hunting is permitted, which the bill does allow in parts, how will predator species, including dingoes, be protected from unintended impacts?

**Gayle TIERNEY:** As is the case in all national parks where deer hunting is permitted, it will be an offence to shoot any animal other than deer, including any native wildlife. In addition to the National Parks Act 1975 and Wildlife Act 1975, hunters are also required to abide by the Firearms Act 1996. Significant penalties apply to offences committed under these acts, including the possibility of imprisonment for the most serious offences. Also hunters are required to complete a Victorian firearm safety course. It is also noted that one of the rules in the Firearm Safety Code is to identify one's target beyond all reasonable doubt before shooting.

**Georgie PURCELL:** Thank you, Minister, for the fulsome response. Could you please advise what oversight mechanisms will exist to ensure that ecological objectives of new parks are met?

**Gayle TIERNEY:** Parks Victoria will be responsible for ensuring that the new parks are managed in accordance with the National Parks Act and its ecological objectives. Part of the Parks Victoria conservation program includes monitoring, which is an important aspect of park management. Monitoring enables an understanding of the status of conservation assets and threats and how these change in time and space, which in turn supports decision-making based on evidence and promotes



continuous improvement in effectiveness of management. Parks Victoria will also determine what monitoring may be required in the new parks as part of its broader monitoring program.

**Georgie PURCELL:** Minister, will 1080 poison baits be permitted in the new national parks of Mount Buangor, Pyrenees and Wombat–Lerderderg?

**Gayle TIERNEY:** Parks Victoria delivers invasive species control programs to protect native fauna from predation and competition and habitat damage caused by the introduced animals, including foxes and feral cats. Invasive species control programs for these parks will be developed and implemented in future using the best available science with a range of control methods selected based on need and assessment of risks; they may include the use of 1080 where it is considered appropriate.

**Georgie PURCELL:** How will the government ensure the safety particularly of companion animals in parks where 1080 programs are underway when we know that signage is often difficult to spot and does not effectively deter people from the area? We have had a lot of tragic incidents of companion animals consuming 1080 baits, and of course there is no antidote or solution except for death when this happens.

**Gayle TIERNEY:** Prior to the use of 1080 and PAPP pest animal bait products at a specific site, Parks Victoria staff will conduct a risk assessment to reduce the risk to non-target species, which will include of course assistance dogs. Bait products are usually not deployed in areas of high visitation, including campsites, car parks and formalised tracks and trails. Clear signage is installed when bait products will be used, along with updates to Parks Victoria's website. Assistance dogs would be expected to be on leads and under control of the owner. It would also be expected that they would not be taken outside visitor sites and walking trails. Parks Victoria encourages visitors with assistance dogs to check the latest park information on potential hazards which might affect the dog, including baiting.

**Georgie PURCELL:** What lethal control management methods are permitted in these new national parks and on what animal species?

**Gayle TIERNEY:** As an important part of supporting nature to thrive, Parks Victoria undertakes site-specific evaluation of invasive species risks to inform the most appropriate selection of animal control tools to achieve effective, safe and humane outcomes. The tools to be evaluated and commonly used in other locations for introduced animal control include poison baiting, shooting and trapping. Program design will also consider and determine appropriate control approaches for a range of introduced animals that are established in Victoria, including deer, feral pigs, feral goats, rabbits, foxes and feral cats.

**Georgie PURCELL:** Minister, how does permitting deer hunting in national parks align with the conservation objectives of the National Parks Act 1975?

**Gayle TIERNEY:** Recreational deer hunting by stalking is permitted in several parks under the National Parks Act through specific provisions in the act. They provide additional recreational opportunities in those parks where it is permitted. The *Victorian Deer Control Strategy* recognises that, while providing some benefit, recreational hunting on its own is not an effective means of controlling deer numbers. Recreational hunters collectively kill a considerable number of deer in the course of their recreation. For example, in 2024, as I mentioned in my summing up, an estimated 167,600 deer were killed, including 52,600 on public land; 60 per cent of the sambar deer and 58 per cent of the fallow deer were females. The removal of females can contribute of course to population control. Parks Victoria will continue to carry out deer control programs in national parks, including involving accredited recreational hunters.

**Georgie PURCELL:** Minister, you have touched on this: the government has recognised that recreational hunting is not an effective means of controlling deer numbers. Can you cover off what

alternative methods of control the government is also considering to take both a more humane and a more effective approach to introduced species in these national parks?

**Gayle TIERNEY:** As an important part of supporting nature to thrive, Parks Victoria undertakes site-specific evaluation of invasive species risks to inform the most appropriate selection of animal control tools to achieve effective, safe and humane outcomes. It is expected that Parks Victoria would carry out deer control programs in national parks, including using professional shooters and also involving accredited recreational hunters in accordance with park management priorities.

**Georgie PURCELL:** The minister for this bill stated in the second-reading speech that deer hunting in Errinundra and Snowy River national parks will be subject to conditions to help minimise impacts on other users. What are those conditions, and how will the government reduce impact on other park users?

**Gayle TIERNEY:** The conditions will be included in a notice gazetted under the National Parks Act as an indication of the types of conditions which might apply. The notice, published in the *Victorian Government Gazette* on 7 March 2018 to authorise deer hunting by stalking in specified areas of the Alpine and Baw Baw national parks and in the Avon Wilderness Park and the Tara Range Park, includes conditions prohibiting hunting or the use of firearms, bows or crossbows in or within 100 metres of any camping or picnic area and requiring hunters to keep any firearms or crossbows, unloaded in or within 100 metres of any camping or picnic area. There could also be buffers around other features where the use of firearms would not be permitted, for example along popular walking tracks.

The notice also specifies the time of year when hunting may occur. In the Alpine National Park the season avoids the peak summer holiday period between mid-December and mid-February. In the central-west national parks the government has committed to a hunting season during the cooler months of the year between 1 May and the start of the spring school holidays to avoid peak visitor periods. Also, recreational deer hunting tends by its nature to occur away from areas where there are large numbers of visitors and in the cooler months of the year. Recent deer harvest figures for 2024 show that most recreational hunting occurred in the winter and early spring – June to September.

**Georgie PURCELL:** There are very few rangers in East Gippsland. Is the government going to increase enforcement capabilities in these areas that are now open to hunting?

**Gayle TIERNEY:** There are currently 18 ranger positions in East Gippsland east of the Snowy River. Parks Victoria is getting back to basics with a focus on core land and conservation and asset management. Parks Victoria has appointed or will appoint an additional 84 rangers statewide, as I mentioned in my summing up; recruitment is underway for an additional 34 rangers, with another 50 to follow. This will mean more local opportunities to deliver on local priorities, work more closely with communities and partners and increase engagement and education capacity in the regions. In addition to authorised Parks Victoria rangers, authorised officers in the Game Management Authority and Department of Energy, Environment and Climate Action (DEECA) may also carry out enforcement activities in national parks, as they do now.

**Georgie PURCELL:** Minister, considering the major changes to visitor activities both in this bill and recently announced, will the 2016 Alpine National Park management plan be updated?

**Gayle TIERNEY:** Parks Victoria will consider what amendments may be required to the *Greater Alpine National Parks Management Plan* of 2016 to recognise deer hunting in parts of the Errinundra and Snowy River national parks.

**Georgie PURCELL:** This bill revokes the native game sanctuaries in Mount Cole, Langi Kal Kal and Mount Mistake. It expands deer hunting by stalking in the Errinundra and Snowy River national parks and allows it in the three newly created national parks. What is the total area this bill opens for deer hunting?

**Gayle TIERNEY:** It is my understanding that this bill will open up approximately 140,000 hectares for deer hunting.

**Georgie PURCELL:** What consultation took place to inform the decision to open that 140,000 hectares of public land to deer hunting?

**Gayle TIERNEY:** The government supports responsible and safe hunting and the additional opportunities the bill will provide for deer stalkers to enjoy recreational deer hunting by stalking in several national parks. The revocation of the game sanctuaries in central west Victoria, including the Mount Cole native game sanctuary, was part of the Victorian Environmental Assessment Council central west investigation. The introduction of deer hunting into those two national parks reflects a longstanding desire of recreational deer hunters to access those parks, as I understand it.

**Georgie PURCELL:** Minister, have there been ecological or public safety assessments of the implications of allowing deer hunting in these high-visitation areas?

**Gayle TIERNEY:** There have been no specific studies. However, recreational deer hunting tends by its nature to occur away from areas with large numbers of visitors and in the cooler months of the year, as I have previously outlined. It should be noted that hundreds and thousands of deer hunter days are conducted each year without incident. In 2024 deer hunters were active 354,500 days, 49.5 per cent of which occurred on public land exclusively and accounted for 31.4 per cent of the total recreational harvest. The hunting of deer and the use of firearms is highly regulated under the Wildlife Act 1975 and the Firearms Act 1996, and the Firearms Act in particular provides specified offences relating to the safe storage, possession, carriage and use of firearms, including using a firearm in a dangerous manner. Hunting at night, including under a spotlight, is not permitted. Of course anyone in breach of the law can be subject to significant fines and/or confiscation of equipment and/or risk of imprisonment.

**Georgie PURCELL:** What additional resources or measures are being taken to ensure the safety of other visitors who are not hunters?

**Gayle TIERNEY:** Again, this is a good question. Hunting in the new central west national parks and in the Errinundra and Snowy River national parks will be subject to conditions to help minimise potential impacts on other park users. For example, where deer hunting by stalking is permitted in parts of the Alpine National Park, the use of firearms is prohibited within 100 metres of any camping or picnic area, and there may also be buffers around other features where the use of firearms would not be permitted – for example, along popular walking tracks. A number of these points I made in my summing up. Again, recreational deer hunting tends by its nature to occur in areas where there are not large numbers of visitors and in cooler months of the year, and Parks Victoria will ensure that there is appropriate signage in place to inform visitors where deer hunting is permitted. Information on deer hunting is available to the public on several government websites that I have previously mentioned.

**Georgie PURCELL:** Minister, part 8, division 5, of the bill allows Parks Victoria to issue riparian management licences for private landholders who adjoin the Liwik Barring Landscape Conservation Area. How many licences will be issued, and can the minister confirm licences will not allow grazing or other agricultural activity?

**Gayle TIERNEY:** Riparian management licences may be issued over the three streamside areas being added to the landscape conservation area, which are narrow and linear in nature. A licence may be issued for the purpose of maintaining or improving the riparian environment of the area – for example, managing weeds – or other purposes related to protecting or managing the area. The licence will enable the licensee to manage adjacent public land for conservation, such as undertaking weed management and revegetation with local native species. In some cases, the licence could include a special condition to allow grazing as a management tool to achieve a particular management objective – for example, pulse grazing to control certain weed species. It is envisaged that 15 licences will be issued in the first instance, six of which include a special grazing condition. In no cases would

the licence authorise cattle to access the waterway, which would be fenced, and in no cases would they be authorised for general grazing or other agricultural activity.

**Georgie PURCELL:** Minister, I think you covered off this detail in your answer just now, but for the sake of clarity, could you just say where the licences will be and how much area they will cover?

**Gayle TIERNEY:** It is envisaged that there will be 15 licences. That includes 11 in the Little Yarra River streamside area and four in the Britannia Creek streamside area. Of the 230 hectares being added to the landscape conservation area through the bill, approximately 34 hectares will be licensed, about 14.5 per cent of the total area. This includes 3.4 hectares with a special condition to allow grazing as a management tool.

**Georgie PURCELL:** I just have a few more questions left in relation to traditional owner arrangements. How will traditional owner knowledge and practice be integrated into management plans for the new parks and conservation reserves created under this bill?

**Gayle TIERNEY:** Relevant traditional owner groups will be asked to be directly involved in the development of the management plans for the new parks. This will provide one opportunity to integrate traditional owner knowledge and practice into future park management. Parks Victoria will also ensure any obligations under any relevant recognition and settlement agreement regarding management plans are met. The process of integrating traditional owner knowledge and practice into park management is of course an ongoing one, and this will be the case with these new parks. The proposed public land bill will enable traditional owners to be involved in the management of public land, including national parks, in a variety of ways.

**Georgie PURCELL:** How does the bill ensure the protection of cultural heritage sites within the newly created or expanded park areas under this legislation?

**Gayle TIERNEY:** For Aboriginal cultural heritage sites, the Aboriginal Heritage Act 2006 and the Aboriginal Heritage Regulations 2018 will continue to apply regardless of land status. For non-Aboriginal cultural heritage sites, the Heritage Act 2017 will continue to apply regardless of the land status. For those parks managed under the National Parks Act, the act and the National Parks Regulations 2024 will apply, and for the new regional park areas managed under the Crown Land (Reserves) Act 1978, regulations under that act will apply.

**Georgie PURCELL:** Will traditional owners be able to carry out cultural burning, cultural uses or other customary practices within the parks?

**Gayle TIERNEY:** Cultural burns could be carried out in the new parks in conjunction with Forest Fire Management Victoria, as they are now on public land, in line with the Code of Practice for Bushfire Management on Public Land 2025. The department – that is, DEECA – supports traditional owners to practice cultural fire on relevant public land, including national parks, where the cultural burn is carried out in accordance with the fire provisions of the Forests Act. There are opportunities for traditional owner groups to secure funding through the Victorian government's traditional owner grants program. Cultural uses and other customary practices could also be carried out. This could include activities which would otherwise not be permitted under the relevant legislation but where there are exemptions under the relevant regulations or the National Parks Act or where the activity is being carried out in accordance with natural resource agreements under the relevant recognition and settlement agreement.

**Georgie PURCELL:** What resources are being allocated to enable traditional owner groups to assume or participate in management roles in the new parks?

**Gayle TIERNEY:** The initial funding that has been provided to five traditional owner groups whose country includes part or all of the central-west parks will assist with their involvement in planning for when the parks are created. Additional funding will be sought through relevant processes

so that traditional owners can be involved in the future management of the parks to the extent that they wish to be.

**Georgie PURCELL:** Finally, how does this bill align with broader treaty processes underway?

**Gayle TIERNEY:** The bill has been developed separately to the process developed by the Statewide Treaty, but it is aligned with the whole of Victorian government treaty alignment principles, which seek to ensure the government meets its good faith obligations under the Advancing the Treaty Process with Aboriginal Victorians Act 2018 and the *Treaty Negotiation Framework*. In particular the bill does not aim to pre-empt or limit what may be achieved through the Statewide Treaty, including future chapters and traditional owner treaties, and is not precluded from future adaptation or updates as treaty progresses in Victoria.

**Melina BATH:** I have a number of questions, and I am happy, if you are happy, to ask them in clause 1 of the bill. Just following up from your comments that you provided in the summing-up, you said 1.6 million hectares of national parks were being treated for weeds and pests. Can you define what ‘treated’ means?

**Gayle TIERNEY:** You would have gleaned, and you would know also, that in terms of managing the parks it is a range of activities depending on what the invasive flora might be or indeed what the invasive animal may be. There are different regimes depending on what it is.

**Melina BATH:** This is going to be long, so I will try and make my questions as brief as possible; I am looking forward to some good answers. How does the government document what weeds are treated, what area is treated and what the level of success of control is? Is there some report or document that the public can see or that you can table that responds to weed treatment and pest treatment success and area?

**Gayle TIERNEY:** That is incredibly operational, and I will seek advice.

I am informed that that information is available in the annual report of Parks Victoria.

**Melina BATH:** I want to go to comments in relation to what is in and what is out of the new national parks that are being formed. I am not verballing you, Minister, I am responding to some of your comments, and I just want to drill down into this. When it was mentioned that you can go camping in a dispersed fashion with a campfire, is that exactly as it is now in a state forest, or are there dispersed, as the government might call it, camping sites with fireplaces that are designated by government?

**Gayle TIERNEY:** Ms Bath, I am advised that it is the same.

**Melina BATH:** So in the new national parks, basically a family can go in and light a fire anywhere they choose to, as they can now? Is it exactly the same as it is now in the state forests, or are there any parameters on this, Minister?

**Gayle TIERNEY:** I am advised that, in terms of those areas that are currently state forests that become national parks, that will remain the same. And of course it is subject to fire regulations as well.

**Melina BATH:** In terms of the government’s response to the VEAC report – and looking at page 13, and I will get to that later – it states that you can walk your horse along a major road – this is the government agreeing to this in the national park:

horse riding on formed roads and tracks specified by the land manager (see note 1)

So you can walk your horse in the new national park, but you cannot camp with horses, and they are not allowed to graze or feed in the national park. Is that correct?

**Gayle TIERNEY:** Horseriding will be permitted in the new national and conservation parks on roads and tracks where it is currently permitted, including in parts of the existing Lerderderg State Park which will be included in the Wombat–Lederberg National Park.

**Melina BATH:** My question was: can you camp overnight? You can walk your horse through it. Can you camp overnight?

**Gayle TIERNEY:** Yes.

**Melina BATH:** In relation to the walking of dogs through the newly formed national parks, the recommendation in the government's response to the VEAC report says they may be kept on a lead in a specified area. Could you explain exactly what you can and cannot do with a dog in these new national parks?

**Gayle TIERNEY:** Dogs on leads will be permitted on vehicle and walking tracks and in picnic areas and campgrounds in those parts of the new parks where dogs are currently permitted. These areas will be designated under the national parks regulations as has occurred for parts of the existing Lerderderg State Park which again will be included in the Wombat–Lerderderg National Park.

**Melina BATH:** From my take then they are restricted in this new formation. I am going to ask in relation to searching for minerals, and I mean that in terms of tourist fossicking. Is that allowed in these three new national parks?

**Gayle TIERNEY:** The answer is no.

**Melina BATH:** Can we just confirm things like trail bike riding? It states here 'on formed roads and tracks that are open to the public'. In the past someone could go, we will say, off-road. Is it possible for people to go off-road on a trail bike in the new national parks?

**Gayle TIERNEY:** No.

**Melina BATH:** The same with mountain bike riding and cycling – it says 'on formed roads'. Are people able to go mountain bike riding on non-formed roads – we will say making their own way on stony ground – in the new national parks?

**Gayle TIERNEY:** In terms of off-road four-wheel driving and trail, it is illegal to drive off-road on any public land, including state forests and national parks. Vehicles are required to stay on the tracks. Four-wheel driving and trail bike riding are permitted on tracks open to the public in national parks and will continue to be permitted on tracks in the new national parks open to the public, subject of course to seasonal road closures. Four-wheel driving is a popular activity in many of the larger existing national parks, in particular the Alpine National Park. What was the other matter?

**Melina BATH:** Mountain bike riding, trail bike riding, off-road vehicle driving.

**Gayle TIERNEY:** It is the same. The same principles apply.

**Melina BATH:** Minister, I want to just turn to beekeeping. I was very interested that you said in your summing up that the operation of placing beehives in the state forest will be continuing. You mentioned that current licences will continue and existing licences will continue. But when those current and existing licences expire, will the government permit the beehives to continue – that is, does the government have any intention of stopping or cancelling the rolling over, the renewal, of existing licences for beehives on public land in these new national parks?

**Gayle TIERNEY:** A couple of things, Ms Bath: beekeeping will continue to be permitted in the new national and conservation parks and the addition of the Bendigo Regional Park and will continue to be administered under the Land Act 1958. Existing licences are not affected, and applications for new sites will be considered on their merits as they currently are. The Victorian government is committed to a viable and productive beekeeping industry and recognises the important and vital contribution beekeepers make to the economy, agriculture, the community and of course native forest management. DEECA continues to support the beekeeping industry and recently waived licence fees for the burnt apiary sites affected by the 2020 bushfires in the Grampians and the Little Desert national parks for two years until the next invoicing date of 1 July 2027.

A series of focused, face-to-face joint discussions between the Victorian government and industry representatives, including the Victorian Apiarists' Association, is being proposed as a way forward to resolve key matters raised by the industry after the bushfires. These include issues such as the varroa destructor mite and opportunities for communication between the industry, Parks Victoria and other government department representatives following the cessation of the Apiculture on Public Land Engagement Group. It is anticipated that these workshops will be held later this year.

The apiculture on public land policy was developed with the industry in 2013 and ensures continued secure access and streamlined administration of apiculture on public land. It is supported by comprehensive licensing provisions inserted into the Land Act in 2016. New applications for apiary sites are assessed on a case-by-case basis, in line with the longstanding policy of licence conditions. There is no evidence that DEECA staff intend to cancel any current apiary licences in any DEECA region. We fully support this industry. It is absolutely critical to our agriculture industry.

**Melina BATH:** I completely support that position. In rounding out this discussion on that, there are two things. One, will the government consider bringing back the apiculture on public land group? It has got an interesting name, but I will not give you the acronym. That is the first question. And in relation to the national park at Wilsons Promontory, there has been concern that some of the licences there now will not be renewed. Can the minister then state – to all, very positive news – that they will be reinstated? That is a really important one for apiculturists down there.

**Gayle TIERNEY:** I will seek advice on the Wilsons Promontory issue. In terms of the public land engagement group, I understand that it was ceased. I am not sure about what the circumstances were around that, but as I understand it there are communications going on between Parks Victoria and the industry and government representatives. As I said, they are going to be conducting workshops later this year, and I imagine that there will be frank and fearless discussions about what the composition of any stakeholder group might be going forward. I will just check on Wilsons Prom.

I am advised that there are consultations and discussions going on with the beekeepers at Wilsons Promontory, similar to the wider discussions that are going on across the state. They will continue, and progress will be made.

**Melina BATH:** I am actually seeking confirmation that the ongoing licences or the locations will continue on. Beekeepers have told me about their very important work in, we will say, the off-season. They are often used up on the Murray for industry and horticulture; also in the off-season they come down and have a rest at a national park and rejuvenate their hives. This is a really important aspect, and you have identified that and are in agreement with that, but it is also important that we utilise those great national parks like Wilsons Promontory.

**Gayle TIERNEY:** I will need to take that on notice, Ms Bath.

**Melina BATH:** I will just move back now. I appreciate the conversation around some of your points, although I will raise another couple later on, but in relation to VEAC on the economic and recreational impact, can the minister provide evidence to support the VEAC's claim that converting state forests into national parks – and this is in the document – increases tourism and creates jobs? Given that the historical data over the past 25 years suggests otherwise, where has the government actually accessed evidence to support VEAC's claim?

**Gayle TIERNEY:** The national park brand is a significant national and international drawcard. National parks already contribute significantly to local and regional economies across the state. Given the wide range of recreational activities which will continue in the new national parks, their close proximity to Melbourne and the increased profile generated by national park branding, the new parks will complement the other attractions of the region such as historic towns, wineries and hot springs. Overall, it is expected that the new parks will generate greater tourism and economic activity by drawing an increased number of visitors to the region.

**Melina BATH:** I think you said the ‘national park brand’. Can you explain what that means? When you say ‘branding’, I would also appreciate an approximation of what the cost is to rebrand something from the government, which is the taxpayer. Could you provide some context on that, please?

**Gayle TIERNEY:** Again, I would have to take that on notice because it is a statewide question.

**Melina BATH:** Has the department conducted any independent economic modelling to verify VEAC’s projections on tourism growth and employment outcomes?

**Gayle TIERNEY:** No.

**Melina BATH:** Why has VEAC recommended restricting or removing key recreational activities, such as prospecting, despite identifying that recreation of that nature – prospecting and fossicking – is certainly a major economic driver in the central west region?

**Gayle TIERNEY:** Recreational prospecting is generally not permitted in national parks, with some exceptions. In accordance with the government’s response to VEAC’s *Central West Investigation: Final Report*, it will also not be permitted in the new national conservation parks but will be permitted in the Bendigo Regional Park addition. In framing its response to the VEAC recommendations, the government specifically provided additional opportunities for recreational prospecting in central west Victoria by not accepting the recommendations to expand the Greater Bendigo National Park and instead including the proposed addition in the Bendigo Regional Park and including part of what VEAC recommended as the Wombat–Lerderderg National Park in a new Barkstead Regional Park. Do you follow?

**Melina BATH:** Yes. Thank you.

**Gayle TIERNEY:** Can I just say overall there are substantial areas of public land available for recreational prospecting in the central west and broader region outside the national conservation parks – for example, in the recommended regional parks, state forest and historic reserves. These available areas contain extensive goldfield areas.

**Melina BATH:** The Prospectors and Miners Association of Victoria will argue very strongly that in actual fact the area that is being converted into national parks is indeed a very suitable prospecting region and it has been used for a long, long time. I ask in relation to that: when there are specific rules that you need to have a mining licence – whether you fossick, you still need a mining licence, and there are rules and regulations with respect to that – why would the tourist prospector and fossicker not be allowed to do that in these new national parks? I go to the point where I will, in the right clause, move an amendment to include that in section 32D, where other national parks do have the provision for the minister, if that minister sees fit under the right conditions, to allow prospecting. Why would the government not include that in this area, noting the very superficial nature of prospecting and fossicking?

**Gayle TIERNEY:** Recreational prospecting is generally not permitted in national parks, with seven exceptions out of 45 existing national parks. These exceptions are set out in section 32D of the National Parks Act 1975. The activity will also not be permitted in the new central west national parks in accordance with the government’s response, as I have said, to the VEAC final report. Overall, there are substantial areas of public land available for recreational prospecting in the central west and broader region outside the national parks, including regional parks, state forest and historic reserves, which I have already mentioned. These areas contain extensive goldfield areas. In making its recommendations VEAC took into account the location of goldfields and noted that the recommended Mount Buangor National Park is of little interest for recreational prospecting. The most prospective parts of the Pyrenees range are in the recommended regional park, state forest and historic reserves adjoining the Pyrenees National Park, and recreational prospecting would be allowed in those areas.

