



Hansard

LEGISLATIVE ASSEMBLY

60th Parliament

Wednesday 20 March 2024

Office-holders of the Legislative Assembly

60th Parliament

Speaker

Maree Edwards

Deputy Speaker

Matt Fregon

Acting Speakers

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

Leader of the Parliamentary Labor Party and Premier

Jacinta Allan

Deputy Leader of the Parliamentary Labor Party and Deputy Premier

Ben Carroll

Leader of the Parliamentary Liberal Party and Leader of the Opposition

John Pesutto

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

David Southwick

Leader of the Nationals

Danny O’Brien (from 26 November 2024)

Peter Walsh (to 26 November 2024)

Deputy Leader of the Nationals

Emma Kealy

Leader of the House

Mary-Anne Thomas

Manager of Opposition Business

James Newbury

Members of the Legislative Assembly
60th Parliament

Member	District	Party	Member	District	Party
Addison, Juliana	Wendouree	ALP	Lambert, Nathan	Preston	ALP
Allan, Jacinta	Bendigo East	ALP	Maas, Gary	Narre Warren South	ALP
Andrews, Daniel ¹	Mulgrave	ALP	McCurdy, Tim	Ovens Valley	Nat
Battin, Brad	Berwick	Lib	McGhie, Steve	Melton	ALP
Benham, Jade	Mildura	Nat	McLeish, Cindy	Eildon	Lib
Britnell, Roma	South-West Coast	Lib	Marchant, Alison	Bellarine	ALP
Brooks, Colin	Bundoora	ALP	Matthews-Ward, Kathleen	Broadmeadows	ALP
Bull, Josh	Sunbury	ALP	Mercurio, Paul	Hastings	ALP
Bull, Tim	Gippsland East	Nat	Mullahy, John	Glen Waverley	ALP
Cameron, Martin	Morwell	Nat	Newbury, James	Brighton	Lib
Carbines, Anthony	Ivanhoe	ALP	O'Brien, Danny	Gippsland South	Nat
Carroll, Ben	Niddrie	ALP	O'Brien, Michael	Malvern	Lib
Cheeseman, Darren ²	South Barwon	Ind	O'Keeffe, Kim	Shepparton	Nat
Cianflone, Anthony	Pascoe Vale	ALP	Pallas, Tim	Werribee	ALP
Cleeland, Annabelle	Euroa	Nat	Pearson, Danny	Essendon	ALP
Connolly, Sarah	Laverton	ALP	Pesutto, John	Hawthorn	Lib
Couzens, Christine	Geelong	ALP	Read, Tim	Brunswick	Greens
Crewther, Chris	Mornington	Lib	Richards, Pauline	Cranbourne	ALP
Crugnale, Jordan	Bass	ALP	Richardson, Tim	Mordialloc	ALP
D'Ambrosio, Liliana	Mill Park	ALP	Riordan, Richard	Polwarth	Lib
De Martino, Daniela	Monbulk	ALP	Rowswell, Brad	Sandringham	Lib
de Vietri, Gabrielle	Richmond	Greens	Sandell, Ellen	Melbourne	Greens
Dimopoulos, Steve	Oakleigh	ALP	Settle, Michaela	Eureka	ALP
Edbrooke, Paul	Frankston	ALP	Smith, Ryan ⁷	Warrandyte	Lib
Edwards, Maree	Bendigo West	ALP	Southwick, David	Caulfield	Lib
Famham, Wayne	Narracan	Lib	Spence, Ros	Kalkallo	ALP
Foster, Eden ³	Mulgrave	ALP	Staikos, Nick	Bentleigh	ALP
Fowles, Will ⁴	Ringwood	Ind	Suleyman, Natalie	St Albans	ALP
Fregon, Matt	Ashwood	ALP	Tak, Meng Heang	Clarinda	ALP
George, Ella	Lara	ALP	Taylor, Jackson	Bayswater	ALP
Grigorovitch, Luba	Kororoit	ALP	Taylor, Nina	Albert Park	ALP
Groth, Sam	Nepean	Lib	Theophanous, Kat	Northcote	ALP
Guy, Matthew	Bulleen	Lib	Thomas, Mary-Anne	Macedon	ALP
Halfpenny, Bronwyn	Thomastown	ALP	Tilley, Bill	Benambra	Lib
Hall, Katie	Footscray	ALP	Vallence, Bridget	Evelyn	Lib
Hamer, Paul	Box Hill	ALP	Vulin, Emma	Pakenham	ALP
Haylett, Martha	Ripon	ALP	Walsh, Peter	Murray Plains	Nat
Hibbins, Sam ^{5,6}	Prahran	Ind	Walters, Iwan	Greenvale	ALP
Hilakari, Mathew	Point Cook	ALP	Ward, Vicki	Eltham	ALP
Hodgett, David	Croydon	Lib	Wells, Kim	Rowville	Lib
Horne, Melissa	Williamstown	ALP	Werner, Nicole ⁸	Warrandyte	Lib
Hutchins, Natalie	Sydenham	ALP	Wight, Dylan	Tarneit	ALP
Kathage, Lauren	Yan Yean	ALP	Williams, Gabrielle	Dandenong	ALP
Kealy, Emma	Lowan	Nat	Wilson, Belinda	Narre Warren North	ALP
Kilkenny, Sonya	Carrum	ALP	Wilson, Jess	Kew	Lib

¹ Resigned 27 September 2023

² ALP until 29 April 2024

³ Sworn in 6 February 2024

⁴ ALP until 5 August 2023

⁵ Greens until 1 November 2024

⁶ Resigned 23 November 2024

⁷ Resigned 7 July 2023

⁸ Sworn in 3 October 2023

Party abbreviations

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

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Wednesday 20 March 2024

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

Bills

Commercial and Industrial Property Tax Reform Bill 2024

Introduction and first reading

Tim PALLAS (Werribee – Treasurer, Minister for Industrial Relations, Minister for Economic Growth) (09:34): I move:

That I introduce a bill for an act to reform the taxation of commercial and industrial property, to amend the Duties Act 2000, the Taxation Administration Act 1997, the Treasury Corporation of Victoria Act 1992 and other acts and for other purposes.

Motion agreed to.

Brad ROWSWELL (Sandringham) (09:35): I request a brief explanation of the bill.

Tim PALLAS (Werribee – Treasurer, Minister for Industrial Relations, Minister for Economic Growth) (09:35): The bill will implement commercial and industrial property tax reform to move away from stamp duty and move towards a more efficient tax to encourage businesses to invest and to create jobs.

Read first time.

Ordered to be read second time tomorrow.

Business of the house

Notices of motion

The SPEAKER (09:35): General business, notice of motion 17, will be removed from the notice paper unless the member wishing the matter to remain advises the Clerk in writing before 2 pm today.

Notice given.

Petitions

Middle East conflict

David SOUTHWICK (Caulfield) presented a petition bearing 1775 signatures:

Issue:

This petition of residents in Victoria draws to the attention of the Legislative Assembly the matter of teachers in the Victorian Department of Education with some Australian Education Union branches participating in a week of action supporting Palestine. Teachers and support staff are being asked to wear Palestinian keffiyehs and display other symbols of Palestinian identity into schools and students are being encouraged to participate in marches and other activities supporting Palestinians. Such activities are marginalising other students who are of a different national identity in the region and can only serve to inflame and heighten tensions that possibly can lead to tragic consequences. The role of teachers and support staff in schools is that of educators and not political activists. Educators should be encouraging students to learn in the school environment and not to march in the streets during school hours. Personal political bias and membership of political parties is not forbidden for teachers; but teachers should not be bringing those opinions and bias into the classrooms to influence students unduly. It is also contrary to the Department of Education guidelines which strongly supports equitable and safe learning environments for all students in schools. to always be maintained.

Action:

The petitioners therefore request that the Legislative Assembly call on the Government to mandate that teachers who involve themselves in actions such as the call to a Pro-Palestine week of action where students

are indoctrinated and encouraged to be involved in activities that hold a political bias and can only serve to raise tensions within the school and community to be stood down or terminated for going against Departmental policy guidelines. These guidelines require teachers and schools to provide a safe and equitable environment for all students, including students from minority groups within our larger inclusive society. For teachers to be involved in such activities is inappropriate and unprofessional as it puts at least one group of students at risk.

Ordered that petition be considered tomorrow.

Committees

Legal and Social Issues Committee

Register and Talk about It: Inquiry into Increasing the Number of Registered Organ and Tissue Donors

Ella GEORGE (Lara) (09:37): I have the honour to present to the house a report from the Legal and Social Issues Committee on the inquiry into increasing the number of registered organ and tissue donors, together with summary booklet, appendices and transcripts of evidence.

Ordered that report, summary booklet and appendices be published.

Public Accounts and Estimates Committee

Report on the 2021–22 and 2022–23 Financial and Performance Outcomes

Sarah CONNOLLY (Laverton) (09:38): I have the honour to present to the house a report from the Public Accounts and Estimates Committee on the inquiry into the 2021–22 and 2022–23 financial and performance outcomes, together with transcripts of evidence.

Ordered to be published.

Documents

Documents

Incorporated list as follows:

DOCUMENTS TABLED UNDER ACTS OF PARLIAMENT – The Clerk tabled:

Auditor-General – Withdrawal from 2026 Commonwealth Games – Ordered to be published

Commissioner for Environmental Sustainability Victoria – Strategic Audit of the Implementation of environmental management systems by agencies and public authorities – Report 2022–23

Members of Parliament (Standards) Act 1978 – Register of Interests – Returns submitted by Members of the Legislative Assembly – Ordinary Returns 1 July 2023 – 31 January 2024 (two volumes) – Ordered to be published

Ombudsman – Social housing complaint handling – Progress report – Ordered to be published

Wildlife Act 1975 – Wildlife (Prohibition of Game Hunting) Notice No 1 (*Gazette S113, 8 March 2024*).

Bills

State Electricity Commission Amendment Bill 2023

Council's agreement

The SPEAKER (09:39): I have received a message from the Legislative Council agreeing to the State Electricity Commission Amendment Bill 2023 without amendment.

*Motions***Member conduct**

James NEWBURY (Brighton) (09:39): I move, by leave:

That this house recognises that ministers are disrespecting Victorians by refusing to answer genuine questions without notice when they respond generally instead of dealing with the substance of the questions.

Leave refused.

Planning policy

James NEWBURY (Brighton) (09:40): I move, by leave:

That this house condemns the state Labor government for their ongoing centralisation of planning power and ripping away of community rights near environmental renewable projects, future Suburban Rail Loop stations, designated growth and economic zones, public housing sites and school and childcare locations.

Leave refused.

Land tax

James NEWBURY (Brighton) (09:40): I move, by leave:

That this house calls on the Treasurer to apologise and refund land tax bills paid by Brighton bathing box owners who only license use of the box – they do not own the land – after the state government admitted to illegally charging box owners around the bay.

Leave refused.

Middle East conflict

Tim READ (Brunswick) (09:40): I move, by leave:

That this house:

- (1) notes that since this house resolved on 17 October 2023 to stand with Israel:
 - (a) the Israeli military has killed or injured over 100,000 Palestinians; and
 - (b) there is a growing humanitarian catastrophe in Gaza;
- (2) does not support the state of Israel's continued invasion of Palestine.

Leave refused.

Rising Festival

Cindy McLEISH (Eildon) (09:41): I move, by leave:

That this house:

- (1) notes the Rising Festival Melbourne performance involving an artist drugged to unconsciousness, penetrated and filmed onstage may breach Victoria's consent laws; and
- (2) calls on the Premier to:
 - (a) intervene and ensure this performance does not proceed; and
 - (b) ensure that no taxpayers money is spent on the performance.

Leave refused.

Neerim District Rural Primary School

Wayne FARNHAM (Narracan) (09:41): I move, by leave:

That this house:

- (1) condemns the state Labor government for its deceptive community consultation process in regard to Neerim primary school; and

- (2) produces a transparent process to discuss the future of the school so all the community can attend.

Leave refused.

State Library Victoria

Gabrielle DE VIETRI (Richmond) (09:42): I move, by leave:

That this house:

- (1) notes that the State Library has terminated the contracts of four writers who have spoken in support of Palestine;
- (2) expects our public institutions to hold high ethical and transparency standards and deems political censorship indefensible; and
- (3) requires the library to publicly and fully account for its decision.

Leave refused.

Members statements

Gael Emond

Jacinta ALLAN (Bendigo East – Premier) (09:43): Today I rise to pay tribute to the well-lived and well-loved life of Gael Patricia Emond. Auntie Gael was the second-eldest daughter of Fred and Monica Krausgrill, and her older sister Glenda, my mum, recalls the many times Gael's mischief would often land them both in trouble when they were growing up. While raising her family with husband Geoff, Gael worked in the education sector supporting children with special needs and developed strong lifelong bonds with the students and their families.

It was thanks to a childhood filled with a love of music and performance, with fortnightly musical sessions in the family home, that as an adult Gael was motivated to make an extraordinary contribution to the community arts sector in Bendigo, which I want to honour today. Through decades of volunteer service to the community arts sector, serving on the committees of the then Strathfieldsaye municipal brass band and the Bendigo Theatre Company, Gael devoted countless hours week in, week out to both those community organisations, who were stronger and better thanks to Gael's time, talents and commitment and provided a community-based pathway for many talented artists to start their journey.

Auntie Gael was also someone you wanted to spend time with because she was just so much fun. But what I loved more about her was that she treated everyone equally. My love and sympathy to Geoff, Matt, Chris and Kate and their families. Rest peacefully, dear heart.

Mansfield community achievements

Cindy McLEISH (Eildon) (09:44): Mansfield is a strong, vibrant and inclusive community that bats well above its weight in so many different areas. In the last couple of weeks it has hosted a number of incredibly well attended community events and many of the locals have received significant awards and well-deserved recognition.

Congratulations to Mel Kirley from the Mansfield Hunting and Fishing shop, who organised the Mansfield outdoor expo. The expo attracted an enormous crowd, with over 8000 visitors and more than 50 stalls, and was an absolute winner for local traders and exhibitors. Congratulations to Karen Pirie and the organisers of the Mansfield pottery festival, which included the *Poets of Pottery* exhibition, potters market and workshops. Congratulations to the organising committee of the Merrijig Rodeo, another sold-out event. The event continues to do well every year.

Local paramedic Jason Learmonth was a joint winner of the WorkSafe Health and Safety Representative of the Year for his work on ambulance driver fatigue in regional and rural areas. Local ag tech company AirAgri, owned by James and Paul Diamond, was awarded the Commitment to Workplace Health and Safety on a Farm WorkSafe award. Local golfer 87-year-old Perrin Gooding at Mansfield Golf Club scored a hole in one for the first time in 33 years. And the congratulations are

not limited to adults. Local student 11-year-old Lara Hempenstall in December last year had a big hair chop, raising over \$5000 for charity. Mansfield does so well. I am so proud to be their member.

Ballarat Gold Mine

Natalie HUTCHINS (Sydenham – Minister for Jobs and Industry, Minister for Treaty and First Peoples, Minister for Women) (09:46): I rise to speak on the devastating and avoidable workplace incident that has occurred. On Wednesday last week two goldminers were working 500 metres underground air legging and were pinned beneath fallen rocks. This is a manual form of mining that most companies have stopped using due to safety concerns. A 21-year-old miner is still fighting for his life in hospital and another miner, a 37-year-old man from Bruthen Kurt Hourigan, was killed. My thoughts are with his family and friends and all those involved, particularly the 200 workers at the site that need to return to the site to earn a living. Tragically, this is the 12th workplace death this year alone, and everyone should have the right to return home to their families safely after a hard day's work.

I acknowledge the great work done by the Australian Workers' Union secretary Ronnie Hayden and his strong support of the families and workers at the Ballarat Gold Mine. I commend Ronnie and his team of organisers for their unwavering commitment to workplace safety and ensuring workers are always at the forefront of the union's mind. I will be awaiting the outcomes of the investigation, and any culpable parties should be held to account. Victoria's industrial manslaughter laws are a critical mechanism to ensure this occurs. Can I thank the members for Eureka and Wendouree for their great advocacy and for again standing up for local workers in their electorates.

Korumburra Secondary College

Danny O'BRIEN (Gippsland South) (09:47): It was with great pride that I attended the official opening of the new Korumburra Secondary College last week – a fantastic new facility to support local children and their families for decades to come. The new facility has had a long gestation. Stage 1 of the project was funded by my predecessor Peter Ryan and the previous Nationals and Liberal government, but it took a further six years of hard campaigning to get the full rebuild funded. I am very proud of the community and our efforts. We wrote letters, signed petitions and raised the issue in Parliament and the local media, and eventually the government came through. While it was a wide campaign, I would particularly like to thank Sam Norrey and Matt Row for their community campaigning and principals over the journey, Abigail Graham, Vaya Dauphin and John Wilson. When we opened the first stage of the building a student was heard saying, 'This is too good for us.' That comment both saddened and inspired me. The clear message to Korumburra and district students now is this: as a wider community, we value you, we value your education and we want to give you the best facilities for your learning.

Gippsland South electorate events

Danny O'BRIEN (Gippsland South) (09:48): Last Sunday might have been a stinking hot day, but it did not stop some great events in Gippsland, including the annual Stony Creek Cup. It was disappointing that the Danny O'Brien trained favourite did not salute the judges in the Danny O'Brien MP Handicap – not least because I had some money on it. But congrats to the connections of Confrontational, which won the cup.

Hot weather deterred some, but a great day out was still had at the free Sale Music Festival, with a big line-up of local musicians entertaining the crowd. Congrats to Heather and David Harrington and their team for again putting on a great festival. Gippsland is the place to be in March.

Oakleigh electorate student leadership awards

Steve DIMOPOULOS (Oakleigh – Minister for Environment, Minister for Tourism, Sport and Major Events, Minister for Outdoor Recreation) (09:49): Each year I present my Community Builder Award to a student at every local school in the electorate of Oakleigh. This is a way to recognise an

exceptional student who gives back to their school community and the community more broadly. These are leaders with an extraordinary commitment to and care for others – leaders now and leaders in the future.

My congratulations to Hayden from Amsleigh Park Primary, Arjun from Carnegie Primary, Mikayla from Glen Huntly Primary, Talia from Hughesdale Primary, Ruby and Noa from Huntingdale Primary, Robert from Katandra school, Isabella from Murrumbene Primary, Georgia from Oakleigh Primary, Zoe from Mount Waverley Heights Primary, Rocco from St Anthony's Primary, Darby from St Patrick's Primary, Anna from Sacred Heart Primary, Claryz from St Peter's Primary, Elouisa from South Oakleigh Primary, Dante from Christ our Holy Redeemer Primary, Zack from Clayton North Primary, Usamita from Oakleigh Grammar, Piper and Sophie from Kilvington Grammar, Jude from John Monash Science School, Dylan from Salesian College, Liana from Sacred Heart Girls' College, Genna from South Oakleigh College and Jono from Glen Eira College. My very best wishes to all these fantastic students as they go on to achieve success.

Portland District Health

Roma BRITNELL (South-West Coast) (09:50): For 15 months Portland hospital's helipad has been closed. For 15 months sick and injured locals have been forced to endure a 14-kilometre journey to the local airport whilst the helipad at the hospital sits unused. For 15 months the minister has not had an answer to when it will reopen. For 15 months the minister has not said why it was closed. The people of Portland campaigned for years for their helipad. They fundraised and supported its establishment in 2014. Just eight years later, in December 2022, the state Labor government closed the helipad, first blaming the Civil Aviation Safety Authority and, when that was revealed to be untrue, blaming a lack of staff. The minister should be ashamed. She should be embarrassed at all the excuses she has used whilst Portland locals in unimaginable pain and whose lives are at risk are required to travel 15 minutes to the airport along our rubbish country roads.

I have had enough of this minister's ducking of her responsibilities and have started a petition demanding the helipad at Portland hospital be reopened for use by Ambulance Victoria helicopter emergency medical service choppers. The petition is up and running at local businesses across Portland for locals to sign and signal to our city-centric Labor state government that we will not be silent and we will fight for our healthcare needs. I encourage everyone hearing this to sign the petition and send the minister a message. We need to save seconds that save lives, and the minister must reopen the Portland hospital helipad now.

Newbury Primary School

Ros SPENCE (Kalkallo – Minister for Agriculture, Minister for Community Sport, Minister for Carers and Volunteers) (09:51): Congratulations to all the students at Newbury Primary School who have taken on student leadership roles for 2024 and who I had the pleasure of presenting their badges to earlier this month. It was fantastic to join these excited and proud students at their school assembly as they take on their new leadership responsibilities. There are around 1200 students at Newbury Primary School, and with Myla, Ariana, Aubrey, Abrish, Alexander, Ella and Riyansh stepping up from the prep classes through to Dontae, Harnit, Dilraj, Divyaan, Layla, Aarika, Thaissa and Harveer representing the year 6 classes, every one of the 53 classes has a student empowerment leader. Add to this eight digital innovators and eight house leaders and there are close to 70 student leaders for 2024.

Newbury Primary School is a great school in my electorate which this government opened in 2017. Since then principal Michelle Nunn has done a fantastic job in fostering a strong sense of community among staff, students and families, and I thank her and teacher Leonie Gasper for their very kind invitation to this presentation. Congratulations again to all those students who have taken on leadership responsibilities at Newbury Primary this year, and thank you to all the families and friends who joined in the day to celebrate these students. To all the 2024 student leaders: I know you will do a terrific job. Enjoy your new roles, and thank you again for having me at your school to share in this very special day with you.

Rowville rail line

Kim WELLS (Rowville) (09:53): Melbourne needs a rail link to Rowville, not a train going from nowhere to nowhere. After a request from the Victorian Liberals the Parliamentary Budget Office conducted an investigation into the real costings related to the Labor government's Suburban Rail Loop. What they found has absolutely staggered me: \$216.7 billion will be needed to fund the SRL. For those of us that live out in the Rowville electorate, we are constantly pained by every mention of the ongoing Suburban Rail Loop when we cannot even get into the CBD on public transport. For a lot of people this number is pretty hard to comprehend, and it is all going onto a credit card.

A better idea would be to put some of the SRL funding into delivering the long-awaited Rowville rail. At the last federal election, when the funding for Rowville rail was allocated under Alan Tudge, MP for Aston, and the federal Liberals, \$475 million was secured to build an extension from Caulfield to Monash University that would have extended out to Rowville. All that was needed was for the state Labor government to match that funding. Yet as soon as Albanese and his government were elected we saw the Rowville rail funding cut in their first budget without any justification. However, I bet if Rowville rail was delivered, that train would be packed with residents going in and out of the city day and night. I will continue to fight to have a Rowville rail link secured for the electorate of Rowville.

International Women's Day

Sarah CONNOLLY (Laverton) (09:54): It was great to spend last Wednesday celebrating International Women's Day in Truganina with so many fabulous local women from across the Laverton electorate. We were fortunate enough to have the Minister for Women attend our morning tea, where she spoke about gender equality and the theme of investing in women and addressing financial barriers and gender pay parity. I want to thank the team at Mamma Roti in Truganina for hosting us and Rashi from Little Growling for the fantastic catering she did in preparing and absolutely catering for the best feast ever. It was great to see so many women from different backgrounds, including school students, teachers, businesswomen, two of our fantastic local mayors and more, all in the same room together.

This year there is a very special reason to be celebrating International Women's Day here in Victoria: because it was the first one in 32 years that we have had a woman as Premier, the second in this state's history but certainly not the last. We also celebrated the fact that for the first time two-thirds of our government's ministers are women. With our government we can see in action a government that has gender equality and outcomes for women at the fore of its decision-making processes. In areas like women's health, child care, education, transport and employment, we are making bold strides in creating a more inclusive state for all Victorian women and, importantly, their families, and that is something I think we can all continue to celebrate.

Regional health services

Tim McCURDY (Ovens Valley) (09:56): Hospital amalgamations have officially hit the radar by the Allan Labor government for Melbourne. The narrative has surfaced, the excuses are lining up and now we wait for the fatal blows. Regional health is best served locally and not by forcing people to navigate the larger centres for basic health needs. The Minister for Health and the Premier will have blood on their hands if they push this unacceptable outcome. Fund our local health services and keep local health local.

Yarrawonga Riverlands Tourist Park

Tim McCURDY (Ovens Valley) (09:56): I want to raise my concerns for the tenants of the Riverlands caravan park in Yarrawonga, who have alerted me this week about their concerns about remaining in their homes into the future. Apparently the owners are developing the land. Current tenants were told when they invested in their removable homes that they were safe for life. I urge the Riverlands caravan park to be fair and reasonable in all negotiations with tenants. The cost-of-living crisis and the housing crisis are hitting home for many families in the Ovens Valley electorate. We do

not want more people homeless, we want to see a fair and reasonable transition going forward for all the families and retirees in the caravan park.

Central Murray Sunrise Rotary Club

Tim McCURDY (Ovens Valley) (09:56): The Sunrise Rotary Club of Yarrawonga and Mulwala have begun their push for a blood bank donation facility in Yarrawonga hospital. Travelling to Wangaratta can be a chore and time-consuming. I fear that as people get older they will drop out of blood donation if it is not made easier for them to. I fully support their project and will lobby every avenue I can to achieve this goal.

Wild dog control

Tim McCURDY (Ovens Valley) (09:57): I want to put on record my concerns about the Victorian government for Melbourne's failure to guarantee wild dog funding beyond this year in my electorate. Wild dogs cause massive damage. Farmers' losses can be up to a hundred lambs per year at the hands of wild dogs. Many of the kills are thrill kills, and we must continue to fight against wild dogs.

Northcote Primary School

Kat THEOPHANOUS (Northcote) (09:57): I begin with a huge congratulations to Northcote Primary School, which over the weekend celebrated 150 years. It was fantastic to join their school fete and even contribute a photo of my own to the historical archive: a snap of me as a prep student with my teacher Wendy. We were also treated to a display of the famous chalk drawings hidden for decades and uncovered during the school's renovation: incredibly detailed depictions of goblins and fairytales, brought to life by former teacher Elaine Hobbs – a small snapshot of the beauty of my former school. I offer Northcote Primary my warmest wishes as they look to the next chapter.

World's coolest street

Kat THEOPHANOUS (Northcote) (09:58): Just a short stroll up from Northcote Primary, it would be remiss of me not to point out that you can find yourself in none other than the coolest street in the world. Yes, you heard right. As reported last week, High Street in Melbourne's north is officially the coolest street – not in Melbourne, not in Victoria, not in Australia; in the world. Brunswick Street is all right; Chapel Street, okay, sure; Sydney Road, yes, it has got some spice. But High Street in Northcote, Thornbury and Preston has a special magic. *Time Out* described our epic restaurants, hidden bars, live music venues and boutique shops but also our warm sense of community that means everyone feels welcome. It has been an honour to support this one-of-a-kind street with two major festivals funded by the Victorian Labor government: the Eighty-Six and Northcote Rise. I invite all members to join me on the coolest street in the world.

Wren Pleasant

Gabrielle DE VIETRI (Richmond) (09:59): I rise to pay tribute to the life of Wren Pleasant. Wren turned up to the rental crisis inquiry last year with blue hair and a razor-sharp tongue. She blew us all away with her confidence and insight. She spoke of a callous housing system that puts landlord profits over people's needs. She called for a new system where renters would not risk their health and home to have their basic rights met. She ended her submission by saying:

... renters are suffering for the purpose of this investment. this suffering applies to our bodies, through heat, cold and mould, and to our mental health and our lifestyles. we renters are the underclass you've created. help us please help us

Earlier this month, after struggling with depression, Wren died. Wren was an academic, a sex worker, an artist, a trans lesbian, a writer and neurodivergent, and whether she knew it or not, she was a brilliant advocate for many. We let Wren down in so many different ways. But if this government followed only Wren's advice – and I urge them to look at it – that alone would create the safety and securities that all renters deserve. Wren, I am sorry this world has failed you. We have lost a remarkable person.

Lunar New Year

John MULLAHY (Glen Waverley) (10:00): It has been a great start to the Year of the Loong in the Glen Waverley district community as tens of thousands of residents celebrated the Lunar New Year. Without doubt it is one of the best times of the year in my community, with families coming together celebrating the year ahead, which in this case is the Year of the Dragon.

It was wonderful to welcome the Premier to the Glen Waverley community to open the annual Kingsway Lunar New Year and Lantern Festival. It would not be possible without Vincent Chow OAM and the work of the entire Monash Chinese Events Organising Committee. Thousands of visitors came along to support local businesses and stallholders, including at my mobile office stall, with our wonderful volunteers having lots of positive conversations with our local Chinese community.

I also had the pleasure of celebrating with the Chinese Association of Monash. Together we made glutinous rice balls, participated in singing and watched traditional dance performances. Thanks to Michael Miao, the CAM president, for such a terrific event, and a shout-out to the Chinese Association of Victoria, run by president Boon Chuan Tay and their stellar management team, for their terrific Lunar New Year event as well. It was a pleasure to cross Dandenong Creek and join the vibrant celebration with the Chinese members of our community.

The Chinese community in Glen Waverley and indeed across Victoria contributes so much to our great state. I am proud to be a member of the Allan Labor government, which supports our Chinese community in our words and our actions. Xīn nián kuài lè. Gōng xǐ fā cái. Xièxiè.

Monbulk electorate student leaders

Daniela DE MARTINO (Monbulk) (10:02): I rise to celebrate the outstanding students of some of our local primary schools. This is one of my favourite times of the year, meeting bright young leaders eager to make their mark and improve the experiences of those around them.

At Upwey South Primary School I had the honour of presenting badges to our school captains Mila, Jack, Franklin and Eden along with house captains Jake and Poppy, Olive and Matilda, Judd and Quinn, and Will and Charlotte.

At Emerald Primary School I had the privilege of recognising the school captains Max W, Ethan, Mia and Eliza alongside house captains Thea, Storm, Charli, Max T, Matilda C, Oli, Audrey C, Dart, Jack, Rainger, another Matilda C, Taylor B, Olivia, Nile, Lulu and Jasmine C.

At Ferny Creek Primary School I had the honour of recognising the leadership of school captains Jude and Evie and school vice-captains Nova and Jack. House captains Miranda, Jade, Abbie, Matilda, Chloe, Vincent, Toni and Thalia, along with their respective vice-captains, should also be congratulated on their positions.

At Mount Dandenong Primary School I had the pleasure of presenting leadership badges to school captains Spencer, Josephine, Lia and William and house captains Bailey, Ricky, Gabriella, Jack, Tully, Sydney, Ned, Isabella, Miranda, Lucille, Rafael and Solomon.

Well done to these remarkable young leaders for their dedication, drive and commitment to working for their school communities. They are our future, and their motivation to leave their schools better than they found them is an honourable one indeed. I look forward to seeing the good work they will undertake over the coming year.

Sandringham Hospital

Brad ROWSWELL (Sandringham) (10:03): A very, very happy birthday to our Sandringham Hospital. It is not just bricks and mortar on Bluff Road, it is the caring heart of our community. Last week I joined the community of the Sandringham Hospital on two occasions. I joined the Sandringham

Lions and their volunteers Deb and Lee for the Lions' scone-a-thon. I rolled up my sleeves. I took off my jacket. I did not help whip the cream, but I dished it out with the scones and the jam, and it was wonderful providing those scones to those who work at Sandringham Hospital, acknowledging their contribution and support for our community. I also attended the Lunch by the Bay at Sandringham Yacht Club together with the Shadow Minister for Health Georgie Crozier in the other place.

I want to thank the Sandringham Hospital, all its staff and all its volunteers for the magnificent contribution that Sandringham Hospital makes and will continue to make in our community for 60 more years.

St Agnes Primary School, Highett

Brad ROWSWELL (Sandringham) (10:04): I also attended on the weekend the St Agnes Primary School fete. To the principal Lachy Foot and to the wonderful St Agnes Primary School community, congratulations on a fantastic event. As many would know in this place, I won the door prize at the Quill Awards on Friday night, very embarrassingly – a night's accommodation at Crown Casino and breakfast the following morning. I was running the auction at the St Agnes Primary School fete and actually auctioned that off at the fete, raising an additional 700 bucks to help with the resurfacing of the playground at St Agnes Primary School – a great win for a great local Catholic primary school.

Melton electorate fuel prices

Steve McGHIE (Melton) (10:05): The average fuel price across the state last week was \$2.06 a litre. In Melton just this week every single fuel station was selling unleaded at \$2.31 – no market, no competition, just pure price gouging in Melton at the fuel pump. Just down the road in Bacchus Marsh at the same retailers, Coles Express and Ampol, the price for unleaded was \$1.89 per litre, a 42-cent difference. But it is not just the 42 cents, it is the extra \$25 a week, the extra \$101 a month, the extra \$1205 a year that Melton people are being robbed of when filling up their cars. The people of Melton are very angry, and rightly so. They are being ripped off by big fuel companies, who are getting away with it. To add fuel to this fire, the closer you get to the city, the cheaper the fuel is: at BP Rockbank, \$1.84; BP Caroline Springs, \$1.84; and then at Albion, at the Ballarat Road United, it was \$1.83.

Why are Melton families paying premium prices for the same fuel as the rest of the state? The RACV fuel finder tells you not to pay above \$2.31, but those who live in Melton do not have that choice. These fuel retailers are taking Melton residents for a ride and are showing no sympathy, compassion or morality in their choice to sell fuel for 20 cents above the state average.

In my inquiries I have questioned the ACCC, and I am now turning to Consumer Affairs Victoria and will be raising these concerns with the Minister for Consumer Affairs herself to help bring down these prices and draw attention to the disgusting actions of these big companies, in particular leading into the Easter break.

Mackie Road Neighbourhood House

Eden FOSTER (Mulgrave) (10:06): I rise today to share with you all my wonderful experience at the Mackie Road Neighbourhood House open day in Mulgrave on the weekend. It was a day filled with warmth and connection, all thanks to the incredible staff and volunteers who pour their hearts into serving our community. This place is bustling with activity, offering a wide range of programs that cater to everyone, regardless of age, interest or ability. From educational workshops, including art classes, to enjoyable activities such as Pilates and tai chi, there is truly something for everyone. I urge all Mulgrave residents to drop by and explore the many opportunities waiting for them at the Mackie Road Neighbourhood House. It was a great day to celebrate this vital hub for our community.

Holi Festival of Colours

Eden FOSTER (Mulgrave) (10:07): I also take this opportunity to extend very warm wishes and a happy Holi festival to all those celebrating it this week in the Mulgrave electorate. Holi holds immense significance, symbolising the triumph of good over evil and the arrival of spring. This is an

important festival for our Hindu community, but it also serves as a shining example of the fantastic multiculturalism we have in Mulgrave and Victoria, where people of different backgrounds come together to share in culture, colour, laughter and unity. As people across our community cover each other with vibrant colours, let us remember the welcoming message of harmony.

Harrison Ashley

Jackson TAYLOR (Bayswater) (10:08): I would love to give a very big shout-out to Harrison – young Harry – from Wantirna South Primary School, who swam over 18 kilometres and raised over \$2000 for the Starlight Children’s Foundation. What an absolute little legend. It was great to have him in the office the other day with his brother and mother to say well done and give him the shout-out he absolutely deserves. Well done to you, Harry, and I look forward to following your swimming and your journey over the next few years at primary school and secondary school and throughout our local area.

Knox Library

Jackson TAYLOR (Bayswater) (10:08): Of course the Knox Library is now open. It is absolutely next-level, 21st-century stuff, and I am very proud that the state government has helped deliver it in partnership with Knox council. They have done a wonderful job. A big thankyou to everyone for their patience while we delivered this fantastic new community space for locals and all families to use and enjoy for generations to come.

Boronia Heights Primary School

Jackson TAYLOR (Bayswater) (10:08): I would also like to give a big shout-out to the new leaders at Boronia Heights Primary School, a fantastic local primary school in my part of the world, out in Bayswater district. Congratulations to the new leaders. I know they are going to make their school immensely proud.

Fairhills Primary School

Jackson TAYLOR (Bayswater) (10:09): It was also great to open the new covered basketball court at Fairhills Primary in Ferntree Gully. It looks amazing. It was a long time waiting. Thank you so much to the community for your patience while we got on and delivered this project. The kids are already loving it. There was a 99 per cent approval rating at the assembly the other day when I opened it. They loved it – absolutely loved it.

Bayswater South Primary School

Jackson TAYLOR (Bayswater) (10:09): Finally, a very big shout-out, quick shout-out, to the new student representative council leaders at Bayswater South Primary School, a great local school where we are getting things done. Well done to the new leaders. Go well.

Northern Centre of Excellence in School Engagement

Kathleen MATTHEWS-WARD (Broadmeadows) (10:09): I had the pleasure of launching, at Banksia Gardens, the Northern Centre of Excellence in School Engagement Building Blocks resource. I thank Banksia Gardens Community Services and local school partners for their commitment to ensuring no-one gets left behind.

Glenroy College

Kathleen MATTHEWS-WARD (Broadmeadows) (10:09): I congratulate Glenroy secondary college on their innovative Harmony Day program running right through the month of March. It kicked off with students celebrating the Christian tradition of Shrove Tuesday, continues with an iftar dinner and includes cultural dress day, Bollywood dancing and henna. We are so fortunate to be one of the most successful multicultural and multifaith societies in the world, and what we have here is

precious. Sharing and celebrating our traditions helps understanding, promotes inclusion and gives people a sense of value and belonging.

Pascoe Vale Girls College

Kathleen MATTHEWS-WARD (Broadmeadows) (10:10): Great things are happening at Pascoe Vale Girls, and it was fabulous to visit there with the member for Pascoe Vale and see progress on their \$14.2 million arts and technology centre funded by Labor.

Hume Central Secondary College

Kathleen MATTHEWS-WARD (Broadmeadows) (10:10): I had the pleasure of presenting school leadership badges and meeting so many high-achieving 2023 graduates at Hume Central Secondary College, including dux Nadeen Abu Ghalyoun, who scored a 97.3 ATAR. As a refugee she has faced many challenges, but she still finds time to give back to the community. Along with her sister Doreen she volunteers with the Aiming High program run by Banksia Gardens.

St Francis de Sales Primary School, Oak Park

Kathleen MATTHEWS-WARD (Broadmeadows) (10:10): It was an honour to present leadership badges to the student leaders at St Francis de Sales Primary, and it gave me a great chance to check out their new classrooms and multipurpose buildings thanks to the \$2 million co-contribution from the Labor state government.

Cranbourne Park Primary School

Pauline RICHARDS (Cranbourne) (10:11): I am so pleased to have the opportunity to talk about one of the great schools in Cranbourne. Cranbourne Park Primary School is a topnotch place where under the leadership of Ross Carlson and deputy principal Michael Youngs we have some school leaders who are doing extraordinary work. I would like to particularly pay credit to school captains Kymani De Thierry and Hailey Franzi and also acknowledge other school leaders. I was really pleased to be able to give out the badges last week to Jackson Evelyn Liardet, Kasie Knowels and Dyllan Wheeldon. We were absolutely just delighted to be able to make a commitment to having their oval refurbished. Having a school with great educators, having a school with great students and great leadership and having the types of resources they need is exactly what makes Cranbourne, and of course the great state of Victoria, special. The hospitality I always receive from that school is something that makes my heart sing.

Ramadan

Pauline RICHARDS (Cranbourne) (10:12): I was also very pleased to celebrate iftar with the local Hampton Park Turkish senior citizens together with the member for Narre Warren South. Kim Hassan and her husband Jeff gave their usual extraordinary gift of hospitality. It was really wonderful to be with them. Ramadan Mubarak!

Road to 120 program

Juliana ADDISON (Wendouree) (10:12): It was great to visit St Patrick's College Ballarat last week with the Minister for Roads and Road Safety and the member for Ripon to launch the Road to 120 program. The program between the Clontarf Foundation and the TAC is aimed at supporting Aboriginal boys through the process of getting their drivers licence. The importance of having a drivers licence post school cannot be understated, and the program aims to have all the boys driving safely. All the best to the Clontarf boys. Go well.

The DEPUTY SPEAKER: I acknowledge in the gallery a former member for Mitcham and Ringwood, Dee Ryall. Welcome back.

*Statements on parliamentary committee reports***Legal and Social Issues Committee***Register and Talk about It: Inquiry into Increasing the Number of Registered Organ and Tissue Donors*

Ella GEORGE (Lara) (10:13): It is with great pleasure that I rise today to speak on a committee report, in particular the Legislative Assembly's Legal and Social Issues Committee's first report to the 60th Parliament, *Register and Talk about It*. Last year the Legislative Assembly referred to the committee an inquiry into increasing the number of registered organ and tissue donors. Despite 81 per cent of Victorians supporting organ and tissue donation, Victoria has the second lowest registration rate of all Australian states and territories, at just 23 per cent. Among young people these statistics are even lower, with just 10 per cent of Victorians aged 16 to 25 years having registered to be an organ and tissue donor. So this inquiry set out to understand why registration rates are low and what can be done to encourage more Victorians to register to become an organ and tissue donor.

Organ and tissue donation is a selfless act that has the power to save and transform lives. Transplants provide a unique opportunity for people who are very sick to improve their health and quality of life. Along with investigating how to encourage a greater rate of organ and tissue donation, this inquiry also considered some of the issues that impact donation rates. The reality that faces a grieving family when asked to provide consent to donation is not something anyone wants to experience, yet many families find the strength at a time of intense sadness to recognise that they can help others and provide consent for their loved one to become a donor.

The committee learned that registering to become an organ and tissue donor goes hand in hand with discussing your wishes with your family and loved ones. Having had a prior family discussion about donation wishes significantly influences the likelihood that a family will provide consent for a donation to proceed. Evidence tells us that family members feel much more comfortable consenting to donation when they know that they are affirming and fulfilling their family member's donation wishes.

I mentioned earlier Victoria's low registration rates, which are even lower for young people. The committee identified building awareness about donation among young Victorians as a key opportunity. It makes a series of recommendations to encourage this cohort to register to become a donor and share their donation wishes with family. This includes the delivery of a program targeted at 15- and 16-year-olds ahead of them becoming eligible for drivers licences and incorporating donation into the school curriculum.

The committee found that South Australia has the highest donor registration rate in Australia, at 72 per cent, and this is due to South Australia being the only state where it is possible to record your donation decision on your drivers licence. One of the most significant recommendations that this report makes is that the Victorian government scope the reintroduction of the option to register to become a donor on the Australian Organ Donor Register when applying for or renewing a drivers licence. This recommendation was guided by the proven success of the South Australian drivers licence registration system combined with evidence that almost all eligible Victorians hold a drivers licence.

A key topic raised throughout the inquiry was a lack of awareness and understanding about tissue donation and how it differs from organ donation, and the committee makes several recommendations to reduce this knowledge gap. Another area where there is a lack of awareness is stem cell donation, which is used to treat certain types of blood cancers, like leukaemia and lymphoma. The committee learned that Australia gets approximately three in four of its stem cell donations from overseas. This means that not enough Australians are registered to become stem cell donors on the Australian Bone Marrow Donor Registry, and the committee makes a series of recommendations aimed at improving this.

On behalf of the committee, I thank the expert and community witnesses who shared learnings about barriers to registering to become an organ and tissue donor and ideas to create a more accessible registration system. Evidence provided by family members of their own experiences of a loved one's donation enriched this report and its recommendations. I am exceptionally grateful for all who shared their personal stories, and I thank them. I thank my fellow committee members for their immense contribution to this inquiry. I also extend my thanks and gratitude to the committee secretariat: Jessica Strout, Katherine Murtagh and Danielle Broadhurst. Thank you for all of your hard work, support and dedication to this important inquiry. I encourage all Victorians to consider registering to become an organ and tissue donor and have a conversation with your family about it. I commend this report to the house.

Legal and Social Issues Committee

Register and Talk about It: Inquiry into Increasing the Number of Registered Organ and Tissue Donors

Chris CREWITHER (Mornington) (10:18): I rise today to speak on the *Register and Talk about It* report following the parliamentary inquiry into increasing the number of registered organ and tissue donors. It was indeed an honour and a privilege to be part of the Legal and Social Issues Committee's inquiry and, with the secretariat and committee, to produce the final report. I would like to acknowledge everyone who made submissions or appeared before the inquiry, as well as the Donor Tissue Bank of Victoria, which allowed us to visit in person. I would also like to acknowledge everyone who is or has been a committee member, including chair Ella George, who just spoke; deputy chair Annabelle Cleeland; Cindy McLeish; Meng Heang Tak; Gary Maas; Christine Couzens; and Jackson Taylor. I would also like to acknowledge the amazing secretariat: Jessica Strout, Katherine Murtagh and Danielle Broadhurst.

In particular I would like to acknowledge all staff, volunteers, organisations and community members who are or have been involved in organ and tissue donations, including everyone here in the gallery today, in particular those here and in our community who have been or who are tissue or organ donors or recipients or indeed stem cell donors or recipients or who are donor families. That includes Dee Ryall, a former member for Mitcham and Ringwood, here today in the chamber with her husband Jeff and his son Tim. Jeff submitted to the committee after donating a kidney to his son Tim. Some six years ago it became apparent that his son, now 40 years old, had declining kidney function and that a transplant was required at some point in the future. Throughout this process and his engagement with the live kidney donor program at the Austin Hospital he learned the following: there is a distinct lack of awareness of the opportunity to be a live kidney donor; that in a perceived wrong the decision for post-mortem organ donation can be overridden by family; and just how grateful he was to be able to provide the opportunity to his son to continue living a rich and fulfilling life.

There are many highlights as to the importance of this inquiry. Organ and tissue donation numbers increased in 2022 by around 30 per cent following the pandemic, within which there was a decrease in tissue and organ registrations. But only 23 per cent of Victorians have registered on the Australian organ donor register, which is well below the national average of 36 per cent and extremely far below South Australia, which is at 73 per cent. Victoria at this point had the second-lowest registration rate of all the states and territories, and the rate has only increased by 4 per cent since 2015. Notably, regional areas had a higher average registration rate at 30 per cent, as compared with metro areas at 22 per cent. This definitely highlights the need for this inquiry.

Key issues included general community lack of awareness with many willing to donate but not being registered, unclear donor registration status, the ability of family members to veto the deceased's wishes to donate their organs and tissues and lack of talking to family members about this, with discussion with family members being a key factor in terms of organ and tissue donations going through to fruition, as well as cultural beliefs discouraging organ and tissue donation. We also

discussed the need to ensure a focus on tissue donations and stem cell donations along with organ donations.

We looked at many potential solutions. A particular focus was licences, noting that South Australia retains the link between licences and organ and tissue donation registration and at the same time has the highest registration rate in the country. We also looked at opt-in, opt-out and in-between models, and there was much debate about this within the committee. We also in particular looked at family consent, noting that family members currently can override an individual's decision, with this particularly occurring when family members have not talked about it sufficiently or at all, particularly in the midst of someone passing away, when there is a lot of emotion and grief at play.

In terms of our recommendations, we have looked at increasing awareness and overcoming myths, particularly through education. In recommendations 1 and 2 we support the return to a drivers licence approach, noting the experience in South Australia but also in America, where this system has led to some states having 70 to 80 per cent of the population signing up to organ and tissue donation. We also looked at a number of recommendations to improve stem cell donation rates.

I note the great work of the secretariat as well as all the committee – chair Ella George, as I mentioned before – and everyone involved. Thank you once again to all of those donors, recipients and donor families who are with us and in the community for all your efforts.

The DEPUTY SPEAKER: I remind members to use correct titles.

Legal and Social Issues Committee

Register and Talk about It: Inquiry into Increasing the Number of Registered Organ and Tissue Donors

Chris COUZENS (Geelong) (10:23): I am pleased to rise to contribute on the report by the Legal and Social Issues Committee inquiry into increasing the number of registered organ and tissue donors. I want to start by acknowledging Jessica Strout and the secretariat team for their incredible work throughout this inquiry. To the committee chair, the member for Lara: thank you for your significant guidance and sensitivity, particularly to those families and individuals who shared their own personal and at times emotional experiences giving evidence to the committee. I also want to acknowledge the Legal and Social Issues Committee members and the work that they have put into this inquiry.

The final report makes 74 findings and 41 recommendations to improve registrations and improve access to registration. The committee received 49 submissions and eight pieces of additional information. The committee held seven days of public hearings, hearing from 73 witnesses across 31 sessions. The committee also conducted an onsite visit to the Donor Tissue Bank of Victoria. I do want to thank the experts, organisations, volunteers, individuals and of course families who contributed to this important inquiry.

I am not sure how many people are aware that a deceased donor can help up to seven people through organ donation and 200 people through tissue donations. During the inquiry David Gillard, a donor parent, told us that many Victorians know that they can be an organ donor but are unaware they can also become a tissue donor:

Organ donation was not an option because they still had to go through a process of investigation, but he was a prime candidate for tissue donation. We thought, 'This is what Rhys would want.'

Rhys was always sharing and giving during his life, 'so it was kind of perfect', he said. He continued:

So the machine kicked in, the process went through. Later on we found out that he donated corneas and skin, and over time we found out that all of his donations were successfully – I do not know what the word is – not transplanted but gifted, and it gave us a lot of comfort knowing that he had helped other people.

Discussing organ and tissue donation and sharing donation wishes with family reduces the burden of decision-making for a potential donor's family at a time of intense grief and substantially increases the likelihood that a family will consent to donation. Cynthia Caruana, a donor parent, said:

It is important to note here that it was from all the conversations that we had as a family that we were fully aware of his wishes, which made it easier to fulfil when his time was here. It is crucial for a person's loved ones and next of kin to be aware of their wishes. If not, the additional shock at a time of such grief and sadness is almost overwhelming for families to take in, and the decision, with such a small window, is sometimes lost.

The rate of family consent to donation has decreased over the past 10 years. Family consent in the donation process is critical. Families are always asked for consent when organ and tissue donation is considered.

The committee recommends automatically contacting people after they register on the Australian Organ Donor Register to encourage them to share their donation wishes with family and to provide information on starting family discussions and an option to share donation decisions with family members via email. It is important to talk to your family once you have registered to become a donor, because they will be asked to consent to the donation. Education and awareness initiatives about the AODR and donation can be tailored for different communities. Local government areas across Victoria have varying AODR registration rates. Every locality has different demographics. For example, some are more culturally diverse than others or expect to see a large increase in population. I ask all members in this place to register, if they have not already, and to read this report or at least the summary booklet *Register and Talk about It*. This was a really fascinating inquiry for me, and I commend this report to the house.