Many goldfields in the recommended regional parks in the Wombat forest would remain available for recreational prospecting. In addition, in framing its response to the VEAC recommendations the



government specifically provided additional opportunities for recreational prospecting in central west Victoria. It did not accept VEAC's recommendation to expand Greater Bendigo National Park by 3152 hectares and instead included the proposed addition of Bendigo Regional Park, where recreational prospecting will be permitted. It included part of the VEAC recommended Wombat–Lerderderg National Park in the new Barkstead Regional Park of 4855 hectares, where recreational prospecting will be permitted. Overall, the areas becoming unavailable for recreational prospecting through the creation of new national parks represent approximately 1 per cent of the public land available for this activity statewide, and most of the area being made unavailable to prospecting does not overlap with the goldfields. Also, I should mention it was Ryan Smith in 2013 who decided against having larger prospecting tools – more than small picks, axes et cetera – in national parks if it is permitted at all.

**Melina BATH:** Touché, Minister. But on behalf of the prospectors and miners, they cannot see the sense in what is happening here. Given the fact that on so many occasions they actually remove rubbish, rusty old whatevers, out of the bush and take it away, it just seems like an absolute travesty on their behalf. I want to understand: has the government ever looked at the Alan Moran Regulation Economics report that estimated the \$2.8 billion cost to the Victorian economy from VEAC's recommendation, and in doing so, and understanding the current gold price, does the government acknowledge the lost opportunity and cost of excluding areas from future mining exploration in these areas?

**Gayle TIERNEY:** Again, this is a very operational question, and I will seek advice.

It is the same answer that I have already given you. I understand that the Prospectors and Miners Association of Victoria consultant economist claims the net present value loss of the VEAC recommendations would be in the magnitude of et cetera, et cetera, and then I gave you an answer that said the national park brand is a significant national and international drawcard, et cetera, et cetera. I do not have any further comment to make in relation to that.

**Melina BATH:** In relation to the VEAC process, there was a consultative process, and in that consultative process 3000 submissions were lodged. Going through those submissions, 66 per cent of those submissions actually state that they are opposed to the formation of these national parks in the central west. Did the government give any consideration to these submissions when it adopted, almost entirely, the VEAC report?

**Gayle TIERNEY:** What I can say is that it was a two year investigation that included extensive consultation with a wide range of stakeholders and the community, including targeted meetings with various stakeholders; 11 drop-in sessions in regional towns in the investigation area; public meetings in Trentham and Lancefield; and two opportunities to provide formal submissions, initially on notice of the investigation and subsequently on the release of the draft proposals paper. VEAC also established a community reference group to provide advice to the council on the investigation in accordance with the Victorian Environmental Assessment Council Act 2001. This included representatives of the Prospectors and Miners Association of Victoria, Four Wheel Drive Victoria, Bushwalking Victoria, Central Victorian Apiarists Association and Victorian Farmers Federation (VFF) as well as two local councils and several conservation groups. VEAC's recommendations to government were informed by what they heard through the consultations and advice and careful consideration of the important environmental, social and cultural values of the area. Recreational opportunities in the region were key considerations in the investigation.

**Melina BATH:** Minister, at the Bendigo summit in March 2024 the Premier said:

I will never put a padlock on our public forest.

However, this bill restricts multi-use forest access, and that does not align with the Premier's statement. What is the rationale behind the Premier saying one thing and this bill doing another?

**Gayle TIERNEY:** The shadow environment minister raised in her contribution to the debate on the bill in the Assembly that the Premier had stated at the Bendigo bush summit exactly what you have mentioned. In response, the new national parks will not lock up our public forests. They will provide a wide range of opportunities for visitors to enjoy them. Most recreational activities will continue to be enjoyed in the parks, including walking, picnicking, nature observation, fishing, camping, car touring and four-wheel driving, trail bike riding, mountain biking, horse riding, dog walking on leads and seasonal deer hunting by stalking. National parks across the state welcome millions of visitors each year. Indeed Parks Victoria records that in 2022–23 national parks and other parks and reserves in Victoria welcomed approximately 90 million visitors, contributing significantly to local and regional economies.

**Melina BATH:** On this point we will have to disagree – and I will move on – because there is exclusion of activities and restrictions on activities. I will go to the creation of the national parks and look more at Parks Victoria. The government has in the last few years cut full-time park rangers, and through investigation I have researched and found 144 full-time park rangers being cut. You have said that there are going to be 84 new park rangers that the current minister is installing. That is still only 60 per cent of what was cut. How will Parks Victoria manage an extra 65,000 hectares when rangers have overall net declined?

**Gayle TIERNEY:** With respect to the public land estate managed by Parks Victoria, there has been very little change over the past 10 years, with the figure remaining around 4.1 million in terms of national parks, and the National Parks Act annual report 2014–15 records the area of national parks as nearly 2.905 million hectares compared to 2.915 million hectares in 2024–25, a change of approximately 10,000 hectares – certainly not a 20 per cent increase. The Parks Victoria budget comprises ongoing operational funding and fixed-term initiative funding – that is, core funding and project funding. The level of initiative funding to Parks Victoria varies each year based on the Victorian government and departmental priorities. As such, Parks Victoria's total revenue and net result, as published in its annual report, varies each year. These variances can be misinterpreted as reductions in core funding. Government funding of Parks Victoria has increased significantly in the past 10 years. Funding in June 2015 was \$161.096 million, and funding in June 2025 was \$265.507 million. Staffing numbers in June 2015 were 957 full-time equivalent. This increased in June 2025 to 1054.8 FTE, which includes 505 rangers, including casuals. Parks Victoria is getting back to basics with a focus on core land conservation and asset management. There are fewer executive roles, a flatter structure, clearer accountabilities for faster decisions by empowered teams, and stronger place-based delivery. Since the new CEO was appointed, as I mentioned in my summing up, we have appointed or will appoint an additional 84. I think I went into a breakdown of how that was occurring in a previous response. This will mean more local opportunities to deliver on priorities, more close work with communities and partners and increased engagement and education capacity in the regions.

**Melina BATH:** I am reading a different set of annual reports to you, because Parks Victoria spent \$2.82 million in 2024–25, which was a decline of 4 per cent after we adjust for CPI on what Parks Victoria spent under a former Liberal and National government in 2013–14, after there had been an increase of management over the last decade. In effect there has been a decline in spending with an increase in per capita, and over the past decade employee numbers have increased by 27 per cent – 1145 in 2023–24. The increase was 43 per cent for executives and managers with only a 3 per cent increase in field rangers. Parks Victoria has too many suits and too few boots. We have yet more national parks to be looked after, and they need to be effectively looked after.

**Gayle TIERNEY:** I think on this one, Ms Bath, we are going to have to agree to disagree. In addition to all of that, there have been structural changes in Parks Victoria recently, and I understand that there are much flatter structures that are in play.

**Melina BATH:** You know I have nothing against the current CEO and feel there have to be some changes made. In terms of the KordaMentha review of Parks Victoria, will that be made public in any way? If so, what parts will be made public? I guess I am asking the minister to make it public.

**Gayle TIERNEY:** Ms Bath, I will take that on notice.

**Melina BATH:** Will the minister commit to increasing the number of field staff in these regional areas to improve on-ground park management and fire mitigation? I have got a series of questions about fire mitigation and protection.

**Gayle TIERNEY:** From our perspective, we already have, and I have indicated that to you in previous responses. Do you want to go on to fire?

**Melina BATH:** We will look at the national parks at the moment. But can the minister guarantee that local CFA brigades and Forest Fire Management Victoria will retain full access for fire preventative works on both the new national parks that will be formed and then the other smaller parks that will be created by this bill?

**Gayle TIERNEY:** I will come back to you momentarily on some of the matters you have just raised, but I think it is also important to note that the secretary of DEECA will remain responsible under the Forest Act 1958 for the prevention and suppression of fire on public land, including parks, under the National Parks Act 1975. This will not change when the new central west parks are created, and there will be no change to the way government agencies acquit their responsibilities. Bushfire risk will continue to be managed under the Department of Energy, Environment and Climate Action's strategic, risk-based approach, and according to the code of practice for bushfire management on public land, relevant agencies will be consulted on fire management activities in the parks as necessary. There will be no reduction in firefighting capacity in Forest Fire Management Victoria because of the creation of new parks.

**Melina BATH:** Great. Has the fire risk assessment been completed for each of the proposed park areas, and will that be published before commencement of any and all mitigation work – that is, fuel reductions or mechanical mitigation?

**Gayle TIERNEY:** I am advised that land tenure does not change any of that.

**Melina BATH:** Given that Victoria's fuel-driven bushfire risk is primarily influenced by vegetation load and then structure in the forest, what mitigation activities are formally described as fuel management delivery, and how will the government ensure that the new national parks are managed to reduce fuel-driven risk through effective management?

**Gayle TIERNEY:** The land tenure does not matter in this, I am advised.

**Melina BATH:** I will ask it a different way: how will the new parks be managed to mitigate fuel-driven risk, considering the restrictions on ecological thinning, mechanical treatments and access track maintenance that may arise from this reclassification?

**Gayle TIERNEY:** There is no difference. It is the same as what occurs now.

**Melina BATH:** When were the most recent overall fuel-hazard assessments conducted, and when will the updates on these new national parks be published?

**Gayle TIERNEY:** I would need to take that on notice, Ms Bath.

**Melina BATH:** While you are there – thank you – what is the current fuel load across the three new national parks, and how will it be monitored annually? Also, how does this government justify using recently burnt areas as evidence of reduced risk when dense undergrowth increases fuel ladders? The government uses in its Safer Together program the fact that recent bushfires are integrated into the assessment of its Safer Together residual risk.

**Gayle TIERNEY:** Again, regardless of tenure, we will always work towards making sure that bushfire risk is mitigated.

**Melina BATH:** Given that the Safer Together policy has only resulted in a 1.6 per cent annual fuel reduction over the last 10 years through planned burning and/or mechanical burning, compared to the 2.2 million hectares lost in wildfire/bushfire over the last 10 years, what targets will apply to the new national parks to ensure that fuel-driven risk is meaningfully reduced? That not only applies to flora and fauna but also then reduces risk to local communities.

**Gayle TIERNEY:** Again, we will always work towards mitigating against fires. Vegetation issues are just one part of the regime that is implemented regardless.

**Melina BATH:** I want to confirm that the CFA and Forest Fire Management Victoria will retain full, unrestricted access for suppression operation fuel management delivery, including bulldozer lines, water points and strategic fuel breaks and mechanical breaks, with any change in this bill.

**Gayle TIERNEY:** What occurs at the moment will continue to occur.

**Melina BATH:** We are in one of the most fire-prone states in the world. I want to understand how the government, with this Safer Together policy, is actually able to say that it is protecting Victorians and indeed will protect these new areas when we are just seeing fuel loads driven up and up and up, and I will say, specifically in these new declared parks and settings? How can the minister assure us that Victorians are safe?

**Gayle TIERNEY:** There is no change. The secretary of DEECA retains the statutory responsibility under the Forests Act for the prevention and control of fire in parks under the National Parks Act, regardless of who is managing the parks. Parks Victoria staff transferring to different areas does not change anything.

**Melina BATH:** I will ask another couple of questions and then I am happy to return in a moment. I would like to turn to the Great Ocean Road and Environs Protection Act 2020, and you made a couple of comments in your summing up that Parks will transfer or has transferred – and I think it comes into effect on 1 November this year, so we have passed that date – assets et cetera to the Great Ocean Road Coast and Parks Authority (GORCAPA). I want to drill down into this a little bit and understand the new land management strategy and how it will affect public access to traditional recreation areas along the Great Ocean Road. That is my first one in this series.

**Gayle TIERNEY:** So the land management strategy is prepared by the authority and will set out the long-term direction, strategies and priorities for the protection, management and use of the Great Ocean Road coast and parks managed by the authority. The strategy is intended to be a comprehensive, forward-thinking document that will align with and complement the Great Ocean Road strategic framework plan, which covers the broader Great Ocean Road region. The strategy must be consistent with the legislation under which the land is managed and any other legislation applying to the land and the government policies applying to that land. It must also address any matters specified by the minister in a ministerial direction or in a statement of obligations.

**Melina BATH:** Has the funding agreement been signed between DEECA and GORCAPA ahead of the transition? I wanted to just kind of understand the transfer of assets – so we will say buildings, the toilet block et cetera – and then staff and the management of those assets and funding of staff. Can you unpack how that operates and who will be responsible and the funding stream for that management?

**Gayle TIERNEY:** The transfer of direct on-ground field management of parks under the National Parks Act within the Great Ocean Road coast and parks from Parks Victoria to the authority will see the jobs, depots and offices, vehicles, equipment and funding that currently exist within Parks Victoria for National Parks Act land within the Great Ocean Road coast and parks transfer to the authority, which is expected to occur by 1 July next year. Parks Victoria and the authority are working closely

to build the authority's capability and plan to coordinate the transfer of staff and resourcing from Parks Victoria to the authority to enable a smooth transition for the authority in taking on this operational role.

**Melina BATH:** In terms of GORCAPA, then GORCAPA will inherit responsibility for maintaining that infrastructure such as campgrounds, visitor centres and walking tracks previously managed by Parks? That is my first question in that. And then: how many parks staff will be transferred to GORCAPA?

**Gayle TIERNEY:** It is expected that the authority will deliver on-ground field management services in the national park land that it is responsible for by 1 July. Parks Victoria will continue to provide direct field management services to the authority up until direct on-the-ground field management of national park land within the Great Ocean Road coast and parks has transferred from Parks Victoria to the authority. In terms of the specifics with the number of staff, I do not have that information available, but I can advise you, just in terms of conversations that I have in my electorate, that it seems to be a pretty seamless exercise.

**Melina BATH:** This is a little bit further from my patch, Minister, so this might sound like a simple question, but how is GORCAPA and the assets, the maintenance, the funding for them and the staff framed? Is it framed in an annual report? Is that publicly available? How is it acquitted back to budget funding? How is there transparency around this process, maintenance of assets and staff et cetera?

**Gayle TIERNEY:** As required under the act all revenue is reinvested into the Great Ocean Road coast and parks to protect the environment, improve visitor experiences, advance community priorities and enhance local infrastructure and amenities. The authority can also request funding via the annual state budget process. For example, in the 2025–26 state budget it received operational funding. Establishing a sustainable funding model is the next step – I think I mentioned that previously – in the evolution of the authority to ensure that it has the resources needed to deliver on all of its responsibilities. The government is committed to delivering a sustainable funding model for the authority, and we will have more to say soon.

**Melina BATH:** I do not still have a clear picture about the reporting. Is there a report to Parliament?

**Gayle TIERNEY:** Yes, there will be an annual report, Ms Bath.

**Melina BATH:** Thank you; I appreciate that. How does this bill ensure that tourism operators and residents are consulted before changes to land use or access are made, so there is that interaction with the local tourism and the local residents? I will ask that question.

**Gayle TIERNEY:** It will be GORCAPA that engages with them. Again, through fairly recent conversations with some local councils as well as community members who are engaged in community activity – they have been engaged and have been satisfied with that level of engagement on a variety of things. As you probably know, there is a lot happening on the Great Ocean Road with the Geelong City Deal, so it is almost 24/7 the engagement that is occurring.

**Melina BATH:** Minister, in terms of that timeline for the first land management strategy to be developed and approved under this framework, what is that timeline and what is the strategic framework plan? When will it be reviewed, how regularly, and how will performance be measured?

**Gayle TIERNEY:** The land management strategy, I think I have already mentioned, is prepared by the authority and will set out the long-term directions and the strategies and priorities for the protection, management and use of the Great Ocean Road coast and parks managed by the authority. It is intended to be a comprehensive, forward-thinking document that will align and complement the Great Ocean Road strategic framework plan, which covers the broader Great Ocean Road region. The strategy will be consistent with legislation under which the land is managed and any other legislation applying to the land, and government policies applying to that land must also address any matters specified by the minister, a ministerial direction or a statement of obligation. So the authority will

prepare the management strategy, the minister will approve the land management strategy and the amendments will require the authority to consult with the public, relevant government departments and agencies and the relevant Aboriginal bodies for land covered by the strategy. The amendments will require the authority to take into account any submissions received from the public on the draft strategy before finalising it for ministerial approval.

**Melina BATH:** Thank you, Minister; that is good. That is comprehensive. I would like to move to firewood collection, and this is a really important component that we are very concerned about in general since the closure of the timber industry and the removal of that community firewood and the dividends from the sustainable native timber industry. My question is: why did the government permit the Bendigo park firewood to continue on to 2029? What was the rationale when these new national parks will cease firewood collection, period? What was the rationale behind allowing the Bendigo park collection to continue on to 2029?

**Gayle TIERNEY:** It is pretty straightforward. It is consistent with the government's response to the VEAC *Central West Investigation: Final Report*. Domestic firewood collection will be permitted in designated firewood collection areas declared in the Bendigo Regional Park addition until 1 July 2029, with large old trees and other ecological values protected.

**Melina BATH:** How many Victorians rely on collection of firewood from state forests in and around the central west? Does the government have any idea of the quantum or the number of households?

**Gayle TIERNEY:** Can we take that on notice, because it is quite a specific area?

**Melina BATH:** I am happy for you to take these on notice, but I would really appreciate on behalf of many people being able to understand this. What mechanisms are in place to monitor and replenish firewood collection areas to meet community demand?

**Gayle TIERNEY:** Ms Bath, as I mentioned in my summing up, firewood is a scarce resource. Quite simply, as I have said previously on the record, sometimes we just cannot keep up with demand.

**Melina BATH:** I think there are a lot of trees out there, Minister; some of them fall over and some of them decay, and some of them are, you know, available to be successfully chopped up. Minister, has the government considered integrating firewood collection as part of fuel load reduction strategies, particularly in terms of bushfire-prone areas? You have just said that it is a scarcity in the government's opinion. Has the government thought of broadening ways to actually use this as a fuel reduction strategy and use it as firewood?

**Gayle TIERNEY:** There is the potential, I am advised. In fact it has occurred, and some people in the chamber might know that that occurred in the Wombat forest.

**Melina BATH:** I did not hear that, Minister. Sorry.

**Gayle TIERNEY:** There is the potential, and it actually has occurred; it occurred in the Wombat forest.

**Melina BATH:** So there is potential for it to continue on?

**Gayle TIERNEY:** Well, yes.

**Melina BATH:** We are getting the nod from the box. Just on that, it is a really important point that there are some recognised traditional owners, the Taungurung people, who – looking at it – abut the eastern side and around, and then the Dja Dja Wurrung, and I have spoken a lot in relation to the Dja Dja Wurrung actually wanting to forest garden in the Wombat – and I will just use Wombat, but it can be the others as well. When that windrow timber fell down there seemed to be some argy-bargy, I do not think with the government, but it just seemed to fall over. I want to understand: what will the government enable and what will it look like for the Dja Dja Wurrung to use either windrow timber

or ecological thinnings – the Dja Dja might call it a different capacity, but let us say managing the bush for forest gardening? What is the government going to do and how is it going to facilitate those sorts of interactions with the Dja Dja Wurrung?

**Gayle TIERNEY:** Of course, I do not want to make decisions on behalf of the Dja Dja Wurrung at all. These will be issues that need to be worked through with different First Nations groupings throughout the state if and when the issue arises.

**Melina BATH:** So the minister is saying that all bets are off, that it could well be that the Dja Dja Wurrung want to use timber, want to thin the timber, want to garden the timber or the trees for the best outcomes for the forest. That is the question, but would the government then enable – and this is a very key point that the Greens I think seem to want to shut down – the Dja Dja Wurrung or the forest managers to actually utilise that timber to the highest value, and if that means selling that timber, then I am assuming the government has no problem with that as a philosophy or a practice.

**Gayle TIERNEY:** As I said, I am not going to offer a view on any of this. I think the world has changed a little bit in that traditional owners need to be able to have the ability to sit down and have the conversation and to work through the issues, and I am not going to adhere to any party political views on any of this, regardless of whether they might be the Greens party or anyone else. The important thing is that there is genuine conversation with local Indigenous groups about the things that you are suggesting.

**Melina BATH:** I am seeking the best way forward for people and for forests. Minister, the Taungurung people have a land and water council, and there is a gentleman there by the name of Matthew Shanks, and I have had the pleasure of meeting Matthew Shanks. He is the manager of biocultural landscapes – it is a mouthful. He speaks about it in one of his press releases, and I will read it all for transparency. He says:

Cultural Reserves allow Country to be managed in a way that is consistent with our knowledge and values as Taungurung people

He also goes on to say:

This is the way Country has always been for the Taungurung – people belong to Country.

And then his final quote in a media release:

In contrast, National Parks reflect a twentieth century model of conservation that believes the best way to conserve the natural values is through the exclusion of people.

Minister, does the government agree with this Taungurung man?

**Gayle TIERNEY:** I am not going to offer an opinion on a comment that someone might have made. What I am interested in is a genuine process where people who are close to this issue sit down and work through the issues. That is the important element, and it is consistent with the previous answer I gave you in terms of the Dja Dja Wurrung.

**Melina BATH:** How does the bill accommodate hunting as a cultural practice for regional communities and traditional owners across the board, but in those areas as well, where these footprints of new national parks occur?

**Gayle TIERNEY:** My understanding is that it would potentially vary depending on whether there is a natural resource land use agreement, Ms Bath.

**Melina BATH:** If there is an actual land use agreement that says you can hunt on there, then traditional owners will be able to continue on. Is that how I am reading it?

**Gayle TIERNEY:** Again, it would be subject to further discussion with the parties.

**Melina BATH:** So an agreement is an agreement until it is changed? That is the reality.

**Gayle TIERNEY:** No. In terms of specificity, it will require full and open discussion.

**The DEPUTY PRESIDENT:** Just a reminder that it is not a conversation. Just if you can wait till you have the call.

**Melina BATH:** How will the bill ensure that traditional hunting areas are not lost due to reclassification of public land in this bill?

**Gayle TIERNEY:** There seems to be an element missing in our conversation, Ms Bath, and that is the element of collaboration. I for one am very positive about the ability of people to actually sit down and work through issues. I am not going to offer up any solutions to things, particularly when it comes to this particular area, because I just do not think it is appropriate and it predetermines conversations that possibly have not even taken place.

**Melina BATH:** This is broad spectrum hunting in general that I speak to. It was not specific to membership of our Victorian population. Will there be a public review process for changes in hunting access in these newly designated parks, and will there be feedback sought from hunting organisation groups and the like?

**Gayle TIERNEY:** We welcome feedback in terms of the way that it is proposed to operate and look forward to ongoing communication with individuals but also peak organisations that have got a particular interest in terms of making improvements or suggestions for change.

**Melina BATH:** Are there any designated zones within these new national parks where deer hunting by stalking will be permitted or excluded, and how will these be managed? Can the minister or Parks Victoria issue special consent for hunting in conservation areas under controlled conditions?

**Gayle TIERNEY:** Conditions and boundaries within the parks will be established.

**Melina BATH:** How will they be established and what is the process of that?

**Gayle TIERNEY:** Again, it has been through stakeholder engagement where it has, for a whole range of reasons, worked out to be logical, feasible and appropriate.

**The DEPUTY PRESIDENT:** Again, a reminder that it is not a conversation, Ms Bath. You need to stand so that it gets on the microphone and Hansard can record what you are asking.

**Gayle TIERNEY:** I think I mentioned in my summing up that, in terms of those areas, it will be gazetted as well. I remind the house that it will be gazetted, so it will be on the public record and people will know exactly what the boundaries are.

**Melina BATH:** I will ask a couple more, and then I will sit down and let other members have a turn. In terms of our forests and the forests that will be affected by this bill – and there are a variety of footprints – how does the government facilitate and promote active forest management? And what does the government see as active forest management?

**Gayle TIERNEY:** Ms Bath, I understand that there are a variety of different ways. One example that was just provided to me is work with various communities – it is called healthy forest plants. There are a range of activities that are underway through Parks Victoria and various other coastal management activities that I am aware of in my patch that are of huge benefit to the local community.

**Melina BATH:** This is a broader question. We have been speaking about DEECA. The Victorian government last put out a *State of the Forests* report in 2018. They are supposed to be every five years, but we are now two-plus years overdue. How does the government know if it is actually protecting vulnerable species, if it is doing that work? More importantly, how does the public know the government actually knows what it is doing or if any of the actions it is taking are being effective?

**Gayle TIERNEY:** I think, Ms Bath, you are claiming that there has not been a *State of the Forests* report released since 2018? Is that correct?



**Melina BATH:** By the Victorian government, as opposed to the federal government report.

**Gayle TIERNEY:** There were findings and recommendations of the latest *State of the Forests* report 2023, and that has informed and is addressed in the Victorian government's response to the Great Outdoors Taskforce and the eminent panel for community engagement.

**Melina BATH:** This is a debate that go on all night. I am aware of this, but my question is that the government is tasked with conservation, including active management of our forests. I would argue that the resources have been depleted. Great Outdoors Taskforce aside, where is the landscape monitoring of vulnerable species and where are the results of that monitoring for the Victorian population to see? Where does that exist in the Victorian government's repertoire? Where do we see this?

**Gayle TIERNEY:** The monitoring occurs across Parks Victoria and DEECA, and again, when I asked the question about reporting, it is in the annual report.

**Melina BATH:** Minister, without going through and asking you to read the annual report into *Hansard*, which I will not, how many threatened species are listed and assessed? How many national parks are they assessed in? We have got vulnerable species; we have got threatened species – what is the degree of that? Because I would contend that it is not as fulsome as it could be.

**Gayle TIERNEY:** Again, Ms Bath, this is a very operational matter and the request is very detailed, and of course I would not be expected to have that level of information at hand.

**Jeff BOURMAN:** Minister, given native logging has been killed off by this government, what are we protecting these areas from?