Public Accounts and Estimates Committee

Report on the 2023–24 Budget Estimates

Tim READ (Brunswick) (10:28): I would like to comment on the Public Accounts and Estimates Committee's report on the 2023–24 budget estimates, because it gives me an opportunity to raise an important health issue which is largely ignored in this place, and that is the state of public dental care. It is still a surprise that public dental care is rarely mentioned here, when you consider that it is an area of health care where the key performance indicator, waiting times for treatment, has been steadily worsening every year for a decade. Consider that in the year 2014–15 the average wait time for public dental treatment was 11.8 months. Even prior to the pandemic this had blown out to around 20 months, and it is now well over that. I can understand why Labor do not want to talk about public dental care, but they can get away with it too because of the coalition's ambivalence to funding of public health services. It has been the Greens in all jurisdictions that have been the only ones standing up for public dental, and I note that it was federal intervention driven by the Greens in 2011 that cut national waiting lists to their record lows.

Now, one thing that Labor will talk about is the Smile Squad initiative, and indeed there is a Smile Squad van that got lost and was washed up on the steps outside this morning. In fact the Smile Squad initiative takes up the vast majority of the words in PAEC's report in terms of public dental. There is nothing wrong with Smile Squad – a program that sends dental vans to public schools, by the way – but the overwhelming focus on the performance of a program that only cares for children obscures the underperformance of an important, basic health service for low-income Victorians.

It is interesting to see that the members opposite are baring their teeth at the moment. It is terribly important that we do not allow Smile Squad to be used as a fig leaf to obscure the underperformance of the government in funding public dental, especially when, as PAEC notes somewhat more mutedly, the total FTE oral health positions such as dentists in all Victorian public health services have reduced each year since 2018, and that includes Dental Health Services Victoria, which manages the Smile Squad program. So even including the much-vaunted Smile Squad program, the entire public dental system in Victoria has become steadily weaker in each of the last six years. The only pages in the PAEC report devoted to dental care are entirely devoted to Smile Squad, suggesting the Public

Accounts and Estimates Committee is unwilling to even briefly mention the deterioration in public dental services over the past decade. I cannot help wondering how the report would read if this committee responsible for holding the government accountable for its spending were not government controlled. I may not be alone in this.

We already set the bar for public dental care incredibly low in this state, with a waiting list target of 23 months to see a dentist, excluding those prevented from rejoining the waiting list because they have seen a dentist in the last 12 months or those on a separate specialist care list. This is almost double the recommended waiting time for general dental care. The government is only a hair's breadth from abolishing waiting list targets altogether. We now have Labor governments at both state and federal levels. There are no more excuses. Labor needs to stop pretending that gums and teeth do not count as health care and to look after low-income Victorians by putting its money where its mouth is.

Public Accounts and Estimates Committee

Report on the 2023–24 Budget Estimates

Tim RICHARDSON (Mordialloc) (10:32): It is great to rise and speak on the report on the 2023–24 budget estimates. Normally committee reports do not get people up and about that much, but there we go. The member for Brunswick – good to have him in here today.

I want to turn my attention in the budget estimates to the mental health section of the report and for a number of reasons reflect on the report and its findings around the significant investment that has been made by the Victorian government on behalf of the mental health and wellbeing of everyone. An important milestone that we passed just this month was the third year of the final report into the royal commission's recommendations; 65 were tabled in addition to the nine interim recommendations that were put forward. This is a landmark and transformational reform that is being led out of Victoria. Other states and territories and the Commonwealth are looking towards the experiences in Victoria and how we are rebuilding our mental health and wellbeing system. It is hard policy work, and you can see through the budget estimates in 2023–24 that it is not through a lack of investment or policy ambition from the government. But cultural change takes time, and we have invested over \$6 billion in mental health and wellbeing reforms.

I want on this occasion to recognise those with lived experience who shared their stories during the royal commission's deliberations. Thousands of people put themselves forward with their lived experience to share their understanding of the sometimes significant impact that the broken system has had on them. As Parliamentary Secretary for Mental Health and Suicide Prevention I have had the privilege of meeting with a number of families who have lived experience of poor outcomes in the mental health system and share that hope and aspiration that we will turn it around for others into the future. When you meet with someone who has lost someone close to them due to suicide, it is a harrowing moment. A lot of people would have done that as members of Parliament. We all know of someone with lived experience. We might know someone that we have, sadly, lost to mental health, and it is such a crippling ripple effect. It is 150 people that are impacted by the loss of someone to mental ill health, and we lose 770 Victorians at the moment. We need to do everything we can to turn around those outcomes, and the budget estimates detail that quite substantially. Sadly as well, if you are from a CALD community, if you are from First Nations communities or if you are in regional and rural Victoria, you are disproportionately impacted, and we need to acknowledge that a disproportionate impact needs a disproportionate response. Very soon we will be seeing some important work in that space around strategies that will be coming forward to set the course for the next years ahead in that reform journey and agenda.

I had the opportunity recently to launch the global conference for Movember at the MCG, which was a really amazing moment, but it was also a stark reminder of the challenges we have in men's health and particularly men's mental health. They have done so much great work in prostate health and care, and we have seen in the medical research investment just how significant the advancements have been in the health and wellbeing outcomes. You can see the medical research investment that has been made

that is referenced in the budget estimates, but then you see in mental health that 71 per cent of people that we lose in Victoria are boys and young men and three out of five Victorians who we lose to suicide have not interacted with a mental health service before. So we have a really important frame here where we are investing in mental health and wellbeing – the beds, the workforce, the lived experience workforce – but then we need to really tuck in to the preventative health message.

We need people to know where to go from the moment they are impacted. That is why in the 2023–24 budget I was so proud to see more investment in the mental health locals. This means that in any council area or any postcode the ambition is that you will know where to turn in your time of need and that there is no wrong door to this. If you walk into the mental health local and you are under the age of 26, we will connect you in with Headspace. If you are a young parent bringing your child in, we might connect you with the infant and children centres that we are establishing as well. We are wanting to make sure that in every element and every corner of our community people know where to go and can get the help they need. That is the fundamental thing. We can have all the performance measures in all elements, but if we continue to lose more Victorians and if we continue to have a system where people do not know where to go, then we are not getting the outcomes that have been set forward. Thankfully, we are leaning full in, and you can see that from the investments that have been made, the \$6 billion that has been invested. I will give a big shout-out to the Health and Community Services Union for all the work they do. The lived experience workforce and the peer workforce are doing an outstanding job, and we will turn it around for Victorians.

Legal and Social Issues Committee

Register and Talk about It: Inquiry into Increasing the Number of Registered Organ and Tissue Donors

Annabelle CLEELAND (Euroa) (10:37): I proudly rise today to make a contribution on the Legislative Assembly Legal and Social Issues Committee *Register and Talk about It* report following the inquiry into increasing the number of registered organ and tissue donors in Victoria. There are many, many thankyou's that I would like to make quickly, because so many people contributed to this epic inquiry. Firstly, I want to thank everyone who entered submissions to the inquiry. We received 49 submissions, and across seven days of public hearings we heard from 73 witnesses. Each of them was integral to contributing to this report. We are deeply grateful to all who shared their personal stories. Sharing their stories was integral to improving our understanding of the organ and tissue donation process, and I hope it can lead to some real improvement in the number of donors as well as the process itself.

I want to note the support, passion and dedication of Allan Turner of Zaidee's Rainbow Foundation, who is a major advocate and champion raising awareness of paediatric organ donation. Allan Turner has been running Zaidee's Rainbow for 17 years, since his daughter died at the age of seven and donated her organs to seven other children to save their lives. I would also like to thank the rest of the committee members, including chair Ella George, the member for Lara, for putting in an enormous amount of work to make sure this inquiry and the report was a success. I also want to thank the secretariat team of Jess, Danielle and Katherine for their professionalism and assistance throughout the inquiry and reporting process. It was emotional, it was heavy and we always felt supported with your professionalism and expert research skills throughout the journey.

As deputy chair of the committee the inquiry itself was an eye-opening experience. I am sure all members involved learned so much about what would not generally be considered when it comes to organ and tissue donation. The standard concerns during this inquiry related to being a registered donor and improving those numbers. After the hearings between June and September last year, we ended up going a lot further than that. We heard contributions about the difficulties associated with and the logistics of organ and tissue donation, such as arranging transplant teams and the need to have hospitals and medical facilities fully resourced. The logistics and facility side of things is something felt

particularly hard in regional areas, with far less transplant specialists and facilities to carry out the necessary transplants.

Registration still remains an issue. Some of the submissions we received criticised moving to a national register and removing it from the drivers licence process, and this is evident in our extensive recommendations in this space. Alternative options, including opt out rather than opt in, were discussed too and have been included in depth throughout this report, as was adding opting in through drivers licence registration. Contributions from hospitals and transplant centres for both tissue and organs are included in this. This includes international perspectives after we heard firsthand how the systems operate in other countries like Spain and the UK. There is also a section dedicated to cultural concerns over organ donations and what can be done to improve awareness in communities like Indigenous, Muslim and English as second language communities.

I want to share examples of stories we heard during the inquiry. One recipient of organ donation twice, Alison Mackay, advocated for people to sign up as donors, as it saved her life. She wrote:

I have completed the online form myself, and it was ridiculously quick, easy

...

I honestly believe organ donation should be an opt out program. I think the lack of care, interest and “it doesn’t affect me” is why so few people fill in the form.

Leonard Dark also said that we should:

Make it opt-out rather than the current opt-in scenario, just as it is in Singapore.

Leah Macey supported that, saying:

I strongly believe that the option of being an organ donor should be included in request for a licence of any kind; driving, boating, hunting etc.

The report highlights some statistics, including that the nationwide consent rate has decreased from 56 per cent to 54 per cent in the last year. Victoria has a 52 per cent consent rate, one of the lowest in the country, despite having the largest amount of transplant recipients. There are around 1800 Australians waitlisted for a transplant and around 14,000 additional people on dialysis.

It has been a mammoth amount of work, and we genuinely hope to improve this space and save and improve lives. Thank you, everyone, for your contributions. Just quickly, I want to draw attention to the front-page art from the Donor Tissue Bank of Victoria. Green, yellow and red leaves reflect the cycle of seasons and grief and bear the first names of people who have donated. I encourage all to register.

The DEPUTY SPEAKER: I again remind members to use correct titles.

Bills

Confiscation Amendment (Unexplained Wealth) Bill 2024

Statement of compatibility

Anthony CARBINES (Ivanhoe – Minister for Police, Minister for Crime Prevention, Minister for Racing) (10:43): In accordance with the Charter of Human Rights and Responsibilities Act 2006, I table a statement of compatibility in relation to the Confiscation Amendment (Unexplained Wealth) Bill 2024:

Opening paragraphs

In accordance with section 28 of the *Charter of Human Rights and Responsibilities Act 2006*, (the **Charter**), I make this Statement of Compatibility with respect to the Confiscation Amendment (Unexplained Wealth) Bill 2024 (**Bill**).

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

Overview

The Bill amends the *Confiscation Act 1997* to strengthen Victoria's existing unexplained wealth laws by introducing a new unexplained wealth order that better targets unlawfully acquired wealth. The Bill also makes other miscellaneous amendments to that Act.

The Bill adds a new unexplained wealth order as a third pathway to Victoria's existing unexplained wealth scheme. Under this new pathway, the Director of Public Prosecutions (DPP) may apply to a court for an unexplained wealth order if there are reasonable grounds to suspect that a person's wealth exceeds their lawfully acquired wealth by at least \$200,000. The person is then required to satisfy the court that their wealth was lawfully acquired. If they cannot do so, then the court may order the respondent to pay the State the value of any wealth the court is not satisfied was lawfully acquired.

The court may also exercise its discretion to reduce the amount payable under an order or refuse to make the order if it considers that making an order for the full amount of a person's unexplained wealth, or making any unexplained wealth order, would be manifestly unjust. In addition, the Bill will extend the ability of a respondent to seek relief from undue hardship or forfeiture caused by an unexplained wealth order, through a reduction in the total debt payable or a payment from forfeited property, within 60 days of any order or forfeiture made.

If the debt is not paid within the time required by the order, being 90 days or as otherwise ordered by the court, the State may recover the amount as a judgment debt and any restrained property may be forfeited without the respondent's consent to satisfy the debt.

Gaps in the current Victorian confiscation framework can impede unexplained wealth laws from capturing organised crime group members who distance themselves from offending. The creation of a new unexplained wealth pathway that removes the requirement for a nexus with serious criminal activity is essential to ensure law enforcement in Victoria can effectively target high-level organised crime figures who are able to distance themselves from criminal offending while reaping significant financial benefits.

The Australian Criminal Intelligence Commission has repeatedly emphasised the increasing sophistication of organised crime groups through complex money laundering activities that obscure the criminal offences that generate illicit gains, and the increasing infiltration of legitimate business resulting in commingling of lawful income and proceeds of crime.

In addition to providing that there is no requirement for a nexus with criminal activity under the new pathway, the Bill provides a definition of wealth that includes all interests in property owned by the person, under the effective control of the person, or expended, consumed or disposed of by the person whether by gift, sale or otherwise. It also includes any service, advantage or benefit provided to the person, or at the person's request or direction. This expanded definition of wealth reflects the sophistication of organised criminals and ability to use wealth that appears legitimate to fund the purchase of assets while using unexplained wealth to fund significant consumable or lifestyle expenses.

Human Rights Issues

The following rights are engaged or limited by the Bill:

- right to a fair hearing (section 24);
- property rights (section 20);
- right to privacy (section 13(a));
- the protection of families and children (section 17(1)); and
- criminal process right – not to be compelled to testify against themselves or to confess guilt (section 25(2)(k)).

Under the Charter, rights may be subject under law only to such reasonable limits as can be demonstrably justified in a free and democratic society based on human dignity, equality and freedom.

Right to a fair hearing (section 24)

Nature of the right

Section 24 of the Charter provides that a party to civil proceeding, has the right to have the proceeding decided by a competent, independent and impartial court or tribunal after a fair and public hearing. This ensures that a party is not substantially disadvantaged compared to the opposing party when putting their case, commonly known as the principle of equality of arms.

As is the case under the existing unexplained wealth powers in Part 4A of the *Confiscation Act*, the Bill provides that once an application for an unexplained wealth order under the new pathway is made by the DPP or an appropriate officer, the respondent bears the onus of proving that their wealth was lawfully acquired.

This amendment engages and limits the right to a fair hearing as the reverse onus of proof on a respondent may infringe the fairness of a hearing insofar as it can result in an unacceptable imbalance between the parties or inequality of arms.

Importance of the purpose of the limitation

The purpose of the limitation is as outlined when the existing unexplained wealth scheme was introduced, to address the fact that the information necessary to establish the acquisition of property is often information that is peculiarly within the knowledge of the owner of that property. A person who has lawfully acquired property ought to be able to readily point to information that supports that acquisition, whilst such information would often be difficult for the prosecution to establish.

Nature and extent of limitation

Whilst the reverse onus of proof requires the respondent to prove their wealth was lawfully acquired the Bill also establishes significant thresholds that must be met and safeguards available to a person who is subject to unexplained wealth proceedings under the new pathway. The DPP or an appropriate officer may only apply for an unexplained wealth order if a police officer suspects on reasonable grounds that a person has wealth that exceeds their lawfully acquired wealth and the total value of the wealth that is not lawfully acquired is \$200,000 or more. In practice, such a suspicion is likely to require a forensic investigation of a person's wealth.

In addition to meeting these substantial thresholds, the Bill provides that the court is not required to consider any wealth of which the DPP has not provided evidence, and provides that the court may accept non-documentary evidence if it is satisfied that it is not reasonable to expect documentary evidence to exist due to the nature of the transfer of wealth, the passage of time or any other reason. A privilege against self-incrimination also applies except in relation to a charge of perjury or a proceeding under the Confiscation Act. Any statement made or evidence given in response to an application for the unexplained wealth order, or any derivative evidence, is not admissible in evidence against that person.

In practical terms, once these requirements have been met, the respondent is then best placed to explain the origin of their own wealth, whereas the State is not.

The relationship between the limitation and its purpose

The limitation is consistent with the Bill's purpose of depriving criminals or their associates of unlawfully acquired wealth. The importance of depriving criminals and their associates of unlawfully acquired wealth and removing the incentive to engage in criminal activity justifies imposing the burden on the applicant for exclusion to demonstrate that the property was lawfully acquired.

Less restrictive means reasonably available to achieve the purpose that the limitation seeks to achieve

It is possible that the burden of proof could instead rest with the prosecution. However this would require the prosecution to have access to the knowledge and records of the respondent, dating back many years of which there may be no documentary evidence. This information is peculiarly within the knowledge of that person and therefore it is appropriate that the burden of proof rests with the respondent to an unexplained wealth order.

Therefore, I consider that the limitation on the right to a fair hearing is reasonable and justified.

Property rights, right to privacy and protection of families and children

Property Rights (s 20)

Nature of the right

Section 20 of the Charter provides that a person must not be deprived of his or her property other than in accordance with the law. This right requires that powers which authorise the deprivation of property are conferred by legislation or common law, are confined and structured rather than unclear, and are accessible to the public and are formulated precisely.

The Bill's operation to facilitate the restraint and forfeiture of wealth is a deprivation of property and therefore a limitation on the right to property.

Nature and extent of limitation

As outlined above, the effect of an unexplained wealth order under the new pathway is to require the respondent to pay the State the value of any unexplained wealth as set out in the order. The DPP or an appropriate officer can also seek a restraining order over a person's property, which possibly could include a person's home, which prohibits the respondent from dealing with the restrained property in any way without the approval of the court. Such a restraining order may then be used to secure payment of a debt under an

unexplained wealth order, and should a person be unable to satisfy payment of the debt, their property can be forfeited without their consent.

The right to privacy (section 13(a))

Nature of the right

Section 13(a) of the Charter protects every person's right to privacy. The Charter provides that a person has a right not to have his or her privacy, family, home or correspondence unlawfully or arbitrarily interfered with. An interference with a person's right to privacy should not be unlawful or arbitrary.

The Bill limits the right to privacy by interfering with a person's ability to be left alone by making their wealth subject the surveillance of the State and interfering with their home.

Nature and extent of the limitation

The scrutiny of a person's wealth, the burden on the person to prove its lawful acquisition and the imposition of a civil debt to the State will necessarily interfere with many elements of a person's private life. The deprivation of that wealth has the potential to negatively affect a person's integrity, identity, relationships and dignity, being characteristics of a person's privacy.

The protection of families and children (section 17)

Nature of the right

Section 17 of the Charter provides that families are entitled to be protected by society and the State, and that every child has the right, without discrimination, to such protection as is in their best interests and is needed by them by reason of being a child.

The Bill limits the protection of families and children as any deprivation of explained wealth under the new pathway will impact on the maintenance of a person's family or deprive a child of benefits from the unexplained wealth.

Nature and extent of the limitation

In providing for the restraint and forfeiture of property and the imposition of a civil debt to the state the Bill may impact families and children, particularly where the family's principal residence or source of income becomes restrained or forfeited. However, the extent of the impact on families is confined as a result of various safeguards that protect those impacted by the operation of unexplained wealth restraining orders and unexplained wealth orders. Firstly, as with the existing pathways, anyone affected by the operation of an unexplained wealth restraining order may apply for reasonable living and reasonable business expenses to be paid from the restrained property. This continues to ensure that a person affected by a restraining order is able to provide or maintain reasonable standard of living for his or her dependants. Secondly persons with an interest in property other than a respondent to an unexplained wealth order are able to apply for exclusion from a restraining order or from forfeiture on the basis that the property is lawfully acquired. Thirdly in circumstances where a debt is imposed or forfeiture occurs, a person is entitled to apply for relief from undue hardship to reduce the debt or for a payment of a specified amount from forfeited property.

Importance of the purpose of the limitations

The purpose of the limitations discussed above are to provide the mechanism, through restraint, forfeiture and the imposition of a debt to deprive persons of the use and enjoyment of unlawfully acquired wealth. The deprivation of property and wealth from members of organised crime groups who are able to distance themselves from criminal offending, such as facilitators and organisers of organised crime, goes to the fundamental purpose of unexplained wealth laws and is a powerful tactic against organised crime. As outlined above, the increasing sophistication of organised crime networks, their ability to obfuscate the illicit nature of wealth, and infiltration of legitimate industries resulting in co-mingling of illicit and apparently legitimate wealth necessitates an adaptable approach to unexplained wealth.

The relationship between the limitations and their purpose

The operation of the restraint, forfeiture and debt imposition provisions is sufficiently confined to target serious organised crime figures who distance themselves from actual offending. The Bill includes safeguards to protect against arbitrary outcomes arising as a result of the removal of a nexus to criminal activity. Firstly, the minimum \$200,000 threshold ensures that unexplained wealth orders are only targeted toward the most serious of cases and reduces the risk of targeting low level offending or other contexts where records of finances are less likely to be kept but are not related to organised crime. Secondly the discretion of the court to determine whether the order or the level of debt is manifestly unjust and either to refuse to make the order or direct a lesser payment. Thirdly a person may apply for relief from undue hardship through a reduction in the total debt payable or from forfeiture in the form of a payment.

Less restrictive means reasonably available to achieve the purpose that the limitations seek to achieve

It is necessary to restrain property in advance of the making of an unexplained wealth order to secure payment of any debt imposed.

Appropriate procedures and robust tests are included in the Bill to ensure that these rights are only interfered with lawfully and consistently with the objectives of the Act. The new unexplained wealth pathway firstly requires a reasonable suspicion of unlawfully acquired wealth and secondly, a minimum threshold of \$200,000. The respondent is then able to provide evidence to the Court to demonstrate the lawful acquisition of their wealth. The Bill provides for the acceptance of other types of evidence in addition to documentary evidence to account for evidence which may not be available due to the effluxion of time, the nature of the transfer of the property or any other reason.

As part of the Court's determination, the Court may refuse to make or reduce the value of the unexplained wealth order if doing so would be manifestly unjust. This discretion will provide a critical safeguard in circumstances where a person is unable to satisfy the court on documentary or oral evidence that their wealth or property was lawfully obtained but the Court nonetheless considers it would be manifestly unjust to make the order. This discretion has been carefully considered to ensure it does not create uncertainty or erode the utility of the new unexplained wealth pathway.

Further, the Bill will extend the ability of a respondent to seek relief from undue hardship or forfeiture caused by an unexplained wealth order, through a reduction in the total debt payable or a payment from forfeited property.

Importantly, the Bill will also extend existing arrangements for third parties to apply to have their interest in property excluded from an unexplained wealth restraining order, or for exclusion from forfeiture, to the new pathway. The Bill will also provide the court with a discretion to make an exclusion order where it considers it would be manifestly unjust not to make the order.

A respondent's restrained property will only be forfeited in circumstances where they are unable to satisfy the debt fixed by the unexplained wealth order.

As the unexplained wealth order seeks to remedy gaps in the existing unexplained wealth scheme it is not considered there are any less restrictive means available to achieve the intended purpose of this Bill.

Therefore, I consider the limitations on the property rights, right to privacy and protection of families and children are reasonable and justified in light of the rigorous tests, safeguards and opportunities to persuade the court not to make an unexplained wealth order.

Criminal Process Rights (sections 25(1), 25(2)(k) and section 27(1))*Nature of the rights*

Criminal process rights under the Charter which may be relevant to discuss include the right to be presumed innocent until proven guilty at section 25(1), the right not to be compelled to testify against oneself or to confess guilt at section 25(2)(k) and rights with respect to retrospective criminal laws at section 27(1).

Nature and extent of the limitation

The expanded remit of the unexplained wealth scheme draws attention to utilising civil laws to target what is essentially criminal behaviour. The scheme includes a reverse onus of proof and enables consideration of past wealth now expended, consumed or disposed of. The Bill also preserves a privilege against self-incrimination for a respondent who gives evidence in a proceeding for an unexplained wealth order. These measures would engage criminal process rights if the unexplained wealth order pathway amounted to a criminal charge or criminal proceedings.

However, I do not consider that the criminal process rights are relevant as the unexplained wealth scheme can properly be regarded as a civil scheme and the amendments do not amount to the laying of a criminal charge. The Act states that proceedings on application under the Act are civil in nature and is subject to the civil standard of proof. Further, the Bill explicitly excludes any nexus to criminal activity as a basis for the making of an unexplained wealth order under the new pathway, and provides that it does not matter whether the police officer has a reasonable suspicion that the person has engaged in serious criminal activity. In addition, the Bill provides for the imposition of a civil debt which is not a criminal sanction or punishment.

The Bill provides that the new unexplained wealth order is a civil order that results in the deprivation of wealth that is not lawfully acquired and the transfer of that wealth to consolidated revenue. The standard of proof for unexplained wealth proceedings is the civil standard being determination on the balance of probabilities.

Further, the purposes of the scheme are preventative and remedial rather than punitive. That is, the imposition of the new unexplained wealth order is aimed at the deprivation of unlawfully acquired property or wealth,

thereby removing incentives to engage in serious and organised crime and preventing such wealth from being used to fund further such crime.

Right not to be compelled to testify against oneself or to confess guilt at section 25(2)(k)

To the extent that the right against self-incrimination under section 25(2)(k) of the Charter is engaged by requiring a person to provide information in a civil proceeding that may be relevant to criminal charges, I am satisfied that the right is not limited and any engagement is justified. The Bill provides an express safeguard that if a respondent to an unexplained wealth order makes a statement or gives evidence at the hearing of an application, the statement or evidence is not admissible against them except a proceeding for perjury or under the Confiscation Act.

The Hon Anthony Carbines MP
Minister for Police
Minister for Crime Prevention
Minister for Racing

Second reading

Anthony CARBINES (Ivanhoe – Minister for Police, Minister for Crime Prevention, Minister for Racing) (10:44): I move:

That this bill be now read a second time.

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

Incorporated speech as follows:

Money is often a primary motivating factor for those who engage in, or organise and facilitate, serious and organised crime. Confiscation powers, and unexplained wealth laws in particular, are therefore a powerful tactic to disrupt serious and organised crime because they provide a mechanism to deprive even the highest levels of serious organised crime groups of their unlawfully acquired wealth.

The Confiscation Amendment (Unexplained Wealth) Bill 2024 amends the *Confiscation Act 1997* to strengthen and improve Victoria's existing unexplained wealth laws by introducing a new unexplained wealth order that better targets unlawfully acquired wealth. The Bill also makes other minor amendments to give effect to the new pathway and improve the operation of the *Confiscation Act 1997*.

A new unexplained wealth order

Victoria's existing unexplained wealth scheme currently enables the Director of Public Prosecutions or an appropriate officer to apply for the forfeiture of the property of a person who is reasonably suspected of criminal activity or who is reasonably suspected of owning property that they did not lawfully acquire. The person with an interest in the property must prove the property was lawfully acquired or it will be forfeited to the State.

The Bill adds an unexplained wealth order as a third pathway to Victoria's existing unexplained wealth scheme. The new pathway proposed in this Bill can be differentiated from these existing unexplained wealth pathways as it will not require a connection to criminal activity to enable applications for an unexplained wealth order. Instead, all that is required to be shown is that there are reasonable grounds to suspect that a person's wealth exceeds their lawfully acquired wealth by at least \$200,000. The person is then required to satisfy the court that their wealth was lawfully acquired, and if they cannot do so the court may fix a debt requiring them to pay the State the value of any wealth the court is not satisfied was lawfully acquired.

The thresholds for existing unexplained wealth pathways, \$50,000 in relation to property in which a person who has engaged in serious criminal activity has an interest, and no threshold for property that was not lawfully required, will be retained. This reflects the need to provide for these matters to progress in the Magistrates Court and the Court's \$100,000 jurisdictional limit in civil proceedings.

This reform will enhance the ability of Victoria Police and the Director of Public Prosecutions to target senior organised crime figures who distance themselves from actual offending but play a pivotal role in the movement of funds, property and favours in criminal organisations.

Definition of wealth

By contrast to the existing unexplained wealth pathways, the proposed new unexplained wealth pathway is not limited to property that a person currently owns or has an interest in. Rather a financial assessment would be conducted of a person's wealth. The Bill includes a definition of wealth that captures all interests in property owned by a person, under the effective control of a person, or expended, consumed or disposed of by the person whether by gift, sale or otherwise. It also includes any service, advantage or benefit provided to

the person, or at the person's request or direction. This will allow the laws to target individuals who use their unexplained wealth to fund a lavish lifestyle while using legitimate income to fund property and other significant purchases. To avoid depreciation, wealth will be assessed according to its value either at the time of acquisition or at the making of an order, whichever is greater. This broad definition is vital to capturing the many currencies in which serious organised crime figures and groups trade in and the ways in which unlawfully acquired wealth is hidden from view.

Burden of proof

Consistent with Victoria's existing unexplained wealth pathways, the burden of proof of explaining the lawful acquisition of wealth is placed on the person in respect of who an application for an unexplained wealth order is sought. The respondent to an unexplained wealth order will have to satisfy the court on the balance of probabilities. This is appropriate as the respondent to an application for an unexplained wealth order is best placed to account for their own holdings and that knowledge will uniquely be within their purview.

Court discretion to prevent manifest injustice

To balance the expansion of the unexplained wealth scheme, the Bill empowers the court to refuse to make or reduce the value of an unexplained wealth order if it considers doing so would be manifestly unjust. This will provide an important safeguard to ensure the scheme is used and applied consistently with the scheme's purpose and to prevent unreasonable and disproportionate outcomes.

In addition, the Bill will extend the ability of a respondent to an unexplained wealth order to seek relief from undue hardship or forfeiture caused by an unexplained wealth order, through a reduction in the total debt payable or a payment from forfeited property, within 60 days of any order or forfeiture made.

Restraining orders and interests of other persons in restrained property

Consistent with the existing pathways, the DPP or an appropriate officer can seek a restraining order to prohibit the respondent to an application for an unexplained wealth order dealing with their property in any way without the approval of the court. The restraining order will also act as security for the payment of the debt if the order is granted. If the debt is not paid within the time allotted, either 90 days or otherwise as ordered by the court, the State may access and forfeit the respondent's restrained property to satisfy the debt. The person whose wealth is suspected to exceed their lawfully acquired wealth will not be able to seek to exclude their interests from the restraining order, but instead will be required to prove to the Court how their wealth was lawfully acquired. Should they do so the restraining order will cease. Any other persons with an interest in restrained property will retain the ability to seek to exclude their interest in property from a restraining order under existing mechanisms in the Confiscation Act. The Court will have a discretion when hearing an exclusion order application, to refuse to make or reduce the amount of property restrained under an unexplained wealth restraining order under the new pathway if making the order would be manifestly unjust.

Evidentiary requirements

The Bill will protect a person's right to silence and privilege against self-incrimination by providing that any statement made, or evidence given by a respondent to an unexplained wealth order and any derivative evidence, will not be admissible in evidence against that person except in a proceeding for perjury or in any other proceeding under the Confiscation Act. Therefore, the respondent's rights when giving evidence to satisfy a court that their wealth was lawfully acquired are safeguarded. In addition, the Bill will extend the Court's ability to accept other evidence if satisfied that it is not reasonable to expect documentary evidence to exist because of the nature of the transfer of any wealth or the effluxion of time or any other reason.

Other amendments to the Confiscation Act

The Bill will also make a range of other amendments to the Confiscation Act to improve and clarify the operation of the scheme as well as make consequential amendments that flow from the introduction of the new unexplained wealth pathway. These amendments include:

- ensuring freezing, production and monitoring orders – all court-based powers to prevent assets from being dissipated and to enable the gathering of financial information – are available under all unexplained wealth pathways and not only in particular pathways as is currently the case
- empowering the court with discretion when granting relief to a dependant of a serious drug offender upon the automatic forfeiture of their residence
- other technical amendments to confiscation procedures, including enabling the court to give all directions that are necessary to give effect to a restraining order.

Conclusion

These improvements to the unexplained wealth scheme are critical to disrupting serious and organised crime in Victoria and keep our community safe.

I commend the Bill to the house.

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

That the debate be adjourned.

Motion agreed to and debate adjourned.

Ordered that debate be adjourned for two weeks. Debate adjourned until Wednesday 3 April.

Disability and Social Services Regulation Amendment Bill 2024

Statement of compatibility

Ben CARROLL (Niddrie – Minister for Education, Minister for Medical Research) (10:45): In accordance with the Charter of Human Rights and Responsibilities Act 2006, I table a statement of compatibility in relation to the Disability and Social Services Regulation Amendment Bill 2024:

In accordance with section 28 of the *Charter of Human Rights and Responsibilities Act 2006* (the **Charter**), I make this statement of compatibility with respect to the *Disability and Social Services Regulation Amendment Bill 2024* (the **Bill**).

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

Overview of the Bill

The main purpose of the Bill is to amend the *Social Services Regulation Act 2021* (**SSR Act**) – which will amend the *Disability Act 2006* (**Disability Act**) – to transfer the existing functions and powers of the Disability Services Commissioner (**Commissioner**) to the Social Services Regulator (**Regulator**). The Bill also amends the SSR Act to provide for the delay of the commencement of the Worker and Carer Exclusion Scheme (**WCES**), and the *Children, Youth and Families Act 2005* (**CYF Act**) to transfer certain oversight functions of the Secretary to the Regulator while WCES is delayed.

The Bill also:

- amends the *Residential Tenancies Act 1997* (**RTA**) to further provide for matters in relation to Specialist Disability Accommodation (**SDA**) dwellings; and
- makes consequential amendments to other Acts, including the *Regulatory Legislation Amendment (Reform) Act 2024*, *Children and Health Legislation Amendment (Statement of Recognition, Aboriginal Self-determination and Other Matters) Act 2023*.

Specifically, the Bill:

- expands the role and functions of the Regulator to absorb the complaints handling and investigation functions of the Commissioner;
- abolishes the office of the Commissioner;
- establishes the role of the Associate Social Services Regulator (**Associate Regulator**) to whom the Regulator can delegate their powers, duties and functions under the SSR Act;
- provides for the delay of the commencement of the WCES;
- transfers the Secretary's regulatory functions in relation to the investigation of out of home carers to the Regulator;
- delays the commencement of the confidentiality notice provisions within the SSR Act;
- transfers information sharing, confidentiality and reporting provisions relating to Commissioner functions from the Disability Act to the SSR Act;
- makes minor amendments to residential notice provisions for SDA dwellings in the RTA; and
- amends the definition of a supported residential service in the SSR Act and *Supported Residential Services (Private Proprietors) Act 2010* to align with previous reforms on SDA dwellings.

Human rights issues

The Bill will amend the SSR Act and the CYF Act to confer on the Regulator new functions and powers for the purposes of:

- dealing with complaints and investigations in relation to disability services; and
- providing regulatory oversight of out of home carers, including in relation to the conduct of investigations into allegations against carers, and the administration of the Victorian Carer Register.

The Regulator will assume the functions of the current entities responsible for these functions, being respectively the Commissioner and the Secretary. The relevant provisions relating to the Commissioner will be consequently repealed by the Bill.

The Bill does not alter or expand the existing scope of the substantive powers currently assumed by the Commissioner and Secretary, nor does it increase the existing potential for those powers to be exercised in ways that limit human rights. Some of these limitations have been discussed previously by the Statement of Compatibility to the Disability Amendment Bill 2017. That said, given the nature and extent of limitations on human rights that may occur as a result of the exercise of the powers being transferred, I will now state why these limitations are considered reasonably justified and compatible with the Charter.

The conduct of investigations impacts upon the rights of persons who provide or work in disability services, including employees and volunteers, and out of home carers, who may be the subject of an investigation overseen by the Regulator. The human rights that might be limited by these powers include: privacy and reputation (s 13(a)); freedom of expression (s 15(2)); property (s 20); fair hearing (s 24(1)); and protection against self-incrimination (s 25(2)(k)). Further, the abolition of the office of the Commissioner, the removal of certain functions of the Secretary, and repeal of the scheme regulating out of home carers under Part 3.4 of the CYF Act, could engage the right to equality under section 8(3) of the Charter, for people with disability, children and young people.

The Bill further promotes a range of human rights under the Charter by preserving existing protections in the Disability Act and CYF Act. The new investigation and oversight powers of the Regulator in Parts 2 and 3 of the Bill, transferred from the Commissioner and Secretary, and the appointment of the Associate Regulator provide safeguards against abuse or neglect of people with disability and children, promoting rights under the Charter, including to equality (s 8); privacy and the home (s 13(a)); liberty and security (s 21); humane treatment when deprived of liberty (s 22), and to be free from cruel, inhuman or degrading treatment (s 10(b)). The protection of children (s 17(2)) is also promoted by increasing the safeguards for children receiving disability services, and children and young people in receipt of out of home care.

Further, the Bill's proposed amendments to Part 12A of the RTA are aimed at ensuring timely notifications regarding residential notices, which are necessary to enable the Public Advocate to undertake their safeguarding role. As these amendments relate to such matters as notices to vacate and the termination of SDA residency agreements, these reforms will promote the Charter rights to equality (s 8), to not have one's home unlawfully or arbitrarily interfered with (s 13(a)), and to property (s 20).

Therefore, to the extent that the Bill limits any Charter rights, such limits are reasonable and justifiable in accordance with section 7(2) of the Charter. Relevantly, all measures in the Bill are directed at protecting the rights of people with disability, children and other vulnerable persons who use social services (service users). To the extent that any clauses limit a Charter right, those limits are justified measures to achieve the overarching purpose of protecting the rights of service users.

Right to equality

Section 8(3) of the Charter relevantly provides that every person is entitled to equal protection of the law without discrimination and has the right to equal and effective protection against discrimination. The purpose of this component of the right to equality is to ensure that all laws and policies are applied equally, and do not have a discriminatory effect.

'Discrimination' under the Charter is defined by reference to the definition in the *Equal Opportunity Act 2010* (EO Act) on the basis of an attribute in section 6 of that Act. Direct discrimination occurs where a person treats, or proposes to treat, a person with an attribute unfavourably because of that attribute. Indirect discrimination occurs where a person imposes a requirement, condition or practice that has, or is likely to have, the effect of disadvantaging persons with a protected attribute, but only where that requirement, condition or practice is not reasonable.

Abolition of the role of the Commissioner

Clause 23 of the Bill includes amendments to abolish the office of the Disability Services Commissioner (**Commissioner**), and Division 3 of Part 2 of the Bill amends the SSR Act to remove provisions relating to the Commissioner in the Disability Act. The role of the Commissioner is a statutory role that is being

abolished due to the significant reduction in the scope of services covered by the Commissioner since the transition of many disability service providers to the National Disability Insurance Scheme (NDIS). This narrowing scope means the Commissioner is not viable as a stand-alone regulator. Accordingly, the Commissioner's complaints handling and investigation functions for people accessing Victorian Government-funded disability services are being transferred to the Regulator.

The abolition of the office of the Commissioner could engage the right to equality under section 8(3) of the Charter, for people with disability. This is because the State has a positive duty to protect persons from discrimination on the basis of disability, and the abolition of the entity that was designed to support the oversight of the Victorian disability services sector, including relevant complaints and investigation processes, might result in an erosion of protections against disability-based discrimination.

However, I consider that the abolition of the Commissioner would not in fact limit the right to equality under section 8(3) of the Charter, as Clause 19 of the Bill amends the SSR Act to enable the Regulator to absorb the complaint handling and investigation functions of the Commissioner. Further, the creation of the new role of Associate Regulator in clause 11 of the Bill provides for a dedicated Governor-in-Council appointed role which could manage the future complaint functions of the Regulator.

As such, there will be no reduction in safeguards for people with disability who continue to receive State-funded disability services. New Parts 9A, 9B and 9C of the SSR Act empower the Regulator to resolve complaints, conduct investigations into the provision of disability services, and protect the rights of people with disability. Section 15 of the SSR Act, as amended by the Bill, will enable the Regulator to delegate functions to the Associate Regulator as needed, including the functions relating to complaints and investigations into the provision of disability services.

The Commissioner's powers under the Disability Act to initiate investigations into abuse and neglect occurring in the provision of disability services will not be transferred to the Regulator in relation to current disability service providers. This is because the Regulator has an existing power to investigate registered social service providers, which include disability service providers, where there are concerns with safe service delivery and breaches of service user agency and dignity. Therefore, this change will not result in an overall reduction in powers or functions of the Regulator in relation to initiating investigations into abuse or neglect with respect to current disability service providers.

Therefore, the amendments do not propose to treat people with disability unfavourably, and are not likely to have the effect of unreasonably disadvantaging those persons, so as to constitute direct or indirect discrimination.

Removal of Secretary's regulatory powers in relation to out of home care

Division 1 of Part 3 of the Bill transfers to the Regulator the Secretary's responsibilities and functions under Part 3.4 of the CYF Act, which concerns the regulation of out of home carers. These functions relate to the conduct of investigations into allegations against carers, and administration of the Victorian Carer Register, both of which are designed to prevent individuals found to present an unacceptable risk of harm to children in care from working in the out of home care sector.

As the Secretary has a statutory responsibility under s 16 of the CYF Act to promote the prevention of child abuse and neglect, the reduction of the scope of the Secretary's functions and powers could engage the right to equality under section 8(3) of the Charter, for children and young people.

However, I consider that the above right is not limited by the repeal of the Secretary's regulatory functions in relation to out of home care as these functions will simply be assumed by the Regulator, ensuring that there will be no reduction in safeguards for children in receipt of out of home care. On the contrary, the above approach will provide for role clarity between the Secretary and the Regulator, thereby enhancing the exercise of the respective functions.

Delay of the commencement of the WCES

Clause 25 of the Bill amends the commencement of the SSR Act to provide for the delay of the commencement of the WCES, which will operate as a negative licensing scheme to enable workers and carers to be excluded from working in the out of home care sector where their conduct shows they pose an unjustifiable risk of harm to children, replacing the current scheme under the CYF Act.

The delay of this scheme could engage the right to equality under section 8(3) of the Charter, for children in out of home care services. This is because the State has a positive duty to protect persons from discrimination on the basis of age, and the delay of a scheme designed to enhance protections for children and young people against neglect and abuse, might result in an erosion of protections against such discrimination.

However, the continued operation of the Victorian Carer Register and investigation of out of home carers, the current scheme under the CYF Act, while the WCES is delayed, preserves existing protections for children

in out of home care, such that these amendments would not constitute direct or indirect discrimination against children.

Repeal of Part 3.4 of the CYF Act

Clause 86 of the Bill proposes to repeal Part 3.4 of the CYF Act upon the commencement of Part 5 of the SSR Act. As Part 3.4 of the CYF Act provides a regulatory framework aimed at the protection of children in out of home care, the repeal of Part 3.4 of the CYF Act could engage the right to equality under section 8(3) of the Charter for children and young people in out of home care. However, as this scheme is being replaced by WCES as set out in Part 5 of the SSR Act, which sets out a consolidated regulatory regime designed to safeguard the rights of children in receipt of out of home care, I consider that this right will not be limited.

Right to privacy and reputation

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

Section 13(b) of the Charter relevantly provides that a person has the right not to have their reputation unlawfully attacked. An ‘attack’ on reputation will be lawful if it is permitted by a precise and appropriately circumscribed law.

Disclosure to the Regulator

The Bill proposes to transfer certain information from the Secretary and the Commissioner to the Regulator to enable the Regulator to exercise their new functions. Specifically:

- Clause 85 of the Bill requires the Secretary to disclose to the Regulator any information held by the Secretary in relation to the administration of Part 3.4 of the CYF Act; and
- Clause 23 of the Bill provides transitional provisions related to the abolition of the office of the Commissioner and the transfer of their functions to the Regulator, which includes new section 338B of the SSR Act which would, among other things
 - vest all rights, properties, assets, debts, liabilities and obligations of the Commissioner in the Regulator; and
 - substitute the Regulator as a party to any proceedings, arrangements, memoranda of understanding or contracts of the Commissioner.

While these provisions may interfere with the right to privacy to the extent that they allow information to be shared, the interference will be neither unlawful nor arbitrary. This is because these amendments are carefully confined to their statutory purpose, to enable the transfer to the Regulator of certain functions currently administered by the Secretary and Commissioner. Therefore, the proposed disclosure of information does not extend beyond what is reasonably necessary to achieve the legitimate aim of the Bill, such that it is reasonable and proportionate to the Bill’s important objectives. Further, existing privacy protections will apply in the SSR Act concerning further use or disclosure of this information. For example, the limitations on disclosure of protected information in section 196(2).

Information sharing

New section 283ZZF of the SSR Act, inserted by clause 19, enables the sharing of information acquired in the course of administering the new functions transferred from the Commissioner, including personal and health information in relation to clients and information about staff of a disability service provider and a regulated service provider. This provision is necessary for the effective regulation of disability services in Victoria. Privacy is protected through provisions that prohibit the use of the information other than as authorised or necessary for the purposes or in the circumstances provided for in new section 283ZZG.

New section 194A of the SSR Act, inserted by clause 27, will enable the Regulator to use information it obtains when investigating the conduct of a carer under the CYF Act, to inform its regulatory functions under the SSR Act. For example, where an investigation of a carer reveals potential non-compliance with the Social Services Standards by a registered service provider, which may warrant further investigation by the Regulator under the SSR Act.

While these provisions engage the right to privacy, this interference is neither unlawful nor arbitrary and is therefore compatible with the right to privacy in section 13 of the Charter.

Investigation powers

Clauses 14 and 15 expand the application of the existing entry powers of authorised officers to accountability investigations, which are certain types of investigations in relation to the provision of disability services and

regulated disability services. Accountability investigations are investigations undertaken by the Regulator into complaints about current and former disability service providers and regulated disability service providers, those initiated by the Regulator into former disability service providers and current and former regulated service providers, and investigations referred by the Minister. The Minister may refer certain investigations relating to current and former disability service providers and regulated service providers. These increased powers are designed to facilitate the operation of the expanded complaints and investigation functions of the Regulator.

Clause 16 of the Bill further expands the seizure powers pursuant to a search warrant to any document or thing not named or described in the warrant if the authorised officer reasonably believes that the document or thing may afford evidence that is relevant to an accountability investigation. Clause 17 authorises an authorised officer to inspect, examine, make enquiries or observe any activity at the premises including in relation to a person with a disability who is receiving or has received services on the premises, and, if relevant to the investigation, to see and interview a person with disability, their relative or any other person of significance to them who is on the premises. However, clause 18 of the Bill prevents interviews from taking place with a person with a disability unless the authorised officer has first obtained the consent of the person being interviewed, or if the person is unable to consent, the consent of their guardian, or if none, the next of kin of the person. Further, if interviewing a person with a disability, the authorised officer is required to take all reasonable steps to mitigate any negative effect of the interview on the person and allow the person's guardian or next of kin to be present.

These powers engage the right to privacy in section 13 of the Charter, which protects against unlawful and arbitrary interferences with a person's privacy, family, home or correspondence. While the powers may involve some interference with privacy, these powers are necessary to ensure the Regulator is able to conduct an effective investigation into complaints, systemic or individual issues of abuse or neglect of people with disability, or investigations referred by the Minister. The powers inserted by clauses 16 and 17 are further subject to the various safeguards outlined.

However, I note that clause 34 repeals section 132F(2) of the Disability Act, which prevents the powers being used to inspect, copy or remove medical records unless the person with disability, their guardian or next of kin has consented. The Bill does not introduce a corresponding provision in the SSR Act to maintain this safeguard to privacy interference. Instead, to provide for greater coherency and consistency within the SSR Act in relation to the general powers of authorised officers in relation to documents, for the purposes of an accountability investigation, powers of authorised officers in relation to documents will reflect the existing powers after entry by authorised officers in section 119 of the SSR Act, which includes their existing safeguards. This will mean that, for the purposes of an accountability investigation, an authorised officer will be able to inspect or examine documents, and only seize documents if they believe on reasonable grounds that the seized document or thing is relevant to an accountability investigation (see clause 17). Further, to the extent that the SSR Act does not expressly provide protections in respect of medical records, people with disability are afforded protections under the *Privacy and Data Protection Act 2014 (PDP Act)* and the *Health Records Act 2001*. Accordingly, as people with disability will continue to enjoy various safeguards to their privacy under these Acts, I consider that any interference with privacy is neither unlawful nor arbitrary.

Although the powers involve some interference with the privacy of the residents and occupier(s) of the premises, I consider that the interference is neither unlawful nor arbitrary and is therefore compatible with the right to privacy in section 13 of the Charter.

Ability to publish certain matters including adverse comments about a person

New section 283ZZK of the SSR Act, inserted by clause 19, requires the Regulator to report on investigation findings that may include adverse comments or opinions about individuals or service providers, which may have an impact upon a person's work, their relationships (including as a carer) and their reputation generally. Accordingly, the exercise of the Regulator's functions may engage the right to privacy and reputation in section 13 of the Charter. However, the Regulator's power to make and provide reports of referral investigations or initiated investigations into systemic abuse and neglect or individuals to the Minister or Secretary, and to provide to Parliament reports into systemic abuse and neglect that may be published, are for the important purpose of protecting the rights of people with disability.

Further, I consider that the procedural safeguards provided for in the Bill ensure compatibility with the rights to privacy. In particular:

- new section 283ZT(2) of the SSR Act expressly provides that the Regulator is bound by the rules of natural justice, and must give a person an opportunity to make submissions before making a decision affecting that person;

- where the Regulator conducts a hearing in respect of an investigation, new section 283ZW requires that the service provider be provided notice of the hearing and provides that if the investigation is to consider allegations against any person, notice of the hearing must also be given to that person;
- new section 283ZZK of the SSR Act requires that the Regulator provide individuals with a reasonable opportunity to comment before any adverse comment about them is published in a report to the Minister or Secretary, and section 283ZZL requires that individuals cannot be named or identified in reports given to Parliament;
- new section 316(1)(jc) of the SSR Act, inserted by clause 21, empowers the Governor in Council to make regulations to prescribe processes for the naming of service providers for the purposes of reporting information required in the annual report of the Regulator. This enables safeguards to be included which the Regulator will be obliged to comply with.

Accordingly, as any interference with privacy and reputation will be authorised under legislation and is subject to appropriate safeguards, I consider the Bill does not amount to an arbitrary interference with these rights.

Fair hearing

Section 24(1) of the Charter provides that a person charged with a criminal offence or a party to a civil proceeding has the right to have the charge or proceeding decided by a competent, independent and impartial court or tribunal after a fair and public hearing. The term ‘civil proceeding’ in section 24(1) has been interpreted broadly to encompass administrative decision making of the kind provided for in the Bill.

Transfer of the Commissioner’s functions to the Regulator

The above procedural safeguards discussed in relation to accountability investigations therefore also ensure that these provisions are compatible with the right to a fair hearing.

Further, the new section 283ZZC provides that the Regulator, Associate Regulator and their staff are not able to be compelled to give evidence in a court in relation to an accountability investigation unless the court gives leave, similar to existing section 132U of the Disability Act. This provision promotes the effective function of the Regulator and their staff in conducting accountability investigations, but nevertheless enables a court to exercise its discretion to compel persons to give evidence with leave, which is a feature that protects a person’s right to a fair hearing.