**Gayle TIERNEY:** Basically your question is why do we have national parks; is that right?

**Jeff BOURMAN:** No, actually not necessarily why we have national parks; it is: why are these going to become national parks? Given that the reason that has been given previously for making something a national park is to protect it from logging, and given that logging is no longer a thing in this state, why are we doing this?

**Gayle TIERNEY:** There are things other than trees, and the forests are full of them, whether they be flora or fauna. So that is one of the key reasons, and that is why they are heavily visited, because they do provide opportunities for people to not only admire and relax in that sort of environment but undertake a range of activities, including in certain parts deer hunting.

**Jeff BOURMAN:** Following on from that, Minister, what is to stop people from doing that now except for the expanded deer hunting in the state parks?

**Gayle TIERNEY:** I think that the main thing is that there are parameters and rules and notifications and signage that inform and enhance the experience by and large, Mr Bourman.

**Jeff BOURMAN:** I guess I will make a statement rather than ask a question, Minister. I feel that there is no advantage to anyone except for an ideological few that feel that a national park is a good park, but two are state parks. My next question is: what is the practical difference between a state park and a national park? Two are state forests, but neither of them are logged, so I am still at a loss. But my question is: what is the practical difference between a state park and a national park?

**Gayle TIERNEY:** They both have the same obligations under the National Parks Act to apply to both the state parks and the national parks. These are being created to have a signpost essentially for people to know that this is a place where you can undertake a range of activities and that there are parameters and boundaries around those activities, as well as geographic boundaries as to where those activities can occur.

**Jeff BOURMAN:** What is to stop us from putting up a signpost now as they are?

**Gayle TIERNEY:** Well, you would need a lot of consultation, a lot of community involvement. You would need a range of stakeholders discussing the types of activities that you could or could not or in a reduced fashion undertake, and it would be gazetted. It would be public knowledge, and there would be information that would pertain to those specific sites that would be available publicly.

**Jeff BOURMAN:** I could go on for hours about that, but it leads me on to the next question. Who was consulted in the move to make these various land tenures into national parks?

**Gayle TIERNEY:** There is a long list; I will grab it. This is the same answer that I have previously given with this exercise, which was fed in through the VEAC exercise. It was a two-year investigation, and it included extensive consultation with a wide range of stakeholders and the community, including targeted meetings with various stakeholders, 11 drop-in sessions in regional towns in the investigation areas, public meetings in Trentham and Lancefield, two opportunities to provide formal submissions – initially on notice of the actual investigation, then subsequently on release of the draft proposals paper. VEAC also established a community reference group to provide advice to the investigation in accordance with the VEAC act. This included representatives of the Prospectors and Miners Association of Victoria, Four Wheel Drive Victoria, Bushwalking Victoria, Central Victorian Apiarists Association, the VFF, local councils and several conservation groups.

**Jeff BOURMAN:** That is quite a list. I know there are two sides to this story – there was the original VEAC report and what the government has added with the extra recreational hunting, for which I am thankful – but with the initial consultation there was a long list of people, but given there was actually going to be a direct effect on hunting by people in the state forests, were any of the shooting or hunting organisations consulted?

**Gayle TIERNEY:** I will check that for you, because obviously I was not the minister at the time.

It is my understanding that there were consultations with VEAC on the VEAC process and also with the outdoor rec exercise.

**Jeff BOURMAN:** Minister, if I could have on notice maybe the full list of who was consulted; I just feel that none of the hunting organisations were at least consulted in the initial report way back when. I know it goes back a while and you pointed out you were not the minister at the time, and I recall that. But if I could get that on notice, that would be awesome.

**Gayle TIERNEY:** Yes, that is fine. And that was at the initial phase, not necessarily the consultations that have occurred in recent times.

**Jeff BOURMAN:** Moving on to the Mount Buangor situation, why did the government back out of initially allowing hunting in there, given that, as per Ms Purcell's question, the risk assessment of hunting on public land is quite low?

**Gayle TIERNEY:** The government supports responsible and safe hunting, and with the additional opportunities the bill will provide to deer stalkers to enjoy recreational deer hunting by stalking in several national parks, the government support for this is clear. It is also even further made clear with the over 130,000 hectares that this bill will unlock for recreational deer hunting by stalking.

**Jeff BOURMAN:** That does not actually answer my question, specifically that Mount Buangor is being excised by the Greens beside me with the government's support. So obviously the government supports it; the question is: why? Originally the government was supportive of having hunting in there, seasonal hunting with restrictions and so on, and now it is not. Why is it so?

**Gayle TIERNEY:** It is my understanding that the position of the government is that there is a significant amount of land on which the hunting of deer by stalking can occur and that that is considered to be an appropriate amount of land.

**Jeff BOURMAN:** Minister, how can we trust the government if it has already sold out on the Mount Buangor thing? The reason I say that is clearly, already – I am not usually one to use these

words, but here it goes – the government has caved in to the Greens. The Greens are moving an amendment to cut it out; the government is supporting it. How do we know that somewhere along the line we are not going to get just a little chop here, a little chop there, and before we know it we are we are hunting nowhere?

**Gayle TIERNEY:** Again, Mr Bourman, the land involved in the area that you identify is really quite small, and the fact of the matter is that there are 130,000 hectares that will be unlocked.

**Jeff BOURMAN:** I am actually quite aware of Mount Buangor. For 20-something years I used to drive past there every fortnight or so, and sometimes through there. But it is still the principle, not necessarily the amount. It does not matter whether it is 1 hectare or whether it is 100,000 hectares; originally the government said it was, and now it is not. I would just like to know the government's thinking, given the government's answer to Ms Purcell was that hunting, under a risk assessment, is quite low risk.

**Gayle TIERNEY:** I do not have anything else that I can offer you at this point except to say what I have already said I think on three occasions now – that we believe, in terms of this package, that the 130 hectares that will be unlocked is sufficient.

**Jeff BOURMAN:** I will not keep on flogging a dead horse – or a dead deer, as the case may be. You mentioned Parks are getting more rangers. What additional cost is going to be incurred to police these areas?

**Gayle TIERNEY:** Mr Bourman, are you talking about the 84 new rangers?

**Jeff BOURMAN:** Yes.

**Gayle TIERNEY:** I will just check. Again, can I take that on notice, because it is a recruitment process that has started, but it has not completed.

**Jeff BOURMAN:** I forget where I am going with that. Thank you, I will just leave it at that. Minister, where does the Game Management Authority going to fit into this? Will they get more officers as well given that currently, as it stands, the regulation of game hunters is done by the Game Management Authority in conjunction with other people like Parks Vic? Are the GMA going to get additional resources to help with this?

**Gayle TIERNEY:** Agencies and department work will happen in collaboration. Parks Victoria is the land manager, and the GMA is the hunting regulator. In terms of the GMA or other departments, conditions will be communicated to hunters via the usual channels soon after the passage of legislation in terms of the ongoing communication arrangements with, I am sure, your members.

**Jeff BOURMAN:** I am not actually asking for how many; it is just whether the government intends on upping the numbers of GMA officers. It feels to me that it is more work to police something when it is only available at certain times of the year, and now with these new national parks there are going to be restrictions on the dogs you can have and all sorts of stuff, which you do not currently have in state forests. I am not asking for particular numbers, but is the government intending on beefing up the GMA to at least help it cope with the increased load, given that at times now it is already struggling?

**Gayle TIERNEY:** Of course, DEECA and Parks Victoria will develop a profile that they think is going to be suitable, and of course there will have to be ongoing discussions with the GMA as well to work out the proper profiling of staffing levels.

**Jeff BOURMAN:** Minister, I am going to give you one last question, at least for the moment: given that there has been a statement that there are going to be no more national parks post this by the government, has VEAC been shut down now?

**Gayle TIERNEY:** The answer is no, but there are discussions going on internally in terms of a whole range of things, like GORCAPA and this part of the bill too. We need to work out what needs to be done going forward, and we need to know staff profiling as well. It is all part and parcel of the package.

**Sarah MANSFIELD:** Clause 27 amends section 62(1A)(d) of the Forests Act 1958 to deem certain lands managed by Parks Victoria as protected public land. It also deletes a couple of subparagraphs from section 62(1A)(d) of the Forests Act: subparagraphs (ii) and (iii). Does all of this mean that the bill maintains the Conservation, Forests and Lands Act 1987, and if so, can you please explain that impact?

**Gayle TIERNEY:** Can I have the beginning of your question – not the beginning of the start of your question but the beginning of the end of the question?

**Sarah MANSFIELD:** Does all of this mean this bill maintains the Conservation, Forests and Lands Act 1987?

**Gayle TIERNEY:** The answer is yes.

**Sarah MANSFIELD:** Given that is the case, can you explain what the impact of those other changes are on the operation of that act?

**Gayle TIERNEY:** The advice is that it will not be impacted by any of this.

**Sarah MANSFIELD:** What is the impact of these amendments – the ones that I referred to earlier in clause 27? What impact will they have on the on-ground management responsibilities between agencies? For example, which agencies will now manage what?

**Gayle TIERNEY:** My advice is that that is purely a technical correction.

**Sarah MANSFIELD:** Just for some further clarification then, does it mean that higher conservation value areas such as nature conservation reserves, regional parks and the Murray River Park remain under Parks Victoria management?

**Gayle TIERNEY:** The answer is yes.

**Sarah MANSFIELD:** Thank you for that clarification. Does DEECA or the secretary remain in control of forest parks?

**Gayle TIERNEY:** Yes.

**Sarah MANSFIELD:** Noting that under section 47BA of the Crown Land (Reserves) Act the Murray River Park is part of the fifth schedule of that act and will continue to be managed by Parks Victoria under this change, can the government confirm if Murray River Park has been formally gazetted?

**Gayle TIERNEY:** No, it has not been formally gazetted.

**Sarah MANSFIELD:** I will change tack now. The Forests Act still allows native forest logging through the use of forest produce licences, while the wood pulp agreement could also be reactivated to bring back native forest logging. What steps are the government taking to remove loopholes which allow native forest logging under the Forests Act, in line with their commitment to end native forest logging?

**Gayle TIERNEY:** As the member is well aware, it is this government that eliminated native forest timber harvesting. In terms of other matters that you allude to, those are matters that are currently before the courts.

**Sarah MANSFIELD:** That might be something we have to pick up once that is resolved in another forum. Why did the government reject the expert recommendation from VEAC for Wellsford forest to be protected as the Greater Bendigo National Park?

**Gayle TIERNEY:** The answer to this is contained in the Victorian government response to the VEAC final report, and it is on page 32. The government does not accept recommendation A3 for the Greater Bendigo National Park addition, and instead this area will be added to the existing Bendigo Regional Park to a depth of 100 metres below the surface. This will support a broader range of recreational activities, provide another area for domestic firewood collection from designated sites until June 2029 and provide greater flexibility for the north central Victorian goldfields ground release. The government supports mining occurring beneath the park addition and acknowledges that some minimally intrusive surface activity may need to occur in the regional park addition to support this.

**Sarah MANSFIELD:** Thank you, Minister. What are the activities that the government envisages it needs to provide greater flexibility for in the north central Victorian goldfields ground release in the Wellsford forest, and what impact will this have on ecological values and visitor access?

**Gayle TIERNEY:** If there was a proposal for activity, then obviously the proposal would contain a range of information, including potential impacts, and that would be submitted to resources.

**Sarah MANSFIELD:** Thank you, Minister, for that response. My understanding from what you have said is that it depends on the activity and then they have to get that approved. Regional parks allow domestic firewood collection, which can risk further degradation of remnant vegetation and habitat loss in areas that were recommended for a higher level of protection as a national park. What ecological assessment, planning or other measures will be undertaken to ensure that the ecological values of Wellsford forest are protected from the impact of domestic firewood collection?

**Gayle TIERNEY:** As I understand, it will be the land manager that will determine those designated areas.

**Sarah MANSFIELD:** I just want to get some clarity about that response. This was about the ecological assessment planning and the other measures that might be taken, so all of that responsibility will be delegated to the land manager.

**Gayle TIERNEY:** Correct.

**Sarah MANSFIELD:** Moving on to the issue of deer hunting, what measures and additional resources will be provided to manage the interface between deer hunting and bush users at the Pyrenees National Park and similarly at the Wombat–Lerderderg National Park?

**Gayle TIERNEY:** Deer hunting has been occurring for some time, and in terms of resourcing, we will be – or DEECA will be – monitoring this to ensure that there are appropriate staffing profiles.

**Sarah MANSFIELD:** I appreciate that response, Minister, but is it possible to be provided with some specific measures that perhaps already exist that help to manage the interface between deer hunters and bush users to ensure safety et cetera?

**Gayle TIERNEY:** Most of it is in terms of what is on websites, but there is also signage that is available or will be available in those areas that have not had it previously.

**Sarah MANSFIELD:** Minister, in terms of the time it has taken to introduce this legislation in response to a VEAC investigation, it has taken a relatively long period of time compared to other VEAC investigations. I am just trying to get an understanding of why it took so long in this instance.

**Gayle TIERNEY:** I do not think I need to go to the box for this one. I think you know the answer, and the answer is that there are polar opposite views on a number of elements in this bill, ranging from hunting to firewood to resources to a whole range of things. A lot of that takes time. As we know, when you consult, when you have got research and data and meetings and meetings and meetings to

work through the issues, it all takes time. I think that most people who are familiar with some of the issues contained in this bill would say that this has got lots of arms and legs and significant levels of complexities attached to it, not to mention the different political views.

**Sarah MANSFIELD:** I know you have been asked about timelines, but I am just wanting to get an understanding of why there are different implementation timelines for different parks and perhaps get an indication of specifically which parks will be created when.

**Gayle TIERNEY:** Parks Victoria and DEECA will be working together to work out exactly how all of this can come together, but I have been assured it will be all progressed by October 2026.

**Sarah MANSFIELD:** Does the amended definition of protected public land under section 62 of the Forests Act restrict extractive activities – for example, logging, grazing and firewood collection?

**Gayle TIERNEY:** No.

**Sarah MANSFIELD:** If not, given it is not the case, how will these be regulated or phased out?

**Gayle TIERNEY:** As I understand it, it relates to the fire activities. It is not necessarily about what the general definition of public land is, per se – for example, when you are talking about the secretary of the department and fire responsibilities under the act.

**Sarah MANSFIELD:** Thank you, Minister, for that clarification. Changing tack completely, in relation to the parts of the bill that deal with Glenample Homestead, this was identified as part of efforts to spread visitor impacts and experiences along the Twelve Apostles area. The legislation removed the lease of this site, so we are just wondering: what are the plans for Glenample Homestead now?

**Gayle TIERNEY:** As I understand it, this is again just a technical amendment and it really has not got anything to do with the substance of this bill. But I am happy to talk to you as a fellow Western Victorian on this matter, given that it is in our electorate.

**Sarah MANSFIELD:** Thank you, Minister, for that response. What impact does repealing the National Parks (Amendment) Act 1989 have on wilderness and state parks and access for mining? I think this is an issue that may be touched on in different ways through this discussion.

**Gayle TIERNEY:** The National Parks (Amendment) Act 1989 made a wide range of amendments to the National Parks Act 1975, mostly in 1989. However, one provision involving an addition to the Moondarra State Park was not proclaimed at the time, pending a decision on whether the land was required as part of an overburdened dump associated with the development of the Latrobe Valley coalfields. The area is not required for that purpose, and the addition has now been proclaimed. This means that the amending act can now be repealed.

**Sarah MANSFIELD:** Is there any other impact of repealing that act on access for mining in our state parks?

**Gayle TIERNEY:** No.

**Sarah MANSFIELD:** In October 2022 Victoria agreed at a national environment ministers meeting to work collaboratively to achieve a national target to protect and conserve 30 per cent of Victoria's landmass and 30 per cent of Australia's marine areas by 2030. It would be good to get an understanding of how the new central west parks and other changes contribute to this agreed goal. I do not know if you have got a figure you can provide that explains what contribution this will make.

**Gayle TIERNEY:** I do not have that level of detail. It does not necessarily directly pertain to this bill, but I get your question. My suggestion would be to contact the minister's office directly on that, because obviously there is some history to it, and it probably was well before he was even Minister for Environment himself.

**Sarah MANSFIELD:** I have a feeling that there may be a response that we can get from the environment minister's office, so we will follow up on that. According to *Achieving 30 by 30 on Land: National Roadmap for Protecting and Conserving 30% of Australia's Land by 2030*, we are currently ranked about sixth out of the Australian states in terms of the percentage of land protected. I am just wondering what plans the government has to contribute to the agreed 30-30 targets. It is a follow-on from that previous question.

**Gayle TIERNEY:** In creating the three new national parks and two new conservation parks, and in addition to an existing regional park – I have a list here that I think was also contained in my summing up – in total, taking into account the existing protected areas, state parks and nature conservation reserves, these new national conservation parks, along with Mirboo North Conservation Park, will add approximately 44,000 hectares to Victoria's protected area system. In addition to Victoria's existing protected areas, this will contribute to the national 30-by-30 target of protecting 30 per cent of Australia's terrestrial and marine environments by 2030. The national road map for achieving this target acknowledges the contribution of governments towards achieving the target will reflect each government's individual circumstances, priorities and resources.

**Sarah MANSFIELD:** I just have a final question, and this follows on, I think, from one of Mr Bourman's final questions. The Victorian Environmental Assessment Council has provided the government with an excellent report here after extensive community consultation, and that has largely formed the basis of this legislation. We note that VEAC does not currently have any active investigations or assessments. They have had a reduction in staff. What plans does the government have for future VEAC investigations or assessments?

**Gayle TIERNEY:** I think I alluded to this in an answer to a previous question. This is very active at the moment in terms of internal discussions within government in terms of what happens next, and I think it would not serve any purpose for me to make any further comment on that. But it is active and there are a range of considerations and discussions that are being undertaken.

**Sarah MANSFIELD:** I move:

1. Clause 1, page 2, line 10, after "land" insert "and to make further provision in relation to agreements or arrangements relating to fire prevention, suppression and recovery".

I have spoken to all of these in my second-reading speech, but this is an amendment that would stop forest produce licences, permits and fire management activities as an excuse to log. It adds to the purposes of the bill, hence it is being moved in clause 1. One of the issues we know is that despite the government's commitment to end native forest logging, there is a risk, and we have certainly heard reports of some of these activities effectively being used to continue native forest logging, with the products of these activities being sold and used to make a profit. I do not think it would come as any surprise that we want to see the government's commitment to end native forest logging completely fulfilled and believe that this just closes a loophole in the existing relevant legislation.

**Melina BATH:** This is in relation to fire prevention. That is what you are suggesting, and that it requires additional assessment, ecological assessment. I am very concerned about this. Bushfire mitigation is a very serious business, and I believe that this Victorian government is doing insufficient of it as it is now. The processes around organising, planning and applying for and getting a permit for bushfire-preventative or fuel-reduction burns are quite extensive as they are now, and I think anything of this nature is an overreach and is not required. As I said, they are very extensive, and there can be times even when the application goes through and they are about to have the fuel reduction burn but there can be wind changes or the like and then it does not happen. What happens with that then is if it goes on the backburner, for want of a better word, and it does not get done in that year, the fuel load builds up again. If there is a lightning strike or arson or whatever, then our forests become more and more and more fuel laden. Like we saw in 2019–2020, the bushfires were massive and they did not stop and they incinerated flora, fauna, stock, houses and infrastructure. I am very concerned that anything that slows this very comprehensive program down is a retrograde step.

**Gayle TIERNEY:** The government will not be supporting this amendment.

**Council divided on amendment:**

*Ayes (7):* Katherine Copsey, David Ettershank, Anasina Gray-Barberio, Sarah Mansfield, Rachel Payne, Aiv Puglielli, Georgie Purcell

*Noes (32):* Ryan Batchelor, Melina Bath, John Berger, Lizzie Blandthorn, Jeff Bourman, Gaelle Broad, Georgie Crozier, David Davis, Moira Deeming, Enver Erdogan, Jacinta Ermacora, Michael Galea, Renee Heath, Ann-Marie Hermans, Shaun Leane, David Limbrick, Wendy Lovell, Trung Luu, Bev McArthur, Joe McCracken, Nick McGowan, Tom McIntosh, Evan Mulholland, Harriet Shing, Ingrid Stitt, Jaclyn Symes, Lee Tarlamis, Sonja Terpstra, Gayle Tierney, Rikkie-Lee Tyrrell, Sheena Watt, Richard Welch

**Amendment negated.**

**Sitting suspended 6:30 pm until 7:37 pm.**

**The DEPUTY PRESIDENT:** I call on Ms Bath to move her amendments 1 and 2, which test her amendments on her sheet MB16C.

**Melina BATH:** I move:

1. Clause 1, page 2, lines 22 to 25, omit all words and expressions on these lines.
2. Clause 1, page 3, lines 3 to 4, omit “Mount Buangor, Pyrenees, Wombat-Lerderderg.”.

The Liberals and Nationals do not believe that the formation of the three proposed Mount Buangor, Pyrenees and Wombat–Lerderderg national parks are in the best interests of either the Victorian public or environmental outcomes. We believe that the government can actually keep these as state forests and still provide better environmental outcomes and better active management of our state forests and retain all the access that Victorians have enjoyed for decades.

**Sarah MANSFIELD:** While I thank Ms Bath for moving these amendments, I think she will understand that we are at the exact opposite end of this one and strongly support the creation of the new national parks. It is the part of this bill that we are most strongly in favour of, so we will not be supporting these amendments.

**Gayle TIERNEY:** The government will not be supporting these amendments either.

**The DEPUTY PRESIDENT:** The question is that Ms Bath’s amendments 1 and 2 on her sheet MB16C, which test all of the other amendments on her sheet MB16C, be agreed to.

**Council divided on amendments:**

*Ayes (17):* Melina Bath, Jeff Bourman, Gaelle Broad, Georgie Crozier, David Davis, Moira Deeming, Renee Heath, Ann-Marie Hermans, David Limbrick, Wendy Lovell, Trung Luu, Bev McArthur, Joe McCracken, Nick McGowan, Evan Mulholland, Rikkie-Lee Tyrrell, Richard Welch

*Noes (22):* Ryan Batchelor, John Berger, Lizzie Blandthorn, Katherine Copsey, Enver Erdogan, Jacinta Ermacora, David Ettershank, Michael Galea, Anasina Gray-Barberio, Shaun Leane, Sarah Mansfield, Tom McIntosh, Rachel Payne, Aiv Puglielli, Georgie Purcell, Harriet Shing, Ingrid Stitt, Jaclyn Symes, Lee Tarlamis, Sonja Terpstra, Gayle Tierney, Sheena Watt

**Amendments negated.**

**Georgie PURCELL:** This is an amendment to omit deer hunting in the newly created national parks. I have covered it off pretty extensively in my second-reading contribution. I move:

1. Clause 1, page 3, lines 1 to 5, omit all words and expressions on these lines.



**Council divided on amendment:**

*Ayes (7):* Katherine Copsey, David Ettershank, Anasina Gray-Barberio, Sarah Mansfield, Rachel Payne, Aiv Puglielli, Georgie Purcell

*Noes (32):* Ryan Batchelor, Melina Bath, John Berger, Lizzie Blandthorn, Jeff Bourman, Gaele Broad, Georgie Crozier, David Davis, Moira Deeming, Enver Erdogan, Jacinta Ermacora, Michael Galea, Renee Heath, Ann-Marie Hermans, Shaun Leane, David Limbrick, Wendy Lovell, Trung Luu, Bev McArthur, Joe McCracken, Nick McGowan, Tom McIntosh, Evan Mulholland, Harriet Shing, Ingrid Stitt, Jaclyn Symes, Lee Tarlamis, Sonja Terpstra, Gayle Tierney, Rikkie-Lee Tyrrell, Sheena Watt, Richard Welch

**Amendment negatived.**

**The DEPUTY PRESIDENT:** Dr Mansfield, I invite you to move your amendment 2, which tests your amendments 5 to 12.

**Sarah MANSFIELD:** I move:

2. Clause 1, page 3, line 3, omit “Mount Buangor.”.

I explained these amendments at length during my second-reading contribution, but these are the amendments that remove recreational deer hunting from the Mount Buangor National Park. There are then a series of consequential amendments to update the bill with those previous elements removed.

**Melina BATH:** The Liberals and Nationals will oppose this. We believe it flies in the face of deer hunters and their existing provisions in other national parks for similar arrangements. It is a short season, and we believe it is completely in order to keep this provision in the bill.

**Jeff BOURMAN:** If I may, I will ask the Leader of the Greens in the Council some questions on her amendment. Why have the Greens only picked Mount Buangor to remove?

**Sarah MANSFIELD:** As he may appreciate, and from my previous contribution on this debate, we would have liked to see recreational deer hunting removed from all the national parks. Hence we supported Ms Purcell’s amendment to do that. One of the reasons we focused specifically on this area was the significant amount of advocacy we had from a broad range of groups around their concerns about this particular national park and some of the other activities that take place there, including school camps. I think it is very sensible that the government has agreed to support this amendment to remove Mount Buangor from the recreational deer hunting areas.

**Jeff BOURMAN:** Who did you consult with to decide that only Mount Buangor should go?

**Sarah MANSFIELD:** As I outlined in my second-reading speech, the reason for focusing on Mount Buangor was related to the significant amount of correspondence we received from a range of groups. These included the Victorian National Parks Association (VNPA), Outdoors Victoria, Australian Camps Association, the Pyrenees Shire Council and Environmental Justice Australia, and we also did some consultation with the Federation of Victorian Traditional Owner Corporations. We consulted with a significant range of groups around this. A number of these stakeholders do not have an ideological position on deer hunting but hold very significant concerns about other bush users’ rights and safety with the proposed changes to allow recreational deer hunting in that area.