Delayed commencement of confidentiality notice provisions

Clause 25 of the Bill proposes to delay the commencement of the confidentiality notice provisions in Division 3 of Part 8 of the SSR Act. These provisions empower the Regulator or Panel to issue a confidentiality notice to a person specifying a restricted matter, which can be any matter that the Regulator reasonably considers would be likely to prejudice an investigation, a fair trial of a person charged with an offence, or the safety or reputation of a person. The purpose of these notices is therefore to protect a person’s rights to personal safety, reputation, or a fair hearing, against inappropriate disclosures concerning the exercise of powers under the SSR Act. As such, this amendment may be considered to engage the Charter rights to life (s 9), reputation (s 13(b)), and to a fair hearing (s 24(1)).

Given that confidentiality notice provisions serve a protective purpose, their delayed commencement is relevant to the extent that such a delay constitutes a decrease in the level of protection afforded to human rights. However, the delayed commencement is considered necessary to facilitate corresponding amendments to be made to the *Victorian Inspectorate Act 2011*, which will provide for clear oversight powers to be provided to the Victorian Inspectorate for the effective monitoring of the use of these powers by the Regulator or Panel (to which criminal penalties attach for non-compliance and which are coercive in nature, hence constitute limits on other rights). Given the issuing of these notices also conversely affects the rights of the person subject to a notice (including their freedom of expression), I consider it appropriate that their commencement be delayed until the proper oversight scheme is in place and can be operationalised effectively. Accordingly, to the extent that the delay to the commencement of the confidentiality notice provisions may delay the application of protections to some rights, it ultimately serves a legitimate purpose of ensuring these coercive powers are subject to appropriate safeguards.

Freedom of expression

Section 15(2) of the Charter provides that every person has the right to freedom of expression, which includes the freedom to seek, receive and impart information and ideas of all kinds. The right to freedom of expression in section 15 of the Charter has been interpreted as encompassing a right to access information in the possession of government bodies, at least where an individual seeks information on a subject engaging the public interest or in which the individual has a legitimate interest.

However, section 15(3) provides that the right may be subject to lawful restrictions reasonably necessary to respect the rights and reputations of others, or for the protection of national security, public order, public health or public morality.

Disclosure of information and confidentiality provisions

The Bill includes provisions to ensure that those persons with a legitimate interest can access information about an investigation or decision of the Regulator. In particular, the Bill provides that:

- Information can be provided to a range of persons and bodies under new section 283ZZF of the SSR Act;
- The Regulator is required to provide a person with disability (or their guardian or next of kin as relevant) who was the subject of an initiated investigation, and any person who is alleged to have abused or neglected the person with a disability in relation to an individual initiated investigation, a copy of the Regulator's decision, including reasons for the decision (see new section 283Y);
- The Regulator may give a copy of a report of a systemic initiated investigation to the clerk of each house of Parliament (s 283ZZL(1)).

However, there are otherwise limits upon the extent to which information may be disclosed:

- New section 283ZZG places limits on the Regulator, the Associate Regulator, their delegates, and staff of the Regulator being able to disclose information obtained by them in the performance of their functions, which includes investigations; it is also noted that the existing equivalent limitation on information disclosure under the Disability Act will also be saved under clause 34, meaning that former Commissioners and staff will continue to be limited in their ability to disclose such information; and
- New section 283ZZL precludes the Regulator from giving a copy of a report to the clerk of each house of the Parliament if the report identifies or names an individual, or contains information that enables an individual to be identified.

These confidentiality provisions are necessary to protect the privacy of individuals and to ensure the Regulator can conduct effective investigations, by enabling persons to provide information to the Regulator in the knowledge that it will be kept confidential.

Therefore, while there are restrictions upon the ability to access information in the possession of the Regulator, those limits are reasonably necessary to respect the rights of others, and are therefore compatible with the right to freedom of expression.

Right to property

Section 20 of the Charter provides that a person must not be deprived of their property other than in accordance with law. This right requires that powers which authorise the deprivation of property are conferred by legislation or common law, are confined and structured rather than unclear, are accessible to the public, and are formulated precisely.

Search and seizure powers

The expanded seizure powers under a search warrant, which authorise the removal of any document or thing not named in the warrant but which are relevant to an accountability investigation (clause 16 of the Bill) may engage property rights under section 20 of the Charter. This could also be said of the expanded power of authorised officers to be able to seize any document or thing if they believe on reasonable grounds that the seized document or thing is relevant to an accountability investigation (new section 119(d)(iv) of the SSR Act, as inserted by clause 17(2)). However, the provisions empowering the removal of documents or things do not limit property rights, as any interference with property through such removal would be undertaken in accordance with the provisions of the Bill, which are accessible, clear and certain, and sufficiently precise to enable a person to regulate their conduct.

Therefore, even if clauses 16 and 17 could be considered to deprive a person of property, any such deprivation will be 'in accordance with law' and will therefore not limit the Charter right to property. In addition, any deprivation of property is reasonably necessary to achieve the important objective of protecting the rights of people with disability.

Protections relating to investigations

Clause 19, which inserts section 283ZZCC into the SSR Act, provides that a person who makes a disclosure made to the Regulator in good faith under or for the purposes of new Parts 9A, 9B or 9C of the SSR Act – relating to complaints and investigations of disability services and regulated disability services – is not subject to any liability in respect of the disclosure. Insofar as a cause of action may be considered 'property' within the meaning of section 20 of the Charter, this provision may engage the right. However, if clause 19 could be

considered to deprive a person of property, any such deprivation will be ‘in accordance with law’ and will therefore not limit the Charter right to property. In particular, section 283ZZCC is drafted in clear and precise terms. In addition, any deprivation of property is reasonably necessary to achieve the important objective of ensuring that the Regulator can conduct effective investigations, by enabling persons to provide information to the Regulator without exposure to the prospect of personal liability.

Abolition of office of Commissioner

Clause 23, which inserts new section 338B into the SSR Act which transfers all rights, property, assets, debts, liabilities and obligations of the Commissioner to the Regulator, is relevant to the property rights of a natural person who holds an interest in the property, liability etc. being transferred. However, I consider that the right to property is not limited by this amendment as the person is not being deprived of their property interest. Rather, the property, rights, assets, debts, liabilities and obligations are being transferred from one statutory office to another without altering the substantive content of that property right. Accordingly, the provisions to transfer the assets, debts, liabilities and obligations of the Commissioner to the Regulator do not limit this Charter right.

Right to protection against self-incrimination

Section 25(2)(k) of the Charter provides that a person charged with a criminal offence is entitled not to be compelled to testify against themselves or to confess guilt. This right is at least as broad as the common law privilege against self-incrimination. It applies to protect a charged person against the admission in subsequent criminal proceedings of incriminatory material obtained under compulsion, regardless of whether the information was obtained prior to or subsequent to the charge being laid.

Investigation powers

Division 1 of Part 2 of the Bill extends the application of the existing investigation powers of authorised officers under the SSR Act to require the production of documents or things and answer questions in relation to accountability investigations. This may engage the right in section 25(2)(k) of the Charter. Further, clause 34 of the Bill repeals the existing protection against self-incrimination in the Disability Act. However, the SSR Act contains a similar provision that excuses a person for refusing or failing to provide information that they are required to do under the SSR Act if doing so would tend to incriminate the person. Additionally, clause 18 of the Bill amends the SSR Act to ensure that the obligation to inform a person of the relevant privilege and self-incrimination provisions also applies to any enquiries made under the Regulator’s new accountability investigation powers. Therefore, the Bill preserves the existing protections against self-incrimination as far as possible.

The privilege against self-incrimination generally covers the compulsion of any information or documents which might incriminate a person. However, the application of the privilege to pre-existing documents is considerably weaker than that accorded to oral testimony or documents that are required to be brought into existence to comply with a request for information. I note that some jurisdictions have regarded an order to hand over existing documents, particularly in the context of regulatory monitoring where such documents are required to be kept to evidence regulatory compliance, as not engaging the privilege against self-incrimination. Importantly, the requirement to produce a document does not extend to having to explain or account for the information contained in that document. If such an explanation would tend to incriminate, the privilege would still be available.

To any extent that a requirement to produce documents is a limit on the right in s 25(2)(k), I consider it to be reasonably justified pursuant to s 7(2) of the Charter. Any limitation on the right that is occasioned by the authorised officer’s investigation and monitoring powers is directly related to its purpose. The Bill will amend the SSR Act such that the documents that an authorised person can require to be produced include those necessary for the purpose of an accountability investigation. Taking into account the protective purpose of the Bill, there is significant public interest in ensuring that authorised persons are able to access information and evidence that may be difficult or impossible to ascertain by alternative evidentiary means, and to use such evidence to bring enforcement action where appropriate.

There are no less restrictive means available to achieve the purpose of enabling authorised persons to have access to relevant documents, and access to such documents is necessary to ensure the safety of people accessing social services. To provide for a ‘use immunity’ that restricts the use of produced documents to particular proceedings would unreasonably obstruct the role of authorised persons and the aims of the scheme, as well as giving the holders of such documents an unfair forensic advantage in relation to criminal and civil

penalty investigations. Any limitation on the right to protection against self-incrimination is therefore appropriately tailored and the least restrictive means to achieve the regulatory purpose.

The Hon. Ben Carroll MP
Deputy Premier
Minister for Education
Minister for Medical Research

Second reading

Ben CARROLL (Niddrie – Minister for Education, Minister for Medical Research) (10:45):
I move:

That this bill be now read a second time.

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

Incorporated speech as follows:

There are more than 1.1 million Victorians that live with disability. An effective and efficient safeguarding framework is vital to ensure that these Victorians can access high-quality services, and can do so without fear of abuse, harm and neglect from providers.

This Bill reflects the Government's ongoing commitment to protect people accessing disability services in Victoria. It also improves the effectiveness of the safeguarding framework for people accessing social services more broadly.

As part of improving the safeguarding framework for social services, from 1 July 2024 the Government will roll out a stronger regulatory framework for social services, including disability services, and a new Social Services Regulator will be in place that is independent from the Department of Families, Fairness and Housing.

The new social services regulatory framework focuses on service user safety, agency and dignity. The Regulator will have an expanded set of compliance and enforcement tools, enabling it to take decisive action if there is a breach of the new regulatory framework – for example if service user safety is compromised – to better protect Victorian social service users.

Currently, the landscape for the regulation of social services, particularly disability services, in Victoria is complex and uncoordinated. It involves several different regulators and complaints bodies. The number of entities involved in regulation and complaints for social services can be confusing for service users. The system is not always simple or accessible for disability service users.

The establishment of the Regulator will strengthen protections for service users across the sectors it covers. It also creates an opportunity to examine the other entities that also play important roles in safeguarding disability service users.

The regulatory landscape for disability services is continuing to evolve. In particular, many disability services that were previously overseen by the Disability Services Commissioner have shifted to the National Disability Insurance Scheme, meaning its scope is now very small, covering forensic disability services, services to Victorians ineligible for the NDIS and some Transport Accident Commission services.

In summary this Bill will:

- merge the functions of the Disability Services Commissioner into the Social Services Regulator, enabling these critical functions – resolving complaints about non-NDIS disability service providers – to continue.
- delay the Worker and Carer Exclusion Scheme, which regulates out of home care workers and carers, for up to two years, while maintaining existing protections for children and young people in out of home care
- make minor and clarifying amendments to the *Residential Tenancies Act 1997* and *Social Services Regulation Act 2021* so their provisions reflect recent legislative amendments made by the *Disability and Social Services Regulation Amendment Act 2023*.

These changes will not reduce any safeguards for people accessing disability or out-of-home care services. These changes are the first step in establishing a more comprehensive safeguarding framework that will better protect Victorian social service users.

I will now discuss each of the reforms in the Bill in turn.

Merging the functions of the Disability Services Commissioner with the Social Services Regulator

The Disability Services Commissioner has played a vital role in the safeguarding framework for disability services since its inception in 2007. The Commissioner receives and resolves complaints about disability service providers and promotes the rights of people with a disability to be free from abuse and neglect.

The Commissioner has received over 3000 complaints relating to disability services. Where the Commissioner cannot directly resolve a complaint, it supports services users by referring their complaint to other safeguarding entities.

However, as I have noted, the role of the Commissioner has changed as many services have moved outside its scope to the National Disability Insurance Scheme. The Office of the Disability Services Commissioner is now very small and is no longer viable as a standalone entity.

While the scope of the Office has reduced in size, its functions continue to be important for the services it covers. The Government is committed to these functions continuing.

The rights of people with disability remain a key priority for the Victorian Government. The Regulator will continue to ensure people with disability are protected from harm, abuse and neglect and receive safe and high-quality services. This means there will be no reduction in protections for disability service users.

Instead, the new arrangements will ensure that protections for people with a disability are delivered more effectively, simply and accessibly. Service users and providers that previously needed to interact with two separate entities will now interact with a single regulator. This will simplify the regulatory landscape for these services.

Having the complaint functions of the Commissioner in the same body as the Regulator will also make it easier to share regulatory intelligence to identify risks and inform the Regulator's ability to investigate allegations of abuse or neglect.

This Bill also establishes an Associate Regulator role, which will be a Governor in Council appointment, and report to the Social Services Regulator. There is flexibility in how this role may be used. However, it is intended that this role will result in dedicated oversight of complaints about disability and other services and maintain a degree of independence of complaint handling from the Regulator's other functions.

These changes are the first step in the Government's longer-term vision for Victorians accessing social services. It is expected that by 2026, the Regulator will have a broad-based complaints function that will cover all social services within its remit. This will establish critical new safeguards for service users that do not currently have access to a dedicated complaints function. These reforms will be introduced in a second piece of legislation to be considered by the Parliament at a later time, along with reforms to merge the core functions of the Victorian Disability Worker Commission and the Disability Worker Registration Board, into the Regulator – creating a one stop shop for regulation and complaints for social service users.

Delaying the Worker and Carer Exclusion Scheme

The *Social Services Regulation Act 2021* establishes a new Worker and Carer Exclusion Scheme for out-of-home care workers and carers. This scheme will prevent out of home care workers and carers found to present an unacceptable risk of harm to children from working in the out-of-home care sector. The scheme will replace the current Victorian Carer Register and Suitability Panel, which provide similar protections.

This Bill will delay the commencement of the Worker and Carer Exclusion Scheme for up to two years, to commence on or before 1 July 2026. This provides more time for the out-of-home care sector to implement the new scheme. It will enable out-of-home care service providers to focus their attention on transitioning to one new scheme, the social services regulation scheme. The proposed delay will also provide the Regulator with more time to focus its attention on supporting providers to transition to the new social services scheme.

Existing protections for children and young people will continue while the Worker and Carer Exclusion Scheme is delayed. Carers working for registered out-of-home care services must continue to be registered on the Victorian Carer Register, and the Suitability Panel will continue to determine if a worker should be disqualified from working in the sector. The Bill provides that from 1 July 2024, administration of the Victorian Carer Register will shift from the Secretary of the Department of Families, Fairness and Housing to the new Social Services Regulator.

Streamlined notice provisions for residents of specialist disability accommodation and other minor amendments.

This Bill makes minor and clarifying amendments to the *Residential Tenancies Act 1997*, *Social Services Regulation Act 2021* and other Acts. The changes are needed to ensure alignment of those Acts with amendments made by the *Disability and Social Services Regulation Amendment Act 2023*.

The changes will streamline and enhance residential notice provisions and associated safeguards for residents of specialist disability accommodation under Part 12A of the *Residential Tenancies Act 1997*. Importantly, the changes will preserve the Public Advocate's safeguarding role in respect of notices issued under Part 12A of that Act.

Finally, the Bill amends the definition of "supported residential service" in the *Social Services Regulation Act 2021* and *Supported Residential Service (Private Proprietors) Act 2010* to align with amendments to the *Residential Tenancies Act 1997* made by the *Disability and Social Services Regulation Amendment Act 2023*.

Conclusion

The Government is committed to ensuring that the safeguarding framework for people accessing social services is effective, efficient and fit for purpose. For service users, it also needs to be clear, user-friendly, and responsive. The Bill reflects this important commitment by ensuring a strengthened, single regulator can investigate both disability service providers and other social service providers to address abuse and neglect and resolve complaints about disability service providers.

The Bill also ensures that current safeguards for disability service users and clients in the out-of-home care sector are maintained. It will make those safeguards more effective by connecting them to the new independent regulator.

These reforms are part of the Government's greater vision to create a social services oversight system that responds to the feedback of service users and providers and is economically sustainable.

I commend the Bill to the house.

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

That the debate be adjourned.

Motion agreed to and debate adjourned.

Ordered that debate be adjourned for two weeks. Debate adjourned until Wednesday 3 April.

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

Second reading

Debate resumed on motion of Lily D'Ambrosio:

That this bill be now read a second time.

James NEWBURY (Brighton) (10:46): I rise to speak on the Energy and Public Land Legislation Amendment (Enabling Offshore Wind Energy) Bill 2024. Victorians and Australians want to see energy that is reliable, secure, affordable and clean. That is what Australians want. That is what Victorians want. So two weeks ago, when the government brought to the Parliament and considered the Climate Change and Energy Legislation Amendment (Renewable Energy and Storage Targets) Bill 2023, the coalition did not oppose it. Part of that bill was a commitment to introducing offshore wind energy targets of not less than 2 gigawatts by 2032, 4 gigawatts by 2035 and 9 gigawatts by 2040. The bill set out those targets, and that bill passed the Parliament. Yesterday the Parliament considered an amendment that went through the Council, and that bill was passed and now will go for royal assent. So this Parliament has come together and said that we do need to ensure that as Victoria transitions in terms of its energy production we have a plan in place which sets out where our energy generation will go – how much energy we will have in each form of energy production over what period of time – and do it in a responsible way.

The coalition made the point during the debate that as that transition occurs, we need to see energy produced that is, as I said, reliable, secure, affordable and clean. That means we need to make sure that we do not see ongoing blackouts, and many members raised the recent blackout that saw 530,000 Victorians lose power to their homes, the biggest blackout in our state's history, and blackouts since – not of the same magnitude but blackouts since.

What this bill does is take it an element further in relation to that first bill, as the minister has pointed out herself, as it relates to offshore wind. The bill is quite a simple bill in that it creates a Victorian licence system that enables feasibility of offshore wind projects on Crown land. So this bill creates a

system whereby 21-year licences can be provided to allow feasibility and works to be done in the private sector to enable the construction of offshore wind. This is the Victorian licensing component, if you want to put it that way, for offshore wind.

What this bill does not do and what this government has not done is explain the plan for offshore wind. That matters for two reasons: firstly, because we need to ensure that we have enough energy supply, and when offshore wind is a central component to your future energy supply you would want the government to have a plan to ensure that we have it; but secondly, because the bill that I spoke to earlier, which we passed only, finally, yesterday, sets out how quickly we need to generate energy supply more generally and specifically in relation to wind. What we have seen over primarily the last few months is a collapse of the government's offshore wind policy. The offshore wind policy in Victoria has become, sadly, a national laughing stock, and I will get into the detail of that issue throughout the debate.

I spoke earlier about the recent blackout, and for mums, dads, families and Victorians the idea that we are now in a circumstance where our energy is not secure has been made patently obvious, with more than half a million people recently suffering in that blackout. So Victorians have started to speak very, very strongly about the concerns they have about energy security in this state, as they should. Energy security is a must. But so too have businesses started to be far more outspoken about the government's net zero target, the offshore wind component and the lack of a plan to get there. Recently the Victorian Chamber of Commerce and Industry held an event on the journey to net zero, and the chamber chief executive Paul Guerra spoke at length about some of these issues. He said:

The fragility of our existing system was exposed. We can't get to net zero on a hope and a prayer.

And he was talking about that historic blackout. Further:

... the concern lies in how are we actually going to get there?

Further:

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

And finally:

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

And I do apologise, but that was a direct quote from the chief executive.

The DEPUTY SPEAKER: Order! Just to pick the member up, unparliamentary language is not excusable because it is in a quote. I caution the member.

James NEWBURY: Thank you, Deputy Speaker. The chief executive was making the point that we need to have more than a target and we need to have more than ideology; we need to have a plan of how to get there, and what this bill does not do is set out that plan.

What this bill does is create a licensing regime, effectively. It does not do any more than that. It creates a licensing regime. It says that companies can come to the government in relation to Crown land and they can be licensed to do feasibility work. That is really what the guts of the bill are about. What it does not do is it does not say how this government is going to ensure that we have the projects that we need, the build we need in terms of energy supply, the wind turbines we need and the offshore wind projects we need. How are we going to do that? That should be a concern to all Victorians.

The chamber has done a power of work on these issues. Paul Guerra further said – and I will refer to a recent survey of 500 of their members – at that event that if the government:

... cannot guarantee that the lights remain on in this state, then I can guarantee that many businesses will find places other than Victoria to set up.

The survey conducted of their members – and I will read in some of the findings of that survey – found that energy policies were the top concern for 65 per cent of Victorian businesses, so two out of three. Eighty-six per cent said they believed the move to renewables would impact their output – concerning: 86 per cent, so five out of six. Seventy-three per cent said Victoria’s February power blackout had forced them to close. Three out of four were forced to close throughout that blackout – extraordinary, with the impact, as we know, of the loss of stock and the loss of capacity. Eighty-one per cent cited cost as a main barrier to switching from gas to electricity. I think that the case is being made very, very strongly. When we speak about the concerns from business about the government’s ideological push over practicality, the government’s gas ban is a deep, deep concern to all Victorians but also all Victorian businesses. It is an ideological ban and a ban that is going to affect all Victorians, both business and otherwise.

Mr Guerra further said:

We want to get behind that –

as in the renewable energy reforms –

... but it relies on having a clear plan to signal to businesses that access for reliable energy will also be affordable.

That is not unreasonable. And finally:

Specifically on gas, if we don’t have a clear plan which also includes affordable pricing, and if we get out of step with the other states in Australia by becoming more expensive for energy, that increases the operational risk for business.

What are some of the themes that industry is talking about? They are recognising the need for a plan, but they are also making it clear that that plan cannot be purely around ideology and that there has to be a practical element, a practical plan, and that is where the government has fallen short and been exposed on a national stage.

You only have to look at the point raised by Mr Guerra in relation to affordability and some of the reported data that the Victorian government has produced on things like wind energy. The government’s estimated cost of offshore wind is \$94 a megawatt hour, whereas in Britain the government recently auctioned at \$139 and in the US at \$230. So the government has set out a plan or an estimate which is in no way in line with what is actually happening in markets around the world where these projects exist, and that should be a concern and goes straight to the affordability question.

We have also seen projects in total disarray in terms of offshore wind. Over the last three months we have seen effectively a total collapse of the government’s offshore wind policy. We see reports of multiple companies making applications that are in dispute – tens of applications with the federal government that are in dispute over borders of where the projects will occur – and concerns as to how those disputes will be resolved. We have not even got to the point of them being built, but the level of disputation, clearly because of the management of the government strategy, both state and federal, has led to, clearly, a collapse of our Victorian offshore wind policy.

We saw that no more clearly than at the start of the year with the Port of Hastings. To remind the house, the Port of Hastings was a project that was reportedly 146 hectares in size, including reclaimed land, the clearing of vegetation and the dredging of 92 hectares for a 600-metre long, 100-metre wide wharf which the federal minister for the environment, as we now all know, rejected because large areas of the bay’s wetland –

... will be destroyed or substantially modified as a result of direct impacts of the proposed action.

The minister further stated it would cause:

... irreversible damage to the habitat of waterbirds and migratory birds and marine invertebrates and fish ...

Finally, in terms of impact on the food webs of the mudflats and coastal area, pollution is a significant risk and could result from oil and chemical spills, discharge of ballast water, shipping accidents, marinas and launching ramps, sewage and bilge water and other debris.

When the federal government announced its findings on the project, effectively rejecting the project, it sent a spear through the Victorian government's offshore wind strategy, this project which was central to early generation in order to meet the government's targets, but it also exposed the hollowness of the Victorian government's plan to actually deliver on its targets. As I said earlier, you need more than a target – you need a plan to deliver on it.

We know the federal minister for climate change has said on the record that there is:

... a long lead-up for offshore wind.

He further said:

... we don't expect much offshore wind to be operating by 2030 in Australia ... setting up a new industry from scratch takes time. And we envisage most of the projects will be generating power post-2030.

If I can read that quote again from the minister:

... setting up a new industry from scratch takes time. And we envisage most of the projects will be generating power post-2030.

That is why earlier this year when the federal government knocked down the Port of Hastings proposal, not only Victoria but Australia could see quite clearly that the Victorian government did not have the capacity to deliver on the projects that they needed to, not only because of the supply we need in Victoria but because of now the law which requires them to do it. I should state that should the government not reach that target, there is no penalty. There is simply no penalty. It is a target in law without a single penalty or any downside for the minister who does not achieve it. I mean, the minister can just snub her nose. She can amend the target. She can ignore the target.

What concerns I think business, but also Victorians more broadly, in relation to offshore wind is watching projects like Hastings go down primarily because of a lack of responsible governing in terms of this government and the way they manage projects. We know that that particular project was warned about the risk of proceeding with that proposal. Infrastructure Victoria in 2017 was asked to assess whether Hastings or Bay West in Werribee would be best placed for future projects, and it talked about at that time the wetland risks at the Port of Hastings.

So in 2017 the government was paying one of its own departments to provide advice, which they did, and yet another part of government, which taxpayers are paying for, were proceeding with a project which they had received advice would be of concern. The issues that were raised were all of the issues which ended up being on the table when the federal minister provided her decision on the project. The government could have simply dusted off the report, which taxpayers had paid for, and received the insight several years earlier, but they did not.

What was I think so concerning for Victorians was not only to see the policy of wind unravel but to see the government unravel during press conferences that week on the actual project – unravel before our eyes day by day. It started with the Premier stating multiple times that the Port of Hastings proposal had passed through state government environmental approval processes. Confidently the Premier stepped out and said, 'No, this has all gone through our environmental work, it's all been ticked off.' I recall the Premier saying that the government would start to lobby the federal government to change their mind. The Premier would change their mind. Embarrassingly, later that same day, we found out that the environment minister had not approved the project. Just for anybody who was not listening to the first point: contrary to what the Premier had gone out in the press conference with gusto to say, the environment minister had referred the project off for an environmental effects assessment in October the year before, several months earlier. All of that assessment was noted on the minister's department's website, so someone was not reading the government's website.

But the Premier was not the only one not reading the government's website, because then we saw the Minister for Environment come out next – so the Premier came out on Tuesday of that week, then the Minister for Environment came out on Thursday – and, when asked about this project, said, 'We can't talk about the federal government's decision yet.' 'Why can't you?' the media asked. Fair question – 'Why can't you?' Because the minister had only received a summary. He said:

My understanding is that we have ... effectively a summary of the decision. We don't have the full decision yet, so it's hard to give you an answer to that question without having the actual details of the reasons the federal government said no

...

Let's understand what the decision is before we then commit to whether we stay on that site. But your question is, how do we mitigate it? Well, we need to find out what they're concerned about in detail, before I can give you an answer on how to mitigate it ...

It was on the federal government's website the week before – a week earlier, on Friday the week before. So we have got the Premier saying the state government have approved it on the state website, the state environment minister saying, 'I can't speak in detail to the matter, because the decision hasn't been made public' – it was on the federal government's website. Is it any wonder Victorians are saying, 'What is the government's offshore wind plan?' The government needs to do more than come to this place with this bill. It does provide a licensing regime for feasibility work; it does do that. But that is all that it does. In substance it provides a feasibility licensing regime for Crown land; that is the substance of the bill.

What the projects are, where they are – there is no plan. The government has not made it clear to Victorians, and when you are seeing hundreds of thousands of people suffer blackouts, when you are seeing business saying to you in the strongest possible terms, so strongly – you might recall that the Deputy Speaker, who was in the chair earlier, noted a word that they had used and cautioned me when that word was used. That was the head of one of the biggest business organisations in the state, who had used strong language in saying how strong the concerns were.

Finally I should mention the Minister for Energy and Resources in that week in relation to Hastings. Just when you thought the Premier and the Minister for Environment had embarrassed Victoria enough, no, here comes the minister for energy, who had a dummy spit. There is no other way to say it. The minister for energy had a dummy spit and railed against the federal government, just railed against them: 'It's not the state government's fault; it's not the state government's fault.' I presume what actually happened is by the end of that week the entire cabinet, government and Premier were saying, 'Minister for energy, what's going on here?' and so the minister came out and gave one big almighty whack and said, 'It's all the feds' fault.' I mean, that is the standard go-to line for this government: 'It's all the feds' fault.' Well, it was. 'It's someone else's fault.' It is starting –

A member interjected.

James NEWBURY: Well, they are. Everything is the feds' fault.

Danny O'Brien: Even the Labor feds.

James NEWBURY: That is right, and that is what we saw that week. We saw the minister in a very unedifying dummy spit blame the feds for a project they had been warned years before would be a problem – years before. It is extraordinary. It was very, very unedifying.

We have seen only earlier this week with the Portland decision a project – and I am not in any way reflecting on the decision, but I would note for the record the decision that the energy minister Chris Bowen announced. The Southern Ocean offshore wind zone, which originally was meant to span 5132 square kilometres, is now a fifth of the size. The approval is for a fifth of the size. In no way is the coalition reflecting on the decision; we are just noting that in terms of how we actually deliver offshore wind it has not been made clear to Victorians, because in that project the new size will generate 2.9 gigawatts, from the originally estimated 14.6 gigawatts.

I do note that the coalition will be circulating amendments, and under standing orders I wish to advise the house of amendments to the bill and request that they be circulated.

Amendments circulated under standing orders.

James NEWBURY: Those amendments go to two things. Firstly they go to social licence and ensuring that throughout the processes of this bill there is a social licence component, a consultation with the community component, because we know that the government is not in any way ensuring that communities are part of these decisions. In fact the government is ripping away the rights of the community to have a say over decisions, which is appalling. Only last week the government confirmed that they would extend their planning powers further in the assessment of development facilitation program projects and add renewable energy. Under that program, effectively, the government has absolutely no say, so we will be moving amendments that go to community consultation but also go to ensuring that these projects are undertaken by people who are fit and proper persons. Those two amendments are fair and reasonable: community consultation and the fit and proper person.

In terms of community consultation, I do note the government's previous report from March 2022, which suggests that up to 70 per cent of agricultural land will need to be renewable. I have spoken to the government about that estimate, and they have set out that that was the, I suppose, 'impossible scenario', in their terms, and to produce the most gigawatts possible, whereas their estimate is that to achieve the target we will need to produce just under half of what that scenario was. So that still says that almost 30 per cent of ag land could be covered.

The government needs to ensure that we have reliable, affordable, secure and clean energy, and that is what the coalition has been speaking about. We have been speaking about ensuring that we do. We will not be opposing this bill. We will be moving amendments. But we are calling on the government to do more than set targets. We are calling on the government to set out a plan to achieve them and also let Victorians know that we will have reliable, secure, affordable energy and how that will be delivered, because that is what Victorians deserve and this government has not set out that plan.

Paul EDBROOKE (Frankston) (11:16): Acting Speaker Marchant, it is lovely to see you in the chair. I rise to speak on the Energy and Public Land Legislation Amendment (Enabling Offshore Wind Energy) Bill 2024. I mean, who in their right mind would be against that? But I have been sitting in here for the last half-hour, and we have heard from the Liberals a lack of imagination, a lack of vision, a lack of planning for the future and a lack of a plan to actually oppose – to be the opposition and be an alternate government and actually adapt to and overcome problems like this government does.

Members interjecting.

Paul EDBROOKE: Well, we will get to what Michael Lamb might think of this bill soon, and we will get to the failed Liberal candidate for Dunkley as well. Don't you worry about that.

Of course this bill is our first piece of legislation in our offshore wind program, which has been happening for years. The lead-up to this has been happening for years. It is simple legislation in a way. It amends the Victorian public land and electricity legislation to allow offshore wind projects to undertake site investigatory activities to determine the design and placement of connection of infrastructure. The connection of infrastructure is required to deliver electricity generated by offshore wind projects in declared Commonwealth waters into the Victorian grid, and the bill provides a clearer pathway for offshore wind proponents awarded feasibility licences in Commonwealth waters under the Offshore Electricity Infrastructure Act 2021 to undertake an aligned related feasibility assessment in Victorian waters and on shore for better project planning. This is done through allowing the Minister for Energy and Resources to declare a licensee under the Offshore Electricity Infrastructure Act 2021 an offshore wind generation company. It also clarifies arrangements under the four main land acts that refer to agreements with electricity companies for the purposes of construction and operation of new electricity infrastructure.

Those who have been listening to the last 25 to 30 minutes of, well, confusing bile from those opposite will be asking themselves a question right now, and that is: why are the Liberals and the opposition so against renewable energy? This argument is not just about offshore wind; it is about renewable energy.

Members interjecting.

Paul EDBROOKE: I hear some laughter across the aisle, and that is fine, but history gives us the best foundation of evidence to actually work from.

Members interjecting.

Paul EDBROOKE: Hang on; I will get there. In 2018 we heard the Leader of the Opposition say:

... anybody who says that having solar at home is going to drop their bills by about \$1000 a year, I think they're dreaming ...

That was the member for Bulleen. He would be pleased right now to be corrected. Our Solar Homes program – a hugely popular program – customers save up to \$1073 annually off their bills. Further to my point about this kind of holistic optic that is portrayed by those in opposition, even though they will stand here right now and say, 'No, no, no we're for renewables,' there are the opposition leader John Pesutto's remarks to no less than the Electric Energy Society of Australia. The opposition leader at the time – he is still opposition leader, actually, isn't he? – outlined a radical agenda on climate and energy that undermined community and investor confidence in his party's commitment to climate action. He supercharged the climate sceptics by arguing that science is just an ideology – science is just an ideology – and there is nothing wrong with taking the view that climate change is a hoax. I quote the opposition leader:

Even if people have different ideological perspectives on climate change and sustainability, and that is all legitimate in my view, there is nothing wrong with that.

That was stated to industry leaders in the Electric Energy Society of Australia. I might be wrong here, but science is just like magic – except science is real and evidence-based and you can work from it. To encourage sceptics that their views are correct is actually misleading them when you are talking about climate science. Just because one scientist out of 100 says 'I disagree' does not mean the other 99 scientists are wrong. It is clear that climate change is not a hoax. It is clear that people arguing that climate change is a hoax are not working from a basis of evidence. For people in this chamber to laugh when government members stand up and say there is opposition to renewables on the other side of the chamber, when they hear quotes like that, is laughable in itself.

Nick Staikos interjected.

Paul EDBROOKE: I will get to Frankston soon, member for Bentleigh, but to reinforce that view and my fear that those opposite do not actually agree with us about a renewable energy evolution or revolution, we had only just recently a local Liberal candidate for Dunkley telling us that we should look at nuclear energy on the peninsula. The candidate refused to answer questions about this. He obviously had grand plans, but he refused to answer any questions that were asked of him by Richard Willingham from the ABC. I see why, but my point is that I do not think there was any consultation with the community at all. I think the mayor might find himself in a spot of bother if he said that in his mayoral capacity, because not one person I know – not one person in Frankston, on the peninsula, in Dunkley – has ever said to me, 'You know what, Paul? We need to have a beer and talk about nuclear energy, because that is the way the future is going. We need to do that. I watched *Chernobyl* the other night – what a great documentary. We should do that on the peninsula – we should. We should build a big concrete thing, make a sarcophagus when it goes wrong – we should do that. I also watched the doco on Three Mile Island. Paul, we should have a beer and talk about that. That's got potential here in Dunkley. I reckon we should do that.' Not one person has done that.

I do note that these amendments put forward by the opposition to this bill mention 'adequate community consultation' about nine times. I think it is pretty inconsistent for your Liberal friends to

be talking about nuclear energy without any consultation, putting that up at an election and then having the guts to come in here and talk about community consultation on this bill and offshore wind.

A little while ago – I think it was the 2018 election – we actually had someone who proposed that he might have been the opposition leader by now. He was pretty confident, this bloke. He was the Liberal candidate in Frankston, and he is not a bad bloke. But he could not see where renewables fit in. He would not meet with people about it, and he would not meet with any environmental groups. Famously, on David Speers he created the clip that is now being used in media training of what not to do. I think we have all seen that clip – I will not labour the point – but once again for me to be here today and act like the opposition have changed and are embracing renewable energy, indeed offshore wind, would be me lying to myself when I have heard the candidate for Dunkley and the state candidate for Frankston come out and be proponents for building new coal-fired power stations. I do not know how they were going to be run or funded. Apparently there was an issue with privatisation and whatnot that we could not get around. They talked about nuclear only a month ago; I am having a meltdown trying to get it in my mind how those opposite expect us to believe they are not against renewables. They have opposed renewables at almost every turn, and I know they are not opposing this bill; there is an amendment. I think there was one bill previously that I was in here for that was voted for. They cannot tell us what they want to do. While we have spent three years talking about renewable energy, offshore wind and creating the structure to actually make sure that we can implement that – and, I must admit, producing six-monthly implementation plans for the public, unions and international players all to see and be consulted on – those opposite have been talking about fracking, nuclear and coal-fired power stations.

It is quite something to be standing here today, though – on a positive note – and being the first speaker on this bill. It is the first bill that we have brought to this house, which is going to be endorsed hopefully by those opposite as well, to make sure we can enter that new stage of the future – a stage that means we do not leave a legacy of rubbish for our young kids and the next generation to deal with. This is a brave government looking into the future and making plans for the future. I endorse this.

Danny O'BRIEN (Gippsland South) (11:26): I am pleased to rise to speak on the Energy and Public Land Legislation Amendment (Enabling Offshore Wind Energy) Bill 2024 before us today, and I will do so as one of a few, literally only two or three in this chamber, that actually have some skin in the game on this issue. I will come to the member for Frankston in a moment and talk about how many of his constituents are looking forward to offshore wind turbines just off Frankston in Port Phillip Bay, because it is not happening. So it is all very good for everyone over that side to stand up and say, 'We're all hairy chested about renewables. We're going to build heaps of renewables – wind turbines, solar, offshore wind. But we're not going to do it in any of our electorates. Don't be ridiculous.' Indeed as I have pointed out to the member for Albert Park numerous times before, this government has specifically precluded wind farms being built in any of your electorates, with the exception of the member for Ripon. It is just hypocrisy.

I want to talk a little about the bill. The bill basically sets up a process by which the offshore wind developers can get a licence, if you like, to look at their connection points through public land. That particularly, when we are talking about public land, includes the 3 nautical miles of Victorian waters off the coast and then the area up to a connection point and then through transmission, through the grid. It does that by amending a number of different acts with respect to public and Crown land. We do not have an issue with that. I do make the point, though, that it is quite ironic that this government has its offshore wind targets and has a massive offshore wind campaign that we hear about so often, but no-one has ever mentioned that the entirety of those offshore wind farm plans are in Commonwealth waters. If it were not that the Commonwealth actually had set this up, the government's plans would be completely pointless – unless, as I said, the member for Frankston and the member for Albert Park and the member for Carrum and the member for Mordialloc might like to start saying, 'Let's put some offshore wind farms in Port Phillip Bay.' But we have not heard anyone

arguing for that, have we? No-one is suggesting that. That is what I want to talk a little bit about with this issue. It is a symptom of energy policy, and offshore wind is a classic example.

We have had the government come down – we had Chris Bowen come down to Seaspray with the Minister for Energy and Resources and say how this is going to be great for jobs in regional Victoria, in Gippsland in particular. And I actually think there are good opportunities and potentially some really good opportunities for us with offshore wind in Gippsland, but that relies on us having the jobs geographically located in Gippsland. One of the points that are lost on those opposite and many people who are promoting the offshore wind industry and the jobs that will go with it is that all of the Gippsland wind farm zone is off the Ninety Mile Beach, off my electorate and that of the member for Gippsland East. You do not go and put a tinny in at Seaspray and chug out to work on the offshore wind turbines. That is not how it works. These offshore wind farms are serviced and built from a port. We only have one likely port that could do that in Gippsland, Barry Beach, and it is the port that has been used for 50 years or more for the offshore oil and gas sector. It has been the base for constructing offshore platforms, and now it is becoming the base for deconstructing those offshore platforms.

But did the government look at Barry Beach? No, it did not. It went to Hastings. So even the idea that there would be some jobs in this for Gippsland was taken away, because the government said, ‘No, no, no, we’re going to set up the construction port at Hastings.’ As the member for Brighton has pointed out, that did not go terribly well for the government, and they are floundering at the moment because they really do not know where they are going to do it. I would again challenge any of those opposite to give a guarantee that the offshore wind sector in Victoria will in fact be built from Victoria, because I know some of the developers’ proposed locations are actually closer to Tasmania in terms of steaming times than they are to Hastings, Geelong or the Port of Melbourne. The government needs to actually make sure it gets this right.

The fact that the government has just gone straight to Hastings and ignored a Gippsland port for the offshore wind sector is I think a very strong symptom of what happens in the energy debate. In the energy debate the politics and the benefits are all for the city. It is all about members on that side being able to stand up in Footscray, in Glen Waverly or in Box Hill and say, ‘We’re delivering these renewable energy targets.’ But who has to put up with it? We in the country are the ones that have to put up with it.

A member interjected.

Danny O’BRIEN: I have just made the point that we are not getting the jobs. The jobs are going to Hastings. Didn’t you listen to that bit? This is the point. If you do not understand that about offshore wind, then none of you have the right to stand up and talk about this. The member for Frankston was there saying, ‘No-one wants to put a nuclear terminal in on the Mornington Peninsula.’ Well, has he asked anyone in Gippsland if they want wind turbines or solar farms? I know he does not have any in Frankston. I know the member for Polwarth does. I know the member for Narracan does. I know the member for Ovens Valley has got issues with batteries in his area. And I know the member for South-West Coast does. We are not saying that we are opposed to this, but God it riles me when I hear city MPs get up and speak on all these wonderful things they are doing – ‘Aren’t they great? We’re saving the planet’ – and they have to bear none of it on that side. You just get the political benefit, and it is us in the country, whether it is the coal-fired power stations shutting down, whether it is the offshore wind base not going to Barry Beach but going to Hastings, whether it is us having to put up with 250-metre turbines within a kilometre of our homes or whether it is 500 acres of solar panels – who on that side has got 500 acres of solar panels? No-one.

Nina Taylor interjected.

Danny O’BRIEN: Albert Park has got what? Oh, big high-rise buildings. Oh, my Lord!

This issue brings me to the announcement last week by the government that it will remove the rights of Victorians when it comes to renewable energy projects by taking away their ability to appeal to

VCAT and by taking away their opportunity to have a planning panel and by forcing them, if they want to object to a decision that has been made, to go to the Supreme Court, which is not the case for any other energy projects in the state. It is only for renewable energy. And not one of those is going to be coming from those opposite in the city electorates; they are all in those members' electorates on this side that I just talked about. The member for Ripon – did she stand up and argue against this? Not publicly. Did the member for Macedon, the Minister for Health? Is she raising concerns about how her constituents have had their voice taken away on this? Has anyone actually stood up to the government? No, because you just do not care. It does not matter to you that the regional Victorians subject to these will not have the opportunity to go to VCAT. Members opposite will laugh, but in 2018 –

Members interjecting.

Danny O'BRIEN: Grow up, idiot. Listen to the people in my electorate in Alberton. The Alberton wind farm put up a proposal, and the department you are working with ticked off on it: 'No problem; here's the permit.' My people, a small group of farmers, took it to VCAT and found a significant flaw in the legal basis for that permit being approved, to the extent that VCAT withdrew the permit and that project did not go ahead. Under your new laws that is now going to be stopped. So we will still have departments and developers making mistakes like that because this Labor government has taken away the voice of country people with respect to these projects. That is a disgrace, and the government stands condemned for it.

The hypocrisy of the government on this – it is all good for those out there to put up with it, for us to lose the jobs in our coal industry and our timber industry – another renewable that we would like to talk about, but those opposite do not seem to think it is renewable – but we will suffer the consequences of the offshore wind. We want the jobs that will come from offshore wind. I have actually been overseas and had a look at the opportunities that occur in the UK, Denmark and other places. There are potential jobs there, but the government has got to get it right and actually start to focus on making sure those jobs are delivered in places like Gippsland.

We do not want to have to put up with the new transmission lines, the towers on our land and the solar panels taking up good farming land and not see those jobs come to us. That is something this government really does not seem to understand. There are opportunities for us here. I would just like the government to understand that where it is doing all these things is in regional Victoria. We want to capture some of the benefits, not just the negatives. The government needs to actually start to listen.

Jackson TAYLOR (Bayswater) (11:36): It is a great pleasure to rise and speak in support of the Energy and Public Land Legislation Amendment (Enabling Offshore Wind Energy) Bill 2024. I would say to everyone watching online and in the gallery today: do not judge the previous contribution. We normally get along famously in this house. The member for Gippsland South is a great bloke. It is a great privilege to rise after him and to hear his – was it support for renewable energy?

Danny O'Brien interjected.

Jackson TAYLOR: Okay. Excellent. Fantastic. So we are not happy to have renewable energy in electorates apparently, but no issues with coal and –

Danny O'Brien: Well, have it in yours.

Jackson TAYLOR: Unfortunately in Bayswater, while it has the words 'bay' and 'water' in it, there is no bay and water. So in your references around offshore wind, it is not quite possible, but I appreciate your enthusiasm.

It is a great privilege to rise in this house, and I think those opposite are perhaps jealous of the bold agenda of the Andrews now Allan Labor government. Our bold, progressive agenda – we are leading the nation, and we are leading the world. It is great to follow the member for Frankston. It is always great to hear the member for Frankston regale us about his previous electoral battles with the former

Liberal candidate for Frankston. I always enjoy hearing the story about David Speers. I know those opposite would rather he did not regale us with those particular stories, but they are always great to hear.

It is no surprise to many of us in this place to hear some of the rhetoric coming from those opposite and, sadly, from their partners in Canberra. Again, when it comes to renewable energy, it is now not so much talking them down, though I think there is still an aspect of that, but there are now delaying tactics, which is what the last Liberal federal government was all about – delaying, stopping projects. I am sure those opposite would love to do a bit of that as well, and thankfully we are in the government and we are getting on and we will not be deterred by those opposite.

But now we have got this absurd obsession with nuclear, and we have got the federal opposition leader talking about putting nuclear plants in parts of Victoria. I can tell you now: there is not a single person in my electorate who has said to me they would love a nuclear reactor in their community. So again I put the challenge out there – and I think there have actually been a couple who have taken me up on this – to all those opposite: do you want to have a nuclear power plant in your backyard in your electorate? We have seen some of the tragedies and some of the devastation overseas, the tragic loss of life when it comes to nuclear power plants and what can happen with natural disasters and when they are not managed and run effectively. Do we want to have that in our backyard here in Victoria? So I ask every member opposite: will you support nuclear in your electorate?

Nick Staikos interjected.

Jackson TAYLOR: That is right, member for Bentleigh. I think if we want to talk about it quietly and want to whisper about it, let us call it for what it is. Let us get it out on the record, because I can tell you now, no-one in my community is asking for it, and that is not what I would want to see because we already have the answers here. We have renewable energy. The cheapest form of energy is renewable energy, and we saw that this week with the Victorian default offer. When we talk about energy, it is not just about it being the right thing to do, following private investment. We know what is happening with private investment. They are getting out of fossil fuels, and they are getting into renewable energy. They are leaving. We cannot simply wait and watch. We have got to get on with it, and we actually have to have a plan. That is exactly what we have done, and that is exactly what this piece of legislation is doing – we are continuing our work on delivering the renewable energy that we are going to need to power our state when fossil fuel, when coal, leaves the state.

Of course there is a transition period. I know there are some in this house – I do not think they are here at the moment – who think you can just flick a switch and off you go, straight onto renewable energy. That is not possible. We have got to work with communities, and we have to have an effective transition to make sure that we are generating the power that Victorians need – reliable power – which is exactly what this government is doing. We will continue to do so by being responsible, by listening to the science and by working with industry and working with communities, and that is exactly what we have done.

We know that part of that is absolutely about delivering cheaper energy. I mean, just this week we had the Minister for Energy and Resources share the fantastic news with Victorians and this place about the draft Victorian default offer, which is a Victorian first. Now the federal government have also followed suit, and a lot of other states as well have followed suit in delivering default offers. This shows that bills will be going down by \$112 for households and \$266 for small businesses. That is money back in the pocket of over half a million Victorian families and 58,000 businesses. We are also a government who have delivered a number of rounds of the power saving bonus. That is real cost-of-living relief – getting money back into the pockets of –

Nick Staikos interjected.

Jackson TAYLOR: Member for Bentleigh, whilst some may interject, I have seen a number of DLs with the power saving bonus, and I say: kudos to you. I think it is fantastic. I would have liked a

bit more of a shout-out – ‘The Victorian Labor government is delivering’ – but, you know what, beggars cannot be choosers. I am glad a lot of you are out there talking about the power saving bonus.

Danny O’Brien interjected.

Jackson TAYLOR: Yes, we know how government spending works, member for Gippsland South. I understand that. The next time the Liberals are in government I look forward to them saying, ‘The taxpayer-funded government is delivering’. I do not think it will quite work that way. I think people are very understanding of how government spending works and how expenditure and revenue work. We understand all that. Yes, you can post another one of those Facebook comments on one of my posts going ‘Taxpayer-funded’ – yes, I understand that and I respect it, and we have to be respectful of every single taxpayer dollar we spend. That is exactly why we are investing in renewable energy. So thank you very much, member for Gippsland South, for absolutely clarifying just how government spending works and where we get our money from to pay for all the things we are delivering and all the things that the Victorian people voted for at the last election and in 2018 and in 2014, because we are a government that is about action and getting things done. Thank you very much. I do enjoy some interjections. Some of them are spicy. It is all good stuff, I tell you.

There are some other great things as well that this government is doing. It is not just about enabling offshore wind – a great conversation and a great debate that is taking place in this place today. We also have our container deposit scheme. Reverse vending machines are going gangbusters. I am pretty sure that one at Mitre 10 in Bayswater is the busiest in the state. I am hoping –

Members interjecting.

Jackson TAYLOR: Absolutely, member for Bentleigh. It is also generating business for the Mitre 10 in Bayswater. Again, member for Gippsland South – no bay, no water in Bayswater. It is a great place. You should come and check it out, though.

We have got the container deposit scheme, and that is part of the Allan Labor government’s agenda when it comes to our environment and when it comes to renewable energy. That is again putting money back into people’s pockets. It is turning everyone’s attention to the need to do more when it comes to climate change and to our environment locally in Victoria and nationwide. It is very important to bring the community along with you when it comes to these changes, whether it is the CDS or whether it is the new four-bin system that we are rolling out, working with councils. It is the circular economy.