We believe that the changes that are being proposed here are sensible. The recreational deer hunters will once again have the nearby game hunting reserve available to them to continue game hunting. It is a much larger area than the Mount Buangor National Park area, so in effect they have got a larger area to hunt in as a result of these changes. We believe that this is a sensible change, and it has a broad range of support behind it.

**Jeff BOURMAN:** Did the Greens consult with anyone from, let us call it, the pro-hunting side to get their opinions of whether there was any mitigation of any of the purported risks?

**Sarah MANSFIELD:** As I said, we consulted with a number of groups who do not have a strong opinion either way about deer hunting. The groups that we spoke to were primarily concerned with the safety of the other bush users in that area. They may well have supported deer hunting as well. We did not consult directly with some of the groups that you are alluding to. However, we understand that the government has done plenty of consultation in the formation of this bill with those groups, and we feel that their needs have been well reflected in many of the other aspects of this bill. I feel that this amendment is a sensible one that reflects the interests of a broad range of bush users.

**Jeff BOURMAN:** Last question, Dr Mansfield: did any of the groups that you consulted with do a risk assessment or did they just not want the hunting there?

**Sarah MANSFIELD:** As I alluded to in my second-reading speech, there were a range of risks highlighted by various groups about potential deer hunting occurring there, and they outlined what those risks would be. Whether that satisfies your requirements for a formal risk assessment I am not entirely sure, but we believe that the risks outlined were significant. We also have had extensive discussions with the minister's office about this, and my understanding is that they agreed with some of the assessments that have been made by those groups. So the decision to remove recreational deer hunting from Mount Buangor in particular is a direct response to the potential risk to those bush users.

**Gayle TIERNEY:** The government will support this amendment.

**Council divided on amendment:**

*Ayes (22):* Ryan Batchelor, John Berger, Lizzie Blandthorn, Katherine Copsey, Enver Erdogan, Jacinta Ermacora, David Ettershank, Michael Galea, Anasina Gray-Barberio, Shaun Leane, Sarah Mansfield, Tom McIntosh, Rachel Payne, Aiv Puglielli, Georgie Purcell, Harriet Shing, Ingrid Stitt, Jaclyn Symes, Lee Tarlamis, Sonja Terpstra, Gayle Tierney, Sheena Watt

*Noes (17):* Melina Bath, Jeff Bourman, Gaelle Broad, Georgie Crozier, David Davis, Moira Deeming, Renee Heath, Ann-Marie Hermans, David Limbrick, Wendy Lovell, Trung Luu, Bev McArthur, Joe McCracken, Nick McGowan, Evan Mulholland, Rikkie-Lee Tyrrell, Richard Welch

**Amendment agreed to.**

**The DEPUTY PRESIDENT:** Ms Bath, I invite you to move your amendment 1, which tests your amendment 2 on sheet 18C.

**Melina BATH:** I move:

1. Clause 1, page 3, after line 7 insert –  
“(va) to provide for certain searching for minerals in certain parks; and”.

I have canvassed this very well. The Liberals and Nationals believe that the minister should have the opportunity to be able to, through ministerial discretion and keeping environmental standards, enable recreational fossicking and prospecting in the new national parks. It is not a green light; it just enables the minister to have that decision and that discretion while still keeping any environmental safeguards.

**Council divided on amendment:**

*Ayes (17):* Melina Bath, Jeff Bourman, Gaelle Broad, Georgie Crozier, David Davis, Moira Deeming, Renee Heath, Ann-Marie Hermans, David Limbrick, Wendy Lovell, Trung Luu, Bev McArthur, Joe McCracken, Nick McGowan, Evan Mulholland, Rikkie-Lee Tyrrell, Richard Welch

*Noes (22):* Ryan Batchelor, John Berger, Lizzie Blandthorn, Katherine Copsey, Enver Erdogan, Jacinta Ermacora, David Ettershank, Michael Galea, Anasina Gray-Barberio, Shaun Leane, Sarah Mansfield, Tom McIntosh, Rachel Payne, Aiv Puglielli, Georgie Purcell, Harriet Shing, Ingrid Stitt, Jaclyn Symes, Lee Tarlamis, Sonja Terpstra, Gayle Tierney, Sheena Watt

**Amendment negated.**

**Amended clause agreed to; clauses 2 to 26 agreed to.**

**New clause 26B (20:07)**

**Sarah MANSFIELD:** I move:

3. Insert the following New Clause before clause 27 –

**‘26B Licences and permits with respect to forests**

After section 52(1AA) of the **Forests Act 1958** insert –

“(1AB) A licence or permit granted under this section is subject to a condition that the holder of the licence or permit must not sell any timber thinned, cut or removed in accordance with the licence or permit for profit.”’.

This amendment again I spoke to in my second-reading speech, but this is the one that stops logging under forest produce licences and permits from recommencing. Logging used to happen via forest produce licences and permits under the Forests Act. Our amendments stop native forest logging from recommencing by stopping timber collected under these permits from being sold for profit. This does not ban the permits altogether, because they also cover things like honey harvesting and other issues that have been raised I think in the discussion around this bill. It is about stopping timber collected under these permits from being sold for profit and in essence being commercial harvesting of timber under the guise of forest produce.

**Jeff BOURMAN:** A quick question for the doctor here: Dr Mansfield, new subsection (1AB):

A licence or permit granted under this section is subject to a condition that the holder of the licence or permit must not sell any timber thinned, cut or removed in accordance with a licence or permit for profit.

Correct? So if they do it for free or make a loss, it is okay?

**Sarah MANSFIELD:** The intention of this is to stop people selling it for a profit. They would still be subject to any other conditions around undertaking that work. As we said, they could still get a permit. They still have to meet the conditions required to obtain that permit. If they do that, then that permit has been issued. That is fine. It does not ban the permits being issued. It does prevent them from selling it for profit, however. If they have obtained that permit, they are not able to then go on and sell it for a profit.

**Jeff BOURMAN:** Dr Mansfield, maybe I did not make myself clear. I am being a bit of a smart alec here. It says I cannot do it for profit. If you do not make a profit, if you make a loss, can you do it? Because that is it: if you sell something and you do not make a profit, then by the letter of the law, if not the intent, you are good.

**Sarah MANSFIELD:** I find it hard to see how you would. I mean, you would have to be doing a pretty bad job to make a loss on this.

**Jeff Bourman** interjected.

**Sarah MANSFIELD:** I have provided an answer. Our amendment is very clear. You are not able to sell it for a profit. That is the intention of this amendment.

**Melina BATH:** I think this is quite a narrow-minded instrument, if I can be blunt. Often we talk in this place at length about traditional owners managing their own country, whether that be through thinning or the like, and therefore we are then going to remove the right of those traditional owners to sell that wood for the highest value. Likewise, we have community thinning potentially. I know that there are some very bespoke industries that the government has endorsed – one of them is making guitars out of particular hardwood. This would knock all that on the head, and I think whilst driving an ideology it is actually just cutting out good sense even further.

**Sarah MANSFIELD:** Just to respond to that, the Greens firmly support First Nations forest management and always have; they are the original and best experts when it comes to caring for

country. This amendment is really designed to close what is currently a gaping loophole which a future government could use to bring back ecologically destructive industrial native forest harvesting. We are really looking at closing a loophole that exists here. So if the government agrees to fixing this loophole, we would be very happy to see further amendments to the forest projects permit system that could be made to enable First Nations people to thin forests and sell those proceeds in ecological and sustainable ways. There are further amendments that could be made, but we believe that this loophole is so significant at the moment that it needs to be closed as a priority.

**Council divided on new clause:**

*Ayes (7):* Katherine Copsey, David Ettershank, Anasina Gray-Barberio, Sarah Mansfield, Rachel Payne, Aiv Puglielli, Georgie Purcell

*Noes (32):* Ryan Batchelor, Melina Bath, John Berger, Lizzie Blandthorn, Jeff Bourman, Gaelle Broad, Georgie Crozier, David Davis, Moira Deeming, Enver Erdogan, Jacinta Ermacora, Michael Galea, Renee Heath, Ann-Marie Hermans, Shaun Leane, David Limbrick, Wendy Lovell, Trung Luu, Bev McArthur, Joe McCracken, Nick McGowan, Tom McIntosh, Evan Mulholland, Harriet Shing, Ingrid Stitt, Jaclyn Symes, Lee Tarlamis, Sonja Terpstra, Gayle Tierney, Rikkie-Lee Tyrrell, Sheena Watt, Richard Welch

**New clause negatived.**

**Clauses 27 to 49 agreed to.**

**Clause 50 (20:19)**

**The DEPUTY PRESIDENT:** The question is that the clause stand part of the bill.

**Council divided on clause:**

*Ayes (17):* Melina Bath, Jeff Bourman, Gaelle Broad, Georgie Crozier, David Davis, Moira Deeming, Renee Heath, Ann-Marie Hermans, David Limbrick, Wendy Lovell, Trung Luu, Bev McArthur, Joe McCracken, Nick McGowan, Evan Mulholland, Rikkie-Lee Tyrrell, Richard Welch

*Noes (21):* Ryan Batchelor, John Berger, Lizzie Blandthorn, Katherine Copsey, Enver Erdogan, Jacinta Ermacora, Michael Galea, Anasina Gray-Barberio, Shaun Leane, Sarah Mansfield, Tom McIntosh, Rachel Payne, Aiv Puglielli, Georgie Purcell, Harriet Shing, Ingrid Stitt, Jaclyn Symes, Lee Tarlamis, Sonja Terpstra, Gayle Tierney, Sheena Watt

**Clause negatived.**

**Clauses 51 to 53 agreed to.**

**Clause 54 (20:25)**

**Sarah MANSFIELD:** I move:

6. Clause 54, line 29, omit “50” and insert “37”.
7. Clause 54, line 30, omit “50 and” and insert “37 and”.
8. Clause 54, page 37, line 1, omit “8A” and insert “8”.
9. Clause 54, page 37, line 3, omit “8B” and insert “8A”.
10. Clause 54, page 37, line 9, omit “8C” and insert “8B”.

These are consequential amendments related to the previous amendments that have already passed.

**Amendments agreed to; amended clause agreed to; clauses 55 and 56 agreed to.**

**Clause 57 (20:26)**

**Sarah MANSFIELD:** I move:

11. Clause 57, line 14, omit “8C” and insert “8B”.
12. Clause 57, line 16, omit “8D” and insert “8C”.

These are further consequential amendments related to the previous amendments that have passed.

**Amendments agreed to; amended clause agreed to; clauses 58 to 124 agreed to; schedule 1 agreed to.**

**Reported to house with amendments.**

**Gayle TIERNEY** (Western Victoria – Minister for Skills and TAFE, Minister for Water) (20:28): I move:

That the report be now adopted.

**Motion agreed to.**

**Report adopted.**

*Third reading*

**Gayle TIERNEY** (Western Victoria – Minister for Skills and TAFE, Minister for Water) (20:28): I move:

That the bill be now read a third time and do pass.

**Council divided on motion:**

*Ayes (22):* Ryan Batchelor, John Berger, Lizzie Blandthorn, Katherine Copsey, Enver Erdogan, Jacinta Ermacora, David Ettershank, Michael Galea, Anasina Gray-Barberio, Shaun Leane, Sarah Mansfield, Tom McIntosh, Rachel Payne, Aiv Puglielli, Georgie Purcell, Harriet Shing, Ingrid Stitt, Jaclyn Symes, Lee Tarlamis, Sonja Terpstra, Gayle Tierney, Sheena Watt

*Noes (17):* Melina Bath, Jeff Bourman, Gaelle Broad, Georgie Crozier, David Davis, Moira Deeming, Renee Heath, Ann-Marie Hermans, David Limbrick, Wendy Lovell, Trung Luu, Bev McArthur, Joe McCracken, Nick McGowan, Evan Mulholland, Rikkie-Lee Tyrrell, Richard Welch

**Motion agreed to.**

**Read third time.**

**The PRESIDENT:** Pursuant to standing order 14.28, the bill will be returned to the Assembly with a message informing them that the Council have agreed to the bill with amendments.

**Voluntary Assisted Dying Amendment Bill 2025**

*Council's amendments*

**The PRESIDENT** (20:34): I have received a message from the Legislative Assembly in respect of the Voluntary Assisted Dying Amendment Bill 2025:

The Legislative Assembly informs the Legislative Council that, in relation to ‘A Bill for an Act to amend the **Voluntary Assisted Dying Act 2017** to improve the experience of voluntary assisted dying, to consequentially amend other Acts and for other purposes’ the amendments made by the Council have been agreed to.

**State Taxation Further Amendment Bill 2025***Second reading***Debate resumed on motion of Gayle Tierney:**

That the bill be now read a second time.

**David DAVIS** (Southern Metropolitan) (20:35): I rise to make a contribution to the State Taxation Further Amendment Bill 2025. I want to begin by making a couple of points here. First, we oppose much of this bill, but there are parts that we do support. I am going to divide the bill quickly into the three key parts and explain this to the chamber, but I will in the first instance ask the clerks to distribute the two sets of suggested amendments that I have to propose. It would be helpful if that could occur.

This is a bill that adds to Labor's taxation. We have already had over 60 new taxes under this government. There have been massive increases in taxation that have hit our families and hit businesses. We have the highest level of taxation in the country, and the impact on families and businesses is now extreme. Some of this was recorded very closely in the recent work of the Business Council of Australia, but more broadly the local business groups have made it very clear that the tax increases are hurting so many families and so many businesses. This is a further instalment. We saw the emergency services tax come in – \$3 billion over four years – just a short while ago.

This bill has three parts. The first part we strongly support. It carves out properties located in Dinner Plain from the vacant residential land tax base. Obviously these snow-based or ski field based properties are inherently likely to be vacant for much of the year because, frankly, snow is not there the whole year. People may use them at other times, but their primary purpose as places in the snowfields is reduced. It clearly is unfair to clobber those properties in the Dinner Plain area. It has a different ownership structure to that of many of our ski fields, which are on leasehold arrangements. This is a longer term ownership arrangement, a more traditional title arrangement, and the residential land tax base applies currently to those properties, which hits them very hard. We support this. A number of our members, including those in this chamber, have advocated strongly for the removal of this tax and for a fairer shake for people in the Dinner Plain area.

The second part of the bill relates to the congestion levy. There are two parts to what is going on here. This is a levy that was introduced in the early 2000s. It is called a congestion levy; it is actually just a raw tax on parking. Let us call it for what it is – it is a parking tax; it is not a congestion levy. There is no great evidence that it has an impact on congestion. But it does certainly, as a parking tax, clobber families, clobber businesses, make it more difficult for people to utilise those facilities, and it has a huge impact on the viability of a number of our shopping strips and a number of the businesses in these areas. The bill does two things. It increases the congestion tax – the so-called congestion tax; the parking tax – in the category 1 and category 2 areas to which it currently applies. Then it expands the so-called category 2 area eastwards into the City of Yarra and the City of Stonnington. In doing so it is imposing a brand new fresh tax on both of those municipalities, and it will hit them very hard.

I know this area well. The Stonnington area is part of my electorate and Ms Crozier's electorate, and we understand very much that this is going to have a huge impact on people in our area. Rachel Westaway, the member for Prahran, has been arguing very, very strenuously that this tax is going to hit Stonnington quite hard. We know the troubles that are already there with Chapel Street, the loss of amenity that has occurred in some of those areas and the high taxes that are already placed on some of those areas because of the government's land tax arrangements and other taxation arrangements. This will put an extra layer over the top. It will make many of the properties less viable. It will make many of the shopping strips and centres much less viable. My office is in Chapel Street, in the Vogue centre, which is the kind of area that will be clobbered heavily. That type of pocket is exactly what the government is trying to get stuck into. There are some exemptions, but nonetheless these will be new taxes applied to a large number of parking situations in these two new areas in the City of Yarra and in the City of Stonnington.

Finally, the third part of this bill doubles the amount that local councils are required to pay to the state government when collecting pet registration fees. This is a modest amount of money, but it is a huge percentage. It is an almost doubling of the fee that is scooped back by government, and you have got to ask why. It seems the government is doing this everywhere. We saw even recently the vaccination tax the government has put on councils – if you deliver a vaccination as a council, the government is now charging you a fee to do that. This is a government that is desperate for money, a government that is desperately in financial straits, a government that has huge problems with the growing debt – the debt will exceed \$194 billion by the end of the forward estimates. That is a huge increase and a massive impact on the state.

This is because the government is wasting money. It is wasting huge amounts of money. We know that many of the large projects, some worthy projects, have seen huge increases in their budgets. Even if a project is worthy, the large increases in the budgets, the cost blowouts, are driving the state's budgetary problems. There is a \$50 billion addition to the state's financial negative position because of these massive budget blowouts in major projects. I point directly to those and say this is the sort of problem that the state has got, and these are the sorts of problems that we need to deal with as a community. We need to make sure that our projects run on time, that they run on budget and that the amount of cost blowouts, the squandering of additional money on projects because they cannot manage the projects, are constrained. We cannot endlessly go on adding more and more debt to the state's position, and we cannot clobber our businesses and make it harder and harder and harder for them to deliver the services that are required.

As I said, we strongly support the carving out of properties in Dinner Plain from the vacant residential land tax arrangements, but we do not support the congestion levy increase of 73 per cent in the category 1 and category 2 areas and the expansion of category 2 eastwards, and my first set of suggested amendments will deal with both of those issues. The first tranche of suggested amendments will also deal with the amount that councils are required to pay with these pet registration fees and the collection of pet registration fees. It is a nasty tax. It is a tax that adds additional costs for families. Families can ill afford these costs being imposed on them now. Pet registration is important, but more tax that is collected in that way – the state government is scooping the money back. That has got to be passed on through to families who have got a pet, and I do not think anyone supports that. The second set of suggested amendments takes out Stonnington. It says the expansion of the levy into Stonnington is wrong. It has got lots of problems in that area, specifically down Chapel Street, and the imposition of these new levies will not help us at all. So we will seek to remove Stonnington if our other amendments, which seek to stop the expansion on a broader front and the increase in the congestion levy, are not successful. That will be a secondary option if our first option there is not successful.

I want to draw the attention of the chamber to the Property Council of Australia's notes that they have kindly provided to many members on the congestion levy. They deal with the congestion levy and explain it very nicely but also point to the increase in costs and precisely the amounts that are involved. Category 1 is the CBD and surrounding areas, it is \$1750 per parking space. Category 2 is the inner suburbs of Albert Park, St Kilda, North Melbourne, Fitzroy, Carlton and Parkville, \$1250 per parking space. Both of these are proposed to increase – a 73 per cent increase in category 1 up to more than \$3000 and a 73 per cent increase in category 2. As I have said, an expansion of the category 2 eastwards from 1 January 2026 will mean a rate increase from 0 to \$2150 in those pockets, which is the City of Yarra and the City of Stonnington.

What does this mean? According to the data from members of the property council, the proposed levy increase imposes a minimum average cost of \$ 13 per day per parking space on car park owners across both categories. Margins for car park owners remain slim, and absorbing the levy will lead to financial unviability. They say as a result this cost will inevitably be passed on to everyday Victorians. Multiple car park operators have already advised they will close car parks to reduce losses where losses cannot be passed on. They make the point, and I am quoting here, that this congestion levy – a tax, a parking tax, which is what it is – 'stifles economic growth and the social revitalisation of the inner city'. That

is my point about Chapel Street – what it needs is help, not a new tax. A new tax will not help places in the City of Stonnington or the increase in the cost-of-living pressures. It will also hit key workers. I mean, many key workers will be clobbered by this. Those who are staying very late in key places will face increased costs. It will lead to the closure of needed car parks. But we understand the government hate cars and they hate car parking, and they want to hit it in every way that they possibly can.

It is an ineffective way of targeting congestion, in any event. There is no doubt about that; it is a very indirect and ineffective way. The levy:

- undermines the feasibility of new market and affordable housing projects within mixed-use precincts ...
- reduces local government gross revenue from parking by up to 75 per cent, leading to funding cuts for community services ...

this is according to the property council –

- applies without genuine consideration to frequent and accessible rail access, especially in the expanded category 2 zone ...

without in any way providing genuine alternatives to private vehicles. So there is no commensurate increase in public transport occurring with this levy.

**Ryan Batchelor** interjected.

**David DAVIS:** No, there is not, not on this list. No, no, there is not.

**Ryan Batchelor:** We're about to open the Metro Tunnel.

**David DAVIS:** So you are saying this is to pay for the Metro Tunnel? Is that what you are saying? Let the *Hansard* record that the Metro Tunnel is being funded by this new tax. That is what we have heard – that the Metro Tunnel needs this new tax to pay for part of it. That is what we have heard. We have heard it directly from this government member now that the Metro Tunnel is to be paid for by these new taxes. That is what he said.

I want to point to the fact that a number of car park owners have indicated that there are serious problems that will be encountered. There is a set of issues that are pointed to. I know Infrastructure Victoria tried to say, 'We're going to model this on Sydney.' Well, there are a number of different points in Sydney. The incomes are lower in Sydney, about 25 per cent lower in many areas; the utilisation may well be less; and a number of the CBD and other parking areas that are clobbered by this actually do not have as much easy public transport. So could this levy increase have an impact on the housing supply in Melbourne? The answer is, according to the property council, yes:

- New homes often get delivered as part of 'mixed use' precincts that combine ... housing with retail or office space. Mixed use developers and asset owners will be forced to absorb the congestion levy, jeopardising the supply and affordability of new homes in well placed and strategically significant inner city precincts.

I think that is undoubtedly true. They are going to make it harder to get the economic viability to the point where developers will proceed, and this will certainly make the viability of access to a number of these car parks difficult for average Victorians.

We are very much troubled by the government's endless new taxes. We are troubled by the government's approach with this congestion/parking tax. We are troubled by the government's approach with quite a nasty little slug on pet owners. Why do they need to hit pet owners in this way? Inevitably the new pet tax is going to be passed through from councils to pet owners. Why do those who have got a cat or a dog need to be hit in this way? I do think it is a bit nasty. I just think it is not the sort of tax that we think is appropriate, and we will certainly be opposing it. As I have said, there are three parts to the bill. One we strongly support; the other two we have big troubles with.

**Aiv PUGLIELLI** (North-Eastern Metropolitan) (20:52): I rise to speak on behalf of my Greens colleagues with respect to the State Taxation Further Amendment Bill 2025 and state from the outset that the bill proposes some relatively straightforward changes to a number of state property taxation



acts, including the Land Tax Act 2005 and the vacant residential land tax, the Duties Act 2000, the Commercial and Industrial Property Tax Reform Act 2024 and the Building Act 1993. My Greens colleagues and I support these relatively minor amendments with respect to those acts. We are especially proud in fact of the effect of the changes that we previously negotiated with the government around the vacant residential land tax, which is further amended in this bill. It is an absolute no-brainer that we need to stop land banking in this state and use residential land to build homes for people to live in. That is why the changes my Greens colleagues and I negotiated to strengthen vacant land tax will roughly double the expected revenue from unoccupied housing in the 2025–26 financial year – funds that will be used to build more homes but, importantly, will also force thousands more homes to be brought onto the housing market for people to live in rather than just being left sitting vacant.

To be blunt, the Greens are the only party in this country who believe that the primary purpose of residential land is not making capital gains. We believe that this land should be used not just to build houses on but to build houses that are actually lived in as homes by owners and renters. This is also why we have negotiated to bring in changes to Airbnbs, for example, giving residents of apartment blocks the power to decide whether they want Airbnbs operating in their buildings or not. We do these things because we believe that housing is a fundamental human right.

Back to this bill: beyond the changes to property taxes, the bill also proposes changes to the Congestion Levy Act 2005 to expand the congestion levy into inner suburbs as well as increase the applicable levy rates. Congestion charges in one form or another are used in major cities all over the world to help guide people's transport choices from motor vehicles to cleaner, healthier, cheaper and often faster options in areas where there are good active and public transport alternatives. Road congestion alone costs the City of Melbourne around \$4.6 billion every year, and this is estimated to grow to \$10 billion by 2030 as our city grows. We simply cannot afford the financial costs of this motor vehicle traffic in our city.

But it is not just about the cost of congestion to our economy. The transport sector is responsible for almost a quarter of our state's total carbon emissions, second only to electricity generation, and while most other sectors of the economy are reducing their emissions, our state's transport emissions are continuing to rise every year. Eighty-five per cent of these transport emissions come from motor vehicles on roads, with 55 per cent of these coming from passenger cars. We all know the safety risks of motor vehicles on the road, but most of us do not acknowledge, at least as often, the silent and invisible dangers. It is really shocking to learn that the pollution from motor vehicles alone is responsible for around 1800 premature deaths in this country every year, which, incredibly, is higher than the number of fatalities from our national road toll. But Melbourne does not have to be this way. Especially in the inner city and the inner suburbs there should be cleaner, healthier, cheaper and, again, often faster options of getting around. In most developed major cities all over the globe – particularly looking at Europe, for example – this is the case. Melbourne should not be any different. Melbourne in this regard could be aiming to be more like Vienna or Paris or Singapore, and because more than half of motor vehicle trips in Melbourne are less than 6 kilometres, this vision is achievable. But it will not happen simply by introducing a congestion levy by itself, I will note; we also need to build a safe, accessible and interconnected public and active transport system.

To be fair to the state government, they have invested in a bunch of major public transport projects for the CBD and the inner suburbs – and noting of course the Metro Tunnel project is due to open later this year – but at the same time they have invested tens of billions of dollars more into toll roads, an American strategy of the last century which has not worked. That is a fact known basically to anyone who has driven on Transurban's CityLink recently. Even worse than this, this Labor government has effectively given up on making the tram network accessible for people with disability, despite the fact that this could be achieved for only one-thirteenth of the cost of the North East Link toll road. Hundreds of thousands of Victorians are disabled or have mobility issues, and it is completely unacceptable and frankly shameful that these members of our community are denied the option of using public transport,

which I note also puts our state government in direct breach of its obligations under the UN's Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities and our country's own national disability laws.