This bill also talks to our net zero emissions. We had a really important conversation at the last election. We have now brought our net zero emissions target forward to 2045 – a really, really important thing that this government is doing, leading the world when it comes to taking action on climate change and getting to net zero emissions. It is good to see the federal government on board as well. We are moving to renewable energy – 95 per cent by 2035, which was subject to some debate yesterday with the amendments passing through. It is very, very important stuff that this government is doing.

We know this bill is of course our first piece of legislation in our offshore wind program. It is very simple legislation in that it will amend Victorian public land and electricity legislation to allow offshore wind projects to undertake site investigatory activities to determine the design and placement of connection infrastructure. The connection infrastructure is absolutely required to deliver electricity generated by offshore wind projects in declared Commonwealth waters into the Victorian grid. The bill provides a clearer pathway for offshore wind proponents awarded feasibility licences in Commonwealth waters under the offshore electricity act of 2021, and it is done through allowing the Minister for Energy and Resources to declare an offshore wind generation company under the Offshore Electricity Infrastructure Act 2021 of the Commonwealth to be a licensee. So it is a very, very important piece of legislation.

Again we are continuing in our leadership when it comes to generating renewable energy. Another thing we are doing is we are getting back into government-owned renewable energy, a significant platform at the last election, one of the most important policies, I believe, that the Allan Labor government is cracking on with. It is absolutely huge. I remember getting out and on the doors talking to locals, and that was the one reason why they voted for us. They remember what the old SEC did, and they know that the Liberals got rid of it. It will never be back to what it was; we all know that. No-one is pretending that, but we are getting back into it to help drive down power prices. They may dislike it, and they will probably privatise it if they ever have a chance to get back into government. But I support this bill.

Roma BRITNELL (South-West Coast) (11:46): I rise to speak on the Energy and Public Land Legislation Amendment (Enabling Offshore Wind Energy) Bill 2024. This is a bill that basically sets up licensing for Victoria's offshore wind projects, because there is no legislation that covers the licences and the infrastructure. But what this bill does not do is give us the explanation of the plan the state government has. However, there is implication and highlighting that South-West Coast will have wind turbines. This will have tremendous consequences for my electorate of South-West Coast. It will gravely impact an electorate that already is crisscrossed with renewable energy developments, an electorate which has more wind turbines than any other electorate in Victoria. Yet under this Labor government South-West Coast's world-famous whale nursery is under threat from the proposed offshore wind developments, which are clearly identified as a way forward in this bill.

I simply do not trust the state or federal Labor governments to get the balance right between protecting our whales and developing offshore wind off the coast of Warrnambool and Port Fairy. I do not trust Labor, and I cannot support wind turbines over a whale migration pathway. Let me be clear: I understand the role of renewables in achieving energy targets, but I do not support risking a precious whale migration pathway for an offshore wind farm whose risks are not fully understood. It is that simple: do not risk our whales; do not build an offshore wind farm in Warrnambool and Port Fairy's whale nursery.

One of the reasons I have such distrust is Labor's decision last Thursday to change the planning rules, a change which completely erodes the right of the community to object to offshore wind projects as well as onshore renewable energy projects. It is shameful that the supposedly environmentally conscious Labor Party would wilfully put the environment and important areas like the whale nursery off Logans Beach in my electorate at risk for a project we do not understand the impacts of on the environment. I remind Labor that we live in a democracy. As much as they might wish it was, Victoria is not a dictatorship.

This bill will allow offshore wind developers to obtain tenure over public land for the purposes of assessing the feasibility of constructing offshore wind electricity transmission infrastructure, designed to provide certainty to the industry. In addition, it enables the actual transmission of offshore-generated wind energy to the Victorian grid on land. A subsequent easement arrangement over public land says that perhaps Killarney Beach, which is right in the middle of the declared offshore zone, would be required to enable the connection to be made, and this bill facilitates that, as it does not currently exist in legislation. Now, I note that there is commitment to putting the transmission lines underwater, but once it gets to shore, once again, there is no commitment to underground transmission lines. They are prepared to just crisscross them all over the landscape.

I personally hold major concerns over allowing the state Labor government the responsibility of making decisions that will affect our very fragile and pristine marine system. Offshore wind off the coast of Warrnambool and Port Fairy will be located in the whale migratory pathway that has existed for thousands of years. Even worse, it will be placed in a whale nursery to where, after many years of whaling, almost to extinction, the whales are finally returning and building up in numbers as they come to give birth. It is a very protected and valued site for keeping whales safe and ensuring they are not disturbed. You cannot swim in the area, you cannot boat near them, you cannot jet ski near them

or windsurf. Everything is planned very carefully, mindful of minimising any disturbance to the valued and greatly popular return of the whales to the south-west coast.

How can we as a community believe the state Labor government care enough not to jeopardise the good work that the community have in place to protect this sanctuary when this bill and this government are purposefully making it harder for local communities to object to offshore wind projects on environmental grounds? Last week we saw the government declare that they had changed the rules around renewable projects so that the community panel process where people can have their say will be removed along with the ability to have an appeals process through VCAT. The Labor government is effectively accelerating the planning pathways for projects so that the community can no longer have any input, steamrolling over communities' rights. It also means that it is harder for the community to get answers to important questions like where the workers developing the offshore wind farm will be located and how long they will be developing the site for. Is the infrastructure installation project going to take place during the winter months, when whales are migrating past as part of their journey from Antarctica to southern Queensland, and if so, what measures, if any, are in place to stop whales being impacted? It is simply steamrolling over Victorians' rights.

The community are rightfully not trusting of government processes to ensure the environment has been considered and will not be harmed. The government's recent actions show just how chaotic the government is when it comes to offshore wind. The example I can use to demonstrate this is Hastings, where there was supposedly going to be a renewable hub for Victoria. Two years earlier Labor Minister for Planning Richard Wynne actually said this area would never be utilised as there is a protected Ramsar wetland nearby and it would not be able to be used in that way. Despite this, the Minister for Ports and Freight went down there and got photos, saying, 'This is the port we will be using as a renewables hub', followed by the Minister for Energy and Resources saying, 'This is the place where the energy hub will be for offshore wind,' followed by the Minister for Planning, Minister Kilkenney, saying, 'Everything's in order.' Eventually the federal minister for environment had to show some leadership and came out attacking her state colleagues, saying it cannot happen for exactly the same reason that the previous minister had stated two years earlier – the site is too sensitive an area to be developed because of the protected Ramsar wetland. To top it off, the environment minister was exposed as not having not done his homework when he said he was waiting for the federal minister's full reasonings to block the project when they were already available online.

This bill being introduced so soon after that embarrassment from the Labor members across the chamber has me rightfully concerned that they are going to push ahead and put the wetland, which is protected for a reason, at risk in their crusade to keep their inner-city seats happy. This saga demonstrates that, like when the Premier said, 'We will find a way. It's going to happen,' this government will not stop at anything, not least the risk to the environment, in their crusade to reach their goals. They have made secret deals with coal power plants to keep lights on because they know they cannot reach their renewable targets, and I feel that they are prepared to put our whale migratory path and nursery at risk. The government will risk the environment with transmission infrastructure and development in a fragile marine environment.

Our Liberal policy is to overturn the gas ban by Labor because we will not have enough power to keep the lights on. Gas is required to keep Victorians warm, and it is not environmentally destructive, because we need to have power. We heard the small business advocate saying that if the Victorian government cannot guarantee they will keep the lights on, he can guarantee that Victorian businesses will be leaving. So the Victorian Liberals will repeal the ban on gas and keep the lights on. Labor, on the other hand, is prepared to harm the environment in the name of the environment, saying they want to reach their targets for renewable energy when they know there just is not the ability to do so. There is not enough storage capacity, there is not the capability and wind and solar alone will not do it.

Just as importantly, in the briefing we were very concerned to hear that the state government will just simply be trusting the Commonwealth to do their due diligence, because they will give permits to the

ones the Commonwealth have given authority to. I just think we are passing the buck there and not doing the necessary checks that Victorians need to be sure of.

We do not in South-West Coast oppose renewable projects. Our region has over 400 wind turbines already, with hundreds more planned. What we do oppose is having our rights removed and no longer being able to be part of the conversation. The government needs to be finding a balance between renewable energy developments and affordable and reliable energy, and that certainly is not proving to be the case. Power prices have increased over 28 per cent in the last two years, and one shudders to think what will happen when they put up expensive wind towers in 60-metre-deep water off the coast of Warrnambool, which will cost Victorians far more in power because that has to be passed back to the customer. Most planning seems to take years, but this government seems to be able to plan these wind farms and get through processes of bureaucracy within six months. The government is riding roughshod over Victorians, and Victorians in South-West Coast have had enough. We will not allow our whales to be compromised.

Gary MAAS (Narre Warren South) (11:56): It gives me great pleasure to rise and to make a contribution to the Energy and Public Land Legislation Amendment (Enabling Offshore Wind Energy) Bill 2024. As we all know, Victoria has high-quality offshore wind resources with the potential to go in a range of locations, as does the rest of the country. In that regard Australia truly is the lucky country. We are unlocking the power of offshore wind to improve our energy security as coal-fired power stations are gradually being retired. This will improve affordability and sustainability and bring us another step closer to net zero by 2045. The offshore wind industry in Victoria provides just so many opportunities to reduce emissions and, importantly, to fast-track job and economic development opportunities for regional Victoria, particularly in clean energy generation and green manufacturing.

It was with some interest this morning when I was going through my media scroll feed that I saw a headline that piqued my interest. The headline read, 'Victoria's renewables fast-track "will lead to terrible decisions": expert'. As I said, it piqued my interest somewhat. I wondered who this expert might be. I kept reading through. The expert was RMIT's Emeritus Professor Michael Buxton. I just thought to myself, 'Buxton. Now, how do I know that name?' So I did have a little bit of a Google search on this name, Professor Michael Buxton, and I kept reading the rest of the article from that fine beacon of the working class, the *Australian* newspaper, and it said that Professor Michael Buxton is a billionaire rich-lister who is a donor to the Liberal Party and made his wealth through property development. So these experts who come forward in the advisory wing to the Victorian Liberal Party are actually all about property development.

They have gone very quiet on the other side, because it has actually got nothing to do with planning decisions, it has got nothing to do with fast-tracking renewables but it has everything to do with not being able to develop property and to make money. This mob – they do not care about renewables. All they care about is protecting their mates and making money off property development. That is all they care about. And it is always the member for Brighton who will stand up and interject.

James Newbury: On a point of order, Acting Speaker, on relevance, I do not want to embarrass the member, but there are two Michael Buxtons.

The ACTING SPEAKER (Juliana Addison): Could you please stick to the point of order and tell me what your point of order is? You do not want to embarrass people. What is your point of order? I missed it.

James Newbury: I said, on relevance, there are two Michael Buxtons, and unfortunately the member has mistaken the two of them.

The ACTING SPEAKER (Juliana Addison): I ask the member to continue.

Gary MAAS: Buxton: a very famous name in property development.

Members interjecting.

The ACTING SPEAKER (Juliana Addison): Member for Polwarth, the contributing member will be heard in silence.

Members interjecting.

The ACTING SPEAKER (Juliana Addison): Member for Polwarth, I ask you to listen respectfully to the member, please.

Richard Riordan interjected.

The ACTING SPEAKER (Juliana Addison): Richard Riordan, enough!

Gary MAAS: The Australian government has established the regulatory framework for this offshore wind energy development to occur and the potential for some –

James Newbury: On a point of order, Acting Speaker, as the standing orders provide, members should be referred to by their correct titles, even by Acting Speakers.

The ACTING SPEAKER (Juliana Addison): I will note that, thank you.

Gary MAAS: The Australian Commonwealth government has established a regulatory framework within which this bill will participate. The amendments are intended to work with and not be contrary to existing rights and obligations that apply under the acts being amended by the bill.

The Energy and Public Land Legislation Amendment (Enabling Offshore Wind Energy) Bill is the state government's first piece of legislation in our offshore wind program. The legislation is simple. Projects will undertake site investigatory activities which will allow the government to determine the design and placement of connection infrastructure. It is necessary legislation to deliver electricity to the Victorian grid that is being generated by offshore wind projects. Legislation is important as it ensures we are moving ahead with our offshore wind development with gusto. It ensures offshore wind development is moving ahead and coal-fired power stations are burning out; we need to ramp up our renewable energy to keep our state running and meet energy and climate targets.

The bill itself makes specific amendments to the Land Act 1958, the Crown Land (Reserves) Act 1978, the Forests Act 1958, the National Parks Act 1975 and the Amendment of Electricity Industry Act 2000 to enable activities relating to the investigation of connection assets to be approved on public land and clarify arrangements under the four main land acts, those amendments being introducing the concept of offshore wind energy generation company into the electricity industry act; creating a category of licence in the Land Act, Crown act and Forests Act; allowing a maximum licence term of 21 years in alignment with other licences under land legislation; and enabling investigation into connection routes over the National Parks Act with the consent of Parks Victoria or similar agencies.

Importantly, the new licence regime allows the government to have an active role in directing the placement of connection assets. This means that offshore wind projects can be inserted into the existing public land licensing regime and they are not exempt from meeting the existing obligations under Victorian law. It also ensures that environmental risks are mitigated, including consideration of traditional owners and their important connection to land and sea when coordinating placement of infrastructure, forming meaningful partnerships with traditional owners and engaging in genuine consultation. That is of the most importance when it comes to the government to ensure the respect and power that First Nation communities deserve.

Offshore wind is an absolutely critical component of Victoria's commitment to decarbonisation and fighting the effects that come with climate change. Renewable energy through wind, solar and batteries will all help move Victoria away from fossil fuels and towards our pledge of 95 per cent renewables by 2035. In my electorate of Narre Warren South constituents are certainly on board with the active take-up of renewables and are already making the switch to energy-efficient upgrades in their homes.

The City of Casey, which is within the electorate of Narre Warren South, has one of the highest uptakes of solar panels as part of the solar panels program, and that demonstrates the willingness of my constituents to make that transition. They are certainly on board with that.

Offshore wind gives our state unparalleled levels of generation capacity, and the stats prove it, with our first wind farm in Victoria set to power some 1.5 million homes. This government is absolutely serious about ensuring offshore wind projects and the conservation of our environment as well. And there will be plenty of jobs that come from this as well. Some 59,000 jobs are expected to be created as we transition to ambitious and achievable renewable energy targets. We have created over 5100 jobs in large-scale renewable energy since we were elected, and we will continue to do this as the Allan Labor government's climate action goal of net zero emissions by 2045 continues.

This bill is an excellent bill. It shows the hard and dedicated work and commitment of our Minister for Energy and Resources and of the department, and I commend the bill to the house.

Richard RIORDAN (Polwarth) (12:06): I rise today to contribute on the Energy and Public Land Legislation Amendment (Enabling Offshore Wind Energy) Bill 2024, and this of course is a very, very important piece of legislation for the Polwarth electorate. It is important because the Polwarth electorate, like many opposition members' electorates in regional Victoria, has borne the brunt of this government's quest for renewable energy. While the government makes much of the fact that it is soldiering ahead with renewable energy, we have learned today that there is really only one government electorate that is carrying any burden whatsoever in the renewable energy space.

The concern about this legislation is the government continues its way of, when there is any community upset or community concerns, changing the rules so that you cannot contest these basic ideas, and we have seen that time and time again. We have seen it so much with onshore energy that pesky things like broilgas or wetlands or proximity to people's homes are no longer reasons why we should not be building up to 300-metre-high towers next door to people. It is an interesting juxtaposition that this government will very much carry the can for any sorts of industrial developments in their own neighbourhoods, but when it comes to opposition members' neighbourhoods they are very, very happy to turn a blind eye.

What the government has not made clear to Victorians is, as we roll out renewable energy, of course we need a brand new transmission network that is going to be required to move all this electricity from one part of the state to another at the times that Victorians need it. We have had quite a lot of debate in recent times about whether that transmission infrastructure should be high voltage or DC – direct current – transmission, and clearly there is a very, very big difference. I am sure many of the government members sitting opposite will be completely unaware of the difference between HV or DC distribution, because they have a very, very big cost difference but they also have a marked difference on the environment and the way they are shared.

The concern in this legislation for the people of Polwarth is the fact that we are giving a relatively new authority, the Great Ocean Road Coast and Parks Authority (GORCAPA), extra permission to grant permits to allow the cabling that is going to be required. That is going to allow it to come onshore, so they have now clarified that the Great Ocean Road Coast and Parks Authority will enable the trenches. They will be the ones issuing the permits that enable the trenches that will need to be dug from 3 kilometres offshore all the way inland. Along the Great Ocean Road's coast and parks, of course, most of the land that you are going to have to cross is either inside the national park, near townships or a long, long way from the nearest distribution line. For example, anywhere along the Great Ocean Road to the nearest transmission point that an offshore wind farm can connect into will be somewhere between a 70-kilometre and a 150-kilometre drive. That is through the Otway Ranges – so the Otway Forest – it is through the Heytesbury farming district and it is through the backblocks of Torquay, Jan Juc, across from Winchelsea and that quite heavily populated rural community.

So the question that this bill does not really facilitate – it does not give a pathway or a direction to what that would actually mean. If the government continues with its desire to have high-voltage AC distribution lines, we are talking needing trenches 50 metres wide and some many, many metres deep that have to be backfilled with sand, concrete and all sorts of materials that would have to travail from 3 kilometres out at sea to right across our pristine landscapes in the Otway Ranges, the Heytesbury farming area and other areas. This government has not made it clear how that will work.

Now, there are alternatives to the trenches once the electricity comes onshore from Bass Strait and out at sea, and they would require the building of a large interconnector that would be essentially like a giant power board that the transmission lines from out at sea would connect into, and then it could be above ground. The government has a propensity to support above-ground transmission distribution, which might be cheaper on one hand but has huge environmental consequences as well. So the question that this government need to clarify for the community when they talk about this is: with that offshore electricity that GORCAPA is going to approve the transmission lines for, where is that going to connect in, and where is that infrastructure going to go? Because about a \$500 million industrial structure will need to be built somewhere close to the shoreline for the powerlines to connect into, and then there can be further distribution across, most probably, to the Portland interconnector, which is some 50 kilometres north of Colac, running east to west across the landscape there. It is a huge amount of extra infrastructure and facilities that will need to be taken into account, and the community will quite rightly ask questions: how will that come onshore, what will it look like and what other cost burdens will the community have to bear? Unfortunately, with the changes that this government has made in just the last couple of weeks, the communities that will be potentially affected by these decisions will not be able to go to VCAT to lodge complaints and protest about it or to raise their concerns. In fact they will be basically ignored, and this will be essentially a *fait accompli*.

What we also know about this legislation is that it essentially allows for offshore wind speculators. We have seen the effect of onshore speculators over the last 20 years now in Victoria. They are essentially people that are not going to be the builders or owners of the infrastructure but rather are investors who go about trying to get the permits in place. These people do not necessarily have an incentive for the project to go ahead, but they can cause great angst and anxiety in communities as they undergo the investigation. Sometimes, with all the effort, concern and heartache that communities can go through – I have certainly seen that in my own community recently, with, say, the Mumblin wind farm, which has consumed a lot of time, effort and energy of the local community, and at this stage it looks like that project, for example, will not go ahead.

But this legislation is all about the government racing to try and figure out how it is going to replace the massive input into our energy system from existing infrastructure and methods, such as the Latrobe Valley's coal plants. But this legislation also does not make mention of or refer to the extra shoring up and firming up of electrical supply that we will need in the state of Victoria. The Australian Energy Market Operator, the national regulator of electricity demand and supply and planning, points out that if we get to the figure of 95 per cent, we are also going to need to move our reliance on gas from around 2 per cent to about 23 per cent. That is because, despite previous government speakers talking about powering 1.5 million homes, anyone who knows anything about a wind farm knows that it is actually not powering the 1.5 million homes all day, every day like traditional energy generators may. It in fact peaks, ebbs and flows – peaks and wallows. It goes up and down, and the gaps have to be filled in. The gaps in that energy supply can only be filled in by rapid peak generators such as the Mortlake gas peaking plant, which is an essential element in the Victorian energy grid today, or through batteries, both of which we will need a lot, lot more of, and those facilities will need to be built or constructed or provided somewhere where this extra transmission infrastructure is going.

The government needs to be more transparent and honest with regional communities. We are putting legislation through today that is not only going to allow serious changes to our foreshores and our national parks along the Great Ocean Road, it is also going to necessitate the building and construction of much more and much larger infrastructure that does not currently exist anywhere along that road

network or across those communities. So I think it is reasonable as the member for Polwarth that I would be raising this with the government and seeking their feedback on how they plan to manage that, because these are obvious questions the community will have.

Existing legislation such as the Marine and Coastal Act 2018 of course influences how we prune trees and how we look after the environment immediately around our surf clubs – it goes into that much fine detail – and to think that massive trenches and pieces of infrastructure will be able to go across the same parcels of land without that same community input and feedback should be a worry to local communities and a concern.

Paul HAMER (Box Hill) (12:16): I also rise to talk about the Energy and Public Land Legislation Amendment (Enabling Offshore Wind Energy) Bill 2024. It is a really important bill because the government has set targets for renewable energy across a number of different energy sources but particularly in offshore wind power – 2 gigawatts by 2032, 4 gigawatts by 2035 and 9 gigawatts by 2040. This is a really important bill on the pathway to achieving those targets because we need the policy and the regulatory reform to support any changes to that industry.

Our energy future in Victoria does stand at a crossroads, and I think this bill demonstrates that the Allan Labor government are fully committed to expanding the renewables mix in Victoria – wind, solar, renewable hydrogen – and then going down to community batteries as well. We have already achieved so much, and the transition can be seen all around us. We have got nation-leading renewable and energy storage targets and our renewable energy target of 25 per cent by 2020 has been met. Obviously, we have got quite ambitious targets for 2030 and 2035, but we are determined to meet those targets because we know the energy requirements of the state but also the environmental impacts that necessitate taking this action.

I just want to reflect a little bit on what has been debated today. There seems to have been a lot of criticism of offshore wind energy, particularly in terms of the source from which this offshore energy generation will be occurring. Obviously by its very nature and by its very wording offshore energy is sourced from offshore, which means that there is only part of the state where this can be generated. I know the member for Gippsland South was trying to promote the idea that maybe it should be set up in Port Phillip Bay, but the reality is that the resource does not exist in Port Phillip Bay. The resource exists through Bass Strait because –

Wayne Farnham interjected.

Paul HAMER: Exactly right, member for Narracan. That is where the wind is. I mean, you have got the roaring forties, which do not hit a single parcel of land from South America all the way through to Bass Strait, roaring through Bass Strait and providing a generally very reliable energy source.

Offshore wind generation is not a new technology. It has been used in many other parts of the world, and it is well established. Putting it in Victoria makes a lot of sense, and Victoria is well placed in terms of where its existing energy generation is located and its transmission is located to actually take real advantage of this resource. That is not a resource that we can simply locate in my electorate of Box Hill or along Port Phillip Bay. Regardless of what residents along the bay might think of having an offshore generator tower, you simply have to put it where the resource is. In exactly the same way, when we set up the original SEC and when we originally set up coal-fired power stations, they were not located in Melbourne; they were located in the Latrobe Valley, because that is where the resource is. It is the same with our gas plants.

A lot of members on the other side have also raised environmental concerns.

James Newbury interjected.

Paul HAMER: As the member for Brighton knows, that is an important concern that is also considered by the Allan Labor government. In any consideration of these assessments, we will always look to balance environmental impact for generating the new energy resource. But if you were to

believe the opposition, these environmental concerns only exist when you are looking at renewable energy facilities.

The member for South-West Coast mentioned further exploration of gas. The member for South-West Coast said that it was Liberal policy to overturn the gas ban, which indicates that they will want further exploration of gas. There were no riders or environmental concerns or anything related to further exploration of gas –

Roma Britnell interjected.

Paul HAMER: Or any of the fracking. If the member wants to talk about fracking, it is as if fracking does not have any environmental impacts whatsoever. Then you have got the federal coalition, who are talking about a nuclear energy revival, and again there is not a single discussion about what the environmental impacts are of having a nuclear energy industry. It is all very well to say that this is our energy future and we going to be pushing all of this energy mix, but you cannot just say, ‘Look at the renewable energy generating plants,’ and then say, ‘Well, no, we can’t do that because this has got an environmental impact,’ and then ignore all of the environmental impacts that are going to come with further gas exploration and nuclear energy and further coal plants probably as well. I am sure that that would be on the agenda for the coalition as well.

The member for Polwarth was also talking about speculators and how we should be banning speculators from the renewable energy industry and the offshore wind industry. This is how a lot of the mining industry works as well. If it is for coal or oil or gas, a lot of that starts as speculators looking for product to see if there is a large enough resource for them to then sell that licence to a larger producer who can actually then generate it. I really feel that it is disingenuous for the coalition to be arguing that it is only these renewable energy sources that somehow have these environmental and economic and financial problems yet somehow the non-renewable sources are just plain sailing and there are no impacts whatsoever on their communities at all or on the broader community.

We do need to be looking at our energy mix, and we do need to be transitioning to a renewable future. The legislation that is proposed under this amendment and the regulatory changes that will occur as a result of it will certainly put the steps in place that will enable more studies to be done and more assessments to be done of how we are actually going to deliver this renewable energy in the future. It is a critical component of our future mix, offshore wind. We will be able to provide incomparable levels of generation capacity with the resource that is available. Victoria is a leader in offshore wind, and it should remain that way because of the natural resource that we have. We do not have some of the other resources that some of the other states have, but we do have offshore wind and a reliable area where there will always be no land – between South America and Bass Strait. So I commend the bill to the house.

John PESUTTO (Hawthorn – Leader of the Opposition) (12:26): I move:

That debate be adjourned.

I move that debate be adjourned to discuss one of the most damning independent reports we have seen tabled in this Parliament in years. We all knew for many months that the government were struggling to deliver the Commonwealth Games, and when they finally got mugged by reality and realised they could not deliver them for that pathetic lie of a \$2.6 billion envelope, we called on Victoria’s Auditor-General. Yes, it was my colleagues and I on this side of the house that not only worked to establish an inquiry in the other place, which has produced some very revealing facts about the biggest debacle in Victorian sport and a big debacle that has hurt our state’s reputation, we also asked Victoria’s Auditor-General, one of the independent integrity agencies in this state, to look into this debacle. They have looked into this debacle, and we now know things that this government tried to hide from the Victorian people. Let me tell you what the biggest lie was. On 20 April –

The DEPUTY SPEAKER: Order! The Leader of the Opposition knows that term is unparliamentary. I ask you not to repeat it.

John PESUTTO: The biggest con was that on 20 April 2023 cabinet met and secretly decided to increase the funding envelope for the Commonwealth Games from \$2.6 billion to \$3.6 billion. Now, for those who do not recall, the figure of \$2.6 billion was a line item in the 2022–23 budget, but, guess what, when cabinet secretly met and lifted that funding envelope by \$1 billion – which may not mean a lot to people who are experts in spending other people’s money – they hid that figure. They hid the blowout in general contingencies. Why did they do that? Because they did not want the Victorian people to know about this lie, to know about the blowout and to know that the now Premier, Premier Allan, could not confidently manage the Commonwealth Games.

And then do you know what else happened? In this chamber on 16 May 2023, when my good friend the member for Nepean asked the Premier about the funding for the Commonwealth Games, the Premier affirmed the figure of \$2.6 billion – a serious breach of the standing orders of this house.

Colin Brooks: On a point of order, Deputy Speaker, as members well know, a procedural motion it is not an opportunity to debate the substance of the matter that the Leader of the Opposition wants to debate. This is a procedural motion, and he should come back to the adjournment motion that he has put forward.

John PESUTTO: On the point of order, Deputy Speaker, the reason why this matter is so urgent is that, as everybody in this house now knows, we are not opposing the enabling offshore wind energy bill. We are not opposing. There have been a number of speakers and there will be more. But this is an urgent matter. It is urgent because the Auditor-General –

The DEPUTY SPEAKER: I am overruling the point of order. The ruling, as the minister said, is correct, and I uphold the point of order. The procedural matter you are putting forward is on the urgency of the debate, not the debate, and if the Leader of the Opposition could come to that, I would appreciate it.

John PESUTTO: Excellent. Thank you, Deputy Speaker. This matter is urgent because the Victorian people need to know that they can believe their Premier. They need to know that they can trust and rely on their Premier and the government she is supposed to lead.

Colin Brooks: On a point of order, Deputy Speaker, the member is now reflecting on a member of this house. He knows he should not do that.

The DEPUTY SPEAKER: That is a matter for debate, Minister.

John PESUTTO: Make no mistake, we have never seen such a damning report from an independent integrity agency into any political leader in this state. I have never seen a report like it. You cannot avoid the conclusion; the conclusions are irrefutable. The dates stand as unmistakable evidence of deceit, of hiding important facts. Imagine covering up for a blowout of a billion dollars, and instead of updating the line item that had existed in the last financial year’s budget, actually burying it in contingencies, thinking we are never going to find out.

Colin Brooks: On a point of order, Deputy Speaker, the Leader of the Opposition is defying your earlier ruling.

The DEPUTY SPEAKER: The member’s time has expired.

Iwan WALTERS (Greenvale) (12:32): I would like to say it is a pleasure to rise to speak on this procedural debate, but it really is a deep disappointment to not be continuing to speak on the government business program.

Members interjecting.

The DEPUTY SPEAKER: Order! The member for Greenvale is entitled to be heard.

Iwan WALTERS: Deputy Speaker, I do note that there was a lot more volume when I was speaking than when the for-now opposition leader was speaking and making his contribution. The

Leader of the Opposition, who I am glad referenced his good friend at the table the member for Nepean – the Borg and McEnroe of Victorian politics –

James Newbury: On a point of order, Deputy Speaker, on relevance, this is a procedural debate. I understand that the government has refused to let any ministers defend this motion, but the backbench member should know better than the way he is debating this motion.

The DEPUTY SPEAKER: I encourage all members to adhere to the previous ruling that this is on the urgency of the debate or lack thereof. I ask the member to come back to the procedural motion, without assistance. Members are warned.

Iwan WALTERS: The urgency of the debate and the merits of the Leader of the Opposition are not strengthened by his shouting and the carry-on of the members behind him now. This is not an appropriate use of the Parliament's time. We have an important government business program that we have been discussing, which was agreed to yesterday. The residents in Greenvale care deeply about sport. They care about the \$10.5 million cricket facility that is being built in Greenvale at the moment by this government. They care about the new changing rooms that are being built at Roxburgh Park football and cricket clubs by this government. In all of the conversations I have with members of my community on the doors, at railway stations and at street stalls, they talk to me about the things that matter: the cost-of-living measures that this government has been bringing in, energy and housing, improving the conditions that renters have in Victoria – which are the issues that are on the government business program this week. The Leader of the Opposition continues to shout, continues to carry on, continues to be completely disconnected from those behind him. His points are not rendered any stronger by shouting.

James Newbury: On a point of order, Deputy Speaker, it is not appropriate or relevant for the member to be reflecting on the Auditor-General and the report they have provided.

The DEPUTY SPEAKER: There is no point of order.

Iwan WALTERS: The procedural motion is seeking to interrupt the government business program, which has two important bills – one of which is being debated – relating to energy in this place and the distribution and the generation of renewable energy that we have heard about in the Bass Strait, ensuring that that energy can get onshore and be distributed around the state through an upgraded transmission network that is regulated properly and that has a legal framework to ensure that the transition that is underway in Victoria can be managed as efficiently and as effectively as possible. Also, as I said, we are going to be talking about housing and the rights of renters, ensuring that the tenure and the dignity and the security of renters in Victoria are protected. That is what the residents of Greenvale that I speak to regarding the issues that matter to them want to see debated in this place. That is why it is I think an egregious shame that every week we have these attempts to railroad the government business program, to cut across the important issues that residents in my constituency tell me they want to see debated and actioned in this place: housing, energy, education, projects like the \$22.38 million stage 2 development of Greenvale Secondary College –

Members interjecting.

The DEPUTY SPEAKER: The member for South Barwon is warned.

Iwan WALTERS: and the \$10.5 million upgrade of Bethal Primary School. These are the issues which are central to residents in my community. And the Leader of the Opposition is regularly in my community. It is very interesting that he is not spending more time in his and tending to his own backbench and the relationships he has with his own party room.

Members interjecting.

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

Member for South Barwon withdrew from chamber.

Iwan WALTERS: It is always lovely to see him, in a way that I suspect his colleagues do not quite welcome. I oppose this motion, and I want to see us get back to the issues that matter.

Sam GROTH (Nepean) (12:37): It is my pleasure to rise to support the motion to adjourn the debate by the Leader of the Opposition, because it is a dark day for Victoria when the Premier of this state can mislead the people of Victoria. The Commonwealth Games was a clear hoax to deliver votes in regional Victoria by the previous government, and Premier Allan was a part of every part of that process. The Victorian people deserve to know and deserve to have that debated in this chamber so that it is made clear –

Mary-Anne Thomas: On a point of order, Deputy Speaker, as you have already ruled, this is a narrow procedural debate. As yet the member on his feet has not mentioned the procedural debate, so I ask you to bring him back to making the case –

The DEPUTY SPEAKER: I encourage the member for Nepean to debate the urgency of the matter on the procedural motion.

Sam GROTH: An hour ago the Premier faced the press, and when asked about who should be held accountable for what is in this report, she said no-one should be held accountable because those responsible are already gone. The Premier was the minister in charge of Commonwealth Games delivery.

Mary-Anne Thomas: On a point of order, Deputy Speaker, the member is obviously unable to abide by your ruling, so I ask you make it very clear that he is to speak to the procedural motion.

Sam GROTH: On the point of order, Deputy Speaker, I think if we are going to move to adjourn the debate, it is important to note why we are moving to adjourn it. We cannot just adjourn debate without putting forward the argument as to why we are doing so.

The DEPUTY SPEAKER: If you can bring it to why it is important, then I will understand.

Sam GROTH: It is important that we move to adjourn the debate because, as the Leader of the Opposition stated, in the 2022–23 budget there was a line item for the Commonwealth Games of \$2.6 billion. I note the Minister for Tourism, Sport and Major Events is across the table right now. He sat in on the cabinet meeting, and I note he has not got to his feet yet. He sat in on the cabinet meeting that on 20 April approved an extra billion dollars to fund the Commonwealth Games, which was never going to go ahead, based on what we read. He sat in that meeting to approve an extra billion dollars, which was then hidden in general contingency in last year's budget. The Premier herself stood in this chamber –

Steve Dimopoulos: On a point of order, Deputy Speaker, the member on his feet shows a complete lack of understanding of budgetary processes. Contingencies are pretty normal across all of government, and it is a poor excuse. May they never hold public office or executive office. They have got no idea about how budgets work.

The DEPUTY SPEAKER: There is no point of order. The member for Nepean to resume on the procedural motion.

Sam GROTH: It is important we note these matters so we know why we are going to adjourn the debate and why this motion has been moved. On 14 July, four days before the Commonwealth Games was cancelled, the Premier put to cabinet, to this government, a submission asking for \$4.2 billion. Four days before the Premier came out and announced –

Paul Edbrooke: On a point of order, Deputy Speaker, as a fellow national medal winner, I see where the member is coming from, but this is a narrow procedural debate and the member is defying your ruling.

The DEPUTY SPEAKER: The member for Nepean to continue.

Sam GROTH: \$4.2 billion the now Premier put to cabinet, and the then Premier Daniel Andrews came out four days later and that cost had gone from \$4.2 billion to over \$7 billion in four days. How can this government, as incompetent as they are, find a \$3 billion blowout in four days?

Steve Dimopoulos: On a point of order, Deputy Speaker, there is somewhere in the standing orders where occupational health and safety matters. I am going slowly deaf listening to the high-pitched voice of the member for Nepean, because he has no basis in reality and therefore he raises his voice –

Members interjecting.

The DEPUTY SPEAKER: That is not a point of order. The member's time has expired. Before I call the next member, if I cannot hear points of order, it is going to take a lot longer.

Lauren KATHAGE (Yan Yean) (12:42): The sound and the fury, the noise obscuring the lack of substance – because all this is is a stunt, and it is a distraction. What could they possibly be looking to distract us from? What could it be? Could it be their leadership troubles? Potentially they are buying –

James Newbury: On a point of order, Deputy Speaker, this is a tight procedural debate, and I am very concerned about the ongoing reflections on the Auditor-General by the government.

The DEPUTY SPEAKER: It is a tight procedural debate and I encourage the member to debate the procedural motion, not other things.

Lauren KATHAGE: We are a party that has got a massive agenda to get through, and they are trying to stop us, distract us and slow us down. They are wanting to distract from their own problems, they are wanting to stop us moving forward with improving renters rights. Do you know why I know that? Yesterday in this house we heard from the member for South-West Coast how troubled she was by the improvements for renters that we made in our 2018 changes for renters. She was troubled.

James Newbury: On a point of order, Deputy Speaker, on relevance.

The DEPUTY SPEAKER: Back to the procedural motion, member for Yan Yean.

Lauren KATHAGE: The reason I oppose this is because we are working to improve renters rights and they are worried and are trying to distract us from that, from continuing with our program for the day. We heard from the member for South-West Coast why: basically anything to stop renewables. Perhaps they need more time. They are looking for time, maybe to read all the reports that tell us that nuclear does not make sense for Australia. Maybe they need time to run a fundraiser for their leader. Maybe the member for Nepean needs time to go and get his suits measured –

James Newbury: On a point of order, Deputy Speaker, the member is defying your ruling.

The DEPUTY SPEAKER: The member for Yan Yean to continue on the procedural motion in front of us.

Lauren KATHAGE: Thank you for your guidance, Deputy Speaker. We have a lot to get through this week, and we want to continue to deliver renewable energy for our communities. We want to make this renewable energy change because we know that offshore wind is going to be a powerhouse of our future electricity grid, and we know that, with our targets, offshore wind will be an important component of that. We want to talk about that. We want to pass the legislation that will enable that, because we know that renewable energy will produce cheaper power, and that is why it is urgent – because our communities want cheaper power bills, and that is what we are delivering. We are delivering it now. We saw the Victorian default offer is already cheaper for families from July. We are delivering cheaper energy through making a renewable energy system, and we know that those –

Sam Groth: On a point of order, Deputy Speaker, I am sure the \$600 million the government wasted on cancelling the Commonwealth Games could have got a long way to helping Victorians with the cost of living.

The DEPUTY SPEAKER: There is no point of order. Frivolous points of order are not only annoying but against the standing orders.

Lauren KATHAGE: I am offended on behalf of my constituents that he would make light of the difficulties that people have with their power bills. This is a real concern for our communities, and that is why we are acting to improve that for them. We know the proof is in the pudding with the Victorian default offer information that came out this week. They are running scared because they know that what we are doing works, that what we are doing is popular and that what –

James Newbury: On a point of order, Deputy Speaker, on relevance – ‘running scared’? The government has not sent out a frontbencher to –

The DEPUTY SPEAKER: The member to continue.

Lauren KATHAGE: I thank the member for Brighton for his confidence in me as a backbencher. I am sure that the frontbenchers are proud to have behind them an amazing team, always willing to speak for the government.

David SOUTHWICK (Caulfield) (12:47): I rise to support the Leader of the Opposition’s call to adjourn the government business program and talk about something that is more important than anything else at the moment, and that is waste and mismanagement. We have a cost-of-living crisis. Victorians cannot afford to put food on the table at the moment, and we have a government that has wasted money. In a report today \$1 billion has completely gone – vanished. Where has it gone? We need to understand today: where is that \$1 billion? Where is that \$1 billion of taxpayers money? We heard the Premier today say that there is nothing more to see in this report.

Pauline Richards: On a point of order, Deputy Speaker, this is a tight procedural debate. I would ask you to bring the member back to the procedural debate in front of us.

The DEPUTY SPEAKER: The member to continue. He was on the procedural debate.

David SOUTHWICK: As I was saying, the Premier has come out today and said there is nothing to see in this report, a report that is so important that we need to discuss it today. The Premier has said everything has been accounted for. We know that the Premier was up to her eyeballs in this debt – the Premier, who was responsible for the Commonwealth Games and who led the hoax for votes in the lead-up to the Commonwealth Games. We know how important it is to get to the bottom of this, because Victorians are suffering at the moment. That is why we need to bring on this debate today. That is why it is so important for the Premier to face the music and tell us how involved she was, where the \$1 billion is that is still missing in action and why \$600 million was also –

Juliana Addison: On a point of order, Deputy Speaker, it is a very narrow procedural debate. If the member could be instructed –

Members interjecting.

The DEPUTY SPEAKER: Order! Members on my left, if they wish to hear the member for Caulfield, will stop interjecting. The member for Caulfield to continue on the procedural motion, which he was on.

David SOUTHWICK: As I was saying, there is no more appropriate time than now to debate what the Victorian Auditor-General has put in front of us right this very minute. He has put into our hands a whole lot of questions that this government need to answer now. How involved was the Premier? Where is the \$1 billion – gone, finished.

Pauline Richards: On a point of order, Deputy Speaker, he is defying your ruling. I ask you to bring him back to the procedural debate.

The DEPUTY SPEAKER: Member for Cranbourne, frivolous points of order are out of order. The member was on the procedural motion and will continue. I counsel other members, wherever you are: if you are going to make a point of order, make it useful.

David SOUTHWICK: It is clear that the government cannot handle the truth. They are trying to cover up what is already one of the biggest cover-ups that we have seen. This is a massive cover-up. This is a hoax on the 2022 election. Quite frankly, we should have a re-election based on this. A whole lot of people went to the election in regional Victoria, including in Bendigo, the Premier's seat, to be able to talk and vote on this – a Commonwealth Games that was never going to be delivered. And we know about the blowouts, which have already been spoken about in here. This report talks about the fact that even the \$6.9 billion cost that caused the cancellation of the games was overinflated. We know in a cost-of-living crisis we need to debate this now. That is why we need –

Juliana Addison: On a point of order, Deputy Speaker, referencing the member for Bendigo East is not a part of this procedural debate, and I ask you to call the member on his feet –

The DEPUTY SPEAKER: It is not a point of order; it is a matter of debate.

David SOUTHWICK: We know the Deputy Premier is up to her eyeballs in all of this. She should be the one that has questions to answer about how involved she was. Where is the waste, where is the mismanagement? Where is the minister? We know today not one of the frontbench have come forward – not one of the frontbench. The Minister for Tourism, Sport and Major Events is sitting there hiding his head in shame.

Paul Edbrooke: On a point of order, Deputy Speaker, the member should be using proper titles. The Premier is not the Deputy Premier.

The DEPUTY SPEAKER: Under the noise, I did not hear it. You have got 9 seconds.

David SOUTHWICK: The Minister for Tourism, Sport and Major Events is gutless. He will not even defend this report that shows that they cannot handle the truth of a massive cover-up.

The DEPUTY SPEAKER: The member's time has expired. The member for Tarneit has the call.

James Newbury: On a point of order, Deputy Speaker, if I can seek your clarity, I thought I saw the minister for sport go to speak. I think you have accidentally given the call to one of the backbenchers over the minister for sport.

The DEPUTY SPEAKER: It is not a point of order. The call has been given.

Dylan WIGHT (Tarneit) (12:53): I wish I could say it was a pleasure to rise to speak on this procedural motion this afternoon.

Members interjecting.

Dylan WIGHT: I am glad to see you have all had your Weet-Bix this morning, guys. I will tell you what we do love: we love it when we come in here and we see the Leader of the Opposition a little bit animated. He gets up with his little head wobble and starts looking at the cameras. I tell you what, it would be cute if it was not so sad, mate. But at least there has been one positive to come from this procedural motion. We have seen the member for Nepean and the Leader of the Opposition work hand in glove this afternoon, and that has been absolutely fantastic.

James Newbury: On a point of order, Deputy Speaker, on relevance, I appreciate that keeping to this motion will be a challenge for this member, but I would ask you to bring him back to it.

The DEPUTY SPEAKER: What is a challenge is the Chair hearing the members on their feet. It is very hard to decide on that if I cannot hear it. The member for Tarneit to continue on the procedural motion.

Dylan WIGHT: Just to finish my thought, it is great to see them work so closely together. I will tell you what, it had Scott Morrison vibes about it, though, didn't it: 'This is my leader, and I'm ambitious for him.' Hugging with the one hand –

Sam Groth: On a point of order, Deputy Speaker, the member is defying your ruling.

Members interjecting.

The DEPUTY SPEAKER: The member for Bentleigh can leave the chamber for a quarter of an hour.

Member for Bentleigh withdrew from chamber.

The DEPUTY SPEAKER: The member for Tarneit on the procedural motion, without assistance.

Dylan WIGHT: Like I said, to get to the procedural motion, obviously we on this side of the house oppose this, because we come in here week after week after week after week to do what matters for all Victorians, and just about every single week we come in here we face a frivolous procedural motion to do nothing more than distract Victorians from the rabble that is the opposition. We are in here this week with an incredibly important government business program. In fact we were –

Sam Groth: On a point of order, Deputy Speaker, if four motions are an important, full government business program, instead of debating a billion-dollar blowout that is the Commonwealth Games and the Premier having her fingers all over it –

The DEPUTY SPEAKER: Order! The point of order is frivolous – seriously.

Dylan WIGHT: I understand it is hard for the member for Nepean to keep up every now and then, but as I was about to say, we were just in the middle of debating incredibly important legislation that is going to drive our renewable energy targets right here in Victoria, some of the most ambitious renewable energy targets anywhere in the world – 95 per cent by 2035. It is going to drive down energy prices in doing that as well. We are here to debate the matters that matter to all Victorians, not to pull cheap political stunts.

Assembly divided on John Pesutto's motion:

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

Noes (53): Juliana Addison, Jacinta Allan, Colin Brooks, Josh Bull, Anthony Carbines, Ben Carroll, Darren Cheeseman, Anthony Cianflone, Sarah Connolly, Chris Couzens, Jordan Crugnale, Lily D'Ambrosio, Daniela De Martino, Steve Dimopoulos, Paul Edbrooke, Eden Foster, Matt Fregon, Ella George, Luba Grigorovitch, Bronwyn Halfpenny, Katie Hall, Paul Hamer, Martha Haylett, Mathew Hilakari, Melissa Horne, Natalie Hutchins, Lauren Kathage, Sonya Kilkenny, Nathan Lambert, Gary Maas, Alison Marchant, Kathleen Matthews-Ward, Steve McGhie, Paul Mercurio, John Mullahy, Tim Pallas, Danny Pearson, Pauline Richards, Tim Richardson, Michaela Settle, Ros Spence, Nick Staikos, Natalie Suleyman, Meng Heang Tak, Jackson Taylor, Nina Taylor, Kat Theophanous, Mary-Anne Thomas, Emma Vulin, Iwan Walters, Dylan Wight, Gabrielle Williams, Belinda Wilson

Motion defeated.

The SPEAKER: I acknowledge in the gallery the former member for Lowan and minister the Honourable Hugh Delahunty.

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

The SPEAKER: I acknowledge in the gallery former Speaker the Honourable Judy Maddigan, former Speaker the Honourable Alex Andrianopoulos and former minister and member for Bundoora and Greensborough the Honourable Sherryl Garbutt.

Members

Minister for Prevention of Family Violence

Absence

Jacinta ALLAN (Bendigo East – Premier) (14:02): I rise to inform the house that for the purposes of question time today the Minister for Jobs and Industry will answer questions for the portfolio of employment and the Minister for Agriculture will answer questions for the portfolio of prevention of family violence.

Questions without notice and ministers statements

Commonwealth Games

John PESUTTO (Hawthorn – Leader of the Opposition) (14:02): My question is to the Premier. The Victorian Auditor-General's report on the withdrawal from the 2026 Commonwealth Games, released today, says:

The decisions to bid for, plan and then withdraw from the Games have cost Victoria over \$589 million with no discernible benefit.

Why did the Premier waste \$589 million on a project that did not proceed?

Jacinta ALLAN (Bendigo East – Premier) (14:03): I thank the Leader of the Opposition today for his question, and I also would like to take the opportunity to thank the Auditor-General for their work. We always maintained that it was the most appropriate independent agency to look into these matters, and I thank them for the report that was tabled today. The Auditor-General's report today goes to confirming that the government made the right decision to not proceed with a 12-day sporting event that was estimated to cost more than \$6 billion and that as the costs were continuing to increase there was no benefit that was initially anticipated. So in that context I say that the Auditor-General's report does confirm that we made the right decision in making this decision to not proceed with this event, because it would have cost far, far more than the amount identified in the report to not proceed.

John PESUTTO (Hawthorn – Leader of the Opposition) (14:04): The Auditor-General found that:

This waste of taxpayer money on an event that will not happen is significant ...

Will the Premier guarantee to Victorians not to waste taxpayer money on any other project that does not proceed?

Danny Pearson: On a point of order, Speaker, the Leader of the Opposition is asking the Premier to answer a hypothetical, and I ask you to rule it out of order.

James Newbury: On the point of order, Speaker, the supplementary was not hypothetical in any way. It was directly linked to the original question, and it referred to the original question in asking about any other project – not hypothetical in any way.

The SPEAKER: I will allow the question.

Jacinta ALLAN (Bendigo East – Premier) (14:05): The Leader of the Opposition has not identified any of the projects that he is speculating on, so it does make it –

Members interjecting.

Jacinta ALLAN: But we do know when it comes to not proceeding with projects that the Leader of the Opposition wants to scrap the Suburban Rail Loop, scrap the thousands of jobs that are working

on that project and not see improved public transport services. There is only one person in this place who is all about scrapping and cutting, and that is the Leader of the Opposition.

Ministers statements: Suburban Rail Loop

Danny PEARSON (Essendon – Minister for Transport Infrastructure, Minister for the Suburban Rail Loop, Assistant Treasurer, Minister for WorkSafe and the TAC) (14:06): I rise to update the house on the progress in delivering the city-shaping Suburban Rail Loop. On this side of the house we know the Suburban Rail Loop is essential to delivering more homes in areas with access to jobs and services. Construction is underway, as the Premier just said, and the project is on the way to creating up to 8000 direct jobs and supporting up to 24,000 jobs during construction. 1260 workers are already working on this project, and by 2026 there will be more than 4000 people on the job. At Burwood, in the member for Ashwood's electorate, piling work is almost complete and excavation is ready to start on the tunnel-boring machine launch site. In Box Hill, in the member for Box Hill's electorate – there he is – tram relocation works are finished, and we are establishing a compound for main works. Not to be left out, the member for Sandringham will not have long to wait. Site establishment works are about to get underway at the site of the new Cheltenham SRL station.