The state Labor government also have a poor record on active transport infrastructure like bike lanes. Ten per cent of people living in the inner city are already riding to work, with a similar proportion walking, yet Infrastructure Victoria reports that 200,000 more active transport trips would occur every day if the state government invested in dedicated bike lanes and pedestrian infrastructure.

Safety fears – being hit by a car – are the number one reason why people do not ride their bikes. Tragically, preventable cyclist deaths are still far too common in our state, especially around the inner suburbs of Melbourne, yet the evidence clearly shows that the presence and quality of dedicated cycling infrastructure significantly improves safety and that, where bikes are separated from cars by separated lanes, far more people feel safe to go and ride, so we need to get on and build those.

But perhaps the biggest beneficiaries of building better public and active transport are people who do have to drive a car for their transport, because every person who decides to ride a bike or take public transport provides one less vehicle in the traffic jam and one more parking space at the end of the journey. One of the most frustrating things about a lot of the tabloid media coverage that we see on traffic problems that they commonly adopt is this false dichotomy between support for bike lanes and support for cars when the reality is pretty straightforward: having more people on bikes and more people on PT reduces motor vehicle traffic and opens up parking spaces, which is why the peak motoring advocacy organisation, the RACV, is among the loudest supporters, calling for more separated bike lanes and bike superhighways, even across inner-city Melbourne.

My Greens colleagues and I support congestion levies as a principle, but we also support the recommendations of Infrastructure Victoria that at least some of that revenue that is generated must be directly invested into building the essential alternative transport infrastructure that is still lacking in our city, especially active transport infrastructure around those inner-city areas. To this end, I will now speak to the amendments that have been prepared in my name. I request that they now be circulated.

Under the current Congestion Levy Act there is no requirement for the government to distribute any revenue towards building and improving alternative transport infrastructure to provide people with safer, cleaner and more efficient alternatives to driving a car. I note a lot of those who have voiced opposition to the congestion levy have said that they do so because they feel it is purely a means of revenue raising from the state government. I also previously have noted – just before – the recommendation from Infrastructure Victoria that the congestion levy revenue should be invested in active transport projects. Effectively, to this end, the amendments that I am moving in my name seek to address these concerns to ensure that at least some of that revenue that is generated from the congestion levy goes directly back to the inner-city communities who are generating the income to build new and improve existing active transport infrastructure in these areas.

Amendment 4 would insert a new section 34B into the act. It says that the minister, on behalf of the state, must enter into a MOU with each municipal council whose municipal district includes any land that is in the levy area and that this MOU relates to the annual allocation of funding to each council for active transport or other transport initiatives. For ease of administration the amendments have not been drafted to insert a formal hypothecation of congestion levy revenue, but in practical effect this is what the amendments will deliver. If passed, this means there will be a legislative requirement for each of the Melbourne, Yarra, Merri-bek, Port Phillip and Stonnington city councils to be provided with new annual funding from the state government for the purposes of funding active and other transport infrastructure. For the Yarra, Merri-bek, Port Phillip and Stonnington city councils, this will mean that they are allocated funding from the congestion levy scheme for the first time.

While the specific details of the MOU and exact allocation of funding to councils are not established within the legislation, we have an agreement with the government that this will provide no less than \$15 million across all councils, provided each and every year on an ongoing basis. It is significant

funding that will now be reinvested directly in these inner-city communities which would otherwise have just been sitting in state government's consolidated revenue, as has been voiced by some members. It is a great outcome for these communities, and I commend these amendments and the bill to the house.

**Ryan BATCHELOR** (Southern Metropolitan) (21:02): I am pleased to rise to speak on the State Taxation Further Amendment Bill 2025, a bill which makes a number of amendments to the state taxation system. But I just want to confine my remarks tonight to the topic of the congestion levy, because it has been the subject of a bit of debate. Mr Davis has given it a range of other names. I will refrain from repeating those here. He is more than capable of speaking for himself. But I want to talk a little bit about the fact that we know congestion does affect our city. We know that trying to move around our city in particular is affected by congestion. We have had the reports from Infrastructure Victoria saying that congestion costs Victoria and Victorians billions of dollars. In fact Infrastructure Victoria has modelled the congestion cost to the Victorian economy at over \$10 billion from 2030 alone. We know it is felt in a range of places, but particularly it is areas close to and including the city which suffer disproportionately in many respects from the effects of congestion.

I know that I am not alone in having spent many an hour sitting on Punt Road waiting for some traffic to clear, spending quite a long time only to move a small number of kilometres. That is one of the things that have obviously been motivating the government to look at how we can improve transport and improve the way we move around Melbourne. The congestion levy included in this bill is one of those measures. Two things are being done to the congestion levy today. One is that the rate is being increased, and the other is that the area to which the congestion levy applies is being expanded. It is not the first time that this Parliament, this chamber in fact, has considered a state taxation amendment bill that seeks to both increase the levy and expand its operation. We had a debate on a very similar piece of legislation about a decade ago. I just want to read out what the Assistant Treasurer in that debate said. At the time the then Assistant Treasurer said:

We accept it is not necessarily going to be popular among business groups and others, but we believe as a government that it is an appropriate measure having regard to investments the government is making in public transport and transport infrastructure more generally in the inner city, which is the area in which this levy will apply.

Now, of course that comment was made by the Liberal Assistant Treasurer Mr Rich-Phillips, a former member of this place, in May 2014, which I believe would have been under the Napthine government. It is a bit hard to keep track of who the Leader of the Liberal Party is in any given year, but I think in 2014 it was Denis Napthine. He was the Premier of this state. It was the Napthine government, in fact, that increased the rate of the congestion levy and expanded the boundaries of the congestion levy in a state taxation bill passed by this Parliament in 2014. It is interesting that now Mr Davis stands up and rails against a measure that is basically very, very similar to something that he voted for on 8 May 2014. He is against it today, but he was in favour of it before.

**David Davis:** On a point of order, Acting President, it is not a fact that I voted in favour of something at that time that is on the same level as this. This is actually an increase –

**The ACTING PRESIDENT (Jeff Bourman):** Mr Davis, what is your actual point of order?

**David Davis:** My point of order is that the member is wrong and is misleading the house.

**The ACTING PRESIDENT (Jeff Bourman):** No, that is not a point of order.

**Ryan BATCHELOR:** I am sorry if Mr Davis does not know which way he votes from one day to the other, one year to the other and one decade to the other. If he wants to stand up and explain his voting record, he is more than capable of doing so. What we saw in 2014 was the Liberal government increase the rate of the congestion levy and expand its application to new areas.

*Members interjecting.*

**Ryan BATCHELOR:** They voted for it. They voted to increase the rate of the congestion levy in 2014, and they voted to expand its application.

*Members interjecting.*

**Ryan BATCHELOR:** The interjections from the opposition, who cannot quite understand how today they are voting against something that they used to be in favour of, I think speak to everything that is wrong with the current Liberal Party. They are against something for a moment and then they are in favour of it, or they are in favour of something and then they are against it. They do not know what they support and they do not know who they support from one day to the other.

*Members interjecting.*

**David Davis:** You're a goose!

**The ACTING PRESIDENT (Jeff Bourman):** Mr Davis, I heard that one. I would ask you to retract.

**David Davis:** I retract that he is a goose.

**The ACTING PRESIDENT (Jeff Bourman):** Mr Davis, I want you to retract properly.

**David Davis:** I retract.

**The ACTING PRESIDENT (Jeff Bourman):** Thank you. Mr Batchelor to continue, please, in silence.

**Ryan BATCHELOR:** I do not know why members of the Liberal Party or Mr Davis have got such difficulty explaining why they were in favour of something one day and against it the next, because what their bill did in 2014 was increase the rate of the congestion levy and expand its application to new areas, and that is exactly what this bill before us today does. So maybe the Liberal Party, Mr Davis and others can explain why their votes keep changing – why they keep shifting their position. I do not know, maybe it has got to do with who their leader is at any particular point in time.

I will just make one more comment. Mr Davis in his contribution expressed concern about the way that this levy applies to certain retail premises and the effect it has on retail strips. What he is also doing with the amendments that he is circulating here today, particularly his amendment to omit clause 15 from this bill, is seeking to omit a provision that will reduce the rate of the levy on all of the spaces in the category 2 areas that fall under the congestion levy. So what he is trying to do through his amendments to this bill is block concessions from the congestion levy that will apply to parking spaces for retail premises or shopping centres.

I would like the Liberal members in their contributions further in this debate to explain why they are opposed to clause 15 in this bill, why they are opposed to a concession for parking spaces and why they have moved an amendment specifically to seek to omit that from the bill. The inconsistency in the positions of the Liberal Party is breathtaking. They have got an opportunity in front of us today. Maybe someone other than Mr Davis can help clarify why they are opposing something they were in favour of when they were in government – in fact triple the rate of the congestion levy when they were in government – and expanded to considerably more parts of Melbourne than this bill does today. But I cannot speak for them. I cannot explain why they have changed their position. Only they can explain why they have changed, and I look forward to hearing them do so.

**Gaelle BROAD (Northern Victoria) (21:11):** I am pleased to be able to speak on the State Taxation Further Amendment Bill 2025. The bill is bittersweet, and I will speak to that later. But 'further amendment' is so accurate. Further amendment – Labor love amending tax legislation. They just keep adding to it. It is like a long roll of toilet paper that just keeps going; it never ends. We have seen over 60 new or increased taxes under this government, and I think we are losing count. Think of the emergency services tax. We have got the holiday tax, the schools tax. We have the vaccination levy,

payroll tax. We have had hikes in land tax, even number plate taxes. The births, deaths and marriages fees have gone up. I know just last week, with that sitting, I spoke about Probus clubs that are being asked to pay \$437 if they make a change to their constitution to Consumer Affairs Victoria, and yet other states charge just between \$23 and \$84. Everywhere we look, Victoria loves to tax, and that is because they have a big debt. They have a big black hole, and now we have a big pile of taxes. How big? We are heading towards \$194 billion state net debt, and we will soon be paying \$29 million every single day in interest. When I spoke about this last year we were paying \$15 million every day. That is soon going to be double. It is quite extraordinary what we are seeing.

According to the budget forward estimates, Victoria's net debt will reach 25 per cent of its gross state product. Analysis by the Parliamentary Budget Office of the last decade to 2023–24 shows that net debt has increased by an average of 22.9 per cent each year. Anyone with a home loan knows that interest rates matter – how much extra it costs to borrow money. Treasury Corporation of Victoria have estimated that the state will need to refinance \$86 million in debt between 2029 and 2034. I have heard it called a debt time bomb, because during the pandemic interest rates on that debt were just 2.4 per cent. But they have jumped, and they are expected to double to around 5 per cent in future.

Recent reports show again, and you will be aware of it – the people of this chamber – that the government certainly has not reined in spending. The public servant wages bill blew out by \$540 million. The Helen Silver review – we have been waiting months; it has not been released yet. There have certainly not been any details.

You wonder why the government keeps looking for additional tax revenue. I would say the Suburban Rail Loop – I know Mr Welch has raised that topic many times. It has had 'TBC' in the budget papers. Victorian taxpayers are funding a \$900,000 salary for the chief. I find that extraordinary. It is over \$200,000 higher than recommended by the Victorian Independent Remuneration Tribunal. On top of that, he lives in Queensland, so Victorian taxpayers are actually paying for his flights down to Melbourne. But we still do not have any idea of what the Suburban Rail Loop is going to cost. The Prime Minister says, 'Oh, yes.' The Prime Minister says, 'Yes, yes, come down. We'll put in extra money, but you've got to wait till May to find out.' This is extraordinary. I will add too that the chairman of the Suburban Rail Loop Authority is a former Deputy Premier to Daniel Andrews, James Merlino, and he receives nearly \$170,000 for the privilege.

So it comes as no surprise that this bill contains increased taxes. But it is bittersweet, as I mentioned, because I know that we have advocated very strongly for Dinner Plain to be exempt from the vacant residential land tax because just like every other snow resort, for some reason Dinner Plain was left off, and it makes no sense that people are having to pay that tax. I know my colleague Mr McCurdy in the lower house, the member for Ovens Valley, has advocated strongly for that. I did raise questions with the Treasurer about this back in May and then also raised it again and wrote again. I was very excited when I heard that changes were coming – that was a positive. Then I was very frustrated to see that it has been put in with much of the content of this bill.

We have heard Mr Davis talk about the impact of the congestion levy. This bill amends the act to change the category 1 area levy rate to \$3030 per leviable parking space, in line with the parking space levy rates in Sydney's CBD. But what has been pointed out is that we certainly do not have the same property prices or the same salaries as Sydney, so it is not a very good comparison. The bill also changes the category 2 area rate to \$2150 per space, and these changes will commence from 1 January 2026. Mr Batchelor wonders why we are opposed to it. A big hint: 73 per cent hike on the cost is a good reason, I would say, to certainly reject it. At the time of the bill briefing, the Treasurer's office estimated that the additional revenue raised by the levy increase will be approximately \$85 million to \$90 million per year. We have heard Mr Davis talk to that, about the Property Council of Australia. They have provided further insights into it. According to the data that they have received from their members, it imposes a minimum average cost of \$13 per day per parking space. Those costs flow on – taxes have a habit of doing that – and it is households that end up paying more. The Property Council found that the 73 per cent increase proposed would pass on that extra cost of \$13 per day.

Since this congestion levy was introduced, it has been increased by more than 600 per cent, but the council receives a fixed sum of \$7 million a year, and that amount has not increased since the levy was introduced almost 20 years ago. This is a repeating pattern that we are seeing from the Allan Labor government. I was on that local council parliamentary inquiry, and we heard from so many councils talking about how the state government has passed on many costs to local councils. We have seen that with the emergency services levy as well. They are using local councils to actually collect state revenue, and they are using councils now as a bit of a cash cow to collect funds on their behalf. We see this through the animal registration fees, where it talks about increasing the amount payable by a council to the Treasurer in respect of each registration fee collected by it in a financial year for a dog or a cat, and then it goes on to say ‘for each financial year after that, an amount that increases from the previous financial year by the rate fixed by the Treasurer’. Red flag. That just means, guess what, taxes are just going to keep going up. The Allan Labor government is doubling its tax on all dogs and cats from \$4.51 to \$9 per animal from July next year, as I said. This might sound small, but there are 2.2 million registered pets in Victoria, and this will certainly easily deliver another \$10 million windfall each year to the government. Every dog, cat and greyhound also will have their registration fees double, because the act seeks to increase the amount payable by Greyhound Racing Victoria to the Treasurer in respect of each registration fee collected by it.

Victoria is now the state with the highest taxes, highest net debt and highest unemployment and certainly very low business confidence. And every dollar we see spent on interest reduces our capacity to invest in health, in education, in community safety and in the transport services that our state desperately needs. This government is doing everything they can to use smoke and mirrors, as I have said. They are using councils now to try and collect additional revenue and return that money to the state. But these new taxes will be passed on, and they are just going to put more pressure on households and add to our cost of living. Nothing is off limits. This is a very desperate government, and we are seeing that in this bill. They are looking for the coins in the back of the couch. They are searching through the car at the back of the seats, looking there too. Labor cannot manage money, and Victorians are paying for their waste and financial mismanagement. Thankfully, we are just one year away from the next state election in November 2026.

This tax bill is bittersweet. As I said, we definitely want to see Dinner Plain exempt from the vacant residential land tax. And I thank Mr Davis for the amendments that have been put forward, because we cannot stand by and support a government that is crippling our state with even more taxes.

**David ETTERS HANK** (Western Metropolitan) (21:22): Others have spoken on various provisions, so I will not take up the chamber’s time by going over them again.

**Georgie Purcell** interjected.

**David ETTERS HANK:** You cope with your disappointment well. Instead I will turn my attention to the congestion levy. A congestion levy sounds like a fine idea, and it would be reasonable to assume that its purpose is to prevent congestion on our roads, and one would expect that such a levy would be accompanied by corresponding uptakes in public transport and the like. That all sounds great. However, this is not a congestion levy; this is a car park levy. In most major cities – such as London or Singapore, for example – where a congestion levy has been introduced, it applies a cost to vehicles driving through the regulated area. Our more, shall we say, oblique Victorian congestion levy is simply a tax on car parks.

The levy will increase parking costs by around 73 per cent in the existing category 1 and category 2 areas, and it expands category 2 to include parts of Burnley, Cremorne, South Yarra, Windsor, Richmond, Abbotsford and Prahran that have never been liable to this levy in the past. And surprise, surprise, there is actually no evidence whatsoever that it will do anything to decrease congestion. There has been no analysis on whether the levy has reduced congestion at all. The congestion levy was introduced in 2006 – I thank Mr Batchelor for his erudite history of the levy – and since that time it

has increased by a whopping 658 per cent. If passed, this congestion levy will collect more revenue from people parking their cars than is collected from all of the gaming venues in Victoria collectively.

There is no doubt that car park operators will pass this levy onto their patrons, and many of these are workers and families who likely have no alternative but to drive to their place of work, adding to their cost-of-living pressures. My region is host to some of the suburbs with the highest private commuting rates. It is not because the residents are particularly wedded to driving to work, crawling along the Calder for an hour and a half each day, each way – most of them would rather not do that. But with the abysmal public transport options available to many of them, they really do not have much of a choice. And while well-heeled inner-city suburbs boast the highest work-from-home rates, areas like Cairnlea and Hoppers Crossing in my neck of the woods have some of the lowest work-from-home rates in Melbourne, so the levy will increase their parking costs by an average of \$1386 per year. The levy will negatively impact people like hospitality workers and healthcare workers, many of whom are women, as well as shift workers, who are understandably reluctant to catch public transport home after their shifts. Students and young people, who are particularly vulnerable to price increases, will be disproportionately affected, as will tradies, community workers, retail workers and salespeople who rely on off-street parking for their work.

Other members have spoken about the impact on retailers who will be negatively impacted by this car park tax. Stallholders at the Queen Victoria Market reckon this will seriously damage their trade, as a huge proportion of shoppers travel from outside of the city to go to the market and this will be a real deterrent to them. I could go on, but essentially we oppose this cash grab by the government dressed up as a congestion levy.

**John BERGER** (Southern Metropolitan) (21:26): I rise to speak on the State Taxation Further Amendment Bill 2025. I would like to thank the Treasurer for helping us steer the state budget back into an operating surplus whilst delivering the essential services Victorians rely on.

This bill delivers on seven key objectives, and I want to go through each one in detail. First, it makes changes to the congestion levy and the rates within each category. Next, it also makes changes to the vacant residential land tax, particularly as to how it applies to Dinner Plain Alpine Village. The bill will also pass several exemptions to the land tax in certain circumstances. The bill also contains reforms for the foreign purchaser additional duty as it relates to New Zealand citizens in Victoria and their circumstantial exemption. There is a minor amendment to the limitation period for cases of fraud. Six, this bill will make amendments to the building permit levy in relation to consistency and validating past, present and new rates with the Building and Plumbing Commission, formerly known as the Victorian Building Authority. Finally, the bill also passes changes to payments for dog and cat registration fees collected by councils and for greyhound registration fees collected by Greyhound Racing Victoria. There is a longer list of more minor forms which I will touch on later, but I want to explain these seven objectives in greater detail for the benefit of the chamber or those listening.

First, the changes to the congestion levy: the congestion levy amendments will see the rate in category 1 increase to \$3030 per parking space from the start of January 2026, which brings the rate in line with the rates in Sydney CBD. Category 2 areas, which are largely in inner Melbourne, will be expanded towards Chapel Street, Bridge Road, Swan Street, Victoria Street, Hoddle Street and Punt Road. The rate for this category will increase to \$2150 per parking space from the start of next year and will be adjusted annually for inflation from 2027. The commissioner of state revenue will also publish a map of these levy areas on the State Revenue Office website, where most Victorians access their information on state taxation. Government school premises will be exempted from this levy from 2026, when it will be provided free of charge, bringing government schools in line with non-government schools, which already enjoy such an exemption. Following some further consultation with key industry stakeholders, a new 50 per cent concession from the congestion levy will apply to spaces in category 2 which are located on or are adjacent to retail premises such as shopping centres. Car park owners who own and operate exclusively residential parking spaces will also no longer be required to register with the State Revenue Office.

This bill makes changes to the vacant residential land tax when it comes to Dinner Plain. Dinner Plain will be excluded from this tax, applying retrospectively from 1 January 2025. It shares similar amenities to nearby Mount Hotham Alpine Resort with a similar seasonal economy and provides the same service for visitors. It is functionally very similar, economically speaking, to the alpine resort which is exempt from the tax, so as such we are retroactively exempting Dinner Plain from all of the taxes as well. This is a straightforward change which is only fair. The State Revenue Office will contact local owners to refund any tax paid by them this year before this amendment comes into effect.

Next, we have a new land tax exemption from the start of next year. A new exemption will be available for land valued less than \$300,000 if it contains a non-permanent shelter. That means things such as caravans or tents which are used as the owner's home. This will help ease financial hardships and tax burden on those who may own a plot of land but cannot afford to build a home on it. This bill also includes new exemptions where it relates to New Zealand citizens. New Zealand citizens under this amendment will be excluded from paying any foreign purchaser additional duty, or FPAD, and the absentee owner surcharge, or AOS, when appropriate. There are of course conditions attached to this. A requirement for being an ordinary resident in Australia will be in effect replacing the existing special category visa test. That visa test has in the past caused some administrative anomalies for some New Zealand citizens, and this amendment will fix that up. The new requirements will bring the treatment of New Zealand citizens in line with other foreign citizens in Victoria. This bill will also remove the requirement for New Zealand citizens to hold a special category visa to be eligible for the first home owner grant. There will still be a need to comply with the existing 12-month residency requirement to qualify for the first home owner grant; they will just no longer have to deal with the administratively confusing and tiresome special category visa.

Next there are the changes to section 27 of the Limitation of Actions Act 1958. The amendments provide for postponement of the limitation period in cases where fraud or mistake apply to proceedings which section 20A(2) also applies. The amendment will not affect the limitation period that applies to the recovery of taxes on other grounds.

Sixth, this bill proposes changes and amendments to the Building and Plumbing Commission and associated rates for permits. The bill will make clarifications on the method of calculating the building permit levy, and it will be validated past current levies. This will provide consistency and certainty for consumers, buildings and the Building and Plumbing Commission, which was formerly the Victorian Building Authority. With that, I commend the bill to the house.

**Georgie PURCELL** (Northern Victoria) (21:32): I rise to speak on the State Taxation Further Amendment Bill 2025 too. From the outset, I wish to note that I will ultimately be supporting this piece of legislation. While there are some aspects of this bill that I absolutely do not agree with, there are also some positive changes to come from it, particularly for my constituents in Northern Victoria. I will highlight the good before I get into the bad.

Firstly, under these changes residential land tax within the village of Dinner Plain will be excluded from the vacant residential land tax scheme, and this will apply retrospectively from 1 January this year. This change brings Dinner Plain into line with the Mount Hotham Alpine Resort, which shares a similar seasonal economy and is also not subject to vacant residential land tax. I am informed that upon this legislation's passage, local owners at Dinner Plain will be contacted by the State Revenue Office to organise any refunds.

I also welcome the decision to create a new land tax exemption for land which is valued at less than \$300,000. This will be a welcome change for people in my electorate who are living in a caravan or a tent on their land. I hope it will make a meaningful difference in reducing financial hardship for people who cannot afford to build a home on their land.



For our friends across the ditch – I was actually just messaging my good friend Reed Fleming from New Zealand about this – this bill will bring the treatment of Kiwis into line with other foreign citizens by replacing the existing special category visa test with an ordinarily residing in Australia requirement.

Turning my attention to perhaps the most controversial bit of the bill, expanding the congestion levy, I did um and ah about whether to support this for some time, and I want to put on the record that I broadly do support any effort to ease congestion in or around the city. A congestion levy done well does have the power to not only raise revenue but to also reshape how Melburnians move, live and work. I want to be clear that I do not make the decision to support yet another increase on tax lightly. The government cannot continue to rely on just taxing Victorians as a short-term solution. It does need to find a way out of its budget crisis without hitting hardworking people. I know that there has been opposition to expanding this scheme, and I want to recognise the groups and councils that have advocated against this. I have listened over the past few months in good faith and considered all of their arguments.

I do have concerns that expanding this charge will only give car park operators the mandate to jack up their prices even further. When Victorians are already struggling to make ends meet, any move to drastically make parking even more expensive than it already is should be condemned, and I hope the car parking conglomerates will respond to this change with empathy. In landing on this decision I considered the impact that this would have on shift workers, and many others have spoken about the risks particularly to young women who rely on their own vehicles because they do not feel safe catching public transport, especially at night. That is something that I can certainly relate to myself as well.

I am pleased that some shopping centres have received carve-outs and on-street parking will remain exempt. I have also considered the flow-on effects that any price impacts may have on families from outer Melbourne and regional Victoria who are wanting to travel into the city to enjoy sport, live music or hospitality. The government needs to understand that not everyone lives near accessible public transport. We have heard the argument just to drive to the nearest train station, and I do think that many of us in regional areas know that this is not as straightforward as it seems. I myself grew up in a small country town with no public transport options, and driving to a train station to then get on a train just is not a feasible option; it actually takes up significantly more time. This answer from the government just does not work for everyone in reality. Ultimately the government have given me repeated assurances through our conversations that they do not believe any anticipated increase passed on by car park operators will be majorly noticeable to consumers upon exiting the car park.

Despite my concerns raised, I do think that there are positives that could come out of expanding this levy. The Grattan Institute have recently described it as:

... an attractive instrument for governments because it helps to better align the incentive to drive with the full costs to the community of one person driving.

It is a fact that encouraging people to leave their cars at home is a good thing. Everyone in this place knows that driving in Melbourne's CBD is an absolute nightmare at the best of times, so less cars on these roads can only make things better. But I can understand why people do opt to drive when our public transport system is also buckling under immense pressure. I do not envy anyone getting on a tram during peak hour in the morning or at night and being jammed in like sardines. The government must use the revenue raised by this expanded tax to increase services, particularly on our tram and our train networks. We cannot simply tax our way out of congestion. *Victoria's Infrastructure Strategy 2025–2055*, developed by Infrastructure Victoria, has identified desperately needed improvements to our tram and train network that would go a long way to easing traffic on our roads and freeing space on public transport. The government, as has been touched on by multiple members already, in typical fashion, have decided to lump multiple proposals and things into the one piece of legislation, which has deeply frustrated and I think made a difficult decision-making process for many of us.

The last component that I want to speak on is the changes to the amount of money that the government will collect from pet registration fees. This is something that has obviously come across my desk quite continuously since it was announced, being an Animal Justice Party MP. They are proposing to double the cost of fees to register cats and dogs, from \$4.50 to \$9. In 2024 to 2025 almost 630,000 dogs were registered with councils, which raked the government in \$2.84 million, while almost 222,000 cats were registered, collecting \$999,000. It is important to note that the only reason that I am supporting this is because the total revenue, which is expected to be about \$7.5 million according to some quick maths based on similar figures, will go directly towards funding animal welfare initiatives. I have canvassed this proposal quite extensively with many in my community who are very used to paying pet registration fees, as I am as well, and the consensus has been that they are more than happy to pay an increased pet registration fee if they know that that money is going into initiatives that directly benefit and improve the lives of animals. I have had direct conversations with the government about the fact that this funding cannot just go to the larger organisations and the regulators but also needs to be dispersed across the many smaller community rescue groups and animal welfare organisations which are run by volunteers and survive on donations and once a year can apply for a grant.

It has been really difficult to get any attention for them from the government, and it is my hope, with a bigger pool of funds that is raised from this registration fee system, that there will be more money to go around to these incredibly hardworking groups who do just so much work to rescue, rehome and rehabilitate all types of animals across the state. It is a very, very thankless job, and this amount of money, if shared around in the right way, would be so meaningful to them and significantly improve the ways in which they run their operations and the way in which they feel supported by this government. And I must say that right now that feeling of support is very minimal – they feel quite left behind – which leads me to the bit that really annoys me here about this bill, and that is the cost of registering a racing greyhound, which will only rise from \$3.50 to \$7. That means that the racing greyhound, which exists for the purpose of making a profit – they are a cog in a brutal machine – will actually be paying less than the family pet within a household. That is just not good enough. It is an absolute farce, and to be completely honest, it is totally out of step with community expectations. I think it is not just my people – the animal activists and the animal protection community – that are outraged by this proposal; it is a joke that Greyhound Racing Victoria-registered participants are paying less money for these dogs that are having their lives gambled on and their lives put at risk every single day.

Just yesterday morning I woke up to an email from the Coalition for the Protection of Greyhounds telling me that four dogs broke their legs at the one meet in the one night at Sale. This is an industry that will be paying less, contributing less to animal welfare initiatives when they are the ones that are creating the problem. They are the ones creating the animal welfare crisis; they are the ones creating the dogs and the animals in need of homes. I think that the government owe us an explanation as to why they think these people who exploit animals as part of a desperate bid to win a buck should pay less than the everyday family registering their golden retriever or, like me, registering the rescue dachshunds that have come out of the puppy farming industry or my Cavalier Aggie or my cats, who have all come to me from these hardworking rescue groups, who will be paying more and fighting to receive government funding.

So there really is a lot to be answered for about this decision. We have made it clear to the government how we feel about this, because this is an industry that just actually very, very recently released its annual report for 2024–25, and in this report they outed themselves for having the highest euthanasia rate, highest animal cruelty incidents and lowest adoption rehoming figures in four years. They have low rehoming figures, while again these community rescue groups who are in desperate need of money – who I am really hopeful will get some money out of this increased pet registration system – are rehoming more dogs than this well-funded, industry-affiliated program that receives constant backing and support from the government. The industry-aligned Greyhound Adoption Program, the group that I am referring to, are funded by Greyhound Racing Victoria, and they found homes for 283 fewer dogs than the previous year, and they found homes for fewer dogs than these community

rescue groups that are run by volunteers and survive off donations with basically no government support.

We have long known that volunteer-run community rescue groups rehome more dogs than the industry does itself – I talk about it a lot – and it is awful for these people who step up and give these dogs a safe, loving home and life to be hit with a higher registration fee. Like I said, these people are actually more often than not happy to pay a higher fee if they know that money is going towards animal welfare initiatives that actually directly benefit the lives of these animals, and that is what we will be pushing for. This is all while Greyhound Racing Victoria are still flat out refusing to introduce a breeding cap, leaving volunteer rescue groups to absorb the consequences of their negligence, and not only that, paying a lower registration fee. What is more than that, the government is rewarding them for this incompetence. They are constantly rewarding them. They refuse to admit that the industry is failing, they refuse to admit that this program itself is failing, and just a few weeks ago they gave the Greyhound Adoption Program \$3 million of taxpayer money. That is a huge amount – that is almost half the amount that this increased registration fee system will raise, which we hope will be spread appropriately across animal welfare initiatives. But the government once again really needs to reflect on its priorities and really needs to think about the way that it continuously throws taxpayer money at this blood sport.

It is telling that the government insists on pushing ahead with propping up this dirty industry that has absolutely and well and truly lost its social licence. In collating my comments for this speech, I was talking to my staff and saying that I do hope to have conversations with the new Leader of the Liberal Party, the member for Kew, to canvass her view on whether it is an economically sound decision to actually throw copious amounts of money at such a flailing operation. The alternative Premier has expressed a keen interest in bringing the budget back into line, and I am saying right now that we have a solution for her and we have a solution for the Liberal Party, because we only need to look at other jurisdictions which are led by both Labor and Liberal governments who have had the courage to call out the greyhound racing industry. It is happening all around us. We are the outlier when it comes to racing dogs. In fact just last week the Tasmanian government introduced legislation to make it illegal by mid 2029. The Liberal government in Tasmania is banning greyhound racing, and they started that process by doing exactly what I am talking about now, and that is defunding the industry – telling the industry that if they think they have a social licence, then they should stand on their own two feet. And guess what their immediate response was? It was: ‘We can’t. We can’t survive without taxpayer money; we can’t survive without having everyday people’s income thrown at us.’ We should look at doing the same thing here.

Meanwhile the Labor government in Western Australia is currently undertaking a parliamentary inquiry into the so-called sport, the Labor-led New South Wales government has also held two inquiries and in South Australia the ever-popular Premier Malinauskas has also had an inquiry and he has put the industry on notice. He has told them that if they cannot clean up their act within two years, they will be shut down as well. So that is almost every state in our country that is taking action on the overwhelming community feedback that we need to do something about the way that these dogs are suffering, the way that they are continuously injuring themselves and dying on racetracks and the way that the industry are constantly thrown money despite the fact that their social licence has just completely diminished. And here in Victoria, what does Premier Jacinta Allan do? She throws more money at it and protects the industry from her own government’s latest tax grab. She chooses to tax the family pet more than the racing greyhound, which is exploited across our state.

I actually was having positive discussions with the government about making a change to increase the cost of racing registrations to be higher than the cost of registering the family pet, and they seemed to show a willingness to help facilitate this change. Mysteriously, however, these conversations suddenly fell flat, and I suspect that this is a case of one person stepping in – which has happened with many of my issues before – and calling the shots, which is incredibly disappointing. I had intended to still move this as an amendment in my own name to increase these racing registrations and put the racing industry

on notice to say to them: you should be paying more; you are complicit in cruelty; you are the reason that we have an animal welfare crisis in this state. But unfortunately, due to the workings of the upper house when it comes to taxation bills, it was procedurally impossible for me to do so. So I just really want to have on the record my absolute disgust and disdain that the government has made this decision and that they have chosen to give the racing industry another get-out-of-jail-free card, and that in order to make the money that they need to make protect animals in this state, they are not going after the people responsible for the animal welfare crisis. They are going after the family pet in the family home and not the ones creating this very problem before us; they are not going after the ones creating the rehoming crisis and they are not going after the ones creating the welfare crisis.

Ultimately, as I stated earlier, the only reason – and I want to be clear about this – that I am pushing ahead in support of this legislation with a whole lot of hesitation is because without the security of this extra revenue, I have no confidence that the government will actually sufficiently fund animal welfare initiatives. We only need to look at the evidence; we only need to see what is going on around us. We are seeing the constant defunding of critical services and really, really important initiatives that improve the lives of Victorians. Without this dedicated fund to go towards animals and their protection and ensuring that the pot is sufficiently full – which, as I have said, I have canvassed with my community; they are happy to pay this increased cost, knowing that it goes into protecting animals – I have no faith, without this specific delegation of money set aside, that it will be funded at all.

We have had to fight really, really hard to get animals included in the state budget. In fact it was something that was not given a whole lot of attention before the Animal Justice Party was in the Parliament. Each and every year we have made significant strides in making the case to the government about why they need to fund animal protection initiatives, and I am moving forward in supporting this bill in good faith that the Treasurer will appropriately assign the money raised to the people who need it the most. That is not the large organisations and that is not the regulators; that is the people who are using their own income and their own time every single day to try and help animals. They are at breaking point. They are burnt out. They are at their wits' end. I can only hope that in making this decision their lives will be improved.

I am supporting this legislation not as a favour to the government but as an obligation to my community and the people that I represent who need that recognition and who need that funding in order to carry out their work – because if they are not carrying out their work, the government is not carrying out that work either. All that does is leave animals to languish and to suffer in our state, and that is the very, very last thing that I want, because we know that animals are already being failed by this government. There is no way that I can risk that even further by cutting off the guaranteed funding stream or by refusing to support an increase to their funding stream, which is ultimately what this bill will do. So for the reasons outlined and on balance, I will be supporting this bill, although somewhat hesitantly, and I look forward to canvassing a number of those issues that I have spoken about in my second-reading contribution in the committee-of-the-whole stage of the bill.

**Richard WELCH** (North-Eastern Metropolitan) (21:53): I will make a short contribution on this. This is another new Labor tax that does not do what it says it does, in a long line of them. There is a congestion tax. It is not about addressing congestion any more than the COVID tax was about addressing COVID debt or the Emergency Services and Volunteers Fund has anything to do with emergency services or volunteers. It is just another new tax.

I met someone out in Blackburn the other day, and they mentioned the cat and dog tax. They said, 'It's just Labor being Labor, essentially, because if it's not nailed down, they'll tax it and they'll take it away.' If you are going to have a targeted tax – not a broad tax that funds general revenue – then it really should have a very targeted purpose; otherwise it is really just punitive. It is a punitive revenue-gaining exercise. If we are going to have a congestion tax, then surely the objective has to be to reduce congestion. There is absolutely no evidence that simply imposing a tax on the parking lot operators is going to reduce congestion. In fact I suspect it may increase it because people will be less likely to use

that form of parking and they will seek parking on the streets, which is not included in all of this. This is a targeted tax without a targeted purpose, so it is actually a punitive revenue-generating exercise.

In terms of the pet tax, what is the value for money there? Because what this amounts to, the registration of your cat or dog, is a glorified spreadsheet sitting there somewhere with dog names on it – Fido, Charlie, Max. That is effectively all it is. It serves no other substantive purpose. What are they doing to earn any registration fee whatsoever, let alone double it, let alone give themselves the latitude to up it however they like whenever they like? It is a targeted tax without actually any really specific purpose. I admire Ms Purcell's faith in the system, but there is no money going to animal welfare out of that. Maybe it will go to some administrator who is tapping on the spreadsheet, maybe putting in a few formulas to see how many brown-eyed terriers we have or something like that; I do not know. There is no value in it.

But there is a bigger impact as well. As Mrs Broad explained, the congestion tax will raise about \$85 million a year. That is \$85 million that comes out of both consumers' and operators' pockets, so that has a clear, direct economic impact. That is \$85 million less that consumers have to spend in the shops. It is \$85 million less that the operators of the car parks, which we want to be maintained in good condition, to have good, safe environments and to have the latest technology, have to maintain them in a way that maintains standards. They have less working capital to do that as well. What has the government done to earn this money – nothing. It is simply confiscating the working capital of one business to use for itself, again, for no targeted purpose. It is just a punitive revenue-raising exercise. It really goes to show to me at the end of the day the lady who said it is just Labor being Labor is spot-on, because this government has become a dead weight around the neck of Victoria.

If we are trying to grow as a state – we are a state with manifest economic challenges, mostly because of the debt and the need to service debt – the high level of tax is completely suffocating the ability of businesses to grow. We will never grow out of the debt. We obviously cannot tax our way out of that debt, though these economic geniuses think we can. The government is offering us no solution. This is a good example. Their only solution is, 'We won't grow the state's revenue; we'll just tax more of what's there for ourselves.' It is an ever-diminishing circle, a diminishing marginal return approach, and we are circling the plughole right now, and we are going to go down the drain.

Mr Batchelor made a remarkable contribution when he asked how we could possibly justify opposing a congestion charge. How could we, when 10 years ago – maybe it was 14 years ago – we supported one? Well, it is as simple as the difference between a small thing and a big thing. If you can tell the difference between something that is small and something that is big, then you will understand why we might have supported something 14 years ago but do not support it now. At that time of course we had not added 64 new taxes, had we? That is why we do not support it now and we might have supported it then. We had not run the state into the ground economically back then. That is maybe another reason why we would have supported it then but do not support it now. Maybe we actually had a genuine purpose for a congestion tax, whereas this is simply an exercise in raising money because you are broke and you cannot fund anything properly – essential services.

There are some sensible bits. We are finally getting the tax off the necks of a couple of communities out there – good. But of course Labor, being Labor, had to bundle this up into an omnibus bill so that they can sneak the nasty stuff through, because they are a nasty party. The only things you know how to do is misrepresent their work, tax people –

#### **Business interrupted pursuant to standing orders.**

**Ingrid STITT:** Pursuant to standing order 4.08(1)(b), I declare the sitting to be extended by up to 1 hour.

**Richard WELCH:** I am glad I have got another hour to go – I do not really. I think we heard a contribution that said this was part of responsible budgeting as well. Anyone in the real world out there just looks at it and rolls their eyes. This is just Labor being Labor, because this is where we are after

X number of terms of Labor, a government so bereft of ideas that the genius economic move when we have got the highest unemployment in the nation, the highest inflation in the nation and the highest debt in the nation and we are falling miles and miles behind the rest of the nation in the adoption of AI and data centres – when all that is going on – is ‘Let’s tax cats and dogs.’ Well done. I would have loved to have seen the focus group that sat down and said, ‘Come on, we’ve really got to crunch the numbers here. How do we get Victoria out of this abyss? Cats and dogs – that’s what we’re going to do. Cats and dogs! And when we’ve done cats and dogs, what else can we cut?’ In 1966 the Beatles released the album *Revolver*, and on side 1, track 1 was a song called *Taxman*. It had lines like ‘If you drive a car, I’ll tax your seat’, ‘If you take a walk, I’ll tax your feet’ and ‘If you get too cold, I’ll tax the heat.’ Well, Labor will tax your car park. That is the economic genius of this government. We are going to have a car parking-led recovery in Victoria, and it is so important that they had to put a bill through to tax cats and dogs and car parks. If you look at the scale of the problems, they are broadly commensurate, aren’t they? It is a tired government bereft of ideas. This is their big idea for the week – congratulations. The rest of the community are rolling their eyes, going, ‘It’s just Labor being Labor.’

**Tom McINTOSH** (Eastern Victoria) (22:02): I will tell you what, I am pretty happy to stand and support this bill, being Labor, particularly today when we talk about the community rolling their eyes at the Liberals being the Liberals: Guy, O’Brien, Guy, Pesutto, Battin and Wilson. What a load of theatre we have heard over there today of all days.

The State Taxation Further Amendment Bill 2025 will amend the Congestion Levy Act 2005 to increase the category 1 area levy rate to \$3030 and the category 2 area levy rate to \$2150 from the 2026 calendar year. It will also expand the category 2 area to include the suburbs of Burnley, Cremorne, South Yarra, Windsor, parts of Richmond – excluding Victoria Gardens shopping centre – Abbotsford and Prahran. It will provide a 50 per cent concession for conditional free retail parking spaces within the category 2 areas that are located on or adjacent to retail premises and retail shopping centres. It seems that some of those opposite have a problem with that. It will make minor technical amendments to the Land Tax Act 2005 to exempt vacant residential land if significant renovations or repairs on the land start and finish in the same calendar year, to exclude land in the village of Dinner Plain from the imposition of the vacant residential land tax and to introduce a land tax exemption for low-value land with non-permanent shelters.

We will amend the Domestic Animals Act 1994 to increase fees charged on pet registrations from \$4.51 to \$9 and for greyhound registrations from \$3.50 to \$7, amend the Duties Act 2000 and the Land Tax Act to exclude New Zealand citizens from the foreign purchaser additional duty and the absentee owner surcharge if they satisfy an ordinarily reside in Australia test, amend the Building Act 1993 to remove uncertainties when calculating the building permit levy and retrospectively validate past and current BPL calculations, amend the Commercial and Industrial Property Tax Reform Act 2024 and the Duties Act 2000 to clarify when land enters the commercial and industrial property tax reform scheme and amend the Limitation of Actions Act 1958 to reduce the risk to state finances where a court finds a state tax to be invalid. I will leave my remarks there.

**David LIMBRICK** (South-Eastern Metropolitan) (22:05): I also rise to speak on the State Taxation Further Amendment Bill 2025. I have got good news and bad news on this. I will start with the good news. Good news is always good. The exclusion of Dinner Plain from the vacant residential tax makes sense because it is snow country and it is not occupied for a lot of the year, so it makes sense that they do that. The land tax exemption for low-value land with a non-permanent shelter is about people that have a block of land and have a caravan or tent on it. Yes, they should not be paying land tax, and so that is a good thing. It also does some things around New Zealand citizens, with exclusions from paying foreign purchaser additional duty and other things, which are good things.

Now, the bad things – well, the minor bad thing is with the domestic animal and greyhound registration fee amendments. Yes, they will be increasing. There has been lots of coverage about this in the media, saying that they are doubling fees and this sort of thing. Well, that is not quite true, because most of

the fees actually are from council, not from the state government, but nevertheless they are increasing it somewhat.

But the thing that worries me the most is this congestion levy amendment. The congestion levy amendment is very deceptive because it does not address congestion at all. It actually just addresses the number of car parks. If it was the number of car parks that were actually used, then it would be a congestion levy, but it is not. In fact some of the people in this area that will be affected by this have been forced through planning regulations to provide a certain number of car parks, and now they are being forced to pay tax on those car parks of around about \$3030 per parking space – not quite double but quite an increase from the current levy – regardless of how they are used. I fail to see how this reduces congestion at all, because it has no relevance whatsoever to whether the car park is actually used or not.

I will also note that I have spoken extensively to different people who have properties in these areas, and they have told me that many of these businesses allow their staff to use these car parks for free. So what we will see through this congestion levy is that the businesses that currently allow staff to park at their place of work for free – and some of these places are quite scary at night, actually, around Richmond –

**A member** interjected.

**David LIMBRICK:** Yes, around Richmond. These staff may no longer have these free car parks, and because the purpose of the congestion levy is to get cars off the road, these staff will not be driving their cars to work but rather will be taking public transport at night, and this is dangerous. I have spoken to business owners that say that they have staff, many of them being women, who do not want to walk around Richmond at night to catch public transport – which with the current state of things is an extremely dangerous thing to do, walking around Richmond at night, as a young woman especially – and be forced into catching public transport. I think that this is outrageous. I think that what the government is doing here is totally wrong. If businesses want to provide free parking for their workers to ensure their safety, why on earth should the government be interfering in that process?

In fact the government claims to care about the safety of workers, claims to care about the safety of retail workers, and yet they institute this tax that will force them potentially to take public transport in the middle of the night in areas of Melbourne that I think all of us here would agree are not particularly safe for people to wander around in at night by themselves. I think that this is an outrageous thing, and therefore the Libertarian Party will be absolutely opposing this bill, because what they are doing with these congestion levy amendments is wrong. It is putting workers in danger, and it is forcing taxes on things for reasons that are misleading. The government is misleading Victorians through this. It is not a congestion levy. They are not taxing congestion. If it was a tax similar to the one in New South Wales, maybe I could say, ‘Well, actually they are trying to stop congestion because that is based on whether or not the car park is actually used.’ But in Victoria, no, we are just basing it on how many car parks you have, regardless of whether they are used. So it is not a congestion levy, it is just a tax on car parks, and this is wrong.

**Evan MULHOLLAND** (Northern Metropolitan) (22:10): I rise to speak on the State Taxation Further Amendment Bill 2025, and it is a dog’s breakfast of a bill. If they could tax dogs’ breakfasts, they would; in turn they have just taxed dogs. This bill is an absolute tax grab by this Labor government, desperate to find revenue to plug its ever-growing debt. It contains two significant tax increases that really just illustrate how tired and bereft of ideas this government has become. The first is a completely unjustifiable hike on the congestion levy, payable on car parks in the CBD and surrounding suburbs; and the second is a completely shameless tax grab that increases the registration fee for our beloved pets to either be passed onto pet owners or to be absorbed by already stretched local councils. How many times do you want to whack councils with more and more costs that have always been in the remit of the state government? We had an entire inquiry on this actually, where the

government was found out for continuously handballing responsibilities and debt onto local government.

I want to talk about the 73 per cent increase in the congestion levy, because it is a whopper of a tax increase. The levy hike punishes Victorians, it harms small businesses, it discourages visitors and it undermines Melbourne's recovery, and all without any credible evidence – not one shred of credible evidence – that this tax reduces congestion. And we know, because the Minister for the Suburban Rail Loop has not ruled it out, that the Suburban Rail Loop precincts will be covered by a congestion levy, and you can have any bet they will be at these increased rates. So if you live in Cheltenham or Box Hill or Glen Waverley or around Monash along the Suburban Rail Loop, you can guarantee – because they will not deny it – that those communities are about to be taxed with a congestion levy. 'Oh, but no tax increases for existing home owners,' the minister for the SRL says. Actually there is, and it is in the form of a congestion levy on all of those areas to fill their value capture black hole, which will be funded by state debt up-front.

This government has run out of money. We are hurtling towards \$194 billion of debt – \$25 million a day; over \$2 million an hour. And when Labor waste – as they have wasted \$50 billion of infrastructure cost blowouts, all under Jacinta Allan's watch, and when they torch \$600 million on the Commonwealth Games – somebody has to pay for that, and the people that are paying the price are, around the clock, health workers and frontline workers who work in inner-city locations like Richmond or Stonnington or park around the Alfred or some of our hospitals around Richmond. Now they are going to be taxed. So this side loves to say that they are for workers, but they would love nothing more, absolutely nothing more, than to get some revenue out of them too.

**Jaclyn Symes** interjected.

**Evan MULHOLLAND:** I will take the interjection from the Treasurer, who says hospitals are exempted from it. But we know that many staff park in existing areas outside of their hospitals, as what happens –

**Jaclyn Symes:** Street parking is exempt as well.

**Evan MULHOLLAND:** Have you tried to park around those hospitals, Treasurer? I do not think so. I have, and many will use existing car park facilities like Wilson.

Frontline workers in the city will be taxed because this government has run out of money. You have run out of money, and you are going to apply the same congestion levy to all those Suburban Rail Loop precincts. We know this because the minister has not ruled it out. It is going to be part of the value capture plan. As we have seen, the congestion levy will apply to those areas to fill their value capture black hole, as reported by the *Age* and the *Herald Sun*, who scoped out five so-called different options to fill the value capture black hole. If you live in those areas, you will also be getting a congestion levy. Category 1 is rising from \$1750 to \$3030 per parking space. The category 2 levy is rising from \$1240 to \$2150 per parking space. This government clearly does not like people who travel into the city by car.

I thought Mr Ettershank made an excellent point, because it goes the same way for people in my community as well. He was talking about places like Wyndham Vale. Wyndham Vale is very similar to the outer suburbs in my electorate, where over 70 per cent of people in those communities have to leave those communities for their employment. This government does not care about those communities. They have to leave those communities. They have no public transport. Mr Ettershank mentioned Wyndham Vale. The government have been promising for the last two elections – not one, two elections – that they will electrify those train lines, and no-one believes them. You rock up to Tarneit station or Donnybrook station, and what should be a metropolitan electrified rail service is a three-car V/Line service with a packed platform of people unable to get on the train. Why is that – because of this government's decisions, because of this government's waste and because of this government ploughing \$50 billion of cost blowouts. Instead of, as we saw with Infrastructure Victoria,



urgently required infrastructure projects in our growth areas of Melbourne, they have carried the horse and cart along to plough into the Suburban Rail Loop in the eastern suburbs, instead of the urgent priorities that Victoria needs. That is what this government has done. Again, it does not actually care about the growth areas of Melbourne and their needs.

I ask those ministers making a decision to go to Donnybrook station early in the morning and watch the train cancellations go by and stations pack up. Go to Tarneit station and they will see that, first of all, the public transport system is not adequate, and secondly, they will know that people have to travel by car. Many people work around the clock in those communities, in the city and in the inner city, and this government does not care about them.