When those opposite say they will cancel SRL, they are saying they will sack 4000 workers, they will cancel 24,000 jobs, they will make it harder for young people to find affordable housing and they will ignore what Victorians have voted for twice. While we focus on delivering the projects Victorians need, those opposite are hiding and counting their numbers. I will give you a tip: it is not like in tennis, you cannot go from 0 to 15 to 30; you have got to count them one by one, member for the Nepean – one by one. We are getting on and creating thousands of construction jobs. The only jobs those opposite are interested in are their own.

Commonwealth Games

John PESUTTO (Hawthorn – Leader of the Opposition) (14:08): My question is to the Premier. The Auditor-General has found that the government's \$6.9 billion cost estimate for the Commonwealth Games was 'overstated and not transparent'. Why was the Premier not transparent with Victorians?

Jacinta ALLAN (Bendigo East – Premier) (14:08): I thank today's Leader of the Opposition for his question. I point to the Auditor-General's report, and included in that Auditor-General's report is a response from the departments of Premier and Cabinet and Treasury and Finance, where they stand by the advice that they gave to the government at the time – that the upper cost limit for proceeding with the games was in that \$6.9 billion range. It was on that basis that the government made that decision that was announced on 18 July last year to not proceed with a 12-day sporting event where all the costs were going up and all the benefits that had initially been estimated were not going to be realised.

It was also at that point in time in making that decision that we had an opportunity to take the \$2 billion that had been allocated for the delivery of the games and get on with the delivery of the reason why we agreed to step in and host the games in the first place, and that was delivering more homes for regional communities and getting on and delivering sporting infrastructure. I note the minister for tourism and major events was in Gippsland just this week announcing the four sporting venues that we will be proceeding with for that local community. I note in fact that the mayor of Ballarat has made some observations:

Despite the cancellation Ballarat is set to benefit from one of the biggest investments by any government –

Members interjecting.

The SPEAKER: Order! The member for Eildon is warned.

James Newbury: On a point of order, Speaker, on relevance, the Premier is now debating the question.

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

Jacinta ALLAN: I will go back and repeat Mayor Des Hudson's quote. I think it is a bit rude to interrupt the mayor as I was part way through his quote. Des said:

Despite the cancellation Ballarat is set to benefit from one of the biggest investments by any government in our city –

David Southwick interjected.

Jacinta ALLAN: we will let Des know what you think of him –

resulting in a generational investment into sporting and transport infrastructure.

This goes to the heart of why we made the decision at the point in time that we made the decision.

Peter Walsh: On a point of order, Speaker, I would ask you to bring the Premier back to actually answering the question as to why she was not transparent with Victorians.

The SPEAKER: The Premier was being relevant to the question that was asked in relation to the Commonwealth Games.

Jacinta ALLAN: I was asked about the advice I received and the government received at the time about the costs of the games. You want to talk about transparency. The Leader of the National Party wants to talk about transparency. I will be delighted –

The SPEAKER: Members will direct their comments through the Chair.

John Pesutto: On a point of order, Speaker, on relevance, the question did not refer to advice. It was referring to the figure of \$6.9 billion, which came four days after you submitted to cabinet a figure for \$4.2 billion –

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

Jacinta ALLAN: As I was saying, my reference to the mayor of the City of Ballarat goes to the reason why we made the decision at that point in time when the costs were going up for a 12-day sporting event when we wanted to make sure we could get on and deliver the benefits which were why we agreed to step in and host the games in the first place. If the Leader of the Opposition wants to have a debate about transparency, I say absolutely, because you know what, we made the decision and told the Victorian community the very next day, unlike this mob opposite.

John PESUTTO (Hawthorn – Leader of the Opposition) (14:13): The government has been found by the independent Auditor-General to have wasted hundreds of millions of dollars to not hold the Commonwealth Games and to have misrepresented the true costs of them proceeding. Does the Premier accept the criticisms in the Auditor-General's report?

Jacinta ALLAN (Bendigo East – Premier) (14:13): As I said I think in answer to the first question from the Leader of the Opposition in question time today, I have acknowledged and thanked the Auditor-General for their report and the government has always maintained that it was the appropriate independent agency to undertake an inquiry of this type. So I have acknowledged the receipt of the report. I have acknowledged the content of the report. However, I do also point to the fact that the report validates the decision of the government to not proceed with a 12-day sporting event, because it would have cost more than \$6 billion, a position the Leader of the Opposition himself supported and agreed that he would have made the same decision if he was presented with that set of circumstances. The Auditor-General's report validates that decision that the government made and announced on 18 July last year.

Members interjecting.

The SPEAKER: Order! Member for Caulfield! Assistant Treasurer! You will both be removed from the chamber if this keeps up.

Ministers statements: health infrastructure

Mary-Anne THOMAS (Macedon – Leader of the House, Minister for Health, Minister for Health Infrastructure, Minister for Ambulance Services) (14:14): I rise to update the house on how the Allan Labor government is delivering brand new healthcare facilities for the people of Victoria. Only last week I had the great pleasure of joining the Premier at Latrobe Regional Health, where we were able to open stage 3 of the redevelopment of that hospital. You can only open stage 3 when you have done stage 1 and you have done stage 2, and wasn't it a great day to see the people of the Latrobe Valley getting the healthcare infrastructure that they need and deserve.

It was also an important day to reflect on what had previously happened at that very same hospital, a hospital that was sold by the Liberal–National parties when they were in government – what a disgrace, what shameful behaviour. Unlike those on the other side of the house, we do not cut, close or privatise health care. We get on with building and delivering the healthcare infrastructure that all Victorians need, whether it be a brand new hospital at Bendigo; whether it be substantial redevelopment down at Warrnambool, which I know the member for South-West Coast is very excited about; whether it be the more than half a billion dollars we have committed to Albury–Wodonga Health; whether it be the new hospital at Ballarat – \$595 million – or a new Shepparton emergency department. Only the Allan Labor government is investing in the resources that we need.

Members interjecting.

Mary-Anne THOMAS: The member for Geelong has reminded me of course of the significant investments that we are building at the women's and children's hospital down in Geelong. I think it is really important that the house understands that this government stands resolute in its commitment to delivering the health services that Victorians need. There is only one political party or coalition that closes and privatises hospitals, and that is the Liberal–National parties. Some things never change.

The SPEAKER: Before I call the next question, can I acknowledge also in the gallery that we have the former member for Caulfield Helen Shardey.

Commonwealth Games

Sam GROTH (Nepean) (14:17): My question is to the Premier. The Auditor-General found that on 20 April 2023 cabinet 'agreed to a revised gross budget of \$3.6 billion'. On 16 May 2023 the Premier told Parliament in question time, 'We are committed to delivering the Commonwealth Games with that \$2.6 billion.' Why did the Premier mislead Victorians?

Jacinta ALLAN (Bendigo East – Premier) (14:18): I thank tomorrow's Leader of the Opposition for his question.

Members interjecting.

The SPEAKER: Assistant Treasurer, you will have to leave the chamber for half an hour.

Assistant Treasurer withdrew from chamber.

Jacinta ALLAN: I also thank the member for Nepean for this opportunity to clarify some misinformation that he and the opposition have been providing on this matter. The question that was put to me by the member for Nepean actually misrepresents the question I was asked in this place on 16 May of last year. The member for Nepean on 16 May last year in a substantive question asked me a question about federal funding for the then Commonwealth Games that was being worked on by the government at the time following the release of the federal budget in I think the week prior. I was then asked a supplementary question that went to 'could I guarantee'. Could I guarantee that the \$2.6 billion of Victorian funding for the games was still available, and the answer I gave was yes, because it was.

It was at that point in time because the state budget was not released until 23 May. The member for Nepean asked me a question in this place; I answered that question, and I stand by that answer today.

Members interjecting.

The SPEAKER: The member for Frankston is warned.

Sam GROTH (Nepean) (14:20): On 20 April 2023 cabinet agreed to a revised gross budget of \$3.6 billion. The additional cash was hidden in general contingencies. Why did the Premier hide the \$1 billion blowout in contingencies?

Jacinta ALLAN (Bendigo East – Premier) (14:20): The member for Nepean has not fully represented what the Auditor-General has presented in his report. I will refer to page 9 of the Auditor-General's report, because he goes on to say that further advice was requested:

... from the minister by June on how the Games could be delivered in regional Victoria for that budget.

This is entirely consistent with what we have been saying since 18 July last year – that no final decisions had been made. It was –

Sam Groth: On a point of order, Speaker, page 19 of the Auditor-General's report also says:

This estimate was not shown separately in the budget papers because it formed part of a general contingency –

The SPEAKER: Order! The member for Nepean knows that that is not a point of order.

Jacinta ALLAN: Indeed there are a couple of former Treasurers sitting opposite who know that Treasury often make provision whilst further decisions are being made. This is an entirely prudent approach, and again the Auditor-General's report validates what we have been saying since 18 July last year.

Ministers statements: education funding

Ben CARROLL (Niddrie – Minister for Education, Minister for Medical Research) (14:22): I am delighted to update the house on the record investment in brand new schools happening under the Allan Labor government. Since 2015 we have built 96 schools in Victoria. To give that some context, though, 50 per cent of schools built around Australia have been built right here in Victoria, the Education State, and that is not including the almost 2000 upgrades we have done in addition to those 96 schools. It is also not including the almost \$500 million of investment we put into education maintenance every year.

While they have been busy trying to count to 15 this week, we have been opening brand new schools. I have already opened 14 this year, and soon I will get to number 15 before any of those opposite will as well. We think education is beyond being a nice thing to do; we see it as the single most important public investment in our future. We know education changes the dial on disadvantage. We know 92 per cent of disadvantage is in public state schools. That is why we have invested \$30.8 billion in education programs since we came to office – \$30.8 billion. Let that sink in for a moment. What did they invest when they were last in office? \$1.2 billion, not over one year but over four years.

On this side of the chamber, we believe in lifelong education, beginning from birth through the Best Start, Best Life program, right through primary, right through secondary, right through rebuilding TAFE, making sure that every student, every Victorian has a pathway. While they are looking for pathways over the other side, we are making sure we are focused on the real people, school students, making sure they have the best start and the best life in the Education State.

Drug harm reduction

Sam HIBBINS (Pahran) (14:24): My question is for the Premier. Over the Labour Day weekend there were multiple serious suspected drug overdoses at festivals around the state. Today the

Queensland government announced that it will run pill testing at a festival over Easter and a fixed-site service from next month, with another planned. To quote the Queensland Labor health minister:

... we don't want people ending up in our emergency departments – or worse losing their life.

Premier, the evidence is in and the experts agree: pill testing saves lives. How much longer will Victorians, particularly young Victorians, have to wait until this government finally introduces pill testing?

Jacinta ALLAN (Bendigo East – Premier) (14:25): I thank the member for Prahran for his question. I do not think he specifically named it, but I think he was referring to the Pitch music festival, which was held on the outskirts of Ararat on the Labour Day long weekend, which was, as we all know, pretty much four days on a stretch of really hot and extreme weather that was experienced during that time. And at the outset can I also pass on my condolences, because there was a young person's life lost who attended that music festival. Given that there is a coronial inquiry underway, it would be inappropriate for me to speculate as to what the cause of death was, but I do want to acknowledge that this would have been a very distressing and difficult time for that young person and his family. Also I want to thank the emergency services and other support agencies who both supported festivalgoers on that very hot and difficult weekend and also supported them when the decision was made by the festival organisers for that event to not proceed I think sometime on the Sunday.

The member for Prahran specifically referred to a Queensland announcement today. I will say I have not seen what the Queensland government announced today, but what I can say is that we are focused on –

Danny O'Brien interjected.

Jacinta ALLAN: Are you supporting the Greens, are you? Oh, hello. Have we got a bit of a thing going?

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

Jacinta ALLAN: In terms of the policy setting in terms of alcohol and drug policy focus, we do take a harm minimisation focus. That is why, whether it is through doubling investment in drug and alcohol services or supporting people in our community, we will continue on that approach. I know the Minister for Mental Health particularly is very committed to continuing to look at ways that we can reform and improve supports to people in our community. However, as I have previously communicated publicly – and I have nothing new to change or announce today – we have no current plans to make the announcement that the member for Prahran was seeking today.

Sam HIBBINS (Prahran) (14:27): Premier, the push within the community for pill testing has been going on for the best part of a decade. It was in 2017 that there was a spate of overdoses in my electorate of Prahran. There have been numerous overdoses and deaths since. Health experts, drug and alcohol specialists, pharmacists, unions, the coroner – over 80 organisations – are all calling for the government to implement pill testing. The longer the government waits, the more hospitalisations and overdoses there will be. Why will the government not urgently introduce pill testing to help save lives?

Jacinta ALLAN (Bendigo East – Premier) (14:28): With all due respect to the member for Prahran, my answer to his supplementary question is identical to my answer to his substantive question. I have got nothing further to add.

Ministers statements: energy policy

Lily D'AMBROSIO (Mill Park – Minister for Climate Action, Minister for Energy and Resources, Minister for the State Electricity Commission) (14:29): I rise to update the house on the benefits that our nation-leading renewable energy targets are delivering for all Victorians. We have hit 39.3 per cent renewable electricity in this state already this year, up from just under 11 per cent when we first took office. We are absolutely in touching distance of our 40 per cent target by 2025. Because of this

hard work and our record investments, we have delivered the lowest wholesale prices in the country, with benefits flowing through to Victorians' power bills. Victorians on the Victorian default offer will pay \$317 less than in other states, and small businesses will pay \$1328, or 27.4 per cent less than in other states. We know that renewables are the cheapest way to create new, clean electricity, so the more renewable energy we can get into the system, the more benefits will flow to Victorians.

But we know that those opposite just cannot understand the numbers, and I want to be able to clear that up. You actually need to be able to count beyond 10, because here is another number that is really critical. Nuclear energy is five times more expensive – 500 per cent more expensive – and it is Victorians who will pick up the bill. We know that renewables are the cheapest form of energy that you can build. The Leader of the Opposition wants to be Progressive Pesutto in Hawthorn and Plutonium Pesutto on Spring Street, but on this side of the house we say the same thing, whether we are talking to people in Berwick –

James Newbury: On a point of order, Speaker, can the minister refer to people by their correct titles, please?

The SPEAKER: I uphold the point of order. The minister will refer to members by their correct titles.

Lily D'AMBROSIO: On this side of the house we say the same thing all the time, whether we are talking to people in Berwick or in Sandringham, Nepean, Polwarth or anywhere else that people have leadership in mind. We are united and focused on keeping the lights on and power bills down for every Victorian.

Land tax

Brad BATTIN (Berwick) (14:31): My question is to the Treasurer. The Fernando family purchased land in Clyde North to build their dream home, a big financial and emotional decision. The first builder they signed up with, sadly, passed away. Sometime later the Fernando family signed up with Smarthomes, and they moved into their dream home on 20 March 2019. This year Labor sent the Fernando family a land tax bill for their home, their primary place of residence. Will the Treasurer cancel the Fernandos' tax bill?

Tim PALLAS (Werribee – Treasurer, Minister for Industrial Relations, Minister for Economic Growth) (14:32): I thank the member for his question, and I make it very clear to the member that the government has a legislative framework within which the State Revenue Office undertake their responsibility. They take it seriously, and they are required to exercise it independently. With regard to Shamini Fernando's issues, I do not want to bore the Parliament by going into much detail on this particular section of the tax code and how these rules have changed over time, but the crux of the case is that Ms Fernando did not meet her tax obligations and as such is not entitled to a tax break. This is the advice that I have received from the State Revenue Office. It would be unfair to other taxpayers to waive those rules – to other taxpayers who have met their obligations – and to treat Ms Fernando in any other way.

Brad BATTIN (Berwick) (14:33): The Fernandos are here with us in Parliament today. Just last week Mrs Fernando was shopping for groceries just to live. When the bill reached \$200 she told the cashier to stop processing as she could not afford any more of the food that was on that conveyor belt. Why is the Treasurer forcing the Fernandos to choose between paying an illegal land tax bill and their family, to put food on the table?

Tim PALLAS (Werribee – Treasurer, Minister for Industrial Relations, Minister for Economic Growth) (14:34): I thank the member for his supplementary question, but I do make the point that the matter of the application of the law is ultimately the responsibility of the State Revenue Office. People do have rights of appeal and they also have rights to appear before the judicial processes in this state, and it is entirely wrong and inaccurate for the member to suggest that there has been anything other

than full compliance with the law in this respect. However, in circumstances where the Fernandos may indeed need support and assistance, I can make available the State Revenue Office to assist them in terms of a schedule of repayment of their liabilities to the state.

Ministers statements: government achievements

Jacinta ALLAN (Bendigo East – Premier) (14:35): I am very pleased to update the house on the work the government is doing to create more jobs, grow the economy and deliver all the services that Victorian communities and families rely on. In the past 12 months more Victorians have found a job here in Victoria than in any other state in the country. Unemployment is at a historic low of 3.9 per cent, and in regional Victoria it is even lower at 3.3 per cent. When Victorians head to work, they might go to work in some of our world-class hospitals, our fabulous schools – as we have heard from the Minister for Education – or our TAFEs, or they might go to work on removing level crossings or upgrading road and rail right across the state.

But beyond that bricks-and-mortar investment that supports jobs, we also see support being provided to families, whether it is through our school breakfast clubs, where thousands of students every single day are getting a healthy, nutritious start to the day, which of course supports them to get the best out of their learning over the course of that school day, or they might get support through our affordable school uniforms and glasses or our Camps, Sports and Excursions Fund, which also helps support families with some of those additional costs that come with sending your kids to school.

Of course today is World Oral Health Day. My kids have come home with their little orange toothbrushes and their orange toothpaste thanks to a visit to their school from the Smile Squad. These are the sorts of investments that we are making. It is not just in bricks and mortar but importantly too what goes on in these important public facilities that are delivering vital public services so that everyone in our community can get a good start in life.

Roma Britnell: On a point of order, Speaker, I bring to your attention four unanswered questions which ministers have been sitting on for many months, despite that I raised them with you last sitting week. Of particular importance is the question regarding Tasty Plate, which my office is receiving numerous correspondence regarding. These constituents deserve to have the minister respond as she is required to do. The questions are to the Minister for Environment, the Minister for Disability and the Minister for Health. I appreciate your assistance in ensuring ministers do their job. The four overdue, unanswered questions are 338, 413, 470 and 531.

Rulings from the Chair

Constituency questions and adjournment matters

The SPEAKER (14:38): I have reviewed yesterday's constituency questions. The member for Melton asked the minister to provide an update to his constituents on a matter. I have previously informed the house that I would rule out constituency questions that ask ministers to provide advice or to provide an update on matters, as these are technically actions. Therefore I rule the member for Melton's constituency question out of order.

Yesterday I also had a referral from the Deputy Speaker around the adjournment debate matter raised by the member for Euroa for me to consider. The member asked the minister to not cut services and staff. Therefore, the member effectively asked the minister to continue to do something. The Deputy Speaker rightly referred to Speaker Maddigan's ruling that asking a minister to continue to do something does not constitute asking them to take action and asked the member to rephrase the action she requested. The member for Euroa rephrased her request and asked the minister to provide appropriate funding, and I have ruled the rephrased request for action by the member for Euroa in order.

Constituency questions

Kew electorate

Jess WILSON (Kew) (14:39): (570) My question is to the Minister for Public and Active Transport. When will the minister commit to upgrading the dangerous state of Walmer Street bridge? In August last year I asked the Premier to release the \$200,000 scoping study and business case for upgrading the century-old Walmer Street bridge in Kew, which is a vital piece of pedestrian and cyclist infrastructure connecting Kew with Abbotsford. The Premier refused to release that scoping study and business case, coming back with a typically mealymouthed response about the government's supposed commitment to delivering more cycling routes for Victorians but without any evidence to back up that claim. Since they will not release this document, perhaps they can do one better and actually commit to upgrading this piece of vital infrastructure. The existing bridge is not fit for purpose. It is not safe. It is an accident waiting to happen. The old, uneven planks are a hazard. There has also already been an incident on the bridge, which one local cyclist has written to the minister about. It is only a matter of time before a serious injury to a cyclist or pedestrian occurs on this old, narrow bridge, and I ask the minister to consider upgrading it as soon as possible.

Pakenham electorate

Emma VULIN (Pakenham) (14:40): (571) My question is for the Minister for Health. How many visits have been made by local women to the BreastScreen Victoria clinic at 20 Main Street, Pakenham, since it opened in late January 2022? The Pakenham clinic was the 44th BreastScreen Victoria clinic in the state, and it was the first Vic BreastScreen clinic in our local area. Previously, women in my electorate would have to travel some distance to access their biannual screening mammogram or wait for the mobile service to visit Pakenham. Eligible Victorians aged between 50 and 74 years of age are invited to have a free mammogram every two years as they are the most at risk of developing the disease. This service is free. No Medicare card is needed. It is centrally located with highly qualified and caring staff. It means easier access to early screening and better health outcomes for my community. This is a good example of the Allan Labor government taking a preventative approach to women's health issues.

Gippsland South electorate

Danny O'BRIEN (Gippsland South) (14:41): (572) My question is to the Minister for Roads and Road Safety, and I ask the minister to fund a solution to the intersection in Leongatha known as 'kamikaze corner'. This is a very, very dodgy intersection of the Strzelecki Highway, McCartin Street, Hughes Street and a number of different streets. It was part of the bypass originally for Bair Street in Leongatha, but it has become an absolute nightmare. It has been an issue that has been going for a long time now. I have had a significant number of signatures on petitions that I have tabled here in the Parliament, and yet now, nine years since it was first done, it continues to be an issue that people raise with me virtually daily when I am in Leongatha and surrounds. I ask the minister to provide funding to actually start to deliver a solution to this dodgy intersection.

Broadmeadows electorate

Kathleen MATTHEWS-WARD (Broadmeadows) (14:42): (573) My question is for the minister for sport, and I ask: what is the proposed time line for the delivery of the Oak Park sports field lighting project, including steps that have already been taken? Both Oak Park footy club and Oak Park Cricket Club are great local clubs and are bursting at the seams. For many years they have been advocating for competition-grade lighting. During the election I worked really hard to secure a commitment of \$650,000 from the Labor state government to install lights at JP Fawkner Reserve, and this Labor government delivers. In the budget last May funding was committed to install these lights, a huge win for the community and for local sport. The state government relies on local councils to deliver projects, and the clubs are eagerly awaiting the lights so that oval use can be extended to enable more games and training and increase participation. We were all expecting the lights to be installed by now. I would

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like to understand what steps have been taken up until now and how delivery times of state-funded projects by local councils can be improved.

Nepean electorate

Sam GROTH (Nepean) (14:43): (574) My question is to the Minister for Environment. I want to address the ongoing environmental degradation unfolding at the Portsea front beach dating back as far as 2009. Local advocacy group the Nepean Ratepayers Association believe there is fresh evidence linking unnatural erosion, wave hazard and accretion issues to the channel deepening program. The data is contained in the *Portsea Coastal Process and Groyne Feasibility Study* by Water Technology. This independent report was not commissioned by the government but supported by concerned locals. The Nepean Ratepayers Association have repeatedly requested a meeting with the minister over the last six months, including through their legal representatives. Sadly, the government has failed to organise a meeting. My question is simple: when will the minister meet with the Nepean Ratepayers Association on this critical issue?

Preston electorate

Nathan LAMBERT (Preston) (14:44): (575) My question is for the Minister for Roads and Road Safety, and my question is: what work is being undertaken nationally to develop consistent highly visible designs for bike path crossings such as those found on Cramer Street and Oakover Road in Preston? As many of us know, there is a slightly unusual situation at the moment where there is a very standard, highly visible design for pedestrian crossings, with the zebra lines and the yellow lights that we are all familiar with, but there is no equivalent for bike crossings. If you are building a bike path, you cannot use a zebra crossing because cyclists are required to dismount at a zebra crossing, but you have no well-known high-profile alternative. As is the case at Cramer Street, you just have to put a give-way sign and a raised section. We are very grateful to the minister for installing some speed bumps, which are slowing traffic down, but if we did want lights or high-visibility options, we do not have them. We appreciate any information the minister can provide on this national issue.

Richmond electorate

Gabrielle DE VIETRI (Richmond) (14:45): (576) My question is for the Minister for Housing. There are over 125,000 Victorians on the public housing waiting list right now, so can the minister please tell me why across many of our public housing towers in Richmond, Fitzroy and Collingwood at least one in every 10 apartments is empty. On one floor in a building in Richmond, six out of 10 apartments are empty, and they have been for at least eight months. I have been to all 12 of our public housing towers in my electorate, and I would estimate the vacancy rate in some of our public housing towers to be at 15 per cent. That is when the private vacancy rate is now below 1 per cent and so many people are desperate for a home. Labor's housing system is so broken that we cannot even get people into empty homes in the middle of a housing crisis. It is a disgrace.

Kororoit electorate

Luba GRIGOROVITCH (Kororoit) (14:46): (577) My question is for the Minister for Community Sport. Can the minister please tell us what stage the upgrades are at at Ian Cowie reserve? Community sport is part of the fabric of the Kororoit community, and the Ian Cowie reserve in Rockbank has served the community well for over 30 years. Every week thousands of locals participate in organised sport. The reserve is the home of the mighty Western Rams Football Sporting Club and hosts junior and senior football, netball and more, but the reserve's facilities have been in dire need of redevelopment for some time, and its clubrooms are much in need of upgrades. At the last state election, the state Labor government promised \$2 million towards redeveloping clubroom facilities at the reserve. I am looking forward to my constituents soon enjoying modern, safe and all-inclusive clubroom facilities at the reserve so that they will be able to continue – at an attractive place for people of all ages and walks of life – to come together, keep fit and enjoy themselves.

Shepparton electorate

Kim O'KEEFFE (Shepparton) (14:47): (578) My question is for the Treasurer, and the information I seek is: will the upcoming May budget include sufficient funding to repair the road network across my electorate of Shepparton? My office has been inundated with constituents from right across my electorate raising concerns at the appalling and unsafe condition of our roads. The state of our roads has been deteriorating dramatically, with successive cuts to the road maintenance budget totalling 45 per cent since 2020. Dodging dangerous potholes, broken road and uneven road surfaces continues to be a dangerous daily hazard. The ability to efficiently get produce transported from my region is being hampered by our second-rate country road infrastructure. The Shepparton district is a major transport hub as well as a major transport thoroughfare. Rather than seeing repairs, the crumbling roads are subjected to speed limit reductions or warnings. Vehicles are getting damaged and costing transport businesses thousands of dollars a month as well as leaving constituents with out-of-pocket expenses that they cannot afford during a cost-of-living crisis. I have never seen the roads in such a state of disrepair.

Ripon electorate

Martha HAYLETT (Ripon) (14:48): (579) My question is for the Minister for Environment. Minister, when will work begin by Parks Victoria and other agencies to rebuild the much-loved camping facilities and critical tourism infrastructure in the Mount Buangor State Park? The surrounding communities were devastated by the recent Bayindeen bushfires in my electorate. The fires caused the loss of three camp sites, seven toilet blocks, two shelter huts, multiple picnic tables and fireplaces, signage, fencing, lookout areas and more. Eight walking tracks stretching across 40 kilometres have also been lost, with bridges, boardwalks and handrails badly impacted. Having camped in this beautiful state park with my family last Easter holidays, I know how special it is. Our community is eager to see recovery works begin swiftly so that locals and tourists can enjoy our region again. I look forward to providing them with the minister's response.

Bills**Energy and Public Land Legislation Amendment (Enabling Offshore Wind Energy) Bill 2024***Second reading***Debate resumed.**

Dylan WIGHT (Tarneit) (14:49): It gives me great pleasure this afternoon to rise to speak on the Energy and Public Land Legislation Amendment (Enabling Offshore Wind Energy) Bill 2024. Those on this side of the house understand how pivotal offshore wind is going to be for Victoria's energy make-up going forward. Those on this side of the house understand how important it is to move to a clean energy future, and those on this side of the house understand how important it is to drive down energy prices. Offshore wind has perhaps the greatest capacity to generate renewable energy of all of the different sources that will be available to us here in Victoria, so it is incredibly important to get the policy settings right to be able to continue that really important work.

I know it seems like a lifetime ago now – before lunch and before debating a procedural motion – that we were debating this bill last, but I just want to pick up on a couple of points from some contributions by those opposite. The member for South-West Coast spoke at length about issues with a potential offshore wind project down in her seat, just off the town of Portland. It struck me as incredibly interesting. She spoke in opposition to that project just one day after she quite rightly made a contribution in this place and spoke of the fantastic work of a former member for Portland in bringing in and helping establish the Portland smelter. She spoke about it because it was so important at that time, in the late 1980s, to broaden western Victoria's and indeed Portland's industrial base. Borthwicks meatworks had just closed. There were people out of work. The smelter was able to come in and create a whole bunch of new skills in that town, and indeed that aluminium smelter has sustained so many families over the last 30 years. Then just one day later she walked into this place and vehemently

argued against once again broadening that industrial base there in Portland. The cold, hard fact of the matter is that not only are these offshore wind projects great for people's energy bills and great for transitioning to a renewable energy future but they are also fantastic for jobs. They create tens of thousands of jobs, and indeed they create a whole new industrial base in the areas that they are constructed in. Just as the aluminium smelter was so important to broaden that industrial base in Portland in the late 1980s, a potential offshore wind project there would be equally important to once again broaden that industrial base and bring brand new skills into a town that absolutely needs them.

I also chuckled a little bit at the fact that the member for Polwarth was speaking about his opposition to offshore wind for a whole bunch of reasons. I will just say I wonder how the member for Polwarth's constituency there in Anglesea feels about a nuclear reactor in Anglesea, which has been spoken about at length by the federal Liberal leader Peter Dutton. Frankly, I have not heard the member for Polwarth, or anyone else from the Victorian Liberal Party, come out and say it is a bad idea. Whilst you may think that people in your constituency are not too stoked about offshore wind and wind power in general, I tell you what, they are not going to like a nuclear reactor down there in Anglesea either.

A member: My mum's furious.

Dylan WIGHT: Of course she is – everybody is. Those on this side of the house, as I said, understand that the integration of offshore wind is going to be an absolutely pivotal step for ensuring a sustainable and robust energy mix. Like I said, it is great for a renewable energy target, great for power bills and also great for jobs. The move is not merely a supplementary option but a crucial necessity as coal-fired power stations, once the backbone of electricity generation in this state, are ageing and nearing the end of their operational lives. Indeed we see that those private companies that operate those coal-fired power stations – and not to get into it, but we know why they are private companies instead of the SEC – have made their own minds up, and those coal-fired power stations will be coming to an end in the decades to come. It is complex and the legislation and the policy framework around it is complex, but frankly we need to get as much cheap renewable energy into the system in the decades to come as we possibly can to make sure that Victorians' power bills continue to come down. With these stations signalling their closure, like I said, it is incredibly important for us to escalate our renewable energy sources to maintain power supply, achieve energy and climate objectives and transition towards a more environmentally friendly landscape.

Offshore wind, as I said, offers unparalleled generation capacity, propelling us towards our goal of achieving 95 per cent renewables by 2035. Offshore wind energy stands out for its massive potential to generate electricity, significantly outpacing the capabilities of onshore renewable sources. Offshore wind is by far the greatest generating tool or generating type of renewable energy that we are going to have available to us here in Victoria. Victoria is leading Australia's charge into this venture and has cultivated substantial investment interest, setting ambitious targets that underscore its commitment to renewable energy. The state's pioneering efforts are marked by plans to construct its first offshore wind farm, aiming for an impressive capacity of at least 2 gigawatts by 2032, with further expansion to 4 gigawatts by 2035 and 9 gigawatts by 2040. The initial project is expected to power about 1.5 million homes, highlighting the significant impact offshore wind can have on the energy mix and on reducing our reliance on fossil fuels.

Indeed it is also bringing power prices down at the same time. On that point, everyone would have noticed and read the news about Victoria's default offer, the VDO, and the fact that it has come down by 7 per cent this week. The reason for that is simple: the more renewable energy we get into the grid and the more renewable energy we get into the mix of our power supply, the more the prices will come down, and that is exactly what has happened this week. We now have 38.5 per cent of our energy being created from renewable sources. What that means is that Victorian households are saving money. They are saving money on their bills every single year. It also means that Victorian small businesses are saving money as well, which is fantastic. But it is also great because it means, as I have said in this place previously, that Victoria is becoming the greatest place in Australia for businesses to invest. There is absolutely no doubt about that – I have said it before – and the reason for that is that

we are so ambitious with our renewable energy targets that we will continue to drive power prices down.

With over 30 projects expressing interest since the announcement of our targets, the state has attracted global investors looking for long-term commitments. This burgeoning interest is supported by the establishment of two prime zones of development in Gippsland and the Great Southern Ocean, making Victoria a hub for offshore wind development. Additionally, the state's strategy includes comprehensive implementation statements that update stakeholders on progress, outline time lines for competitive auction processes and project the creation of thousands of jobs, further cementing Victoria's role as a key player in the global transition to renewable energy.

As I said at the beginning of my contribution, this policy is obviously a fantastic environmental policy. It will drive down energy prices, and it will supercharge our transition to 95 per cent renewable energy by 2035, but it is also fantastic for jobs and local communities and our skills base as well.

Tim BULL (Gippsland East) (14:59): I rise to make a contribution on the Energy and Public Land Legislation Amendment (Enabling Offshore Wind Energy) Bill 2024. As we have heard from those who have made contributions before me, this bill is to allow offshore wind developers to obtain tenure over public land for the construction of transmission infrastructure. We are not opposed to offshore wind development being explored, but there are a number of considerations that we think need to be taken into account. I just want to head down a slightly different path to some of the areas that previous speakers have covered off on. Rather than repeating the concerns that have been raised, I want to in particular talk about some concerns that are held by the commercial and recreational fishing industries and also communities around tourism.

This bill talks about the construction of transmission infrastructure, and we are well aware that that will obviously have implications on land, but state waters exist to 3 nautical miles offshore before we then move into federal waters. So apart from land tenure responsibilities around building infrastructure and the like on land, this becomes a significant issue for both our commercial and our recreational fishing fleets. When the federal government announced the zone off the Gippsland coast for wind farm development it seemed to give very little consideration to either the commercial or recreational fishing industries or some tourist towns like Lakes Entrance. The reason that I say that is the eastern end of that zone finishes right off Lakes Entrance. They are key commercial fishing grounds, both inside the 3 nautical miles of state waters and outside into federal waters. The predicament we face here is that whilst the majority of wind farm developments are off the coast of the electorate of the member for Gippsland South, who is here, the commercial impacts are on a sector that operates out of my electorate, that being the fishing fleet out of Lakes Entrance.

Our commercial fisher men and women out of Lakes Entrance have had enormous pressure applied over recent years around loss of fishing ground. That has included obviously the development of the oil and gas fields in Bass Strait, but there have also been exclusion zones for wildlife and there have been exclusion zones because of decisions made around alleged overfishing of some species and the like. What it has resulted in is the footprint diminishing. Whilst the wind farms will have the capacity to do that again, the wind farm infrastructure where these cables will be coming ashore from the different wind farms, I am assuming, will likely have exclusion zones placed around it, because some of these fishing practices are fishing on the ocean floor.

As a nation, we are a net importer of seafood. Members will be very surprised to know an island nation like Australia imports 70 per cent of our seafood, which is just phenomenal. We import 70 per cent of it. So we need to protect our fishing industry, our sea farmers if you like, and we need to be producing more of our own seafood. To import 70 per cent for an island nation is disgraceful. We need to grow the sector, and we will not grow the sector by diminishing commercial fishing grounds in key areas. That is what this federal government wind farm zone does. The port of Lakes Entrance, which I referred to earlier, has the biggest throughput of seafood of any port in Victoria, and it has one of the biggest throughputs of seafood of any port in the nation. So we have got to be very careful in decisions

we make off the coast of Gippsland to further reduce those fishing areas, because not only are they critical to the economy of my electorate but they are critical to the state's economy and the nation's economy. It is a big industry.

Also sitting there are more threats of extended and expanded marine park areas that, again, have the possibility of excluding more fishermen from these zones. We cannot continue to put impediments in front of this sector. That is why I raise this issue – because this bill goes to land tenure, and for up to 3 nautical miles offshore, I can imagine if get wind farms being developed in Bass Strait, we will have these tentacles of cables coming in. I believe there is some talk about them linking up with the Basslink infrastructure on land in Gippsland, but we will have cables coming in from the different wind farms. And when we get inside those 3 nautical miles, that impacts our inshore trawl fishery, that impacts some of our Danish seine fisheries that operate in the state waters. It is also an issue for the federal waters, but these are the state waters. I would hope that the minister of the day or the ministers in charge of their respective portfolios are going to take this into consideration. We do not know if these cables are going to be trenched. If they are going to be trenched, come out and tell us, and the fishermen can still go over the ocean floor. But if they are not going to be trenched, it will impact on key fishing grounds.

The other option that the government might talk about is compensating fishermen: 'We're going to take some ground off you; we will compensate the fishermen for those easements that we have where this infrastructure's going to come ashore.' That is a pretty quick sugar hit for some of the existing licence-holders, but we have got to be better than that. We have got to protect our food producers both on land and on the water. To continue to take ground away and just say 'We'll compensate' is just going to drive up more imports, and that 70 per cent of imported seafood that we have will get greater and the amount that we are producing locally will continue to reduce.

I also noted, as has been discussed in this chamber before – I think the member for Gippsland South may have mentioned it in his contribution – that the government announced that it is going to fast-track a lot of these proposals, these renewables projects, through the bureaucracy system to avoid any hold-ups. Many property holders on land have expressed concerns that they are just going to be pushed to the side while decisions are made. We also need to make sure we are not only consulting with people who have landholdings; we need to be consulting with the fishing fleet, both commercial and recreational, that uses these waters within the 3-nautical-mile zone. To ignore their concerns or not to consult with them could have significant impacts on their ability to catch their quota and maintain their business viability.

The other one I want to touch on before I finish is the need to be able to consult with communities. As I mentioned, the eastern end of the federal wind zone is right off the coast of Lakes Entrance. I am assuming, Acting Speaker, like most members in this chamber, you would have been to Lakes Entrance at some time. Do you know that sight when you are driving down the Jemmys Point hill, when you are coming over the hill and you are looking out to sea you can see the entrance to the Gippsland Lakes there? You can see Bullock Island in the foreground; you have got Lake Reeve, Fraser Island and Flannagan Island. It is a people stop. There is a lookout there for very good reason. What we do not want is wind farms on the horizon. There is a lot of area of coastline where there is no development. I think of the area from about Ocean Grange right down to Manns Beach and McLoughlins Beach, down that way. There is a lot of area in between those two locations where there is no development, and in fact it is pretty marshy mosquito-infested swampland, some of it. We need to be able to make sure that we do not refuse the right of communities in tourism areas to have input into these processes.

We have got to get this right. We are only going to get one chance, and we have got to get it right that first time. So, please, I urge the government to not wave through the approvals processes without engaging with the communities, because input from the communities and people like the commercial fishing industry and the recreational fishing industry will help us get this right in the first place so that we do not end up with legal challenges and we do not end up having to revisit legislation in the

Parliament. I can understand that there is a need to streamline the process, but streamlining the process should not come at the expense of talking to those very, very important industry representative groups. I will finish my contribution by urging the government to please open the lines of communication.

Nina TAYLOR (Albert Park) (15:09): I am very pleased to speak to this bill, and I should say it is the first piece of legislation in our offshore wind program. It is simple legislation, and just in a nutshell, it will amend Victorian public land and electricity legislation to allow offshore wind projects to undertake site investigatory activities to determine the design and placement of connection infrastructure, which is obviously vital to this overall project – or multiple projects, I should say, incorporated – in getting to our very strong emission reduction targets that we have put in place for good reason, for the future of all Victorians.

Now, I did first want to tackle the issue – there have been many issues raised, and that is why we have these solid debates in the Parliament – as to why, for instance, Gippsland has been chosen. I would like to go contrary to the proposition that perhaps it is a punitive measure or otherwise, which seems to have been the general tenor or tone that has been associated with the choice of this particular location. Not so, and why? Well, we know more broadly that our state has the best offshore wind resources in the country and amongst the best in the world – so that is the overview as to why Victoria, and it is certainly a government decision that we are leading on this – but also we know that Gippsland, this area, has optimal wind resources. It is actually geography. It is science. Science is directing why when we look at the strength of those wind resources in Gippsland. That is why, for instance, Albert Park perhaps is not featured in this discussion today. It is not about ‘Oh, let’s do harm to Gippsland’ or otherwise; it is simply ‘Where are the best resources for the offshore wind project?’ It is science; that is it. So I do not know what more to say on that, except I hope that that may allay some of the concerns and perhaps the offence taken that we are pursuing offshore wind in that location. It is just common sense.

Let me tell you, in Albert Park, theoretically, if they did have the strength of wind et cetera, I am sure they would much prefer that than nukes any day of the week. This thought, this proposition as I understand it – and I am happy to have a contrary argument put forward – that Peter Dutton wants to put nukes purportedly in the Latrobe Valley I do not think is a very nice thing to do to the people down there. So if we are talking about sensitivities and the –

A member: Where are the Nationals standing up for the Latrobe Valley?

Nina TAYLOR: Exactly. What about them? What about the people down there? They have already had coal, and it seems like the opposition is quite happy to perpetuate coal down there for eons to come regardless of the impact on the environment and the atmosphere. But oh, no, we cannot have wind turbines! I mean, you never see them so animated as when we discuss renewables. It is like striking a match, and bang, off they go because their opposition is so strident to this concept. But anyway, we will lead the way in spite of their attitude to this.

There are members of the opposition who have been suggesting, ‘Where is the plan? Where is the plan? It is a mystery. We don’t know where it is.’ Well, I am happy to clarify that for the chamber, because our government actually releases implementation statements – they are on the Department of Energy, Environment and Climate Action website – every six months, and, guess what, they go into issues such as procurement and transmission. Oh, my goodness, there it is. So for the opposition: if you want to know where the plan is, have a look at the implementation statements. I heartily welcome you to look at them there, because we are not hiding this information. We actually want people to know about it. It is really important. Energy is a very, very high priority for good reason.

Another aspect that is obviously really important, because we were touching on elements of local concerns and consultation on these issues, is with regard to traditional owners. The new licence regime will provide an opportunity for the Victorian government to have an active role in guiding and coordinating the placement of connection assets. And there is a further point here: this can help

mitigate the risk to social licence and traditional owner support caused by disorderly or insensitive location of infrastructure. So rest assured that there is very prudent and diligent work that has to go into every element of this process of implementing these very strong offshore wind projects, and hence prioritising the input in terms of consultation particularly of traditional owners is certainly very important. The Victorian government's engagement with traditional owners is underpinned by self-determination, I should say as well, and the government aims to form genuine, meaningful partnerships with traditional owners by transferring power back to and being held accountable to traditional owners. This is consistent with broader work that we have in progressing towards treaty as well. I will not go into that, because we are talking about energy today. This inserts offshore wind into the existing public land licensing regime. It is not a carve-out for offshore wind and does not provide exemptions for offshore wind licences. That is a really important element of progressing these offshore wind projects.

Another key element of course which I think should be or certainly would be a priority for most Victorians, if not all Victorians, is knowing that we are certainly prioritising energy security. Further to that point, we know that offshore wind provides incomparable levels of generation capacity, far more than onshore renewables, moving us more quickly away from fossil fuels and towards 95 per cent renewables by 2035. Victoria is Australia's offshore wind leader. We have worked to build strong investment interests and will have a successful multicompetitive auction. We know that we very much need to see the realisation of these offshore wind projects. We do have an imperative to facilitate the transition and to meet those strong renewable investment targets to be able to get to net zero by 2045, and offshore wind is simply a key mechanism to be able to get to those inputs.

The first offshore wind farm will be constructed here thanks to our ambitious offshore wind targets of at least 2 gigawatts of new capacity by 2032, 4 gigawatts by 2035 and 9 gigawatts by 2040. Our first wind farm in Victoria will power 1.5 million homes. This is another point that I want to make, and I really want to drill down on this: these are the first targets of their kind in the country, and we have become a global leader in the development of offshore wind. So it is really important, because Victoria is leading on this offshore wind trajectory, that we be given the opportunity to be able to work through the appropriate mitigation elements that are encompassed in and required as part of facilitating a successful offshore wind trajectory in this state.

We do not apologise – and why should we – for fighting for our state and our state's ability to progress on offshore wind. We will fight for Victoria. We have been doing the heavy lifting in this space for some time, and that is why we are actually calling for a national approach to offshore wind that aligns environmental approvals and regulation and a national taskforce to align things that are absolutely important, like environmental approvals, regulation and planning approvals, which the Commonwealth rejected – so targets nationally that show our entire nation is serious about this, and I believe it is. We already have a *National Electric Vehicle Strategy*, a national hydrogen strategy and a national energy performance strategy under development – it is time for national leadership on offshore wind to help Australia reach our ambitious renewable energy targets. We are happy to be leading the way here in Victoria, but as I say, we make no apologies for doing that, for fighting for our state, and we would like a national approach on this as well – why not? Across the country this is the way forward. I think there is an imperative for the whole country to get those emissions down, to provide energy security into the future; it is in all our best interests.

Peter WALSH (Murray Plains) (15:19): I rise to speak on the Energy and Public Land Legislation Amendment (Enabling Offshore Wind Energy) Bill 2024. I note, listening to those who have been making a contribution, it has been a very wideranging debate about everything but the bill in most cases, particularly by the member for Albert Park. She said that she has all these documents and she has read all of these documents so carefully; she was not actually talking about the bill at all.

This bill deals with the 3 nautical miles offshore that are Victorian waters and deals with on land. It does not deal with where the wind farm is going to be built, because that is in Commonwealth waters and is a Commonwealth issue. It is the Commonwealth's decision as to what goes into Commonwealth

waters, as we saw with the issue of the Port of Hastings, where the government was going to put the port facilities to build these wind farms – it was a Commonwealth decision as to whether that went ahead or not. The Commonwealth has a lot to say about this. This legislation is about the 3 nautical miles and on land as to how wind farms actually connect with the Victorian grid. That is specifically what this legislation is about.

Nina Taylor: Offshore wind.

Peter WALSH: Yes, it says it in the title. We do not have the powers to do that. It says it in the title, but it does not actually say it anywhere in the bill. So for someone that said they have read all the papers to do with this and was quite scathing of our side of politics – perhaps they might want to go back and read those papers again and actually read what it is about.

This actually amends a number of pieces of legislation that deal with how, if there is offshore wind that Commonwealth approves to happen, it can get ashore and get into the Victorian grid. It changes the Land Act 1958, the Crown Land (Reserves) Act 1978 and the Forests Act 1958. What I find intriguing with some of these changes, particularly the changes to the Forests Act, is that the minister has the power to make those changes and must consult with the industry but not with the forestry industry about making changes. So you could find a situation where you have got Crown land that has got forest on it – and the bill also changes the National Parks Act 1975 to allow infrastructure to go onto a national park, and we know how a lot of people do not want changes to national parks and do not want infrastructure built on national parks. So I could envisage that this sets up a framework to investigate; it does not actually give the permission, but it could end up that we have an underground cable coming ashore from the Commonwealth-approved wind farms that are out in the Commonwealth waters, but once it comes ashore it comes above ground.

Now, to bring that power into the grid you are going to need a substation. This is exactly what has to happen. So once it comes ashore underground, it will go above ground – it will pop up somewhere – and there will be a giant substation. Now, we know with VNI West, the people of Ballarat North were very worried that there was going to be something like 50 hectares taken up there with a substation to manage all the renewable energy that was coming into that particular area to come through to Sydenham and supply Melbourne. So you are going to have potentially these giant wind farms offshore in Gippsland – and you have heard from the member for Gippsland East about the potential issues for the fishing industry. You are going to have these wind farms in those zones, which are approved by the Commonwealth. Power will come ashore. Under these powers there will be investigations as to where that comes ashore and what infrastructure will be built when it comes to shore, and you could find you have got a 20-, 30-, 40- or 50-hectare facility sitting in the middle of a national park to actually have this power come ashore and get into the Victorian grid. If that facility is sitting in a national park, you are going to have to have a giant powerline to then take it to wherever it connects to the Victorian grid. So you are then going to have effectively a great big scar through the middle of a national park that is going to take a powerline through it. At the moment, the government has shut down VicForests from harvesting trees. Those trees actually regrow. Every tree that VicForests harvested regrow to store more carbon, but under this, if there is a facility set up in a national park and a major transmission line built through a national park, those trees will not regrow, because that would actually be a fire hazard.

Danny O'Brien: Won't they build it around the trees?

Peter WALSH: I do not know. I am not sure what the Labor Party's coalition partners the Greens are going to think about a massive substation in the middle of a national park and a huge scar through the national park that will actually do that. Those on the other side might laugh, but if they actually read the legislation and actually understood the rules, this is what they are enabling to happen.

Nina Taylor interjected.

Peter WALSH: No, again, I am actually talking about the legislation, not the extraneous issues that those on the other side have all wanted to talk about through this.

There are some amendments that we will move for this legislation which are particularly around community consultation. There is no compulsion for the government to go through any community consultation around this, so people that enjoy the vista of living in a beach area in East Gippsland could find that once it comes ashore underground and pops up, their beautiful view has a powerline on it, their beautiful view has a huge substation on it or their beautiful view has a major transmission line that runs out of that substation back to the Victorian grid. There is no consultation process around that; this will just be forced on them there.

One of the clauses here repeals section 34 and 35 of the Land Act 1958. These sections provide for a public hearing process related to, among other things, applications under this part of the Land Act et cetera to demonstrate the bona fides of their application for such leases. These public hearing sections are outdated, it effectively says, and they are going to be taken out. In my mind, the minds of the Nationals and the minds of our coalition partners the Liberals, public consultation may be outdated for the Labor Party. It may be outdated for the Labor Party to actually talk to the community before they do something, but from our point of view public consultation is not outdated. Public consultation should be a key part of this, and public consultation should not be just putting it on some obscure website where most people can never find it. It should be genuine, real public engagement where people actually know what is being proposed and they do not have to find it on a website where you have to track through a whole heap of links to get to it – it actually can be found, can be read.

And true public consultation is about having public meetings. It is actually about having, most importantly I think, a minister or a senior member of the government front up and talk to the community. With all respect to the people that work in the departments, I do not think it is their job to go and face the public. It is actually the minister's job to go and face the public and have genuine consultation about what they are going to do in their particular community. I am a northern Victorian, and I like northern Victoria; I was born in the Mallee and raised in the Mallee and I understand the flatlands of the north. But some of the people from Gippsland actually enjoy the hills, enjoy the view and do not want that destroyed with a giant substation and a huge transmission line.