This is a terrible tax. It will affect many people in my electorate, and it is just a disgraceful tax. It expands east into parts of Burnley, Cremorne, South Yarra, Windsor, Richmond, Abbotsford and Prahran. Car parks in the City of Yarra and the City of Stonnington are now captured for the first time. This will have a huge impact on Victorians. The average cost will be \$13 per day plus GST per CBD car space. That has to be passed on. I do not want to hear lectures from this government about cost-of-living pressures and how it cares about cost-of-living pressures when it is literally adding to the cost-of-living burdens of all Victorians. This government is doing that. Of course costs will be passed on. Regional Victorians travelling to Melbourne for medical appointments will be paying. Families heading into the city for events, shows or sporting matches will be paying. Victorians with a disability for whom public transport is not always suitable will be paying. Anyone who prefers to avoid late-night public transport for safety reasons will be paying because of this government's decisions to waste, to rack up the debt and to blow out on infrastructure projects – that is what this government has done. Driving and parking in Melbourne should remain accessible and affordable. This policy absolutely does reduce choice and safety, especially at night.

Car park owners, who are operators, warn closures are likely as costs cannot be absorbed. Local businesses and shopping strips, like Bridge Road, Chapel Street, Fitzroy and Albert Park, will suffer from reduced customer access and foot traffic. In the same way that they have damn near killed Victoria Street they are eyeing off other streets to tax and to make pay. Businesses are already struggling through economic conditions, debt levies and other charges.

There is no evidence that this tax will reduce congestion. The claim that the levy reduces congestion lacks evidence. No modelling has been provided. However, the government did model the revenue that it expects to generate but just not on the claim that the levy reduces congestion – it is funny, that. This is a revenue-raising measure, not a congestion reduction strategy. This is a government focused on plugging budget deficits by taxing Victorians.

I will just finish off by saying that this bill introduces a 100 per cent increase in the state government's share of cat and dog registration fees. The amount payable to the state government per pet registration will rise from \$4.51 to \$9, indexed annually under the Monetary Units Act 2004, and the greyhound registration levy paid to the state doubles from \$3.50 to \$7. The government is running out of money, and it is now targeting family pets as a source of revenue. You know that if it woofs or purrs, Labor will tax it. This is a bad tax as well. We knew that the government would tax anything, but this is a step too far. Many dog and cat owners will be appalled by this, as I am.

It just goes to show the waste of this government and its decisions around infrastructure cost blowouts, its decisions around the Commonwealth Games, its decisions which I highlighted last week. It cut \$1.3 million in a cruel, heartless cut from Parentline, a much-loved service. Almost a week later it announced round 2 of the little anglers program for \$1.5 million to hand out fishing rods to schoolkids – after the success of round 1, where it also spent another \$1.5 million, only to have hundreds of Victorian government-branded fishing rods up on Facebook Marketplace and Gumtree. But 'Yes, let's cut Parentline and use that cut to fund little anglers.' Those decisions symbolise the character of this government and of the waste that we have seen. We have up to \$194 billion of debt that we are heading to, \$25 million a day, over \$2 million an hour. When you waste money – when Labor wastes

money – somebody has to pay for that, and all Victorians are paying the price for your terrible decisions, including this terrible tax, which will impact my community.

**Jaclyn SYMES** (Northern Victoria – Treasurer, Minister for Industrial Relations, Minister for Regional Development) (22:25): Thank you to those that have made contributions on the bill and for the opportunity to briefly sum up on what is a relatively straightforward bill. People seem to have grasped the intention of it, so I do not need to go over it in too much detail, but I do want to just revisit the non-permanent shelters exemption. It is something that is going to have a really big impact on a small cohort of people. It exempts properties with a value of under \$300,000 from land tax if there is a non-permanent shelter on that land that is being used as the owner's home. This is a situation that has come up on occasion. I have had requests for ex gratia consideration from people in this situation. I have had stories of people for a range of reasons, whether it is loss of employment, illness, marriage breakdown or other things that have happened in their lives that perhaps have meant that they are living in a temporary structure or a caravan on their land. This is effectively a legislative fix that is catching up with the way I have been treating these examples that have been brought to my attention, because I have exempted many of these people through the ex gratia process. So ensuring that this is an automatic exemption, in my view, is only fair. I thank in particular the State Revenue Office for the information also in feeding through some of these examples. I am very pleased to have this minor fix, which impacts just a very small amount of people but has a big impact on them, given the stories that I have come across in my inbox.

Dinner Plain is obviously in my electorate, and I am very familiar with it. The bill brings the village into line with other alpine resorts across the state by exempting them from being liable for vacant residential land tax. Again, this is common sense. Accommodation at Dinner Plain, for all intents and purposes, is very similar in relation to usage of other alpine resorts like Falls Creek, Mount Hotham and Mount Buller. They are almost exclusively used for only a few months a year and quiet for the majority of the year, so this is fixing this up and ensuring that this community is treated similarly to those. I know that there are many MPs that have had this brought to their attention as well, particularly those of us that share the same parts of northern Victoria as those people that we represent. So thank you to those members that have welcomed that change.

Obviously most of the debate tonight has centred on the congestion levy, and I think that is probably where we will spend a bit of time in the committee stage as well. But I do want to point out that it is not a new tax; it is a levy, and it was introduced in 2006 by the Bracks government. The original levy was \$400 per space. That went up to \$1300 per space when the Liberals were in government in 2014. I think Mr Batchelor went through some of the history in relation to that. But for the past 11 years the rate has only been indexed, and today we are responding to advocacy, advice and information in relation to the benefits of making changes to the congestion levy, because it will go some way to tackling congestion in the city. We know that congestion stifles business, it clogs up the city, and we will have over \$10 billion in lost productivity by 2030 if we do not act in relation to making these changes. Both through this bill and by increasing public transport offerings, we think that this is about getting the balance right and providing a good outcome for the City of Melbourne.

The total increases per day for each zone, I just want to reiterate, are \$3.50 per day for current category 1 and \$2.50 per day for category 2. Despite Mr Mulholland's contribution, there are a range of exemptions that pick up things like hospitals, on-street parking, car parks that are provided for shift workers and schools. I guess what I would say too is that this was announced in the budget update last year, and since that time I have engaged in a lot of consultation on this bill to make sure that we have had the conversations with a range of people, which is why we have picked up and made some new exemptions and things reflecting the experience and real-life examples that have been brought to my attention.

The increase is liable to be paid by the car park owner, and I do not know why people are sort of making their comments about the concern of it being passed on to the consumer. That is deliberate; we want it passed on to the users of the car parks, because that is how you deter people from using

their cars who could take up the many, many options in relation to public transport here in the state of Victoria, and the very affordable public transport, because we have made changes in relation to regional fares, opportunities for seniors – that will be extended to every weekend next year – and obviously the announcement in relation to free public transport for under-18s. So public transport in Victoria is very affordable and very accessible, not to mention more and more services coming online with increased rolling stock and obviously Melbourne Metro Tunnel, which is going to allow, again, more and more services for people to get into the city and move around and really reduce the use of cars, not to mention making the city a safer place for those that want to engage in cycling or walking – less cars, less opportunities for them to interact and cause issues with active transport users.

What I just did also want to point out is the daily increases that are referred to cover a 24-hour period. If you think about when car parks are used, generally someone does not park in a car park for 24 hours; generally there is a fair bit of turnover. So if you consider a car park in category 1 of \$3.50 per day, even if that is passed on to the car park user, that is going to be passed on and spread across multiple users. That is my experience of seeing what happens with the turnover in car parks for that period of time.

There has been a little talk about the expanded zone. I have got a map that clearly demonstrates that this is about fairness. This is about equal treatment of like communities, and these are small amendments to lines on a map. I think there was a lot of talk about the impact on those communities in relation to the car parks, but there are actually not a lot of paid car parks that are going to be picked up by the congestion levy in this respect, because there are a lot of existing exemptions and a lot of on-the-street car parks. I heard a lot about Victoria Street – well, the parking on Victoria Street is not picked up in this bill. In relation to some of the car parks in that area, some of those are also the conditional car park arrangements, where it is free for a period of time unless you stay past a certain amount of hours. We have made special accommodation for those types of car parks as well in the interests of fairness.

There has been a lot of commentary around the fact that this is not about dealing with congestion, and I think it is best for me to point to others that suggest perhaps that is wrong. We know it works, Infrastructure Victoria found it works, and the Grattan Institute have also found it works. In 2018 Infrastructure Victoria – so, again, this is an independent infrastructure advisory body – conducted a review of the last time the levy boundary was expanded. They concluded that the levy had been successful at reducing the supply of leviable car parking in the leviable area, which led to 3900 vehicles off the morning peak period. By way of comparison, that means that the last increase in the levy saved around two lanes of freeway worth of congestion on our roads. This is a significant impact. They have done the modelling; this is not government modelling. In today's money, I am advised that this would be almost \$1.6 billion in avoided freeway expansion costs. So there is a lot of benefit in looking at this model, and that is why we are here today.

Also, in their 2020 report titled *Good Move: Fixing Transport Congestion*, Infrastructure Victoria again commented on the benefits of congestion levy and went further, recommending the congestion levy charge be increased and be expanded to include Richmond, South Yarra, Windsor and Prahran to tackle congestion. This was in 2020. The Grattan Institute has consistently called on the Victorian government to increase Melbourne's parking levy to match Sydney's, as Melbourne's parking levy is around half the cost of Sydney's. The institute also believes a reduction in banked-up cars will create a more livable city while improving road safety for pedestrians and cyclists, issues that I touched on before.

I do want to thank all of the organisations that we consulted with. As I said, it was probably originally intended that this congestion levy would be part of an earlier bill, but I delayed it to ensure that I could continue to have active consultation in relation to the impact and consider some of the suggestions that were coming through. In particular I would like to thank the Shopping Centre Council of Australia, Vicinity Centres, Property Council of Australia, Salta Properties, Wilson Parking, Queen Victoria Market, Parking Australia and Assemble. I do particularly want to call out to the Shopping Centre

Council of Australia, because without their consistent engagement we would not have had the reliable data and material available that got us to the position of being able to provide a 50 per cent concession for shopping centres providing conditionally free parking. Without this information and assistance to government, we would not have been able to implement the concession without being confident that it was the right thing to do. This, I believe, is a good outcome. It will make the application of the congestion levy fairer.

Throughout the consultation on the bill, as I said, we have made multiple concessions, following representations. I would like to particularly point to the shift in boundary applying to the Queen Vic market from category 1 to category 2. Queen Vic market is right on the border of the categories, and we think that its congestion impact is more closely aligned with category 2 than category 1 after consulting with them. It also brings the market into line with other markets in the congestion levy area – namely, South Melbourne Market and Prahran Market. Also, we really do recognise the importance of encouraging the weekly food produce shop at these markets, so I was very pleased to be able to respond to that advocacy and make that change.

I will move on from the congestion levy to a couple of the other elements of the bill. We are doing some good things for the New Zealanders. The tax bill, as I said, has a lot of fairness components, and so that is why we are making it better for New Zealanders who ordinarily live in Australia. They will be exempt from the absentee owner charge and foreign purchaser additional duty. I thank the members that have welcomed that change.

Pet registration has attracted some conversation as well. It does make modest increases for pet registration fees charged by the state for dogs and cats from \$4.50 to \$9 and for greyhounds from \$3.50 to \$7. It is important to note that this reflects the growing demand and complexity in animal welfare management and costs in providing these programs and services. All revenue goes towards animal welfare, ensuring that Victoria can continue to have the services and laws in place to protect our pets and wildlife. This will fund responsible pet ownership programs, research into domestic animal management, administration of laws that protect our pets and trial of the RSPCA's two-up model and allow for an expansion of animal welfare initiatives. I understand that there are a few amendments for the committee stage. I am more than happy to deal with those, and I might leave that for the committee stage. I commend the bill to the house.

**Motion agreed to.**

**Read second time.**

**Committed.**

*Committee*

**Clause 1 (22:39)**

**David DAVIS:** I move:

1. Clause 1, page 2, lines 1 to 19, omit all words and expressions on these lines and insert –  
“(b) to amend the **Congestion Levy Act 2005** to make statute law revision amendments; and”.

This is a suggested amendment because we cannot amend money bills and hence we can only suggest it to the Assembly. But this, as I understand it, is a test for our other amendments on the omission of congestion levy changes. What we seek to do here, in short, is to deal with the expansion of the zone and the increase in the amounts in the congestion levy.

**Jaclyn SYMES:** I think it goes without saying that the government will not support an amendment that effectively diminishes the good work that is contained in the bill.

**Aiv PUGLIELLI:** The Greens will also not be supporting this amendment.

**The DEPUTY PRESIDENT:** The question is that Mr Davis's suggested amendment 1, which tests his amendments 3, 5 and 7 to 17, be agreed to.

**Council divided on amendment:**

*Ayes (16):* Melina Bath, Gaelle Broad, Georgie Crozier, David Davis, Moira Deeming, David Ettershank, Renee Heath, Ann-Marie Hermans, David Limbrick, Wendy Lovell, Trung Luu, Bev McArthur, Nick McGowan, Evan Mulholland, Rachel Payne, Richard Welch

*Noes (21):* Ryan Batchelor, John Berger, Lizzie Blandthorn, Jeff Bourman, Katherine Copsey, Enver Erdogan, Jacinta Ermacora, Michael Galea, Anasina Gray-Barberio, Shaun Leane, Sarah Mansfield, Tom McIntosh, Aiv Puglielli, Georgie Purcell, Ingrid Stitt, Jaclyn Symes, Lee Tarlamis, Sonja Terpstra, Gayle Tierney, Rikkie-Lee Tyrrell, Sheena Watt

**Amendment negatived.**

**Aiv PUGLIELLI:** I move:

1. Clause 1, page 2, after line 19 insert –

“(vii) to require the Minister to enter into a memorandum of understanding with each municipal council regarding the funding of active transport initiatives; and”.

I will speak to this briefly. As I said in the second-reading debate, there is currently no requirement for the government to distribute any revenue to affected councils or towards transport infrastructure under the Congestion Levy Act. This amendment inserts into the legislation a requirement that the government must effectively do both of these things – that it must allocate some annual funding to the five councils currently affected by the levy and that the councils in turn can use to fund active transport initiatives in each of their local communities. The amendment provides a mechanism for this by requiring the government to enter into separate memorandums of understanding with each council that is affected by the levy. Currently the state government has an MOU with the City of Melbourne that provides the council with \$7 million annually for active transport initiatives due to the congestion levy, but for Yarra, Merri-bek, Port Phillip and Stonnington city councils, this would mean they would be allocated funding as a result of the congestion levy scheme for the first time.

Establishing this requirement in legislation would also ensure that all these inner-city councils, including Melbourne, could be confident that they would receive this annual funding from the state government on an ongoing basis. While the amount allocated to councils is not legislated, we have a separate agreement that has been reached with the government that at least \$15 million in total will be distributed across all the councils every year. For Yarra, Merri-bek, Port Phillip and Stonnington, this will mean they receive funding for the first time that they would not otherwise receive, and for the City of Melbourne it will mean they receive more funding than they currently do under their existing agreement with the state government. The governments also agreed that the MOUs will specify that funding must go to active transport infrastructure projects and cannot be used simply for the routine maintenance of roads and footpaths that the councils already carry out.

Regardless of where you stand, I suppose, on the congestion levy as a whole, what my Greens colleagues and I are putting forward is requiring that some funding must be directed to these communities from which the revenue is generated for active transport infrastructure instead of it all sitting in the state government's consolidated revenue. This we see as an improvement on the changes proposed in the bill, and I commend the amendment to the house.

**David DAVIS:** The Liberals and Nationals will on this occasion not support the amendment, but we understand the spirit that it is brought in. The congestion levy, the parking tax, scoops in a truckload of money, and it goes into consolidated revenue, often to be squandered on large projects that do not return what they should, and there are other similar issues. I think what the Greens are seeking to do here is to in some respect, to a certain level, hypothecate, but we do not think this goes to a level that would achieve that. And we do not agree that only active transport should be considered. There are

other worthy transport projects that surely would be worthy of consideration. But it is an amendment brought in good spirit, and we recognise that.

**David LIMBRICK:** I thank Mr Puglielli for putting forward this amendment, and I actually appreciate the spirit in which it is intended, which is to return the money back to the communities from which it was taken. However, I share Mr Davis's concern in that I am not sure that this is the best way of going about this; in fact I am very upset about the money being taken in the first place. Therefore my position is that I will simply oppose the bill overall and not support this amendment. Regardless of that, I acknowledge the idea of returning the money back to the community from which it was taken, but I would rather it was not taken in the first place.

**David ETTERS HANK:** We have indicated already our position on the car park tax. However, we are supportive of this amendment from the Greens. It will make a contribution, particularly in preserving the current funding to the City of Melbourne and also to a couple of other local councils. On that basis, to the degree that it will assist in active public transport use, that is a desirable thing.

**Jaclyn SYMES:** I thank Mr Puglielli and the Greens for this amendment. I note the government is supportive of it. I would also like to thank the Greens for their constructive conversations in relation to this matter. As has been pointed out by Mr Ettershank, there has been an existing practice with the City of Melbourne in relation to \$7 million going back into council's funds for active transport projects, and having conversations in relation to extending this to other impacted councils is common sense. As I indicated in my summing-up, tackling congestion in the inner city is really important to productivity. I think it has been articulated as money that comes out of these communities. I have said that these are communities and councils that will benefit from a congestion levy because they will have less congestion and therefore their businesses will have people coming and going and there will be less emissions and a nicer environment to perhaps get on your bike or take a stroll in. Obviously we are also investing in public transport and making that more accessible and more affordable. So there are plenty of opportunities for people to take up those transport options. The improvement of active and public transport alternatives is in the spirit of this bill; therefore the suggested amendment specifying the MOU is something that we are happy to support and again thank the Greens for.

**The DEPUTY PRESIDENT:** The question is that Mr Puglielli's amendment 1 be agreed to. This tests all of Mr Puglielli's remaining amendments.

**Council divided on amendment:**

*Ayes (21):* Ryan Batchelor, John Berger, Lizzie Blandthorn, Katherine Copsey, Enver Erdogan, Jacinta Ermacora, David Ettershank, Michael Galea, Anasina Gray-Barberio, Shaun Leane, Sarah Mansfield, Tom McIntosh, Rachel Payne, Aiv Puglielli, Georgie Purcell, Ingrid Stitt, Jaclyn Symes, Lee Tarlamis, Sonja Terpstra, Gayle Tierney, Sheena Watt

*Noes (14):* Melina Bath, Gaelle Broad, Georgie Crozier, David Davis, Moira Deeming, Renee Heath, Ann-Marie Hermans, David Limbrick, Wendy Lovell, Trung Luu, Bev McArthur, Nick McGowan, Evan Mulholland, Richard Welch

**Amendment agreed to.**

**The DEPUTY PRESIDENT:** Mr Davis, I invite you to move your suggested amendment 2, which tests your suggested amendments 4, 6 and 18 to 20.

**David DAVIS:** I move:

2. **Suggested amendment to the Legislative Assembly –**

Clause 1, page 3, lines 29 to 32 and page 4, lines 1 to 3, omit all words and expressions on these lines.

This is the Fido and Kitty tax amendment, and this seeks –

**Jaclyn Symes:** Is that your pet's name?

**David DAVIS:** No, we have a different name for our pet, but this is two archetypal pets that are to be taxed by the government. That is what is going on here: a tax for Kitty and a tax for Fido. It is a modest amount of money, but it doubles the amount of the government take, and it inevitably will be passed by councils through to the owners of Kitty and Fido.

**Business interrupted pursuant to standing orders.**

**Jaclyn SYMES:** Pursuant to standing order 4.08, I declare the sitting to be extended by up to 1 further hour.

**David DAVIS:** This is a test for the remaining amendments that apply in relation to this particular issue.

**David LIMBRICK:** I will be supporting this amendment, although I do not own a Fido or Kitty. I have a rabbit, which is exempt from taxes.

*Members interjecting.*

**David LIMBRICK:** Rabbits are libertarian, I think. Not for long under this government – they will come for the rabbits eventually. I know that they will come for the rabbits, so I will stand up for the dogs and cats now, but the rabbits will come later.

**Georgie PURCELL:** I just thought it was important I spoke on this one briefly as well because it is obviously an issue that has come across my desk quite significantly, being from the Animal Justice Party. I will not be supporting this amendment. I have made it really clear that the revenue raised from this increase goes into really important animal welfare initiatives across Victoria. I have actually engaged pretty significantly with the organisations who benefit from this funding. They are in need of this funding, and many pet owners across the state are happy to pay an increased amount if it means that animals are better protected in Victoria, although I have expressed my disappointment that the greyhound racing industry is paying less than what is paid for the family pet. I hope that the government do take that feedback on board, given that they are creating many of the animal welfare problems in Victoria. And my cat is actually called Kitty.

**Aiv PUGLIELLI:** I concur, effectively, in whole with Ms Purcell's contribution. For similar reasons, the Greens will not be supporting this amendment.

**Jaclyn SYMES:** I thank Ms Purcell for her conversations with me on this introduction to the state tax bill. Obviously it is in relation to changes under the Domestic Animals Act 1994, so it was something that came in and used my bill as a vessel. I had the opportunity to talk to Ms Purcell about some of the important initiatives that she gets behind and some of the animal welfare outcomes that can benefit from what is a really, really small increase. It is about \$4 million a year that it will raise, and it will all go to helping fund responsible pet ownership programs, animal welfare initiatives, research and the like. I would also put on record that this is being communicated as a doubling of registration fees. I have had a lot of correspondence come through my office that says, 'The Liberals told me that my pet registration fee is going to double.' No, it is the state government component, which is \$4.50, which is about 8 cents per day. I have had a lot of feedback saying, 'For \$4.50 a year I would love to contribute to animal welfare.'

**Nick McGowan:** \$4.50 or \$450? A day?

**Jaclyn SYMES:** Four dollars and 50 cents a year per cat or dog, not rabbit. I would just put it that there are a lot of people who are concerned they are going to receive doubled registration bills from their council, which is not what is happening. It is a \$4.50 increase going to causes that Ms Purcell would rather –

*Members interjecting.*

**Jaclyn SYMES:** It is a levy from the Domestic Animals Act and it does not come to the Treasurer, Mr Mulholland, so we will not be supporting the exclusion of this from the bill.

**Council divided on suggested amendment:**

*Ayes (16):* Melina Bath, Gaelle Broad, Georgie Crozier, David Davis, Moira Deeming, David Ettershank, Renee Heath, Ann-Marie Hermans, David Limbrick, Wendy Lovell, Trung Luu, Bev McArthur, Nick McGowan, Evan Mulholland, Rachel Payne, Richard Welch

*Noes (21):* Ryan Batchelor, John Berger, Lizzie Blandthorn, Jeff Bourman, Katherine Copsey, Enver Erdogan, Jacinta Ermacora, Michael Galea, Anasina Gray-Barberio, Shaun Leane, Sarah Mansfield, Tom McIntosh, Aiv Puglielli, Georgie Purcell, Ingrid Stitt, Jaclyn Symes, Lee Tarlamis, Sonja Terpstra, Gayle Tierney, Rikkie-Lee Tyrrell, Sheena Watt

**Suggested amendment negated.**

**Amended clause agreed to; clauses 2 to 17 agreed to.**

**Clause 18 (23:12)**

**The DEPUTY PRESIDENT:** Mr Puglielli, I invite you to move your amendments 2 to 4, which have already been tested by your amendment 1.

**Aiv PUGLIELLI:** I move:

2. Clause 18, line 15, omit “**section 34A**” and insert “**sections 34A and 34B**”.
3. Clause 18, line 24, omit ‘area.’ and insert “area.”.
4. Clause 18, after line 24 insert –
 

**‘34B Memoranda of understanding with municipal councils**

  - (1) The Minister, on behalf of the State, must enter into a memorandum of understanding with each municipal council whose municipal district includes any land that is in the levy area.
  - (2) A memorandum of understanding under subsection (1) must relate to an annual allocation to the municipal council for the purpose of funding active transport or other transport initiatives.”.

**Amendments agreed to; amended clause agreed to.**

**Clause 19 (23:13)**

**David DAVIS:** I move:

1. **Suggested amendment to the Legislative Assembly –**  
Clause 19, lines 16 and 17, omit “, Stonnington”.
2. **Suggested amendment to the Legislative Assembly –**  
Clause 19, lines 17 and 18, omit “Dandenong Rd, Queens Way,”.
3. **Suggested amendment to the Legislative Assembly –**  
Clause 19, page 15, lines 6 to 8, omit “, a straight line extending, at the same angle as Williams Rd N, to Williams Rd N, Williams Rd N and Williams Rd” and insert “and Punt Rd”.

These are levy area changes and they relate to the City of Stonnington. They are advocated strongly for by the member for Prahran Rachel Westaway. She is very determined that everything be done to make sure that these new parking taxes are not imposed in the area of the City of Stonnington in this way. The government’s major expansion will have a very detrimental effect on key areas in Stonnington, including Chapel Street and associated areas. She has been a very strong and as I say a fierce advocate for her area and has insisted that this amendment be put and that for those who wish to penalise Chapel Street it is seen very clearly that that is what they are doing.

**Jaclyn SYMES:** The government will not be supporting this amendment. The expanded zone is reasonable, legitimate and about equity. The areas of Prahran, South Yarra, Richmond and surrounds



are similar to the inner south and inner north, with similar congestion levies, transport serviceability and distance from the city. That is why Stonnington has been included in the expanded levy and, thanks to consultation with the Greens, will benefit from some flow-on funds for active transport for their community and visitors to their community. I will also point out that in their 2020 report titled *Good Move: Fixing Transport Congestion*, Infrastructure Victoria provided recommendations that the congestion levy charge be increased and be expanded to include Richmond, South Yarra, Windsor and Prahran to tackle congestion.

**David DAVIS:** I appreciate the government's view on this and I know Infrastructure Victoria did work on this area, but Infrastructure Victoria did not look at the detailed negative effects of these parking taxes on local areas. They did not look at the increased impact on small businesses and related matters. So in those circumstances I understand why Ms Westaway would be so firm in pushing to protect areas.

**Aiv PUGLIELLI:** The Greens will not be supporting this amendment.

**Council divided on suggested amendments:**

*Ayes (14):* Melina Bath, Gaelle Broad, Georgie Crozier, David Davis, Moira Deeming, Renee Heath, Ann-Marie Hermans, David Limbrick, Wendy Lovell, Trung Luu, Bev McArthur, Nick McGowan, Evan Mulholland, Richard Welch

*Noes (21):* Ryan Batchelor, John Berger, Lizzie Blandthorn, Jeff Bourman, Katherine Copsey, Enver Erdogan, Jacinta Ermacora, Michael Galea, Anasina Gray-Barberio, Shaun Leane, Sarah Mansfield, Tom McIntosh, Aiv Puglielli, Georgie Purcell, Ingrid Stitt, Jaclyn Symes, Lee Tarlamis, Sonja Terpstra, Gayle Tierney, Rikkie-Lee Tyrrell, Sheena Watt

**Suggested amendments negatived.**

**Clauses 19 to 75 agreed to.**

**Reported to house with amendments.**

**Jaclyn SYMES** (Northern Victoria – Treasurer, Minister for Industrial Relations, Minister for Regional Development) (23:22): I move:

That the report be now adopted.

**Motion agreed to.**

**Report adopted.**

*Third reading*

**Jaclyn SYMES** (Northern Victoria – Treasurer, Minister for Industrial Relations, Minister for Regional Development) (23:22): I move:

That the bill be now read a third time and do pass.

**Council divided on motion:**

*Ayes (21):* Ryan Batchelor, John Berger, Lizzie Blandthorn, Jeff Bourman, Katherine Copsey, Enver Erdogan, Jacinta Ermacora, Michael Galea, Anasina Gray-Barberio, Shaun Leane, Sarah Mansfield, Tom McIntosh, Aiv Puglielli, Georgie Purcell, Ingrid Stitt, Jaclyn Symes, Lee Tarlamis, Sonja Terpstra, Gayle Tierney, Rikkie-Lee Tyrrell, Sheena Watt

*Noes (16):* Melina Bath, Gaelle Broad, Georgie Crozier, David Davis, Moira Deeming, David Ettershank, Renee Heath, Ann-Marie Hermans, David Limbrick, Wendy Lovell, Trung Luu, Bev McArthur, Nick McGowan, Evan Mulholland, Rachel Payne, Richard Welch

**Motion agreed to.**

**Read third time.**

**The PRESIDENT:** Pursuant to standing order 14.28, the bill will be returned to the Assembly with a message informing them that the Council have agreed to the bill with amendments.

*Adjournment*

**Ingrid STITT** (Western Metropolitan – Minister for Mental Health, Minister for Ageing, Minister for Multicultural Affairs) (23:26): I move:

That the house do now adjourn.

**Family violence**

**Jacinta ERMACORA** (Western Victoria) (23:26): (2131) My adjournment matter is for Attorney-General Minister Kilkenny. New legislation will strengthen protections for women and children experiencing family violence. The action I seek is an update on how these reforms will improve safety outcomes for survivors and victims to rebuild their lives.

**Somerton Road, Greenvale, duplication**

**Evan MULHOLLAND** (Northern Metropolitan) (23:26): (2132) My adjournment is to the Minister for Roads and Road Safety. It concerns a matter of concern in the neglectorate of Greenvale. I am seeking the action of the minister to commit to the duplication of Somerton Road, particularly upgrading the intersection at Roxburgh Park Drive onto Somerton Road. I continue to hear from residents that this is something they are concerned about. There is a growing safety risk along Somerton Road as the traffic increases, particularly at the Roxburgh Park Drive intersection. Accidents are becoming more and more frequent. There is not often a time where it is not severely congested during peak periods, and near misses are becoming all too common.

In that frame I recently wrote to the minister seeking action. However, the minister's response made it clear that there are no plans to duplicate Somerton Road or upgrade the Roxburgh Park Drive intersection. This is despite the fact that Major Road Projects Victoria completed planning works for future projects back in 2023. Three years later there is no commitment, no funding, not a peep from the government about what it is doing about Somerton Road. This is a critical road connecting multiple communities in one of the fastest growing areas in Victoria. I guess the government can just spend another \$35 billion on the Suburban Rail Loop in the eastern suburbs. I am telling you a tiny fraction of that will duplicate Somerton Road and ease the traffic burden on my community.

The minister in her response to me rightly identifies the northern suburbs trajectory of growth and the increasing pressure on our road network that that seems to be placing but at the same time ignores the need to actually duplicate Somerton Road. If relevant authorities have recognised the need for an upgrade, planning has been completed three years ago and residents have clearly expressed concern, the question must be asked: what is the government actually waiting for? This government only knows neglect when it comes to the outer north. I seek the action of the minister to get on with it and commit to duplicating Somerton Road and upgrading the Roxburgh Park Drive intersection.

**Animal welfare**

**Georgie PURCELL** (Northern Victoria) (23:29): (2133) My adjournment matter is for the Minister for Agriculture, and the action that I seek is an assessment into how the department is ensuring non-accredited livestock transporters are meeting their obligations under the Livestock Management Act 2010. I think many of us here know that sudden moment when you pull up beside a transport truck and lock eyes with a farmed animal. It happened to me just this week on the way into Parliament. The noise of the road fades and you are suddenly face-to-face with maybe a chicken, a sheep or a cow in distress. I was just four years old when that happened to me with a sow, fresh off watching *Babe* and completely fascinated by pigs. I asked my parents where she was going, and they did not lie to me, and from that moment on I knew I wanted to do everything I could in order to protect them.

According to Agriculture Victoria's official guidance, any livestock operator involved in regulated activities must complete a systematic risk assessment unless they are operating under an official department-approved accreditation or quality assurance program, such as TruckSafe, National Saleyard Quality Assurance or Australian pork industry quality assurance program. A systematic risk assessment involves assessing the likely risks to animal welfare and biosecurity that may result from practices such as transporting to saleyards or to slaughterhouses. It must include the control measures in place to ensure ongoing compliance with the existing livestock management standard and explain how any identified risks to animal welfare or biosecurity are being minimised.

The potential lack of accredited operators in Victoria raises serious questions about how we can be sure animals are being transported safely when these programs are not in place. Evidence from independent investigators in our state shows that animals are being transported without enough space, exposed to extreme heat or extreme cold, handled in ways that increase stress or moved for extended durations, causing unnecessary suffering. We can even see this ourselves when watching transport trucks on our roads. Much of this stems from a lack of effective enforcement to ensure compliance with welfare standards. A sheep tightly confined in a truck during a long, hot journey may experience severe stress, dehydration or injury – issues that accredited programs are designed to prevent. Without these protections in place, animals are going to continue to be left in horrific conditions.

The action that I seek is for the minister to advise how many livestock transporters are currently accredited in Victoria and what measures the department is taking to ensure that non-accredited operators are meeting their obligations under the Livestock Management Act so that animals and their welfare are not being compromised during transport or at saleyards.

#### **Mount Waverley ambulance services**

**John BERGER** (Southern Metropolitan) (23:32): (2134) My adjournment matter today is directed to the Minister for Ambulance Services in the other place. It was excellent to hear that more mobile intensive care ambulance paramedics – MICA for short – are hitting the roads this month to provide life-saving care to Victorians across the state. The Allan Labor government knows how vital Ambulance Victoria is to the healthcare system, and I am pleased to see this intake progress alongside our Victorian state budget 2025–26 investment into emergency services, with \$58.4 million invested this year in expanding emergency department capacity and short-stay units and \$146 million to support quicker emergency response and care across the state. In 2020 the then Andrews Labor government invested \$181.8 million into Ambulance Victoria's development program, focused on rebuilding and upgrading ambulance stations across the state. One of the reconstructed facilities was Mount Waverley ambulance station in my electorate of Southern Metro. My request is that the Minister for Ambulance Services visit Mount Waverley ambulance station with me to see firsthand how our investment into emergency services is benefiting the Ashwood community and surrounding areas.

#### **Youth crime**

**Renee HEATH** (Eastern Victoria) (23:34): (2135) Over two days in the last fortnight five locals from Pakenham, Officer and Beaconsfield have reported the same car ramming cars on the Monash Freeway at night while brandishing large kitchen knives, egging people and cars on the Pakenham high street using the eggs that they had stolen from Coles that morning, destroying the paint of both car parks and driving cars at 80 kilometres per hour along 60-kilometre roads. Of course all reports said that the car's occupants were teens. It is the same car, by the way, and they are believed to be the same teens who drove by and egged my office last week at around 8 am. They were also later seen chasing a local resident's son along the Princes Highway, attempting to run him off the road and waving a knife as he tried to reach safety at the Pakenham police station.

Sadly, what has happened in Pakenham is not an isolated event or an isolated act of vandalism or intimidation; it is part of a statewide youth crime crisis. According to the *Herald Sun* last week, police pursuits in Victoria have surged to almost 1000 per year – that is two to three per day, fuelled by teen

criminals in stolen cars who ram parents that are doing school drop-offs, live streaming their crimes, only to be let out on bail again and again.

There are 2000 vacancies across Victoria Police at the moment at a time when there is a horrific crime crisis, so the action that I seek is for the Minister for Police to explain what is being done to address this issue. Locals are stressed out; some are even terrified, they have told me. The action is for the minister to outline what is being done to make Pakenham and the area safe again.

### Sunshine train station

**David ETTERSHPANK** (Western Metropolitan) (23:36): (2136) My adjournment is for the Minister for Development Victoria and Precincts and relates to the Sunshine station master plan. Sunshine is the only precinct in Melbourne recognised as a metropolitan activity centre, an employment and innovation precinct, a priority precinct and a transport superhub, and we are informed that there is more super on the way, with a \$4.1 billion commitment to the new Sunshine station redevelopment in partnership with the Commonwealth.

However, Sunshine should not just be a place to travel through on the way to the airport. It has the potential to be so much more. I was fortunate enough to attend the recent West of Melbourne Economic Development Alliance conference, where Sunshine was touted as a natural hub to become Melbourne's second CBD. Just like Sydney's Parramatta, widely regarded as a successful second CBD, Sunshine is well placed to be a self-sufficient urban centre with its own connectivity, commercial centre, civic amenities and public spaces. WOMEDA's *Western Growth* paper warns that unless there is a step change in the way that governments and business think about this region, more than half the workers in the west are projected to be commuting out of the region by 2034.

In October 2022 the state government committed \$143 million to implementing the first stage of the Sunshine station master plan. However, limited progress has been made on this commitment. This project has the capacity to unlock \$8 billion in private investment opportunities, as well as to create 29,000 jobs and to attract 43,000 new residents to the area by 2051. This is a once-in-a-generation opportunity to get a second CBD right.

Implementing the Sunshine station master plan concurrently with the Sunshine superhub works will be critical to minimising overall disruption to surrounding businesses and the community. So the action I seek is for the minister to reaffirm her commitment to the master plan with clear delivery timeframes and outline a whole-of-government approach to the precinct.

### Metro Tunnel

**Sheena WATT** (Northern Metropolitan) (23:38): (2137) My matter is for the Minister for Transport Infrastructure in the other place. Last Sunday I had the opportunity to join colleagues, including the Premier and the Prime Minister, for a preview trip through the Metro Tunnel ahead of its opening on 30 November. It was one of those moments when the scale of the achievement really settles in. Travelling through the finished stations, you can feel the sense of pride from everyone involved. This is a project that Victorians have waited a long time for, and it stands as just another reminder that Labor governments do not just talk about infrastructure, we deliver it. We build the big projects that keep our state moving.

For communities across the Northern Metropolitan Region, the Metro Tunnel will be transformative. Parkville station will finally give our world-leading health and medical research precinct the direct rail connection it has always needed. Arden station will be the centre of an entirely new neighbourhood, opening up jobs and opportunities as the precinct grows. State Library and Town Hall stations will make moving through the CBD simpler and more accessible, especially for families, shift workers and students.

The Metro Tunnel means more frequent, more reliable services right across the network. Free public transport on weekends during the opening period will give every Victorian a chance to experience

these new stations for themselves. This is what long-term planning looks like – a government investing in a modern rail network and a transport system worthy of our growing state. The action that I seek is for the minister to outline how many additional services will run during the summer start period, which begins on 30 November, and what increase in passengers we can expect when the big switch begins on 1 February.

### **Royal Melbourne Philharmonic**

**David DAVIS** (Southern Metropolitan) (23:39): (2138) My matter for the adjournment tonight is for the attention of the Minister for Planning. It relates to the Drill Hall and specifically to the Royal Melbourne Philharmonic (RMP) orchestra and the Royal Melbourne Philharmonic choir. These are very, very old and established institutions; in fact they were established in 1853 and have been performing continuously ever since. I pay tribute to the volunteers and to the professional people that make these services so valuable for Victorians.

The state government has housed them at the Drill Hall for a long period of time, going back into the 1990s, but the Drill Hall at 239 A'Beckett Street, Melbourne, is a centre that the Minister for Planning has decided must be vacated by a number of community organisations. This is pretty nasty, it is pretty thoughtless, and there has been no assistance provided. Correspondence sent to me states:

The central issue is that Drill Hall remains the most suitable venue for the RMP to continue its operations. We are struggling to survive, not through lack of popularity or engagement with Melbourne's community, but because we receive no other regular support from government. The use of the Drill Hall has been a precious form of in-kind support. The latest information we have is that we will have no support for a move or to find an alternative venue, and we will not be permitted to use Drill Hall beyond 31st January 2026.

There has been communication with the minister. My correspondent states:

Over a year ago, we had written to the ... Minister requesting assistance with our occupation at the Drill Hall ... We heard little ... until just recently when they advised of our need to vacate.

Again, this is not the right way to go about it, as Anna Joy Hoffmann, the president of the Royal Melbourne Philharmonic, has said to me in written communications.

The history, as I say, is quite remarkable. This is a world-beating gem that needs to be protected, and the idea that the state government would just throw them out onto the street without support or without assistance is abhorrent. I am calling on the Minister for Planning, who has control of the Drill Hall as I understand it, to ensure that there is a solution found. She will need to meet with the RMP and find a way to resolve this. It is completely and utterly unacceptable that they are to be simply thrown out on the street – a community organisation, an arts group, that needs this support. They are of the highest quality, the highest excellence, and this is something that needs to be preserved, so I call on the minister to meet with them and provide a solution.

### **Energy policy**

**Sarah MANSFIELD** (Western Victoria) (23:43): (2139) My adjournment matter is for the Minister for Energy and Resources, and the action I am seeking is for her to advocate to the federal government to stop ConocoPhillips from progressing their oil and gas drilling projects in the Otway Basin, including at the Essington-1 well.

The US fossil fuel giant ConocoPhillips this week announced that they have found a significant gas reservoir south-west of Port Campbell. This was part of test drilling for fossil gas in six locations off our Victorian and Tasmanian coasts that the federal Labor government has effectively handed over to fossil fuel giants to exploit for profit. Governments justify supporting these projects based on the great fossil fuel industry myth of a gas shortage in south-eastern Australia, which ConocoPhillips says is their target market, but this fails to take account of the rapid transition to renewables in Australia's south-eastern states. The industry acknowledges that gas production at these sites is unlikely to add additional supply to the market within the decade, in part due to the lack of availability of critical drilling rig equipment.

Victoria has a legislative requirement to achieve 95 per cent renewable energy by 2035; that is a decade from now. What on earth are we going to do with bucketloads of gas in 10 years time that we do not need? I am fairly certain ConocoPhillips are going to keep drilling, and if we do not need the gas here they will just sell it somewhere else. Not only do not we need it but the risks of these projects in terms of our climate, marine environment and livelihoods are absolutely diabolical. Global emissions continue to rise as our fossil fuel consumption grows. Any hope of a survivable climate for our kids and their kids demands an immediate end to new fossil fuel projects. Allowing ConocoPhillips to proceed is, quite simply, criminal negligence.

Then there is Victoria's marine environment. Gas exploration starts with seismic blasting, and that is something I have spoken about at length in this place. It is devastating to marine ecosystems. Fossil fuel giants also have an appalling track record of environmental vandalism – leaks, spills, accidents and leaving their old rusty infrastructure trash behind. ConocoPhillips has recently been reported to have downplayed and effectively covered up massive methane leaks at a gas plant in Darwin for years. The potential damage from an oil leak along Victoria's south-west coast is truly frightening. Fossil fuel giants do not care about the cost to communities or the environment. For them, it is just the cost of doing business. Minister, if your Labor government believe in climate action, you should be doing everything in your power to stop ConocoPhillips gas drilling off Victoria's coast from proceeding.

#### **Expedition Pass Reservoir**

**Wendy LOVELL** (Northern Victoria) (23:45): (2140) My adjournment matter is for the Minister for Environment, and the action that I seek is for the minister to fund construction of new onsite parking at Expedition Pass Reservoir in the 2026–27 state budget. Expedition Pass Reservoir is a popular recreation waterway in the Castlemaine Diggings National Heritage Park, owned and managed by Parks Victoria. People travel there from all over central Victoria for fishing, birdwatching or even paddling a canoe, but more than anything it is a favourite swimming spot for local families and is especially popular on hot days, when the small car park on Golden Point Road fills up very quickly. When the car park is full it is common for vehicles to start parking along the roadside, and every hot summer's day the road becomes crammed with parked vehicles, making it unsafe for pedestrians to cross and forcing cars to drive down the centre of the road. The Victorian government is currently spending \$6 million to strengthen the reservoir's dam walls, and it should back that spending by also investing to improve the visitor experience. The current lack of parking and pathway infrastructure means that there is a heightened safety risk for pedestrians walking from their cars to the water, as well as for motorists and cyclists.

Mount Alexander Shire Council has conducted an analysis of traffic and parking conditions and made changes to the local road rules to improve safety, but more needs to be done. Council has identified a suitable location for building a new car park on land managed by Parks Victoria on Llewellyn Road. Parks Victoria have also confirmed to council that they are open to putting a car park on this site, but they do not have the funds for construction. The Victorian government must step up and match their investment in the reservoir itself by investing in the infrastructure that allows more people to visit and enjoy the reservoir. I call on the minister to improve safety for pedestrians and accessibility for visitors who drive to this beautiful spot by funding the construction of new public parking at Expedition Pass Reservoir.

#### **Melton rail line electrification**

**Katherine COPSEY** (Southern Metropolitan) (23:48): (2141) My adjournment is to the Minister for Transport Infrastructure, and the action I seek is to electrify the Melton line without delay. While Melbourne suburbs from Sandringham to Sunbury are served by electric Metro Trains, suburban stations on the Melton line are currently served by V/Line regional trains, and it has been acknowledged for a long time that this is not good enough. It means that trains run less frequently than they should, it means both suburban and regional passengers trying to squeeze onto trains that were never designed for this many people and it means slower journeys for regional trains that have to stop

at all those suburban stations. In 2018 this government announced funding for the *Western Rail Plan* to plan for the electrification of the Melton line and how that would fit in with airport rail and Wyndham Vale. But in 2025 the people of the west still do not have their electric Metro Trains and they do not even have a firm commitment from the government to the project. The government have recently announced that they will build the Sunshine station super-hub. That will lay out the provision for the future Melton electrification, but still there is no commitment to moving forward with the project. The Department of Transport and Planning secretary Jeroen Weimar has been quoted in the media saying that Melton line works would not start until the Sunshine project was finished in 2030, but Infrastructure Victoria have recently called for the two projects to be built at the same time. Infrastructure Victoria have highlighted how urgent the Melton electrification project is, and they have said that there is no engineering reason why the two projects cannot start at the same time. In fact, as they point out, this would be much less disruptive for passengers. Rather than years of replacement buses for the Sunshine project and then years more for electrification, the government could take advantage of line shutdowns for one project to complete works on the other. Minister, the people in Melbourne's west and the regional passengers who share these trains have waited long enough. I urge you: bring forward the electrification of the Melton line and give passengers the services they deserve.

### Community safety

**Ann-Marie HERMANS** (South-Eastern Metropolitan) (23:50): (2142) My adjournment is to the Minister for Police, and the action I seek is to call on the government to scrap the costly violence reduction unit announced today by the government. We are told this new bureaucracy will cost Victorians \$19.8 million, plus another \$7.7 million for mentoring programs, and that it will report directly to the Premier. The government claims this will transform youth justice, but what it really represents is another layer of administration, another headline and another diversion of funds away from the frontline services. Victoria already has a patchwork of crime prevention programs. The truth is the violence reduction unit is not about reducing crime. It is about reducing political risk. It is about headlines, not outcomes. This funding should be redirected to proven, community-led initiatives that strengthen families, support schools and provide genuine opportunities for young people. It is about creating the illusion of action while avoiding the hard work of investing in schools, families and communities. It is about plugging a budget black hole with taxpayer money, while telling Victorians that everything is under control. Instead of strengthening the CFA, local youth workers and regional services, this government has chosen to pour millions into a new bureaucracy that duplicates existing efforts and centralises control in the Premier's office. The government points to Scotland and London as proof of success. Our communities face different challenges, and our justice system has different pressures. Importing overseas models without proper scrutiny is reckless. Worse still, the government has failed to set clear, measurable targets for reducing violent crime here in Victoria. Without benchmarks, this becomes nothing more than a political experiment funded by taxpayers. I am particularly concerned about the first program announced under this unit, pairing children as young as eight with reformed offenders. While lived experience mentoring can have value, the risks of exposing vulnerable children to former offenders are obvious. Where are the accountability and safeguards?

According to the Crime Statistics Agency, youth offending has become more brazen, more violent and more organised. Carjackings, aggravated burglaries and gang-related assaults are rising, communities are fearful and frontline police are under-resourced. Yet instead of directing funding to police, schools and families, the government has chosen to create a new bureaucracy that will consume millions, duplicate existing programs and deliver little in the way of real outcomes. Our police are under-resourced, our schools are struggling to keep young people engaged and our regional communities are crying out for fairness. With the unit reporting directly to the Premier, there is no transparency. That is not accountability; that is centralisation of power. It bypasses parliamentary scrutiny, bypasses community oversight and concentrates decision-making in the hands of one office. That is not how you build trust in crime prevention; that is how you build suspicion. Victoria does not need another bureaucracy; it needs real investment in the people and communities who are already doing the hard work of keeping our state safe.

### Community sport

**Trung LUU** (Western Metropolitan) (23:53): (2143) My adjournment tonight is for the Minister for Community Sport, focusing on the need for kids to access and actively participate in sport. The action I seek is for the Allan Labor government to urgently address the increasing number of Victorian families who can no longer afford to have their children engage in local sport due to the rising cost of living. A recent finding in the Australian Sports Foundation's *State of Sports Fundraising Report* indicates that for six consecutive years there has been a record level of donations needed for community clubs and individuals to help keep families involved in sport and ensure clubs remain sustainable. The \$200 voucher program for kids is insufficient and does not cater for all families, especially since registration fees are doubling at most, if not all, sports clubs. In Victoria we are reportedly receiving a total of \$45.6 million in donations from individuals and organisations – an increase of \$8.5 million on the previous financial year.

In my electorate, the president of the Footscray United Rangers soccer club has expressed that donations from the broader community have been crucial in subsidising players fees, and that is giving more families the chance to participate than in past years. The cost of living is seriously affecting families, and many in my electorate are making cutbacks across the board just to pay the bills. Unfortunately, families are often forced to make difficult choices regarding their household budgets and the increasing costs of participating in sports. It can be too much for families to bear. We know that active engagement in team sports from a young age enhances a child's physical and mental health. It helps coordination, reduces anxiety and stress and fosters teamwork, collaboration and communication. Now more than ever, we must provide hope for younger Victorians to ensure there are opportunities for them to thrive, regardless of where they live or how much their parents earn. All children should have access to quality community sports, so I look forward to the minister prioritising these issues so children will not miss out on the opportunity to be involved in community sports.

### Victims of crime

**Gaelle BROAD** (Northern Victoria) (23:56): (2144) My adjournment is to the Attorney-General. It relates to the support, or lack of it, provided to victims of crime in Victoria. Even though the perpetrator pleaded guilty, I spoke with someone yesterday who has been struggling to navigate this service for the last five years. They were notified of financial assistance but are yet to receive any benefit. They have spent countless hours calling the support line, not getting through. Calls to the victims of crime financial assistance scheme have remained unanswered. After contacting the complaints line, they were told paperwork would be sent, but it did not arrive. They have turned up to counselling appointments confirmed the day before only to be told that the counsellor was double booked. They turned up to court to be accompanied by a support person who never showed up. The list of failures has continued, and they are tired of getting the run-around.

Just over 12 months ago I raised concern about the system that was set up to support victims of crime. At the time there was a massive privacy breach when the personal email addresses of over 480 victims of crime were shared by the service, notifying people of the transitional arrangements from Victims of Crime Assistance Tribunal to the new financial assistance scheme. An apology did little to address the issue, and the incident left victims having to deal with the significant stress and trauma caused by this breach. This state government-run service is meant to offer protection, support and financial compensation to victims of crime, but from the experiences I have heard firsthand, it appears victims are being put through the mill. The lady has consented to me providing contact details in the hope that she will be able to speak with someone who will be able to assist. The action I seek is for the Attorney-General to examine this service to not only address the issues raised by this one lady but the many others not brave enough to speak out about the shortcomings of a service that is meant to support them.



**Responses**

**Ingrid STITT** (Western Metropolitan – Minister for Mental Health, Minister for Ageing, Minister for Multicultural Affairs) (23:58): There were 14 adjournment matters to 11 separate ministers, and written responses will be sought.

**The PRESIDENT:** The house stands adjourned.

**House adjourned 11:58 pm.**