If this government are going to be genuine about doing that, I would actually ask them to accept the amendments that we have put forward where there is genuine public consultation before anything is done under this particular legislation. I would also ask them to accept the amendment that there be a fit and proper person test applied to whoever the applicant may be. We want to make sure that if wind farms are approved by the Commonwealth and this bill is needed to bring the power from those offshore wind farms ashore, the businesses that are actually doing this and the people that are in charge of this actually pass the fit and proper person test. We do not want a situation where we have an overseas company that does not do the right thing by Victoria and if there is an issue of compensation we find that it is a shell company in some tax haven somewhere else in the world and no-one can ever get compensation out of them. So it is very important, I think, that if the government are genuine about doing this they actually accept the opposition's amendments and have genuine consultation about whatever project may be there to bring this power ashore and have a fit and proper person test in the legislation as well.

Until that happens I just do not think the government are being serious about how they treat country communities. They just want to sit here in Melbourne and force this down people's throats without having genuine consultation and involving them in it. Things happen in Melbourne without any idea of what we think. Why should Melbourne people come and tell us what is going to happen in our communities?

Emma VULIN (Pakenham) (15:29): I rise to speak on the Energy and Public Land Legislation Amendment (Enabling Offshore Wind Energy) Bill 2024. I want to acknowledge the Minister for Energy and Resources and her department for their work to bring this bill to the house. This bill is

about developing and delivering a thriving offshore wind energy sector for Victoria. I am proud to be part of a government who understands the importance of renewable energy, unlike the federal coalition and some of those opposite. I think I can safely say that my community does not want a nuclear reactor in our neck of the woods and we certainly do not want the nuclear waste. I am almost certain that our neighbours in Gippsland would feel the same way. I also bet the member for Bulleen is grappling with the idea that his party is suggesting that nuclear is the way forward. It is a decade plus to build a reactor, and at an astronomical cost. We heard today it is 500 per cent more. We live in Australia, a land with an abundance of sources of safe, clean renewable energy, and now that I have said my piece about that I will get back to the bill.

Victoria is committed to maintaining advantage as the first state to move on offshore wind energy farming. We have a desire to be globally competitive in attraction and investment in this renewable energy source. We need to ensure that we have the legislative framework in place to make this happen. Victoria will be the home of Australia's first offshore wind farm. We have legislated targets of 4 gigawatts by 2035 and 9 gigawatts by 2040 for these offshore wind projects. Establishing these wind farms will also create thousands of jobs in planning, construction and the ever-growing renewable energy sector for the long term. The plan is to have at least 2 gigawatts of offshore capacity by 2032. That is enough energy to power 1.5 million homes. This is all part of the efforts across our energy network to work towards net zero by 2045.

To get the offshore wind farms built, investigations need to occur to determine the design and placement of the connection infrastructure to deliver the electricity generated through offshore wind into the Victorian grid. Simply, we need this bill to enable the investigations to get underway. This bill amends the Land Act 1958, Crown Land (Reserves) Act 1978, Forests Act 1958, National Parks Act 1975 and Electricity Industry Act 2000 to enable activities on public land to be approved to do the investigations. Works on private land will need to be negotiated directly with the owners.

Consultation with community is crucial. The Department of Energy, Environment and Climate Action, DEECA, consulted on the bill with the relevant traditional landowner corporations whose land and sea country may be directly or indirectly impacted by offshore wind development. This government's engagement with traditional owners is underpinned by a commitment to self-determination. We have committed to supporting the Gunaikurnai Land and Waters Aboriginal Corporation's, GLAWAC's, aspirations for mutually beneficial agreements with feasibility licence holders in line with international best practice. Last September GLAWAC released *Gunaikurnai and Offshore Energy: Aspirations for a Better Future* to government and developers. The document sets their expectations in negotiating agreements with offshore wind generators that will help enable the seven goals of their *Whole-of-Country Plan*. The Victorian government supports this strategy and acknowledges that self-determination is a core principle. This is about forming genuine and meaningful partnerships with traditional owners.

DEECA also engaged with industry and potential investors in Victorian offshore wind projects to see what regulatory changes they considered were most urgent to get things underway. The government has established Offshore Wind Energy Victoria, OWEV, as the organisational gateway for industry, stakeholder and community engagement, as we plan and grow this exciting new industry. OWEV is now part of DEECA, and it is responsible for coordinating and supporting the new industry's development.

In December 2022 the Australian government declared an area of the Bass Strait off Gippsland as Australia's first offshore wind zone. Offshore wind farms will be in Commonwealth waters, adjacent to the state waters, which extend 3 nautical miles from the coast, as the member for South Gippsland was talking about before. Those wishing to set up the wind farms are required to obtain the necessary licences to undertake feasibility research and demonstration, construction and commercial works under the Commonwealth's Offshore Electricity Infrastructure Act 2021 and related regulatory frameworks.

This bill is putting in place the framework for licences to work across state waters into Commonwealth waters to investigate, demonstrate and then build the linking infrastructure. This inserts offshore wind into the existing public land licensing regime. It is not a carve-out for offshore wind or about providing exemptions for offshore wind licences. This is a thorough process which requires the meeting of existing obligations and considerations under Victorian law.

Getting the offshore wind farms off and flying is of state and national but most importantly global value. It is part of our contribution to preventing further climate change. Over 30 projects have been invested in in Victoria since our targets were announced – that is, international investors, ready to set up in Victoria for decades, which makes a lot of sense when there is a significant list of countries already in the offshore wind energy generation business. Countries with offshore wind farms already include: China, the United Kingdom, Germany, Vietnam, Denmark, the Netherlands, Belgium, Norway, Taiwan, Japan, South Korea, United States, Spain, Macau, the Faroe Islands – which is an independent territory of Denmark – Portugal and Ireland. Denmark has been the world leader in offshore wind farm development, building the world's first wind farm in the 1990s. Without a doubt, the technology is available.

The Allan government has done the work, providing three detailed implementation statements which have paved the way for the legislation we have in front of us today. In our later statement, we provided an updated timetable for our offshore wind development. The Victorian government will run a multiproject, competitive auction process, beginning with expressions of interest in the fourth quarter of 2024 and closing in the first quarter of 2025. The request-for-proposal phase is targeted for commencement in the third quarter of 2025 and to close in the first quarter of 2026, and contract negotiation and award are expected to occur later in 2026.

One of the biggest wins for me from this bill is the job creation in the renewable energy sector which will flow from it. Offshore wind energy has the potential to create thousands and thousands of jobs. The waters near Gippsland and the second field of the Great Southern Ocean off Portland have the potential to support 13 gigawatts of offshore wind capacity, creating nearly 6000 jobs, with up to 4000 during construction and 1750 for operations and maintenance annually. Many of these jobs will hopefully be just down the road from my electorate of Pakenham, in Gippsland, and provide my community with an option to travel in the other direction, making a big difference for the betterment of our planet.

This bill will also allow the Minister for Energy and Resources to declare a licensee under the Commonwealth Offshore Electricity Infrastructure Act 2021, the legislation I mentioned earlier, an offshore wind generation company. It will be these companies that will be the employers in energy for the future, just as we are reviving the State Electricity Commission. We need this generation. Offshore wind is critical to our energy mix, along with solar. It is not a nice to have, it is what we do need. Victoria's coal-fired power stations are run down and reaching the end of their life. These stations are flagged for closure, so we need a significant ramp-up of renewable energy to keep us out of the dark and meet our climate and energy targets. Offshore wind provides incomparable levels of generation capacity – far more than onshore renewables – and will move Victoria more quickly away from fossil fuels and towards 95 per cent renewables by 2035.

Given offshore wind energy is a new industry, there are of course members of the community who will be logically concerned about the potential impacts on our marine and coastal ecosystems. In my background reading for the bill, I learned that in investigation and construction of an offshore wind farm project developers apply a range of protective measures. There is quite a long list of them, so I will not read them all. Under the Victorian Environment Effects Act 1978, projects that have a significant effect on the environment of Victoria require environmental assessments, so they will look at all that sort of stuff. This process is administered by the Victorian Department of Transport and Planning. Offshore wind has so much to offer our state as a new form of renewable energy to fight climate change, and I commend this bill to the house.

Tim READ (Brunswick) (15:39): It is a pleasure to speak on the Energy and Public Land Legislation Amendment (Enabling Offshore Wind Energy) Bill 2024. The bill, as we have heard, is about facilitating the connection of future offshore wind turbines in Commonwealth waters greater than 3 nautical miles from shore to transmission infrastructure that runs through Victorian waters and land and connects to the electricity grid. The framework to ensure offshore electricity can traverse both state and federal regulatory jurisdictions to deliver energy to the grid is obviously vital for those seeking to build offshore wind projects. The bill seeks to facilitate this by the issuing of long-term licences over areas of public land to offshore wind companies so they can begin investigative activities on how to link their generation to grid connection points.

The bill will hasten the transition from coal to renewable energy, but I am left wondering why we are seeing it in 2024. The coal-to-renewables transition is vital and could have been and still could be so much faster than the timetable being followed by the present government. I was interested to look at how many offshore wind farms there around the world. I see that China has 105; the UK, 39; Germany, 28; Vietnam, 26; and so on. I think Australia still has zero, so we got a little way to go. Those figures were from January last year, by the way.

If we have got a climate emergency right now, then we can and must act accordingly. I marched with Extinction Rebellion on Saturday, and we stopped just out there on the corner of Collins and Spring streets, and one of their signs said, ironically, 'Sorry for the delay.' It was making the point that while Saturday shoppers might be delayed by the protest, that is nothing compared to the trouble that is being caused by climate change. And we are not talking about some future theoretical climate catastrophe – a bushfire blocked the Western Highway about three weeks ago, and thousands of kilometres of Victorian rural roads were seriously damaged by flooding in spring in 2022. Global heating pushed more water into the atmosphere, and when it came down it did over a billion dollars worth of damage to Victorian roads in one month just about 18 months ago. MPs from outside Melbourne tell me that roads are vital to our rural economy, so global heating is already holding up the traffic – sorry about the delay.

But you can interpret that sign another way. This Parliament should be sorry for the delay in transitioning Victoria to renewable energy. Given the climate damage we have already suffered and the worse damage to come, we should be much further along the path to retiring coal than we currently are, where we are still burning over 100,000 tonnes of the stuff every day. For some time now it has been clear that much of our future energy will come from Bass Strait – from the wind above the sea, that is, not the hydrocarbons beneath – and transmission is one of the main barriers to large renewable projects. There are too few funded wind farm projects in the pipeline because the easy areas to build and connect are full and because of declining investment in renewables nationally. So it is the lack of transmission that clearly needs to be addressed there.

In the short time that we have had to look at this bill and consult with stakeholders we are left with some persisting questions. The bill does not specify in detail the terms of the licence agreements granted to offshore wind companies on what their investigations in public land may entail. I understand licence conditions are intended to enforce existing environmental effects statements (EES) and environmental laws and restrictions, but to what extent is unclear. The second reading also outlines that the minister or a delegate may consider cultural and environmental factors such as these when issuing a licence, but the bill does not specify or mandate this. So we will be looking for further reassurance that an offshore wind company will not be able to bulldoze part of a national park, for example, or destroy thousands of years of First Nations cultural heritage just to determine whether or not somewhere is a good place to put a transmission cable. Nor does the bill give any indication if some of the most delicate and important areas of public land, particularly areas in state forests and national parks of significant cultural or conservation status, will be declared off limits from investigation activities. At least we would like to see some kind of assessment framework for allocating licences based on the condition and value of the public land that favours issuing licences to cover areas of degraded land such as farmland to the greatest extent possible.

Having established these concerns, I want to also make it clear that we recognise there is conflict between building the essential renewable energy infrastructure such as wind turbines and transmission lines and threats to existing wildlife and ecosystems where this infrastructure is located. We are of course in a biodiversity and extinction crisis at the same time that we are in a climate emergency. I am not trying to say that attempting to balance these conflicting priorities is always simple, but the Greens' position is that we cannot solve climate change by destroying nature. We desperately need intact ecosystems as part of the climate solution, such as healthy forests and oceans which absorb and sequester carbon. Habitat destruction in Victoria such as deforestation has led to a worsening climate crisis and is also one of the biggest threats to biodiversity. All renewable energy projects should avoid harmful impacts to nature and First Nations cultural heritage.

We also know that we need to involve the local communities in these processes to the greatest extent possible. The more certainty and clarity we can give communities, the better, and I will talk a bit more about that in my contribution to the National Electricity (Victoria) Amendment (VicGrid) Bill 2024 debate tomorrow. For now, the Greens look forward to ongoing discussions with the Minister for Energy and Resources and her office in relation to resolving our concerns with this legislation.

Eden FOSTER (Mulgrave) (15:45): Today I rise in support of the Energy and Public Land Legislation Amendment (Enabling Offshore Wind Energy) Bill 2024, which takes us on the next step towards our ambitious and much-needed climate and energy targets that we took to the last election. Offshore wind plays a key role in the green energy transition, and this government is determined to make sure we do not get left behind in the global green revolution. This piece of legislation allows offshore wind projects to undertake site investigatory activities to determine the design and placement of connection infrastructure required to deliver electricity generated by offshore wind projects in declared Commonwealth waters into the Victorian grid. In simple terms, this legislation is a prerequisite for any construction of future offshore wind projects. The crux of this bill lies in its amendments to several acts, and these amendments are critical for approving activities on public land related to the investigation of offshore wind connection assets. This government has sought broad consultation from Indigenous traditional owner corporations, Energy Safe Victoria, the Essential Services Commission and relevant members of industry in order to strike the right balance between emissions reductions, environmental conservation and energy affordability.

The Allan Labor government has committed to ambitious offshore wind generation targets over the next two decades. These targets position Victoria as the offshore wind capital of Australia. Now, with two approved offshore wind zones, one in the Bass Strait off Gippsland and another in the Southern Ocean region near Warrnambool and Port Fairy, this government is ready to oversee the biggest offshore wind project in the country. The Allan Labor government aims to maintain its national first-mover advantage and global competitiveness in attracting offshore wind energy development and investment. Regulatory certainty is paramount to achieving this goal, and this bill provides the necessary framework to facilitate offshore wind projects.

Offshore wind in this state will create thousands of jobs, with up to 4000 being created during construction and 1750 for operations and maintenance annually once construction has completed. These are jobs that those opposite do not support. They claim to support this legislation, but all I have been hearing today is complaining about these projects. Maybe they would prefer a nuclear power plant instead.

The offshore wind policies championed by this government draw a clear distinction between those of us on this side of the chamber, who support renewable energy and aspire to achieve net zero emissions by 2045, and those across the aisle, who are beholden to fossil fuel companies. Their inconsistency on net zero within their own caucus mirrors their chaotic coalition. I can guarantee that those opposite will have a completely different energy policy in perhaps two years time than they claim to have now. Maybe they will be talking about mini Chernobyls by the next election.

Talking about the opposition, let us remind ourselves what their leader has said in the past about climate change and climate science – their leader today, I might clarify. He has said that the science is just ‘ideology’ and that there is nothing wrong with taking the view that climate change is a hoax. He said:

Even if people have different ideological perspectives on climate change and sustainability, and that is all legitimate in my view, there is nothing wrong with that.

To be honest, I feel bit of empathy for the Leader of the Opposition because he seems to be pandering as much as he can to the climate deniers in the caucus. I will give him a tip: there is nothing that he can do to get their support, so –

Danny O’Brien: On a point of order, Acting Speaker, I am reluctant to be critical of the new member for Mulgrave, but it is the form of the house that members should not read speeches. I gave her some leeway while she was reading a quote, but it is very clear now that she is reading her speech, and I ask her to cease doing so.

The ACTING SPEAKER (John Mullahy): Member for Mulgrave, are you referring to notes?

Eden FOSTER: I am referring to notes, Acting Speaker.

The ACTING SPEAKER (John Mullahy): The member for Mulgrave to continue.

Eden FOSTER: I might continue to refer to my notes. I was talking about giving the Leader of the Opposition a tip. There is really nothing that the opposition leader can do to get the support on the other side. Maybe the opposition leader should consider working constructively with this government to lower power bills and lower emissions with renewable energy rather than nuclear reactors, which is what perhaps is best mate, the opposition leader in the federal Parliament, wants for this state.

Unlike those opposite, we do care about the environment and the self-determination of Indigenous peoples. Because of that, one of the main priorities of this legislation is making sure that there are limited environmental impacts from offshore wind projects. We are also ensuring the self-determination of Indigenous communities in the areas that may be affected by offshore wind. The government aims to form genuine, meaningful partnerships with traditional owners by transferring power back to and being held accountable to traditional owner organisations. When you compare it to those opposite that have backflipped on supporting the treaty, the contrast is very clear. Those opposite talk about the importance of consultation, and it is incredibly important to make sure those that are affected by projects have their voices heard. But for some reason the opposition does not want to listen to Indigenous people, the traditional owners of this state and the land that these projects will be on. Actually, if they are planning to support nuclear energy, maybe they should consult with residents of Fukushima or Chernobyl; they might have a thing or two to say about nuclear power plants.

Projects may require meeting the requirements set out in the land use activity agreement under the Traditional Owner Settlement Act 2010 if there are any known environmental or traditional owner cultural values or sensitivities in the relevant area. We are making sure Indigenous voices and concerns are heard. For an offshore license to be granted, the Minister for Environment may also consider the proposed scope and nature of the investigatory activities to be conducted on the Victorian seabed and onshore as well as the period that the applicant wishes to have access to the land.

But offshore wind is only one aspect of the Allan Labor government’s energy policies. The Victorian energy upgrades program for households allows households to save up to thousands of dollars by replacing old, expensive gas household appliances with new electric items. One of the most common issues my office works with constituents on is making sure that they are able to access VEU grants to replace their old gas appliances. There has been a clear desire from my electorate for the transition that this government is undertaking when it comes to moving away from gas.

The revival of the SEC is also a key part of the Allan Labor government’s plan to lower prices and reach net zero by 2045. Only those on this side of the chamber want to see a strong SEC able to invest

state government money into renewable energy projects across the state. I have seen firsthand the damage that the privatisation of the Kennett era has done to working people, and by reviving the SEC, this government is determined to lower prices, reduce our emissions and give Victorians a state-of-the-art electricity grid. Those opposite, we know, do not support the SEC, but they were awfully quiet about it during the last election if we cast our minds back. Maybe it is because we all know that the vast majority of Victorians back the SEC, including those that voted for the opposite. I heard that a lot during my by-election – that there was a lot of support for the SEC and bringing that back.

These amendments are critical for our state to reach zero emissions by 2045. This bill is critical for that, for our future, for our children's future and for their children's future. I am happy to stand here today, and I commend this bill to the house.

Wayne FARNHAM (Narracan) (15:55): I am happy to rise today to talk on the Energy and Public Land Legislation Amendment (Enabling Offshore Wind Energy) Bill 2024. It has been quite interesting today. I have listened to a few of the contributions today, and I am going to reference the member for Box Hill, a hell of a good guy but a little bit delusional. When I questioned him today whether the wind blows in Port Phillip Bay, he said to me, 'No, it does not, member for Narracan.' The member for Box Hill might be interested to know that the wind today is at 43 kilometres an hour in Port Phillip Bay. Guess how much at Barry Beach – 34. The wind does blow in Port Phillip Bay.

The member for Albert Park talked to us about the science of wind and why the science is so important, why it has to be in Gippsland South. There is another thing about science, and I will put this to the member for Albert Park, being that she is right into renewables: science will tell us that the sun will shine everywhere, so why don't we put solar panels on Albert Park? Why don't we take up that parkland? Cover the whole thing in solar panels rather than covering regional Victoria in solar panels and wind farms.

Nina Taylor interjected.

Wayne FARNHAM: You are going to cover the whole park, are you? I would love to see that. Your greenie mates would have an absolute fit to see that. The Labor coalition with the Greens would be absolutely besides themselves if Albert Park was covered in solar panels. I can see that.

The one thing I support the members for Gippsland South and Gippsland East with is consultation. Regional Victoria, with the government's renewables plan, is going to be left behind on consultation. We heard the member for Gippsland East today talk about the importance of fishing in that area. It is very important to that economy in Gippsland East, and it is very important that this government actually consults with the stakeholders down there. I could not agree more with the member for Gippsland South and his comments today about the wind farms that are going to be built literally off his electorate – right through his electorate – and the fact that regional Victoria is bearing the brunt of renewables and it is not happening in Labor seats.

We have a figure that has been thrown around in the past that 70 per cent of agricultural land will be taken up by renewables. It was corrected today – that figure is somewhere closer to 30 per cent. Whether it is 30 per cent, 40 per cent or whatever, the fact of the matter is that if 30 per cent of our agricultural land gets used for renewables, I hope they consult, because I can tell you that in my electorate a 250-acre solar farm has been put in. It has been put in in a bushfire zone, so how that got through I will never know. Of course the neighbours are up in arms, and they have taken that to VCAT. I hope the neighbours win in VCAT because it is the lack of consultation on this renewable push by this government that is the biggest problem in regional Victoria.

A member interjected.

Wayne FARNHAM: Well, this mob got in before, and I think they will win because the way the government's consultation process is going with this in regional Victoria is an absolute disgrace. They just say, 'We're doing this in this location.' The member for Gippsland South's contribution today

was really, really on the money, and I could not agree with him more. He nailed it right through his contribution, as did the member for Brighton. The member for Brighton pointed out that the government's wind program is not going well considering the federal Labor government has absolutely slammed the Port of Hastings. Your federal colleagues have absolutely slammed the Port of Hastings, member for South Barwon. There were four ministers that got it wrong. Four ministers got the Port of Hastings wrong and now your wind program is in the toilet. I keep talking about this.

The member for Albert Park is over there, throwing her arms around like a seagull in the breeze –

The ACTING SPEAKER (John Mullahy): Order! The time has come to interrupt business for the grievance debate.

Business interrupted under sessional orders.

Grievance debate

The SPEAKER: The question is:

That grievances be noted.

Members interjecting.

The SPEAKER: Order! The member for South Barwon is warned.

Government performance

Brad ROWSWELL (Sandringham) (16:01): I rise to grieve for the state of Victoria for a number of reasons. I rise to grieve for the state of Victoria because of the way this Labor government has mismanaged the economy. I rise to grieve for the state of Victoria because of the way this Andrews now Allan Labor government have mismanaged not only the economy but the operation of government over the last 10 years. Just today we heard of the Commonwealth Games debacle presided over by this Andrews now Allan Labor government. We hear of Victorian taxpayers money being wasted in every which way. We hear of the lack of respect that the Victorian government has for Victorian taxpayers money.

The point that I want to make from the outset is this: the difference between the government and the opposition is that in our eyes we see Victorian taxpayers money as just that. We see Victorian taxpayers dollars as the hard-earned money of Victorians who do the right thing and who pay their taxes to be in turn provided with the services they rely upon – the health services, the education services, the emergency services and the public transport services – unlike those opposite, who see Victorian taxpayer dollars as simply the Victorian Labor Party slush fund. We know this because they waste, we know this because they tax and we know this because the Victorian taxpayer misses out on many opportunities time and time again.

We know that the Victorian government has wasted more than \$38 billion on major project blowouts in the last 10 years alone. We know that Victoria's debt is scheduled to be \$177 billion, according to this government's own budget papers and the budget update in December last year. We know that that means Victorians are paying \$15 million each and every day for the interest bill courtesy of decisions made by the Allan Labor government, and we know that in just three short years time that interest bill will climb to \$24 million a day, each and every day, just to pay off the interest on Labor's debt.

I tend to believe the internationally renowned and respected ratings agency Standard & Poor's more so than this Allan Labor government. They themselves have said that the debt in this state is more likely to climb to something like a quarter of a trillion dollars. If Victoria's debt does reach a quarter of a trillion dollars, forget paying 15 million bucks each and every day in interest payments and forget paying 24 million bucks each and every day in interest payments; Victorian taxpayers will be slugged \$40 million a day, each and every day, in interest payments courtesy of the mismanagement of Victoria's economy at the hands of Labor.

Debt matters. Economic management and mismanagement matter. When Victorians work so, so hard to make ends meet, to pay for their school fees, to pay for their grocery bills, to pay for their energy bills, how are they rewarded by this Labor government – they are rewarded with higher taxes and more debt that they have to pay off. When Victorian Labor wastes, Victorian Labor taxes and Victorians pay the price each and every day.

In today's Victorian Auditor-General's Office report on the Commonwealth Games we see that Victorians have been slugged with Labor's con games tax. Let me repeat that for Hansard so I am not misrepresented: Victorians have been slugged with Labor's con – c-o-n – games tax. The Labor government have today been called out – they have been found out – for close to \$600 million in waste because of the fiasco that has been caused by the Commonwealth Games cancellation. That means that every Victorian household will be charged 227 bucks. It is equivalent to \$227 on the head of each Victorian household. It is equivalent to 88 bucks on the head of every Victorian. Again, when Labor waste, Labor tax and Victorians pay. Labor's con games tax of close to \$600 million matters. It matters because Victorians cannot trust the Allan Labor government to manage the economy. They cannot trust them to manage the state.

What is disappointing about this is that it is clear that the government uses the Victorian public service to proof up whatever it wants. You know, one day they are saying that the Comm Games should be this amount; the next day they are saying it should be that amount. They are undermining the independence of the public service along the way. It is an absolute disgrace, and when decisions are made in such a secretive and dishonest way, it is all Victorians that pay the price. The government is not giving Victorians the respect they deserve. The Victorian government is not giving Victorian taxpayers the respect they deserve. Again, the difference between the government and the opposition is that we respect Victorian taxpayers. Every day ending in 'Y' we respect Victorian taxpayers, unlike the government, who simply see Victorian taxes as the Victorian Labor Party's slush fund to go and waste on projects that are often 10, 20, 30, 40, 60 per cent over budget, with blowouts left, right and centre. Again, when Labor waste, Labor tax and Victorians pay.

As we know, in Victoria at the moment – in fact across the country – Victorians are experiencing a cost-of-living crisis. Victorians are being subjected to the highest school fees in the country to send their kids to public school. Parents are paying more than \$108,000 to send their kid to a public school in this state over 13 years of education. And what are they getting in return? They are getting NAPLAN results through the floor, they are getting education standards through the floor and they are getting a Minister for Education who stood here yesterday and assured this house that there was not a teacher working in Victorian schools that should not be working in Victorian schools, a Victorian education minister that is backing the Victorian Institute of Teaching, although the VIT itself have been found time and time again to be absolutely incompetent – and Victorians are again paying the price.

We have got energy bills through the roof. In the last 12 months alone energy prices in households have increased by 25 per cent and in businesses by 26 per cent. Victorians are paying the price for decisions the Labor government makes every day of the week. Now, Labor say that they are here for people, that they care for people, that they understand people, that they want to lift Victorians up when they are downtrodden, when they are hard on their luck. If that is true, then why don't they demonstrate that in their actions? They simply do not. The cost of housing is going through the roof. The Victorian government has said that we are in the middle of a housing crisis, and we on this side agree – we are in the middle of a housing crisis. But they have been in government for 10 years. Victorians need to look no further than the Labor government here in Victoria, who by their decision-making and by their inaction over the last decade have actually contributed to this housing crisis.

What is Labor's solution to the housing crisis that Victorians are currently facing?

Tim Richardson interjected.

Brad ROWSWELL: More taxes, member for Mordialloc – close but no cigar. More taxes – a rent tax and increases in land taxes. How on earth you can tax housing more and expect to get more houses online and more Victorians into houses I cannot for the life of me understand. But that is how dimwitted, that is how false in its argument, this Labor government is. Grocery bills – absolutely through the roof. In my household I do the supermarket shopping. Nine times out of 10 I do the supermarket shopping, and I know that my household grocery bill has increased from about 120 bucks a week to more than 200 bucks a week in the last 12 months. I know from speaking to supermarkets and from speaking to banks that people's supermarket baskets are actually reducing in size. We have got a circumstance now where Victorians are buying groceries for maybe two or three days, and historically they may have bought them for the week. They are doing that because of their own cash flow circumstance. They do that because at the same time as they are trying to put food on the table they are trying to pay their mortgage, they are trying to pay their school bills and they are trying to pay their power bills. Cost of living is a massive issue in this state at the moment. According to the Salvation Army, over 12.8 million Australians – 62 per cent of Australians – are more stressed about their finances this year compared to last year, which is an increase of 10 per cent year on year. Australians are fair dinkum at breaking point, and of all the Australians reaching out to charities, almost half are doing so for the first time.

Darren Cheeseman interjected.

Brad ROWSWELL: Can I say there are lots of things that I would love to be proud of, but I would genuinely think, despite the unruly interjections of the member for South Barwon, that he and his colleagues would agree that the circumstance of the reliance of Victorians upon some of our charitable organisations in this state and certainly around the country is something that we should not be proud of at this time. According to Vinnies, a great organisation in our community, demand for Vinnies services has risen by 22 per cent. Vinnies says that of the people seeking help, one in three are reaching out for the first time, up from one in four on the previous year. According to the Foodbank, Foodbank Victoria is feeding 57,000 people a day in our state. Some of the charities they are distributing food relief through have seen a 200 per cent spike in demand. Many people are experiencing food insecurity for the very first time.

Again, there are many things that I am sure in a cross-partisan, nonpartisan way we should be proud of, but those statistics which I have referred to are surely something we can all agree are a great stain of shame on our state at this time. My point is this: when we have the privilege, when we have the opportunity, to sit on that side of the house instead of this side of the house, we just will not watch this going by. We will not just watch this going by. We will stand up for Victorians. We will stand up for vulnerable Victorians. Why? Because that is the right thing to do. On that side of the house they say they do, but their actions are yet to prove it. They have had the great privilege of occupying that side of the chamber for a decade, and this state is worse off because of it. What Victorians need to do, and what I implore all Victorians to do, is in November 2026 to consider whether their lives are better or worse after 10 years of Labor. Are they better or are they worse? I am sure, I am confident, the majority of Victorians will agree that their lives are not better off after a decade of Labor.

I am often asked as Shadow Treasurer: if elected, what will we do? I want to share with the house –

Members interjecting.

Brad ROWSWELL: If government members will stop interjecting, I will tell them exactly what we plan to do at this point in time. The first thing we will do is scrap your ridiculous schools tax. We will scrap that schools tax.

Members interjecting.

The SPEAKER: Member for South Barwon, you can leave the chamber for half an hour.

Member for South Barwon withdrew from chamber.

Brad ROWSWELL: We will launch a wholesale review of Victorian taxes. Victoria's tax system under this government, where 53 taxes have either been increased or introduced in the last 10 years, is punishing Victorians at a time they can least afford it. That is why we will introduce a wholesale review of Victoria's taxes – to improve productivity, to increase and stimulate the economy and to give Victorian businesses and investors the certainty they need to create jobs, to create wealth and to create investment opportunities so all of us do not just survive but thrive.

We will introduce a Victorian version of the Productivity Commission to improve productivity in this state, and we will govern for all Victorians by legislating a Victorian debt cap in this Parliament. That is our commitment to the Victorian people. That is an ironclad commitment to the Victorian people. In the short time I have remaining, Victorians cannot afford another year of this Labor government.

The SPEAKER: Before I call the member for Tarneit, I remind members that interjecting across the chamber is disorderly.

School holiday activities

Dylan WIGHT (Tarneit) (16:16): That was a rubbish leadership audition, wasn't it? I grieve this afternoon for the future of school holiday activities under a potential Liberal government. It is shaping up to be a fantastic school holiday for Victorian kids and families, and I should know because I have got the two coolest kids in Victoria in my humble opinion. The Allan Labor government has sponsored a variety of programs that will surely be memorable for our kids, and I very much look forward to taking advantage of some of those programs with my two boys Koby and Kai. Indeed I grieve for the future of these programs under a future Liberal government and encourage Victorians to make the most of them whilst they can and whilst they are here.

We have got investments in fishing. We have got camping and bushwalking programs. We have delivered on creating more and upgrading existing suburban parkland in places just like my electorate of Tarneit. We have invested in sports and creative industries and will still find room to support our fantastic zoos. All of these programs stack up to make sure that Victorian families have plenty of fantastic school holiday experiences to enjoy and help make Victoria a destination for interstate travel, which is obviously a fantastic benefit for our local economy as well.

My two boys absolutely love fishing. I do not – I am no good at it – but my two boys absolutely love going fishing. The Allan Labor government has made significant strides in supporting our fishing community, highlighting this government's dedication to fostering the next generation of anglers. With a \$1.5 million investment, thousands of primary school children are being given the chance to develop a lifelong passion for fishing, joining the ranks of over 1 million Victorian recreational fishers. This initiative was showcased over the summer, when more than 90,000 kits, each containing a free fishing rod, necessary equipment and a kids' guide to fishing booklet, were distributed. I know that through their school my children were able to receive these packs and have used them very keenly ever since. These kits not only encourage physical activity and outdoor fun but also aim to educate youngsters about aquatic environments. The government's efforts have also increased the fish population, nearing the goal of stocking 10 million fish this past year to ensure vibrant and healthy waterways.

In addition to making fishing more accessible and enjoyable, the Allan Labor government has made it cheaper and easier for families to spend time on the water by eliminating parking and launch fees, saving them up to \$315 annually on parking permits. This action fulfils a promise made in 2018 and complements the government's substantial investment of over \$130 million in fishing and boating facilities statewide, with an additional \$74.5 million earmarked for future infrastructure improvements, including \$22.1 million for enhancing ramps, jetties and car parks. This comprehensive approach underscores the government's commitment to improving recreational fishing and boating experiences for Victorian families. I grieve for the future of our little anglers if the Liberal Party ever finds its way to the government benches.

But we have not stopped there. This government also knows how important camping and bushwalking are for ensuring that Victorian children have a strong connection to nature and to the outdoors. We have allocated \$106.6 million to the Victoria's Great Outdoors program, a significant investment aimed at enhancing the state's national parks and forests for the community's enjoyment. This funding is being used to create more camping grounds, enhance four-wheel drive tracks and improve walking trails, thereby increasing opportunities for Victorians to experience the beauty of the outdoors. Among the developments are 55 upgraded camping grounds, including those at Beauchamp Falls in the Otways and Neds Gully in Cathedral Ranges, alongside 31 new campgrounds at locations such as Flat Spur at Mount Buller and Thomson Bridge in Gippsland.

Fulfilling a 2018 pledge, the Allan Labor government has ensured access to fishing and camping on Crown land frontages, opening over 400 free camping sites for families. Additionally, the program has upgraded 29 kilometres of walking trails and 125 kilometres of four-wheel drive tracks right across Victoria. These efforts make Victoria's unique environments more accessible and enjoyable for families, promoting physical and mental wellbeing through affordable outdoor activities. The government has responded to the growing demand for access to nature with these initiatives, enhancing the safety and accessibility of our open spaces. Once again I grieve for the future of Victorian camping if the Liberals ever get their hands on programs and commitments like these.

The Allan Labor government has also made a substantial investment of \$315 million to enhance and create open spaces available to Melburnians, recognising the importance of these areas for community connection, relaxation and enjoyment across generations. Sometimes it is not possible to go out on a larger trip to go fishing or to go camping, but sometimes it is just as good to walk down the road to your local park in the suburb in which you live. I know these open spaces will be of great benefit to Victorian families these school holidays. Once again one of the favourite things for my boys to do is just to go to their local park and spend half an hour or an hour playing on the equipment and enjoying the outdoors. This initiative not only aims to improve quality of life for the people of Melbourne but also to offer a haven for local flora and fauna, to support the health of waterways and to strengthen connection of traditional owners to the land.

Following a commitment made during the 2022 election, the government is currently in the process of delivering 14 new dog parks, including a brand new dog park in my electorate, which will be in the suburb of Hoppers Crossing. This will contribute to far better health outcomes for Victorians and their beloved pets. Interestingly enough, out of all the announcements that we have made across elections and all the announcements that I have made in my electorate of Tarneit, this one, a new dog park, is absolutely one of the most popular announcements that we have done. Everybody loves their pets and everybody loves their dogs, and people in Hoppers Crossing will be able to take their furry loved ones to a brand new dog park just down the road.

Additionally, the revitalisation of 41 local parks, the creation of 29 pocket parks and the development of seven off-track walking and cycling trails are underway right across metropolitan Melbourne. These projects underscore the critical role of open spaces in supporting both the environment and community wellbeing. The Allan Labor government remains dedicated to preserving and enhancing Melbourne's open spaces for the benefit of future generations. I grieve for the future of our parks and open spaces under a Liberal government.

Of course I have not forgotten Victoria's fantastic zoos, one of which is located in the member for Point Cook's electorate but just across the road from me, the Werribee zoo, one of my kids' favourite places in the whole world. Two or three times a year, I would say – just about every school holidays – I have to take a trip to the Werribee zoo so they can jump on the safari bus and go around and look at all the fantastic animals and attractions. I will just say, though, for those in the chamber who have not been to the Werribee zoo: if you are going in the warmer months, just be careful of the snakes. They are not snakes in captivity; they are just snakes rolling around the zoo. So just be careful.

We have supported the Kids Go Free program at Zoos Victoria for many, many years. It is just one of our government's programs to support families with the cost of living. You can take your kids along to these fantastic attractions absolutely free, keeping the money that you have earned in your pocket to be able to get on with the necessities of life. The zoo is a very special place for all Victorians, absolutely it is. I can see those opposite agreeing with me. The zoo is a special place for all Victorians. We all have wonderful memories from our childhood of visiting and learning about some of our planet's weird and wonderful wildlife. Zoos Victoria plays such an important conservation role in our state as well, supporting the health and welfare of animals right across Victoria. We are proud to fund the Kids Go Free program, which has provided free entry to all four zoos in Victoria for kids on school holidays, weekends and public holidays for years. Making the zoo more accessible to families is also making learning more accessible, making outdoor activities more accessible and of course making joy more accessible to families right across Victoria. I grieve for the Kids Go Free program, member for Mordialloc, if those opposite ever come to government.

We have covered a fair bit here, but also let us not forget sport, major events and community sport facilities as well, facilities that I know are so incredibly important to families in my electorate of Tarneit. These school holidays my family and I will be getting around just some of the wealth of major events and sporting events our state has to offer. I know that it is not school holidays yet, but we took a little trip to watch Carlton and Richmond just on Thursday night, and I know the member for Malvern agrees with me about how fantastic that result was.

Michael O'Brien interjected.

Dylan WIGHT: Absolutely. Among these events during the school holidays we have the Stawell Gift, an amazing fixture on Victoria's sporting calendar held in the scenic Grampians, having been held there for – I might get this wrong – over a hundred years. Proudly supported by the Victorian government, the gift, since its first race in 1878 – I should have read a little bit further in my notes – has become a cherished event, with a rich history and tradition. I encourage visitors to the Grampians during the school holidays to do their very best to explore the region's arts, culture and the exceptional food and wine that the region is known for.

Additionally, the return of Ironman 70.3 racing to Geelong on Sunday 24 March is an exciting event for all triathletes and spectators, offering a chance to enjoy Victoria's beautiful beaches and fantastic coastal scenery; the member for Geelong agrees with me there.

A member interjected.

Dylan WIGHT: The member for Tarneit might do a triathlon; you never know. I have probably got some training to do.

Moreover, the 2024 Highland Dancing Champion of Champions Championship of Australia, to be held at the State Netball and Hockey Centre in Parkville, will showcase the best of highland dancing over two thrilling days, with support of course from the Allan Labor government.

I also extend an invitation to Victorians to experience the diverse array of sporting events being hosted in our state-of-the-art facilities. From Melbourne United's game 3 in the NBL series to matches featuring Melbourne Storm, Melbourne Victory and Melbourne City in the Melbourne and Olympic parks precinct, sports fans have plenty to choose. I would also like to give a plug to Western United, an A-League team who have just started their journey right there in Tarneit, opening their new facility and their new stadium with an A-League Women's match on the weekend. If you are living in the outer west, do your very best to get down and support your local A-League team.

We do not want to forget regional Victoria in respect to these sports. Geelong will face North Melbourne at Kardinia Park. The new Joel Selwood Stand has increased the stadium's capacity to 40,000, ensuring that Victorians can enjoy top-tier sporting action throughout the state during the school holidays. Thank you very much.

Brad Rowswell: On a point of order, Speaker, I seek your guidance on this. Perhaps members need a reminder that this is a grievance debate. I think the closest the member for Tarneit got to grieving was worrying about snakes at Werribee park zoo.

The SPEAKER: There is no point of order, member for Sandringham.

Government performance

Tim BULL (Gippsland East) (16:32): It is a pleasure to rise to make a contribution on this debate and to follow the member for Tarneit, who tackled the very big issues in the state around fishing and bushwalking and going to the zoo. I think even highland dancing might have got a run. It was good to see him covering the big issues of concern to Victorians.

I want to make a number of points in relation to rural and regional Victorians, including in my electorate of Gippsland East. There will be no political exaggerations here; I just want to put on the record a general summary of how bad things are in rural areas under this government. I am going to start with roads, and the Minister for Roads and Road Safety is here at the table.

I cannot remember roads being so bad. Trucking companies in my area who have had drivers driving for them for decades and bus companies cannot remember the roads ever being so bad. It is certainly not an imagined fantasy, as some members of the other side have described it. We had the minister standing up late last year saying very proudly that the government had filled 116,000 potholes. Doesn't that prove a point – that we have 116,000 potholes? What happens is the temporary fixes last a matter of weeks. As soon as we get a bit of rain and we get a few more trucks, they are potholes again. Country Victorians are having to put up with this day after day.

The other issue that we have got that proves the point of just how bad our road network is is the amount of damage claims that have been lodged on vehicles. In 2021 the number of claims was 298. In 2023 it rose to 1532, and it will be higher this year. Do we need any more proof from drivers themselves that it is as bad as it has ever been? It has never been worse. We do not want temporary repairs. We want investment in our roads to have permanent fixes – not fill 116,000 potholes where I reckon a month later 80,000 of them are back as potholes again. It is a short-term solution that is not a solution in the long run. It ends up going absolutely nowhere.

People who come into my office say, 'How come our roads are so bad but we are spending \$216 billion on a metro project?' Is that why our roads are so bad? Is it that country roads money is being funnelled into metro projects? We were told that was going to cost \$50 billion a couple of years ago. We are now up to \$216 billion. Goodness knows where that is going to end up.

I will move on to health, another area of complete and utter disaster. We have got people dying in pain on waiting lists. I am sure we have all had their families in our electorate offices. We have got people who cannot get a scan result back in time so they can start their oncology treatment. These patients, you can imagine the sleepless nights they are enduring only to turn up for an appointment with their oncologist and be told the scans are not there, in some cases up to five and six weeks later. We have had ambulances ramped at hospitals because there are no beds for the patients to go into inside those hospitals. This is not a knock on our medical staff. I know a lot of people who work in our hospitals. They are fantastic people. They are doing their best, but they need more support. Every time we raise something about health and the waiting list and the disastrous situation we are in, all we get back is, 'Oh, we'll blame COVID.' We are a few years down the track from COVID now, and we cannot keep blaming COVID; we have got to fix the problem.

With all this going on, the hospitals in my electorate, and I am sure in other areas of the state as well, are being told to cut their budgets – 'Trim your budgets.' They are being told, 'Don't trim your budgets so that it impacts on any frontline services.' Well, they have not got a magic wand. How can you cut millions out of a country hospital budget and not impact your frontline services? That is fantasy land commentary coming from the Minister for Health. If she expects what she is asking in her letters to

country hospitals to be achieved, she is fair dinkum living in fantasy land. Our hospitals need more funding and more support. We have got to address these overlying problems. Again, people ask, 'Why isn't there any money for health? Is it going into that rail link thingy in Melbourne?' I cannot go and get a coffee down the main street of Bairnsdale without someone mentioning that to me.

Housing: the public housing waiting list is out of control. It has grown massively in recent years. The government stands up in this place and beats its chest about its Big Housing Build, but the Big Housing Build to a large degree is a fantasy, because while they are building new homes they are demolishing and selling off old stock. So the Big Housing Build is not the net gain that it is claimed to be on that side of the chamber. It is almost deceitful. Since the commencement of the Big Housing Build in 2021 and up until June 2023 there were 3180 public housing homes disposed of either by sale or by demolition. Do we hear about that? The Big Housing Build when it was announced was to be promoted as a net gain in housing. On top of that with the homes that have been demolished and the few that have been built, we have got a net loss of bedrooms, of roofs over heads. There has actually been a net loss under the Big Housing Build. In my patch in 2017 we had 933 public homes – 933 in my area of Gippsland. This year we have got 931. They have sold off more stock and demolished more stock than has been built – absolutely ridiculous.

Then we have the federal government coming out and announcing record immigration levels. I mean, the pressure that that puts on all facets of society but in particular our housing – we cannot look after our own let alone having record levels of immigration coming into our country. It just does not work. Then we have got the repairs not being done to public housing. We heard from the member for Croydon in here yesterday, who spoke about the basic repairs not being done. Just as an example of some of the slow time frames, I have got an 89-year-old pensioner who lives alone in a little place called Cann River up in the east of the state. There is not a lot happens in Cann River, but it is a great little community. He has been without his television reception because of a glitch for four months. For this gentleman, his only source of entertainment – even call it company and interaction with the outside world – at age 89 on the pension is through watching the television. He is in a bushfire-prone area. It is where he gets his news every summer. For four months he has been trying to talk to the department to get it fixed, with no response. But there are so many cases around my electorate of work not being done, work not being completed, fences pulled down and not put back up again and damage to properties not being fixed. It is a joke.

Rentals are a big part of our housing mix, and what have we done – or what have you guys done over there? What has the government done, I should say, Speaker. They have increased land tax on second residences. In a housing crisis and a homelessness crisis, who the hell thought this would be a good idea? It drives landlords from the market. There is this perception that seems to be on that side of the house that all landlords are rich. These are mum-and-dad investors. They are nurses, they are schoolteachers, they are disability workers. They have chosen to invest in the housing market. They have got other options, but they are providing rentals for people who need to rent. Now, you are forcing them out of the market. We had last week one gentleman who has property investments in the electorates of Gippsland South and Gippsland East who just said he is selling up his investment properties. He is a self-funded retiree. He gets his income off them. That is how he is not a burden on the taxpayer. He is selling his properties locally and he is going to invest in properties interstate because of the land tax smashing that he has received on his bills. He is not a wealthy man, just a self-funded retiree pensioner trying to maintain his income levels. With this policy also, if landlords choose to hang in, they are passing that additional cost on to renters. So then the rentals become unaffordable for renters.

In the cases where they do sell, I would suggest that there are very, very few of those sales being picked up by people on the public housing waiting list. They cannot afford to live in homes. That is why they are on the public housing waiting list. So it is not putting residences back into the pool. I would say they are being bought by people who can afford to pay the additional land tax. It is not helping the bottom end, as this government would have you believe.

Then we have also got the impact on businesses. One publican in Gippsland East two days ago, when I was here in Parliament, sent me an email that bobbed up in my inbox that the land tax on his pub has risen by 380 per cent on last year – 380 per cent. So he has asked me, ‘What have I got to do to survive?’ He is in an area that was impacted by the bushfires a couple of years ago. He is now having to put off staff. Well done; you are impacting employment levels in rural and regional areas. The timber industry decision has kicked us in the guts, we have had the fires go through and now you have introduced a land tax on commercial businesses that results in staff being put off. Who the hell thought in a housing crisis and when we have got to drive the economy to be stronger that a land tax smashing is a good idea? I cannot find anywhere where that is possibly a good idea.

On that land tax, we have got a pensioner, a gentleman by the name of Robert Smith, whose driveway is on a separate title. Because of the lowering of the threshold, he has now got to pay land tax on his driveway to get to his home – because you lowered the threshold. Can you believe that? He has got to pay land tax now on his driveway for the first time because it is on a separate title. We have got another pensioner who had the adjoining block that the Department of Environment, Land, Water and Planning, whatever they were called back then, could not sell many years ago. It was offered to him for \$9000 when he was working. So he bought it and paid it off, and he is a pensioner. Now he has been hit with this land tax on his adjoining block of land, because he is now having to pay under the reduced threshold. He cannot afford to pay it. What does he do? No-one wanted to buy it years ago; no-one will want to buy it now. He thought he was doing the government a favour, and now he is getting hammered.

Other issues we have got, while I have got time: the justice system has massive delays for court hearings. Families having no real say in plea deals – we saw that story this week. Countless victims are concerned about soft sentences. We need to make people accountable. The landlords and local communities shut out of renewable project approvals – that is not going to go well. Input from local communities helps get those decisions right. I concede streamlining the process is not a bad idea, but you can do that without cutting local people out from having their say on these projects. The wild dog program is under threat. We have had a dingo in here this week to pat, for goodness sake. I will show you some photos of what they do to the stock in my area. I have got sheep walking around with their intestines dragging on the ground that they are walking on top of, and we have got a dingo in here that we are patting. It is driving people off the land. We do not need more protections for wild dogs, and we do not need the removal of the buffer zone. It would be absolutely disastrous for our farming community in East Gippsland, absolutely disastrous. They are breeding out of control in the wider bush. We have got timber workers who still have not received their packages. We have got those –

A member interjected.

Tim BULL: Oh, yes, that is funny, isn’t it? We have got down-the-line businesses that were promised funds from the timber industry exit strategy. Seed collectors – we have got people who were not harvest and haulage contractors but drove trucks. One gentleman I am sure a few members of Parliament got this email from around 10 days ago is saying he is about to lose his home because as a seed collector who replenished the coupes for VicForests he has had no income. He was promised a package in a media release four or five months ago; he has heard nothing.

The fire rebuilds are not done. I have raised this in the chamber a number of times. Cape Conran – not done. We are over four years on – four years after the fires. If it was on the banks of the Yarra River, it would have been fixed in weeks – four years. Campgrounds not open, boardwalks not fixed, bridges to campgrounds at Point Hicks, not fixed, by a government that does not give a stuff about the bush. The Premier said he would walk every way with us in the bushfire recovery, and over four years on we have got so many projects not done and many not even started.

My grievance only touches on some of the massive problems we have got for this government in the country. They need to take better care of the bush.

School holiday activities

Lauren KATHAGE (Yan Yean) (16:47): I rise to grieve for the families of Victoria who, should the Liberal–National parties get back into power, will find themselves facing a mountain of cost-of-living pressures during the school holidays. The school holidays are a time when families should be together, should enjoy time and experience wellbeing. That is important, and that is why our government has invested in making sure that families have the support they need during what is a special and precious time for families. Those opposite have said that they do not really believe that this is a topic worthy of grievance, but as a mum let me assure you that it is. Perhaps many of those opposite will not even notice that it is the school holidays, but for us on our side many of us have caring responsibilities alongside our role in this place and in our communities, and we certainly are very aware of the school holidays approaching. We are also aware of the cost-of-living pressures that families are facing, and the member for Gippsland East said that this was not a worthy topic, but I have got a list of activities that are free or cheap, and I would be happy to share them with the constituents of his electorate, because I can guarantee that they are looking for cheap and free activities in these holidays.

Something that I am looking forward to these coming school holidays is at the Yan Yean Reservoir, where Parks Victoria will be running some of their Junior Ranger programs. I have visited before with Ranger Sharyn at the Minibeast Discovery activity at Yan Yean Reservoir, and it was very well attended by local families. This is a chance for families who maybe live on smaller blocks who do not have a rambling garden or bush to get out and experience nature, and in this program you are able to use a net and fish out the mini beasts that live there in the waterways around Yan Yean Reservoir. These coming school holidays I am looking forward to going there with my family. We have just completed upgrades to the Yan Yean Reservoir which make it even more family friendly and an even greater attraction for families. We have got upgraded barbecue facilities, playground surfaces, picnic seating, cold bins and the like, and it is a real drawcard in my community. I think on Father's Day they said they were over 500 people there at Yan Yean Reservoir enjoying the open space, and it is really important that we have that open space to enjoy. But I do grieve that open space like that is potentially on the list for those opposite. Maybe that is where they will put the nuclear waste; I do not know – hopefully not. Hopefully they will never have the chance to put that in our beautiful Yan Yean Reservoir.

Another Junior Rangers program that is running is wildlife detectives, and that is a bit further down at the Morang wetlands, a part of Plenty Gorge parklands. That activity there is going to benefit a great deal in coming years from the Plenty trail upgrade. The member for Mill Park and I were really happy to turn the sod for that upgrade, and that upgrade is going to have the Plenty trail going all the way from Mernda down to Bundoora, so I am sure the Minister for Development Victoria at the table will be glad to hear that if he so wants he can walk all the way and visit us up in Mernda. That is going to be crossing over the Plenty River. There will be five new lookouts and two new bridges. This is a completely free activity for families, and the trail will be all access, so that will mean mums with prams can get out there, wheelchairs can use it and the whole community can get out and enjoy nature.

You could even take that path all the way down to Yarrambat lake, and Yarrambat lake is a lovely asset we have in our community. It would be great for kids of my area to get out there with their new fishing kits that have been delivered with a \$1.5 million investment from our government, giving primary school kids the chance to learn how to fish. We have delivered over 90,000 of the kits, with a fishing rod and the equipment that you need. Yarrambat lake is constantly being stocked by us with fish that are fun to catch. Alan Staton, the president of the Northern Suburbs Fly Fishing Club, I am sure will be there having a go. They recently ran a 'Come and try fly fishing' day for the community, which I attended with my family, and it was great fun. My three-year-old managed to catch something in her dad's pocket – I do not know how. But it is a great activity for families to do, a way for families to be together without having to spend lots of money. Yarrambat lake – we do not want to talk too much about that in front of those opposite, because it is another beautiful big open space that could

potentially be on the nuclear waste dump list, so I would grieve for the families in my area if the Liberals were in power and brought back –

A member interjected.

Lauren KATHAGE: Maybe that is where. As well as getting out into nature, it is good to get out and have a run. The Doreen soccer club, which is run out of the facilities that our government invested in, is a great place to have a go at soccer. That is certainly what my daughter did last school holidays with the DOC Football Academy with David O'Connor. He is an absolute legend. What makes this academy so special is that it is for all abilities. I was so happy about my daughter learning to play soccer alongside children with Down syndrome and children with autism and other conditions. I just thought it was the best of our community. So that is another great activity for families in our area.

Something that we know that families in our area like to do is to visit playgrounds. We have got a destination playground in Wallan that was constructed in partnership between state and council – and Bendigo Bank, I think, also put in a bit. That playground has transformed Wallan. I promise you that these school holidays it will be packed every day. There will be family barbecues, there will be birthday parties and there will be people absolutely swarming all over that place. I grieve because our commitment and our investment into the future destination playground at Doreen, with a splash park and other facilities, would be at risk under a Liberal government. As we have heard, they do not seem to understand the importance of families having free and enjoyable activities to do together. We absolutely do, and that is why we invest in the things that families like.

Something that my family likes to do is go camping, and in fact we were camping in the member for Gippsland East's electorate over New Year's down at Banksia Bluff campground. He shared some concerns in his contribution around our investments in the campgrounds, but I was there. It was full every day of happy campers. We had lovely facilities while we were there and fantastic Parks Vic staff. The children were especially interested in the dead whale carcass on the beach. I am not sure if that counts as a family-friendly activity. It certainly was not a friendly activity for the whale, but that was the highlight for my daughter when I asked her what she liked best about camping.

This government has invested \$106 million in our great outdoors program. We have upgraded campgrounds, we have opened 31 new campgrounds, and my husband is especially pleased about the 125 kilometres of upgraded four-wheel drive tracks. He was recently on some of those on a weekend away with the boys and they had a fabulous time. Hopefully he does not need something else for the four-wheel drive in the future.

We are heading up near Bright these coming holidays. We will be camping up near Bright, and it does concern me that the Buckland Valley around Bright and the mountains around there are a likely target for the nuclear waste dump for the Liberal Party. I can just see the Buckland River, and I can see the fish in the Buckland River –

Members interjecting.

Lauren KATHAGE: That sounds like a threat. I would love to see –

Members interjecting.

The SPEAKER: Member for Ovens Valley, you are not in your place.

Lauren KATHAGE: I grieve for the fish of the Buckland River, who under a Liberal–Nationals government may have three eyes. That is something that none of us want to see and that we would be very sad about.

Today is World Oral Health Day, as we have heard, and I grieve because under the Liberal–National parties, schoolkids will be having to go to the dentist on their holidays because they will have no Smile Squad visiting them during the term. They would cut the Smile Squad, and kids would have to go to the dentist on their holidays – how depressing and how expensive. We know that they would do that,

because they cut Free Fruit Friday, which is important for oral health. The Smile Squad has provided over 80,000 kids across 615 public schools with free dental check-ups.

We did hear from the member for Sandringham that they will stand up for vulnerable Victorians. The member for Sandringham said, 'We will stand up for vulnerable Victorians,' and then he said, 'People always ask me what I would do if I was Treasurer.' He said two things. The first thing he wants to do is help private schools. The second thing he wants to do is help investment property owners. That is who he sees as 'vulnerable Victorians'. He is going to stand up for those vulnerable Victorians. Wow, how fantastic. He said that he respects the hard-earned dollars of Victorians because their tax dollars provide the services they rely on, like health and education. Well, what a betrayal then. What a betrayal that those opposite would have inflicted on people by cutting and closing and selling so many schools, TAFEs and hospitals. That is not respecting Victorian taxpayers, taking away the services that they rely on.

If they are so concerned about escalating costs, why are they sniffing around nuclear? That is what I want to know. For example, with the Hinkley Point C nuclear power plant in the UK, the estimated –

A member: What happened?

Lauren KATHAGE: I will tell you what happened. The estimated cost for that in 2022 blew out to 26 billion – that is pounds, I think. Then in 2023 it was £32.7 billion. Then in 2024 it was £46 billion. Those opposite think that they are the responsible economic managers, and yet they are sniffing around nuclear as though it is some sort of solution for our state. It would be bad news for our state, bad news for energy bills for Victorians, bad news for our environment and bad news for our budget, and the absolute risk that it would pose to our environment is unacceptable. So I grieve for the people of Victoria if those opposite were ever – God forbid – returned to power.

Commonwealth Games

Sam GROTH (Nepean) (17:02): I grieve for the people of Victoria – that they have a government who think that cancelling a major event at a cost of \$600 million is the best decision for the state.

Colin Brooks interjected.

Sam GROTH: It wasn't \$600 million? It was well and truly over \$600 million, minister at the table. We know today that the Victorian Auditor-General released his report into the withdrawal from the 2026 Commonwealth Games, and we know that the Premier of this state, Premier Allan, was the chief architect of the botched 2026 Commonwealth Games, which has completely trashed this state's reputation and has torched that \$600 million of Victorian taxpayer money. Those on the other side might not think this, but if bungling major projects and squandering taxpayer funds was a Commonwealth Games sport, well then, the Premier would be a gold medallist. That is exactly what she would be.

This damning report from the Victorian Auditor-General confirmed all the things that we know – that the decisions to bid for, plan and then withdraw from the games have cost Victorians over \$589 million with no discernible benefit, and this waste of taxpayer money on an event that will not happen is significant. I do refer to the report and the four key findings that have come from the Auditor-General. The first is the cost of those games. The second is that the Department of Jobs, Skills, Industry and Regions (DJSIR) business case for the games was inadequate. And I do grieve for this state. If the business case for holding a Commonwealth Games is inadequate, what about every other project and the business cases that may have been put together – or may not have been put together at all? How does the state and how do the people of Victoria have any confidence in a government that cannot get a business case right for, as they like to say, a 12-day sporting event? It seems like it is insignificant. You look at the major projects and the blowouts that continue to happen in this state. I grieve for this state. If they cannot get the Commonwealth Games right, how are they going to get anything else in the state right that they currently managing?

We also know, because of the key findings, that the agencies did not work together effectively, so those public sector agencies alongside the Premier's office – the Department of Treasury and Finance and the Department of Premier and Cabinet – and the minister herself did not work together effectively to give frank and full and timely advice. We also know that that original budget put forward for the games was unrealistically low. At the start it was unrealistically low. At the end the actual costings that the government used to justify a cancellation of the games – and this is from the Auditor-General himself – were 'overstated'. The \$6.9 billion that the government used to justify withdrawing from the Commonwealth Games was overstated. As per the report, that \$6.9 billion figure was:

... overstated because it double counts costs relating to industrial relations risks and cost escalation risks.

When the government put forward their \$2 billion in contingencies, when they released these fanciful figures, they also included an extra billion dollars. There was \$3 billion in contingency costs that were added on top of each other. The government cannot even count its own numbers when it comes to putting forward an amount that the Commonwealth Games was going to cost.

We know that as far back as April the now Premier and this government knew that the cost of running the games was well over \$4 billion, significantly more than the \$2.6 billion that the Premier herself kept trotting out as a number, including in this place. We know that on 20 April the Minister for Commonwealth Games Delivery, the now Premier, Premier Allan, then the minister, put forward a submission to cabinet to try to get her budget, the budget for the games, lifted to \$4.2 billion. Now, \$4 billion is a long way from \$2.6 billion. That was rejected by cabinet, but they came back with a figure of \$3.6 billion. In 2022–23 they had no problem putting a line in the budget for \$2.6 billion – absolutely no problem putting that amount in there.

One year later, on 23 May, the budget is delivered – gone. Commonwealth Games – gone. Line item – gone. It is completely missing from the budget, and the \$3.6 billion that was put into contingency funds was hidden – hidden in general contingency, hidden away from the Victorian people, hidden away from the people when the Premier was asked in Parliament about the cost of the event. A billion dollars extra does not matter. It would seem that now in this state – I worry about this, and I am sure other members on this side of the house certainly do – when a billion dollars no longer matters, then the people of this state should really have something to worry about.

We know that the Premier misled the Victorian people in this house when she claimed that that cost was still only \$2.6 billion, when only a month earlier the cabinet – there is a minister at the table here, the Minister for Planning, who I am sure was sitting in that room – actually approved a larger budget. We also know as per the Auditor-General's report that the additional funding, as we said, was not shown separately. These are quotes directly from the report:

... not shown separately in the budget papers ... not referred to in evidence given to the Public Accounts and Estimates Committee in its May and June 2023 hearings into the Budget.

Not only did they leave it out of the budget papers; they did not refer to it at all during questioning during those PAEC hearings.

This Labor government knew what the real cost of the Commonwealth Games was going to be, and they covered up the figures for their own political purposes. Right from day one the announcement of the Commonwealth Games, a games that was supposed to help regional Victoria, was nothing but a cruel hoax to deliver votes in regional Victoria ahead of the 2022 election. That is why in October, one month prior to the election, the government added new venues across different cities and different towns. They added new sports. They knew they could not deliver the games for the budget, but even so, one month before the election, they continued to ramp up the scale of the Commonwealth Games. They knew exactly what they were doing. The entire process of planning for these games was flawed right from the very start. The business case presented by DJSIR failed to provide adequate information for an informed decision. The government had their own thoughts on this, and they continued to ignore all of the advice, including from the Commonwealth Games Federation themselves.

The Victorian Auditor-General's Office (VAGO) report also slams the costings in the department's business case as, at worst, simply unrealistic and misleading. We also know that on 13 June the Premier fronted PAEC and said that the government was making tremendous progress in developing the games. That was 13 June; 14 June she was told that lawyers had been engaged to go about cancelling the games. One day after the games were making tremendous progress, lawyers were being engaged. Either the minister in charge of delivering the Commonwealth Games was not actually across what she should be doing, or as the Deputy Premier at the time and the minister in charge she was being completely kept out of the loop of what was going on within her government by the then Premier.

Let us go forward a month. That is 14 June. Let us go forward a month to 14 July – and this is stated in the VAGO report. The now Premier, as the Minister for Commonwealth Games Delivery, took a submission to cabinet to put the total cost of the games at \$4.2 billion. It says:

... the Games could not be delivered for \$3.6 billion without abandoning the principle of a wholly regional Games or significantly reducing the number of sports, venues and villages.

On 14 July the now Premier said this can be done for \$4.2 billion. The then Secretary of the Department of Premier and Cabinet flew out on 15 July. Cabinet made a decision to cancel the games on 17 July. The announcement of the decision to cancel the Commonwealth Games was made on 18 July, and at that announcement we were told – the Victorian people were told – the cost of delivering those games now would be \$6.9 billion or higher, possibly over \$7 billion, and there was no benefit to the state to deliver a \$7 billion, 12-day sporting event.

I find it hard to believe how when the minister in charge can put in a submission saying the games can be run for a cost of \$4.2 billion – and I know the member for Malvern here is a former Treasurer – in three days or four days you can go from \$4.2 billion to \$7 billion. It seems very, very convenient that an extra \$3 billion just might make the announcement a little more palatable to those people in Victoria.

We also know that the government secretly contracted legal services to aid the cancellation as early as 1 June, weeks and weeks before that public cancellation and weeks before the minister in charge, the now Premier, knew. We also know that this government overrode its own initial three-city Commonwealth Games plan for an expanded six-city plan. Doesn't that sound fantastic – from three cities to six cities ahead of that election. Let us call it what it is: if that is not pork-barrelling, I actually do not know what it is. It is a view shared by the Commonwealth Games CEO Craig Phillips, who said this government's original plan to host the games in regional Victoria blew out in costs and 'ran into trouble by playing to local politics in the run-up to an election'.

We know that the Premier favoured friendly unions in the Commonwealth Games village build. We know that there is a briefing document from Development Victoria released to the state opposition under FOI laws that includes a clause which specifies which unions were going to be preferred in the engagement of those contracts. I mean, it is actually endless where this Commonwealth Games debacle goes.

We know the Premier from her own side faced internal attacks and her factional opponents called her the minister for the Fyre Festival. We know that. We know that the Labor government and the Premier leaned on witnesses when they were appearing before the 2026 Commonwealth Games Senate inquiry. The Premier refuses and has refused right from the start. The now Premier, the minister in charge, refused to front the select inquiry over and over and over.

Premier Allan has had so many opportunities to come forward to tell the Victorian people what she knew, when she knew it and what her role was. I would like to see ministers in this state actually start to take responsibility for their portfolios and for their actions. Imagine having ministerial responsibility over the decisions that you make. There is a novel idea. This Premier is allergic to transparency; she is allergic to accountability. She has previously claimed herself that she is not one to cut and run when

challenges get hard. Well, I would completely challenge that statement, because the Premier has not fronted up, has not answered questions –

Sarah Connolly interjected.

Sam GROTH: No, she did not answer the questions today. Absolutely she did not answer the questions today, just like every single question we put to her is not answered. The Premier now has bungled the Commonwealth Games, the Melbourne Airport rail link, the Geelong fast rail and the West Gate Tunnel. The Suburban Rail Loop is blowing out. How far do we need to keep going into a list of projects that continue to be absolutely stuffed by this Premier and this government?

There is gross financial mismanagement right across the board. It has ramifications for Victorians. We are suffering from record debt and record taxes at a time when families are doing it harder than ever. Families are doing it hard. Yes, there are things that this government cannot control, things like mortgage stress, but this government should be taking every opportunity to pull the levers that it has available to it to actually make life easier for Victorians, not to continue to put a further burden on them. \$600 million – let us call it \$589 million. It says over 589 – let us call it \$589 million. That is \$227 for every single household in this state that this government has literally just torched. They have taken it and torched it. Along with the \$600 million, they have torched our reputation. Who would trust this government to do a deal to bring an event to this state? They have absolutely trashed our reputation. And the fact that the Visit Victoria CEO during the Commonwealth Games hearings said that he believed that cancelling the Commonwealth Games actually enhanced our reputation is to me just one of the most absurd statements I have ever, ever heard in my life. You can cancel an event that cost \$600 million, a global event, and somehow that will enhance the reputation of the state as an events capital? I mean, I cannot believe that you would actually think that we as a state cancelling an event would enhance our reputation.

Mathew Hilakari interjected.

Sam GROTH: I have never said that; do not put words in my mouth. Life is getting harder for Victorians. They are being punished, and I grieve for this state with the incompetence of this government.

Opposition performance

Tim RICHARDSON (Mordialloc) (17:17): It is great to speak on the grievance debate. I grieve for the people of Victoria facing an incompetent opposition devoid of policy and engagement but who are more about their own interests than the interests of each and every Victorian and their collective futures. It was a spirited performance from the member for Nepean. We know that if it is not written down for the member for Nepean then it does not quite come out right, so I am glad that spirited, spine-tingling performance that we saw just there – the call to arms to get around Grothy – was so significant –

The DEPUTY SPEAKER: Correct titles.

Tim RICHARDSON: I had chills listening to that. I mean, at one point –

Wayne Farnham: On a point of order, Deputy Speaker, I will remind the member to address people by their proper titles.

The DEPUTY SPEAKER: I thank the member for Narracan. I had just said the same thing.

Tim RICHARDSON: I am glad the member for Narracan is still a Liberal for today, but we will wait to see. Someone is backgrounding, but we will wait to see if he is still a member for the Liberals longer term.

I thought that was a real spirited performance from the member for Nepean. It is not in the sort of range that we saw as an Australian hero, and he was. I used to get up in the middle of the night around

Wimbledon time and just watch him smashing down the serves and hoping for better things, but he was a better tennis player than he is a leader of the opposition prospect. It was a bit like that time he took us on *Postcards* around his hood. Remember in 2021, he took *Postcards* around his hood? Where was the hood at the time? It was not Nepean, it was the electorate of Box Hill, and it was not until later on in February 2023 when the Fletchers Real Estate group on 19 and 20 February 2023, preselection time was going on, said tennis great – I agree with that, you will not have any arguments from me – Sam Groth and his wife have sold up and they are moving to pursue his political career on the peninsula. So the member for Box Hill saw off the member for Warrandyte, saw off a prospective member for Nepean, and then had a bit of a faux pas – a bit like when he did the teleprompter interviews on the sports reports on Channel 9, he should have had the answer written down today when the Leader of the Opposition looked to the member for Nepean and he was hoping to say, ‘No, no, you are the right leader. You are the leader for today, tomorrow and forever.’ No, what did the member for Nepean say? He turned to John, looked John in the eye and said, ‘No, I would absolutely enjoy to be the leader in the future.’

The DEPUTY SPEAKER: Correct titles, member for Mordialloc.

Tim RICHARDSON: ‘I would love to be the leader in the future.’ So at least the record is set. While the member for Nepean wants to restate the quote, I do not think saying that there are factional issues in the Labor Party on a day like this is really the right thing to say in the grievance debate. It is a bit of a peculiar reference. But the member for Nepean – all serve, no volley does not get you grand slams or the opposition leader gig. He was better in doubles, just look at the Wikipedia entry – his singles game needed a bit of work. So my advice would be, get a partner and have a better crack, you might even have a go.

But when you think of the dysfunction that is happening on that side, it is not really a joke. We are seeing some really significant issues, because the policy debate and the leadership from the Liberal party should be so much better. This is of course the party of Menzies and the party of Bolte, which had treasurers of the level of Costello and Frydenberg. If the former Leader of the Liberal Party and former opposition leader the member for Malvern was here – he worked for Peter Costello at that time – he might be able to give those reflections. Now, the party is described by Tony Barry, who is known well to them, as ‘the Victorian Liberal party is where hope goes to die. It is clearly the worst division in the country.’ And that was only just last year in April. I thought, well that is a bit harsh isn’t it; it is a bit inflammatory, those reflections. That was just in April, and I ask what has changed? Because after the 2022 election in November we had these reflections from the honourable learned member in this place – who has not had a promotion, but he has a crack and he has a fair go on the Public Accounts and Estimates Committee (PAEC) – the member for Gippsland South, who said on ABC radio that the Nationals had not considered breaking up the coalition but the discussion is on the table. He said that the Liberals

... are going to go through a fair bit of soul searching in coming days and weeks and months and we have performed very well.

‘We’ being the Nationals of course. They had a bit of a clean-out, didn’t they; they got nine seats. The member for Mildura really leans in and says ‘nine’ every time there is a vote with a bit of force and a bit of confidence, and we hear that and we acknowledge that the Nationals have done well. The member for Gippsland East took a bet each way and said:

I think we need to let the dust settle and just see how many seats they’ve won, who’s their leader and how many seats we’ve won.

And then the Leader of the Nationals just came through and knocked them all out and condemned Mr O’Brien – he got in a bit of trouble; got put in the freezer it looked like. He said the Gippsland South MP

is totally outside his remit in saying that because it’s not a discussion that’s been had in the party room.

...

He is way out of bounds by saying something at this stage without the party room talking about it.

Well, if they were not talking about at the end of 2022, I bet you they are talking about it now. Where we find ourselves now in Victoria in the policy debate and the interests of Victorians could not have gone further from their needs and their aspirations.

If it was bad then, what is the situation we have where the Leader of the Opposition is more interested in issues happening at Flagstaff station in the court precinct than he is in the Parliament precinct right here on Spring Street? When you get to that position where you are not focused on Victorians and the alternative policies you set forward, you really are not fit to govern. And where do we see that? We have seen two of the most senior and eminent people in the Leader of the Opposition's office go and leave recently. It is so destabilising to see figures of that nature. We saw a communications director go, we saw the chief of staff go and we saw the former member for Ripon step back in and save the day and try to salvage the Leader of the Opposition's office. It is because there is a huge amount of dysfunction, disunity, leaking, backgrounding impact and when you get to that point we all know what that looks like. We all know what it looks like when you go out and attack the media rather than talk about the issues of the day. So rather than fronting up and answering those questions that Victorians are entitled to ask – we saw an Auditor-General report put forward today; questions asked, Premier answers. But when questions about transparency were put forward about the Leader of the Opposition yesterday, what did the Leader of the Opposition say? He blamed the media. 'You're giving me a hard go. It is all so hard, it is all too much.' What did Neil Mitchell say – that real fearsome supporter of progressive politics and the Labor Party and our former Premier and the labour movement? Neil Mitchell's comment to Jacqui Felgate was:

He has lit a fire under himself and now he's complaining about the smoke.

I think each and every person can see that playing out right now. It is never the Leader of the Opposition's fault. There is never a moment of reflection. It was not the people in Hawthorn that made the judgement on him. It was someone else that got it wrong. It was the media getting it wrong. It is someone else; it is someone else's fault. It was not him that defamed someone; it is someone else's fault. These are the types of things where you do not front up and you are not accountable. This is what it looks like. How can you lead Victorians when your own party and your own people do not trust you?

All you have to do ask is another good colleague and another good PAEC friend of mine, the member for Polwarth, who coalition people suspected and backgrounded. They did not know why he went on ABC radio the other day. I know why. He has a fair crack. He speaks his mind. He goes off onto weird podcasts sometimes and talks about various different things. We know he has had a crack at wire rope barriers and wind farms. You know, he leans in and speaks his mind, and we commend the member for Polwarth. But when asked and cornered – not, 'How are you going, member for Polwarth?' – the obvious question was going to be about leadership. He panicked, deer in the headlights, or it was orchestrated: 'He is the best leader we have today.' At that stage he fronted up to Raf Epstein's program at about 9:30, so 9½ hours had lapsed and there was, on the books, about 15 hours to go. So for the next 15 hours the Leader of the Opposition, the member for Hawthorn, was still the best option for the day. You could not get a more surreal circumstance right now other than the circus that we saw in the *Herald Sun* about who the prospect might be.

We all know – I have said this before, and this is absolutely true – if the member for Bulleen is still the best prospect and the best answer, what is the question that they are asking? Clearly, his performance and authority yesterday on the doorstops knocked everyone out of the park. He is still the best option for the Liberal Party. Maybe in another time and another era – you know, the Jeff Kennett days – he might have been. But when he is still the best answer, what is the question?

So we had a spirited defence in the grievance from the member for Sandringham talking about where we find ourselves on the economy. I want to remind him, like I have the member for Kew, about their superstar hero, their Prime Minister-in-waiting until the teals took him out, the former member for

Kooyong, Josh Frydenberg, who did some very important work during COVID on that program – I do not know if you saw it – *Nemesis*. It was high rating. There were millions that watched it. Our former Premier reflected on the work that Prime Minister Morrison and Treasurer Josh Frydenberg had done. Well, in Josh's own words, this is what Josh said about debt:

There is a great deal of uncertainty. You can't overlook the fact this is primarily a health crisis that has had a severe economic impact.

Only by suppressing the virus can we ... have success into reopening our economy and getting people back to work.

And this is the kicker:

The more debt and deficit is the price on saving livelihoods.

So that was the equation for the Treasurer of the day – the top of the pops in Victoria, the most senior minister at the time, Josh Frydenberg. That was the equation he put forward. Victorians know that when you come in and you are putting forward a narrative like the member for Sandringham has, you have got to have a bit more than just the ranting, raving and whingeing. You have got to actually have a policy alternative. The member for Sandringham had 13½ minutes; he had 1 minute and 27 seconds to go and then said, 'This is what we'll do differently.' He will have – not a review but a wholesale review, whatever that means. It had the level of depth that his Shadow Treasurer speech had, which was 7 minutes of the greatest – I mean, it was spine tingling; there were goosebumps. We all went, 'Oh, gee, I tell you what, he's definitely a contender going forward.' But that was the equation that was put forward – the price of saving lives. The price of saving lives was what was put forward in the economic circumstances.

Then another treasured Liberal Premier, the one that actually got some stuff done on behalf of their state – no, not Ted Baillieu. What did Tim Smith, the former member for Kew, say about Ted Baillieu in a tweet recently?

You know it's getting desperate when Staley and Pesutto send poor old @TedBaillieu out to defend him ...

referring to the Leader of the Opposition. Harsh – Ted is looking fantastic. Ted was a great leader for them and put forward and brought them back to government. Harsh reflections, but I think the salient point is the absolute desperation from those opposite.

What did Dom Perrottet put forward? Dom Perrottet put forward and said:

With a building boom in ... infrastructure on Australia's east coast pitting states against each other – it is –

... "OK" if costs increased from estimates at the start of projects.

That was the most successful Liberal leader in government that they have had recently. I will say that again:

With a building boom in new infrastructure on Australia's east coast pitting states against each other, Premier ... Perrottet said it was "OK" if costs increased from estimates at the start of projects.

What were those opposite saying all through the last Parliament? 'New South Wales is the standard. We should be more like New South Wales. In fact forget the new state of Victoria; let us unify. Forget Canberra. We should be all one state; it is all a wonderful place in New South Wales.'

You cannot fanboy and fangirl over a Liberal leader in Dom Perrottet and hope that you can be like Dom and then turn around when Dom puts on the record cost increases and issues and put that forward as a prospect. That just gives the member for Sandringham a reference. I acknowledge he is having a fair dip, there is a bit of that Toastmasters training really coming through, you know, the real emphasis on pause, the downloaded speech. He is a really active member around our community. We share an electorate, but it was not lost on everyone in this Parliament – and the member for Berwick and the member for Nepean and even an outside chance that – there he is, the member for Berwick as if like,

come in on the hook, here we go. It was not lost on everyone that the member for Sandringham did a street stall in Highett for about 30 minutes –

Members interjecting.

Tim RICHARDSON: If you listen, you might actually learn something. The member for Sandringham did a street stall and there Channel 7 was waiting for him, waiting in the wings. I do not know if the rumour is right, but I heard Brad got there a little too early, and then the member for Sandringham –

The DEPUTY SPEAKER: Correct titles.

Tim RICHARDSON: had to wait a little bit because 7News was not there. His next street stall in Mentone was a little delayed for the constituents because of the grab to say, ‘I am not interested in the leadership’ – wink – ‘not yet’ – wink. But that was the key point that the whole street stall engagement was putting forward – not like the member for Berwick, who is a two-time failed candidate and has to be the unified choice because three times and you will never come back. We know what has happened with Bulleen. That is a bit of a sore point if you come back for a third time. I mean there is Lazarus with a triple bypass and then there is the literally walking-on-water miracle. And the member for Nepean is so underdone.

What we see is chaos in the Liberal Party, diminishing our democracy. Luckily, we are focused on the interests of Victorians, while they are focused on rolling their leader in a month’s time.

Regional Victoria

Jade BENHAM (Mildura) (17:32): I am not quite sure what the member for Mordialloc was grieving about, after that 15 minutes. But I am here today to grieve for regional Victorians, who are victims of neglect and regional discrimination from the Labor government. Every week in this place we hear from members in statements how a minister has been out to their electorate to open an envelope or to announce something or whatever it is, but rarely do we see them – unless there is something that has occurred that is usually dire; bushfires, storms, something that cannot be ignored – in other patches and even more rare is an invitation to such events. It is just about as rare as that government infrastructure spending.

We see the Victorian Treasurer in the media having a crack at his federal counterpart for us not getting Victoria’s fair share of tax revenue. But you know what? It is about time to practise what you preach. Over 25 per cent of Victorians live in the regions – that is a quarter at least, over that. So how about, instead of sinking money into Commonwealth Games blowouts, \$38 billion in budget blowouts – the member for Mordialloc is familiar with the number 38, I am sure, after 38 cabinet shuffles and he still has not got one. But what infuriates those out in the regions is that big hole under the city where they can see cost blowouts in the Suburban Rail Loop and the Metro Tunnel. Meanwhile you have got people out in the regions, growing your food, growing your fibre, that are getting a half-done, half-cooked Murray Basin rail project and having to get that food and fibre to market and port on roads that are barely worthy enough to carry a horse and cart.

Where do you think your avocado on toast and your almond latte come from? They certainly do not come from the barista; they are coming from us. You know what, there is a really simple solution for most of these things. There was a plan for the Murray Basin rail loop, and that has been put on the table. There has been research on this. In fact Mildura Regional Development put in a submission to the national freight and supply chain strategy review in October last year. They said:

Not converting the Maryborough to Ballarat to Gheringhap ... line –

which is the Maryborough freight corridor, which I talk about standardising and reinstating – not doing that, not standardising that line –

... has severely compromised supply chain resilience. During times of train service disruptions –

and there are a few –

... there is no contingency route ...

At the moment those trains have to come from the north-west of the state and go via Ararat. That is like driving a car from Mildura to Melbourne via Shepparton. It makes absolutely no sense at all. Meanwhile, we have got cost blowouts in city rail projects.

At the same time the trucks are getting bigger. It used to be that the most common truck you might see on major highways from the north of the state going to port or to market would be a road train, a B-double or an A-double, depending on what they were carrying. Now not even some of the biggest freight companies in this state but family farmers are running fleets of 10-plus B-quads. They have the same axle weights, but these are really big, really intimidating. If you can picture that – and I can see your minds ticking over – that is four trailers –

Members interjecting.

Jade BENHAM: Not me – I am not talking about me. But if you can imagine, these same roads are – and I have stopped to measure them many times – not more than 3 metres in width. If you come up in a sedan – and again, tourists are on the roads all the time – Google Maps sometimes takes you the quickest route on back roads, which it absolutely should not, because people go, ‘I’ll go the quickest route’, completely unaware that there are no shoulders or that the shoulders that are there have a drop-off of over 10 centimetres and they are not wide enough. So it is literally a case of them being very intimidated coming up against not only the road trains and the B-doubles and A-doubles that are still there but these B-quads, which are huge. You are trying to drive that at night around windy roads with all of the wildlife, which is about to get worse in the north-west of the state with the kangaroos, the foxes, the goats – and now the wild dogs, which farmers are not allowed to protect their lambs from. I mean, how on earth do you prioritise protecting wild dogs over livestock, over lambs? How are you comfortable with seeing lambs that have been mauled by wild dogs and going, ‘No, we need to protect the dingo. We need to change the unprotection orders so that we can protect them so their numbers can grow.’ That is absolutely insane. Next we will be hearing that lamb prices have skyrocketed again. The farmer probably will not pocket it because of supply issues. At the moment it is hard to sell lambs for more than \$50 a head. I mean, it just defies logic – it absolutely defies logic.

Let me circle back. I got distracted by the wild dog thing because it is really topical at the moment, obviously, with the unprotection laws changing last week at midnight. I got a call from the minister’s office on the Thursday telling me that the orders were changing at midnight that night. How do I communicate that without an email blasting? It is not common practice for farmers to be sitting watching their emails at all hours of the night, but apart from doing an email or a text blast, how do you communicate that with your constituency out in the bush? Papers are still really important, and it will be in the paper.

A member interjected.

Jade BENHAM: No, it will be in the paper this week.

But I was talking about rail. Mildura is the only regional city in this state that does not have a passenger rail service. I know that those on the other side say, ‘Oh, well, that was cut out 30 years ago.’ Well, you know what, the windscreen is bigger than the rear-vision mirror. There have been decades to fix it. It is professed all the time. There have been promises to fix it. This is why people in the great north-west of the state get so furious when they see money being sunk into a big hole under the city and they still have to drive – the cost of living is biting everyone really hard, and the cost of petrol – to get to the city for health care, for appointments, because they cannot get them where they live. It is regional discrimination at its best.

While we are talking about health care, let us talk about the public hospital system, shall we? It is so far in deficit staff are not supported the way they should be. I get letters from staff and I get emails

every single day. I have started compiling them into a nice little dossier binder – I do not even like paper, but it has got to that point – so that we can prove this, because those on the other side do not often believe that this is the case. I have letters from staff begging for us to dig deeper and look at the public health system and what is happening. At the end of the day –

Tim Bull interjected.

Jade BENHAM: Where on earth do you start? Do you start at the budget blowouts that are not being funded correctly? Do you look at the obvious wont to centralise services? Honestly, where do you start?

The DEPUTY SPEAKER: Order! I remind the member that ‘you’ refers to the Chair.

Jade BENHAM: Apologies, Deputy Speaker. Where would the Deputy Speaker start? I would be interested to know in fact, because the state of our public hospitals at the moment is another example of a Labor government who cannot manage money, cannot manage projects and certainly cannot manage the public health system. Yes, we cop it all the time about public hospitals being managed by third parties. Well, honestly, that is their business, managing a hospital with a bank of specialists on call so you can get a specialist appointment when you need it. They can get investment when they need it. If they need 30 extra emergency department (ED) beds, they do not have to beg, borrow and steal from the government. They do not have to beg, borrow and steal for a \$45 million top-up.

At the end of the day I do not care who manages them. All that we want is to be able to go to the hospital and know that the hardworking staff there are well supported to deliver the best health care possible and that we can take our kids to the ED when they need it and know that it is going to be there and the staff are going to be ready to deliver and are supported and have not had to be working overtime for weeks and months on end and are not stressed to the point where they are reconsidering their career. We do not want that, because those people that work in health care on the front line are angels doing God’s work, honestly. I admire them and I am in awe of them every day.

I did go and have a look at the feedback that I have been receiving over the past couple of months through the office, and the important issues that the people of the Mildura electorate are concerned about are no surprise. Guess what is number 1: roads. Roads and transport make up the bulk of complaints – potholes, shoulders not being wide enough and roads needing reconstruction because, as the member for Gippsland South stated in his grievance debate, the patch-up jobs that are being done are ridiculous. There needs to be some sort of accountability for the contractors doing this work, because in our part of the state when it gets warm – and it does; we have just had a week of 40 degrees – whatever they are using to patch those up, as soon as a B-double truck or even a car runs over them it takes the road with it. It is ridiculous.

Number 2 is health and access to specialists and mental health services. Then there is planning issues, land tax and red tape. Everyone I think on this side of the house has spoken about land tax this week. The thing that I hear is, ‘Yes, we get that we need regulation, but honestly we are being strangled by red tape, taxes and admin.’

Housing – the member for Gippsland South also brought up the question of why you would disincentivise the private sector from investing in rentals. It is just ludicrous. I know that this gets ignored, because logic does by those on the other side, but you need the private sector to invest in rental properties because that is what is going to solve a housing crisis. Why would you disincentivise the private sector – mum-and-dad investors who own one property at best most of the time? Seventy per cent of property owners own one property, and we slug them for it. It is absolutely insane. They are renting them out to people that need housing and that need to rent – that cannot afford to buy their own house.

Emergency services, including the CFA and FRV up in our patch – there was a pumper that was 14 years old that broke down on a day of total fire ban the other day, which is insane.

Child care – I know I have only got 2 minutes left, but I could talk about this for 15 minutes – Hopetoun child care, for example. The member for Euroa spoke earlier this week about how three- and four-year-old kinders have had to be put together in the same room. That is absolutely insane for early learning. We hear all the time about how important kindergarten is – I could not agree more; yes it is. I hear this from the kindergarten teachers themselves. I had a phone call this morning, and I have got a public meeting to go to on Tuesday, because Hopetoun child care is at risk of closing down now because the stress of having the kindergartens all in together is insane. There are solutions to this. This is stuff that could take the stroke of a pen. It does not even cost any money. Separate them; change the hours. We need to incentivise people to go out to rural and regional centres – and they are different; we need to start talking about them differently – like Hopetoun to get qualified staff out there to make sure that community still has an early learning centre and still has a kindergarten. You close that kindergarten, and you lose the workforce in the town as well, because someone has to stay home and look after the kids.

I put out on my socials earlier the top three things that people wanted to raise. Obviously, roads was the top response. Actually, health care was the other one, so the top three were the housing crisis, the rural professionals shortage – roads was the first one – and health care. Staff safety as well came up multiple times. Danielle wanted to know why on earth Maryborough is getting such a big upgrade. It just defies logic as to why in one breath the Treasurer says the federal government needs to give us more; well, the Victorian government need to stop with their regional discrimination.

School holiday activities

Alison MARCHANT (Bellarine) (17:47): I rise and I grieve today for what could be at risk if a Liberal government were indeed in government in relation to programs and support that are available to families around school holiday times, and I will bring this back to the topic at hand. School holidays are a really important time for families, but as a former primary school teacher I can also say school holidays are a very important time for teachers as well to have that break and recharge, although many of them do work throughout the school holidays as well. I remember I would always get sick in school holidays. You would stop and you would catch up and you would get sick, but then you would recharge for the next term. Also school holidays can be very important for grandparents. I am the first to admit that I have needed my parents and my in-laws to help with raising my own children, but they did love having them as well and having that special time with the grandkids, going out and doing activities together.

I do grieve that the Bellarine electorate would certainly be in a worse situation if we allowed the opposition to represent them. Nothing would happen. Absolutely nothing would happen, and programs that we support would be at risk. I would argue that the Bellarine is one of the best electorates across the state. Everyone thinks that of their own electorate, but with the uniqueness of our historic townships, the natural environment that we have, our wineries, our tourist attractions, it is an absolutely beautiful place to live, raise a family or retire. Many people have moved to the Bellarine electorate in the last little while. They have moved to the region and they often say to me, ‘I wish I had done it earlier.’

I was born and bred on the Bellarine. I grew up in what was the small rural country town of Leopold, where everyone knew everyone. My fondest memories of growing up – and I suppose they probably are school holiday memories – are of going to the beach and exploring rock pools. You would have fish and chips at Queenscliff and watch the pilot boats go out of the heads. You would go to skate parks or the park, where you would go for walks or bike rides with the family, and all of those were free activities. They did not cost families much. Some of the things I will talk to today are also free for families on the Bellarine, or if they indeed visit the Bellarine. I have a 13-year-old and an 11-year-old who love their screen time, so I am always looking for things that we can do as a family to be out and about and get them off their screens. The list that I go through today – I hope parents will have a look at it and it will encourage them to go out and about, get the kids off the screens and do some things across the Bellarine.

One thing I would grieve if an opposition were indeed in government and is at risk is the Bellarine distinctive area and landscape planning policy that has been placed on our region and the electorate. This was a community-led campaign, alongside the work of the former member Lisa Neville, to protect what is so dear about the Bellarine: to protect the green wedges, to protect our natural environment and to protect our unique townships from overdevelopment. I certainly would grieve if anyone other than a Labor member were to look at that and were to maybe repeal or remove that really important planning policy that ensures that the Bellarine stays as it is intended to and stays protected as a very unique area. That is what the community and residents of the Bellarine expect – that we protect our natural environment as well.

There are two wonderful women who have started a business in the Bellarine, Cayla and Heidi, and they call their business Seaforth. They are about highlighting the beautiful Bellarine. They have T-shirts, tote bags and prints. They use pictures of the Bellarine in their products. They have a wonderful bingo card called Bellarine bingo. You can pick that up in their web store. They are wonderful. You can go across the Bellarine, drive with Mum and Dad, and the kids can tick off where they have been on the different parts of the Bellarine. But I have my own game called Bellarine bingo as well in the car. My kids do not love it as much, but I can literally drive around the Bellarine and point to Labor investments, many of them advocated for and supported by Lisa Neville in the past. Whether it is surf lifesaving clubs, investment; schools – every school on the Bellarine has had an investment; CFA stations, investment; coastal walks, boardwalks, accessibility of our coast, investment; sporting facilities, skate parks, investment. We have had an incredible amount of investment across the Bellarine to support the lifestyle that families absolutely enjoy.

When we think about the Bellarine, we certainly think about beautiful beaches. We want people to come to our beaches and enjoy them, but we also want people to be safe. Every surf lifesaving club on the Bellarine has had an upgrade or redevelopment – Ocean Grove Surf Life Saving Club, Barwon Heads, has had a redevelopment and Point Lonsdale also has a new surf lifesaving clubhouse and is working towards a new clubhouse for what they call the back beach, to service that beach in Point Lonsdale. All of those investments are really important. I do grieve that we would not see that investment with an opposition in government.

With all the beautiful waterways that we do have and the coastline, fishing is very important and is very popular on the Bellarine. I cannot give away my secret fishing spots today, but I can absolutely give you lots of locations that you can try. I just cannot put X marks the spot on exactly where you would get fish. We have plenty of boaters as well on the Bellarine. Every boat ramp has had an upgrade or is about to get an upgrade on the Bellarine as well, and we are really proud of that investment to support that recreation activity. There are plenty of land-based opportunities as well for fishing. I see many kids and families along our piers – St Leonards pier, Portarlington pier and Point Lonsdale pier – and at the Ocean Grove boat ramp. We see plenty of people in Barwon Heads for that land-based fishing. It is absolutely incredible to see kids now out and about with their free fishing rods that were provided by the state government to support our next generation of anglers. I am sure there are lots of kids catching fish.

I will give a shout-out to two boys in Ocean Grove, a primary school aged boy and a high school aged boy who create soft plastics that they sell online. They are called Get the Dogs Soft Plastics. I have used them. I have bought them. I caught a fish with one, so I know that they are a really good product. How great is it for two kids to be entrepreneurial and to do this – something that they love doing, and now they have got a little small business. I am sure people could look them up, but this is just one example of some of the things that you can do, pretty much for free, on the Bellarine. You can get out there, get your fishing rod and see if you can catch dinner.

We also have some pretty historic townships across the Bellarine, and Queenscliff is one of those. The Bellarine Railway is run by a really fantastic volunteer organisation that preserves steam trains and preserves rail carriages. They run services along Swan Bay. It is a fantastic way to see the Bellarine from a different angle. You can hop on board and take a 30-minute train ride or enjoy a longer

experience along Swan Bay. You can do it in a couple of different ways. You can have a family experience, jumping on one of the steam rail experiences, or there is the Q train, which is a very luxurious food and beverage package, I suppose, where you sit in a carriage and experience some of the best and finest Bellarine produce. It is a great experience as well for tourists to come along to that. That is another tourist destination that we have invested in. I am really proud that they have received upgrades not only for their stations but also for the line along there to make sure that when on the Q train people can be served their wine and their coffee without too many spills. It is a fantastic experience.

I just want to highlight this with school holidays and Easter coming up as well: the railway do run a kid-friendly day out with Thomas. They are also going to be running a Good Friday appeal. The railway are going to donate proceeds from the passenger fares to the Good Friday Appeal, which is absolutely fantastic. I note that money from the Good Friday Appeal this year is also going to regional hospitals, and Barwon Health in Geelong will be one of the recipients as well. I think it is fantastic that they are doing that.

We have other absolutely fantastic free things that families can go and do over the school holidays. We have got Portarlington ferries and Searoad Ferries. Portarlington ferries do specials over the school holidays. You can go for a ride on the ferry and go into Geelong or into Melbourne. Searoad Ferries have that Queenscliff to Sorrento trip, which is amazing to do. Hopefully you see dolphins on the way. Sometimes you can see that, and it is absolutely special. They also put on kids events on the ferries over the holidays.

There are plenty of skate parks and bike parks that you can use across the Bellarine. The St Leonards skate park has just had an upgrade, thanks to joint local government and state government funding. It is absolutely fantastic. Ethan, who is a local St Leonards resident down there, had been advocating for something for kids in that area, and a skate park was one of the things that he advocated for. I am sure I have got this right: St Leonards skate park, before the redevelopment, was given the title of the worst skate park in the world by an American skating magazine, which is not great. I will have to get onto them and let them know that it is no longer the worst skate park in the world. It is absolutely magnificent. Every time I drive past I see plenty of families and kids there, which is wonderful. The community have absolutely embraced that; they love it.

We also have lots of natural reserves and parks where families can go for walks. Recently I was at the Ocean Grove Nature Reserve meeting the friends group that look after that place. You can go for a walk there. They have now relaunched their QR code, so you can go along with your phone, scan the QR code as you are walking along and learn about the great Ocean Grove Nature Reserve. It is a wonderful place. I know some of the bush kinder groups go there as well. Certainly you learn a lot about the traditional owners and some of the Indigenous flora and fauna that are in that park.

There is plenty to do in terms of kids getting out and about. There are lots of sporting facilities that have had upgrades: tennis, netball, basketball, soccer pitches, cricket nets. They are all wonderful sports. The kids can just go along to their local sporting facilities and use them over the school holidays. I will recommend that maybe the kids could try pickleball –

A member interjected.

Alison MARCHANT: yes – these school holidays, an absolutely wonderful sport that has taken off on the Bellarine. The pickleball group in Drysdale are now using an old bowling green for their pickleball court. I encourage the kids to have a go at a new sport as well.

The Bellarine has had a lot of investment over the years, and I really grieve that a Liberal government, or a coalition government – in government – would not invest in the Bellarine as we have done. I will

fight every day for continued and further investment, and I will fight for the families of the Bellarine to ensure that they have the lifestyle that they certainly deserve and enjoy at the moment.

Question agreed to.

Bills

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

Second reading

Debate resumed.

Wayne FARNHAM (Narracan) (18:01): I am pleased to continue my contribution. I will start with a reference that the member for Narre Warren South made earlier about a Michael Buxton. I think he got a little bit confused about which Michael Buxton it was. The Michael Buxton that actually wrote the report is Professor Michael Buxton, who worked for a Victorian government planning and environment agency – Environment Protection Authority Victoria – and formerly headed up an intergovernmental process for developing Australia's national greenhouse strategy. Obviously he is a very, very well respected professor. The professor made comment about the government's renewable process, and I will just quote from what he said:

Wind and solar generating facilities will be placed in the wrong location. It's likely that all those broader impacts, the loss of farming land, the impacts on biodiversity and landscapes, won't be properly considered, and what will really only matter will be the need to complete the project, anywhere, no matter what.

That professor is not a donor to the Liberal Party and that professor is not worth \$400 million, as claimed by the member for Narre Warren South. I would just like to correct that and put it on the record that very, very experienced people are worried about the renewable push by the government. He is a very experienced professor. He has been in that industry a long time, and he has raised these concerns because he can see the problem of the way government is going.

Part of the problem also we are going to have with this renewable push is that I think the government jumped the gun when they said 'No more gas.' That is going to be a problem. That is going to be a serious problem in this state – that the government has ruled out gas as part of our energy solution. Gas will need to be part of our energy solution; make no mistake about it. I am not against the renewable push, but I am against the government making kneejerk decisions just on the basis of getting votes. It is not worth our energy sector's security into the future. The government have to very carefully reconsider their position on gas. Our side of the chamber has very strongly come out and said we will repeal the decision on gas, and we will do that because we know our energy sector has to be reliable. That is the number one thing people are concerned about with renewables – the reliability of our energy sector. It is so important that the government does not get this wrong, because there is too much at risk. We have already seen businesses leaving Victoria because of the gas decision. Businesses have come out strongly and said, 'We will not trade in Victoria anymore. We will go to South Australia or we will go to New South Wales because those states believe gas has to be part of the solution.' The member for Warrandyte has said it a few times: it is very hard to cook with a wok on an electric hotplate. It does not work that well.

More to the point is what this is going to cost our economy if gas goes away, and we are seeing businesses go. In the last 12 months the figure is 129,000 businesses that have either closed or left Victoria. That is going to have a massive economic impact on our state, no matter what figure you put on it. It will have a massive economic impact because that is 129,000 businesses, and that is people leaving our state. That is people not paying taxes in our state. That is going to be a massive problem into the future, and the government seriously need to have a look at their energy program because, as I said earlier, the wind side of it is in trouble. There is absolutely no doubt about that now that the Port of Hastings has been shelved or they have got to go back to the drawing board on the Port of Hastings. Gas will have to be part of the solution. You cannot run this state without gas. There are too many

homes and too many businesses that rely on it. I urge the government to reconsider that, because it is so important, and the reflection of business leaving our state is going to drive our state deeper into debt.

Paul MERCURIO (Hastings) (18:06): I am happy to rise to give my contribution to the Energy and Public Land Legislation Amendment (Enabling Offshore Wind Energy) Bill 2024. This bill amends the Land Act 1958, the Crown Land (Reserves) Act 1978, the Forests Act 1958, the National Parks Act 1975 and the Electricity Industry Act 2000. I think it is pretty fair to ask what this bill means and what the changes in this bill mean to people in the chamber and to our families and people in our community. Quite simply, when I look at it and bring it down to one idea, this bill is about getting us to net zero. That is what it is doing, and it does it in a variety of ways. Some of the arguments that I have heard from the other side of the house are that people are saying that there is not enough information in it – there is no plan, there is no structure, what if this, what if that – and I feel like you are putting the cart before the horse. This bill does what it needs to do to get us to net zero. When I wake up in the morning and think I want to cook a roast lamb, I do not go out and put the barbecue on, then go out and buy the lamb, take it home, marinate it, put it in the fridge and cook it in the afternoon. I feel like that is a little bit of what the opposition is involved in. Let us just go out and buy the lamb, do the work and get to net zero.

This bill is just one tranche of the Allan Labor government's journey to achieving net zero, and I will talk about that a little bit more. I just want to acknowledge that my electorate is Hastings. Member for Narracan, you have had a few words to say about that. We have had a little bit of a beating lately, but I do believe that Hastings could and hopefully will play a major role in building offshore wind farms and in Victoria attaining net zero. We did not get a great result, but I disagree with the member, because it is not dead in the water. There is a lot of work to be done, and I am very positive. I would like to reiterate to the house that the Minister for Ports and Freight and the Minister for Energy and Resources are working with the federal government on a path forward to progress the port. Stay tuned to this spot. I remain positive.

This bill will allow for offshore wind project proponents to undertake crucial project planning and design work for connection points that will run through Commonwealth and Victorian waters to an offshore electricity grid connection point. This will be done in a few ways, which include enabling the Victorian licences to be issued or to have agreements entered into so that offshore wind proponents can conduct investigatory works as part of any proposed construction of offshore wind. I might say I have had a lot of people come to my office very excited about doing exploration and getting involved in the offshore wind project in Gippsland. This bill will also allow the minister that administers the Electricity Industry Act 2000 to declare an entity to be an offshore wind generation company so they can begin investigatory activities if necessary under the National Parks Act 1975. It amends the land, Crown land and forests acts – I have already said that – but what that does is enables activities to be approved on public land relating to the investigation of offshore wind connection assets. These are important measures to be undertaken, as we are in a climate crisis. Coal-fired power stations are closing, and a nuclear thought bubble will not provide power to our homes. This bill will mark a continuation of the delivery of 95 per cent renewables by 2035, net zero by 2045 and achieve wind energy targets of 9 gigawatts by 2040 as well.

For those on the other side, this would still be faster than any nuclear project and come at a fraction of the cost as well. Offshore wind is economically viable and environmentally responsible. Wind power is an infinite source of renewable energy. It creates no greenhouse gas emissions, making it an enormously important source of energy for us to achieve net zero, and, guess what, it is free. Fantastic! Wind is free. Nuclear power is not free. We can harness the wind and it is free, but it costs a lot of money to create and harness nuclear power. I think that is a terrific thing for all of us to remember.

We need to provide certainty for our country's first offshore wind industry, which is why this bill is before us today, allowing for offshore wind developers to have long-term certainty that public land can be used for electricity infrastructure to power this state with clean renewable energy. This

connection infrastructure is required to deliver electricity generated by offshore wind projects in declared Commonwealth waters into the Victorian grid.

There are many things that we are proud of in Victoria. We have the best education system in the world, we are the major events capital of the country and a cultural and arts hub, just to name a few off the top of my head. On top of all that, we can be the offshore wind energy leader in Australia as well. Passing this legislation will put us on track to achieve that. The facts of the matter are our reliance on coal is ending, our coal-fired plants are shutting down and those same industries are looking to the future of energy, which is renewables. But we need to ensure that we build the necessary transmission infrastructure to support our renewable energy sector by cutting red tape, allowing proponents to scope out possible sites to see the viability of them and clearing up bureaucratic backlogs that are only stifling the progression of offshore wind rather than accelerating it, so we can meet our targets, drive down emissions and give Victorians cheaper and more reliable power.

Understandably there is some community concern surrounding whether the transmission lines will be underground or above ground, and it is important that we strike the right balance between the two. It is just not economically feasible to put all of the transmission cables underground, as this would be a huge expense, and it has its own environmental impacts. There are advantages and disadvantages to both options. Many factors come into play, and I am confident that this government can and will work through those challenges. But as I said, that is putting the cart a little bit before the horse.

VicGrid have been tasked with coordinating the delivery of transmission infrastructure to ensure that it remains cost-effective, minimises the impact on communities and we do not have a situation where proponents develop individual transmission lines that are not in harmony. There are also great opportunities for landowners to benefit from these projects. The investment for jobs in these regions will provide an economic boon and the chance to train up a new generation of renewable energy workers. Not only will it lead to local job creation, development of new industries and grow training and skills but it will also allow for payments to be made for people hosting transmission lines on their land. This will be done through the Victorian transmission investment framework for our renewable energy zones.

We can talk about all the benefits that this bill will achieve once passed, but currently they are all words. We on this side back those words up with real and tangible outcomes and with legislation to address climate change and progress our renewable energy sector. We have proven to the rest of the country that we can not only achieve our emission reduction targets but smash those targets. We have done that by showing a positive and forward-thinking plan to the Victorian people that does address climate change, and they have repaid us with their faith through voting in three successive Labor governments.

We have cut emissions by more than any other state since 2014, and we have the strongest climate change legislation in the country. That is what Victorians voted for, and that is what they are getting. However, we cannot do it all ourselves; an organised national approach is needed. We are a massive country and we can easily be a renewable energy powerhouse on the world stage, but we need a nationally consistent approach that helps progress offshore wind, not hinders it. We have had to deal with the former Liberal–National federal government, which provided no plans for renewables – no plans for nuclear, for that matter – even though they had nearly a decade to action it, and gave no tangible actions to curb rising emissions. We welcome the Albanese government as our new partners in Canberra and are committed to working alongside them to achieve a net zero future, which will be done through clean renewable energy, with that work starting right here in Victoria, the soon-to-be renewable energy state. It is a very exciting time to be in this space. It is a very exciting time to be a Victorian and to be in government. We in this place stand on the precipice of making what was not that long ago believed to be unattainable attainable. Net zero 2045 is not only possible but probable, but we need to work together – federal, state, local and community. We need to make some brave decisions. It is a brave new world out there, and it is ours for the saving. That is what this bill will do. I commend this bill to the house.

Martin CAMERON (Morwell) (18:16): I rise to talk on the Energy and Public Land Legislation Amendment (Enabling Offshore Wind Energy) Bill 2024, and there have been plenty of people speaking on this today. Obviously the Victorian government is updating a number of acts relating to land to include offshore wind. The bill will allow offshore wind developers to obtain tenure over public land for the purpose of assessing the feasibility of constructing offshore electricity transmission infrastructure. We can have the offshore wind, but we need the transmission lines to hook it into the power stations. The wind energy that is generated is about 3 miles offshore. The infrastructure from the wind turbines is laid on the ocean floor, and then as it gets closer in to the shore it goes underground. It is going to pop up in a designated zone, and it will come to a hub, as such, where at this stage they are looking at changing it from underground and putting it into transmission lines.

We had the member for Gippsland East in his contribution talk about how this affects the fishing industry, particularly out of Lakes Entrance, with the cables lying on the ground. They are going to need to change the way that they access their catch, as such. A lot of it is nets that are dragged along the bottom of the ocean. There are going to be buffer zones that need to be put in place, which is to be expected, but there needs to be some due diligence done in that area so we do not wreck the fishing potential of Lakes Entrance and all the trawlers that have safe port in their harbour.

On the location of the wind turbines, I know the member for Narracan was being a little bit facetious before about building the wind turbines in Port Phillip Bay out here, but the blades on the particular wind turbines are 150 metres long each. As they crank it onto the turbine and they put it up, that is 300 metres high. To give you an example, each wind turbine is going to be taller than the Eureka Tower, and these are going to go off the shore. They are huge, huge infrastructure. You can imagine carrying a 150-metre blade via ship, and as of late last year there was not a ship in the world built big enough that can carry the size of blades. They have to be made and brought out to Australia to help with the development of it. They are over 300 metres high, and they are going to be on our shore. We are going to be seeing them in my part of the world and in the member for Gippsland South's, off his patch down there. We might be able to put one out there in the bay that just does not work, and that could be our Statue of Liberty moment of having it there so the people of Melbourne can appreciate just how big these towers are and what the country folk have to put up with – a little bit of eye pollution, as we say, having to look at them all the time.

Then we get into the transmission lines and the designated sites. The government is doing its due diligence in looking at all of those. The towers are about 80 metres high for the transmission lines and they run through state forests and Crown land, so there are going to have to be works done there to remove trees so these transmission lines can go through. The member for Hastings said before that there is the option to go underground, but all the stats and facts and figures prove that the underground option is very, very expensive, so transmission lines seem to be the way that we are going to go. As it goes through there and comes into my part of the world down in the Latrobe Valley, where they will connect into the Loy Yang A power station, it travels through private landowners' land, so farmers and so forth down there.

We do note that the government has removed the rights of Victorians to take renewable energy concerns to VCAT, and that is a concern. We do need to get it right. We have one opportunity to do it, and they have taken away the rights of people and landowners. If they do not agree with it or think there is something wrong, they still need that avenue to be able to go to VCAT to prove that it is wrong and ensure a proper decision is made. How many trees – that is my question – in these national parks are going to have to be cut down for the transmission lines to go through? What is the buffer zone? Is it going to be 100 trees, 1000 trees, 10,000 trees, and will they be replanted? I know the timber industry, when they cut a coupe down, they had to replant trees. We need to know all these bits and pieces of what is going on.

We mentioned it before, and the member for Hastings said the Port of Hastings has been put on hold at the moment. There is another opportunity at Barry Beach, as the member for Gippsland South spoke about before, but the one thing the Minister for Energy and Resources has to do is guarantee that the

port is somewhere in Victoria. The renewable build is built on 59,000 jobs coming into Victoria, so if we lose the port and the ability to manufacture most of the wind turbines here in Victoria – and there are rumours that it may go to Tasmania – the minister needs to do her due diligence and fight for the people of the Latrobe Valley and the people of Victoria so that we do get these 59,000 jobs. That is what is being promised to us all – local jobs.

And there is a time frame. We talk about getting to net zero, but this piece of legislation is about keeping the power on, because in 2028, which is four years from now, Yallourn power station shuts. That is about 1.2 gigawatts of energy that will be pulled out of the energy system. I did note that at least 2 gigawatts of offshore wind power by 2032 is what the government is saying will happen. Well, in 2028, 1.2 gigawatts will be off the grid because Yallourn will shut. Then by 2035 there will be 4 gigawatts of renewable power. But in 2035 Loy Yang A shuts, and there is about 2.5 gigawatts of power that comes out of there. We need to build the infrastructure, so we need the power supply to be able to do that.

The offshore wind energy industry in Victoria is going to go ahead. There is no-one disputing that at all. Renewables are going to happen. But there are people that work in the power stations that are closing that have worked there all their lives, and their children there are now starting to work in the power industry. We need to make sure that their jobs are secure. That is my role. I know that we are going to transition into renewables, and I am happy for that to happen, but it has to be done at a sensible rate. In four years one of our power stations, which supplies 22 per cent of the power currently to Victoria, will be gone. It will be off the grid. It will be done. There is no coming back from that.

And then in 2035 the other power station, which supplies 30 per cent of power into Victoria, is coming offline too. So there is a real concern that if the government does not start to tell us the plan that is in place, what are our workers in the Latrobe Valley meant to think? If we lose the port out of Victoria, where are they going to work? What are they going to do? What we do best is we manufacture things, so we need to make sure the port is in Victoria maybe at Barry Beach, if it does not go to the Port of Hastings, so the workers and families in the Latrobe Valley have the security that what the government is trying to do in going to renewables is going to be able to be sustained. Is that time line the right time line? Is it intact? We have got to transition out of coal-fired power stations into renewables. As I keep saying, in four years time our first power station – well, we have already lost Hazelwood; that is shut down – Yallourn is going to be closing. I need to give the people of the Latrobe Valley certainty that everything that we can manufacture for the renewable process that is going to happen is going to be down in our patch. We do not oppose this, because we know we need to have this infrastructure, but we just need to have that plan made clear to us.

Jordan CRUGNALE (Bass) (18:26): I love a plan. I rise to speak to the Energy and Public Land Legislation Amendment (Enabling Offshore Wind Energy) Bill 2024, and I want to start by thanking the minister, her office and the Department of Energy, Environment and Climate Action (DEECA) for bringing this landmark bill to us today. It is because of her determination, her forward thinking and, honestly, her national leadership that we are here, and every other jurisdiction is now heading down this renewable road. This bill in its essence will amend the Victorian public land and electricity legislation to allow offshore wind projects to undertake site investigatory activities to determine the design and placement of connection infrastructure. This is important because this connection infrastructure is required in order to deliver the electricity that offshore wind projects in declared Commonwealth waters generate into Victoria's grid. The bill provides a clearer pathway for proponents awarded feasibility licences in Commonwealth waters to undertake and align related feasibility assessments in Victorian waters and onshore for better project planning.

And we do not have a choice. We are all about getting the transition underway, getting the frameworks in place and setting targets and assurance for investment and industry so we can deliver. The coal stations are closing and will close. These coal-fired power stations are ageing, they are dying and they are kind of limping to the end of their lives. It is not just us saying it, it is them themselves. As we all know, offshore wind is critical in Victoria's energy mix; in fact it is critical in Australia's energy mix.

This is the new age, and it goes back, I guess, to Alvin Toffler's 1970s book *Future Shock*. It is an enormous structural change that has to happen, a revolution of sorts, from an industrial society to a technological one, and so here we are. We lead the country, and we have worked hard to build strong investment interest to see our projects completed successfully. Indeed we have become known as the global leader in the development of offshore wind. We have even become the first subnational jurisdiction to join the Global Offshore Wind Alliance. Personally I think that achievement is commendable.

We have also committed to working with traditional owners on the protection of land and water. Importantly, we have committed to supporting the Gunaikurnai Land and Waters Aboriginal Corporation's aspirations for mutually beneficial agreements with the feasibility licence holders in line with international best practice. As I have said, offshore wind is a key pillar in our renewable energy future, and we have been very clear about the implementation. It is not necessarily our fault that those opposite cannot google. It is on our website; it is on DEECA's and the developers' too. It is energy.vic.gov.au, and you will find it all there. It is an offshore wind 101. It has the process, the locations, benefits, what is happening around the world, interactive maps, explainers, even pictures, FAQs, environment and planning, fishing and offshore wind investigations. It has super clear headings taking us step by step through the program and story.

We cannot afford to wait and go, 'Oh, sorry, eek, the lights are off.' We sort it; that is what we are doing. Leave it to those opposite, and we might be living in darkness waiting 20 years for some capital-intensive, expensive, dangerous, unsafe thing that no-one wants in their area, town or backyard. What do we do with the waste and nuclear pollution? It is invisible, which does not mean it ain't there. That is one meltdown we actually do want to avoid.

The Victorian government has an unprecedented \$1.6 billion energy package designed to create renewable energy hubs across the state, improve crucial grid infrastructure, decarbonise our energy system, drive down emissions and support more solar homes, because in this transition to renewables it is a whole-of-everything approach. It is not a singular pathway, nor is it mutually exclusive. It is across sectors, across portfolios, across government, across industry and across our community.

We have certainly heard some very vociferous contributions in the chamber today. Let us be super clear here: when it comes to renewable project planning and community consultation, that actually continues, and it is a key part of the process. There are no changes to the public notice process, and all members of the community will be able to make submissions, which will form part of the decision-making process. With more than one in five renewable projects ending up stuck in VCAT, in the overwhelming majority of cases the initial decision to support the project is upheld. VCAT should not be the default arbitrator. The member for Murray Plains spoke about national parks, and I just want to take a moment to travel 3000 kilometres to Noongar nations over in WA on Mirnang country at a national park, Torndirrup, where there is a wind farm of 12 turbines on the land there generating 75 per cent of clean green electricity for Albany, where I was brought up, which is a very popular tourist attraction now.

Thanks to our ambitious offshore wind targets, which have been discussed in this place today and also previously, there will be at least 2 gigawatts of new capacity by 2032, 4 gigawatts by 2035 and 9 gigawatts by 2040. That is ambition on the meter of smarts, and these are the first targets of their kind in the whole of Australia. The best part is that we know we can achieve it. Our state has the best offshore wind resource in the country, and we are amongst the best in the world. I am really pleased that Gippsland is one of the two zones that we have identified for offshore wind in Victoria. In fact the first offshore wind farm will be constructed in the Bass Strait and has the potential to generate up to 2.2 gigawatts of new capacity, powering around 1.5 million homes and 20 per cent of our electricity needs and creating of course a swathe of jobs. Early works have already seen millions of dollars spent in Gippsland creating work in areas such as local boat operations, construction and marine maintenance. This will only grow as offshore wind moves forward in development, creating thousands of jobs – sparkies, construction workers, project managers and engineers.

Then we have our clean energy careers, which will be implemented in our schools, our TAFEs and our universities, creating intergenerational jobs for thousands. Our most recent implementation statement, which updated industry, the public and the unions on our progress delivering offshore wind, noted all this as well. Plus we will set up local manufacturing capability right here in the state, setting offshore wind local content requirements that will maximise and build this industry for generations. Victoria will be a hub for offshore wind manufacturing, procurement, training and employment, and this is all possible because international investors have their eye on Victoria and stand ready to inject that funding into wind projects right here in our state.

Our government does not just care about the economic opportunities that abound with offshore wind; we are protecting the environment that makes these projects possible because, as the Allan Labor government knows, it is about striking the right balance. It is not environmental considerations or offshore wind, it is both – ensuring delivery of reliable renewable energy and conserving our ecosystems and habitats. Our government works in tandem with experts on this right through from the regulators, traditional owners, industry and other community stakeholders through a range of biodiversity, wildlife, sustainability, climate change and community initiatives, because we are serious about getting the balance right.

We know that with any new industry there are uncertainties and there are risks and potential impacts that this sort of development could have on our marine and coastal environments, and that is why we are engaging with international jurisdictions that have already shone a light in these places and learning best practice from them to align our renewable energy goals with our environmental objectives and make sure that our developments comply with strong environmental protections. We will make sure that all offshore wind projects are subject to robust Victorian and Commonwealth environmental management and impact assessment frameworks before, during and after operations commence. As I said, we are serious about striking the balance for everyone and everything involved in our offshore wind developments.

I just want to reiterate that Victoria is leading the nation on climate action. We smashed already our 2020 emissions target of a 15 to 20 per cent reduction when we achieved 29.6 per cent, which is almost double. The following year we built on that success with a 32.3 per cent reduction, and that is because this government does not just talk the talk but walks the climate action walk. Now we have a target of 75 to 80 per cent emissions reduction by 2035 and net zero by 2045, aligning us with the Paris agreement goals of limiting global heating to 1.5 degrees. In the 8 seconds left – 6, 5, 4, 3 – I totally commend this bill to the house.

Jade BENHAM (Mildura) (18:36): I rise this evening to make a contribution on the Energy and Public Land Legislation Amendment (Enabling Offshore Wind Energy) Bill 2024. My electorate is a long way from any offshore coastal environments, but in reading through this bill there were a few things I thought I should make a contribution on, because renewables and transmission lines of course are really topical in my part of the world at the moment, particularly with some bills that have been recently passed.

The purpose of this bill is to amend acts, one of those being the Crown Land (Reserves) Act 1978, and this was the first one that sparked my interest. There are some Crown land plots in some very high producing irrigated agricultural parts of the electorate that I know growers wanting to expand have had their eye on for a number of years now, and we know that the process of acquiring Crown land is a lengthy process – we get that. I am usually the eternal optimist, but they have asked questions as to whether there are delays in being able to acquire this land for the purposes of putting more solar farms on, because we already have major private solar investments up in the Sunraysia region. There are more sunny days than the Gold Coast, so why wouldn't you.

However, one of the issues that occur is council rates and the huge subsidies that they get, and what we are going to see of course from 1 April is the rights of private landholders being taken away, and people in my patch are angry. The fact is that now to appeal development of solar farm storage or wind

farms they cannot appeal to VCAT and they have to go through the Supreme Court. I mean, these are not wealthy people that want to appeal this stuff. They just want to be able to grow food, grow fibre, do their job and not have to be faced with not being able to have some levers to pull to appeal a decision to put whatever it might be on or through this land. I refer specifically to the VNI West project. The member for Hastings said before that wind is free. Well, I do not know – the infrastructure is not free; transmission lines certainly are not free. We have spoken to Professor Bruce Mountain this week in fact about plan B and how that would be half the cost of what VNI West would be.

Also, there are amendments to this bill that have been presented by this side of the house, and the first one states that there are no provisions in the bill that require the minister to fully and adequately consult with local stakeholders regarding the impact of the proposed offshore wind licences. If we talk about community consultation – and this was the first thing that really got people in the regions and in rural communities offside – when VNI West was proposed, there were some murmurings about some consultation. Then when the options were presented, a preferred option was decided upon, and then after the election it was changed without consultation. There has been subpar community consultation, and the community are the biggest stakeholders here. In towns that have a population of under 1000 people the community are the biggest stakeholders and private landowners are the biggest stakeholders. They should be consulted adequately and not feel like it is just a tick-the-box exercise.

One of those was conducting surveys with people on a Sunday in IGA. If you know anything about these small towns, supermarkets on Sundays in towns like Charlton on the main street are not exactly a thriving metropolis. It is thriving but not a metropolis, because people have got better things to do. It is dead – you just do not do those surveys on a Sunday at IGA in Charlton. That was the first thing, and then that did not work, so allegedly there was another exercise that paid people coming out of the supermarket 20 bucks to actually take part because they could not get any engagement. There have been meetings that have been scheduled and cancelled at the last minute, and there have been large community forums that the community themselves have organised and invited the likes of the Australian Energy Market Operator to, and they have not fronted up. This makes communities angry.

What also makes communities angry is the fact that there has been no consideration and the contradiction that exists if there is going to be a significant, frightening percentage of productive agricultural land taken out of production. It was first said that it was going to be 70 per cent – that is frightening. It has been changed or there have been conversations, ‘No, it’s not 70 per cent, it is 30 per cent.’ Regardless, taking that out of production without the need for proper consultation or without the ability for appeal to VCAT is insane. And at the same time, landholders have to accommodate their workers, because they need workers to get fruit off vines and off trees and need them to harvest grains and cereals, and you need labour for that, and there is a housing crisis especially out in these rural towns. The rental stock is zero percent, so they need to be able to put worker accommodation on their land. But trying to put worker accommodation on is near impossible for a lot of these people, much less trying to excise a dwelling. The main argument that is often presented is that you will be taking valuable agricultural land out of production. Well, I am sorry – you cannot have one contradict the other. It just does not make any sense.

So you can understand why people in these communities are angry. Even tonight I see that in Boort, in fact – which is just a little bit out of my patch, it is in Murray Plains; however, it will be well attended – there is a meeting at the footy club, and the flyer calls for landholders to come along and share their experiences. It says that the group that are hosting this meeting want to protect landholders and communities, and they want to expose Transmission Company Victoria’s underhanded manoeuvres. They want to hear from people who have been approached or not been approached or have not being consulted when they see that this is the route that this is going to take. Matt McLoughlan is from Charlton, and he is living in his 125-year-old mudbrick house. It has been there 125 years, a generational family home. It was actually the home of a World War I hero and a former Victorian senator Harold Edward ‘Pompey’ Elliott, so there you go. That is right in the line of fire for VNI West.

What happens there? Are we just going to go over the top or are we going to consult? Is it going to be compulsorily acquired? No-one knows.

Honestly, you cannot blame these communities for getting so up in arms about the lack of consultation and about the lack of transparency when there is a very clear option on the table for these transmission lines, and that is plan B – use existing easements. It is a far more elegant solution. It makes far more sense, it costs half as much and there is less curtailment out of it. So when you get down into the technicalities and the costings and actually have a look at plan B, why on earth would any government go ‘No, we’re going to spend double the amount and take productive agricultural land out of production so we can do it our way’ and not listen to two or three professors that have written a 108-page report on why plan B is the only plan that should exist?

Ella GEORGE (Lara) (18:46): Acting Speaker Walters, it is always a pleasure to see you in the chair. I rise today to speak on the Energy and Public Land Legislation Amendment (Enabling Offshore Wind Energy) Bill 2024. The Allan Labor government is leading Australia when it comes to renewable energy and taking action on climate change, and this bill is our first piece of legislation in our offshore wind program. At the outset I do wish to acknowledge the relentless work being done by the Minister for Energy and Resources in leading Victoria’s vital transition to renewable energy and bringing back the SEC.

This bill paves the way for offshore wind to get started in Victoria. The changes enacted by the bill include introducing the concept of an offshore wind energy generation company into the Electricity Industry Act 2000; creating a category of licence in the Land Act 1958, the Crown Land (Reserves) Act 1978 and the Forests Act 1958 to allow the investigation of connection routes, essential infrastructure that will connect offshore wind farms to land-based transmission lines; allowing a maximum licence term of 21 years for connection routes, which is in alignment to the terms of other types of licences issued by land legislation; and enabling the investigation of connection routes over National Parks Act 1975 land with the consent of Parks Victoria and other agencies as required.

Victoria is currently undergoing a significant shift in its energy sector. As the coal-fired power stations in Victoria continue to age and become increasingly unreliable, the state’s electricity will be provided by more and more renewable energy sources paired with battery storage as part of our renewable energy transition. Blessed with abundant renewable sources such as sun-drenched plains and windy coastlines, Victoria is well on its way to achieving its renewable energy target of 95 per cent by 2035. Just today the Minister for Energy and Resources updated the house on how Victoria is tracking with our targets. We are currently at 39.3 per cent renewable energy, a huge increase from 11 per cent when we came into government.

A crucial element in this transition is offshore wind energy, which will help the state reach its ambitious targets. In November 2023 Victoria passed legislation to set targets for offshore wind energy generation, including at least 2 gigawatts of offshore generation capacity by 2032, which is enough to power 1.5 million homes; 4 gigawatts by 2035; and 9 gigawatts by 2040. It is not just clean, green renewable energy that offshore wind will generate; this industry will create new jobs and entire career pathways, boost manufacturing and supply chain development, increase regional investment and of course support the state’s climate action goal of achieving net zero emissions by 2045. This bill will enable offshore wind to play a crucial role in ramping up our renewable energy.

When thinking about why renewable energy like offshore wind is so important, what comes to my mind is that climate change is happening right around us and the time for denying it is long past. Time and time again we are experiencing unprecedented weather across Victoria and in fact Australia and the world. Just last month we had a hugely damaging storm event in Victoria, with storms and high winds causing chaos. In the electorate of Lara we saw winds take down powerlines and even transmission towers in Anakie. It left some residents, businesses and schools without power for a couple of days and a huge clean-up job with all the fallen trees. Storm events like this are the result of climate change. As a government it is our responsibility to address this to the best of our ability. That

means investing in renewable energy. That means setting targets to reduce emissions and taking action to achieve those targets and to achieve net zero emissions by 2045. We know that deploying low-carbon energy sources like offshore wind is an essential solution for cutting greenhouse gas emissions to combat global warming and climate change, which is exactly why we are introducing this legislation and investing in renewable energy.

Our state has made exceptional progress on climate action and is setting an example for the rest of the nation. We are not just making promises about climate action, we are delivering on them at an unprecedented rate. Since the election of the Labor government in 2014 we have taken the lead on decarbonisation and have successfully reduced emissions more than any other state. We have exceeded our target of a 15 to 20 per cent reduction in emissions by achieving a 29.6 per cent reduction in 2020, and this increased to 32.3 per cent in 2021. With the strongest climate change legislation in the country and the support of an overwhelming majority of Victorians, we are determined to continue our ambitious agenda for a more sustainable future.

Along with our offshore wind policy, the SEC is another great example of that. The new SEC will accelerate our state's energy transition by investing in energy and storage, and with the SEC in place we can assure investors that they will have a reliable partner to support their long-term investment in renewable energy. By 2025 the SEC will be providing power to Victorian government facilities, including schools, hospitals, trains and trams. This sends a strong message to business and investors that the future in energy is renewable and that this government is committed to investing in it.

In the Geelong region we are embracing renewable energy like wind energy, and I want to acknowledge the role of the electorate of Lara regarding renewable wind energy projects such as the Golden Plains wind farm in Rokewood. From last year wind turbine components manufactured by Vestas have been arriving at Geelong Port before being transferred to Rokewood for construction. This project features 122 wind turbines with 1464 components being shipped on 22 vessels to Geelong. The major components include 366 blades; 732 tower sections; and 122 individual powertrains, which make up the gearbox and the generator; nacelles which cover the generator functions at the top of the wind turbine; and hubs that are positioned at the centre of the three blades.

This is a really significant project in our government's transition to a clean energy future. A large project like this not only contributes to the target of 95 per cent renewable energy by 2035 but contributes to local economies and creates job opportunities, with 400 jobs created during the construction phase. Once completed, the Golden Plains wind farm is expected to produce enough clean energy to power around 450,000 homes and reduce carbon dioxide emissions by over 4 million tonnes annually.

GeelongPort are doing a great job supporting our state's transition to clean energy, and this complex operation to move these massive wind turbine components safely and efficiently is another great example of them putting their unique infrastructure, expertise and location to great use. I am thrilled that the Geelong region is playing its part in our energy transition, with local expertise leading the way and making it happen.

This is not the only renewable energy project where the Geelong region is leading the way. In 2022 GeelongPort partnered with Barwon Water and Barwon Health to form the Barwon Renewable Energy Partnership. This partnership has made a commitment to use 100 per cent renewable electricity and produce net zero emissions after securing a power purchase agreement with the Mount Gellibrand wind farm. This 10-year agreement will see renewable electricity produced at the farm, sent to the grid and then allocated to these three organisations, offsetting the energy used at the three facilities. Barwon Water has a target of using 100 per cent renewable electricity by 2025 and achieving net zero emissions by 2030, so this project is a step towards those goals. For Barwon Health the agreement will provide them with 15 gigawatt hours of clean electricity annually for the next decade, reducing their total greenhouse gas emissions by around 14,000 tonnes per year.

This government has a goal to achieve 95 per cent renewable energy by 2035, and offshore wind plays a crucial role in achieving that. Victoria is leading the way in offshore wind development, and we are proud to announce that the first offshore wind farm will be constructed here and power 1.5 million homes. Our ambitious offshore wind targets – of at least 2 gigawatts of new capacity by 2032, 4 gigawatts by 2035 and 9 gigawatts by 2040 – are the first of their kind in this country. Victoria has become a global leader in offshore wind development, even becoming the first subnational jurisdiction to join the Global Offshore Wind Alliance. We are excited about the potential of offshore wind to provide us with clean, sustainable energy for years to come. We are committed to making Victoria a hub for offshore wind development and innovation.

On this side of the house we are not interested in dangerous nuclear power. We are not the ones proposing a nuclear plant in Anglesea. We are investing in clean, green, renewable energy like offshore wind, and we are setting up policies and frameworks for projects in this new industry to get started and start powering our state. Ambitious plans for offshore wind are exactly what Victorians voted for. Victorians voted for a government that is taking serious steps to address climate change, a government that is committed to creating renewable energy solutions and a government that is committed to driving down energy costs. I commend the bill to the house.

Meng Heang TAK (Clarinda) (18:56): I am delighted to join the hardworking member for Lara today to speak on the Energy and Public Land Legislation Amendment (Enabling Offshore Wind Energy) Bill 2024, another really important bill that adds to the host of energy legislation that has passed this place over the previous weeks and months. Just last sitting week of course we had another important milestone for Victoria with the constitutional amendment and the SEC amendment bills coming through the house. This is a really significant milestone for Victoria and for my community in Clarinda for a host of reasons but particularly because this kind of legislation, these amendments, are good news for bills and cost-of-living pressure.

Cost-of-living relief is so important for those doing it tough. For those on fixed income support, for pensioners and for those doing it tough, every little bit helps. The Allan Labor government has been delivering real and meaningful help: free kinder and free TAFE, restricted rental increases, discounted electricity and gas, school breakfasts and our Smile Squad, which was out at Westall Primary School in my electorate last month. There are so many more initiatives, and we are helping Victorians and Victorian families in big ways and small ways, because every bit adds up.

It is an exciting time, and we had last week a milestone in Victoria's energy transition, because the new SEC will really accelerate that transition by investing in renewable energy and storage, supporting households to go electric and building the renewables workforce for the future. As we know, that transition is underway, with Victoria transitioning to 95 per cent renewable energy generation by 2035. Offshore wind is critical to this. Offshore winds provide a competitive level of generation capacity, more than onshore renewables, moving us quicker away from fossil fuels and toward 95 per cent renewables by 2035.

I am really glad to see this legislation here today, coupled with the other pieces of energy legislation here last week. It is supporting a large amount of solar and wind coming online, large-scale storage capacity essential for storing the renewable energy from this new project, and all pushing to a future of driving down bills for Victorian households and meeting our energy and climate targets. So this is another step in that transition journey here today with this bill, the Energy and Public Land Legislation Amendment (Enabling Offshore Wind Energy) Bill 2024.

The DEPUTY SPEAKER: Order! I am required under sessional orders to interrupt business now. The member will have the call when the matter returns to the house.

Business interrupted under sessional orders.

Adjournment

The DEPUTY SPEAKER: The question is:

That the house now adjourns.

Birmingham Primary School

Bridget VALLENCE (Evelyn) (19:00): (591) Birmingham Primary School in Mount Evelyn is an excellent local school and one of the largest state primary schools in the Evelyn electorate, with nearly 700 students. The matter I raise is for the Minister for Education, and the action I seek on behalf of the Birmingham Primary School community – the students, the teachers and the families – is for the government to allocate much-needed funding in the upcoming state budget to build a new indoor multipurpose stadium inclusive of a gymnasium, kitchen facilities, change rooms and storage.

Currently Birmingham Primary School has no indoor gym facility that can accommodate all teachers and staff in one location, and school assemblies and physical activities currently held outdoors are compromised when it is extremely hot, raining or stormy, as is often the case in Mount Evelyn. I have visited Birmingham Primary School many times – and I pay tribute to the amazing work of principal Trish Enzinger, all of the teachers and the parent volunteers – and have seen firsthand how this new stadium would provide significant benefit to the school. The outdoor court covers are no longer fit for purpose, and the Department of Education would be aware of just how vital it is to allocate sufficient funds to this major infrastructure project for Birmingham Primary School to ensure it has fit-for-purpose and modern learning facilities. It would enable all school assemblies to be held indoors, as well as concerts and performances, presentation events and physical activities when the weather outside is poor. Additionally, this multipurpose stadium would provide a much-needed community hub in times of bushfire, severe storms and flood emergency, which happen relatively often in Mount Evelyn, unfortunately, and it is certainly an initiative that is supported by the local Mount Evelyn fire brigade.

In 2022 it was my pleasure to announce the Victorian Liberals had listened to this school community and would commit \$6.4 million to build a modern, state-of-the-art multipurpose school stadium when in government. So far, unfortunately, this Labor government has failed to match our commitment, which is why I am seeking this important action ahead of the upcoming state budget for this new facility that the Birmingham Primary School community needs and deserves for school assemblies, sports and performing arts, and a place where the Mount Evelyn community can come and gather for important community events or as an emergency refuge in times of bushfire and severe storms.

North Bellarine Aquatic Centre

Alison MARCHANT (Bellarine) (19:02): (592) My adjournment matter is for the Minister for Community Sport, and the action I seek is for the minister to provide an update on stage 2 of the North Bellarine Aquatic Centre. Stage 2 of the aquatic centre is to be built to complete a whole facility, and it will be built as an indoor facility. And I stress the word ‘indoor’ as this is what the community has fought for from the beginning. The indoor facility will be built alongside stage 1, which is currently an outdoor 50-metre pool. The stage 2 concept plans released last year did feature an indoor centre with an eight-lane 25-metre pool, a warm-water pool, a social space, a gymnasium and various associated facilities which have been made possible by a \$20 million investment in the state budget and \$20 million from the federal government.

This has been a very hot topic in my community in recent weeks, with the local Geelong council now deciding to close the outdoor pool for the cooler months. The community are indeed disappointed, and obviously this demonstrates the need for an indoor aquatic centre that they can use all year round. The community feel they have been let down by the Geelong city council and continue to fight this decision. But what I can say today is that when we listen to community and put them at the heart of decision-making, better outcomes are achieved, and that is exactly how the stage 2 indoor facility was

developed. I look forward to hearing from the minister regarding the update of stage 2 of the North Bellarine aquatic and leisure centre.

Beechworth-Wangaratta Road, Tarrawingee

Tim McCURDY (Ovens Valley) (19:04): (593) My adjournment is to the Minister for Roads and Road Safety, and action that I seek is that she instruct Regional Roads Victoria to meet with me and some very concerned constituents at 1782 Beechworth-Wangaratta Road so that we can discuss how we can make this safer. There was a fatality only three weeks ago, and I understand protocols around that. There have been many near misses at 1782 Beechworth-Wangaratta Road. I really think we should be taking this section of the road seriously, and we need to do some work on it. There is a turning lane and there are other issues that need to be included here. It is a stretch of road on which locals tell me they have actually had to tow out vehicles; they have had to do lots of things that are just near misses that never get on the record. I really encourage the minister to invite Regional Roads Victoria to meet with us at that location. As I say, the near misses are not recorded. This fatality was very sad, and I would just like to think that we could get a hearing from Regional Roads Victoria on this section of road.

Geelong Food Relief Centre

Ella GEORGE (Lara) (19:05): (594) My adjournment matter this evening is for the Minister for Carers and Volunteers, and the action that I seek is for the minister to visit the Geelong Food Relief Centre in North Geelong. The Lara electorate is home to some amazing organisations doing important work in our community, and one such organisation is the Geelong Food Relief Centre, who play a vital role in helping families in need put food on the table. The Geelong Food Relief Centre provide food assistance to clients who are suffering from food insecurity and are the leading provider of emergency food relief throughout the Geelong region. They have a bulk food distribution service located in the Lara electorate which supplies food to over 60 community organisations who are preparing meals, operating community pantries and markets and running children's homework classes and breakfast clubs or similar food relief services. In addition to this, they run two mini-marts, where individuals and families can come and shop in a dignified way, choosing the fresh nutritious food that they want to eat. I am proud that the Allan Labor government recognises the importance of this work and supports food relief across Victoria. Again, the action that I seek is for the minister to visit the Geelong Food Relief Centre and see firsthand the work that they are doing.

Mornington electorate police resources

Chris CREWTER (Mornington) (19:06): (595) My adjournment matter is for the Minister for Police. The action I seek is for the minister to substantially increase funding, support, resources and staffing for Mornington police, particularly to enable them to better tackle the growing crime rate in our community. In December it was reported that the Mornington Peninsula, including my electorate in Mornington, is one of the state's top five youth crime hotspots. The most recent data from last year states that there were 75 cars stolen, 45 aggravated burglaries, 26 serious assaults and 10 incidents involving weapons or explosives. Ever since my election as the member for Mornington, I have kept in close contact with anxious and concerned residents in my electorate who have contacted me regarding a spate of home invasions where cars, wallets and more have been stolen. With a number of break-ins being aggravated, it is lucky in some incidences that home owners and particularly children have not been at risk or injured.

Early last year many complaints were coming from Mount Eliza and Mornington in particular, which were identified as hotspots. Early this year many complaints are coming from Mount Martha, with a number of houses around Hearn Road, Capri Drive, Shearwater Drive, The Point, Churchill Road, Stanley Crescent, Ponyara Road and other areas being targeted for break-ins and burglaries. Residents have sat in their homes in fear that they could be the next victims of a brazen home invasion. One resident I spoke to a couple of days ago in Mount Martha said that their young daughter was only 10 seconds away from coming face to face with an intruder coming out of the bathroom at the time,

and she had wondered what might have happened if her daughter had come face to face with that intruder. She also noted the need to strengthen laws, to strengthen enforcement and to strengthen the consequences for offenders, as well as talking about things like Neighbourhood Watch and the need for further action in that area or indeed the need for private security when there are insufficient resources being given to local police.

Having visited Mornington police station just last week – I had the pleasure of presenting them with a Victorian flag, but I also had the chance to tour the station and meet with the officers – I know that they are doing the best they can to tackle the increased crime rates; however, they need more resources, more funding and more staff. I particularly note that Mornington police station had its hours reduced from 24 to 16, from Sunday to Wednesday, last year under the state Labor government. While the minister has publicly stated that an extra \$600 million was included in the 2022–23 state budget for state policing efforts, this is all vague information, and very little clarity has been provided on the state government’s resourcing or lack thereof for Mornington police.

Warneet jetties

Jordan CRUGNALE (Bass) (19:09): (596) My adjournment matter is for the Minister for Ports and Freight, and the action I seek is an update on our \$9.5 million election commitment announced to rebuild both the north and south jetties in our beautiful coastal village of Warneet. Committed to at the 2022 election and funded in the May 2023 budget, advanced tender went out at the end of last year. My understanding is Parks Victoria is on track to release the tender documentation in April, with both the like-for-like and the Better Boating Victoria designs presented. Signs on so many houses in the area have gone from ‘Save the Warneet jetties’ to – post the election budget – ‘Saved the Warneet jetties’ to now ‘Build the Warneet jetties’. I really want to see the ‘d’ replaced by ‘t’ – built. It will no doubt be everyone walking around this town with a big, thick, black texta crossing out the ‘d’ and putting in a ‘t’.

This community is amazing. They love and care about where they live, and they so effortlessly energise together to bring about change for the better, never stopping until it is realised. Thank you, Minister, and we welcome you any time to Warneet in the electorate of Bass. There is a lot within your expansive portfolio that our Labor government has funded and are delivering, and I look forward to relaying your update to this wonderful community. Let us get this done.

Beverley Hills Primary School

Nicole WERNER (Warrandyte) (19:11): (597) My adjournment is to the Minister for Education, and the action I seek is for the minister to provide a time line which he will release publicly for the installation of the substation at Beverley Hills Primary School. Beverley Hills Primary School in Doncaster East is one of the places that makes our electorate truly great. It is one of the best performing schools in the state, with consistently high NAPLAN results. According to the Better Education analysis of 2022 academic outcomes, Beverley Hills Primary School scored a perfect score of 100, which only a handful of other schools received. Of course this does not happen accidentally; it is owing to the tireless work of the staff at Beverley Hills Primary School, and I would especially like to highlight the work of their principal Jennifer Watson, who does an excellent job and works incredibly hard for our school community.

This local school’s record-high results have led to record-high enrolments, and this amazing school gets bigger by the day, with four new school buildings. These buildings run off diesel generators, and they have previously struggled with blackouts during the day, unfortunately interrupting learning. This problem has had a temporary solution with the placing of a second, smaller diesel generator, but this is not good enough. This amazing school deserves the infrastructure that they need to keep educating our next generation. Every two weeks they need to refill the generators with diesel, which is getting more and more expensive by the day, whilst the diesel fumes are affecting nearby residents. Beverley Hills Primary School do not do anything less than their absolute best to deliver impressive results year on year, and the government therefore should not be doing anything less than their absolute best to

ensure that this school has the energy infrastructure that they need to keep the lights on, keep the aircon going and keep students learning.

Mordialloc College

Tim RICHARDSON (Mordialloc) (19:13): (598) My adjournment this evening is to the Minister for Education, and the action I seek is an update from the minister on the progress of commitments that we have made at Mordialloc College, and particularly the planning works that have been undertaken for their STEAM centre redevelopment. We know that education is the greatest thing that we can do to change the lives and outcomes of young Victorians. Indeed this Labor government has invested significantly, from our early childhood education investments through our primary and secondary upgrades and our specialist needs and education settings through to TAFE. People in our community in Victoria know that a Labor government will always support our kids. We have had a few come into the chamber. I do not know if the young people have come in for my speech necessarily, but there are a few young Victorians in observing Parliament. I know it is not orderly to acknowledge them in the chamber, but you think of each and every one of their journeys and educations, and indeed all kids, students, that we have an obligation to support into the future. It is indeed an obligation that we take seriously when you think of the more than 1500 government schools that we have across Victoria.

In my community we have made significant investments to change the lives and outcomes for my constituents, because we do not want the first-class education that our teachers and education support staff provide each and every day to be hamstrung by second-rate facilities. The journey that we have been on in my electorate has been significant. We have heard just recently from Parkdale Secondary College students about the buildings and upgrades that have supported their education and learning, and from Mordialloc College students recently with their STEAM learning centre. We know how important it is to get more people involved in STEAM and to encourage more girls and women to follow up a career in STEAM. That is such a critical focus of Mordialloc College into the future, so we made a commitment of \$12.6 million to invest in Mordialloc College, and I am really keen to see that type of upgrade and that learning into the future.

You can think of the investment that has been made across my electorate – Chelsea Primary School, Chelsea Heights Primary School, Edithvale Primary, Aspendale Primary and Mordialloc Beach Primary School. Yarrabah School is a specialist education setting that we have rebuilt brick by brick. It was portables city until an Andrews Labor government came to be, and no-one had supported those students. Because every student, regardless of their circumstance or their needs, deserves the best outcomes, Yarrabah was rebuilt. We can look at the investment at Parktone Primary School, Parkdale Primary that we upgraded, Parkdale Secondary College, Mentone Park, Beaumaris Secondary College that we rebuilt and then the Catholic and independent sectors. When it comes to education in the cities of Kingston and Greater Dandenong, a Labor government has had the back of our community.

To the young people observing tonight, I hope that gives you a sense of just the investment that Labor governments make. We wish you all the very best on your education journey. I know you will be tuning in to see how the education minister responds with an update for Mordialloc College's upgrades.

Main Neerim Road, Rokeby

Wayne FARNHAM (Narracan) (19:16): (599) My adjournment this evening is to the Minister for Roads and Road Safety, and the action I seek is that urgent action be taken to address the serious issue on Main Neerim Road just outside of Rokeby. This section of road is actually very, very dangerous, and because of the lack of investment in Victorian roads this road is now becoming critically in need of being fixed. I met with Brian Barwick, the CFA captain from Neerim South, and we walked down this stretch of road and he said to me that when they get an emergency call-out on this section of road, the CFA know exactly where to go. The problem is because of the lack of investment the road is old and it is very, very slippery. If you can imagine some S-bends, cars come around these S-bends, water

is shedding across the road, they spin out and they keep hitting this bank. It was expressed to me by Brian that the problem he has and the fear he has is that, because of this rural area, we have the big trucks coming down carting gravel – well, they used to cart logs, but that has sort of backed off a bit. But there are a lot of gravel trucks coming around that corner, and he is extremely concerned that there is going to be a fatality there with a truck slamming into these cars. People who live out there have lived there a long time and know the road, and they are spinning out on a road they know. So I am asking the minister to address this problem. The road needs to be resurfaced before a fatality happens.

Hastings electorate ministerial visits

Paul MERCURIO (Hastings) (19:18): (600) My adjournment matter tonight is for the Treasurer, and the action I seek is for the Treasurer to come down to my electorate to have a meet and greet with some of my local small business owners. As I said in my inaugural speech just over a year ago in this place, it is important to consider and work towards the big things, but just as important are the little things – the small things. In my electorate we have some very large companies with international footprints doing amazing work employing lots of locals and pouring money into our community, but there is truth in the fact that these large companies would struggle to survive or perhaps even exist without the myriad small local businesses that work around them and support them.

I appreciate that the Treasurer in his very difficult role will have a focus on the big end of town with meetings and luncheons, so my invite is extended so he can come and have an opportunity to meet and greet small local business owners and community groups in my electorate to hear about the issues that affect them as small local businesses – not just their struggles but their successes along the way. It will be a wonderful opportunity for them to ask the Treasurer questions so they can better understand the direction that the Allan Labor government is taking in regard to the future of Victoria. I look forward to the Treasurer coming down and spending some time with members in my community.

Responses

Colin BROOKS (Bundoora – Minister for Development Victoria, Minister for Precincts, Minister for Creative Industries) (19:19): The member for Evelyn raised a matter for the Minister for Education, seeking for the minister to allocate funding to Birmingham Primary School in her electorate for an indoor stadium, I think it was, so I will pass that matter on to the Minister for Education. The hardworking member for Bellarine raised a matter for the Minister for Community Sport, and that was to provide an update on stage 2 of the North Bellarine aquatic and leisure centre, no doubt an important project in the member's electorate. The member for Ovens Valley raised a matter for the Minister for Roads and Road Safety, and the action that was sought was to instruct Regional Roads Victoria to meet with him and concerned residents around an issue at 1782 Beechworth-Wangaratta Road, no doubt an important issue that needs the attention of roads authorities. The member for Lara, another hardworking member of Parliament –

Wayne Farnham interjected.

Colin BROOKS: wait until I get to you – spoke about the great work that is being done by the Geelong Food Relief Centre, and I think all members on both sides of the chamber would agree that food relief centres right around our state do a great job of looking after people who need support with food relief. This organisation according to the member for Lara does some great work, and I am sure that the Minister for Carers and Volunteers, whom the member raised this issue with, will look forward to visiting that particular centre.

The member for Mornington raised an issue for the Minister for Police in relation to a substantial increase in funding, resourcing and staffing for the Mornington police station, and I will ensure that matter is passed on to the minister. The member for Bass, another hardworking member of Parliament, raised a matter for the Minister for Ports and Freight, and that was an update on the \$9.5 million investment, I think it was, in the Warneet jetties, no doubt a great project that the local member has championed. The member for Warrandyte has raised a matter for the Minister for Education, asking

that he provide a time line for the installation of the substation at Beverley Hills Primary School, and the member very eloquently outlined the great work that happens at that local primary school. The member for Mordialloc rattled off a whole range of education achievements.

Wayne Farnham: He's not hardworking; he's gone home already.

Colin BROOKS: He is hardworking and is probably out there doing some hard work on behalf of his electorate. He asked for an update on the progress of commitments at Mordialloc College. I reckon he is chasing that response down as we speak, and I think that was a \$12.6 million upgrade, so that is a fantastic project. The member for Narracan raised a very important issue for the Minister for Roads and Road Safety, and the action that he sought was to address safety concerns on Main Neerim Road – I did not catch the locality.

Wayne Farnham interjected.

Colin BROOKS: Rokeby, thank you. It did sound like a very serious issue that the member was raising and one that he had met with the local CFA on, so we will make sure that that matter gets to the minister straightaway. The hardworking member for Hastings raised a matter for the Treasurer to meet and greet local small business owners in his electorate. The member is a great champion for businesses in his electorate, and I am sure that the Treasurer will find time to visit that electorate.

The DEPUTY SPEAKER: I thank all hardworking members. The house stands adjourned until tomorrow.

House adjourned 7:23 pm.